UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

Celebrating Diversity:

The Significance of Cultural Differences on Reading Comprehension

Processes of the Young Adult EFL Learner in a Matriculation

Preparation Programme in Israel

Devora Hellerstein-Yehezkel

May 2013

Dissertation

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been submitted, either in the same or different form, to this or any other university degree.

Signature

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Graphs

List of Diagrams

List of Images

List of Models

Glossary of Terms and Acronyms

EFL – English as a Foreign Language

Mechina – Matriculation Preparation Programme (Heb.)

Bagrut – Matriculation Exam (Heb.)

unseen – a reading passage in the English Matriculation Exam

CLT – Communicative Language Theory

TBLT – Task-Based Language Teaching

moshav - an Israeli cooperative agricultural settlement consisting of small private farms

yeshiva - a Jewish boarding school that focuses on the study of religious Jewish texts and prepares them to become rabbis

ulpan – a Hebrew instruction language school setting given to all citizens who immigrate to Israel

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude to several people who have made this research project possible. First and foremost, I wish to extend my sincerest gratitude to my supervisors, Prof. Judy Sebba and Dr. Andrew Blair for their insights, professionalism, dedication, guidance and support throughout this process. Rather than providing me with quick solutions, they raised challenging questions leading me to finding those answers within myself.

I also wish to extend my gratitude to two figures who have been instrumental in my professional life. Dr. Erica Garb, Former Supervisor of English Matriculation Preparation Programmes in Israel, has been instrumental in the development of the English programme designed and examined in this study. Mr. Mike Garmize, Former Coordinator of English Studies at the college where this study was conducted, has been my professional mentor over the years. I am very grateful to Mike for reading countless drafts of this thesis. His suggestions, linguistic and otherwise, have been invaluable.

 I also wish to thank Mrs. Avital Sarig, our college librarian for all her assistance and dedication. I am also very grateful to Mr. Erez Nevipana for helping me with the graphics in this thesis.

I would particularly like to thank all the students who participated in this project and allowed me to enter their lives and learn from them. Their life stories and experiences have been an inspiration.

I wish to thank my family for their support throughout this long process. Many thanks to my amazing girls, Hagar and Ruth, for their patience. I thank my husband, Eli, for his support. I am indebted to him for taking the girls every Saturday for ice-cream so I could get a few hours of work. I am also grateful for his emotional support and inspiration. As the son of immigrant parents who did not have the opportunity to get an education, his academic and professional success has inspired me as a teacher and researcher. This thesis in many ways tells his story.

Abstract

Reading comprehension in English as a foreign language (EFL) is a key to success in academic studies in Israel. As Israel is a cultural melting pot, adult students come from widely diverse educational backgrounds, often determined by their cultural environment. They arrive at the university or college classroom with vastly different approaches to learning and reading, in general, and to reading in EFL, in particular. The challenge for the EFL teacher is to help students draw from their cultural toolkits while exposing them to new tools so that they can reach their full learning potential. The rationale of the current inquiry is that in order to tailor a programme that takes into account students' needs, a better understanding of the impact of cultural background on their learning process is essential.

This inquiry was guided by three main research questions: How do differing cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds impact upon adult students' approach to and process of learning reading comprehension in English? How do these backgrounds impact upon progress and achievement in reading comprehension in English? And which teaching approach or approaches can best address the range of needs of a culturally diverse student group?

To address these questions, an action research study was conducted using a case study approach. Thirty-nine young adult students who participated in a year-long matriculation preparation programme in a teachers' college in Israel were examined. The programme was based on providing students with both bottom-up and top-down reading skills, with particular emphasis on reading strategies. The learning process that students underwent generated qualitative and quantitative data through class observations, interviews, and student records.

The data indicated that student background played a significant role in how learning, reading, and EFL were approached. Family background, whether more 'traditional' or less 'traditional', reflected students' cultural background, echoed by a school system sharing a similar mindset and approach to EFL pedagogy. As a result, students' background impacted upon their classroom behaviour and social engagement.

Cultural distinctions were apparent at entry level, but were not determining factors in student progress and achievement over the course of the year. Students with greater intercultural competence adopted different learning approaches and reading strategies from those with which they had been educated in their cultural environment and appropriated them as their own. These students also made the most significant progress in their EFL reading comprehension, regardless of background. For students to share their diverse learning approaches and adopt new ones from one another, as well as the new strategies offered by the programme, the establishment of a 'third space', or classroom culture, was crucial. Providing such a space allowed students to exchange learning methods, examine their own, and finally adopt those that were most effective for them.

Enhanced reading comprehension at the end of the programme resulted from a process of several cycles of integration and engagement. Those students who reported feeling more integrated within mainstream Israeli society, in general, were also those who more easily integrated within the classroom culture. These students were also more socially engaged in class and showed greater engagement with texts in English. Consequently they made greater progress and reached higher achievements.

When teaching EFL reading comprehension to a multicultural class of students, it is argued that a classroom culture should celebrate their diversity and allow them to voice their distinct learning approaches. At the same time, their voices should be harmonized through a unified learning approach, based on the application of reading strategies and engagement with a text.

Overview

Getting started on this research project involved a gradual process. Fourteen years' experience of teaching EFL reading comprehension to multicultural classes in Israel rather than providing me with answers regarding my profession, raised and sharpened the questions. The current thesis is the result of the process I have undergone in an attempt to address them.

In the English reading comprehension programme that I teach, my students learn that the reading process involves three stages: previewing, close reading and reacting. Previewing involves gathering preliminary information about a text, close reading involves reading the text in detail, and reacting involves making meaning from the text. This thesis is constructed in the same way. The first part, entitled 'Previewing: Getting Started', consists of chapters 1-4. It provides the context, background, methodology and methods of the study. The second part, entitled 'Close Reading: Looking at the Data', consists of chapters 5-6. It presents an analysis of the data that was constructed throughout the research project. The third part, entitled 'Reaction: Constructing Meaning', consists of chapters 7-8. It attempts to make meaning of and provide explanations for the data in order to contribute to the knowledge in this field.

PART ONE

PREVIEWING: GETTING STARTED

Chapter 1

Introduction and Background

Most people find snowfall a nuisance. But for me, a snowfall is a chance to reflect on one of the Almighty's greatest wonders, the little snowflake. The snowflake, held under a magnifying glass, is an exquisitely intricate and beautiful creation. Furthermore, every snowflake is unique. No two snowflakes are alike.

The uniqueness of each snowflake is but one example of an amazing fact, which is true of the entire natural world. No two blades of grass are identical, no two leaves are exactly the same, and every individual member of every animal species is unique in some way. This is true of human beings as well. None of us has the same fingerprint, and no matter how closely one of us might resemble another, we are different from the other in some respect.

The Talmud recognizes this when it comments that "just as no two faces are alike, so too, no two personalities are alike". We are different from each other physically, psychologically, intellectually, spiritually, and in every other way. Any person who has parented several children knows that each child is different from the get-go.

Woe to the teacher who treats all of his students alike. The so-called cookie cutter method of education is doomed to failure. Each of us has different learning styles and differing intellectual strengths and weaknesses. The secret of successful pedagogy lies in the recognition of individual differences, and in the ability of the teacher to be flexible enough to adapt his or her lessons to each individual and his or her learning needs.

The fact that each of us is uniquely gifted is a basic component of the thought of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, the Chief Rabbi of the Land of Israel, who passed away more than 70 years ago, but whose written legacy keeps him very much alive. Rav Kook insists that the very purpose of education is to help each person discover his or her own individuality, to learn what he or she can do best. Self-discovery, for Rav Kook, is the essence of the educational endeavour.

Rav Kook, besides being an educator, was also a mystic. From his mystical perspective, he views the world as being a unified whole, to which every individual is necessary, because each individual contributes something utterly unique to the cosmos.
Each snowflake is different from the other because the beauty of each snowflake is equally essential to nature's beauty. Each human being is unique because the contribution of every one of us is absolutely necessary for the accomplishment of humanity's ultimate mission.

(Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb, 2010)

1.1. Introduction

Language learning consists of the four basic skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening. Of these four skills, reading comprehension is especially significant for adult learners in order to succeed in post-secondary education. To achieve academic success, reading comprehension skills are essential for the integration of information students must process and the ideas they must formulate. In Israel, as in many countries around the world, reading comprehension in English is a key to achievement in academic studies, for the vast majority of information available to the student is in English. Yet, unlike children who acquire their native language parallel to the acquisition of basic reading comprehension, the adult learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) arrives in class with an established approach to reading.

Adult EFL learners approach reading, in general, and academic texts, in particular, in very different ways from one another - ways they have acquired in the process of learning to read in their native languages and cultural environment. Yet, it is unclear whether the way they approach reading in their native languages is the same approach they employ when reading in English. Moreover, adult EFL learners have typically studied English previously in a school system that reflects their environment. The methods through which learners acquire English are wide and varied, and are also dependent on their educational and cultural background.

Much language learning research to date has focused on linguistic features (e.g., Erlam, 2003; Miralpeix, 2007; Jean & Geva, 2009). Although linguistic skills are essential for developing reading comprehension in a foreign language, they are not enough for the learner to construct meaning out of reading material. A reader who possesses a rich vocabulary and perfect grammar will not succeed in the complex task of reading academic texts without other necessary skills. Reading involves, for example, understanding explicitly and implicitly stated information, understanding relationships within sentences and between parts of a text, identifying the main ideas in the text and its organization, distinguishing general ideas from supporting details, and understanding the communicative value and function of the text (Omaggio, 2001).

As a novice teacher, I had taken for granted that all students learn to approach reading texts in the manner described by Omaggio, the way I was educated to approach reading in the United States where I grew up. My initial teaching experience was with students of a similar background who approached learning a foreign language in the same way. Students with a homogeneous learning style were very receptive to the teaching methods I employed (and was trained to use within that same cultural system) and advanced more or less in a similar fashion. However, when I first began teaching English to a multicultural group of students in Israel, much to my dismay, these students entered the EFL classroom with approaches to learning English different from the one I had grown up with and mistakenly assumed all students utilized.   Some learners were more receptive than others to the teaching style I used in the classroom, while others were extremely resistant. With time, I have come to expect certain patterns of learning behaviours shared by students from specific cultural groups.

As a result of disparate and sometimes conflicting approaches, the teaching methods I utilized in class did not yield the same results as when used with students who shared the same cultural background. This experience led me to question whether disparity in student approaches to learning English, in general, and to reading academic texts in English, in particular, is accounted for by cultural, religious, and linguistic differences. Moreover, confronted with a multicultural group of students, how could I, as an EFL teacher, help students with such a large variety of language approaches reach their full potential? Is there a multi-approach teaching method that can respond to diverse learning needs, so that students of all cultural backgrounds have an equal opportunity to benefit and advance?

1.2 Context

Within the Israeli context, cultural diversity is at the basis of the country's history and identity formation. The state of Israel is a state of immigrants who make up some 50% of the population. Since its establishment, immigration waves have arrived from Europe following the Holocaust, from North African and Middle Eastern countries seeking refuge in the 1950's, from Eastern Europe in the 1970's, and more recently from Argentina, the Former Soviet Union and Ethiopia in the 1980's and 1990's (Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, 2005).

1.2.1 Ethiopian Immigration

The Ethiopian Jewish immigration process in Israel began in the 1980's. In 2006 the Ethiopian immigrant community numbered 105,000 citizens (32,000 of whom were born in Israel and 73,000 who immigrated from Ethiopia). Some 82% of Ethiopian immigrants worked in agriculture in Ethiopia and lived in rural villages in a predominantly oral culture.

> *Immigration to Israel was for the majority of Ethiopian Jews not only a bewildering entry into twentieth–century civilization with its technology and customs, …, but also an introduction into a literate environment for which their former experiences had left the people mostly unprepared, in a new language they had to learn* (Sever, 1994, p.2)*.*

In 1995-6, 55% of immigrants aged 22-64 had no schooling and were illiterate. This average decreased slightly to 44% in 2003-4. The rate of high-school graduates has risen from 11% to 20% among this population. These rates show an improvement over the years, but a wide gap persists with the rest of the population (The Israeli Association for Ethiopian Jews, 2011).

1.2.2 Immigration from the Former Soviet Union

Since the 1980's, more than one million immigrants have arrived in Israel from the Former Soviet Union, making up 17% of Israel's population (Hoffman, 2003). Several features characterize this population of immigrants. Some 70% of them immigrated to Israel with post-secondary education (Horowitz, 2005). They arrived in Israel with a culture which was strongly influenced by Russian culture and

seventy years of Soviet rule. Characteristic of this group of immigrants is the rich literary background it possesses and the emphasis it places on education (Lehrer Bettan, 2007). It has forged a strong Russian speaking community in Israel. While former immigrations made great efforts to achieve full assimilation within Israeli society, with Hebrew becoming the first and only language of immigrants' children, this group continue to preserve their original culture and heritage in Israel (Hoffman, 2003). They have insisted on retaining their language, as evidenced by the large number of Russian-only bookstores that have flourished all over the country. Kindergartens and schools have also been established by educators from the Former Soviet Union where classes are conducted in Russian.

1.2.3 Argentinian Immigration

Since the establishment of the State of Israel, over 60,000 Jews have immigrated to Israel from Argentina. Argentina has a strong Jewish community which has suffered anti-Semitism over the years. Anti-Semitic sentiments and Zionist ideology have traditionally motivated immigration to Israel. Argentina's political and economic crisis in 1999-2000 spurred an additional influx of some 10,000 Argentinian immigrants.   As the economic crisis mainly affected middle class professionals, this wave of immigration was characterized by professionals with post-secondary education (The Jewish Federation, 2002).

1.2.4 Native Israelis

According to the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (2005) about 50% of the Israeli population is made up of native born Jewish and non-Jewish citizens. In many cases, native born Jewish-Israelis continue to maintain the cultural roots, traditions and identity of their immigrant parents. Arab citizens, including Muslims, Christians, Druze, and Bedouins comprise 20% of the population.

1.2.5 The Matriculation Preparation Programme Setting

As a result of these dynamic cultural encounters, Israeli society is exposed to continually changing influences and transformations. The Israeli college or

university classroom is a microcosm of this encounter, presenting teachers with the challenge of integrating diverse cultural backgrounds in the classroom. Young adult students from such varied backgrounds find themselves sitting together in the same class for the first time when arriving at the matriculation preparation programme in the teachers' college where I teach. Generally, the native language of Jewish-Israeli born students is Hebrew. The native language of Arab-Israeli students is typically Arabic, and their second language, which they have learned at school, is Hebrew. The native language of immigrants from the Former Soviet Union is Russian and that of Ethiopian immigrants is typically Amharic. Hebrew is usually the second or third language that immigrants learn and their level of proficiency varies largely depending on the age they arrived in Israel. For Arab-Israeli and immigrant students, English is a third or even fourth language acquired in the school system (and often the last in terms of priority, both in school and in use).

Although the typical matriculation preparation programme classroom in Israel, like the university or college classroom, integrates students from all the backgrounds described above, they are usually products of a somewhat segregated school system. The Israeli school system is comprised of secular Jewish schools, religious Jewish schools, Arab Muslim schools and Arab Christian schools, among others. Jewish immigrants are supposed to be integrated within the secular or religious Jewish schools, depending on the family's religious disposition, though many school populations are predominantly either immigrant or non-immigrant with very little integration between the two. There is no government or education policy that dictates segregation of schools, and, in fact, there are a number of mixed-population schools including mixed Jewish and Arab-Israeli schools. However, in most cases, segregation stems from the nature of the communities formed by the populations described above. That is, a school built in a Christian Arab village, for example, serves the needs of that Christian Arab community. Nevertheless, despite the diversity of education programmes offered for each type of school, all students must pass the Ministry of Education's national matriculation exams to be eligible for acceptance at the majority of universities and colleges in

the country. English is a significant subject among the matriculation exams, and its score often determines whether a student is eligible to learn in an institution of higher education.

The gaps that exist in average scores between different sectors in Israeli society, in terms of socio-economic status, gender differences and cultural background, have been recognized (Svirsky & Dagan-Buzaglo, 2009). As a result, many students, especially from certain sectors in Israeli society, finish their high-school studies without having successfully completed their matriculation exams. These students often choose one of thirty matriculation preparation programmes offered across the country which provide them with a second chance for success.

1.3 The Matriculation Preparation Programme

In order to qualify for studies at the college where I teach, students must receive a minimum cumulative average of 85 in their matriculation exams. The English matriculation preparation programme (hereinafter referred to as 'the programme') offers students a year-long course (6 academic hours per week) to complete or improve their matriculation scores to become eligible for the B.Ed. programme. These students are typically young adults, aged 19-25. They are usually weak students, as they did not successfully complete their matriculation exams during high-school. Many have experienced failure throughout their school years, and come to the programme in hopes of realizing their ambitions to continue their studies.

For this reason, the programme (See Appendix A for syllabus) has three main objectives. The first objective is to improve students' level of English reading comprehension. In an attempt to give students a positive learning experience with successful achievements, this programme aims to provide them with tools that they were typically not given in school. It equips them with problem-solving skills and reading strategies, including previewing skills, understanding meaning by context, identifying main ideas and supporting details, understanding text structures, and understanding implied meaning. Complementary to these strategies, formal skills, including vocabulary and grammar, are also taught.

A second objective is to provide a space that allows students to share and negotiate the wide variety of learning approaches they bring to class. Students are encouraged to express their unique cultural experiences with their classmates. At the same time, there is an attempt to homogenize their widely different approaches to English reading comprehension. The aim is to integrate the students in the class, by providing them with shared learning styles and techniques.

A third objective is to instil in students a love for learning and to motivate them to learn for the sake of learning. Emphasis is placed on the fact that they are not in the course to pass an exam, but rather to learn how to read. For this purpose, the programme focuses on encouraging active participation and engaging in classroom dialogue as part of the learning process.

The specific programme that we have developed to achieve the aims outlined above attempts to prepare students for the national matriculation exam (Hellerstein-Yehezkel & Rosenberg, 2003). Its higher aim is to prepare students for coping with academic texts in English when they become university or college students. The institution where I teach is a physical education teachers' college that trains students to become certified teachers. Thus, in the programme, we fulfil the crucial role of planting the seeds of education in the sense of generating a process of learning, personal growth and self-discovery, which we hope will flourish during their first degree studies. The success of this process has far-reaching repercussions on children learning in the Israeli education system taught by these future teachers.

1.4 Research Aims and Questions

اشتدي يا أزمة تنفرجي.

A problem is solved when it gets tougher.

(Arabic Proverb)

As adult EFL learners who attend the programme possess a variety of diverse approaches to learning English, in general, and to reading texts in English, in particular, the class may be relatively homogenous in terms of vocabulary and grammar knowledge, yet heterogeneous in terms of reading abilities, language

learning styles and approaches. The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of cultural, religious and linguistic background on their approaches to learning English.

The wide variety of reading approaches employed by students in the EFL classroom poses a challenge to the EFL teacher who attempts to equip students with useful reading strategies. As an EFL teacher, I have come to question how to best teach students in the same class with such divergent approaches and needs. Substantiating a link between culture and language learning styles, especially in terms of approaches to reading academic texts in English, may be beneficial to finding a teaching approach that takes into account the various needs of a diverse student group. For this reason, three main questions have guided this inquiry:

1. How do differing cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds impact upon adult students' approach to and process of learning reading comprehension in English?

2. How do these backgrounds impact upon progress and achievement in reading comprehension in English?

3. Which teaching approach or approaches can best address the various needs of a culturally diverse student group?

The precise meaning of 'cultural, religious and linguistic background', as referred to in this inquiry, required a definition which would not lead to stigmatic labelling of students, but would rather seek to better understand the worldviews they constructed while growing up. In his exploration of teaching language in diverse societies, Coleman (1996) explains,

> *It is important to emphasize that a non-universalist – an ideological – approach to the study of behaviour in the English classroom does not imply cultural stereotyping or simplistic labelling. On the contrary, **it recognizes the extraordinary diversity of human behaviour and human achievement.** It argues that we are all, as unique individuals, nevertheless at the same time members of interlocking and overlapping communities and social systems, from the family to the nation state and beyond. In our different ways and to different degrees we influence the other members of each of those communities, just as we in turn are influenced by them. What we do is the*

product of the interaction between ourselves and this cobweb of influences (p. 13, my emphasis).

To address the questions posed in this inquiry I have implemented Coleman's concept of cultural background as described above. Rather than stereotyping students, I have attempted to celebrate their diversity by conducting an action research using a case study approach. I conducted the study with the participation of 39 students of different backgrounds learning English reading comprehension during the 2010-2011 academic year. To this end, I employed both qualitative and quantitative tools as a way of examining the teaching situation from several angles and forming a multi-dimensional picture of the process taking place.

1.5 Justification for the Study

The present study has important implications in several aspects. As a teacher, the present study has been instrumental in enhancing my professional skills and therefore has implications for improving the programme that I teach and coordinate. An improved programme has immediate ramifications on the achievements of the large number of students who study in this programme. However, the findings of the present study are further intended to inform teachers of similar programmes in the thirty matriculation preparation programmes across the country.

While the current study focused at the micro-level on a very specific teaching context, the challenges it examined are shared by teachers around the world. For this reason, on a wider dimension, the present study offers new insights about teaching multicultural classrooms in general. More specifically, it may be informative to teaching EFL, especially the complex task of inculcating reading comprehension for academic texts in English. This has wide-scale implications for a very large number of students who aspire to acquire one of the much desired keys to success in academic studies.

As in the words of Rabbi Weinreb quoted in the start of this introduction, by holding a magnifying glass to examine the unique nature of each and every one of my students and understanding the contribution of each to the process of learning

by the class as a whole, this inquiry hopes to contribute its unique context-specific findings as an additional part to the whole body of knowledge in EFL reading comprehension and the teaching of multicultural classrooms.

Chapter 2

The Role of Culture in EFL:

Literature Review of the Field

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter the issue of teaching reading comprehension in English for academic purposes to young adults in Israel was introduced. In this chapter the relevant literature is reviewed. Developments in foreign language teaching methodology are outlined to provide some background context regarding EFL teaching methodology and the teaching methods implemented in the programme under examination in the current study. The review then focuses more specifically on various models of reading in EFL to highlight the debate existing today regarding the most appropriate way to teach reading comprehension. As the aim of this inquiry is to explore the impact of cultural background on the acquisition of EFL reading comprehension, the chapter ends with a review of current literature on language teaching in multicultural classrooms.

2.2 EFL Teaching Methodology

As globalisation has permeated virtually every part of the world, so has the English language penetrated all geographical and professional areas, from the media to academia. As a result, the acquisition of English has become essential for self-development and professional advancement. The increasing demand for English proficiency has accordingly been accompanied by developments in EFL methodology. A short account of these methodological shifts is necessary to better understand current approaches and arguments in the field.

The grammar-translation method dominated language teaching for centuries. It was predominantly used for teaching the classical languages of Latin and Greek.

This method is based on teaching the grammar rules of the language and translating classical texts between the target language and student's native language. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when modern languages began to be taught, this method was eventually found inappropriate for spoken communication. The **direct method** (Sauveur, 1874; Berlitz, 1921, See Larson-Freeman, 2000) and **audiolingual method** (Fries, 1945; Skinner, 1957, See Larson-Freeman, 2000) replaced the grammar-translation method and were the established teaching techniques used in the EFL classroom until the 1960's. These methods focus on teaching language orally in the target language, based on the tenets of behavioural psychology by which a learner acquires language by conditioning, through continued listening and repetition after the teacher. The class is centred around the teacher who serves as the model for repetition. Accuracy of specific lexical and grammatical structures is the main objective for mastering the foreign language.

With the development of sociocultural studies in the 1960's, language learning began a maturation process through a partial disengagement from the authoritarian hold of linguistics (Howatt, 1988). As knowledge accumulated about the important effects of social situations on human behaviour, language acquisition began to be examined in a new light. Evidence of the influence of sociocultural situations on language began to accumulate. Language was no longer a mechanical product of linguistics, as it became evident that many other factors are involved in the production of language (Halliday, 1973).

Experts argued that emphasising linguistic structure without taking into consideration the context of the situation or culture prevented language students from acquiring communicability (Hymes, 1972; Halliday, 1973). That is, students who concentrate strictly on the formal structure of the language are unprepared for using it in the 'real world' and unable to achieve successful communication. EFL methodology gradually shifted to **communicative language teaching** (CLT) initiated by Austin (1960) whose philosophy of 'speech acts' (the purpose of language is not only to make statements, but also to perform actions) began to question Chomsky's generative theory of language (1965) (language is an innate formal system of

context-free rules). Hymes (1972) posited Chomsky's linguistic competence against communicative competence.

> *In coining the term [communicative competence] Hymes demonstrated a shift of emphasis among linguists, away from a narrow focus on language as a formal system, a focus most clearly seen in the work of Chomsky (1965) who used the term 'competence' to describe knowledge of language* (Hedge, 2000, p.45).

As the term implies, emphasis was now placed on communicability. The language classroom became learner-centred and the teacher's role was to establish communication opportunities for the students. Grammatical accuracy gave way to conveying the content of a message in a communicative context. Hymes (1972), in response to Chomsky, argued

> *If one uses one's intuitions as to speech, as well as to grammar, one can see that what to grammar is imperfect, or unaccounted for, may be the artful accomplishment of a social act, or the patterned spontaneous evidence of problem solving and conceptual thought* (p.272).

Whereas formerly students were required to complete textbook grammar and vocabulary exercises in rote fashion, they were now performing role play, information gap and drama activities to simulate authentic language communication situations (Howatt, 1988).

Nevertheless, despite its claims to prepare students for 'real world' communication, critics of CLT began to identify its shortcomings, namely that it did not achieve the aims it proposed. Although the type of activities in the EFL classroom had changed, the focus on structural accuracy remained. Students working on a role-play activity, for example, were still examined through the teacher's grammar-focused eyes always ready to correct the students' improper usage of a certain verb's tense (Nunan, 1985, 1987; Legutke & Thomas, 1991; Widdowson, 2003; Kumaravedivelu, 2006, Swan, 1985a, 1985b). CLT also stayed true to the traditions and philosophy of the **audiolingual** and **direct methods** of language acquisition (Howatt, 1988)*.* As Swan concluded,

> *For all its attention to meaning, the Communicative Approach has a strong behaviourist streak* (Swan, 1985b, p.81-82).

While using new methods in their classrooms (namely the above-mentioned communicative activities), teachers adhering to the communicative approach would present a new language structure, model it for the students who would then practise the new structure in a controlled task, and then produce the structure in a contrived situation aimed at simulating an authentic condition. Teachers, however, soon realized that contrived situations do not necessarily lead to natural authentic language, and in fact students may be distracted by their focus on form and may employ reduction strategies in order to avoid using language forms which they feel they have not mastered (Hedge, 2000).

Moreover, CLT met with resistance in classrooms whose students were unaccustomed to techniques they had never met before in a classroom situation.

> *Another classroom constraint is the attitude of the learners themselves. There is evidence that learners have some rather definite views on what are 'legitimate' classroom activities (Willing 1985), and that there are frequent mismatches between learner and teacher expectations (Nunan 1986). These may exert a powerful conservative influence on what is possible in the language classroom* (Nunan, 1987, p.142).

This has especially been true in many mostly non-Western cultures that attempted to adopt it. Prabhu (1987) in India, Shamim (1996) in Pakistan, Holliday (1996) in Egypt, Coleman (1996) in Indonesia, Li (1998) in South Korea, and Yu (2001) in China, all reported that both teachers and learners resisted CLT.

> *These and other reports suggest that…CLT offers perhaps a classic case of a centre-based pedagogy that is out of sync with local linguistic, educational, cultural, and political exigencies* (Kumaravedivelu, 2006, p.64).

Some experts have described the problem in many non-Western classroom settings as a dissonance between the imposition of Western teaching techniques aimed at developing independent thinking in students working in collaboration with the teacher and non-Western ideologies based on clear boundaries between the teachers and students. The role of authoritarian teachers is to transmit knowledge to their students who, in turn, are socialized to model authority and conform for the benefit of the community (Jin & Cortazzi, 1998; Hedge, 2000).

An example of such discord was illustrated in a study conducted by O'Malley *et al.* (1985). In the study, Asian students whose experience with language training

emphasized rote memorization were more resistant to 'modern' strategies of vocabulary learning through imagery and word grouping than Hispanic students who did benefit from such strategies. The Asian students who used the supposedly out-dated 'ineffective' strategies of rote memory with which they were familiar, in fact outperformed all the other experimental groups, including those who had been trained in the more 'modern' techniques. This study illustrated that

> *…in the second language arena, cultural background can be expected to play a part in both identifying the set of learning strategies students bring to a task and the ease or difficulty with which new strategies can be trained. Part of the cultural background of students is their prior educational experiences* (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990, p. 165).

Kramsch and Sullivan (1996) found that language teaching approaches that are incompatible with a classroom's cultural ideology will rarely be successful. Similarly, Hedge (2000) emphasizes the significance of 'cultural appropriacy', or the context of the school setting which is influenced by the surrounding culture's concept of teacher and student roles. Nevertheless, a study conducted by Wang and Byram (2011) found that the dichotomy between seemingly conflicting learning approaches may be less profound than often believed. Chinese students learning in a British institution came with approaches distinct from those expected in the European setting, but were able to draw from new concepts and integrate the two approaches. They were thus able to turn cultural difference from a barrier to a bridge (Jin & Cortazzi, 1998). Similarly, the current study aims to identify what students bring with them to the classroom from their cultural environment, what they draw from the new approaches they are exposed to, and how they can integrate the different approaches.

More recent discourse of the postmodern era has thus permitted EFL to evolve to this more mature phase in language learning theories of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The belief that realities are multiple social constructs, subject to change by their context, have had a substantial influence on language theory. EFL research has therefore begun to focus on diverse students' socio-cultural positions in relation to their learning experience. This 'constructivist' orientation views students as individuals who arrive at the language class with an identity

shaped by their particular background, though not necessarily predetermined by those forces. The impact of a learner's native language, gender, race, or ethnicity on language learning has become a subject for exploration in current research (e.g., Byram, 1988; 1998; 2012; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Kramsch, 1993; Norton, 2000; Byram & Grundy, 2002; Widdowson, 2003; Byram & Feng, 2004; Canagarajah, 2006; Kumaravedivelu, 2006; Westbrook, 2010). It has become apparent that these multiple factors, including culture, constructing a learner's identity play a role in the learner's experience with language and language learning.

> *…culture is not simply 'baggage' which is picked up by the child as he grows up and left outside the door as he enters the foreign language classroom. Culture is an integral part of the individual's identity* (Byram, 1988, p. 25).

For this reason, the challenge before the EFL teacher today, is not to produce a near-native speaker, taking on another identity, as advocated by the audio-lingual method. Rather, by learning about other cultures, they can develop a critical examination of their own culture, and thereby gain a better understanding of their own identity.

The focus on student identity in language learning is reflected in the shift from CLT to **task-based language teaching** (TBLT). The notion of one right 'method' was eroded by TBLT which integrates multiple methods in the EFL classroom. In order to complete a language task or solve a problem, students are taught to employ a number of methods that must be integrated in order to convey meaning. These include focus on meaning, appropriate usage of grammar, communication skills, and psycholinguistic processes. This shift has made distinctions between methods less pronounced.

> *Seeing that a one-size-fits-all approach is no longer available, [Widdowson, 2004] recommends fashioning our approaches from the ground up, in relation to local contexts, needs and objectives. Such an attitude can be creative and liberating to teachers. Rather than looking at communities and classrooms through professional spectacles, we see them for what they are as we design specific approaches to suit them* (Canagarajah, 2006, p.29).

With the realization that an optimal method formulated for the ideal student taught by the ideal teacher in the ideal teaching situation is impractical, this shift in EFL methodology has led to what has been referred to as the current 'postmethod'

condition (Canagarajah, 2006). Postmethod pedagogy maintains that each language learning situation requires a different form of teaching. The decline of methods, as Hinkel (2006) refers to recent developments in EFL, has been supported by current research which has explored the diverse language learning contexts that shape the different expectations, needs and goals of diverse populations.

> *Such fundamental factors as who given L2 [second language] learners are, why and where these individuals undertake to learn an L2, and what their available resources are (e.g. time, cognitive, financial) should and often do determine how particular L2 skills are taught and learned* (Hinkel, 2006, p.111).

To address the diversity of language learning contexts, Kumaravedivelu identifies three important postmethod pedagogy frameworks: Stern's (1992) **three-dimensional framework**, Allwright's (2003) **exploratory practice framework** and Kumaravedivelu's (2003) **macrostrategic framework**. These frameworks attempt to construct a flexible pedagogy that addresses the differing needs of teachers and students in their particular learning context. Stern's framework comprising the intralingual-crosslingual dimension, the analytic-experiential dimension, and the explicit-implicit dimension, advocates the integration of seemingly contradictory approaches. Allwright proposed exploratory practice as a way for teachers to integrate research and pedagogy in the language classroom. Kumaravedivelu offered teachers a macrostrategic framework which includes facilitating negotiated interaction, minimizing perceptual mismatches, contextualizing linguistic input, integrating language skills, and raising cultural consciousness, *inter alia*. Today's language teachers are encouraged to tailor language learning to their specific teaching situation.

Thus, critical developments in EFL methodology have emerged from language teaching research viewed culturally, socially and politically. Practitioners from different regions in the world have taken part in developing and integrating diverse teaching methodologies that best suit their teaching context. Proponents of current postmethod theories claim that by taking into account local contexts, teachers who have until now been constrained by methods that have not

necessarily been appropriate to their particular teaching situation, are granted the freedom to construct a tailor-made pedagogy.

> *Postmethod realizations thus initiate a significant shift away from the traditional paradigm, representing alternatives to the impersonal packaging of methods on the one hand and individualistic learner-centeredness on the other* (Canagarajah, 2006 p.21).

The need for tailoring individualistic learner-centred programmes in the Israeli context is especially significant. The Ministry of Education offers a uniform programme intended for all students studying in Israel, while students learn in vastly different types of schools that reflect their diverse cultures, religions and languages. The inappropriateness of this one-size-fits-all approach becomes apparent at the college and university level.

At the same time, as Akbari (2008) has pointed out, postmethod views have been postulated by theoreticians who fail to take into account the practical conditions within which teachers must work. In their attempt to find an alternative to the ideal method appropriate in all circumstances, they offer a utopian language classroom where teachers are free to construct a language programme suitable for their specific local teaching situation. Teachers free to construct their own appropriate methodology on the one hand, are constrained by, among others, the textbooks they are forced to use and the institutional programmes imposed upon them to teach. In many cases, students must pass national tests which examine their mastery of material which is in complete contradiction to the macrostrategies offered by postmethod theory.

> *The ideal classroom environment where teachers can exercise their free will, unfortunately rarely exists in the reality of language classrooms… such impositions highly limit the scope within which teachers can exercise their postmethod rights and social transformation roles (*Akbari, 2008, p. 646).

In Israel, teachers are obliged to spend a significant amount of their teaching on grammar, as a high proportion of national exams test students' grammatical knowledge of English. In addition, a large part of the curriculum concentrates on preparing students to solve reading passages, known as 'unseens', in somewhat formulaic methods. Students spend much of their classroom time on practising

reading passages and answering the same repeated battery of test questions which require little critical thinking on their part.

In addition, only a handful number of locally published dictionaries are permitted for use in the English high-school matriculation exam. Students are indoctrinated in heavy usage of these dictionaries to 'solve the unseen', so that students are rarely taught other skills for understanding vocabulary and are not exposed to any other sources for extracting definitions. Neither are they challenged to read critically, or understand implied meaning in texts. The prevalent view is that there's simply no time, or need, to teach such skills. For many students who at first arrive in my classroom, a question with an answer which cannot be copied directly from the text, but must be deduced from implied messages in the text, is considered 'an unfair question'.

As such, I too am constrained by institutional forces and am also required to prepare students to pass their matriculation exam. However, within these constraints, I believe that my students benefit from an EFL approach that takes into account their specific needs as determined by their diverse backgrounds. The challenge is finding the balance between attending to culturally sensitive, local, context-specific needs and the universal aim of providing students with reading skills and strategies that will prepare all of them for the same national exam, and for future academic reading.

Akbari (2008) concludes that claims made by postmethod theory proponents must be substantiated by empirical data gathered by teachers reporting on their specific local teaching situations. Findings from the current inquiry in my local teaching situation may add valuable information to other teachers in different teaching contexts, but confronting similar challenges. The specific case of the multi-cultural class learning EFL reading comprehension explored here intends to inform professionals and practitioners in the field on the dynamic relations between cultural background, learning approaches and processes, and progress and achievement in language acquisition.

2.3 EFL Models of Reading

In Israel, reading texts in English is the focus of the English education programme from very early on. The high-school matriculation exam in English almost exclusively examines students' reading skills with the purpose of evaluating their ability to cope with academic material which they will encounter at university level. For this reason knowledge on how to improve teaching the skill of reading in EFL is crucial.

Research on first language (L1) reading has offered several reading models to explain the processes taking place during reading in general. These have been broadly divided into three categories: bottom-up, top-down and interactive (Grabe & Stoller, 2002). **Bottom-up models** refer to the mechanical process of reading at the micro-level of the text which includes such technical reading skills as lexical recognition, spelling and phonological processing (Eskey, 1988; Paran, 1996). Grammatical, syntactic and semantic knowledge is necessary for this process to take place. **Top-down models** refer to a global process of reading at the macro-level of the text, that is, the comprehension of main ideas, the connection between ideas, and the overall structure of the text are sought by the activation of skills such as skimming and scanning for general information, making predictions, inferencing and background knowledge through students' schemata (Goodman, 1967; Grellet, 1981; Nuttall, 1996). **Interactive models** refer to the integration of both bottom-up and top-down skills in order to arrive at meaning, through choosing the appropriate type of skill necessary when encountering difficulties while reading (Stanovich, 1984; Stern, 1992).

Research on L2 reading has attempted to draw on the models described above. Literature on the differences between L1 and L2 can be divided into three categories (Grabe & Stoller, 2002). The first body of literature emphasizes **linguistic and processing differences**, namely differences in vocabulary, grammar, discourse, orthography, metalinguistic and metacognitive processes and amount of exposure. Debate has emerged about whether top-down skills from the student's L1 should be activated when teaching bottom-up skills in L2 or whether bottom-up

skills should be mastered before top-down skills can be acquired (Paran, 1996; Birch, 2002; Koda, 2005).

Although there is agreement that both bottom-up and top-down processing skills are necessary for tackling the task of reading in L2, Birch (2002), for example, contends that linguistic knowledge in the target language is fundamental prior to top-down instruction. Others contend that grammatical knowledge is a minor consideration in relation to global comprehension. When confronted with academic texts, students who may have good command of vocabulary and grammar in the target language may nevertheless fail to comprehend the text due to their lack of familiarity with discourse organization and an inability to recognize the arguments developed in the text (Pearson & Fielding, 1991; Goldman and Rakestraw, 2000, Alexander and Jetton, 2000).

Another L1-L2 difference in reading is the student's awareness of the target language. That is, unlike students reading in their native language whose grammatical and vocabulary knowledge is tacit and functions automatically, L2 readers are learning the grammatical structures and vocabulary at the same time they are learning to read. Therefore emphasis has been placed on developing students' metalinguistic and metacognitive awareness and research seems to indicate that classroom activities should aim to provide students with such skills and strategies when approaching reading in a foreign language (e.g., **Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA)**, O'Malley & Chamot, 1988).

A second body of literature has explored the **individual and experiential differences** between L1 and L2 readers. Students in the EFL reading class have differing levels of L1 reading abilities and motivations for reading in the L2, and different kinds of texts and language resources for L2 readers. L1 reading ability has a significant impact on L2 reading and therefore the more general reading skills and strategies a student possesses in L1 the greater is the potential for transfer to L2 reading.

> *All too often, teachers and researchers do not carefully examine the L1 reading skills of their students. Without such knowledge, we are more limited in deciding what skills and strategies to focus on and promote for transfer* (Grabe & Stoller, 2002, p.56).

Heath (1983) found that childhood reading experience trains children to interact with texts in diverse forms which influence future academic reading of texts. She observed three socio-economic classes and found that children from a working class background who were not taught to read explicitly or read bedtime stories by their parents were typically poor achievers in school. Children who were read bedtime stories by their parents and taught to read only for facts and details typically did well at first but encountered difficulty when school tasks required interpretation skills. Middle class children who were exposed to written texts at an early age and were read stories which parents later associated to the children's everyday lives were asked not only factual information but also higher order questions which trained them to organize, summarize and interpret information. At school they typically performed well, as they had come well trained and equipped to cope with academic reading.

This study clearly indicates that early experience with written texts has an important impact on the way students approach reading in general and their future academic success. More current literature has found that young children from higher socio-economic status homes and whose parents and grandparents had higher education levels exhibited higher literacy, which tended to promote higher L2 reading proficiency in middle school (Reese *et al.*, 2000). Other studies have found that home reading practices, such as reading books to children or taking them regularly to the library, serve as a contributing factor to L2 oral language and literacy achievements (Gonzalez & Uhing, 2008; Hammer *et al.*, 2003; Roberts, 2008). Maternal education and parental L2 English skills have also been linked with better L2 proficiency in adolescent immigrants in the U.S. (Carhill *et al.,* 2008).

Thus, one of the aims of the current study was to explore students' prior experience with written texts, shaped by the home and community environments from which they came. Students' individual reading backgrounds were examined in relation to their wider cultural background. The role of parental education was also examined, including the differential impact of maternal and paternal influence on the students' reading experience.

The studies above also relate to a third important body of literature which have examined **socio-cultural and institutional differences** influencing L1-L2 reading development. Differing socio-cultural backgrounds of L2 readers, differing ways of organising discourse and texts and differing expectations of L2 educational institutions have been found to have an impact on reading comprehension in L2. Students in the EFL reading class may come from cultures with a strong oral tradition where literacy is not shared by all. Other cultures may strongly value sacred or traditional texts over others. In some cultures literacy is valued as a basic necessity for success.

> *What it means to be literate, how this literacy is valued, used and displayed will vary from culture to culture. Some cultures have enormous respect for the printed word, such that it is implicitly accepted as authority, and cannot be questioned. Others fear the implications of putting any opinions in print, since the greater permanence accorded to opinions thereby makes the owner of the opinion more 'accountable'* (Alderson, 2000, p. 25).

Therefore cultural background has an impact on how individuals perceive a text, which may often be in disaccord with the cultural assumptions taken for granted by the writer of the L2 text. The question that arises is how these approaches affect the adult EFL learner when reading a text in English. It can be assumed that students who come from cultures that value sacred texts, those who come from cultures with an oral tradition, and those who come from a culture with a rich literary heritage, will be influenced by their cultural background when reading in their native languages, further impacting upon their approach to reading in English. The teacher's identity has also been recognized as playing a role in how texts are perceived and presented to students (Westbrook, 2010). Taking these factors into consideration, the subsequent question addressed by the current investigation is how the EFL teacher can best assist students coming from such dissimilar culturally influenced reading backgrounds improve their English reading comprehension as a group.

2.4 Culture Effects on Language Teaching

ባሁል ከልጓም ይስባል

As reins guide a horse, so culture guides man

(Amharic Proverb)

The term 'culture' is a loaded one. Kramsch (1995) identified two definitions for the term, the first referring to the body of art, language, literature, academic and social institutions of a group of people, and the second referring to the worldview shared by a group of people through the *'attitudes and beliefs, ways of thinking, behaving and remembering shared by members of that community*' (Kramsch, 1995, p.84). As Kramsch warns, there is a reluctance to explore cultural differences for fear of political incorrectness, for fear of labelling or stereotyping groups of people.

> *Under the fear of reinforcing cultural stereotypes, and under the cover of multicultural pluralism, the default assumptions linked to national cultural ideologies remain often unquestioned and, hence, unexplored… Multicultural relativism or democratic pluralism do not automatically reverse these relations of power and authority, they only make them more invisible* (Kramsch, 1995, p.98).

If one avoids the fact that cultural differences exist and play a role in students' way of thinking and learning as established by Vygotsky (1986), we are in danger of simply averting our eyes and missing the opportunity to learn and grow from those differences. Kramsch suggests openly addressing them, as expressed by the different languages spoken in class and different ways of approaching task solving. Pretending those differences are non-existent in class mutes the diversity of voices for the sake of universalism. Instead, teaching and learning experiences are enriched when that diversity is celebrated and when those voices are heard.

Thus, an examination of the influence of cultural background on language acquisition in general, and reading in particular, can enhance the teaching/learning encounter and process. In the complex process of learning a foreign language, culture has repeatedly been observed to play a significant role. Traditionally when

the teacher comes from the culture of the language being taught, teaching has been from the perspective of the L2 culture. However, when the teacher comes from the local culture, the language has usually been taught from the perspective of the L1 culture. Teachers and students enact the traditional culture of the instructional setting in which they were trained, which is part of the native culture of the society in which they were socialized (Kramsch, 1993; Jin & Cortazzi, 1998).

In Israel, the EFL teaching situation becomes more complicated, as there is no single L1 and L2 culture, but a multiplicity of cultures, ethnicities, religions and languages that co-exist, each with its distinct tradition of learning and reading. One interesting ethnographic study on this phenomenon was conducted on three junior high school environments in Israel: an Arab Muslim school, a Jewish Ultra-Orthodox girls' school, and a secular Jewish school. The researchers concluded that

> …*teaching English as a foreign language was, in this context, an encounter of cultures and not merely a linguistic experience. In essence, our data seem to show that a teacher's feedback in an EFL learning situation is culture bound, and, as such, creates different dynamics of classroom interaction* (Leshem & Trafford, 2006, p. 651-2).

In each setting, the teachers taught the same syllabus designed by the Israeli Ministry of Education. Nevertheless, their teaching styles reflected their cultural value system and consequently English language classrooms were conducted in vastly different ways. In that study, both the teachers and their pupils were products of a shared cultural environment, and thus engaged in a dialogue of a shared linguistic, societal and political system. However, the college or university classroom in Israel is composed of students coming from these different cultural systems, including though not exclusively, the three environments examined by Leshem & Trafford, and often meeting for the first time in this learning setting.

These students have been socialized to learn in a way that reflects their cultural system in general, and more specifically English as a foreign language. These students can find themselves in the English classroom with an Anglo-Saxon teacher, bearing his/her own cultural values and teaching system that may often contrast with those of his/her students. This clash of not two, but a multitude of

cultures can create conflict in the classroom which interferes with language learning.

> *As foreign language classrooms are composed of students from an increasingly diverse background, language teachers can no longer count on a stock of common knowledge against which to teach the foreign language and culture; they cannot build on common schooling habits, common conversational styles; they cannot even count on shared levels of knowledge of a common native tongue* (Kramsch, 1993, p.49).

The above description of the foreign language classroom is extremely appropriate to the Israeli teaching context. It reflects the diversity of the student body in higher education and the complexity of the instructional setting facing the typical English teacher. As described earlier, my classroom is usually composed of students from native Israeli sectors, including Arab Christian, Arab Muslim, and Jewish, as well as immigrants from the Former Soviet Union, Ethiopia and South America. Indeed, each arrives to the classroom with different native languages, educational experiences, knowledge bases, perceptions and expectations of their English class. Their first encounter with me, their American-educated English teacher, can certainly be described as a clash of multiple cultures.

One aspect of cultural diversity in Israel which literature has examined is the collectivism-individualism spectrum. Collectivism pertains to societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups (Al-Harthi, 2005). Literature has defined a collectivist culture as one that attempts to integrate individual goals with the collective. Social networks and social cohesion are highly valued. Norms of such a culture require the individual to consider the needs of the others and act accordingly (e.g., Hofstede, 1980; Triandis *et al.*, 1990). Within Israeli society, the literature has posited Arab-Israeli society on the collectivist end of the spectrum, dating back to their nomadic tribal desert roots some 1500 years ago. Their survival depended on the extended family clan (the *'khamoula'*) or tribe. Middle Eastern Arab culture encourages the individual to subordinate personal needs to the collective, which should be the first priority (Al Haj, 1987). Modern secular Jewish society has been posited on the individualistic end of the spectrum. With developments in media and communication and

globalisation trends accelerating in Israel since the 1990's, secular Jewish society has undergone a transition process from the communal solidarity that characterized the state during its first decades of existence to an individualistic society intent on emulating Western society and its value system. At the same time, religious Jewish society has maintained its more collectivistic orientation (Sagy *et al.,* 1999). These conflicting value systems are further complicated by a background punctuated by the Arab-Israeli conflict and tensions between Jewish religious and secular societies in Israel.

Thus, the cultural encounter in the Israeli college or university EFL classroom is an intricate one fraught with major challenges for the teacher. At the same time, it presents an opportunity for meeting, getting to know, and entering a dialogue with the 'Other'. In an attempt to deal with cultural conflicts in the classroom, Kramsch (1993; 2010) suggests that the teacher and students should establish a 'third culture' which allows participants to examine points of conflict and sources of misunderstandings or differences among the cultures and values that exist in the classroom. Instead of avoiding the fact that the classroom is a junction of contrasting cultural systems in an attempt to create a false harmony, teachers should embrace those points of contrast so that students learn to evaluate their own ways of learning and cultural systems as well as those of others. These moments offer the greatest potential for learning and developing (Kramsch, 1993).

Rather than 'third culture', I refer to this space in the current investigation as 'classroom culture', as a number of cultures are involved in moulding it. Students thereby create a space for a new culture of learning, a *'hybrid of these cross-cultural encounters'* (Kramsch, 2010, p.6). By meeting students from 'other' cultures and entering into a dialogue with them to work towards a common goal, each student, in fact, begins to question his/her own cultural system and learns to adopt certain characteristics from those systems with which he/she is in contact.

For this process to succeed, intercultural competence is required. According to Byram (2000),

> *…someone with some degree of intercultural competence is someone who is*
> *able to see relationships between different cultures – both internal and*

external to a society – and is able to mediate, that is interpret each in terms of the other…It is also someone who has a critical or analytical understanding of (parts of) their own and other cultures…(p.10)

According to Kramsch (2010) intercultural competence is the ability not only to understand the 'Other', but the ability to understand one's symbolic self, how it differs from others, and how to adopt and transform the symbols of others in a way that is faithful to one's own culture. The process of developing intercultural competence is in essence making *'the strange familiar and the familiar strange*' (Byram, 2000).

The ability to adopt and transform concepts and language of the 'Other' in a way that they are given new meaning within one's own system is in fact the aim of the programme I teach. By encountering other cultures, the interculturally competent student is able to adopt the approaches, strategies, views of the 'others' in class, including that of the teacher, and to transform them so that they can be used within his/her own system. The teacher's role becomes crucial in presenting opportunities for that encounter and dialogue to occur.

A further dimension which may help to understand the process of intercultural competence is acculturation theory. Literature on acculturation of minority groups has focused either on those members who accept the majority or host culture or those who reject it (Schumann, 1976, 1986; Berry, 1997). Four dimensions emerge from this dichotomy and further inform us about the adoption and use of different languages and other strategies in situations in which two or more cultures meet. **Integration** refers to the ability to adopt the cultural norms of the dominant or host culture while at the same time maintaining the culture of origin, often leading to biculturalism. **Assimilation** refers to the rejection of one's minority culture and adoption of the cultural norms of the dominant or host culture. **Separation** refers to the rejection of the dominant or host culture in order to preserve the culture of origin. **Marginalisation** refers to the rejection of both the culture of origin and the dominant host culture.

In language acquisition, integration has been found to be a mediating factor for improving language skills (Dixon *et al.*, 2012). According to the 'integrativeness' model, students who desire integration within the target language culture display

greater motivation to learn and consequently make greater advances (Gardner, 1985). This model was further developed by Dörnyei (1990) who contended that even in cultures which do not come into contact with the target language, students who identify with the target language's culture also display an integrative orientation. The motivating factor in their language learning is related to their process of identification with the target language culture and their self-concept, their ideal self as integrated within that culture (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009). In his study of Indonesian children's motivation to learn English, Lamb (2004) argued that the ideal self was not necessarily integrated within the target language culture, but involved a desire to belong to a wider unspecified global English-speaking community.

While the above models have examined the role of the student's integration within the target language culture, whether a specific country, or the wider global community, they have not sufficiently explored students' general integrationist skills. The integration of students in a multicultural class within the 'classroom culture' needs further examination. According to Byram and Feng (2004), not enough empirical research has been conducted on the causal relationships between these factors.

> *There is a need for more empirical research but also for a research agenda such that we can build up a systematic knowledge of language-and-culture teaching, the acquisition of intercultural competence by learners inside and beyond the traditional classroom, the relationship between linguistic and intercultural competence, the effect of both or either of these on social identities, and so on* (Byram & Feng, 2004, p.149).

The current inquiry is an empirical study aimed at better understanding the role of integrationist skills in developing intercultural competence and its motivational effect in EFL acquisition. In the Israeli context, there are several implications to integration. The integration of minority sectors and immigrants within dominant Israeli society may play a role in their integration within the 'classroom culture'. This process may differ from the one experienced by students entering the class from the dominant culture, but who must also integrate within

the same 'classroom culture'. These processes presumably play a part in students' social engagement in class and their eventual engagement with a text in English.

Identifying the relationship between integration within Israeli society, in relation to integration within the 'classroom culture', and consequently integration, or engagement, with a written text in English may be instrumental in enhancing students' learning processes in the multicultural EFL classroom. I believe that in order to grapple with the challenge of developing the learning and reading skills of my students – all of them and not just those coming from the dominant culture that appears to hold values and learning styles closest to Western society – a better understanding of how their culture impacts upon their learning and reading is necessary. Instead of avoiding the fact that differences among my students exist and that these differences are impacted upon by social and cultural background, I prefer to take a deeper look into those influences so that I can in fact challenge those stereotypes that exist in Israeli society, particularly regarding minority groups who are expected to fail or succeed based on certain assumptions regarding their cultural background. This requires that all students be allowed to make their voices heard. For these voices to become harmonious, rather than cacophonous, the 'classroom culture' that is formed requires further exploration.

2.5 Summary

This chapter began by tracing developments in EFL methodology, which have generally reflected social science episteme. EFL methodology has mainly shifted from teacher-centred authoritative instruction to student-centred cooperative learning, and the focus has shifted from accurate production of linguistic features to communicative problem-solving activities. Currently the role that specific local contexts play in EFL classrooms has been acknowledged which has led to today's postmethod condition, with the realization that there is no one optimal EFL methodology.

In terms of reading comprehension in EFL, this chapter has reviewed the various reading models offered by the literature and has presented current debates regarding which aspects of reading, linguistic features or general global reading

strategies, play a more significant role and how they should be presented to EFL learners.

As this chapter has shown, each aspect examined in EFL has led to a discussion of individual and cultural influences of the learner. General EFL methodology has come to the conclusion that learners' cultural environment must be addressed by the foreign language teacher for effective learning to take place. EFL reading comprehension theories have similarly come to the conclusion that cultural influences and experience with the written word impact the learner's approach to reading, in general, and to reading in the EFL classroom, in particular.

For this reason, this chapter has also reviewed more current discussions on the significance of culture on language acquisition. Experts have found that most often language instruction in the EFL classroom reflects the general education culture of the teaching context. However, not enough research has been conducted on the EFL classroom composed of students of diverse and often contrasting cultures and worldviews. Kramsch (1993; 1995; 2010) has been instrumental in offering a language teaching model which provides a 'third space' where different views held by students and teacher alike can be voiced and shared, and Byram (1998; 2000) has been instrumental in developing the concept of 'intercultural competence' which allows students to integrate others' concepts within their own worldview. However, as both point out, there has been great reluctance by researchers to conduct empirical research on these relationships for fear that examining differences will perpetuate stereotypes. Nevertheless, if literature has consistently shown the significant impact culture has on integration, intercultural competence, and foreign language acquisition, the assumption of this thesis is that learners can benefit from a teacher with a greater understanding of the role their culture plays in their approach to learning, in general, and learning EFL reading comprehension, in particular. An examination of the 'classroom culture' and intercultural competence in the Israeli multicultural EFL classroom can inform literature regarding these issues.

The following chapter presents the methodological framework for examining these issues. It explains the reasons for choosing to conduct an action

research using a case study approach. It further describes why a constructivist

approach was most appropriate, and more specifically, it outlines the

phenomenological methodology at the basis of this study.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The last chapter described how language teaching methodology has undergone a gradual shift from searching for one optimal theory that would cater to all students in all circumstances, towards the realization that each teaching situation is unique depending on the context and individual participants. Education research methodology has undergone a parallel development. Just as Hinkel (2006) declared that the search for the ultimate methodology in language pedagogy has declined, so Gary Thomas has warned of the dangers lurking behind theorizing education. In *Education and Theory: Strangers in Paradigms* (2007), he argues that the desire of educators to emulate natural science through the production of education theories has been largely unsuccessful.

> *Many educators appear to have at the back of their minds the idea that theory represented the clearest distillation of intellectual endeavour; the conceptual and epistemological cream of the various disciplines from which it had been borrowed. But my argument is that these successes provide no good reason for contemporary education's romance with theory. The domains in which theory has been useful find no congruence in education* (p.20).

That is, rather than make an attempt to follow in the giant footsteps of natural science which can uncover natural laws and formulate generalizations regarding the world, social scientists, and educators in particular, should aim at inquiry of their specific local context. Experience has taught me that in fact, the language learning theories I was trained to follow in the classroom were limited. In practice, students do not necessarily follow what theory proclaims. Just as language education experts currently speak of the difficulty of reaching generalizations, a crucial element for formulating theory, I realize that great care should be taken when making any generalizations about my findings. Rather, by focusing on my local context I will gain a deeper understanding of my students' specific needs. This

knowledge may shed light on the classroom situation that I face on a regular basis. It is from this position that I hope to contribute to other teachers in similar multicultural teaching contexts. Although I do not claim generalizability to all multicultural teaching settings based on my specific class, I do contend that there is a lesson to be learned from its example. Other teachers may recognize and relate to many of the issues raised and learn from my experience.

In order to achieve these aims, several research methodology approaches are applied in this study in accordance with my views as a teacher and researcher. The ontological and epistemological stances underpinning the current study are related to these approaches and consequently guide the process of data collection and analysis. This chapter describes the constructivist approach applied to conduct the current inquiry. It describes the significance of phenomenology in this process. The chapter then discusses why an action research using a case study approach was chosen as the most appropriate methodology for achieving its aims. The chapter finally addresses the issue of my position as an insider researcher.

3.2   A Constructivist Approach

Much has been written and discussed in the debate between the positivistic and constructivist/naturalistic approaches to conducting research (e.g., Robson, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Dunne *et al.*, 2005; Cohen *et al.*, 2007). Undoubtedly, positivistic research's pursuit for 'hard' objective evidence in the natural sciences accounts for many of the scientific developments we enjoy today in modern society. In the social sciences, however, it has become apparent that 'hard' objective evidence does not necessarily apply to human social relations or behaviour, as humans do not generally react or respond with the same predictability as atoms or other physical phenomena. Statistical evidence gathered using quantitative methods is indeed beneficial for informing policy makers in education on outcomes of various programmes and innovations. Quantitative tools are also instrumental in pointing to patterns of behaviour among groups of individuals. However, these have proven insufficient for providing answers about how certain outcomes were reached or for identifying the complex processes

leading to those outcomes. Over the years, constructivism has provided the social sciences with alternative tools for examining human nature, social relations and behaviour. The application of quantitative methods in order to arrive at universal and generalizable 'truths' has been criticised for decontextualising data from local and personal situations and failing to take into account the meaning and purpose of human behaviour (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). When one realises that each human is an individual who views, reacts, and responds to the world differently, one understands that measuring and quantifying a social situation provides only a partial two-dimensional picture.

> *This point is nowhere more apparent than in the contexts of classroom and school where the problems of teaching, learning and human interaction present the positivisitic researcher with a mammoth challenge* (Cohen *et al.*, 2007, p.11).

By employing qualitative tools with which researchers can describe, reflect upon and engage the subjects of the research, they can gain a third dimension and a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under examination.

To better explain the difference between the two approaches, Kvale (1996) provides the miner/traveller metaphor. Whereas the positivist researcher is like the miner who digs for knowledge assumed to exist 'out there' and waiting to be exposed or discovered, constructivist researchers are travellers taking part in constructing knowledge with the subjects of their investigation.

> *The implication here is that we are not dealing with a fixed and exterior social world, but a world of meaning where the actors are constantly in the process of social construction* (Dunne *et al.*, 2005, p.15).

As a teacher, the marks my students receive at the end of the semester are indeed an important quantitative measure indicative of a certain level of English competence they have attained. However, these grades say very little regarding the process of learning my students have undergone in order to reach that level. They indicate even less about the role that I, as teacher, have played in the process which has brought them to that level. As Elliot (1991) maintains, learning is not a passive process whereby teachers transfer knowledge to students who can then be assessed by measuring learning outcomes using quantitative measures for objective examination. Rather, learning is an active process whereby students must

participate in the acquisition and construction of knowledge by synthesizing, reflecting upon and analysing information. Similarly, teaching is a process which aims at engaging and stimulating these qualities in students.

The present study is therefore largely, though not exclusively, a qualitative study of the learning process that each of my students' experiences. The inquiry attempts to examine the process through which each student approaches and develops strategies when reading in English, the role that each student's background plays in that process, and my role in assisting them to progress using a curriculum that focuses on building reading strategies. Bearing in mind the uniqueness of each experience and Thomas's warning against searching for generalizations where none exist, close attention is paid to any common experiences or patterns of learning among students who share a similar background.

The shortcomings of the constructivist approach and the qualitative methods it often applies have been outlined by its critics who believe that evidence incapable of reproducing the same results and of being generalizable to the rest of the population offers little to policy makers and the professional community. Indeed, I realize that the process I am recording and analysing will not recur in other classes. Fortunately, my students are in no way, shape, or form laboratory rats. Specific experiences I confront, no other teacher including myself will encounter again with the same group of students, and the knowledge my students and I construct cannot be reproduced in exactly the same format. However, as no two diamonds are alike, they all have the same composition. Likewise, no two classes I teach are the same, as no two students are alike, yet my student composition is similar every year. Learning about one class is, therefore, beneficial to future ones.

Although this study broadly draws from constructivist epistemology, quantitative data were also taken into consideration as an important additional source of information. Numerical data, namely students' exercise and test scores, are not discounted on 'ideological' grounds. On the contrary, the more diversity to

the types of data that can be collected, the more faithful a picture I hope to
produce.

> *It is absolutely the case that qualitative and quantitative research differ, and*
> *they are governed by different assumptions and ground rules. But it is not the*
> *case that they are incompatible. Indeed, they complement each other. Nor*
> *can social and educational research be divided neatly into one or the other*
> *type* (Thomas, 2009, p. 83).

Therefore, using a mixed-method approach, I attempted to overcome the criticism
that the constructivist approach lacks rigor. Such an approach aims at reaching a
more detailed and balanced view of the situation examined and bringing to light
any contradictions that may not have been apparent to me when applying only one
type of method.   Denzin (1970) refers to the application of diverse methods to
examine a phenomenon as *'methodological triangulation'*. Quantitative tools to
obtain data on my students' performance and achievement as well as qualitative
tools regarding their views and my perceptions were applied to generate multi-
dimensional insights. In addition, *'data triangulation'* entails gathering data from
different people using diverse sampling strategies at different times and social
situations (Denzin, 1970). Although the term usually refers to collecting information
on a certain issue from diverse groups of participants, for the purpose of this
inquiry, my students were the principal source of data. In this case, a comparison
of data that emerged in interviews between individual students (Kvale, 1996), and
between groups of students who shared a common background, further juxtaposed
with data that arose in classroom observations, proved revealing.

   Such an approach does not promise to provide an unambiguous account of
the phenomenon examined. Different sets of data collected by different methods
were not necessarily corroborated or neatly matched. However, the richness and
complexity captured by the data were intended to reflect the situation explored. As
such, it is a reality constructed by all those involved in the inquiry in line with the
constructivist paradigm. The process of collecting and interpreting information by
means of diverse methods including interviews with students, class observations,
student evaluations and grades, proved to be rather 'messy' and non-linear as is

characteristic of qualitative research. Nevertheless, the tapestry that emerged provides a rich in-depth multi-faceted view of my teaching context.

One 'price' of attempting to examine a phenomenon from different angles and viewpoints is the researcher's submission of objectivity, a characteristic of the constructivist approach that is often criticized. As someone who is an integral part of the study, objectivity in the positivist sense is not the objective. Rather, subjectivity is an integral component of this inquiry. The way I perceive and relate to my students and to my practice is a crucial element under examination. In constructivism,

> *The inquirer's voice is that of 'the passionate participant' (Lincoln, 1991) actively engaged in facilitating the 'multivoice' reconstruction of his or her own construction as well as those of all other participants* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 115).

If this is the case, how indeed can the professional community gain any knowledge that can be useful and applied in other classrooms? How can the quality of this knowledge be evaluated? Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that in qualitative research, the traditional criteria for judging the quality of an inquiry, namely validity and reliability, cannot be applied. They propose **trustworthiness** and **authenticity** as more suitable criteria for constructivist research. A study is **trustworthy** if it has *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability* and *confirmability*. According to these criteria, the research findings are *credible* if the findings present a plausible interpretation of the data collected. They are *transferable* if the findings can be applied or transferred to other contexts. They are *dependable* if the process of data collection, data analysis and theory generation was rigorous and they are *confirmable* if the findings are supported by the data and not shaped by researcher bias. **Authenticity** is established by *fairness* (a balanced expression of all views and voices heard), *ontological authenticity* (the enhanced experience of the participants as a result of the research process), *educative authenticity* (participants' enhanced understanding of self and others), *catalytic authenticity* (the study is not limited to producing knowledge but also action), and *tactical authenticity* (research empowers not only the researcher, but mainly the participants). The current inquiry follows a number of procedures, as suggested by Lincoln & Guba, to

establish trustworthy and authentic findings. Thus, I intend to achieve the goal of producing *'high-quality, meaningful research, which offers insights and makes a valuable contribution'* (Manning, 1997, p.93) to my professional community.

3.3 Phenomenology

In keeping with the constructivist paradigm, phenomenology focuses on one's subjective experience of phenomena. According to phenomenology, both the researcher and participants attribute meaning to phenomena through their subjective eyes. An individual's perception of the world is thereby his/her construction of reality. Subjective perceptions are individually shaped by early life experiences which are accumulated over a lifetime to form a stock of knowledge and understanding of the world (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003; Cohen *et al.*, 2007). Life experiences are the building blocks used to construct an individual's system of values, beliefs and attitudes which are shared with others within the same social system.

Language is an essential component of this process, as words are the reference signs for categorizing and organizing the individual's social world. For these reasons, a better understanding of the early language learning experiences that form students' stores of knowledge might explain the diverse approaches they use as young adults in the language classroom. As phenomenology suggests, the views students have of their language learning and reading approaches may differ from my perceptions as their teacher. These perceptual differences are an important intersection to examine, as they might account for some of the challenges I face in the classroom. For example, students who have been trained to sit quietly, complete grammar exercises and answer questions that elicit factual information from reading passages in their English classrooms undoubtedly need to make some adjustments in a class situation that demands less mechanical work and greater participation in class discussions as well as greater engagement with the reading material. Students who come from an educational background that accepts the full authority of the teacher and who have

been discouraged from asking questions or expressing disagreement or doubts regarding what is being studied and how, resist an approach that encourages them to do so. Similarly, as their teacher I enter the first day of class with certain expectations regarding my students' abilities and approaches to learning and must re-form those preconceptions according to the students' behaviour and performance.

It is by exploring the perceptions constructed through early life experiences that I attempted to learn more about my students' attitudes, learning styles, reading strategies, and expectations from their English reading comprehension course. Examining these early life experiences can assist in gaining a better understanding of student perceptions. Reflecting upon the subject's life experiences helps elucidate how that subject perceives and constructs current phenomena. In an attempt to address the research questions posed, this study explores students' experiences through their recollections, impressions and feelings towards early life experiences with learning in general, language learning in particular, and reading. This information is then compared and related to the approaches and strategies I observe students applying in class.

Moreover, cultural background has been recognized as an important factor in constructing an individual's subjective view. Despite the uniqueness of each individual's view of reality, none of us exists in a vacuum, and our external environment has a strong impact in constructing our internal subjective understanding of the world. According to phenomenology, the way we classify and organize our experiences depends on our environment.

> *We learn these typifications through our biological locations and social contexts. Our knowledge of the everyday world inheres in social order and this world itself is socially ordered* (Cohen *et al.,* 2007. p.23).

Guided by the above concepts suggested by phenomenology, I attempted to gain insight into how my students perceive language learning and reading through their past experiences at school and at home, paying close attention to the impact their specific social context has had on shaping those experiences and its influence on their current approaches as adults to learning how to read academic texts in English.

Clearly, this approach is not without its limitations. Among the disadvantages that have been pointed out is the possible lack of accuracy or completeness of student recollections (Robson, 2002; Cohen *et al.,* 2007; Thomas, 2009). Some students may unconsciously have distorted their memories of early life experiences, while others may have forgotten them. Still others may be consciously recounting false recollections in order to create a certain impression. Nevertheless, even distorted or false memories express certain feelings or attitudes students have constructed towards reading and English language learning. By comparing recollected experiences shared by students of a similar cultural background it is possible to reconstruct an authentic view of the learning approaches students were taught in early childhood.

3.4 Action Research

As its name suggests, action research concerns actors – those people carrying out their professional actions from day to day - and its purpose is to understand and to improve those actions. It is about trying to understand professional action from the inside; as a result, it is research that is carried out by practitioners on their own practice, not (as in other forms of research), done by someone on somebody else's practice. Action research in education is grounded in the working lives of teachers, as they experience them (Waters-Adams, 2006).

According to this definition I appear to have been a 'closet action researcher' all along and I'm now ready to come out and make public the knowledge I have accumulated through experience and this project. I began teaching language in the United States while completing my M.A. degree. When I came to Israel in 1995, I quickly realized that the process of professional change I was undergoing as a result of my new teaching situation required exploration, first for understanding and enhancing my practice, and secondly for sharing this knowledge with other colleagues. The relationships I have formed with students over the years have provided me with a valuable database that has and continues to enhance my teaching. The information I have gathered through experience has been shared with other colleagues by raising and comparing teaching dilemmas

and by sharing possible ways of handling them, whether in teacher training fora or the teachers' lounge.

The next stage in my professional life was writing a preparation textbook for young adult students in matriculation preparation programmes (Hellerstein-Yehezkel & Rosenberg, 2003). The aim of the book is to provide students with the reading strategies that many of them lack when entering such programmes. Since its publication, I have come to recognize, again with the help of my students and colleagues, that despite the effectiveness of some aspects of the programme for certain students, the benefits have not been shared equally by all of them. This has led me to the current inquiry.

I first encountered the concept of 'action research' in Elliott's *Action Research for Educational Change* (1991). This initial exposure was instrumental in shaping the methodology design for this research project. Elliott defines the concept in the following way:

> *Action research might be defined as **'the study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of the action within it'**. It aims to feed practical judgement in concrete situations, and the validity of the 'theories' or hypotheses it generates depends not so much on 'scientific' tests of truth, as on their usefulness in helping people to act more intelligently and skilfully. In action-research 'theories' are not validated independently and then applied in practice. They are validated through practice* (p.69, original emphasis).

This definition encapsulates my intentions as a teacher-researcher: to examine my teaching situation in order to improve the quality of my teaching skills through real life classroom situations and to arrive at theoretical insights through practice. The teacher-as-researcher movement developed partly in response to the recognition that theory from outside 'experts' was not particularly beneficial to practice. This movement has proven valuable in contributing to knowledge of the teaching practice (Stenhouse, 1975; Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Elliott, 1991; McNiff & Whitehead, 2006; Somekh, 2006; Altrichter *et al.*, 2008).

An important factor in the teacher-as-researcher movement was the development of reflection on one's practice and raising teachers' tacit knowledge to the level of awareness, thus enabling them to theorize on their practice (Stenhouse, 1975). Through reflection upon practices, theory can then be

constructed and pedagogy enhanced (Waters-Adams, 2006). When I began teaching English in Israel for the first time, I immediately began to question the language education theories I had been taught in the United States because they failed to succeed in my new teaching context. Students who did not share the same cultural system in which I had grown up were resisting the teaching methods I was trained to use. It was at that moment that I began the process of reflection upon my practice and making intuitive adjustments, based on trial and error, in the attempt to address my students' needs. According to Schön (1983), I had undergone the transition process as a teacher from 'technical rationality', which I exercised as a novice practitioner by attempting to implement the teaching theories I learned at university, to 'reflective rationality' when those theories did not produce the results I had anticipated. This was accomplished by negotiating with myself, my students, and my more experienced colleagues those methods and materials that would yield more effective results as characteristic of action research's collaboration (Altrichter *et al.*, 2008).

This process has led my professional self to the current junction of what Schön (1983) refers to as 'reflection-in-action', or action that I have taken to solve problems as they arose, albeit without the ability to academically analyse and verbalize it, and 'reflection-on-action', or the ability to formulate this tacit knowledge explicitly and verbally. This requires me to step back from my actions in order to reflect upon them and articulate them in abstract form (Altrichter *et al.*, 2008). Theory is thus born from practice.

It is at this junction that I aspire to engage with the professional community through action research. By implementing knowledge established by the professional community in the process of conducting the current investigation, I have gained a new pair of lenses with which to hone the view of my practice and a vocabulary with which to verbalize and theorize on these views so that they can be shared in turn with that professional community.

In order to achieve these aims, I implemented a number of elements characteristic of action research. It has been acknowledged that there is no one specific way of defining or characterizing action research (Carr & Kemmis, 1986;

Elliott, 1991; McNiff & Whitehead, 2006; Somekh, 2006; Altrichter *et al.*, 2008).

Just about every discussion on action research begins with a comment such as the

following:

> *The action research family is wide and diverse, so inevitably different people*
> *say different things about what action research is, what it is for, and who can*
> *do it and how* (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006. p.7).

Nevertheless, a number of important characteristics are outlined in much of the

literature which apply to this inquiry. One crucial characteristic of action research is

its **participatory-insider** nature (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Carr & Kemmis, 1986;

Elliott, 1991; McNiff & Whitehead, 2006; Somekh, 2006; Altrichter *et al.*, 2008;

Reason and Bradbury, 2008). Action research was borne out of a shift of the

researcher's role from an outside theoretician to an inside practitioner (actor). My

role as a researcher of my teaching situation is not disconnected from my role as a

teacher taking part in the situation examined.

Similarly, my students play a significant role, not merely as objects of my

investigation, but rather as contributing participants in the process and outcomes

of the inquiry. Their input, opinions and perceptions of the learning process provide

a multitude of voices that must be heard if a better understanding of their situation

is to be gained and if the programme they follow is to be improved. As such, the

collaboration between my students and me for the purpose of better

understanding and enhancing our teaching-learning context allows us direct access

to the subject examined.

> *Action research does not start from a desire of changing others 'out there',*
> *although it may eventually have that result, rather it starts from an*
> *orientation of changing with others* (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p.3).

In its purest sense, action research calls for all participants in the study to be

involved in every stage, starting with formulating the problems to be examined to

the decision of which approaches are to be taken in resolving them (Reason &

Bradbury, 2008). However, in the current study, the problems I have chosen to

examine have been festering over the years I've been teaching, long before the

current inquiry began. As a teacher who has repeatedly confronted them, the

problems emerged and were defined prior to the decision to investigate them. In

addition, I have selected the approaches and methods to be employed in the investigation after a long process of studying which are most appropriate to addressing the research questions. Still, the role of my students was essential in this process. The problems raised and the approaches I selected to resolve them were negotiated with the participants of this study and implemented after their confirmation.

A second characteristic of action research is that it brings about **change in one's practice** and consequently engenders **change in the environment** under study (Somekh, 2006). I believe that a change must be effected in the current state in which certain students, often from a specific cultural background, neither reach their full potential nor advance in the same way as do students from other cultural backgrounds. With my students' cooperation, the programme taught, the teaching strategies I employ, and the learning strategies my students use, are all explored in order to identify which elements require change and improvement. By finding ways to solve the specific problems I am faced with as a teacher, my broader aim is to provide other teachers in the same predicaments as I find myself, with practical knowledge and perhaps inspire them to make their own changes.

A third characteristic of action research is its **cyclical reflexive** nature (Thomas, 2009). A diagram with an image of a coil appears in virtually every discussion of action research to demonstrate that instead of conducting a pre-programmed linear study, cycles of action and reflection unfold throughout action research. By reflecting upon my students' and my actions, by gaining a clearer understanding of the influence of my teaching methods and content on my students and reflecting on their reactions to them, I accordingly made changes in the methods and strategies I employed. The effects of these changes were then followed again by reflection, and so forth. Thus, the data collection process influenced my on-going practice by providing me with immediate information and continuous insights. This iterative nature of action research has been identified as an important strength of the approach as teachers have the opportunity to test the changes they apply in their practice on a daily basis (Altrichter *et al.*, 2008)*.*

Also characteristic of action research is its **emancipatory** nature (Carr & Kemmis, 1983). Discussions on action research include big concepts such as 'liberation', 'emancipation' and 'democracy'. On one level, the essence of action research is emancipatory in the sense that it provides practitioners with the freedom to examine their own work contexts and offer their own solutions independently rather than be bound by outside constraints. On another level, the collaborative nature of all those involved in the inquiry implies an equality relationship, rather than the traditional hierarchy that characterizes the education system (Somekh, 2006). Cooperation with my students in this inquiry aims at weakening the teacher-student power relationship, and granting students the opportunity to voice their views, thus establishing a more equal relationship, not only for this investigation, but also for facilitating their learning. Moreover, as is the case in many classrooms, I realize that inequalities exist between my students, whether due to socio-economic status, minority status, gender, or culture. Obviously, attempts to guide all students to succeed in their English reading comprehension course will not do much to diminish those inequalities in society. Nevertheless, if I am able to create a classroom in which some of those invisible boundaries can be dissipated, I hope I will have contributed in some small way to stimulating students to question the society in which they live and to think about the society in which they ought to live.

To summarize, in the current inquiry I aspire to *better understand my practice* as a teacher by examining my classroom situation through *cyclical reflection* on my teaching situation in order to enhance my practice and the process of learning experienced by my students. This process is activated by the desire to bring about *change* in the current situation and to find ways to understand and meet the diverse needs of my students in order to minimize the gaps between them in terms of development and achievement, and thereby has an *emancipatory* objective. Analysis of this process and its articulation in this thesis are aimed at generating theoretical understandings of the phenomena examined at the local level. This specific case may therefore prove illustrative to other teaching contexts sharing similar issues.

3.5 Case Study

When teaching my students the meaning of the word 'paradox', I often give as an example the well-known saying 'The more I learn, the less I know'. At the conception of this research project, it seemed obvious to me that I have an interesting case before me worthy of examination – an Israeli multicultural EFL reading comprehension class. Like a good doctoral student and novice researcher I began the busy task of reconnaissance, reading the literature on case studies by experts in the field. It soon became clear to me that the definition of the concept of case study was not clear at all.

Starting with the traditional works on research methodology, Cohen *et al.* (2007) define case study as such:

> *'the study of an instance in action' (Adleman et al. 1980). The single instance is of a bounded system, for example a child, a clique, a class, a school, a community. It provides a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theories or principles* (p.253).

This definition seemed clear enough and an appropriate explanation for my study aim, to investigate real people (my students) in real situations (the English matriculation preparation programme). However, when I followed up the search for a more comprehensive meaning of case study, I soon realized that the majority of experts (e.g., Yin, 2009; Stake, 2003; Bassey, 1999, Simons, 2009) find the term 'case study' an elusive concept that is difficult to define. Bassey wrote an article entitled 'What is a case study?' and Tight (2010) entitled his article 'The curious case of case study', both reflecting the difficulty in figuring out what exactly case study means.

Across the spectrum, from methodology to method, argument has raged about whether case study is a methodology, an approach, a strategy, a method, or some other form of conducting research (e.g., Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Bassey, 1999; Simons, 2009; Tight, 2010). Somewhat convincingly, Simons (2009) views case study as neither a method nor a methodology, but rather an approach.

> *I prefer the term 'approach', to indicate that case study has an overarching research intent and methodological (and political) purpose, which affects what methods are chosen to gather data* (p.3)*.*

In accordance with this view, I 'approached' my investigation within the constructivist methodology framework using methods that would best illuminate the 'case' of the multicultural EFL class I examined.

With this approach in mind, I continued my search for the meaning of case study by comparing what the experts agreed upon. They seemed to have reached the conclusion that case study serves as a catch-all phrase for social science investigations in general, as they all focus on a 'case', a particular situation that is experienced by the group of people examined.

> *…case study is essentially a convenient label that can be applied to just about any social research project…* (Tight, 2010, p.329).

Still, what elements are specific to case study as opposed to other investigative approaches? Discussions of case study include in their explanations phrases such as 'an in-depth exploration' or 'an holistic examination' of 'a specific real-life situation' in 'a bounded system' or in 'an instance of action' (Cohen *et al.*, 2007; Stake, 2003; Yin, 2009; Bassey, 1999; Simons, 2009; Tight, 2010). Within the field of education, Simons (2009) provides a particularly comprehensive definition.

> *Case study is an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, programme or system in a 'real-life' context. It is research-based, inclusive of different methods and is evidence-led. The primary purpose is to generate in-depth understanding of a specific topic (as in a thesis), a programme, policy, institution or system to generate knowledge and/or inform policy development, professional practice and civil or community action* (p.21).

This definition also reflects the aims of the current investigation and the means for reaching them. By examining the case of the classroom I teach, I sought to better understand the impact of the programme and my teaching strategies on my students' improvement in English reading comprehension. This approach is also in accordance with Yin's (2009) definition of case study as an in-depth investigation of a "*contemporary phenomenon…within its real-life context*" (p.18).

Stake (2003) categorizes case studies into *intrinsic*, *instrumental* and *multiple* or *collective*. The *instrumental case study* aims at an in-depth investigation

of a particular case to exemplify other similar cases. Whether generalizations can be drawn from a single case study has been questioned. Some maintain that a case is a unique and particular situation which is unrepeatable, and reaching conclusions from such a specific case with a small database is problematic (e.g., Stake, 2003; Yin, 2009; Simons, 2009; Thomas, 2009).

> *There is no intimation in the case study that you will be generalising from this case to others. How could you? It's one case.* (Thomas, 2009, p. 114)

The information I gathered from my students is not enough to make assertions about how all culturally diverse classrooms are conducted, nor about how all members of a certain culture group learn English. Nevertheless, I believe that many elements of the personal experience I share with other teachers will be recognized by those who have also found themselves in similar teaching situations. As Stake (2003) suggests,

> *When the researcher's narrative provides opportunity for vicarious experience, readers extend their memories of happenings* (p. 145).

By comparing the current case with others, the accumulation of similar case studies can then lead to the process of reaching generalizations and theories on the subject. Altrichter *et al.* (2008) maintain that

> *…when several such accounts are brought together for cross-case analysis, the findings become increasingly stable and capable of informing the action strategies of other professionals working in comparable settings* (p.11).

Simons (2009) concludes that the paradox of case study is that from the particular and unique case, the universal can be better understood. Similar situations and dilemmas recur and an action that was beneficial in one case can be beneficial in another with similar elements (Flybjerg, 2006). When medical students train for their profession, they are not sent to the emergency room with a stethoscope to begin treating patients because they passed all their theoretical exams successfully. They must undergo a long process of residency during which they are exposed to a countless number of cases. Teachers are similarly not thrown into deep water without undergoing a student-teaching residency where they encounter real-life cases to which they must apply the theories learned previously in the classroom.

The action research case is therefore an important teaching tool for becoming a professional.

Herein lies the strength of this approach. In the current inquiry, I focused on my particular class of students and on each student's particular needs, while at the same time I sought to find how common those needs and classroom situations are, by reflecting on past experience and the tacit knowledge that I have developed over the years and comparing with literature in the field. The knowledge and insights I gained in the process and share with my colleagues may initiate a dialogue on similar issues in the professional community.

In addition, as Thomas (2009) and Flybjerg (2006) suggest, individual cases, even 'black swan' cases, which deviate from general ones can be revealing. While on the one hand, the case examined here is the multicultural classroom, it consisted of 39 students, each a case in and of him/herself. As such, the individual cases constructed during the study are presented as 'case narratives' (Flybjerg, 2006).

> *…when writing up a case, I demur from the role of omniscient narrator and summarizer. Instead, I tell the story in its diversity, allowing the story to unfold from the many-sided, complex, and sometimes conflicting stories that the actors in the case have told me* (p.238)*.*

My students' stories are presented alongside my perceptions and interpretations of the process they underwent. The reader can thereby become an active participant in constructing meaning from the narratives and shaping the case. Current literature has focused on the role of small-story narratives in EFL research (Norton & Early, 2011; Vásquez, 2011; Menard-Warwick, 2011). Menard-Warwick (2011) defines 'narrative' as

> *a text that connects events, actions, and experiences across time and that additionally evaluates these events and experiences* (p. 565).

Small-story narratives give an additional view of how students as storytellers construct their identities, as individuals, as students, and as representatives of their culture. The narratives are embroidered by me, their teacher and researcher of their learning process. This embroidery is a further construct of my identity formation and representation.

Like all narratives, my story of research should not be seen as a report of the 'facts,' but rather as a dialogic process in which I construct temporal connections and theoretical evaluations out of imperfectly remembered experiences (Menard-Warwick, 2011, p. 572).

In the same way I invite my students to engage with one another, and with me, in the classroom as part of their learning process, and to engage with the texts they read, I invite the reader of this thesis to engage with the narratives and become a part of them.

This approach has been criticised for the lack of professionalism with which it is handled, and the researcher's bias (Stake, 2003; Bassey, 1999; Yin, 2009; Simons, 2009). To minimize these shortcomings, I made every effort to carry out the study in the most rigorous way possible. I conducted peer debriefing through regular consultations with professional colleagues, my dissertation group and the supervisors of this thesis for the purpose of taking into consideration many otherwise missed insights, directions of investigation and possible conclusions (Yin, 2009). Moreover, my still inexperienced research skills are partially compensated for by my extensive practical experience as a language teacher. In the process of conducting this study, I activated the tacit knowledge I have gained through many years of experience (Altrichter *et al.*, 2008). In addition, a thorough and systematic case study protocol and a case study database were kept and each step of the study was carefully recorded and documented (Yin, 2009).

To counter the potential bias effects produced as a result of being an active participant, multiple sources of information were explored. Although this research is a single-case study, it explores the case from a wide variety of angles using diverse research methods and measures, both quantitative and qualitative. The search for inter-related links between these sources and corroboration of the various data collected are a way of establishing trustworthiness and authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Nevertheless, however rigorous the data collection in this inquiry may be, subjectivity is neither avoidable, nor desirable. A significant element under investigation is my teacher role and its impact on my students. The aim of the study is not to give a measurable objective view of the case examined in positivistic terms, but rather to give my subjective view as a teacher of the

classroom I teach. This is indeed a personal journey in which 'I' am an active participant.

> *Subjectivity is not something we can avoid whatever methods we adopt, though it is more visible in qualitative inquiry, where people, including the researcher, are an inherent part of the case* (Yin, 2009, p. 16).

In order to prevent the formation of a distorted picture of the case due to my subjective stance, reflection was undertaken throughout the process of investigation, with the aim of turning subjectivity into a source of insight and understanding (Simons, 2009). In addition, my viewpoints were continuously compared and contrasted with those of the participants involved to allow for diverse opinions and voices to be heard and for conflicting perceptions to be examined. Member checking was also applied to allow participants to confirm my interpretation of the case and to allow them to become joint partners in its construction.

3.6 Positionality and Ethical Issues

> *All researchers are positioned…researchers are positioned by age, gender, race, class, nationality, institutional affiliation, historical, personal circumstance, and intellectual predisposition. The extent to which such influences are revealed or concealed when reporting data is circumscribed by the paradigms and disciplines under which we train, work, and publish. All researchers are positioned whether they write about it explicitly, separately, or not at all (Chiseri-Strater, 1996, p. 115).*

In this investigation of my students' backgrounds, my own has clearly played a role. It has been a factor in the impetus to conduct it and the process of conducting it. It has also played a role in the way my students perceive my position as their teacher and researcher and their level of engagement throughout the study.

I am the product of a multicultural family. My mother is British and my father is a native Israeli. I therefore grew up in a bilingual, bicultural home where intercultural negotiation took place on a regular basis. I was born in South Africa, though spent the first years of my childhood in Israel learning both Hebrew and English as first languages. At the age of nine, my family moved to the United States

where I grew up, matured and was educated. Growing up in a small mid-western town, my family was the only Jewish one there, and I was the only Jewish student in school. Not surprisingly, I quickly befriended the only Muslim student in school, whose parents immigrated to the United States from Pakistan, and the only Catholic student in school. I believe it is this experience which provided me with the foundations for intercultural competence and integrationist skills. I also experienced what it means to be a minority and an immigrant, and the role of language in integrating within a host country. While growing up in a home with Jewish-Israeli traditions, I was also influenced by American values and worldview. After completing both first and second degrees in French and Spanish studies in American universities and having spent time living in Canada and Spain, I returned to Israel at the age of 25 where I continued to pursue my profession as a language teacher.

These experiences have played an important part in constructing my identity and may have led to what Menard-Warwick (2011) refers to as 'positive alienation,' or the feeling of being different from the mainstream culture and attracted to 'other' cultures. Menard-Warwick (2011) has found this phenomenon to be common among EFL teachers. I believe this experience has granted me the unique position of both insider and outsider to Israeli society. As one of my students has commented, *'you are American, but still, you're one of us.'* As a secular Jewish American-Israeli and a Hebrew speaker, I share a certain common ground with my secular Jewish-Israeli students which facilitates communication with them and I believe was an important factor in their ability to trust and open up to me. However as an American, I can, nevertheless, take a step back and look at Israeli culture as an outsider, as I can discern the differences between the two cultures I grew up in, and thus avoid taking for granted the behaviour and nature of either.

My experience as a minority and an immigrant has also played an important role in my ability to understand and relate to the experience of my students of minority and immigrant status. This has also been a facilitating factor in communication with students from these sectors.

I believe that this experience has provided me with an informed position enabling me to relate to each of my students, regardless of background. It has also been instrumental in both easily gaining the trust of my student participants to become involved in the study and being able to examine and analyse their stories from a non-judgmental neutral and respectful stance.

A related issue that may raise ethical questions is the teacher-student relationship with my students. I am fully aware of the power relations that exist between a teacher and a student and that a student might feel pressured to participate in such a study. This mutual dependence may be problematic (Altrichter *et al.*, 2008). I acknowledge and was aware throughout the academic year that students have certain obligations to the programme in order to remain in it. Also, they depend on me, their teacher, to provide them with the necessary skills to pass their matriculation exam. I, in turn, depend on their participation in the study. In fact, in a couple of instances, students jokingly commented that they would agree to interview, as long as I assigned them less homework. However, this interdependence is somewhat limited. In the case of the matriculation exam, two external markers graded it so that the final mark they received was out of my control. I had no influence (other than my teaching skills) over that mark. This substantially limited the power relations between us. The fact that these students were adults also helped limit the sense of coercion that might otherwise be implicit. As adults who have paid tuition to study in the programme, they had no sense of obligation to their teacher. On the contrary, it was my obligation, as their teacher, to provide them with adequate preparation for their exam. Still, great care was taken to clarify to students that they were in no way obliged to take part in the study and that participation was purely voluntary. Once they consented to participating, they were reminded that should they choose to withdraw participation at any stage of the study, they were free to do so. However, none of the students declined participation, and on the contrary, students were enthusiastic to take part in the project and expressed their interest in its aims and findings. They frequently made comments indicating they were in favour of having

their voices heard and that interest was taken in their lives and the process they were undergoing.

3.7 Summary

This chapter outlined the constructivist paradigm framing this study. Within this paradigm, the significance of the phenomenological approach applied in the current inquiry was discussed. As a teacher-researcher, the rationale for conducting an action research using a case study approach was explained. Finally, my insider participant researcher position was considered. The next chapter presents the methods employed to gather data within the methodological framework that was outlined.

Chapter 4

Methods

4.1 Introduction

In the last chapter the methodology framing the current study was outlined. Data collection was designed in accordance with this methodological approach. This chapter describes the research design of the study, its participants, and the tools for gathering both qualitative and quantitative data. Below is an outline of the research design (Table 4.1). Each stage is then described in greater detail.

Stage	Method	Purpose
1: Informed Consent	Informed Consent Form	To inform students of the study aims and request their consent to participate
2: Reading and Entry English Level Assessment	English Diagnostic Level Test	To assess students' vocabulary, grammar and reading comprehension level in English
	Reading Strategy Exercises	To examine students' usage of reading strategies when reading in Hebrew or their native language
3: Intervention	The STAR (Steps to Academic Reading) programme	To teach students reading strategies by scaffolding them in a series of tasks before applying them when reading a text
4: Monitoring Student Performance and Progress	Class observations	To observe students' behaviour, general learning approaches, and reading strategies To observe student interactions in class and student reactions to strategies taught
	Student progress journal kept by teacher	To keep a record of each students' progress: their quiz, test, and reading strategy exercise scores and written assessments of their work To keep a record of individual students' learning process, including key events and student communications with teacher throughout the year
5: Interviews	Semi-structured interviews	To learn about students' life world through gaining an in-depth view of their family, education, reading background, and life experiences
6: Assessment of Student Achievement	Final exam	To examine students' application of the strategies taught in the programme when reading texts in English To assess students' progress and achievements

Table 4:1 Outline of research design

4.2 Description of Participants

In the 2010-2011 academic year, 39 students attended and completed the English matriculation preparation programme I taught at a teachers' college in Israel. Ages ranged between 19 and 27 years (Ave: 23.5 years). The student population included students from native Arab-Israeli and Jewish-Israeli background and immigrants from the Former Soviet Union, Ethiopia, and Argentina. Students included 18 females and 21 males.

The students were enrolled in a special programme geared to students who aspired to continue their studies at the college, which is a physical education and sport sciences teachers' college granting students a B.Ed. and qualifying them to become physical education teachers by the Ministry of Education. Therefore, this group of students shared two similar characteristics. They were athletes or engaged in the field of sports in some way. They were also typically weak students who had not completed their matriculation exams following high-school and the majority experienced difficulties at school, either specifically in English or in other subjects as well. In addition to national psychometric exam scores, they were required to have a cumulative average score of 85% on their matriculation exams at the end of the matriculation preparation programme as a prerequisite for acceptance at the college. English is a crucial subject among these exams, and its grade often plays a role in a student's acceptance to the college.

4.3 First Stage - Informed Consent

At the start of the programme, I presented my research plans and aims to my students and asked for their informed consent to participate in the study. As explained in the positionality and ethical issues section of the former chapter, in order to respect the student-teacher relationship, I did my utmost to make students understand and feel that their participation was completely voluntary. I gave students a written explanation of the purpose of the study, its expected benefits, the policy of confidentiality I must adhere to, how data would be gathered, and the students' right to take part or decline participation (Thomas, 2009). Students who agreed to partake in the study opted in by signing an informed

consent form and received a form with my commitment to uphold the stated ethical criteria. Students were reminded throughout the year at each stage of data collection that they were in no way obligated to take part and could withdraw at any time. All the students attending the programme agreed to take part in the study and signed the consent form.

4.4 Second Stage

Students' English level at the start of the year was assessed by an English diagnostic level test. I also conducted initial conversations with them at the start of the programme to coordinate expectations. Throughout the year, I gathered information regarding their reading proficiency in Hebrew and their respective native languages, with attention paid to the reading strategies they applied when reading.

4.4.1 English Diagnostic Level Test

As part of the standard placement procedures at the programme, students were given an English diagnostic level test (see Appendix B) to assess their level at the start of the year. This test is composed of a grammar and vocabulary section and a reading section. The reading passage and questions are part of a former matriculation exam. The test is a standardized exam given to all students entering the programme for level placement purposes. It has proven to be a valid and reliable measure of students' skills at the start of the programme. Observation of students while taking the test was recorded, with attention to their behaviour and the types of questions they asked during the test. In addition, annotations (including parts of text marked, words circled or translated, notes written in margins, etc.) made by students when completing the test were recorded as a way of examining the student's level of engagement with the text. Questions on the test were also divided by category according to type of skill needed to answer each correctly, and tests were analysed accordingly.

4.4.2 Reading Strategy Exercises

In order to examine students' 'pure' reading strategies, without the added distraction of a foreign language, I prepared four reading strategy exercises in Hebrew that students completed throughout the academic year (see Appendix C). Exercises examined students' previewing skills, ability to identify main ideas and differentiate them from specific details, ability to identify text structures and connectors (listing, sequence, comparison and contrast, and cause and effect), and ability to understand implied meaning. As I do not command my students' native languages other than Hebrew and Spanish, it was decided that students would complete these exercises in Hebrew. The rationale was that Hebrew is a language that all students are expected to command in order to study at the college. Also, I would be able to assess their work without the assistance of a mediating translator. However, during the second reading strategy exercise administered in class, students raised questions indicating they did not command Hebrew as well as some of the native Hebrew speakers in class. For this reason, the other two reading strategy exercises were translated into Arabic, Russian, and Spanish. The exercises were first piloted with students from other classes and then administered to the students in the programme. The students' work was then assessed with the translators of the exercises.

The idea for assessing students' usage of reading strategies in their native languages came about as a result of a critical moment in my teaching. After teaching students how to preview and pre-read in order to predict the main ideas of a text, a student who had expressed his enthusiasm for having learned this skill said that he had never been exposed to it in Hebrew (his native language) and asked if I thought '*it would work in Hebrew as well*'. At this moment I realized that I was not only teaching English, but also equipping students with reading comprehension strategies in general. English language became an 'added value' of this process. I then understood that I needed to learn more about which strategies my students had been exposed to and had acquired in their previous educational background.

For this purpose, I composed exercises to assess students' reading strategies in Hebrew. Each of these exercises was piloted in previous classes. Ideally an assessment examining all these strategies at the start of the year would best inform me of the strategies with which students are equipped when entering the programme. However, piloting such an assessment proved that the task was counterproductive. Students felt overburdened, lost their concentration, and were unable to complete it in a way that reflected their true abilities (Heaton, 1990). For these reasons, I restructured the assessment in the form of several separate exercises each of which focused on one reading strategy at a time in Hebrew. Each was administered to students throughout the course of the academic year prior to being formally taught in class. After students have been exposed to the strategy and have had ample opportunity to practise it in English, they took a matriculation practice exam as a post-exercise activity that required the usage of the strategy in order to understand the passage in English.

The exercises received both a numerical evaluation and a written assessment of how students approached the task (underlining phrases, circling key words, highlighting information, etc.). Originally I had intended to provide only a written assessment of the exercises but I added the numerical evaluation to facilitate comparison between students and evaluation of their progress. Clearly, a numerical score is not sufficient for understanding a student's abilities. It is the written assessment that supplemented the grade by providing richer and more in-depth insights on how students solved each task.

These exercises were 'home-made' (Thomas, 2009) and designed by extracting sections of former English matriculation exams and composing exercises that require the application of specific reading strategies in order to fully comprehend the passage. The disadvantage of composing 'home-made' exercises is that they are non-parametric, non-standardized and more complicated to assess (Cohen *et al.,* 2007), thus compromising their trustworthiness. I attempted to create credible and dependable exercises by using passages used previously in exams for students at this level, and by refining them after piloting them in previous classes. In addition, peer debriefing was conducted with two colleagues

who provided valuable input for refining the tasks. These 'home-made' exercises were thus tailored to assess specific strategies for this particular group of students in their local setting (Cohen *et al.,* 2007) and have proven to be valuable sources of information regarding which strategies need strengthening during the programme.

4.5 Third Stage – The Intervention

The programme we developed and have been teaching since 2003 is based on teaching students reading strategies for the purpose of enhancing their reading comprehension skills (Hellerstein-Yehezkel & Rosenberg, 2003). The rationale of the programme is that increasing students' vocabulary and grammar skills is not sufficient for successful reading comprehension. The complex skill of reading comprehension requires additional reading strategies. Students who attend the programme have consistently informed me that such strategies were not taught to them previously in school, regardless of the background they come from. It is in this programme that they usually encounter them for the first time. In fact, in the current study, out of 39 students, only three reported they had been exposed to some of the strategies, though explained they were taught in passing rather than systematically. All the other students reported being exposed to reading strategies in the programme for the first time.

The programme curriculum (See Appendix A) is composed of the following strategies as structured units of learning:

1. The Reading Process: Previewing, reading, and reacting
2. Understanding Vocabulary (educated guessing, the importance of context, multiple-meaning words and dictionary skills)
3. Main Ideas and Supporting Details
4. Text Structures (listing, sequence, comparison and contrast, cause and effect, research)
5. The Writer's Intentions (inferences and implied meaning, facts and opinions, argument)

Each of the strategies is taught by scaffolding the tasks before they are applied when reading a text (Vygotsky, 1986; Kozulin & Garb, 2001; Omaggio, 2001). During the programme, students were first exposed to a certain strategy by the reading exercise they completed in Hebrew or their native language. Following a discussion

introducing the strategy, students then began learning it by completing a number of tasks in English which gradually increased in difficulty. Once students acquired practice using the strategy, it was then applied when reading a text (see Appendix D for a sample of the previewing strategy chapter). At the end of the unit, students took a practice exam which required usage of the strategy to comprehend the passage.

Vocabulary and grammar were taught alongside reading strategies. Vocabulary was taught in context. Students learned to become responsible for identifying the vocabulary they were unfamiliar with and which was necessary for understanding a given text. In group work they would produce a list to be reviewed, practised, and tested on a weekly basis. Grammar was also contextualised with grammatical structures analysed as used in reading passages.

4.6 Fourth Stage – Monitoring Student Performance and Progress

The process of learning and language acquisition students underwent throughout the year was monitored in several ways. I kept a teaching journal where at the end of each lesson my observations were recorded (51 entries in all). In addition, student work was collected and analysed. Six tests (diagnostic level test, four practice tests, and the final exam) were checked and analysed. Following each test and reading strategy exercise both a numerical score and a written assessment were kept for each student. I also kept a student journal where each student's progress, study behaviour, learning approaches, and any other relevant information regarding that student were kept.

4.6.1 Observation

Observation is one of the most important methods of data collection. It entails being present in a situation and making a record of one's impression of what takes place (Jones & Somekh, 2005, p. 138).

Observation provides a first-hand source of information of what is taking place in the setting observed as it occurs in its natural social situation (Cohen *et al.,* 2007; Robson, 2002).

Due to the larger than expected number of students in the programme, the group was divided into two, each group meeting four academic hours a week from September 2010 to May 2011.   These regular meetings offered considerable opportunities for observation and a rich source of actions, events and behaviours to be observed and recorded. These encounters provided me with continual direct access to the observed situation which is denied to the external observer (Yin, 2009).

As their teacher, I was a participant observer conducting unstructured qualitative observation in the natural setting of the classroom, with the intention of observing myself and my students throughout the academic year. As such, I employed the 'participant-as-observer' approach (Robson, 2002; Cohen *et al.,* 2007). This approach has been found particularly useful for studying small groups as it allows the observer to gather detailed descriptive information of the situation observed.

> *Participant observers gain unique insights into the behaviour and activities of those they observe because they participate in their activities and, to some extent, are absorbed into the culture of the groups* (Jones & Somekh, 2005, p. 140).

Moreover, reactivity effects can be prevented, since my role as a teacher leads to the natural acceptance of my role as observer by my students. Due to the close relationships I formed with my students, I was able to *'short-circuit a lengthy process of development'* (Robson, 2002, p.318) and to gather insider knowledge of the complex dynamics that exist in the classroom.

> *Such immersion facilitates the generation of 'thick descriptions', particularly of social processes and interactions* (Cohen *et al.,* 2007, p. 495).

Observation of my students aimed at thick descriptions of how they interacted with one another, with me, and with the reading tasks given in class and at home. The techniques they used, the ways they approached tasks, their ability to adopt and internalize the strategies taught in class, and their progress throughout the year were carefully monitored. Observations included focus on which students engaged with their texts while they worked, which were 'abusing' their dictionaries, which were keeping organized notes, or which were keeping a personal dictionary to

practise new vocabulary. In addition, student engagement with peers in class and involvement in classroom activity and discussion was monitored and recorded. Observations focused on types of student discourse and engagement inside and outside of class.

More generally, students' sentiments, behaviours, events, and acts were observed with careful attention to any possible link to cultural background and whether students who shared a common native language and cultural background shared similar study behaviours, used similar strategies when reading, or had similar ways of approaching the tasks at hand.

Such participant observation, through immersion in the classroom culture, enabled *prolonged engagement* with my students and afforded me the time necessary to build a trusting relationship with them, as well as *persistent observation* which allowed me exposure to a vast amount of repeated incidents, behaviours and events to be recorded. These have been formulated as ways of establishing *fairness*, or a balanced view of all the voices and sides involved, in order to ascertain *authenticity* (Lincon & Guba, 1986).

In such intensive and involved participation there is a danger that becoming too close to my study participants, becoming 'a native' so to speak, compromises the trustworthiness of my observations. However,

> *...it can be argued persuasively that, when working with people, scientific aims can be pursued by explaining the meaning of the experiences of the observed through the experiences of the observer* (Robson, 2002, p.314).

Thus, as a participant observer I had an 'insider' view that is inaccessible to an external observer (Yin, 2009). I was clearly aware of my subjective position and attempted to do my utmost to provide as honest a picture as possible of what I perceived had transpired in each lesson. This required that I pay close attention to both positive and negative events, to students who stood out as well as to those inconspicuous students who wished to remain unnoticed, students who cooperated as well as those who showed resistance.

I was also aware that my subjective approach to observations invited selective attention, interpretation and memory (Robson, 2002). Particularly for teachers who are action researchers, observation becomes a secondary task added

to the primary task of teaching (Jones & Somekh, 2005; Altrichter *et al.,* 2008). In order to cope with such issues of bias or selective observation, I made a conscious effort to absorb as much of my classroom experiences as possible, even when occurrences ran counter to my expectations. Similarly, I made an exerted effort not to rush to conclusions and rash interpretations in order to make them fit a certain mould I had in mind. Rather, I embraced Robson's (2002) advice to keep an open mind from the start of the process. This required exercising a heightened level of *reflection* during and after each lesson. In the on-going attempt to provide an honest picture of the situation observed, some notes were taken during the lesson when possible and observations were recorded immediately following each lesson in order to retain as much of the relevant information as possible (Altrichter *et al.*, 2008; Jones & Somekh, 2005). Here I fully adhered to Robson's (2002) recommendation to record a detailed account of the lesson taught within 24 hours and not to begin a new observation until the former one had been completed and thoroughly considered.

4.6.2 Student Progress Journal

To monitor student performance and progress, my impressions of how each student was performing and advancing over the course of the year were recorded in a student progress journal. The journal consisted of descriptive sequences and interpretive sequences (Altrichter *et al.,* 2008). A systematic record was kept of each student's numerical scores and verbal assessments of reading strategy exercises and tests.

Following the diagnostic level test, four practice tests and a final exam were given throughout the year. These exams were former English matriculation exams which have been proven valid and reliable for examining students' English reading comprehension. It should be explained, however, that the nature of the exams differed throughout the year, increasing in difficulty in order to prepare the students in a graded fashion, with the final exam being the most demanding. The first three exams were composed of one text and comprehension questions to be answered in English. The fourth exam was composed of one text with answers to

be answered in Hebrew. Students had one hour and a half to complete each exam. The fifth practice exam and the final exam were composed of two texts, one followed by reading comprehension questions to be answered in English, and the other to be answered in Hebrew. These two exams were much more demanding for students as they required the students to keep concentration for three hours.

In addition to exam records, performance in class was also recorded, including participation, interaction with other students and key events or comments made by students that expressed their feelings or opinions regarding the learning process. Parallel to these descriptive entries, my interpretations, thoughts, feelings, ideas, speculations and reflections regarding each student's learning process were also recorded. In addition to monitoring student progress, these dossiers provided a useful source of material to be discussed with students in order to reflect upon their work and behaviour during interviews (Altrichter *et al.*, 2008).

4.7 Fifth Stage – Interviews

> *If you want to know how people understand their world and their life, why not talk with them?...The qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects' points of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples' experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations* (Kvale, 1996, p.1)*.*

In order to understand my students' world and its impact on their learning, interviews were conducted at the end of the programme. The aim of the interviews was to provide an additional dimension of information to be juxtaposed with the other sources of data gathered. This format allowed me to delve deeper into the issues the study aimed to explore and granted students the opportunity to voice their thoughts, opinions and feelings more fully (Cohen *et al.,* 2007). For this reason, in-depth interviews were conducted with students individually. In this type of interview, respondents were asked not only factual information and opinions, but were also asked to propose their insights about certain events (Yin, 2009), the material taught and the methods used in class. In this sense, as Kvale (1996) suggests, interviews were not structured as questions prepared by the researcher

to be answered by respondents, but rather as a dialogue that provided respondents with an opportunity to verbalise their conception of their *life world*, or the narrative the participants produced of the world they have experienced.

> *Interviewing is not merely the neutral exchange of asking questions and getting answers. Two (or more) people are involved in this process, and their exchanges lead to the creation of a collaborative effort called the **interview*** (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 116, original emphasis).

As such, the qualitative research interview becomes "*a construction site of knowledge*" (Kvale, 1996, p. 42). Knowledge is generated through the *conversation* between teachers and their students, in a *narrative* form, so that the collective stories of the students contribute to embedding the texture of their local reality, through the medium of the *language* they use to construct their reality, in an *interpersonal context* (Kvale, 1996).

Such a process, never previously investigated by me systematically, is one that is familiar to me as a teacher accustomed to students who often either stay after class or come to my office to discuss their past experiences and difficulties with learning English. Our discussions about what students have gone through, the difficulties they have faced in the past, and what they have done to try to overcome them, are always revealing and assist my future instruction of those students. These conversations are very similar to semi-structured interviews as Kvale defines them:

> *An interview is literally an **inter view**, an inter change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest* (p.2, original emphasis)*.

During these discussions, I often query and probe students to provide me with further information that may help understand which teaching methods may be most beneficial for them. The conversation thereby becomes a negotiation of meanings between us, each bringing our life world into its construction.

Until the current study, I have not tried to string together the 'pearls' of information students have shared with me. That is, they have never been recorded or processed and analysed. For this reason, semi-structured interviews were conducted so that more structured discussions could focus on the issues at hand, with enough flexibility for students to freely share their past experiences, beliefs or

attitudes (Robson, 2002). Therefore, these interviews were composed of open-ended questions. This also allowed me to prod students to delve in greater depth and detail or to clarify any ambiguities or misunderstandings that arose from the other sources of information gathered (Kvale, 1996; Robson, 2002).

Despite the advantage of the rich, mainly verbal, information interviews provide, standardization is possible only in part (the same key questions are asked of all interviewees, but probes and follow-up questions differ from student to student). Quantification and coding of responses is more problematic in interviews, thus making it more difficult to compare between responses (Robson, 2002; Cohen *et al.,* 2007). Each student's story is unique and individual. Nevertheless, certain topics and ideas are bound to appear repeatedly in discussions held with all the students in class (Yin, 2009). Kvale (1996) has found that when similar procedures and the same interview guide are followed, similar responses or themes are bound to emerge. In addition, even a student's individual story with elements that have not been experienced by any other students, can be illuminating and can shed light on matters that had not been considered earlier (Thomas, 2009; Flybjerg, 2006).

The contradictory nature of the information that emerges in interviews is inevitable. Students can be expected to express conflicting thoughts and opinions; even a single student's interview may be replete with inconsistencies. However, it is this apparent weakness of the interview method that renders it more faithful and, in fact, becomes the source of its strength. From a postmodern perspective, the interview conversation is able

> *…to capture the multitude of subjects' views of a theme and to picture a manifold and controversial human world* (Kvale, 1996, p.7).

The traditional ideal of producing an 'airbrushed' version of the interview with a cleaned up rational account of interview data, free of contradictions, has been replaced by a realist description of the data generated in the interview, with the tensions and inconsistencies that arise in interviews for all to see and ponder. The role of the author of the interview has also been recognized as an additional factor impacting the data transferred from conversation to written text (Fontana & Frey,

2005). In the current study, I conducted interviews in Hebrew, adding another mediation process through translation to English.

Aware of these factors, I attempted to minimize ambiguities by interpreting the student's statements during the interview and asking them to clarify any inconsistencies that were immediately apparent to me (Kvale, 1996). After interviews were analysed and interpreted, interviewees were given a written copy for member checking to confirm or disconfirm my understanding of our interview (Lincon & Guba, 1986).

An additional problem with the statements made in interviews is that they cannot be taken at face value. Students may either be unable to recall childhood experiences with language learning and reading or if they can recount such memories, they may be distorted by the effects of time. Students might also attempt to describe false memories in order to make a good impression on their teacher. An interview is not an everyday conversation between equal partners, and the teacher's status is likely to have an impact on what and how students respond in this semi-structured situation guided by the teacher (Kvale, 1996).   I realised that in order to limit the impact of this sensitive relationship and to minimize misinformation, it was essential to establish a strong rapport with each student, making them all feel safe and comfortable to share their story and to be as forthright as possible with me. When students realised that my principal motive was to assist them to progress and to benefit, I believe they disengaged their inhibitions and spoke their mind freely. The relationship I aspired to establish with my students was one of mutual trust, '…*a feeling of togetherness and joint pursuit of a common mission*' (Cohen *et al.,* 2007, p. 350). I made every effort to establish such mutual trust with students by engaging in *empathetic interviewing* whereby interviewers, instead of being detached and objective, make explicit their intention to be partners in making a positive change for the participants (Fontana & Frey, 2005).

I reiterated to my student-participants that a primary objective of this inquiry was their success in the programme and improving the programme for future students. By working together, by sharing with me their problems, needs,

and views, I emphasized to them the benefit to be gained for us all. I believe I succeeded in gaining their trust and establishing relations of mutual trust. In all, 35 of the 39 students were interviewed. Students were in fact very enthusiastic to take part in interviews. As one student told me when he came to our scheduled interview, *'Finally my turn, everyone says these interviews are really cool*.' I believe students enjoyed the process of the interview and were very responsive to the fact that someone took an interest in their stories and wanted to hear their voice regarding the programme.

A common problem interviewers face, a reluctance or hesitancy among interviewees to be forthcoming or to reveal their views to the interviewer, is also culturally bound. Although this is a broad generalization, Israeli society encourages its members to speak directly when expressing both positive and negative views. As I come from a bicultural background and have taught both in an American and an Israeli environment, it has been my experience that Israeli students freely express their thoughts and opinions in class, even when these run counter to their teachers' views. For this reason, as expected, the vast majority of students provided a seemingly truthful account of their personal stories and voiced their thoughts and opinions without restraint, as both praise and criticisms were reported, and difficult events shared.

4.8 Summary

This chapter outlined the research design of the study. Each stage in the procedure of the study was described in detail. The reasoning for each method employed at each stage was discussed. Concerns, including ethical issues, regarding the methods used were also raised and addressed. The next chapter will give a detailed account and analysis of the data that were gathered.

PART TWO

CLOSE READING: LOOKING AT THE DATA

In chapters 3 and 4 I presented the process and tools designed to examine the case study of this action research project. Rather than 'collecting data' about my students, we constructed a body of data with an attempt to better understand the transition we all experienced in the programme.

Data analysis focused on the research questions which guided the study. Data constructed with the methods presented in detail in chapter four, was analysed with the purpose of examining the impact of cultural, religious and linguistic background on my students' approach to and process of learning reading comprehension in English, their progress and achievement, and which teaching approaches were most effective.

When examining the data, an inductive open coding procedure was applied to identify salient categories and concepts. As a first stage, interview transcripts were annotated to produce a large number of categories (main themes) and subcategories (subthemes) (Dey, 1993). Some of these were expected as they were pre-assigned topics for discussion in the interview guide (i.e., family structure, parental influence, number of languages learned, etc.). Other themes emerged from the data which I did not anticipate prior to conducting interviews (e.g., corporal punishment at school, travel abroad).

As a second stage, after splitting and then splicing the large number of categories and subcategories that were identified, data were eventually grouped into the following categories: family structure, family influence on education, school experience, language experience, post-school experience, and student reflections on the programme.

As a third stage, for each category, data were compared among students, and patterns of shared experiences were examined. Special attention was paid to students with a similar cultural background, and in certain cases patterns were clearly discernible. However, in other cases, certain patterns emerged which were not necessarily related to cultural background, but rather to other factors which will be presented in chapter five. The information generated from this process addressed the first research question regarding the impact of cultural, religious and

linguistic backgrounds on adult students' approach to and process of learning reading comprehension in English.

A similar process was applied for analysing data recorded from class observations and student records. The categories established were student English level at entry to the programme, learning approaches, and process of acquisition. As in the first data set, certain patterns emerged among students who shared similar backgrounds, while other patterns emerged among students as a result of other factors, as will be discussed in chapter six. This process provided insights concerning the second research question on the impact of background on progress and achievement in reading comprehension in English, and the third research question, regarding which teaching approach or approaches can best address the various needs of a culturally diverse student group.

Chapter 5:

Data Analysis: Student Background

5.1   Introduction

This chapter presents the data analysis of students' background. It begins with an overall view of the class composition. An examination of students' family background is then presented with a focus on students' family structure and family influence, particularly on reading habits and general education. The following section presents and analyses experiences students shared with me regarding their school environment. Students' language experience, particularly the acquisition of English as a second, third or fourth language and the form in which it was taught in school, is then examined. The chapter closes with an analysis of students' post-school experiences, focusing on the impact these experiences had on their English acquisition. Analysis of the data indicated that students with a common background shared similar experiences in regard to several aspects of their lives, which correspondingly influenced their learning approaches and reading acquisition in the programme.

5.2 Class Composition

In the 2010-2011 academic year, 39 students attended and completed the English matriculation preparation programme I taught at a teachers' college in Israel. The academic year began with a class of 45 students (ranging in marks in their diagnostic level test from 6% to 78%). This is an unusually high number of students with a remarkably large range of levels for the programme, and a situation with which the administration was not equipped to cope. After a month of discussions, it was decided that this group be divided into two groups according to level. Each group received four academic hours of study per week, as opposed to the six hours a week they were supposed to receive as one class. Students who received less than 30% on their diagnostic level test received an additional two

weekly hours for a period of six weeks. Unfortunately, these lessons were discontinued for several reasons, among them budgetary constraints.

As is the case every year, the class composition was very diverse (See Graph 5.1).
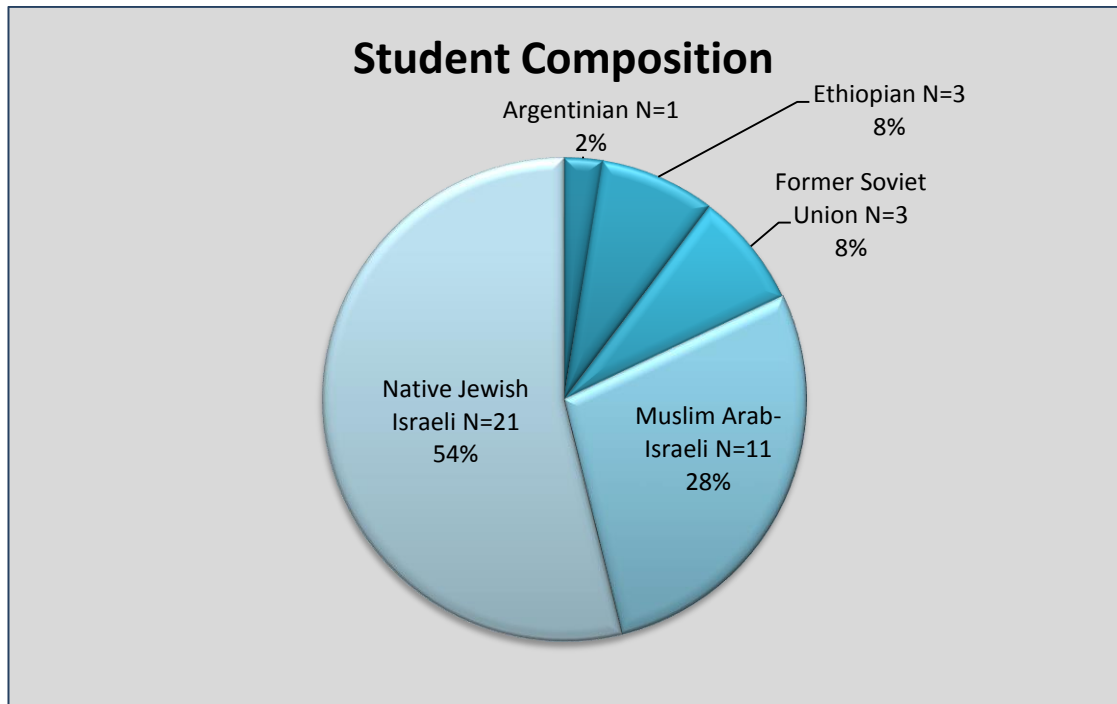
Graph 5.1: Student composition

The gender distribution of the group was 18 female and 21 male students. Ages ranged between 19 and 28. Table 1 presents the students' gender, age, and diagnostic level test scores at the start of the programme, according to cultural background (Table 5.1). The names of the students have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

Ethiopian Students: 3	Name	Gender F: 2 M: 1	Age Ave: 24.33	Diagnostic Ave: 7.33
	Miriam	F	24	6
	Yoni	M	25	6
	Tamar	F	24	10
Argentinian Student: 1				Diagnostic Ave: 18
	Alberto	M	25	18
Arab-Israeli Students: 11		F: 3 M: 8	Ave: 21.27	Ave: 32
	Ahmed	M	19	12
	Halil	M	21	14
	Samir	M	19	24
	Habib	M	20	30
	Ali	M	24	42
	Omar	M	22	48 (copied exam- excluded from average)
	Ehab	M	25	50
	Nabil	M	21	52 (copied exam- excluded from average)
	Narmeen	F	21	52
	Susane	F	21	/
	Bushra	F	21	/
Russian Students: 3		F: 2 M: 1	Ave: 25	Ave: 43.33
	Paulina	F	28	28
	Elena	F	25	38
	Boris	M	22	64
Jewish-Israeli Students: 21		F: 11 M: 10	Ave: 24.33	Ave: 44.85
	Ron	M	23	20

	Iris	F	26	20
	Anat	F	22	20
	Nurit	F	28	26
	Sarit	F	22	28
	Nina	F	25	30
	Noa	F	22	30
	Liron	F	23	32
	Daniel	M	25	34
	Sara	F	23	42
	Nati	M	24	42
	Tamir	M	27	52
	Alon	M	25	52
	Esti	F	24	58
	Meirav	F	22	60
	Ori	M	24	64
	Rachel	F	24	66
	Ben	M	25	66
	Miki	M	24	77
	David	M	26	78
	Yossi	M	27	/

Table 5.1: Distribution of student gender, age and diagnostic level test scores (in percentage) according to cultural background

As the table indicates, in terms of gender, among the students of Arab-Israeli background, a considerably larger number of male students (8) attended the programme in comparison to female students (3). Among all the other sectors the gender distribution was the opposite with a slightly greater number of females in comparison to males. This difference may be due to the fact that in the Arab-Israeli sector physical education and sports are considered more typically male activities, while in the Jewish-Israeli sector these activities have become more accepted in the last twenty years among females as well (Tamir & Galily, 2010). Moreover, teaching as a profession among the Jewish-Israeli sector is still considered a typically female occupation with 79.9% female teachers as opposed to 20.1% male teachers (Rubinstein, 2011), which may explain the slightly higher number of Jewish females in the programme.

The average age of the group was 23.54 years. The average age of students from Arab-Israeli background (21.27 years) was the youngest among the group. Students from native Jewish-Israeli background were, on average, three years older (24.33 years). Immigrant students from Ethiopia, Argentina, and the Former Soviet Union were, on average, either the same age as native Jewish-Israelis or older (24.33 years, 25 years, and 25 years, respectively). The reasons for and implications of these age differences will be discussed later in the post-school experience section of this chapter.

In terms of entry level, students of Ethiopian background entered with the lowest average score (7.33%), followed by the student from Argentinian background (18%), the students from Arab-Israeli background (32%), students from the Former Soviet Union (43.33%), and students of native Jewish-Israeli background (44.85%). Thus, the average score of the students as a group was below 50%, indicative of the weak English level of the student group as a whole. While these average scores represent a small sample of students, the gaps between students of the different cultural backgrounds are reflective of similar gaps that exist in national English exam scores (Ministry of Education, 2010; Svirsky & Dagan-Buzaglo, 2009).

The purpose of the analysis and discussion to follow is to better understand the reasons for these gaps with the aim of bridging them, so that students of all backgrounds can reach higher, more balanced, achievements. For this reason, students' family background, school experience, language experience, post-school experience and processes of learning are each examined and discussed below.

5.3 Family Background

In order to better understand their family background, during interviews, students described their families in general. They were probed to provide information regarding their parents' occupations, education, reading habits, and influence on their education. They also described their siblings and their influence, if any, on their learning.

5.3.1 Family Structure

When discussing their family backgrounds in interviews, students described their family structure as either more 'traditional' or less 'traditional'. I use the term 'traditional' as defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 'based on customs usually handed down from a previous generation.' It should be reiterated that the term 'traditional' does not refer to any generalization or simplification of my students' backgrounds, but rather to the values and norms with which my students were raised and with which they themselves identify, namely family gender roles, family size, religious or secular upbringing and residence.

5.3.1.1 Students from a More 'Traditional' Family Structure

Fifteen students in the programme came from more 'traditional' family structures. These students typically grew up in a patriarchal family structure where the father's role was that of breadwinner and the mother's role was to raise children and care for the home. Fourteen of these students had three to eight siblings. All 11 of the students from the Arab-Israeli sector, one of the students of Ethiopian background who immigrated to Israel at the age of 13, and the three Jewish-Israeli students who grew up in religious homes described such a family structure. These students all came from households where their mothers (with the exception of two) are housewives whose role, according to the students, is to raise children and run the home. Among the fathers, two were unemployed and one was retired. Fathers' occupations included a wide spectrum of occupations ranging from blue to white collar professions. Only one of the Arab-Israeli students' mothers works outside the home and runs a daycare centre and one of the religious Jewish students' mothers is a teacher (both traditionally female occupations).

Students who were raised in such patriarchal family structures described distinct gender roles in their families, and the influence these roles have had on their upbringing and life choices. The role of the female in such family structures is to be 'good wives and mothers', in the sense that they are expected to care for the home and rear children. Below are examples of two students, representative of such an upbringing.

Bushra

Bushra is an Arab-Israeli who grew up in an Arab village in the north of the country. She is 21 years old. Her father is a work manager and her mother is a housewife. She has six brothers and sisters. Her two sisters have a degree in education, one brother is an engineer and one of her brothers is a medical student.

> *I wanted to work in a field where I can help others. This is how we were raised. At first I wanted to study medicine, but my psychometric scores were not high enough to study in Israel. My brother is studying medicine in Russia for the same reason, but my father did not want his daughter to be abroad on her own. He said to me 'How can I let my little girl be so far away in a different country? This is not appropriate for a girl. I cannot protect you this way. What if something happened to you?' Then I thought, maybe I'll study nursing, but my mother said to me, nursing is not a good profession for a woman. She said, 'Nurses work night shifts. How can you be a good wife and a good mother if you work nights?' So, my mother said, 'Why don't you become a teacher? You like children, and you will be able to raise a family.' At first, I thought, me? A teacher? This is not for me. I couldn't see myself in front of a class of children. But I thought about it for a while and finally said, why not? I worked in a kindergarten in the past. I like children and sports. I'll give it a try.*

Similarly, Rachel, who was raised in a religious Jewish home, explained that she comes from a typically 'traditional' family and chose the teaching profession because it would allow her to raise a large family.

Rachel

Rachel is 24 years old. She grew up in a religious home in a *moshav* (an Israeli cooperative agricultural settlement consisting of small private farms). Her father owns a moving company and her mother is a P.E. teacher. She has six brothers and sisters.

> *I grew up in a moshav that is predominantly Kurdish with a Kurdish mentality. I come from a very traditional home…That means the woman keeps the home, raises children, and also goes out to work. She does everything. The man comes home, and she has to take care of him, spoil him… That's what we're used to. I don't mind it, I like it. I like the kitchen. I could spend the whole day in the kitchen. If it means spoiling my man, great! And if it means spoiling my children, **even more so**!*

As Bushra's and Rachel's backgrounds indicate, their choice to pursue their studies in education stems from their desire to fulfil the female role expected of them in their culture, to be good wives and mothers. Still, they have chosen to continue their studies and to work outside the home as teachers in the future, and thus to combine home and family with the pursuit of an education and work.

The two examples below illustrate the male gender roles that are expected of students from more 'traditional' backgrounds.

Ali

Ali is 24 years old. He comes from a Bedouin background. His father trades sheep for a living and his mother is a housewife. He has three brothers and four sisters.

> *My parents are traditional. My father believes that his sons should do what he does. He thinks this [trading sheep] is the foundation for life. He expects all of his sons to continue in his footsteps. They do not think much of me continuing my studies.*

Ali is married and has a 6-month old baby. He lives with his wife and newborn next to his parents. He works nightshifts at a convenience store. When asked how he decided to pursue his studies at the college, he answered,

> *I met a girl, we had a romantic relationship. She was a student here, and that gave me the desire to come and study here too. I realized I don't want to trade sheep or work in a convenience store for minimum wages all my life.*

Similarly, Ehab describes the strong influence his family has had on his life choices.

Ehab

Ehab is 25 years old. He is an Arab-Israeli who grew up in an Arab village in the north of the country. His father owns an aluminium factory and his mother is a housewife. He is the youngest of four children.

> *Because I am the only son, I was expected to help my father in his business when it was failing. My sisters all went to study. One of my sisters studied physiotherapy at the University of Tel-Aviv and one of my sisters went to study law. My mother is the one who pushed us all to study. Even though she herself doesn't have an education, it was very important for her that we study. She would make my sisters sit with me with schoolwork. I finally decided that if I don't continue with my studies now, it will be too late.*

What can be discerned from Ali's and Ehab's accounts is that they were expected to play clear gender roles, following in their father's footsteps. Their choice to continue their studies ran counter to these expectations. In addition, in both of their stories, a female figure was influential in their choice to pursue their studies.

Also in keeping with a patriarchal family structure, such students typically came from two-parent homes. Regrettably, two of the students from 'traditional' backgrounds lost their mothers during childhood. All the other students' parents were married, as divorce is not common among these sectors (See Graph 5.2).
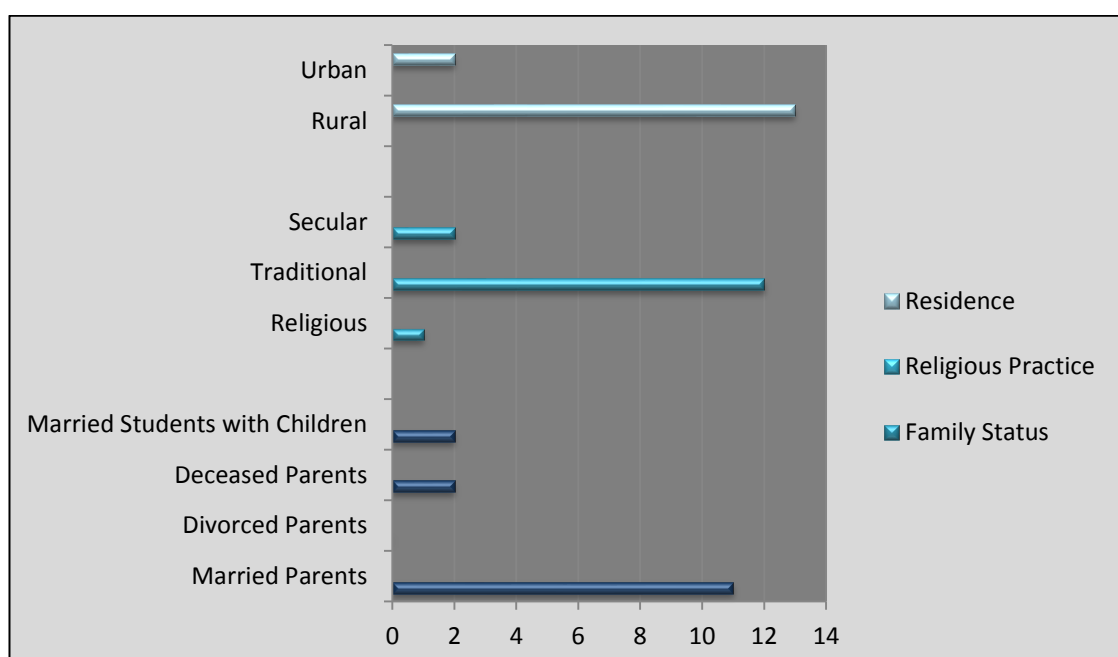
Graph 5.2 Family status, religious practice and residence of students from a more 'traditional' background

In terms of religious practices, 12 students described themselves as 'traditional'. That is, they do not follow all the laws of their religion, as do practising religious members, but they keep some of the more significant ones, mainly related to religious dietary laws (keeping kosher among the Jewish students, or fasting during Ramadan among Muslim students) and adhering to the rituals of religious holidays. One student, Tamir, was a practising religious Jew, while David who grew up in a religious home had undergone a process of secularization and identified himself as secular. Tamar, who immigrated to Israel from Ethiopia, had a traditional upbringing in Ethiopia, though described herself at the current time as secular.

As the graph further indicates, all of the 13 students who grew up in rural areas also came from more 'traditional' family backgrounds. Eleven grew up in Arab villages, one grew up in a Jewish *moshav*, and one, who is also the only practising religious Jewish student among the group, was raised in a communal village and a Jewish settlement in the Judea and Samaria region of the country in the West Bank. Only two students among this group grew up in peripheral urban centres.

What can be discerned is that while students with a more 'traditional' background come from very diverse contexts, they share several common denominators: they predominantly come from a patriarchal family structure where the father exerts his authority, larger family size, traditional religious practices, and an upbringing in a two-parent household, often in a rural area.

5.3.1.2 Students from a Less 'Traditional' Family Structure

In contrast to students from a more 'traditional' background, students coming from a less 'traditional' background described a very different family experience. This group of students included all 24 of the secular Jewish students. They described less gender defined roles for their parents. Typically both parents worked outside the home. In fact 23 mothers worked outside the home in comparison to 18 fathers. Fathers' occupations included a wide spectrum ranging from blue to white collar professions. Two of the fathers were not employed due to health reasons, one was retired, and two students said they were not in touch with their fathers. In one case, a student said her father passed away when she was a teenager and in another, one of the students lost his mother when he was young. All of the mothers, without exception, were employed outside the home in a wide range of occupations. These students also described smaller nuclear families, 20 reporting that they had one to three siblings, more typically one. In terms of family status, religious practice and residence, the students from a less 'traditional' family structure also differed from students from a more 'traditional' background (See Graph 5.3).
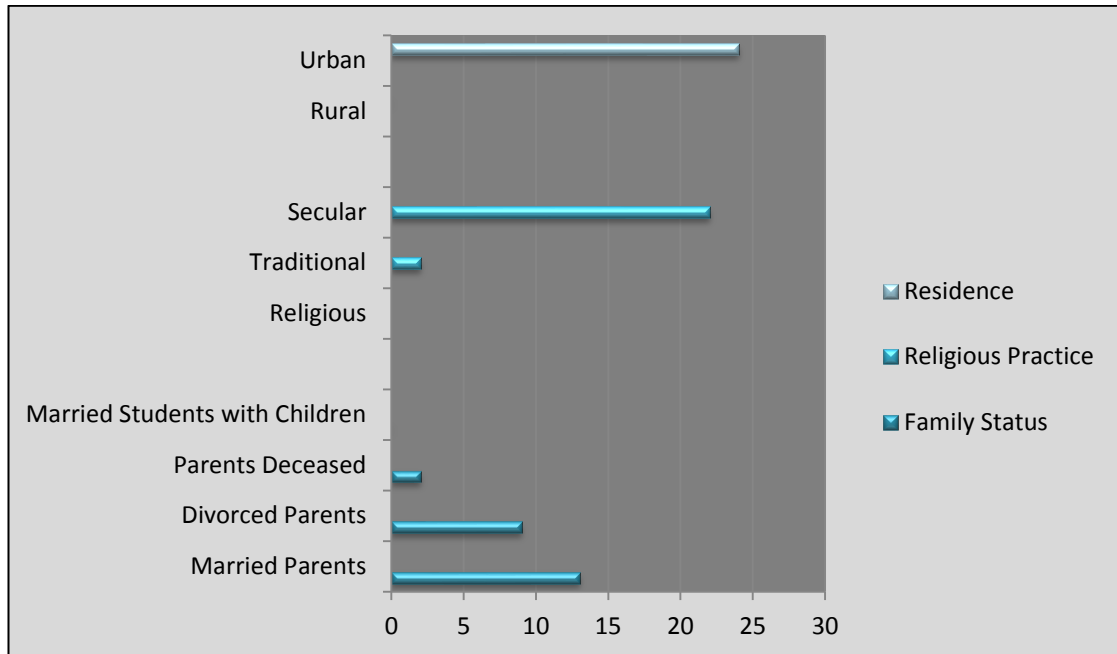
Graph 5.3 Family status, religious practice and residence of students from a less 'traditional' background

All of the students grew up in urban areas, in contrast to the students from a more 'traditional' background, who predominantly grew up in villages. In addition, all of the students described themselves as secular, with the exception of Alberto, the only student to describe himself as traditional. Alberto went to a Jewish religious school in Argentina, though grew up in a secular home. This is quite common among Jewish families in Argentina (The Jewish Federation, 2002). He came to Israel at age 16 on his own where he was in a boarding school that instilled Jewish traditions.

More than a third of these students said their parents were divorced. Thus, with the two students who lost a parent in childhood, almost half of these students were raised in single-parent homes, typically by their mother, who appeared as a strong model figure with a great deal of influence in their lives and their education.

Ori

Ori is a 24-year-old native Jewish-Israeli. He was born in an urban centre at the north of the country, where he grew up. He has one younger brother. He had a secular upbringing. His parents divorced when he was nine years old.

My mother basically raised us on her own. My Dad left when I was 9, and we're not in contact with him. She helped us through school. She would make sure we're doing what we're supposing to be doing…staying out of trouble.

Thus, unlike their peers from more 'traditional' families, students coming from less 'traditional' families, typically described more equal gender roles at home, though almost half were raised in a one-parent household with one or two siblings and a strong matriarchal model figure influencing their education. They were typically raised in secular homes in urban areas. These distinctions also had an impact on the education they received at home and at school.

5.3.2 Family Influence on Education

When speaking with students about the impact their parents had on their studies during school and choice to continue their studies, several patterns emerged. In terms of parental education a distinction was found, especially in terms of gender, between students from more 'traditional' and less 'traditional' family structures.
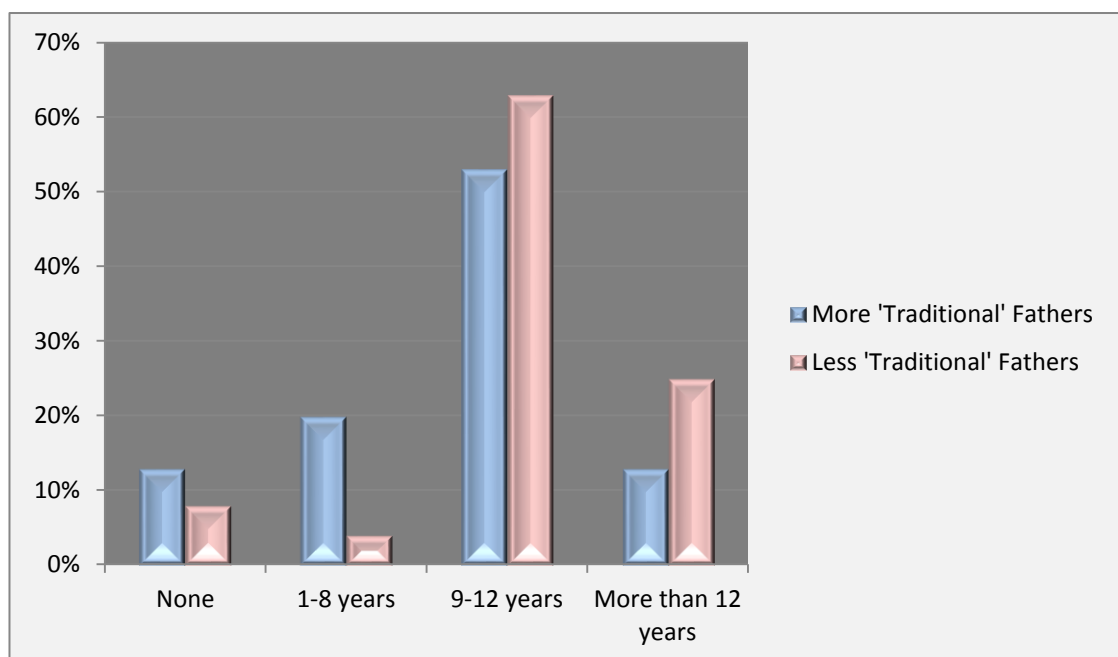
Graph 5.4 Education of more 'traditional' and less 'traditional' fathers
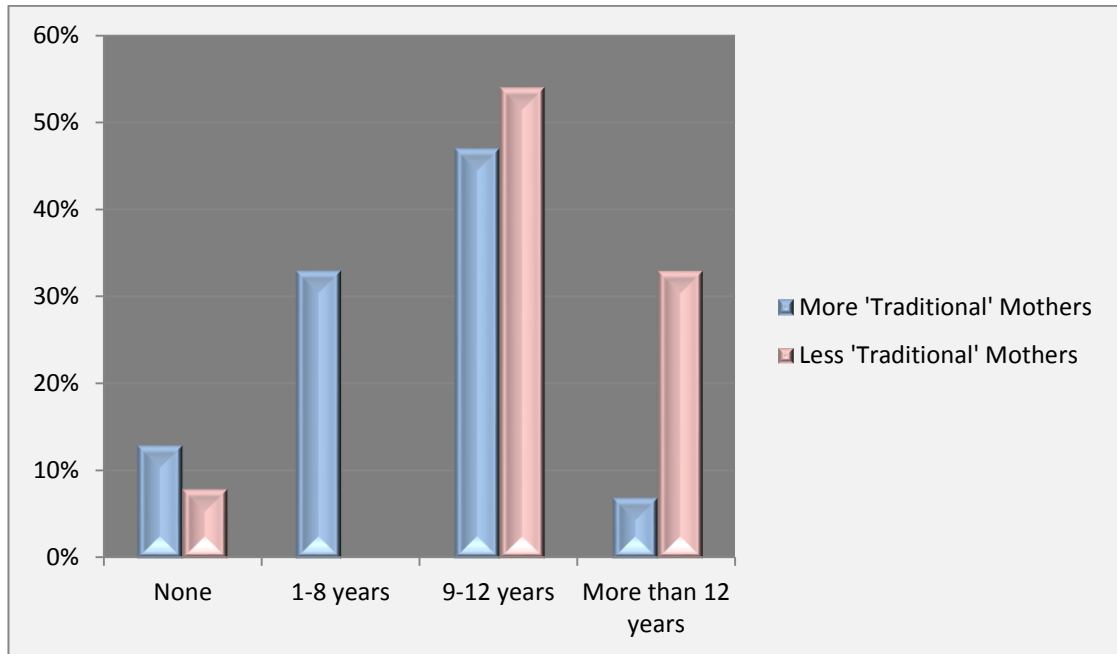
Graph 5.5 Education of more 'traditional' and less 'traditional' mothers

As Graphs 5.4 and 5.5 indicate, the parents of students from more 'traditional' family structures enjoyed fewer years of schooling than parents of students from less 'traditional' family structures. This distinction impacted the influence parents had on students' education.

5.3.2.1 Influence of More 'Traditional' Families on Students' Education

Among the 15 students from a patriarchal family structure, fathers had more years of schooling in comparison to mothers: two had no education, three up to a middle-school education, eight up to a high school education, and two more than 12 years of schooling. A larger number of students in this group described their father as the more dominant figure in their education. They reported that their fathers had a significant influence on their choice to continue their studies and high expectations of them to succeed.

Bushra

(See also p.84)

> *Although my parents did not continue their studies after high-school, it is very important for them that their children continue their studies. All of my brothers and sisters are expected to get a degree. Both of my parents encouraged us to study, but especially my father.*

Habib

Habib is 20 years old. His mother is a housewife who had two years of schooling. His father had eight years of schooling. Habib has two brothers and two sisters. He is the eldest. One of his brothers is an auto electrician and another is an auto mechanic.

> *My father told all of us to choose what we loved and he would help us with our studies in that field. I began boxing at school and won the National Championship in 2008. I always loved boxing as a small child, the gloves and head gear. I began an afterschool boxing class in 9th grade, but I couldn't keep up boxing on a professional level because I wanted to continue my studies. My father told me, an education is for life. If something happens and I can't continue to box, I'll have nothing else.*
> *…We had a lot of discipline at home. My father expected me to come home after school, eat lunch, finish my homework, go to practise from 17:00 to 20:00, and return home. My father told me I could continue with boxing as long as I kept my grades up.*

Among the three students who grew up in religious Jewish homes, all were expected to continue their studies not only by both of their parents, but because that is what their community expected of them. This is especially true of the two male students, who were sent to a *yeshiva* (a Jewish boarding school that focuses on the study of religious Jewish texts and prepares them to become rabbis) when they began middle-school, as are all children of this sector. They were then expected to serve in the army and immediately continue their studies. They explain that this is a path that their older siblings followed and that they were equally expected to take. Any other direction was not an option.

Tamir

Tamir is 27 years old. He is married and has two children. His father worked as a manager in an electronics company until he retired. His mother was a kindergarten teacher until she got married and became a housewife. Tamir has seven brothers.

> *I was the 6th son. In my family everyone was expected to follow a similar track in life and I followed my older brothers' footsteps: middle-school yeshiva, then the high-school yeshiva, and then a combat unit in the army.*

> *All of my brothers continued their studies, some have second degrees. And I did what they did. We all chose a different profession, but basically the same track. I began to study taxes. I was supposed to become a tax advisor. Coming here actually broke that path – I realized I really loved capoeira, and teaching capoeira was what I really enjoyed. So after a lot of deliberation, I finally decided to pursue what I really want to do.*

Among all the students who described a patriarchal family structure, only one student, Ehab, said his mother was the main figure in his life who pressed him to continue his studies. As was described in the section above, he explained that although his mother had no education, it was very important for her that all her children gain an education.

Ehab

> *(See also p.85)*
>
> Ehab's mother had eight years and his father had twelve years of schooling.
>
> > *As a child I remember my father would take me to work with him in his aluminium factory to teach me responsibility. But, for my mother it was important that I leave the family business and continue my studies.*

The fact that his mother was the main force pushing him to pursue his studies, and the higher education tracks his three sisters chose, is indicative of the exceptional role his mother played in his family.

Among all the students interviewed, three (all from 'traditional' family structures) described parents who did not play a role in their studies at all and that their wish to continue their studies came entirely from intrinsic motivation. As mentioned earlier, Ali, who is Bedouin, said that his father expected him to continue his sheep trade.

Ali

> *(See also p. 85)*
>
> Both of Ali's parents had no schooling and are illiterate. Among his siblings, he is the only one pursuing an education. When asked how his parents reacted to the fact that he is in the programme, he answered:
>
> > *They are indifferent. They are not very supportive. They don't ask me anything about my studies, or take an interest.*

Another student who describes indifferent parents is Susane.

Susane

> Susane is an Arab-Israeli. She is 21 years old. Both of her parents had eight years of schooling, and neither of her parents were working at the time of the interview. She has five brothers and sisters, and she is the only one who wants to continue her studies.
>
> *It's been a very difficult year. I'm tired…I'm so tired of doing it all on my own. My parents don't do anything for me. I have to cope with everything on my own. It's really difficult, work, studies, everything...I have to support myself.*
>
> *School was never very important for my parents. Everything I learned, I taught myself. I was a very good student. I loved to learn. I've always wanted to be something great in sports and to achieve a lot in the future. I've always loved sports…this is unusual in my environment. I realized that I am something special and unique. My dream is to open a fitness centre for women in my village.*

Tamar, who is of Ethiopian background, also described parents who did not push her to study, but in her case, she explains that they supported her decision to continue her studies.

Tamar

> Tamar is 25 years old. She immigrated to Israel from Ethiopia at the age of 13. She has six brothers and sisters. She is the only one who is continuing her studies. Neither of her parents went to school, and neither of them can read or write. They are both unemployed.
>
> *I have wonderful caring parents who give me whatever support and attention they can. They help me financially as much as they can…The desire to study comes from me, but once I decided to study, they do what they can to support me. They are always inquiring about how I'm doing and when I return home they shower me with a lot of love. They look up to me because I'm going to study. I'm the eldest of seven children and I feel I have a responsibility as their model... If I succeed in my studies, I could have a positive influence on my younger brothers and sisters.*
> *…When I needed help with school work, there was no one to really help me, other than teachers at school.*

In all three cases, parents of the students had very little or no education. Among all three students, the desire to continue their studies and to succeed academically was internally motivated. In fact, their decision to get an education was a brave choice that they undertook, in contrast to their parents' background, and in Ali's and Susane's case, in spite of their parents' wishes. In addition, they were the only ones among their siblings to continue their studies. Thus, they had no role models in their families to emulate in terms of their education choices. Unfortunately, as will be discussed later, all three did very poorly and progressed very little throughout the year. Despite their expressed will to succeed, they were unable to cope with the burden of the studies required of them. They suffered from severe absenteeism throughout the year, and regularly came unprepared for class. It appears that despite their strong desire, academic success was much more difficult to attain than they expected without family support.

5.3.2.2 Influence of Less 'Traditional' Families on Students' Education

Unlike the experience described by the students from more 'traditional' families, more of those who described themselves as coming from less 'traditional' family structures reported that their mother played a significant role in their education and choice to continue their studies. This may be explained by the fact that more mothers in this sector enjoyed greater exposure to education. Unlike mothers in more 'traditional' family structures, seven of whom had eight or fewer years of schooling, only two of the mothers in less 'traditional' family structures had eight or fewer years of schooling. These two mothers immigrated to Israel from Ethiopia and never had an opportunity to get an education. While only one mother from a 'traditional' family structure had more than 12 years of schooling, eight mothers in this group had more than 12 years of education. In fact, mothers in this group enjoyed more years of schooling than any group of the parents, including the fathers in both more and less 'traditional' family structures.

Thus, it is not surprising that more students from this group said their mother was the main figure in their lives that encouraged them to study.

Ben

Ben is 25 years old. His mother has 18 years of schooling and works as a computer programmer and bookkeeper. His father had 14 years of schooling and works for the Ministry of Defence. He has one sister who also works for the Ministry of Defence. His parents were divorced when he was eight years old.

> *When my parents got a divorce, I moved with my mother and sister to [name of small town in the North]. My parents maintained good relations, and education was always important to both. But, naturally, since we grew up with my mother, she is the one who gave us daily help at school. She's the one who emphasized the importance of education at home.*

Unlike Ben, Miriam's mother had no education. Still, she considers her mother her role model because *'she has aspirations'*. She has been a significant figure in pushing her and her siblings to invest in their studies.

Miriam

Miriam is 24 years old. She immigrated to Israel from Ethiopia at the age of six. In Israel she grew up in a small city in the southern part of the country. Her father stopped working because he went blind. Her mother works as a cleaning woman. She has two brothers, both police officers, and one sister who is a kindergarten teacher. Miriam is the youngest, and the only one still living at home. She has therefore assumed many responsibilities in helping her parents financially and otherwise. Miriam's parents did not go to school in Ethiopia. Neither of them can read or write.

> *I admire my mother. She is my role model, because she has aspirations. I often wonder what she would have achieved if today she was my age.*
>
> *…Although my mother didn't have the money for private tutors or after-school activities, she 'had her ways'. She pushed all of us to be involved in after-school activities in the municipality centres. She pushed us to study, to invest in schoolwork. She always tells us that they came to Israel because we're Jewish. In Ethiopia if you are not rich you cannot go to study. Here you can study if you're rich or poor. This is an opportunity that many throw away.*

Despite her lack of education, or perhaps because she was denied one, Miriam's mother appears to have been a strong driving force in her and her siblings' schooling and the desire to continue their studies.

Among this group of students, only two said that their father was the main influence in their studies.

Yoni

Yoni is 24 years old. His parents immigrated to Israel from Ethiopia and he was born in Israel. Neither of his parents has any schooling, and both of them are illiterate. His mother works as a cleaning woman and his father works in maintenance in a mental hospital. He has three sisters, one older and two younger.

> *My father always pressed me and my sisters to read books. Even though my father could not read, he would have us sit down and read out loud from our school books to him. Sometimes, when I was bored with the book, I'd start making up stuff, 'cause he couldn't tell the difference…He's always telling us, 'See how hard we have to work because we didn't have an opportunity to get an education like you do'.*

Like Yoni, Iris, also spoke of a very strong relationship with her father, who was a significant figure in her education from childhood. However, unlike Yoni, her father was a professional with higher education.

Iris

Iris is 26 years old. She is a native Jewish-Israeli. She has three siblings. Both of her parents have 17 years of schooling. Her mother is a banker and her father is an optometrist.

> *My family always placed a lot of emphasis on learning and studies. My father was a big influence in my studies. He sat with me and helped me with my schoolwork throughout my studies.*

Another three students in this group said that the pressure for them to succeed in their studies came from both parents.

Elana

Elana is 26 years old. She immigrated to Israel from Russia at the age of eight. Both of her parents have 16 years of schooling and degrees in education. Her mother is a school teacher with a degree in social work and her father is a P.E. teacher. She has one older sister who is an accountant.

My father and sister immigrated to Israel first. I immigrated with my mother two years after the rest of my family, because my mother wanted me to learn reading and writing in Russian before immigrating to Israel.

…Education is very important for both of my parents. They wanted me to study medicine.

Nevertheless, half of the students from the secular Jewish-Israeli sector said that although their parents talked to them about the importance of education, they never felt pressure to excel in their schoolwork or to continue their studies.

In summary, when examining student descriptions of how their family influenced their studies, the picture that emerges is that the majority of students from more 'traditional' homes, with a patriarchal family structure, experienced greater pressure to excel in school and continue their education, especially from their fathers, or, on the contrary, disinterest and lack of support from both parents. In contrast, more students who grew up in less 'traditional' secular homes described greater matriarchal pressure or little pressure to excel at school.

5.3.2.3 The Presence of Books

The presence of books and reading in my students' lives was another aspect of parental influence examined. Students described their parents' reading habits and their own. The overwhelming majority reported that they disliked reading for pleasure. Only 13 students spoke of the presence of books at home during their childhood. Twelve of these came from a less 'traditional' family structure, while only one came from a more 'traditional' background. All three students of Ethiopian background explained that since their parents were illiterate, books were not

present at home. As children they recalled their parents telling them stories orally and hearing music at home.

Yoni

> *(See also p.96)*
>
> *My parents can't read or write, so we didn't have books at home. They couldn't read stories to me as a child…I remember my mom telling me stories when I was a kid…and I remember a lot of music. I remember my mother singing at home all the time.*
>
> *…Yes, I remember being taken to the public library when I was a child. But, to be honest, I always ended up in the play corner rather than the book sections.*

Both Tamar and Miriam similarly described the strong presence of oral language at home, rather than the written word. However, Miriam says that although books were not present at home, as soon as she became proficient in Hebrew, she became an avid reader. This was evident in her reading strategy exercises where she exhibited good reading comprehension skills in Hebrew.

Many of the Arab-Israeli students and Jewish-Israeli students who were reared in religious homes explained that when growing up reading involved religious or sacred texts, and reading books for pleasure was not very common. Many of the students related that they would read the newspaper on a regular basis, especially the sports section, though they had no interest in books. Notwithstanding, in two cases, a family figure was mentioned as encouraging the student to read. Bushra recounted that her father would often bring her booklets to read when she was a child. Narmeen described her uncle as the main figure in her childhood who instilled in her a love for reading.

Narmeen

> Narmeen is 21 years old. Both of her parents completed 12 years of school. Her father is a post-office manager and her mother runs a daycare centre. She has three siblings.
>
> *…Books had a major presence at home. My uncle lived in Jerusalem and would bring me books whenever he came to visit… They were mostly in*

> *Hebrew and some in English. He would tell me that the next time he comes he would ask me about them. That's how he encouraged me to read.*

Among the students who came from secular and less 'traditional' backgrounds, half of the students said that books had a certain presence at home and that they remember being read to as children. Nine of these students said that they themselves did not like reading despite the fact that six said their mother was a bookworm. Interestingly only one student, Iris, described her father as an avid reader. She is also the only student among the less 'traditional' group who described her father as being extremely involved in her studies.

Among all of the students who were interviewed, only seven said they enjoyed reading for pleasure and read extensively when they were younger. Two were from a more 'traditional' background, while five came from a less 'traditional' background (See Graph 5.6).
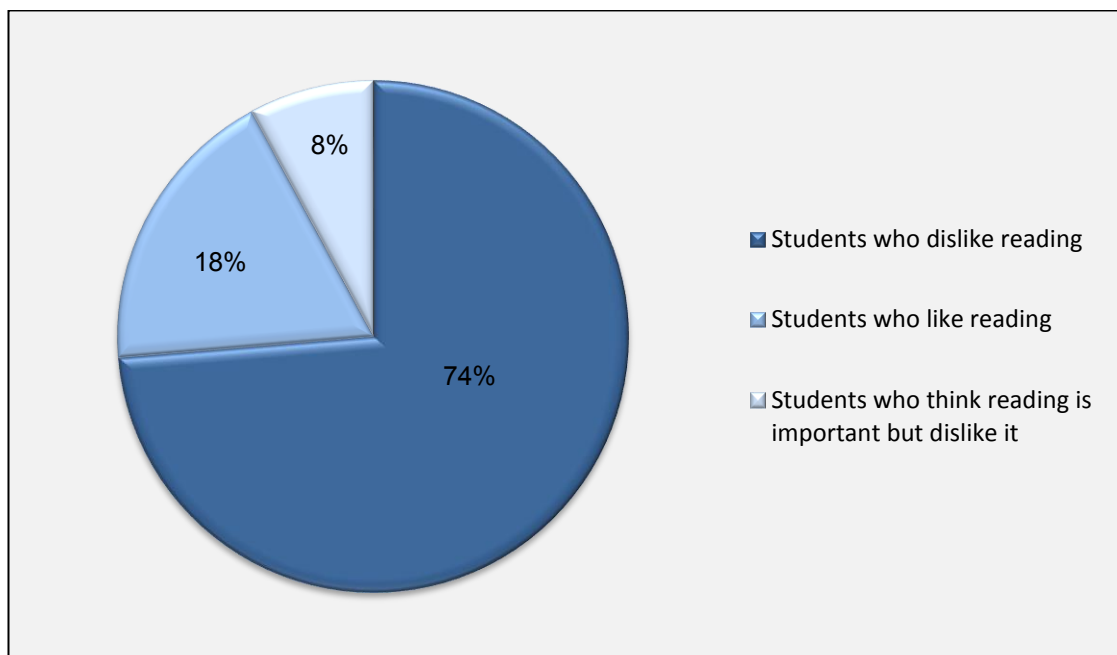
Graph 5.6: Students' reading preferences

Interestingly three students said that they did not enjoy reading and found it boring, though they understood the value of reading for their progress.

Elana

> *(See also p.97)*
>
> *I learned Hebrew quickly, especially because I read a lot of books… I don't like reading books all that much, but I understand their value in improving my language. This is why I'm now reading books in English.*

These students did not make significant progress in the programme. In contrast, of the seven students who said they enjoyed reading for pleasure and read extensively when they were younger, five made moderate to significant progress (two got 90's on their final exams).

Apart from these ten students who reported that they read a lot when they were younger, whether because they enjoyed it or felt it was important, the other 25 students reported they disliked reading as children and as adults. The fact that such a high number of students in the programme dislike reading and don't read for pleasure seems to play an important role in the reason that the average score of the diagnostic level test at the start of the year was so low. That is, despite the differences in their backgrounds, one of the unifying factors is their dislike for reading and the low presence of books in their homes. This early childhood, barren of rich reading experiences appears to have set them up for later failure at school, at least in reading comprehension, regardless of their native language or in which language they read. Those few students who did report that they enjoyed reading and read regularly throughout their childhood, were, in general, also those who described at least one parent who was an avid reader and described a presence of books in their homes. This early experience with reading seems to have provided them with better tools for succeeding in the programme. This supports findings that students' childhood literacy in their native language impacts on reading in a second language (Grabe & Stoller, 2002; Barkon & Avinor, 1995; Reese *et al.*, 2000; Gonzalez & Uhing, 2008; Hammer *et al.* 2003; 2009; Roberts, 2008). However, here, students who learned to read in a language different than the native language spoken at home, as in Miriam's case, benefitted from becoming avid readers in a second language (Hebrew) when learning to read in a third one (English).

5.4 School Experience

The family structure described by students was in most cases mirrored in their descriptions of their school experience. Those students who described their families as more 'traditional' also described a more traditional school experience. Classrooms were depicted as teacher-centred with little or no group work. The majority of students described emphasis on rote learning. Open class discussion was not encouraged, and many students portrayed their lessons as lecture-type classes with the teacher in front of the class speaking the majority of the time.

This was more the case among the Arab-Israeli students, the student of Ethiopian background who immigrated at age 13, and the students from a religious Jewish background. These students reported that they were used to more discipline in school, when compared to secular Jewish schools. During interviews, four of these students raised the issue of corporal punishment as a pedagogical tool at school.

Tamar

(See also p.93)

I'd love to go back there. I miss school in Ethiopia and I would have preferred to continue my studies there and not here in Israel…It's a totally different type of education. Totally different from Israel. In Israel, you can't do anything if someone doesn't want to learn. If you want, you can stay in class, if you don't want to, you can leave class…There's no such thing in Ethiopia! If you're late you get punished…You know what to expect. The discipline is, forget about it. There's no such thing as showing up late to school. There's no such thing as coming to school untidy. There's no such thing! You arrive on time, you go into class, you don't disturb the lesson... A student doesn't even turn around to talk to his classmate behind him. If I turn around, they immediately, they have this stick with which they hit you on the hand. He tells you, go out, I kneel down on my knees and he hits me on the hand.

The student regards corporal punishment and strict discipline as positive tools for creating a good learning environment. Similarly, three students from the Arab-

Israeli sector explained that corporal punishment was imposed in school as an education tool. When asked how their parents reacted, they replied that their parents supported the teachers' use of corporal punishment when it was 'justified'.

Habib

(See also p. 91)

> *I disliked English from the start. When I started English in the third grade, the teacher hit me for misbehaving in class.*

When asked whether his parents complained about the teacher, the student replied,

> *My parents believe that if their son misbehaves, this is considered appropriate punishment. Hitting a student, but not violently - this is considered an appropriate form of teaching discipline. Teachers at school did not hit to hurt the students. They didn't use excessive force. They would hit us on the hand for example.*

> *…You see, I had this math teacher at school. He didn't take account of anyone - not the principal, not the teachers, not the students. He would hit anyone who was out of order. His class had the highest mathematics average in the school.*

When asked whether this was out of fear, the student replied,

> *No, not out of fear. We respected him. We loved him. At the end of the year, we all came and hugged him.*

While on the one hand, Habib associates his dislike for English as a school subject with the corporal punishment he experienced in school, on the other hand, in his eyes, his mathematics teacher is the epitome of a good teacher. A teacher should keep his students under control. Other teachers who do not enforce this kind of authoritarian order and discipline are considered weak. Parents in such communities expect the teachers to take on disciplinarian roles and to use corporal punishment to educate their children.

When I raised the issue in a conversation with Tariq, an Arab-Israeli colleague from Jaffa, he explained,

> *Corporal punishment is less common in Jaffa, or in cities in the centre ⌈of the country⌉, but in the villages it is rampant. Teachers can beat up children – a*

teacher can take off his shoe and hit a student with it. In Gaza, teachers can take a pipe to school and hit the students with it. There is no such thing as student rights.

He further explained that it is not only accepted by the community, but also expected. Moreover, often the teacher is a friend or family member of the student. He knows the parents, so no issue is made by the student or his family. This situation was voiced by two students. One explained that he had a very bad English teacher in high school, but never complained.

In our village, everyone knows everyone. Many of us are family. My teacher was terrible, but I couldn't say anything. He was my father's cousin.

The three students who grew up in religious Jewish homes also raised the issue of discipline in their schools. They all described schools with greater discipline enforced than in secular schools. When asked whether corporal punishment was ever used, they replied that this may have been the case when their parents went to school, but not today. When asked how discipline was enforced in their schools, both Tamir and David replied that because their teachers were rabbis, they naturally respected them.

David and Rachel further commented that they were raised at home on values of respecting their elders, and so respecting their teachers at school reflected how they behaved at home and the respect they gave their parents.

Rachel

(See also p. 84)

Rachel chose to transfer to a secular school during the 10th grade, but spoke of the culture shock she encountered when she spent the year in the secular school.

I studied in a religious school for girls. I spent 10th grade in a secular school and returned to the religious school to complete 11th and 12th grades. The secular school completely lacked any discipline. I couldn't believe it. The students didn't respect their teachers at all. They didn't even respect the principal. I remember that when the principal came into the classroom the students didn't stand up. I was shocked. It signified to me the worst expression of disrespect. There was much more order and discipline in the religious school.

Like Rachel, many of the students who studied in more authoritarian schools perceived secular schools as being over-permissive and lacking in respect. Many used the term 'out-of-control' to describe the secular Jewish classroom.

Students who went to secular Jewish schools described a more 'democratic' style of teaching used in class. That is, student-centred teaching was more commonly used in these schools, with greater discussion and dialogue in class.

Iris

> *(See also p. 96)*
>
> *It's because of my teachers' understanding and support, and my close relations with them, that I was able to cope with my difficulties and complete my high-school studies.*
>
> *…But, I remember one time a teacher was picking on another student in class. I told her that she was being unfair. She threw me out of class. So, I complained to the principal and the teacher was asked to apologize to me.*

While on the one hand, the democratic kind of teaching Iris enjoyed in school allowed her to develop positive relations with many of her teachers, on the other hand, it also led to confrontations with other teachers. The kind of altercation she describes seems improbable in a more discipline-oriented school environment.

In fact, unlike some of the students who spoke of good open relations with their teachers in school, a great deal of students who went to more 'democratic' secular schools spoke in interviews about their dislike and disrespect for many of their school teachers.

Meirav

> *I didn't have any really great teachers at school that I can remember… what you would call 'a teacher for life'.*

Many of the students who studied in secular schools described their classes as being 'out-of-control'. That is, they spoke of a class without discipline or civil discussion, and described teachers as weak, having no role as moderator or discussion leader. They used the same expression, 'out-of-control', that was used by their peers who went to more 'traditional' schools to describe their perceptions

of secular schools. It appears that students in secular schools did not always enjoy the 'democratic' atmosphere in their schools, because according to them, the classroom often turned into 'anarchy' rather than a place for exchanging ideas and learning. In a survey of Jewish schools conducted in 2011, 72% said they would not turn to their teachers if they had a personal problem. 34% of the students said they believed their teachers have no desire to teach, and 50% said that teachers were not significant figures in their lives (Uzan, 2011).

Thus, it appears that a high number of students who entered the programme experienced quite negative incidents at school. Whether they went to more 'traditional' or less 'traditional' schools, many expressed lack of interest, fear, boredom, or aversion when they were in school. They described either authoritarian teachers enforcing discipline through corporal punishment or teachers which seemed either weak or disinterested. These experiences negatively affected their motivation to learn and led to disregard for education among many of them.

In the previous section, regardless of their background, dislike for reading and lack of rich reading experiences in childhood, was a unifying factor in students' low achievements at school and low diagnostic level test scores. Similarly, regardless of their background, a negative school experience, whether over-disciplinarian or over-permissive, was a significant unifying factor in students' earlier failures in school. In either case, most of the students failed to experience a positive learning environment that encouraged open civil discussion which motivated them to learn.

5.5 Language Experience

When discussing their language experience, a clear distinction was discerned between students for whom English was a second language, namely native Jewish-Israeli students, and for whom English was a third/fourth language, that is, students from Arab-Israeli and immigrant backgrounds (See Diagram 5.1 below).

Arab-Israeli Students	Immigrant Students	Native Jewish-Israeli Students
L1 Arabic (N=11)	**L1** Amharic (N=2) Russian (N=3) Spanish (N=1)	**L1** Hebrew (N=21) + Amharic (N=1)/ Italian (N=1)
L2 Hebrew (N=11)	**L2** Hebrew (N=5) **+ English (N=2)** French (N=1)	**L2** **English (N=21)**
L3 **English (N=11)**	**L3** **English (N=3)** Hebrew (N=1)	**L3** Arabic (N=15)
	L4 **English (N=1)**	**L4** Spanish (N=1)
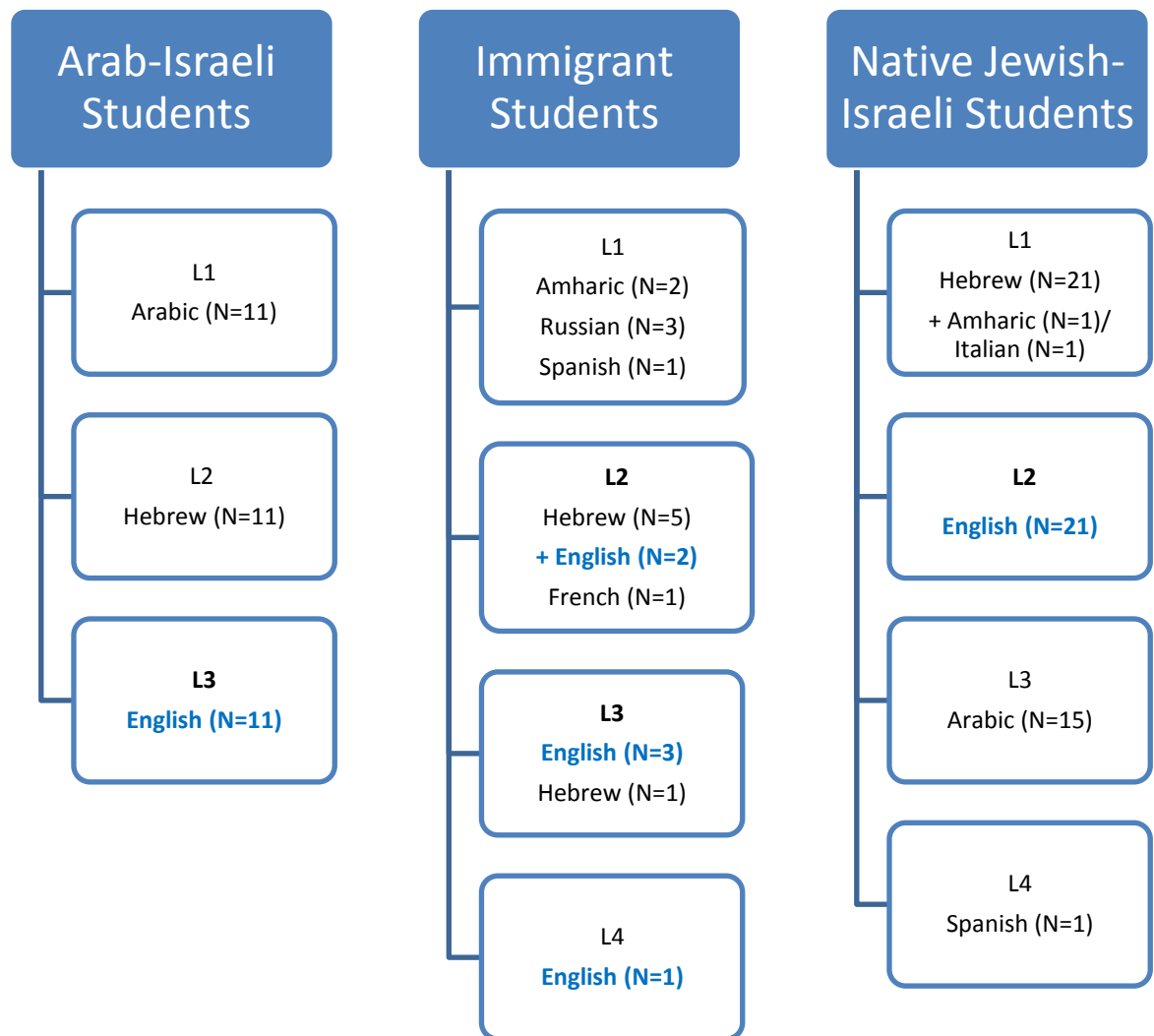
Diagram 5.1 Students' language background

5.5.1 English as a Third/Fourth Language

As the diagram above illustrates, Arab-Israeli students and most of the immigrant students studied English as a third/fourth language. They described English as a lesser priority when they were in school. The majority of the students who immigrated to Israel described a difficult immigration process entailing concentrated efforts to become proficient in Hebrew, making English a last priority. All the students described the first stage of learning Hebrew at an *ulpan*. An *ulpan* is a Hebrew instruction language school setting given to all citizens who immigrate to Israel. The main aim of the programme is to help immigrants integrate into

Israeli society by acquainting them with Hebrew and civic life in the country through language and citizenship classes.

5.5.1.1. Immigration during Adolescence

Three students immigrated to Israel as adolescents. Paulina never studied English before her immigration. Both Tamar who came from Ethiopia at age 13 and Alberto who came from Argentina at age 16 said they had learnt English at school in their respective native countries, and described their levels as quite good upon arrival to Israel. However, both reported that they focused all their energies on learning Hebrew, so that their English was soon forgotten. Both used the expression *'my English was erased'* to describe the process of erosion their English underwent in order to make room for Hebrew.

Alberto

Alberto is 25 years old. His father teaches electronics in poverty-stricken villages in Argentina. His mother is a Hebrew language teacher. He has one older brother. His parents divorced when he was six years old.

> *I was 16. I immigrated to Israel with the 'Na'ale' programme [a programme that recruits Jewish teenagers to immigrate to Israel] ... in Argentina...there's not too much of a future in studies, also because of the environment. So, I said to myself, either I pick myself up and immigrate to Israel and become something, or stay and just 'flow' with life, so I came and said, we'll see whatever will be, will be. So I immigrated to Israel, to do some soul searching. I left everything, friends, family, everything I know...In terms of the language, I knew how to read and write. But, to speak I couldn't.*

> *At the start of the year I thought English is the hardest subject...that was my biggest fear, because I forgot it... when I immigrated to Israel I knew English, because I studied English in Argentina, and when I came to Israel I managed with what I knew, I spoke English and everything, until I learned Hebrew and then my English just disappeared, completely disappeared. It's like my English was erased!*

Paulina

Paulina is 28 years old. Her father is a mathematics teacher and her mother is a Russian language teacher. She has a younger sister. Her parents divorced when she was 10 years old. When she was 16, she came to Israel with her father and sister, while her mother remained in Russia.

In Russia I studied Russian and French. I was good in both, because my mother is a language teacher. When I arrived in Israel, I didn't know any Hebrew. I spent six months in an ulpan and then they put me in the 11th grade. I was expected to continue all the school subjects in Hebrew with other Israeli kids. I tried to make an effort to succeed in school, but I soon realized that this was impossible because of the language gap. My father couldn't help me because he didn't know Hebrew.

…I've been trying to learn English for the past 10 years. I was placed in English class in 11th grade, without knowing any English. I had never learnt English before. I studied French as a second language in Russia, but I forgot most of it because I focused on learning Hebrew. So when I entered the 11th grade I was placed in English class with students who knew English.

…So, I tried to learn English on my own. I would take books and try to read them by myself…using a Hebrew-English dictionary. I took a private tutor for about two months who mainly taught me grammar - tenses. Then I left the tutor because I went to study fitness instruction. I realized that I needed to speak English at the fitness room with clients who came there, so I took a course in [name of commercial language school], which didn't help at all.

What can be clearly discerned is that students who immigrated to Israel as adolescents met language difficulties when they arrived in the country. Their attempts to integrate within their new culture included putting all their efforts into acquiring Hebrew. Whether they had learned English before in their home country or they had never learned English before, the result was the same. English was a last priority in the students' struggle to fit into Israeli society. What is also clear is that the schools they went to in Israel were unable to cope with the challenge of teaching them English alongside their Hebrew acquisition, or helping them bridge the gap between their level and that of their Israeli peers.

5.5.1.2 Immigration during Childhood

Three students immigrated to Israel at younger ages. Miriam immigrated from Ethiopia at the age of six, Boris immigrated from Uzbekistan at age six as well, and Elena immigrated from Russia at age eight. All of these students described a successful immigration process. They all still speak their native languages at home with their parents though have little or no reading and writing skills in the language. All described the concentrated efforts to acquire Hebrew as young children. They also explain that the efforts they invested in learning Hebrew came at the cost of learning English, which, like their peers who came at a later age, became a last priority.

Miriam

(See also p. 95)

Miriam is an Ethiopian immigrant. She still speaks Amharic at home with her parents, but can't read or write in the language. She studied Hebrew as soon as she came to Israel, and began her English studies at school only in the 7th grade.

> *I immigrated to Israel in 1992 at the age of six, but I feel like a sabra [a native Israeli]. I don't remember much from the immigration process. I live through the stories my family tells me.*
>
> *I remember that when I came to Israel, we were all put in ulpan to learn Hebrew, and about the holidays. All the ages were mixed together. It was a big mess. Only when we were divided into groups according to ages I began to advance in Hebrew. I spent half a year in ulpan and half a year in first grade. I started first grade with a gap in Hebrew, especially when I began to read. But then, I was taken out of class and sat with a teacher one-on-one every day for a couple of hours. That's when I really progressed until I could read like everyone else…I began reading short readers, and then we continued to longer readings, kind of like we did with you…If I needed help with schoolwork I got it at school and in after-school programmes.*
>
> *Because the focus every day was on Hebrew, English was completely abandoned. I think that if they would have taught me English at the same time they taught me Hebrew, I would have known English much better. But I was excused from English until the 7th grade. Then I was placed in class with kids who studied English from 3rd grade. The teacher would speak only English in class, and I didn't understand anything. I felt frustrated with English. I thought it was my fault… that something was wrong with me rather than the system. I had a Russian teacher who didn't know any*

> *Hebrew, and I didn't know any English. So, I didn't understand her and she couldn't understand me. I would find excuses to leave the class. I would always volunteer to bring the teacher something or other and I'd disappear for the majority of the lesson.*

As the excerpt above indicates, the students who immigrated to Israel at a young age associated their integration process with their successful acquisition of Hebrew. However, the efforts in becoming proficient in Hebrew, while continuing and maintaining their acquisition of their native language, placed English far behind in priority. As Elana explained, she remained in Russia with her mother, while the rest of her family immigrated to Israel, so she would attend first and second grades in Russia to acquire Russian literacy. Boris also maintained his native Russian so that he could communicate with his father who does not speak Hebrew. It seems that the need to acquire a third, somewhat remote language without any apparent benefits at the time, was too great of a burden for these students. Regardless of age, the stories recounted by these immigrant students resonate with findings of studies on the difficulties immigrant students encounter with English language acquisition in Israel (Barkon & Avinor, 1995; Lehrer Bettan, 2007; Bensoussan, 2009).

5.5.1.3. Students of Arab-Israeli Background

Like their immigrant peers, for the Arab-Israeli students English was a third/fourth language of study. They studied Arabic, Hebrew and English at school. Most of the students regretted the fact that English was given the least priority at school. In comparison to Arabic and Hebrew (10 hours a week), English is allotted fewer hours (only 4 hours a week). When asked to compare the three subjects, students explained that in Arabic and Hebrew, they learned both languages much more profoundly. Virtually all of the students who studied English as a third/fourth language expressed dissatisfaction with the instruction they received and with the fact that it was given such low priority in their studies.

Ehab

(See also pp. 85,92)

I studied Arabic, Hebrew and English at school. We were taught both Arabic and Hebrew like native languages at school…we had a lot more hours than in English. We studied grammar and all the skills because these are languages that we need on a daily basis. But there was not as much emphasis on English – it was not as important a subject. In Arab schools English is like Arabic in Jewish schools.

…Learning three languages at school can be confusing. But I've learned to translate from English to Arabic to Hebrew. It can sometimes make me uncertain of the meaning, but in general, I can now use all three.

Bushra

(See also pp. 84, 90, 111)

In Arabic and Hebrew, classes were more intensive; one lesson on grammar, one lesson on composition, one on reading, etc. English was less intensive. We had fewer hours and we mostly did unseens. I didn't like the teacher. She only spoke in English and she would force us to speak only English in class. I didn't understand anything.

Like their immigrant peers, Arab-Israeli students explain that higher priority was given to Hebrew as a second language. The fact that literary Arabic is an extremely complex language, which is not the same as the spoken language they use at home, is an added challenge to learning English, in fact, a fourth language with an additional system of writing and grammar. This feat is undermined by a school system which places English as a last priority, and provides few hours and little regard to the subject, as was also found by Leshem & Trafford (2006) and Jubran (2005). What appears to characterize all the students who acquired English as a third/fourth language is the fact that studying Hebrew as a second language hindered their acquisition of English in school.

5.5.2 English as a Second Language

Unlike their immigrant and Arab-Israeli peers, native Jewish-Israeli students studied English as a second language. As was found by Leshem & Trafford (2006),

students recounted that English was given high priority at school, especially in secular schools. In general, in the secular community, English is considered one of the essential keys to success in life. The majority of students said that they studied Hebrew, English and Arabic at school. Most began studying English in the third grade and studied two years of Arabic in middle school as required by the Ministry of Education.

In high-school, it became apparent to them that English was a significant subject linked to their future success, academic or otherwise. For those who did poorly in the subject at school, the failure was associated with a sense of shame and inadequacy. Many reported a sense of embarrassment with their level of English when entering the programme.

5.5.3 English at School

Of the 35 students who were interviewed, ten said they wouldn't attend their English classes, and either don't know or cannot remember what was done in class. From descriptions of a typical English class at school by the other 25 students interviewed (13 from a more 'traditional' background and 12 from a less 'traditional' background), three teaching methods were discerned: learning to pass an exam, text translation, and focus on grammar.
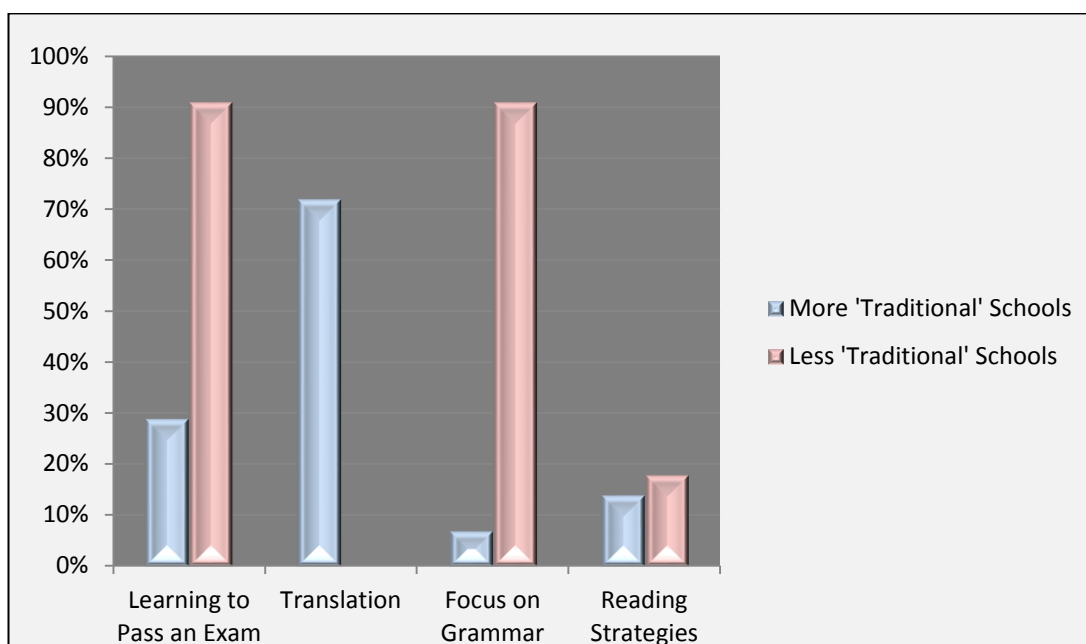
Graph 5.7 Teaching methods discerned according to more 'traditional' and less 'traditional' schools

5.5.3.1 Learning to Pass an Exam

Fourteen students (four from a more 'traditional' background and ten from a less 'traditional background) described being trained to pass the matriculation exam, rather than really learning English or reading comprehension. They practised 'unseens' for which they learned 'tricks' on which parts to copy without necessarily understanding the text.

Ali

> (See also pp. 85, 92)
>
> *My teacher in school taught me to look at the questions and then search for the answer in the text. He taught me that I didn't need to read the whole text in order to answer the questions. I didn't need to look for key words, or mark the text, or look for connectors, or any of that stuff.*

Sarit

> *We worked purely by the book, practising unseens without any techniques on how to read them.*

Another student had a tutor who taught her how to solve 'unseens' so she would solve them easily in class.

Meirav

> *(See also p.104)*
>
> *She taught me to look at the questions and then find the same wording in the unseen and copy those parts.*

Iris summarizes the problem below.

Iris

> *(See also pp. 96, 104)*
>
> *In high-school, we were taught like robots to pass the exam. Teachers had no patience for weaker students. They were worried about preparing the strong ones for the matriculation exam.*

Reading passages would normally be introduced by a list of vocabulary with definitions that the teacher would provide for them or that they would have to look up in the dictionary prior to reading. Thus, students never had to make a choice regarding which vocabulary they should look up and which could be disregarded while still extracting meaning from the text. Students were not trained in choosing the correct definition of a multiple-meaning word, as the appropriate one in the context of the passage was most often readily provided for them. Thus, they were not taught to become independent readers.

5.5.3.2 Text Translation

For eight of the students (all who studied in Arab-Israeli schools), reading texts meant translating into their native language.

Narmeen

> *(See also p. 98)*
>
> *Each student would read a few lines and translate into Arabic. Before reading the text we would read the questions, and then read until we found the answer… Vocabulary was tested by dictation – the teacher would say the word in English and the students would write the word and its translation in Arabic.*

Habib

> *(See also pp. 91, 102)*
>
> *In school, we would get a text, we had to translate it and then the teacher would read the translation while we would check ours.*

Ehab

> *(See also pp. 85, 92, 111)*
>
> *In high-school, English was taught very badly. The teacher would assign an unseen to read, without explaining how to work with it, without giving students any reading strategies. Reading an unseen in class required looking up words in the dictionary and nothing more.*

When asked about grammar, these students said that very little emphasis was placed on grammar, unlike their Arabic and Hebrew studies. They regretted that they had never learned grammar properly. None of the students from other sectors mentioned translation as a teaching technique used in their schools. However, three immigrant students (Alberto, Paulina, and Elana) made extreme usage of translation when reading a passage at the start of the year, attempting to translate virtually every word in the text.

5.5.3.3. Focus on Grammar

In contrast to their Arab-Israeli peers, ten of the Jewish-Israeli students from a less 'traditional' background, and one Jewish-Israeli student from a more 'traditional' background expressed frustration with the substantial emphasis placed on grammar in school. Their memories of English class mainly consist of grammar exercises to practise the tenses, usually out of context.

Sarit

> *(See also p. 113)*
>
> *The teacher pounded tenses into our heads - present simple, present progressive... It only complicated matters for me.*

Nati

> *I remember a ton of grammar. It was a big mess and I simply didn't get it, so I wouldn't do anything in class.*

Surprisingly, the heavy focus on grammar left many students with a sense of confusion and frustration. The vast majority of students, despite years of having tenses *'pounded into their heads'* had not mastered them and performed poorly on their diagnostic level tests in this area.

5.5.3.4. Reading Comprehension

Many students said they had not learned reading comprehension, in general, or reading strategies, in particular. In fact, some students said they did very little reading.

Sarit

> *(See also p. 113)*
>
> *I remember a lot of grammar exercises: cloze, circle the correct tense, that kind of stuff. I also remember dictations. I don't remember much reading work.*

Still, the overwhelming majority of students did remember various reading assignments throughout their school years, mainly 'unseens', for the purpose of passing the exam. Two students remembered being assigned book reports to submit, but both admitted that they would not really read the books, but copied the summary from the back cover of the book instead.

In terms of reading strategies, with the exception of three students, the other 32 students answered that they did not recall being exposed to any reading strategies that were taught in the programme, in English or in their native languages. The students who were exposed to some of the reading strategies

explained that these were never taught formally, but only in passing. They explained that this was the first time they were taught strategies systematically as a unit of learning.

Omer

> *In the past, I remember learning to focus on the main ideas of the text, but not in the same depth as was done in this course (identifying text structures like comparison and contrast, cause and effect, lists). I also learned connectors in the past, but it was never defined in the way it was done in the course in relation to its function in text structures.*

Ori

> *(See also p. 89)*
>
> *I was exposed to some of the reading strategies in the course previously at school, though I believe more emphasis on these was placed in this course and this helped me focus more on main ideas and text structures, and to look more in depth at texts.*

It is interesting to note, that these two students received marks above 90% in their final exams. It appears that the former exposure to reading strategies was beneficial to them. It also seems that acquiring the strategies in a more structured format as separate units of learning allowed them to better internalize and apply them. That is, recognition of some of the strategies due to past exposure facilitated their acquisition when taught formally.

5.5.3.5 Teaching Methods

In terms of how lessons were conducted, most students described an English class that reflected the general school environment in which they studied. Nine of the students who described their background as more 'traditional' and their schools as more 'disciplinarian' in interviews also described English classes conducted in this manner. Lessons were teacher-centred and the majority of class was taught in the students' native language with the teacher standing in front of the class.

Halil

When asked if they ever worked in groups in English class, he answered,

> *No, never. We would work individually on a text, and then the teacher would go over the answers.*

Narmeen

(See also pp. 98, 115)

Class was always taught as a whole. We never did any group work.

Four students among this group described classes that were more 'modern' in terms of methodology. Students worked in groups, class was conducted only in English, and a variety of communicative activities was introduced. However, the students who were taught in this more 'democratic' type of classroom which encouraged dialogue in class described them as 'out of control' (i.e., lots of disruptions, lack of real discussion, teacher incapable of moderating a civil dialogue) and on the whole expressed dissatisfaction with this method.

Susane

(See also p. 93)

> *Sometimes we worked in groups, but the teacher would focus only on one group and ignore the rest… In Hebrew and Arabic, there was no group work. We didn't have open discussions on what was read. We learned much better this way.*

Ahmed

> *English wasn't considered very important. We had a weak teacher and there was no discipline in class…Only two students took the matriculation exam at the end of the year.*

Halil

> (See also p. 118)
>
> *English was a class that had the least control. I remember class was a mess, and the teacher did not have any control over the class. Maybe it's because in Hebrew and Arabic the teacher was a man, but in English the teacher was a woman.*

Interestingly, the student raises gender as an important characteristic of the teacher. Male teachers receive more respect and discipline from students. He further comments that in Hebrew and Arabic the teacher was the authority and taught from the front of the classroom, while in English they worked in groups which is equated with loss of control. This is not explicitly stated, but hinted at by two of the Jewish-Israeli students who studied in religious schools, as illustrated in the account below.

Tamir

> *(See also p. 92)*
>
> Tamir recounts an amusing story of how he landed up learning English with the *yeshiva*'s English teacher's wife.
>
> *I began studying in the 4-pt class. The teacher was very serious and strict. His wife taught the 3-pt level class. Some of my friends were in her class and they told me how much more fun they had there, so I pretended I was having trouble in the 4-pt class and I told the teacher I didn't understand anything, so I was transferred to his wife's class. We'd go to her home in the yeshiva. It was a very nice atmosphere there. The teacher would serve us refreshments and home baked cookies. Sometimes she'd bring an easy text and we'd read and discuss it, but we usually diverted the discussion to other things.*

Although Tamir is not as explicit as Halil, his story implies that the male English teacher enforced more discipline in class than did the female English teacher who served refreshments but offered very little English instruction. In the more 'traditional' schools, English class was either, as for nine students, conducted in the same format as the other classes (teacher-centred, taught from the front of the

classroom, little discussion), or as for four students, it was a unique class distinct from their regular classes, allowing for more 'modern' teaching methods to be used (student-centred, group work, discussion) to reflect EFL methodology mainly developed in Western countries with less 'traditional' ideology. However, these classes are described by students, not as a place where they were exposed to a new type of learning from which they grew and benefitted, but rather as a place that was *'out of control*', much as they described secular schools in general.

In comparison, ten of the students who studied in secular school settings described their English lessons as student-centred with group work and a certain amount of dialogue and discussion. These classes were not unique in comparison to their other lessons, and the students conveyed their familiarity with this kind of learning. However, six of these students perceived these lessons in the same way as did their peers from the more 'traditional' schools, who were unaccustomed to this kind of learning.

Miki

> *The students in the class were very disruptive. I wasn't the type of kid who made trouble in class, so I stopped going. It was a waste of time.*

Liron

> *There was complete mayhem in English class. If some students wanted to do the work, they did it. If others, didn't, they wouldn't...they'd work on something else. Students basically did whatever they wanted.*

An examination of how students described learning at school reveals a wide array of teaching methods used in the classroom. However, for the vast majority of all the students, reading comprehension in English meant answering formula-type questions rather than text analysis. That is, almost all the students were taught to prepare for a test, rather than comprehend reading and were therefore trained in test-taking techniques rather than reading strategies.

Thus, the failure in English shared by the students stems from a number of reasons, as can be discerned by their descriptions. Firstly, as Leshem & Trafford

(2006) and Jubran (2005) found, the low priority given to English expressed by limited hours of teaching, and the higher priority given to Hebrew as a second language among all those students for whom Hebrew is not their native language was a common problem shared by a large number of the students. For students who fell behind in English due to immigration or other difficulties, once the gap was opened, no attempt was made by the schools to close it, and it seems to have only widened. Secondly, lessons in English were commonly described by students, regardless of sector or type of school, as a place of disorder, lacking in any discipline or lesson structure. Consequently students often held their teachers in low esteem and described them as 'weak'. Thirdly, most students described English in school as preparation for the matriculation exam, rather than a subject where language skills were taught. In terms of reading comprehension, students failed to acquire the skills necessary to successfully extract meaning from a text. Rather than text analysis, they were given endless practice 'unseens', without strategies for reading them profoundly and critically. In many cases, copy-paste techniques were taught as 'tricks' for passing the test without comprehension, while in others little more than translation techniques were offered to students. As a result, all students in the programme met failure in English reading comprehension throughout their school years.

In the programme students were required to adopt new approaches to reading. Their copy-paste techniques and 'tricks' for passing tests were no longer effective. Translation techniques also proved insufficient. Most students were exposed to reading strategies for the first time, and they were not easily acquired and applied, as to be expected when learning any new skill. As will be discussed in chapter 6, student reception of these strategies varied on the scale between resistance and acceptance, depending on a range of factors.

5.6 Post-School Experience

Unlike students in other Western countries who usually continue their higher studies immediately after high school. Israeli students are required to serve in the IDF after high school for a period of three years for males and two years for

females. The exception is students from the Arab-Israeli sector and the Ultra-Orthodox sector. Thus, a major distinction between the Jewish and Arab-Israeli students can be found in terms of post-school experiences prior to enrolment in the programme.

With the exception of two students (Sarit and Noa), all the other Jewish-Israeli students spent time working in diverse jobs; some earned certificates in various sports or physical activity instruction and gained experience working in them, while others began study programmes in different disciplines at other institutions but decided to change their track to a B.Ed. in physical education.

Miriam

(See also pp. 95, 109)

> *A lot of people say that despite my young age, I've accomplished a lot. After school I spent a year in the National Service tutoring elementary school children, especially in mathematics…that's my strong side. I also gave after-school instruction. I volunteered in MADA [the Israeli Red Cross], I volunteered in the Civil Guard, and I volunteered to help disabled populations. I was involved in a lot of projects, like food collection and distribution to the needy. Then I joined the (army) NACHAL (soldiers in the NACHAL usually come from youth movements and women usually have education roles). I served for two and a half years. I feel that I got a lot from the experience. I have received so much help over the years and I want to give back whatever I can.*
>
> *After the army, I worked as a tutor… in mathematics, Hebrew, history, at a middle school. Then I went abroad to India and Thailand for half a year. When I returned I studied Clown Medicine ⌈treatment using humour to ease anxiety and pain in patients⌉ and I've just now received my certificate.*

In addition, with the exception of two students, all of the students from the Jewish-Israeli sector said they had travelled abroad following their army service for an extended period of six-twelve months, as is customary in Israeli culture. The most common destinations for the typical 'after-the-army trip' are South America, Thailand, India, Australia and the United States. Students said that these experiences forced them to use English, often for the first time.

In contrast, with the exception of two students (Ali, 24, and Ehab, 25), the students from the Arab-Israeli sector were younger in age than their Jewish-Israeli

peers (M=21.27, ranging from 19-25). They were still in their initial stages of life experience following high-school. These students did not serve in the IDF as required of their Jewish peers. This experience is considered a rite of passage for young adults in Israeli culture – a transition from childhood to adulthood. Many leave home and separate from their families for the first time. They assume adult responsibilities and in many cases receive training in a trade or a profession. Moreover, many of the immigrant students explained the significant role their army service played in their integration in Israeli society.

In contrast, only two of the students from the Arab-Israeli sector had previously travelled abroad. Their travels were with their family to Jordan, where they were able to communicate in Arabic. Most of them spent a year or two working in various jobs, such as store clerks, following their high-school graduation.

This distinction indicates an important difference between students in terms of maturity level and life experience upon entry to the programme. Most of the Jewish-Israeli students underwent a process of maturation engendered by the responsibilities they were given in the army and at work, as well as their time abroad, away from their family. Most of them no longer lived at home, and one was married with two children. Eleven students raised the issue of maturity as being an important factor in the change of attitude towards their studies in the programme in comparison to school. In contrast, the majority of their Arab-Israeli peers were still living at home and obviously still strongly influenced by their parents, especially their fathers. This distinction had a significant impact on students' motivation (intrinsic or extrinsic) to invest in their learning process. In addition, those students who travelled abroad on their own were exposed to English, unlike their peers who were never confronted with a situation in which they were forced to communicate in English.

5.7 Summary

This chapter presented and analysed data on students' family, school, language and post-school background to gain a better understanding of the cultural, linguistic and religious background of the students who attended the programme. While the study set out in search of similar patterns among students sharing the same cultural background, what emerged was a distinction between students who shared more 'traditional' and less 'traditional' background. Students coming from more 'traditional' backgrounds were also raised in more patriarchal family structures and their education was shaped more by their father's influence. They also tended to study in more disciplinarian school systems. Their English studies tended to reflect such school systems and their English classrooms were typically teacher-centred environments without much dialogue between students and teacher. On the other hand, students from less 'traditional' backgrounds were typically raised in more egalitarian or single-parent homes with greater matriarchal influence on their studies. They typically attended more libertarian school systems. Their English studies echoed the general school system framework and students reported more student-centred classrooms and greater dialogue in such an environment.

In terms of language experience, a distinction emerged between students learning English as a second language and students learning English as a third/fourth language. This distinction was necessarily influenced by the students' linguistic and cultural background. It became clearly discerned that students learning English as a second language, mainly native Israeli students, did not have to cope with the greater challenges facing students learning English as a third/fourth language, namely Arab-Israeli and immigrant students. Both of these groups of students studied Hebrew as a second language, which was an essential requirement for them to integrate within Israeli society, and placed English as a last priority.

In terms of post-school experience, a distinction was found between those students who served in the IDF following graduation and those who did not. This distinction was also culturally based, as Arab-Israelis are not required to serve in

the Israeli army. This difference led to a variance in the average age of the students, their level of maturity, and experience with adult skills and responsibilities.

These distinctions, which were influenced by cultural background, played a role in students' approach to learning, in general, and learning English, in particular. These differences also impacted upon students' approaches to reading in their native languages, as well as in English.

Chapter 6:

Data Analysis: Learning Processes

6.1 Introduction

As the previous chapter presented, several factors influenced students' early life experiences. The family structure in which they were raised (more or less 'traditional') impacted upon the way they were educated at home and their reading experience, which was further echoed in the school framework in which they studied. This family structure was influenced by the cultural background they came from, and therefore, students from similar backgrounds shared family, school, post-school and language experiences. These help to understand in part the differences in level between students when they entered the programme and the processes these students underwent when learning reading comprehension in English throughout the year.

This chapter presents the entry levels of students by analysing their diagnostic level tests, and the learning behaviour patterns they exhibited in class at the start of the year. The discussion is followed by an analysis of students' progress and achievements throughout the year as reflected by their commitment and investment to their learning process, their test scores, and their reading strategy exercise scores. The chapter concludes with a discussion of these achievements in relation to cultural and individual differences.

6.2 Entry Level

Before starting the programme students were required to take a diagnostic level test (See Appendix B). The test was composed of two sections. The first was predominantly composed of multiple-choice questions testing the students' knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. The second included a reading passage and reading comprehension questions, with the similar format and same level as

the matriculation exam students would be required to take at the end of the year. However, while the final exam comprises of two reading passages, students were required to complete only one on the level test so as not to overburden them at this initial stage of the programme. Questions required the following reading skills from students:

- to identify main ideas
- to deduce information from examples
- to understand an inference
- to fill out information about an experiment
- to fill out a table comparing two experiments
- to translate two words as they are used in the text
- to provide the references of two pronouns
- to choose the main verb of a complex sentence
- to identify the part of speech of two words as they are used in the text

Questions included open questions, sentence completion, a table, and multiple choice questions. Students were allowed to use a dictionary in this section. For the purpose of this study, only the reading comprehension section was analysed.

The average of the entire group of students was below 50% indicating that the majority of the students entering the program had a weak level of English. Average scores of the reading comprehension section indicate that students of Ethiopian (7%), Argentinian (18%) and Arab-Israeli (32%) background entered at markedly lower levels than students of Former Soviet Union (43%) and native Jewish-Israeli (46%) background (See Table 5.1).

The fact that native Jewish-Israeli students, who study English as a second language at school, receive more hours of study in the subject, more of whom have parents with more years of schooling, and most of who travelled abroad, received the highest average score, is hardly surprising. The fact that, in general, immigrant and Arab-Israeli students who study English as a third/fourth language, receive fewer hours in the subject at school, and for whom Hebrew is given higher priority enter at markedly lower levels is also to be expected. However, why there should be such marked differences between immigrants of different backgrounds is not so

clear. Differences in literacy at home and parental education may play a role in this difference as has been previously found (Reese *et al.*, 2000; Gonzalez & Uhing, 2008; Hammer *et al.*, 2003; Roberts, 2008). This will be examined in greater depth later in the discussion.

Looking at the results from a more 'traditional' and less 'traditional' viewpoint, students had similar averages: an average of 38.91% among students from a more 'traditional' background and an average of 37.13% among students from a less 'traditional' background. Both groups revealed disadvantaged positions when entering the programme.

It should be noted that two students from the Arab-Israeli sector who received 48% (Nabil) and 52% (Omar), had copied many of their answers from their friend who excelled in English and was exempt from the course. This was evident, as the same phrasing of open answers and identical errors appeared on their tests. In individual conversations for coordinating expectations with students at the start of the year, these students admitted they had copied the answers. In the introduction prior to the test, it was clarified that the sole purpose of the test was to identify their strengths and weaknesses in order to best tailor the programme for their needs. It was reiterated that even if students got a zero on the test, this only meant they needed some extra help, which they would be able to get if they took the test on their own. Therefore, copying on this test is counterproductive for the student. Nevertheless, these students ignored the request and proceeded to copy. This phenomenon persisted throughout the year and had significant implications in terms of these students' lack of progress, as will be further examined later in this chapter. The students' tests have been excluded from the analysis. Another three students joined the programme after it began and did not take the diagnostic level test. Thus, the exams of 34 students were analysed and are discussed below.

6.2.1 Understanding Instructions

While the majority of the students in the group understood most of the instructions on the test, several questions posed more problems for them. Fifteen

students left blank or wrote irrelevant information on the question requesting information about an experiment and 26 students did not fill in the table asking students to compare two research studies.

In addition, the question asking students to translate two words into Hebrew as they are used in the text was misunderstood by seven students. Two located the words in the text, but instead of giving their translation, they copied the next few words following each one in the text (ex: fit _bodies_; handle _this ability_). Other students copied the first translation they found in the dictionary of the word without regard to its usage in context. In the parts of speech question three students supplied the preceding word in the text (_the_ coloured, instead of _Adj_. coloured). In a question asking them to provide the main subject and main verb of a sentence from the text, instead of providing them in the appropriate blanks, two of these students copied the instructions (_main subject_, _main verb_). These examples indicate that students lacked understanding, not only of the text, but also of basic instructions with which most students are familiar as they had been exposed to them previously in school.

These errors suggest that many students entered the programme with a lack of basic problem-solving skills needed to understand both the reading passage and the questions testing their understanding of the ideas in the passage. It should be noted, that the three students of Ethiopian background, particularly showed difficulties in understanding instructions, as described above. Thus, the need to build problem-solving skills and the focus of the programme on reading strategies becomes crucial, especially for these students.

6.2.2 Copy-Paste Techniques

The vast majority of students used a copy-paste technique. That is, they identified vocabulary in the question, matched it to the text and copied the sentence from the text with identical vocabulary. This seems to reflect the overall technique students described learning at school. In many cases, students applied this technique without comprehending the meaning of what they had written. Among students who described themselves as having a more 'traditional'

background, this was often expressed by copied fragments which were meaningless on their own. For example, when asked to give two *abilities* bilinguals have, answers included 'the *ability* is transferred to other intellectual', or 'of this *ability* to divide information'. That is, students found the word 'ability' in the question and matched it to a sentence in the text, copying it down as a fragment that rendered it meaningless. Another example of this technique can be seen in the table comparing two experiments. Students were required to state the kind of *test* used in each. Several students wrote 'by the end of the *test*' showing they had matched the word 'test' in the question and text, but had obviously not understood what they had written down.

Many of the students who described themselves as having a less 'traditional' background and the students who grew up in religious Jewish homes also used a copy-paste technique. However, although their answers were incorrect showing they had either not understood the question or the text, their incorrect answers were complete units of meaning. This indicates that although their reading comprehension was weak, they had a better grasp of syntax and knew how to cut and paste the fragment or sentence, so that as a unit it had meaning on its own.

6.2.3 Engagement with Text

Another aspect examined was students' engagement with the reading passage. By engagement with the text, I refer to marking the text in some way, whether underlining or circling certain vocabulary, translating vocabulary into Hebrew or other languages, circling or underlining key terms or ideas, making arrows, annotating, etc. This type of engagement indicates whether the students entered any kind of dialogue with the text, which vocabulary posed problems for them, whether they were able to identify which vocabulary was important enough to translate in order to understand the meaning of the text, and which vocabulary or ideas they deemed important. This kind of engagement is often indicative of students' comprehension of the text, as is reflected on their performance on tests as well.

Overall students showed very little engagement with the text. Fourteen students left the reading passage completely blank, showing no engagement with it whatsoever. Sixteen students translated vocabulary on the reading passage (one native Spanish speaker, two native Russian speakers, three native Arab speakers, and ten native Hebrew speakers translated into their respective native languages). Of these students, three (one native Spanish and two native Russian speakers) displayed heavy translation (virtually every word), of the first three paragraphs, leaving them no time to work on the rest of the passage. All three did very poorly on the level test (18%, 28%, 38%). Concentrating all their efforts on the busy work of translation came at the cost of global reading and understanding the main ideas of the text. It also came at the cost of concentrating on answering the questions. Relying solely on this technique indicated that the students possessed no other reading strategies.

Thirteen students (of all backgrounds without distinction) underlined or circled some of the text (ranging from one term to half a paragraph). However, even when students marked the text in this way showing a certain level of engagement with the text, marking was not systematic or indicative of comprehension of the ideas in the text. For example, no one clearly underlined the main idea of a paragraph and circled details supporting that idea. Instead, some of the vocabulary or sentences marked in the passage were related to the vocabulary in the questions. That is, students using a copy-paste technique employed a marking technique to match similar vocabulary between questions and text.

Overall, the techniques students displayed on their diagnostic level tests proved ineffective for reading comprehension. Students lacked effective reading strategies and were not capable of comprehending the text at any deep level. Vocabulary and grammar skills ranged from beginner to low-intermediate level, and the tool of the dictionary was not applied properly to aid them in comprehension. It should be noted that during the course of the year, students' reading comprehension was also examined in their native languages. A large number of the students showed poor reading comprehension in their own native language, such that even if the same reading passage and questions had been given

to them in their mother tongue, it can be assumed that they would have still performed poorly. This issue will be further discussed later in this chapter.

6.3 Diverse Learning Techniques

Although students in the programme had individual learning styles and techniques, several patterns could be distinguished among students sharing a similar background. One interesting aspect that emerged when examining observation notes was students' group dynamics. This pattern seemed to be influenced by the students' cultural background. That is, students' social engagement seemed to be influenced by the social structure in which they were raised.

6.3.1 Co-Teaching and Learning

መስጠትን የማያውቅ ስጡኝን ማን አስተማረው

He who doesn't know how to give, who taught him to ask?

(Amharic Proverb)

Арте́льный горшо́к гу́ще кипи́т

An artel's pot boils denser

(Meaning: Working as a team produces better results)

(Russian Proverb)

Interestingly, at the start of the year all three students of Ethiopian background did not necessarily sit together as would be expected of students who share a similar cultural background. Instead, they identified strong students in class and sat next to them during lessons. They were assisted by these partners throughout the year. Recognizing their weaknesses, they each understood the benefits they could gain from assistance by a stronger peer. During interviews, Miriam said she studied together with Paulina, a Russian immigrant student (both inside and outside of class).

Miriam

> *I learned a lot from her. I really admire her. I learned to study vocabulary from her by writing the words over and over again until I remember them…I also learned to read a text over and over again. It helps to have a partner listen to you and correct you.*

Yoni

In the very first lesson, Yoni immediately identified the strongest three students in the class and sat with them in the front row of the classroom. When I pointed this out and asked him if he did this consciously, he replied,

> *Yes, I sat next to them on purpose. I believe it's only natural for a person to try to learn from those who are the strongest.*

In contrast to the students of Ethiopian background who sought out a stronger partner, all three students from the Former Soviet Union worked with a weaker partner. Despite their rather low entry level, they took on teacher roles with their partners. Paulina gradually took Miriam under her wing and was an instrumental figure in this student's improvement.

Paulina

> *When working with a partner, one helps the other, especially if one is stronger than the other. I often worked with Miriam. We also worked together outside of class on homework and this was helpful to both of us, because when I have to explain to my friend, it helps me understand as well.*

Boris took Nina (a native Jewish-Israeli student) under his tutelage. Despite his own difficulty in decoding at the start of the year, he would read texts and exercises to her, which may have been instrumental in helping him improve his own decoding skills. However, when asked about working with a partner, he replied that he in fact preferred working alone.

Boris

> *I don't find group work useful, because I think each student needs to cope with the material alone. If your partner gives you the answer, you don't cope with it by yourself.*

When asked about working with a partner, he related this question to working with a stronger partner. His answer indicates that he is not in favour of working with someone stronger than him, and prefers to face his difficulties by himself in order to overcome them.

Elena often assisted Yossi, a native Jewish-Israeli student who had a higher level of spoken English than her, but had difficulty decoding. She took on the role of reading him texts and exercises when working in class. This natural disposition to taking on the teacher role may be due to the fact that both Paulina's and Elena's parents are teachers. The fact that Boris displayed the same disposition is indicative that there may be a cultural element to this behaviour, and that perhaps for students from the Former Soviet Union, education is based on the one hand on 'figuring it out' on your own, while on the other, aiding your peers in the process.

6.3.2 Isolationist and Collectivist Behaviour

في صحراء الحياة الحكيم يسافر في حافلة والمجنون يسافر لوحده

In the desert of life the wise person travels by caravan,
while the fool prefers to travel alone

(Arabic Proverb)

In contrast to the social patterns presented above, the students from Arab-Israeli background tended to isolate themselves from the students of other cultures and to turn to one another for help. At the start of the year, the majority of the students from the Arab-Israeli sector would sit in the back rows, disengaged from the rest of the class, rarely participating or asking questions. That is, the group relations they shared with one another were contrasted with a distance taken from

me, as their teacher, and the rest of the students. This distance was strongly felt in individual conversations I conducted with students at the start of the year. Several of the male students who came into my office took the chair that was intended for them and pulled it back, so as not to sit too close to me. This was not done by students from any of the other culture groups. This reaction may be due to their perception of me as a figure of authority or to gender differences.

My efforts with these students concentrated on breaking down the barrier, and to establish a cooperative relationship, one that would allow these students to expose their errors or weaknesses in order to learn from them. When I began to mix student groups, I intentionally separated these students from one another. Interestingly, I noticed that while working with their new groups they would continue simultaneously helping their fellow Arab-Israeli friends sitting in other groups. In one instance, for example, I sat with a group who was stuck on a certain question and guided them to solve the problem. Habib was part of this group. When I moved to the next group, I noticed that he was going around the room to explain to the rest of his fellow Arab-Israeli friends how to answer the question (Observations, Lesson 19). On several occasions when students worked in such mixed groups, by the end of the task, some of them would reorganize and sit again next to each other, abandoning the group with which they were assigned to work. In one interview, a student who sat with an Arab-Israeli student commented,

> *When Nabil was placed in our group, he slipped back to his friends. On the one hand I thought to myself it's too bad because it's an opportunity to work together, but on the other I thought, it's good that they watch out for each other.*

The issue of helping one another was on the one hand beneficial to the Arab-Israeli students, as they were able to work together in problem-solving tasks and assist one another in completing assignments. On the other hand, it would be counter-productive, as students would rarely work individually or attempt to cope with the material alone. During tests and quizzes, this often resulted in attempts to copy from one another. The issue of copying from friends persisted throughout the year. The problem began from the first diagnostic level test. It continued over the course of the year, not only on tests, but also on reading strategy exercises which

were not for a grade and which I specifically requested that all students complete individually. I also repeatedly explained to students that their grades on their tests throughout the year carry no weight towards their final grade. They are only indicators of how they were progressing and what they still needed to work on. Nevertheless, the concept of working alone to complete a task seemed almost alien, and the fear of failing or showing weakness was one that many of the students from this sector expressed. In one instance, during a vocabulary quiz, Samir who was unprepared was allowed to make it up the next lesson. While students were taking the quiz, he turned on his laptop and attempted to give his friends the definitions of the vocabulary on the quiz using an online dictionary (Observations, L8). During exams, students often attempted to copy from their peers and needed to be separated.

This behaviour seems much deeper than simply a student cheating on an exam or homework assignment, as students from most cultures attempt on occasion. As will be further developed in the discussion chapter, it was related to a general mentality of approaching learning as a group rather than as individuals, reflective of the collectivist nature that characterizes the Arab-Israeli culture (Al Haj, 1987; Haj-Yahia, 1995; Pines & Zaidman, 2003). The majority of students of Arab-Israeli background in the programme subscribed to the collectivist ideal encouraging the individual to make his or her personal needs secondary and to make the collective his or her first priority. They would normally arrive to class together as one group and leave together as well. The exceptions were Ehab, who would sit in the front row, and Ali who would sit in one of the middle rows. These two students would also come to class and leave it independently. As discussed earlier, Ehab and Ali were older and more mature than their peers from this sector.

The issue of copying may stem from another matter, which is parental pressure to succeed in their studies. As several students shared with me, they were expected by their parents, namely their fathers, to bring home good grades. The extrinsic motivation to succeed to please their parents appeared more dominant than the intrinsic motivation to learn.

In a conversation with Tariq, my Arab-Israeli colleague, he explained that in the Arab community,

> *Learning and school is something often done by force, not out of a desire. Parents put very heavy pressure to bring good grades, to succeed in school, especially an Arab in a Jewish community. The pressure is so strong, that there is no enjoyment in learning. That's why copying is a result of this pressure – what is important is that the answer is correct, not how to arrive at it. The interest is in the result, not the path to reaching it.*

Such an approach to learning, out of force and external motivation, is another possible explanation for these students' copying behaviour in class. At the start of the year the majority of the students from Arab-Israeli background would rarely participate, or would raise their hands only to read out answers from their books. When I'd ask them how they arrived at their answers, they would very often not reply, indicating that perhaps someone else had provided them with the answers, which to them was what really mattered. This was also evident in homework assignments they would hand in. Students from other sectors would hand in homework which they had obviously done themselves as it was replete with errors, or not hand it in at all. Several students from the Arab-Israeli sector would often hand in homework with identical answers which were written without a single error and did not reflect their knowledge. Obviously, they knew that I would realize the work was not their own, yet in their perception, they were required to hand in a perfect assignment with 'the right answers'. Despite the fact that I would repeatedly explain to them that it was important for me to see their errors, as this was instrumental in the process of their learning, this conduct persisted throughout the year among four students in particular: Nabil, Omar, Susane, and Bushra. However, among the other students in this sector, a gradual shift in perception was observed and will be further explored below.

The counterproductive method of copying as described above seems associated with the copy-paste technique, pronounced in their work at the start of the year. That is, in general, a deeper level of actually understanding the reading passage was not attempted. The concern was with finding the right answer to copy, regardless of whether it was comprehended or not. The same method was evident in vocabulary quizzes. Prior to each quiz, students would receive a list of vocabulary

which we reviewed to make sure that students had the correct definitions in Hebrew. On their quizzes, several students from the Arab-Israeli sector would define most of the words on the vocabulary list correctly, indicating they had studied for the quiz, though they would place them incorrectly in the cloze. When I asked them what a certain word they had translated correctly in Hebrew meant, they said they didn't know. That is, they had learned the vocabulary and the definitions in Hebrew by heart, without necessarily understanding what they meant. The process to begin asking when they don't understand was a gradual one. On a subsequent quiz, a student (Ahmed) put down the word in Hebrew, and came and asked me during the quiz what it meant. I praised him for asking me, but told him that next time he should inquire before the quiz and not during (Class Observation, L10). Gradually, several of the students learned that asking questions and asking for clarifications were not chastised, but on the contrary, encouraged. By the end of the year, Ahmed, Halil, Habib, and Samir had all undergone a major transformation in this approach to learning. Samir, who on the first exam given during the year had received a 98%, was unable to explain any of his answers to me as he obviously copied the test. By the next exam, he began to ask me questions to clarify what was required of him and how to best approach answering the questions. By the end of the year, this initially very timid student, who had taken his chair back so as not to sit too close to me, asked for an additional practice test before the final exam. He came to my office the day before the exam and sat next to me so that we could go over his answers. This was a major step in his learning indicating the process he had undergone from the start of the year. He took initiative to improve his own learning by asking for extra material and for assistance to check his work, work that he had attempted on his own.

This transition, as observed in the way the four students above changed their learning approaches, was also visible in the students' physical mobility in the class. From silent back row members of the class they were observed gradually moving to middle and front rows and taking greater part in class dialogue.

The ineffective strategies students from this sector used at the start of the year and which persisted among some of them may be due to several reasons.

Interviews with students about copying and reluctance to ask questions or participate in class revealed that one possibility is their inexperience with more 'democratic' classrooms. As discussed earlier, these students were familiar with teacher-centred learning. This was further reflected by learning techniques that involved rote learning and focus on the answer rather than the process. Among students who raised the issue of corporal punishment as an education tool used in their schools, in particular, there seems to be greater emphasis on the outcome than on the process of learning. That is, in more disciplinarian classroom settings, raising questions and debate seem to be discouraged. In the few instances that students said they did experience group-work at school, they described the class as out of control and the teacher as weak. In addition, as described earlier, one student had raised the issue of male teachers getting more respect from their students than female teachers. It is possible that the combination of a female teacher conducting a class in a more 'democratic' fashion than they were familiar with was a learning approach they had difficulty accepting.

Another possibility may be the students' minority status within Israeli society, which is especially sensitive in the background of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Perhaps they initially sense that they do not belong in the Jewish majority of the student body. Their isolationism at the start of the year may be a coping strategy. By sitting together in the back of the classroom, their attempt not to be seen or to take part could be a form of creating a sense of security. This issue was not brought up by any of the students in interviews, as it may be too sensitive for discussion with their Jewish-Israeli teacher.

With time, during the course of the year, increased commitment to learning for the sake of learning was observed among some of these students alongside a process of greater integration within the classroom culture and a greater visible sense of belonging. This transition had implications regarding their progress and achievements in the programme, as will be further explored in the discussion chapter.

6.3.3 Individualist Behaviour

אם אין אני לי, מי לי?

If I am not for myself, who will be?

(Ethics of the Fathers, 1:14, Hebrew)

In contrast to the collectivist approach used by the students described above, native Jewish-Israeli students generally came to class and left individually rather than in groups. A large number of these students expressed their preference to working individually, rather than group work. This was often reflected in classroom observations, as many of them opted to work on their own.

Nurit

> *I personally don't like to work with other students, because I need to arrive at the answer on my own. At the end of the day, I will have to cope with the test on my own.*

This resistance to working together with partners or in group work may reflect the individualistic nature of native Jewish secular society, largely influenced by Western culture (Sagy *et al.,* 1999). It may also reflect the failure these students experienced working in groups in their English classes at school.

In addition, they openly and consistently expressed resistance to learning new or unfamiliar techniques. In terms of the learning process, this seems to be a double-edged sword. Until they have questioned and examined every aspect of the new strategy learned, and until they have been completely convinced of its utility, the majority would not cooperate. Students from this group more often openly expressed their resistance to certain concepts, tasks or even quizzes. For example, when learning the three steps of reading a text (preparing, reading and reacting), students were taught that they need not only understand a text, but react critically to it in some way. Rachel's reaction was,

> *Why should we have an opinion about what we read? It should be enough to understand what it says* (Class Observation, L2).

When taught how to pre-read, Daniel responded,

> *We won't have time to do all that on the test!* (Class Observation, L3)

This statement not only shows Daniel's initial resistance to the strategy, but also his understanding that the purpose of the course is to pass a test rather than learn how to read. On another occasion, when students were asked to extract information regarding the title of the text, its author, source and year, as a preliminary step for previewing, Alon's reaction was,

> *What, all we have to do is transfer the information, what is this kindergarten?*
> (Class Observation, L3)

When taking a quiz requiring students to use vocabulary correctly, not only in terms of its definition, but also in terms of its part of speech, Nina exclaimed,

> *Wow, this is an annoying quiz!* (Class Observation, L14)

Examples such as these abound in my class observations. What they indicate is that the students from this cultural group look for how to 'cut to the chase'. They are not interested in any long process that might 'waste their time'. They are very often unwilling to go through the process first in order to reflect upon and understand its value after.

On the other hand, these types of expressions of resistance also indicate the students' high level of involvement in the class, and their continued dialogue with me as their teacher regarding the material taught. This kind of participation and open dialogue permitted me to justify the application of the strategies and allowed them to eventually accept and adopt them, as after questioning and analysing them, students were either finally convinced to appropriate them, or voice their disagreement. As will be further examined in the discussion, this classroom behaviour reflects the norms of dialogue these students have grown up with in secular native Jewish culture.

A high level of involvement and participation was also evident in the questions they asked in class. Asking questions throughout the lesson was considered part and parcel of the learning process. As early as the diagnostic level test, Tamir did not understand what was required of him in the translation

questions. Rather than copying down the first translation he found in the dictionary as many students did, he approached me and asked,

What is the point of asking us to take out definitions from a dictionary?

That is, he did not answer the question until he understood the rationale behind it, that he needed to understand the meaning of the word as it was used in context. This kind of dialogue would lead these students to a process of understanding the reasoning behind a strategy, followed by its appropriation. For example, on one occasion, several students asked what the point of doing a reading strategy exercise in Hebrew was. Esti replied,

Oh, it's to check if we can do this stuff in Hebrew, so we think about these things, before we have to do it in English (Class Observation, L19).

On another occasion, Liron came to the realization that questions asking the reader to make an implication or to explain a concept that cannot be copied directly from the text are the most challenging.

You know, the questions where we have to give our opinions… formulate an answer, are the most difficult, because we can't copy them from the text (Class Observation, L6).

With the exception of three students (Nina, Sara and Ron) who were disengaged in lessons over the course of the year and did not undergo the process in the same fashion as the other students in this group, the other students from the native Jewish-Israeli sector were involved in such a meta-cognitive process. This kind of classroom behaviour may reflect the more democratic schooling they have experienced. In addition to this group of students, Ehab, Yoni, and Alberto, all front-row sitters, were also highly involved in classroom dialogue. However, their involvement was conducted in a different tone. Characteristic of their respective cultural backgrounds, their form of dialogue and question asking was always conducted in a respectful manner, with less of the critical tone that characterized the manner in which many of the native Jewish-Israeli students expressed their thoughts.

As explained above, this conduct is a double-edged sword, and such a high level of dialogue and participation would sometimes lead to disruption and

difficulty to complete the lesson as planned. To students of other cultures, especially those educated in more disciplinarian school frameworks, this kind of behaviour was perceived as either disrespect or lack of discipline.

My role as the teacher of students who come from such vastly different backgrounds and learning styles was to attempt to orchestrate the different approaches, so that each student would learn from the other and develop intercultural competence (Byram, 2000). The aim was to have students develop and strengthen those techniques that were effective to their learning, while adopting new techniques from their peers and teacher that would enhance their learning process. At the same time, the more difficult challenge was to lead students to abandon those techniques they were taught growing up which were ineffective and were preventing them from making progress. This process involved forming a 'third space' (Kramsch, 1993), where different learning approaches and styles could be discussed and negotiated.

6.4 Acquisition of Reading Strategies and Outcomes

The preceding discussion showed that the year began with, on average, a low initial entry level. Students equally displayed poor vocabulary, grammar and reading comprehension. However, students displayed diverse individual learning styles and techniques that seemed affected by cultural background, and a more or less 'traditional' education. Nevertheless, as will be shown below, a student's cultural background and initial entry level did not necessarily determine that student's progress and achievement throughout the year.

Student progress and achievement were assessed by three indicators: an evaluation of students' commitment to and investment in learning, students' test performance, and students' performance in reading strategy exercises.

6.4.1 Evaluation of Students' Commitment to and Investment in Learning

The first indicator of student progress is the evaluation of their motivation to learn, as observed by their commitment to and investment in their learning process. As test scores are indicative of a certain level students have reached, they

do not necessarily reveal the amount of investment students have made in terms of their learning process and the progress they have made.

> *We all know that the exams as 'the only' instrument to evaluation, doesn't always give the exact picture of a student's ability. Many a times the resulting grade is usually disappointing and the poor result is not necessarily from the student's lack of knowledge about the subject but rather from personal circumstances, stress, nerves, health problems, etc. hence his state of mind, resulting in the performance, good or bad!* (Prasad, 2011, http://www.cbseguess.com/articles/best_way_to_evaluate_students.php)*.*

Table 6.1 presents an evaluation of students' commitment to the programme in numerical values on four parameters: attendance, preparation, class participation, and engagement with the teacher. These reflect the students' investment in the programme and motivation to learn which are necessary for a transition in their learning process to take place. For each parameter students were given a score between 0-5 (0 being the lowest and 5 the highest). The sum of these scores (maximum 20) yielded a percentage score out of 100%. The order of students as they appear in the table is according to the amount of progress made on their test scores from the start to the end of the year (increase in test scores from the diagnostic level test to the final exam, as will be presented in Table 6.2 in the section below). The first name in the table made the least amount of progress and the last name on the list made the greatest amount of progress.

Student Name	Attendance	Preparation (Homework and Quizzes)	Class Participation	Engagement with teacher	TOTAL
Omar	2	1	1	0	20%
Nabil	2	1	0	0	15%
Sara	1	0	0	0	5%
Yossi	2	0	3	2	35%
Tamar	1	0	1	1	15%
Miki	3	3	3	2	55%
Susane	1	1	1	2	20%
Narmeen	4	4	1	1	50%
Ali	3	2	3	3	55%

Boris	5	5	4	4	90%
Bushra	2	0	0	0	10%
David	3	3	4	3	65%
Nina	4	1	1	2	40%
Habib	4	3	3	4	70%
Elena	4	3	4	3	70%
Nati	5	4	3	3	75%
Meirav	4	4	3	4	75%
Rachel	4	5	5	5	95%
Tamir	4	5	5	5	95%
Alon	3	3	4	3	80%
Esti	4	4	4	4	80%
Ron	2	0	1	1	20%
Ori	4	4	5	5	90%
Ben	4	5	5	5	95%
Nurit	4	4	4	4	80%
Noa	4	4	4	4	80%
Sarit	4	4	4	4	80%
Samir	3	3	3	4	70%
Ahmed	4	4	3	3	70%
Liron	5	5	5	4	95%
Ehab	5	5	5	5	100%
Anat	3	2	2	2	40%
Paulina	4	5	5	5	95%
Halil	4	4	4	4	80%
Miriam	3	4	4	4	75%
Iris	4	4	5	5	90%
Daniel	4	4	5	5	90%
Alberto	4	5	5	4	90%
Yoni	5	5	5	5	100%

Ethiopian Background   Arab-Israeli Background

Argentinian Background   Native Jewish-Israeli Background

Former Soviet Union Background

Table 6.1: Evaluation of students' commitment to the programme throughout the year

As the table indicates, except for two cases (Boris and Tamir) which will be discussed later in this chapter, those committed students who made an investment in their learning process made significant progress in accordance with their investment. The distribution of scores in order of the amount of progress made in test scores indicates a relationship between investment and progress. That is, the five students who invested the least in the programme (15%-35%) also made the least progress between the start to the end of the year, while the four students who made the most significant progress (See Table 6.2) were also extremely committed to their learning process (90%-100%).

When examining investment and commitment from a cultural background perspective, the students from the Former Soviet Union received an average of 85%, the native Jewish-Israeli students, 69%, the students of Ethiopian background, 63%, and the Arab-Israeli students, 51%. The student from Argentina received a 90%. These figures indicate that in general, for the students from the Former Soviet Union commitment and investment in education is culturally bound, as has been noted in the literature (Hoffman, 2003; Lehrer Bettan, 2007, Bensoussan *et al.*, 1995; Bensoussan, 2009). The fact that the Arab-Israeli students received a rather low average on commitment and investment may be due to several reasons. The difference between the learning techniques they have learned in school and the ones taught in the programme may be so drastic, as to make it especially difficult for some of the students to adopt. Clearly, more work is necessary in attempting to help them bridge the differences. Moreover, as this student group was markedly younger than the other student groups, their maturity level may have an impact on their commitment to learning.

When looking at inter-individual differences, a very wide variation can be found within each cultural group, other than the students from the Former Soviet Union. Among the students of Ethiopian background, one student received 15% while another, 100%. Among the Arab-Israeli students, four students received 20% or below. These same four students who were so uncommitted to their learning process also possessed the ineffective learning techniques as described in the sections above. They came regularly unprepared to class, exhibited high

absenteeism, were unwilling to take part in classroom dialogue, were reluctant to ask questions, and relied on copying. On the other hand, five students from the Arab-Israeli sector received 70%-100%. These students, who entered with similarly ineffective learning techniques as their peers, showed greater commitment to their learning process and underwent a transformation in their learning and reading strategies. Likewise, among the native Jewish-Israeli students, six students received 55% or below, while seven students received 90%-95%. This variation in scores indicates similar extremes in commitment to the programme as the other culture groups.

In interviews at the end of the programme, several students revealed they had financial and family difficulties which made it particularly difficult for them to become committed to the programme at the time. Some students had no parental support, emotional or financial, while others had an additional burden of caring for ill parents. Clearly, regarding these students, the programme must make every effort to provide them with whatever support it can.

The issues presented here will be further developed later in this chapter in relation to the other indicators of progress and achievement. In order to better understand this relationship, the section below presents and analyses their test scores throughout the year.

6.4.2 Reading Comprehension Tests

A second indicator of student acquisition of reading strategies and student progress was performance on five reading comprehension tests that were given throughout the year.

6.4.2.1 Class Average

The class achieved a 36-point average increase from the diagnostic level test to the final exam (See Graph 6.1).
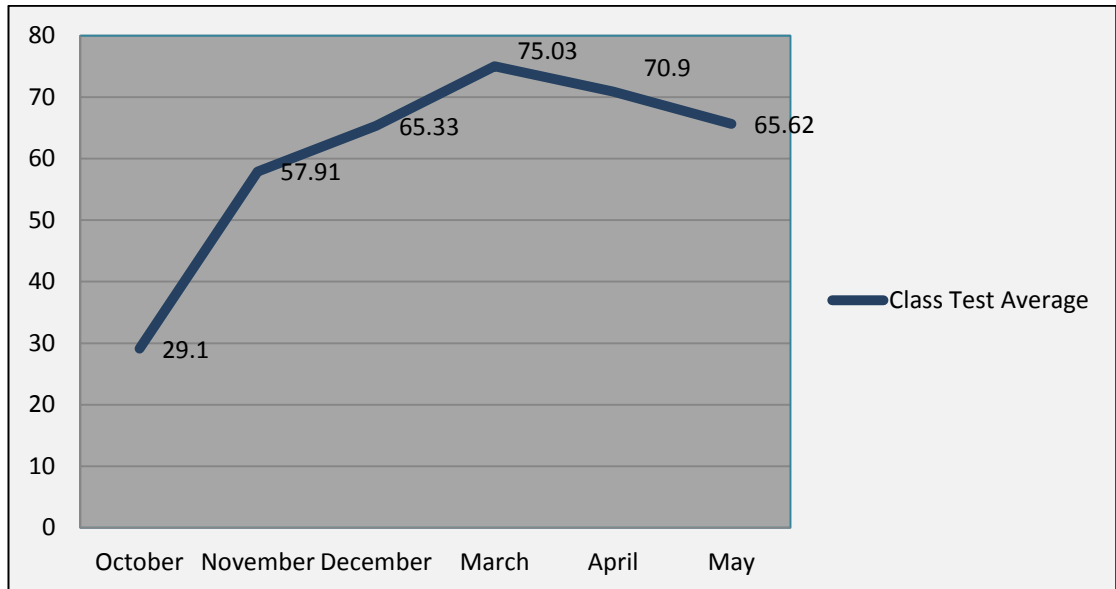
Graph 6.1 Class average test scores (in percentage) throughout the year

As can be seen, continual progress was made throughout the course, with improvement in average scores in each exam, with a slight downturn in the fifth and sixth exams. As was described in the methods section, the first four exams consisted of one text (90 minutes), while the last two exams consisted of two texts (3 hours). Thus, the progress made by the class as a group is even more significant than the numerical increase of 36 points, as the final exam demanded that they maintain concentration for a longer period of time and complete twice as much work. It should be noted, however, that in the fifth exam (April), several of the weaker students did not attend, such that the average is somewhat higher than the average of the final exam (May), which all students completed. In addition, the pressure that accompanies taking an exam which carries such importance, as it determines their entry to the college, seems to have affected some of the stronger students who had performed better in the practice test prior to the final.

6.4.2.2 Group Differences

Analysis of student achievements according to their cultural background shows significant improvement for all groups.
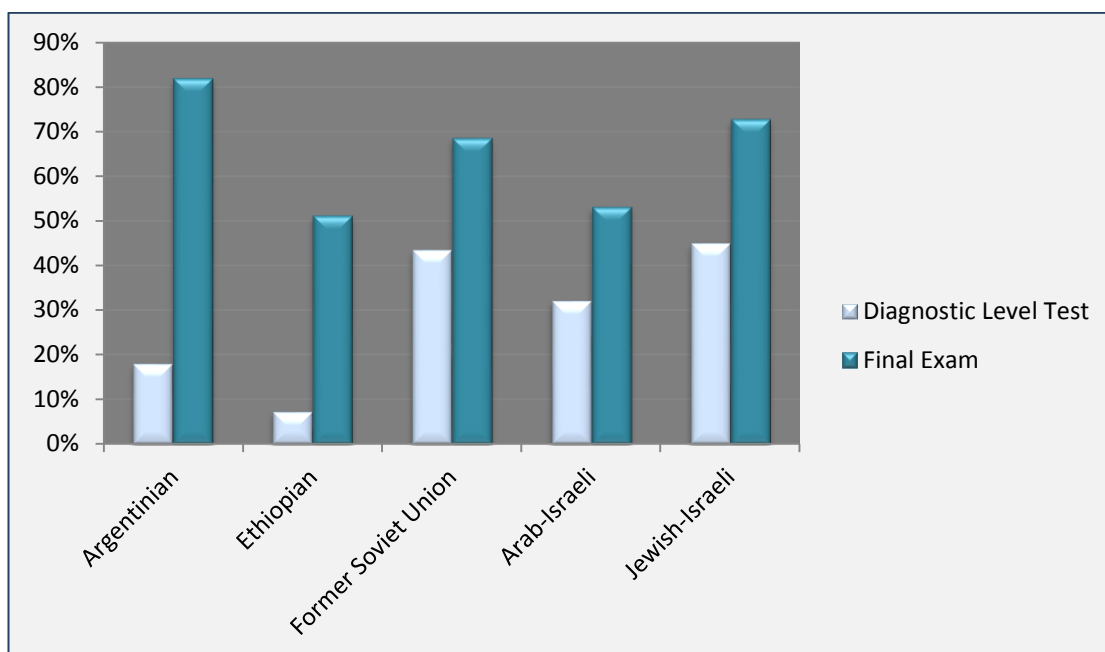
Graph 6.2 Diagnostic level test and final exam scores according to cultural background

As the graph indicates, all groups of students substantially improved their average grades. Gaps still remained with a 30-point difference between the groups of students with lowest (51.33% for the students of Ethiopian background) to highest average (82% for the student of Argentinian background). However, this latter achievement belongs to one single student, which may skew the figures. Such that excluding Alberto, the gap between averages narrows to 21 points, in contrast to the 37-point gap at the start of the year (from 7.44% for the students of Ethiopian background to 44.85% for the students of native Jewish-Israeli background).

Moreover, the order from lowest to highest average levels slightly changed, with students of Ethiopian background still with the lowest average (51.33%), followed by students of Arab-Israeli background (53.27%), Former Soviet Union background (68.6%7), native Jewish-Israeli background (72.85%), and Argentinian background (82%). However, the programme appears to have been successful for all culture groups, as similarity in relative progress can be discerned for all the groups.
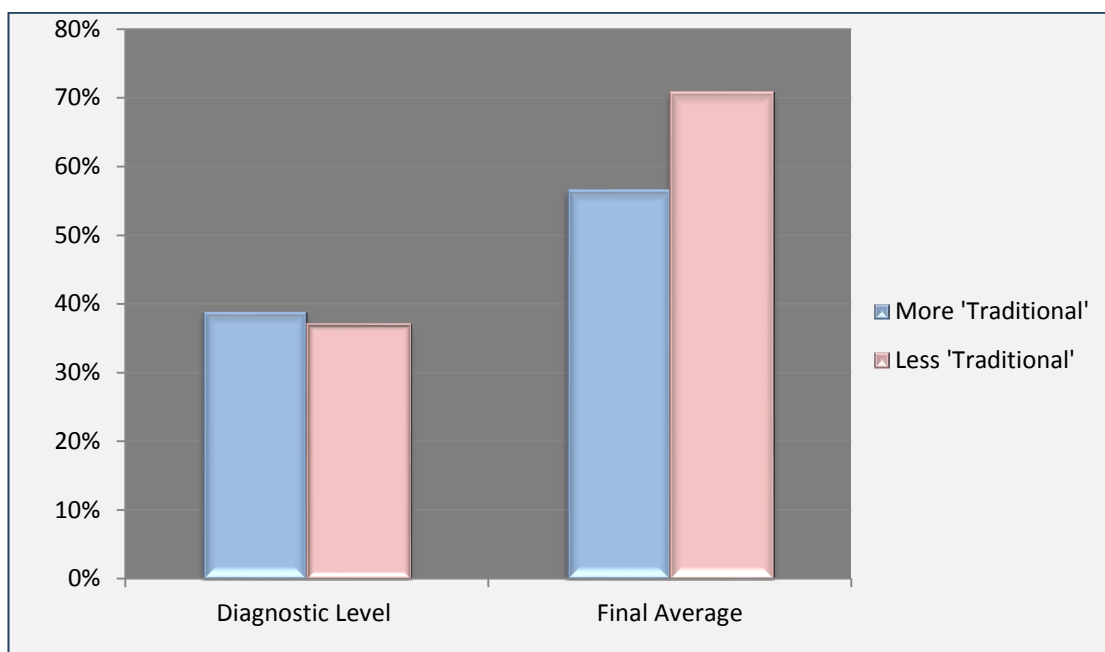
Graph 6.3 Diagnostic level test and final exam scores according to more 'traditional' and less 'traditional' background

When looking at progress in terms of students from more 'traditional' and less 'traditional' backgrounds, the former improved their entry level average score by 17.76 points (from 38.91% to 56.67%), while the latter improved their average score by 33.79 (from 37.13% to 70.92%). While both groups began with practically the same entry level, the less 'traditional' group had a significantly higher increase.
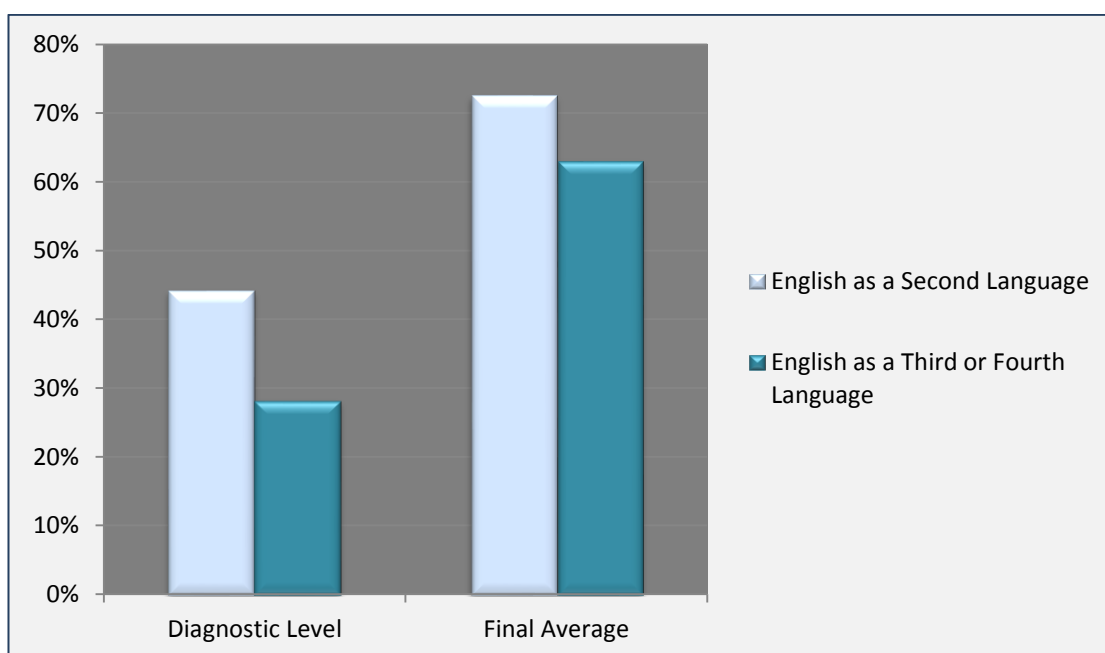
Graph 6.4 Diagnostic level test and final exam scores according to English as second or third/fourth language

Another difference was found when comparing the students learning English as a second language and those learning English as a third/fourth language. While students learning English as a second language began with a significantly higher entry level (44.30%), compared to students learning English as a third/fourth language (28.29%), they increased their average score by 28.25 points (72.55%) as opposed to students studying English as a third/fourth language, who improved their average score by 34.78 points (63.07%). While their final average was somewhat lower than students learning English as a second language, their progress was more impressive. This seems to indicate that the gap between the two groups narrowed and that the programme was particularly beneficial to students learning English as a third/fourth language.

6.4.2.3 Individual Differences

Significant inter-individual differences were found between students, with several discernible patterns. Table 6.2 presents the test scores of the students in the programme, from the least progress made throughout the year to the most progress made throughout the year, in terms of score differences between the diagnostic level test and the final exam. Because each student can potentially make a different score difference (that is, a student who began with a 10 at the start of the year can potentially make a 90-point difference, while a student who began with a 60 can only make a 40-point difference), progress is also presented in proportional terms. The score of each student at the start of the year was subtracted from the final score. That amount is divided by the potential points (100 subtracted from score at start of year) to yield a percentage of progress in proportional terms. In the vast majority of cases progress in numerical and proportional terms reflected progress as observed in class. Singular cases of incompatibility between the two indicators are raised and discussed in detail in the inter-individual differences section.

Student Name	Diagnostic Level Test (Reading Comp Section) OCT.	Test 1 (One text – Answers in English) NOV.	Test 2 (One text – Answers in English) DEC.	Test 3 (One text – Answers in Hebrew) MAR.	Test 4 (Full Test – One text answers in English/ One text answers in Hebrew) APR.	Test 5 FINAL EXAM MAY	Progress in propor-tional terms
Omar	(copied exam)	41	52	Handed in blank test	/	38	-5%
Nabil	(copied exam)	52	60	10	/	40	-25%
Sara	42	89	48	/	/	32	-17%
Yossi	/	78	/	80	73	73	-23%
Tamar	12	/	/	/	/	10	-2%
Miki	70	78	/	80	71	71	3%
Susane	/	28	58	/	/	30	3%
Narmeen	52	83	78	/	/	58	13%
Ali	50	43	62	65	42	60	20%
Boris	64	41	40	63	83	71	19%
Bushra	/	24	/	/	/	37	17%
David	74	76	60	87	/	88	14%
Nina	30	4	33	72	35	45	21%
Habib	30	43	87 (copied exam)	/	/	47	24%
Elena	38	65	71	67	66	56	29%
Nati	42	46	68	80	71	64	38%
Meirav	60	76	70	76	74	82	55%
Rachel	66	76	78	83	70	88	65%
Tamir	52	80	100	100	100	78	54%
Alon	52	54	48	76	/	78	54%
Esti	58	76	/	87	77	84	62%
Ron	20	39	73	47	/	47	34%
Ori	64	61	87	90	87	91	75%
Ben	66	72	73	90	/	97	99%
Nurit	26	59	55	70	94	62	49%

Noa	30	35	51	80	86 (English only)	67	53%
Sarit	28	52	76	63	42	67	39%
Samir	24	98 (copied exam)	91 (teacher moderated)	/	/	65	54%
Ahmed	12	41	64	70	/	55	49%
Liron	32	63	/	80	74	76	65%
Ehab	42	72	70	90	/	90	83%
Anat	20	/	/	80	/	70	63%
Paulina	28	63	58	/	/	79	71%
Halil	14	41	73	/	51	66	60%
Miriam	6	/	/	/	/	60	57%
Iris	20	76	55	/	70	72	65%
Daniel	34	87	96	87	94	92	88%
Alberto	18	65	78	91	78	82	78%
Yoni	6	48	60	62	57 / 66	84	83%

- Ethiopian Background
- Arab-Israeli Background
- Argentinian Background
- Native Jewish-Israeli Background
- Former Soviet Union Background

Table 6.2 Individual student exam score distribution (in percentage), from the lowest to highest point increase

A closer look at which students advanced the most throughout the year indicates that it is not necessarily those students who entered the programme with the highest averages who made the most impressive progress in comparison to students who came in at lower levels. In fact, the opposite occurred. Most of the students who entered with low averages actually gained the most from the programme, indicating that the programme can be particularly beneficial to students who have experienced repeated failures in school, as it provides them with new tools and a new approach for learning and reading.

As the table indicates, what seems most striking is the fact that the students learning English as a third/fourth language, mainly immigrant students and

students from the Arab-Israeli sector (many of whom come from a more 'traditional' background) basically fall either at the top of the scale (41- to 76-point increase), having made the most significant progress and benefitting most from the programme (N=12), or at the bottom of the scale (-12 to 13-point increase), having made the least progress and benefitting least from the programme (N=11). The majority of students learning English as a second language and coming from less 'traditional' homes find themselves at the middle of the scale (17 to 39-point increase) indicating they also benefitted from the programme, but the process was less dramatic in their case (N=16). These cut-off points were chosen because, for the most part, they reflect those students who underwent a significant process of learning, a less significant, yet substantial process of learning, or did not undergo any process at all.

6.4.3 Reading Strategy Exercises

Student progress was also evaluated by reading strategy exercises (See Table 6.3). Students appear in the same order as the tables above, according to progress made from the diagnostic level test to the final exam. As was explained in the methods section, the third and fourth exercises were translated into students' respective native languages. The students who completed the third exercise in another language also took the same exercise in Hebrew for the sake of comparison.

Student Name	PREVIEWING (October) Hebrew	MAIN IDEAS (December) Hebrew	TEXT STRUCTURES AND CONNECTORS (February) Hebrew and Arabic/Russian/Spanish		IMPLIED MEANING (April) Hebrew and Arabic/Russian/Spanish
Omar	5	5	/		4
Nabil	5	4	6	7	4
Sara	7	8	8		/
Yossi	0	/	5		/
Tamar	2	/	/		0
Miki	/	8	6		7
Susane	4	5	7	6	/
Narmeen	8	8	6	8	7
Ali	7	4	6	/	7
Boris	6	5	4		8
Bushra	6	5	/		7
David	1	/	8		8
Nina	8	8	8		6
Habib	8	2	7	7	5
Elena	7	4	4	2	/
Nati	8	4	7		/
Meirav	5	6	9		/
Rachel	6	10	9		8
Tamir	5	10	8		8
Alon	8	/	8		/
Esti	10	8	7		/
Ron	8	/	5		/
Ori	5	6	8		4
Ben	8	/	7		9
Nurit	8	6	/		4
Noa	6	7	8		6
Sarit	6	8	4		6
Samir	6	2	7	8	/

Ahmed	4	5	7	7	4
Liron	6	10	8		6
Ehab	6	/	3 (Heb. Only)		8
Anat	4	6	8		4
Paulina	5	10	7	8	10
Halil	4	6	5	6	7
Miriam	8	/	9		10
Iris	5	6	9		9
Daniel	4	/	8		8
Alberto	4	7	7	8	/
Yoni	5	7	6		8

■ Ethiopian Background   ■ Arab-Israeli Background

■ Argentinian Background   ■ Native Jewish-Israeli Background

■ Former Soviet Union Background

Table 6.3 Distribution of reading strategy exercise scores (on a 10-point scale)

When examining these scores, what is most salient is the fact that the six students who made the most significant increase in their exam scores (Paulina, Miriam, Iris, Daniel, Alberto, and Yoni), showed general improvement in their reading strategy scores over the course of the year. Although each reading exercise examined a different reading strategy, the last exercise on implied meaning was the most challenging one, requiring students to understand inferred meaning, make connections between ideas and express these in their own words (See Appendix C). The fact that these students had higher scores on this skill than in former exercises which required less of them as readers is indicative of the change in reading comprehension they underwent in general.

Moreover, on the last reading strategy exercise, ten students applied the reading strategies taught by marking their reading passage which was not in English. This indicated that these students had transferred the strategies they learned to use when reading in English to their native language. This was a finding I had not anticipated which indicated that these students had fully internalized the strategies they were taught.

Another interesting finding is that in the third strategy examined among students learning English as a third language, a comparison between each student's answers on the exercise they completed in their native language and in Hebrew revealed similar performance. That is, their errors were similar on both versions. Five students had no difference or one more error on the Hebrew version. Only one student, Narmeen, had a difference of two errors. This indicates that in general, there was little or no difference between their comprehension in Hebrew and native language. What is more interesting is that the errors were basically identical on both versions, indicating that the problems in comprehension were not due to language but to reading comprehension.

When one examines the lower end of the scale, those weaker students who failed to make any progress in their exam scores, also failed to improve their scores on the reading strategy exercises and in some cases these worsened. That is, the change in language from Hebrew to their native language made no difference.

6.4.4 The Role of Intercultural Competence in Inter-individual Differences

Three patterns of progress were discerned among individual students: no transformation (-12 to 13 point increase), some transformation (17 to 39 point increase), or a significant transformation in their learning process (41 to 76 point test score increase). The characteristics of each of these patterns are presented below in relation to these students' cultural background, via narratives which describe their experiences and the processes they underwent. These narratives follow the stories of individual students from interviews, my reflections of their stories and classroom observations as recorded in my class journal and class records.

Also, these students' level of intercultural competence was evaluated as an important element of this process. At the end of the data analysis process, it became clear that an additional factor to cultural, linguistic and religious background played a more significant role in students' learning processes and achievements in the programme. It is at this stage that I began to investigate the

concept of 'intercultural competence' as an important influence on students' progress in EFL reading comprehension.

Several models of intercultural competence have been developed (Sinicrope, et al., 2007). In 1976, Ruben developed the Behavioural Approach to Intercultural Communicative Competence which differentiated between knowing about the culture of others and behaving in a culturally competent manner. In the United States, Bennett (1993) developed the DMIS (Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity) to explain how individuals respond to cultural differences. It offers a six-stage developmental model from ethnocentricism to ethnorelativism (from denial, defence and minimization to acceptance, adaptation and, finally, integration). This model has been applied particularly in developing intercultural competence in business cross-cultural interactions. In Europe, Byram (1997) developed a multidimensional model of intercultural competence including five factors (attitudes to other culture, knowledge of self and other's culture, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery, and critical cultural awareness) as described earlier in this thesis. Risager (2007) expanded this model to include ten factors, including mainly linguistic competencies.

In this inquiry I do not refer to any of these particular models of intercultural competence, as for the most part they refer to cross-cultural interactions in which individuals experience a culture in a country different from their own, or learning a target language representative of a culture foreign to them. These models have been applied in preparing employees to work abroad, students to learn abroad, or students in foreign language programmes to communicate with individuals from the target language culture. In this study, intercultural communication refers to interactions between students of multicultural backgrounds all living in the same geographical area learning English as a foreign language. Rather than interaction with native English speakers, intercultural competence here refers to their interaction with one another in the classroom. While this view diverges from the traditional concept of intercultural competence, it draws from Byram's (1997) five-factor model and maintains that students from culturally diverse backgrounds need a positive attitude towards one another,

knowledge of self and others in the classroom, skills of interpreting and relating to each other's cultures and diverse learning approaches, skills of discovering new learning approaches, and most importantly, critical cultural awareness about their own and their peers' backgrounds in order to undergo a significant transition in their learning process.

A large number of tools have been developed to assess the intercultural competence of individuals in various cross-cultural settings. Based on Ruben's Behavioural Approach to Intercultural Competence, the Behavioural Assessment Scale of Intercultural Competence (BASIC) (Koester & Olebe, 1988; Ruben & Kealey, 1979) and the Intercultural Sensitivity Inventory (ICSI) (Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992) were developed as instruments using self-reports to assess an individual's ability to interact and develop behaviour in cross-cultural situations. The BASIC was developed and used to assess individuals who were deployed abroad for one year and their spouses, and examined their immersion to a new culture. The ISCI was developed to assess the behaviour of American students, coming from an individualistic culture, studying in Japan, a collectivistic culture, and vice versa, with emphasis on behaviour in business interactions and the work place. Other instruments, such as the Intercultural Assessment Inventory (IDI) based on Bennett's model (1993), have been developed for assessing the intercultural competence of high-school students studying in international schools (Straffon, 2003), university students studying abroad (Engle & Engle, 2004), and medical residents learning to treat patients of diverse backgrounds (Altshuler, et al., 2003).

These instruments have been criticized for their reliance on self-report surveys, which has led to the development of more direct assessments of intercultural competence. The Intercultural Cultural Assessment (INCA), (Byram, et al., 2004), is a battery of assessment tools based on research conducted by the INCA Project researchers which includes questionnaires, role-plays and scenarios to assess an individual's level of intercultural competence. This was first developed and tested in the engineering sector for the purpose of assessing the intercultural competence of managers and was further developed for assessing individuals' intercultural

competence in a foreign environment or when interacting with people from foreign countries.

Among the large number of instruments that have been developed, none appears to assess students' intercultural competence within a classroom culture. That is, they focus on an individual's ability to integrate within a foreign culture, mainly for the purpose of successful interaction in the work place, when studying abroad, or living abroad. This study contends that a classroom composed of students of diverse cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds, even when all live in this same geographical area, is akin to the experience of interacting in a foreign culture. To succeed in this new environment, students must develop intercultural competence based on Byram's five-factor model as described above. Intercultural competence, in this sense, becomes an integral component of successful academic reading comprehension which also requires similar factors (positive attitude to reading, skills of interpreting and relating information in texts, skills of discovery and interaction with the concepts presented in a text and critical analysis of a text). For the purpose of this study, a scale was developed to assess the level of intercultural competence development within the classroom culture and in relation to the development of English reading competence. The development of students' intercultural competence was assessed on a scale of 1-5 (1-lowest and 5-highest). The division of the scale into five levels was not pre-constructed, but rather emerged from the data analysis process. At the end of this process, classroom observations, student interviews, and student exams (particularly students' interaction with texts), were re-visited and re-analysed at five different periods during the course of the year (at the time each exam was taken) to assess students' development of intercultural competence throughout the year.

The scale is presented in Table 6.4 with a description of each level of intercultural competence and an example of a student's score at the end of the year representative of the level they reached.

Score	Description of Level of Intercultural Competence	Example of Student
1	No intercultural competence, no dialogue with others, isolationist behaviour, resistance to change	**Nabil**: During the diagnostic level test at the start of the year, he attempted to copy his friend's test. In class, he remained isolated from the start to the end of the year, preferring to sit in the back row, would not make any attempts to enter into dialogue with peers from other cultures, and resisted any of the learning approaches offered in the programme. He persisted in using this counter-productive strategy of attempting to copy his peers' work and his level of reading comprehension did not improve throughout the year.
2	Cooperates with other students, but prefers working alone; maintains same learning approaches and does not embrace new ones, does not enter dialogue or criticality process	**Narmeen:** A cooperative student, but preferred working on her own or with students of her own cultural background. Although she began the year with a relatively good level, she resisted new approaches to learning and persisted to use the grammar-translation method she learned at school. She did not enter a dialogue with her classmates and did not attempt to question her approach or those offered in the programme in any critical manner. She was able to understand a text at a superficial level, but was still unable to critically analyse a text.

3	Cooperates with other students, attempts new approaches, but does not internalize them, little criticality (not high level of questioning learning approaches, content, programme)	**Noa:** A cooperative, positive student who would work with students of other cultures, yet, did not display a great deal of interest or curiosity about their cultures. She made a concerted effort to apply the new strategies when reading a text. She would attempt to summarize main ideas, yet it was often a copy-paste of a phrase from the text, failing to show she had understood the main idea. She would identify and highlight connectors in the text, as taught in class, yet this was often done mechanically and she was unable to make the actual connection between the two ideas. On her final exam, she applied some of these strategies unsuccessfully, and translation, as in the start of the year, still dominated her text.
4	Enthusiastic about working with other students, high integration, attempts and embraces new learning approaches, enters a dialogue with other students and teacher, shows criticality (questions learning approaches, content, programme, texts)	**Paulina:** embraced working with students of other cultures; showed an interest in their culture and was highly integrated within the classroom culture. She also embraced the reading strategies offered by the programme and her peers' learning approaches to which she was exposed in class, especially in group work. She appropriated these new approaches successfully when reading a text while developing her own strong grammar and sentence analysis skills, thus able to integrate the various approaches.

		Her criticality developed, but she did not yet enter a significant dialogue questioning those new approaches or what was done in class, nor did she enter a significant dialogue with the text questioning its arguments. She used the approaches very effectively when reading a text, but still at a somewhat mechanical level.
5	Enthusiastic about working with other students and learning about their culture, embraces and appropriates new learning approaches within own system, high criticality (high level of dialogue and interaction with other students and teacher; questions learning approaches, content, programme, texts), high integration and motivation to learn	**Ehab:** Showed a great deal of enthusiasm about learning in general, learning from other students, and learning about others' cultures. He entered a very high level of questioning of the strategies and approaches at every stage of his learning, making constant comparisons to how he had learned in school. This level of criticality was also displayed when reading a text where he reached a level of 'conversing' with the text, adding his ideas and evaluations of statements made in the text.

Table 6.4 Intercultural Competence and Reading Comprehension Assessment Scale

This scale was implemented to assess students' intercultural competence in relation to their process of reading comprehension development. Below is a discussion of the link between these processes in explaining inter-individual differences between students. The significance of this link in enhancing learning and advancing achievement will be further developed in the discussion chapter of this thesis.

6.4.4.1 Students Who Underwent a Significant Learning Process

Of the 12 students who made the most impressive increase (41-76 points), eight have either immigrant or Arab-Israeli background. Four come from a more 'traditional' background. It seems that these students succeeded in integrating between their own cultural background and that of the classroom. Their stories reveal that all shared integrative skills and successful integration within mainstream Israeli society. These skills proved essential in developing their intercultural skills which played an important role in their motivation, engagement in class, and involvement in their learning process. Over the course of the year, these students showed greater criticality. They entered a dialogue process with other students and the teacher in class. They questioned their own approaches to learning and reading and embraced others, appropriating them as their own. In turn, they became more engaged with texts and applied similar critical reading skills when reading a text by applying the reading strategies taught in the programme.

Graph 6.5 presents the average score (in percentage) of intercultural competence among the 12 students who made the most significant transition in their learning process and their progress in EFL reading comprehension according to their exam scores.
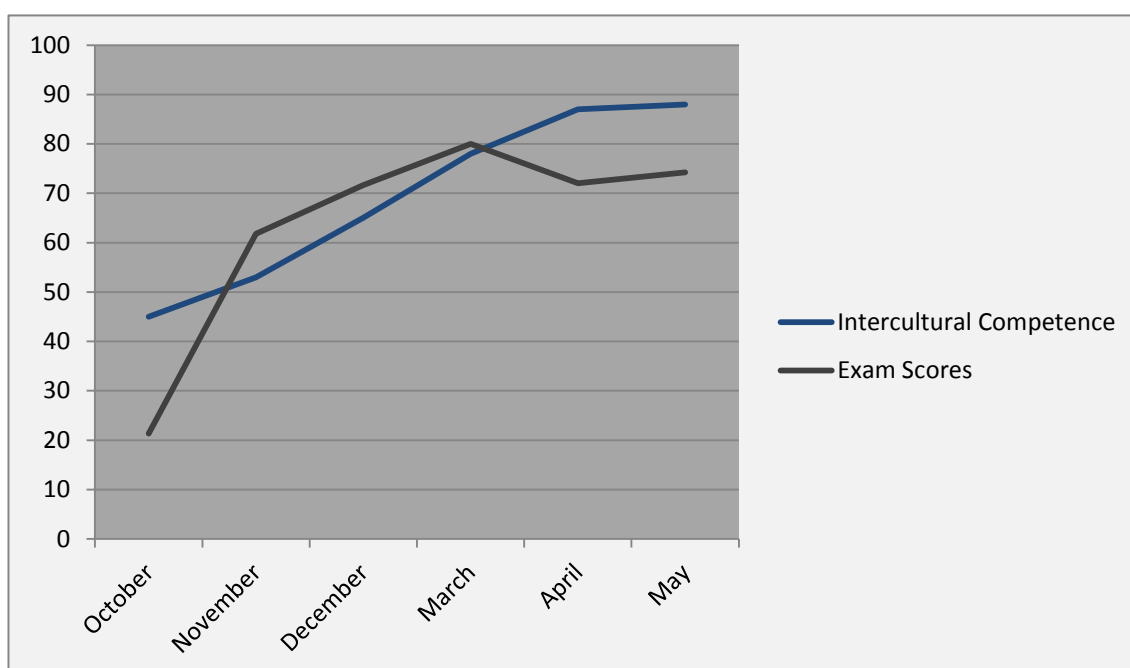
Graph 6.5 Intercultural competence and exam scores (in percentage) of students who underwent a significant learning process

Below are the narratives of five students of diverse cultures, all sharing a similar developmental process in their intercultural competence and EFL reading comprehension, leading to their success in the programme.

Yoni

(See also pp. 96, 98, 134)

Yoni made the most progress of all the students (from 6% on the diagnostic level test to 84% on the final exam). He showed gradual progress from test to test (See Table 6.3). By the third test (62%), he had applied all the strategies taught in the programme until that time. He circled connectors in the text, identified a list of items which he numbered and labelled 'list', and translated key words correctly. When hyphens appeared in the text, he labelled the word before 'term' and the phrase between hyphens 'definition' as taught in class. In this case the function of the hyphens was not to indicate term and definition, and he in fact mislabelled them, indicating that these techniques were still new to him and he was making an effort to use them whenever possible, even if it meant overusing them. Yoni also filled in the information in a table form correctly. This indicated major

progress from the diagnostic level test where he left both tables blank. On the first full exam (two texts), Yoni had a slight decline (57%) due to the greater burden. Several students who missed this test were given a different make-up test and he asked to take the make-up test as well, indicative of his perseverance. On this practice test, he raised his score to 66%. Again he applied all the strategies taught in class (See Image 6.1). On the final exam, Yoni's score rose to 84%, the highest increase (76 points) of all the students in the class. This progress corresponds with his total commitment to and investment in the programme.

Although Yoni grew up in a home with parents who came from a 'traditional', non-Western culture, his upbringing in Israel was secular. He has a small nuclear family. He went to a secular school in an urban environment where he was the only student of Ethiopian background. When discussing the lack of presence of books at home and his parents lack of education, he explained,

> *You see, I was kind of screwed. I was born here. I'm Israeli. But, I knew I grew up differently from other kids…that my house was different.*

He recounts that in the IDF his background became an asset. His athletic abilities, which are often stereotypically associated with Ethiopian background in Israel, were recognized and praised. Thus, from the day he was born, Yoni has been a product of two cultures intertwined, which seems to have resulted in his successful integration within mainstream Israeli society. This appears to have been a critical component in his success in the programme.

3

PART II

INTERNET ADDICTION DISORDER

A.   Society today is becoming increasingly dependent on computers. People use
the Internet for many purposes such as getting information, e-mailing and playing
games. As a result, they may find themselves spending more and more time on-line.
Some Internet users may be unable to control their Internet use. Are these people

5   addicted to the Internet? Psychologists agree that although the amount of time that
people spend on the Internet is certainly significant, time is not by itself the deciding
factor: it is when Internet use disrupts daily life that it can be described as Internet
Addiction Disorder. In some ways, addictive use of the Internet is similar to
'process' addictions, in which a person is addicted to an activity or behaviour such as

10   gambling, rather than 'substance' addictions such as addiction to tobacco.

B.   Use of the Internet may disrupt a person's family or social life, studies, or
career. A person may spend hours surfing the Internet to avoid being involved in a
family conflict, in this way using the Internet as a form of escape. Someone who
does not feel comfortable with other people may prefer to communicate on-line

15   instead of developing real relationships. Addicted people may have difficulty
limiting the amount of time that they spend on-line. There have been cases of college
students getting poor grades or failing courses because they would not take time off
from the Internet. Office workers may spend their time playing computer games
when they should be working, and thus risk losing their jobs.

20   C.   Internet addicts generally display similar characteristics. They may lie about
how much time they spend on-line, or deny that they have a problem. They may be
nervous when off-line, or angry with anyone who objects to the amount of time they
spend on the Internet.

D.   Nobody knows what causes one person to become addicted to the Internet

25   and another, who uses the Internet just as often, not to become addicted. Some
researchers think that there are actual chemical changes that may occur in the body
when someone is engaging in enjoyable behaviour. Just as people who are addicted

Image 6.1 Yoni's engagement with text

Alberto

(See also p. 107)

Alberto began the year with an average score of 18%. He initially resisted using the reading strategies taught in the programme and mainly persisted in using ineffective reading techniques, mainly translation. On his first test, Alberto showed considerable improvement from his diagnostic level test but he still relied heavily on text translation and was unable to understand the main ideas of the text at any deep level. After several individual conversations with him urging him to try to apply the strategies, and a lot of investment in the course work on his part, he was able to achieve a 91% by the third exam, which also required him to answer in Hebrew, not his native language. This was also the first exam in which implementation of strategies was visible on his exam, and full engagement was apparent. He highlighted main ideas in yellow, vocabulary he looked up in pink, and connectors in green.

He continued marking his texts in this way, and by his final exam, he increased his score by 64 points, from 18% to 82%, indicating that he had undergone a transformation in his approach to reading a text (See Image 6.2). This transformation was also reflected by his investment and commitment to the programme (90%).

Alberto decided to immigrate to Israel as a teenager with a Jewish youth movement, partly due to ideological reasons and his desire to connect to his Jewish roots in Israel. Like Yoni, he explains how his athletic abilities both at school and later when he served in the IDF were instrumental in helping him integrate within Israeli society. It appears that this successful integration in Israeli society while still clearly connected to his native Argentina, where his parents reside, provided him with skills to integrate within the classroom culture as well.

Alberto says that English was his main fear at the start of the year. When he

began the programme, he says he was not impressed with it and thought we were not working on what he needed in order to improve his reading comprehension and to pass the exam. Strategies seemed a waste of time. He thought he should translate the whole text and focus on the questions.

> *At first I didn't connect to what you were teaching. But then, I started using the strategies - using a marker to hi-light vocabulary, to look for certain ideas - and things seemed to become clearer and more direct... Today I believe I can read and understand the texts at a more direct level. I don't need to go and translate the whole text…the practice gave me the confidence to apply them, and abandon translating the whole text.*

The gradual transition the student describes proved successful, as his grades dramatically improved once he began implementation of the strategies. The student explains that in order for the transition to take place the student must be prepared to try them.

> *It's a question of believing in the programme– you either believe in it or you don't…if you don't come with a previous method, like me – I didn't have a method - then you don't have a choice but to adopt this one.*

PART II

Text A
INTERNET ADDICTION DISORDER

A.   Society today is becoming increasingly dependent on computers. People use the Internet for many purposes such as getting information, e-mailing and playing games. As a result, they may find themselves spending more and more time on-line. Some Internet users may be unable to control their Internet use. Are these people
5   addicted to the Internet? Psychologists agree that although the amount of time that people spend on the Internet is certainly significant, time is not by itself the deciding factor: it is when Internet use disrupts daily life that it can be described as Internet Addiction Disorder. In some ways, addictive use of the Internet is similar to 'process' addictions, in which a person is addicted to an activity or behaviour such as
10   gambling, rather than 'substance' addictions such as addiction to tobacco.

B.   Use of the Internet may disrupt a person's family or social life, studies, or career. A person may spend hours surfing the Internet to avoid being involved in a family conflict, in this way using the Internet as a form of escape. Someone who does not feel comfortable with other people may prefer to communicate on-line
15   instead of developing real relationships. Addicted people may have difficulty limiting the amount of time that they spend on-line. There have been cases of college students getting poor grades or failing courses because they would not take time off from the Internet. Office workers may spend their time playing computer games when they should be working, and thus risk losing their jobs.

20 C.   Internet addicts generally display similar characteristics. They may lie about how much time they spend on-line, or deny that they have a problem. They may be nervous when off-line, or angry with anyone who objects to the amount of time they spend on the Internet.

D.   Nobody knows what causes one person to become addicted to the Internet
25   and another, who uses the Internet just as often, not to become addicted. Some researchers think that there are actual chemical changes that may occur in the body when someone is engaging in enjoyable behaviour. Just as people who are addicted

Image 6.2 Alberto's engagement with text

Paulina

(See also pp. 108, 133)

Paulina began at a very low level of English (28%) and made remarkable progress with a 51-point increase, receiving a 79% on her final exam. She began the course, like Alberto, with the same ineffective approach to reading in English, mainly translation of each and every word in the passage, but with very high motivation. Her gradual adoption of the strategies taught in class in addition to her hard work to increase her vocabulary and grammar in English (95% on evaluation of commitment and investment in the programme) resulted in a successful process of acquiring English reading comprehension.

Paulina immigrated to Israel from Russia as a teenager with her father while her mother remained in Russia. She underwent a difficult immigration process and failure to integrate within the Israeli school system. Having dropped out in the 11th grade, she explains that when serving in the IDF, where she underwent conversion to Judaism, she finally felt like she belonged in Israeli society, while still connected to her native Russia which she frequents to visit her mother.

Her final successful integration process was also echoed by a successful transition process in the programme. When asked if she had ever been exposed to the reading strategies presented in the course, she replied,

> *I've never encountered a programme like this before... this is the first time I've reached a level of understanding meaning.*

When asked to explain the process she underwent, she explained,

> *At first I found it very difficult and didn't understand what was going on. The texts were very difficult and I would try to translate every word. The only technique I knew how to use was to translate each and every word. It took me a while to change my approach and to begin to look for meaning.*

Like Alberto, the process meant abandoning translation and applying reading strategies. When asked what prompted her to change her approach, she replied,

> *I understood I was working in vain. In the last exam in which I received my*

highest grade, I almost didn't translate any vocabulary.

Clearly, the student needed less dictionary work at this stage, not only because she had abandoned the inefficient technique of looking up every unknown word, but also because her vocabulary had increased over the course of the year. Still, she commented that she began to pay attention to the choice of words she looked up by breaking down the sentence into its elements as was also taught in the programme.

> *I'd sit at home with a text and begin to break it down into the parts of speech, like you showed us in class – I looked for the verb first, then the nouns and then the adjectives, and then I began to understand the sentences. Then I started to look for connectors… I used everything we learned – and everything connected to everything else, parts of speech, connectors, main ideas, vocabulary…*

Apparently her strong foundation in grammar, which she attributes to her mother, a Russian language teacher, and the ability to apply this knowledge when reading in English, in conjunction with her application of the new reading strategies, were responsible for her dramatic progress.

What can be discerned in each of these students with immigrant background is that despite major difficulties that each faced in terms of their identity, each underwent an integration process that has enabled them to connect both worlds that construct that identity. This appears to be an important factor in their ability to interact with students of other cultures in the class, to critically question their own learning approaches and to embrace new ones from their peers. This also enabled them to embrace and appropriate the strategies taught in the programme and undergo the transformation necessary in order to succeed. This intercultural competence (Byram, 2000; Kramsch, 2010), which allowed them to integrate within the classroom culture, permitted these students to make significant advances in their learning process and progress in their English reading comprehension.

Of the 12 students with the most significant improvement, four are from the Arab-Israeli sector and learning English as a third language. Three of these began the programme with very low averages (Ahmed, 12%; Halil, 14%; Samir, 24%). They underwent a major transformation in the way they approached learning and the way they approached reading a text. As described in the discussion above, they began as silent members of the class, sitting in the back row, disengaged from classroom activity and discussion. Each of them underwent a process of learning to ask questions, becoming engaged in class and becoming engaged with the text. By the end of the year, they were all sitting in the first two rows of the classroom. As a result, the students made impressive progress throughout the year (Halil, 66%; Samir, 65%; Ahmed, 55%). Their commitment and investment scores (Ahmed, 70%, Halil, 80%; Samir, 70%), indicate that they all could have invested more in terms of their preparation and participation in class. However, the transition they underwent from virtually no engagement to taking part in class dialogue was instrumental to their progress. It can be expected that with even more commitment, these three students would be able to make even greater gains. Ehab, who is also of Arab-Israeli background and learning English as a third language, is indicative of the possible progress and achievements that can be made when a student is fully committed to the process and integrated within the classroom culture.

Ehab

(See also pp.85, 92, 111, 115)

Ehab began the programme at a higher level (42%) than his peers. He entered the programme at an older age and at a more mature level. However, although he comes from a 'traditional' family background, he is the only student from the Arab-Israeli sector who spoke about the strong maternal influence on his education. From the first day of class, he sat in the front row and was regularly involved in dialogue and class discussion. He did not display the same collectivist characteristics as many of his peers, but rather worked in a more individualistic manner, while still cooperating with his classmates in group work.

His consistent determination to succeed and hard work throughout the year were laudable (100% on commitment to and investment in the programme). When he was absent from class, he communicated with me by email, indicating that he did not keep the same teacher-student distance as his peers, and took initiative in his learning process.

On the first test during the year, Ehab applied all the strategies taught in class until that stage, underlining sentences and key words, numbering the lists in the text, marking the text with an arrow to connect between a reference and the word it refers to, and labelling certain vocabulary with parts of speech (though incorrectly as they were still not mastered). He translated six words into Hebrew, rather than Arabic. The level of engagement was so high, that next to one of the statements in the text ('students who received a test with humorous instructions scored significantly higher than those who took the same test with ordinary instructions') he wrote 'Like!' as one adds on Facebook. On this test, his mark rose from 42% to 72%. His progress was consistent, and by the end of the year, Ehab received 90% on his final exam, indicative of the progress he made.

By the end of the year he fully applied all the strategies taught in class. When two statements in the text explained characteristics of internet addiction, he underlined both and identified the more significant feature, writing next to it

'more important'. In the margins of another section, he labelled a paragraph, 'reasons', indicating he had understood the paragraph organization. His reading passage shows his full engagement with the text (See Image 6.3).

The process this student underwent shows that his reading comprehension from the start of the year was transformed into an in-depth analysis of a text. When asked about whether he had learned the reading strategies taught in the programme before, he reported that he had never studied reading strategies and said he found them beneficial.

> *I've realized over the course of the year that I can understand a great deal without understanding all the vocabulary*.

This experience was different from his high-school experience where emphasis was placed on vocabulary knowledge and translation as the keys to understanding texts.

Ehab integrated easily within the classroom culture, as reflected by his participation in classroom dialogue and cooperation with all the students in class. He questioned the learning process, his and his peers' learning approaches, and embraced those that were beneficial to him. He expressed a critical view of the teaching methods with which he was taught and embraced new strategies offered by the programme. His high level of intercultural competence seems to have been a key factor in his successful progress.

PART II

Text A
INTERNET ADDICTION DISORDER

A.   Society today is becoming increasingly dependent on computers. People use the Internet for many purposes such as getting information, e-mailing and playing games. As a result, they may find themselves spending more and more time on-line. Some Internet users may be unable to control their Internet use. Are these people

5 addicted to the Internet? Psychologists agree that although the amount of time that people spend on the Internet is certainly significant, time is not by itself the deciding factor: it is when Internet use disrupts daily life that it can be described as Internet Addiction Disorder. In some ways, addictive use of the Internet is similar to 'process' addictions, in which a person is addicted to an activity or behaviour such as

10 gambling, rather than 'substance' addictions such as addiction to tobacco.

B.   Use of the Internet may disrupt a person's family or social life, studies, or career. A person may spend hours surfing the Internet to avoid being involved in a family conflict, in this way using the Internet as a form of escape. Someone who does not feel comfortable with other people may prefer to communicate on-line

15 instead of developing real relationships. Addicted people may have difficulty limiting the amount of time that they spend on-line. There have been cases of college students getting poor grades or failing courses because they would not take time off from the Internet. Office workers may spend their time playing computer games when they should be working, and thus risk losing their jobs.

20 C.   Internet addicts generally display similar characteristics. They may lie about how much time they spend on-line, or deny that they have a problem. They may be nervous when off-line, or angry with anyone who objects to the amount of time they spend on the Internet.

D.   Nobody knows what causes one person to become addicted to the Internet

25 and another, who uses the Internet just as often, not to become addicted. Some

26 researchers think that there are actual chemical changes that may occur in the body when someone is engaging in enjoyable behaviour. Just as people who are addicted

Image 6.3 Ehab's engagement with text

Like the immigrant students, Ehab's successful progress and achievement appear to be related to his integrative abilities.

Of the 12 students with the highest increase, four were of native Jewish-Israeli background, studying English as a second language. They began the academic year at lower levels (Anat, 20%; Iris, 20%; Liron, 32%; Daniel, 34%). They spoke in interviews about the demons they've been battling with in terms of English. They also shared extremely negative experiences with English in school and all complained of ineffective teaching and indifferent teachers at the schools they attended.

Daniel

Daniel had trouble at school, particularly in the subject of English. He directs anger towards his school teachers and the school policy regarding the subject in high-school. To maintain high averages, his school prepared students only to the 5-pt English matriculation exam. As his level was not a 5-pt level, he was told that the condition for him to stay in high-school was to stop his English studies. He was instructed not to take the matriculation exam, so as not to lower the school average. Not only did he not have the option of taking the 4-pt exam which would have allowed him to begin his higher education studies, but his motivation and self-confidence in English were crushed. He began the academic year with a great deal of insecurity.

Daniel began applying the strategies from the start of the year. In the 11th lesson (week 6), Daniel got 100% on a quiz on the previewing strategy. This grade seemed extremely significant to him, as he had such severe insecurities. He told me the story about his high-school experience for the first time (which he would bring up again at three different times over the year). He recounted that in the army he tried to study for the matriculation exam by taking preparation classes, but said he had lost interest.

We did a lot of grammar exercises – it was so boring.

The following conversation is a recall I wrote down after class that day:

> Daniel: *Did you invent this method?*
> Me: *No, I didn't invent the wheel. I'm simply teaching you how I learned to read English in school in the United States.*
> Daniel: *Wow, it really works. Teachers should write the Ministry of Education letters to get them to change their programme.*

For this student, who met repeated failure with English, the approach used in the programme was able to provide him with a set of tools to which he had never been exposed. He applied the strategies in every exam and maintained a high 80%-90% average throughout the year, which reflected his commitment to and investment in his learning process (90%).

The conversation above with Daniel is not atypical. In fact, students who had a particularly difficult experience with English at school often express they wished they had encountered a similar teaching approach which focuses on reading strategies when they were younger. While the students in this group belong to the dominant culture group in Israeli society, their repeated failure in school led them to feel marginalized. Their adoption and application of the strategies offered them in the programme is not unlike the integration process described above among the immigrant and Arab-Israeli students who succeeded in the programme. That is, they showed willingness and motivation to embrace new strategies 'imported' by their American teacher. This ability is also an expression of the kind of intercultural competence that allowed them to embrace and integrate these new methods.

6.4.4.2 Students Who Did not Undergo a Significant Learning Process

An examination of the 11 students who made the least progress between the diagnostic level test and the final exam interestingly reveals a student composition similar to that of the 12 students with the most significant progress. This group comprises eight students studying English as a third/fourth language. Seven of these come from a more 'traditional' background and one is a secular immigrant. Three come from a less 'traditional', secular native Jewish-Israeli background learning English as a second language. Among these students, ten had clearly not undergone any process of change or development from the start of the

year. Their lack of commitment to their learning process was reflected by their lack of preparation or investment in the work required, low attendance and lack of engagement in class. These students had little or no intercultural competence, as they did not show interest in working with other students or entering a dialogue with them. They clung to familiar learning approaches in which they were trained as children, even when these proved ineffective, and were not willing to attempt or embrace new ones. They made no effort to integrate within the classroom culture. At the same time, they made no progress in their EFL reading comprehension (See Graph 6.6). The peak increase according to the graph in the fifth exam is misleading. Only four students among this group took the exam, as absenteeism was high among them. For this reason the average score on that exam is skewed. If all eleven students had taken the exam, it can be expected that their average performance would be similar to the final exam, which they all took.
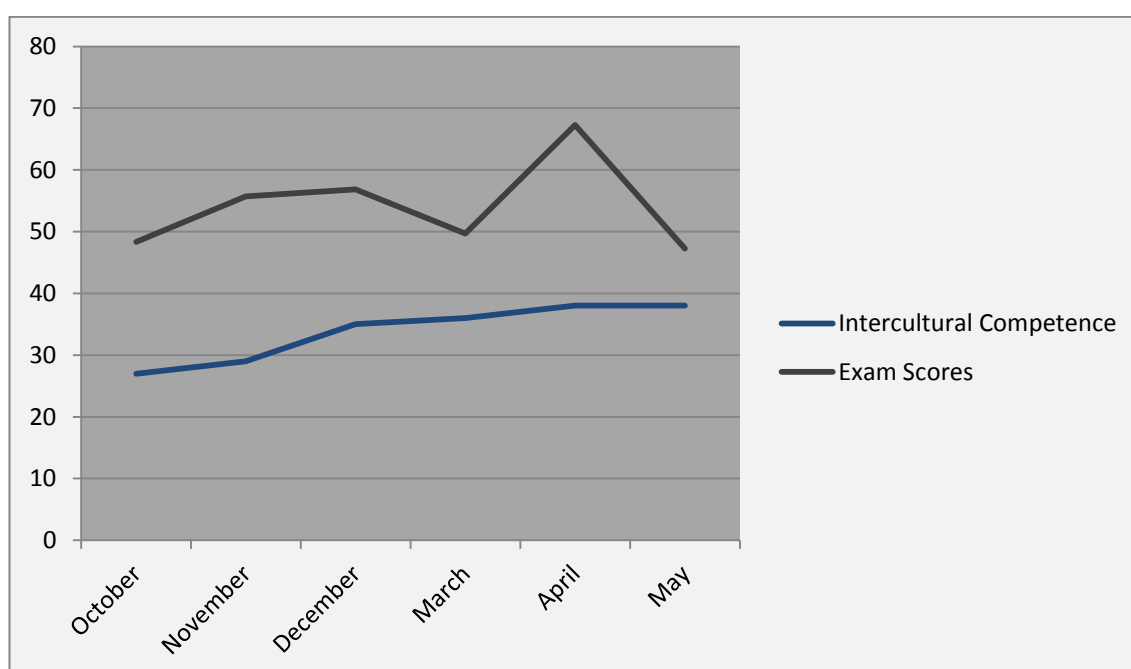
Graph 6.6 Intercultural competence and exam scores (in percentage) of students who did not undergo a significant learning process

When looking carefully at this group of students, what seems to stand out is that all three female students of Arab-Israeli background (Narmeen, Susane and Bushra) are among this group of students. The gradual and difficult process undergone by those students from the Arab-Israeli sector who made significant

progress was a process the three female students did not share. The distinct roles that gender plays in this sector, as described by the students, may be a factor in the greater resistance the female students had to the teaching methods used and learning techniques encouraged in the programme. Despite my many efforts throughout the year to involve them by individual work with them, by placing them in groups with students of other cultures, and by involving the student counsellor, they rejected what the programme attempted to offer them. Unlike Samir, for example, who at a certain stage broke down some of his resistance and sought help by becoming engaged with the work and the class, they failed to show up to meetings I initiated to work individually with them. In all of their exams, with the exception of Narmeen, they were more concerned with whom to copy from than a true attempt to do the work on their own and to learn from their mistakes. Interviews with the girls revealed very strong-willed young women, who spoke with me more in those 30-45 minutes than they had all year. What stands out among all three is the fact that all recounted what good students they had been at school: that is, they were 'obedient', 'well behaved, 'prepared their work', or as they stated, they *'didn't make trouble'*.

Narmeen

(See also pp. 98, 115, 118)

Narmeen entered the programme with a relatively high score on her diagnostic level test (52%). During the first half of the year, she received 83% and a 78% on the second and third exams, though with little application of the strategies taught. Unfortunately during the second half of the year, her absenteeism grew and her investment in the coursework decreased. She missed two exams and finished the programme with a 58% on her final exam, having made almost no progress from the start of the year. Narmeen appeared to be a serious student with potential to succeed. She was attentive in class, and would not attempt to copy work, as many of her peers would. Still, she engaged very little in class dialogue, and persisted to use the translation strategies she had learned in school.

Narmeen described herself as a very good student in school. When asked to describe a typical English class, she explained that class was teacher-centred and the lesson consisted of translating texts. When comparing English at school and the programme, she explained,

> *The methods are very different. I had never learned previewing and those kinds of things. Also, at school explanations were in Arabic, here much of the class is conducted in Hebrew which makes it more difficult for me to understand…and, for me, group work was not effective, because it distracted me, and I couldn't get the work done this way.*

When asked why she had not participated much, she answered,

> *I'm not used to asking questions freely in a lesson. At school, students waited to the end until the teacher asks students if there are any questions and the students waited to get permission to speak. But also in school, I never participated much. Although teachers thought I didn't understand, I just didn't like to talk much in class.*

When Narmeen commented that she had not been exposed to reading strategies before, she was asked whether she found them beneficial or if she used them. She replied,

It's a waste of time. Reading is basically a question of practice. If you know the vocabulary, you understand.

Despite the fact that Narmeen began with the highest diagnostic level test score among her peers from the Arab-Israeli sector, her resistance to applying new strategies and her adherence to old high-school translation techniques seemed to be significant factors hindering her from making progress. As both of Narmeen's parents finished high-school and she reported parental support, exposure to books and reading at home, she was expected to succeed. Nevertheless, it seems that her inability to bridge between her more 'traditional' learning approach and the classroom's less 'traditional' approach prevented her from making the necessary steps to making the transition in her learning process. Rather than integrating within the classroom culture, Narmeen gradually distanced herself from it as the course developed.

Of the 11 students in this group, four came from a less 'traditional' background. Three of these were of native Jewish-Israeli background, studying English a second language. Like Narmeen, they were disengaged in class and unwilling to undergo any significant change in their approach to learning English. One of the students among this group was of Former Soviet Union background studying English as a third language. However, despite the seeming lack of significant progress in quantitative terms, qualitatively this student underwent a significant transformation in his learning process and approach to reading texts in English. He is in fact, the exceptional case in this group of students. It appears that his diagnostic level test (64%) may have been misleading. Although this seems out of the student's character, he may have copied some of his answers on the test. This kind of behaviour was never observed in class during the year, so it remains unclear why he received such a high grade. However his first (41%) and second (40%) tests following the diagnostic level test attest to his actually much lower level at the beginning of the year as observed in class. When comparing these tests with his final grade (71%), his true progress seems to be more apparent.

While these students' parental education, early life learning and reading experiences, and school experiences played a role in disadvantaging some of them and hindering their progress, this was not always the case. The main factor, with the exception of Boris, that is responsible for these students' lack of progress is their resistance to the programme, their isolationist behaviour, and failure to make any attempts at entering a dialogue in class or to give the new approaches a chance. Consequently any change in their learning process was not possible.

6.4.4.3 Students Who Underwent a Learning Process to Varying Degrees

Among the 16 students who made neither the most significant nor the least significant progress (an increase of 14 to 39 points) 14 are of native Jewish-Israeli background. Only two students studied English as a third language (Habib and Elana). It appears that in this group, most of whom entered at a higher average, each underwent a process of accepting new ways of approaching a text and text analysis to varying degrees. It must be noted that a student entering at a higher

average cannot make the same numerical increase in score as a student entering at a lower level. Thus, Yoni, who began at 6% can potentially make a 94% increase, and his final grade of 84% yields progress in proportional terms of 83%. However, the maximum increase Ben can make from a 66% is a 34-point increase, such that his final grade (97%) yielded progress in proportional terms of 99%. Nevertheless, a student who begins at a higher level with a greater foundation is expected to have an easier ascend. While some students from this group made impressive progress this was not necessarily the case with all.

Students in this group showed varying degrees of intercultural competence. Most were engaged and entered a dialogue with other students and the teacher in class. The majority showed criticality throughout the course of the year, questioning other learning approaches as well as their own. They attempted and embraced to varying degrees the new approaches to which they were exposed in class. Similarly critical reading of texts by employing the reading strategies taught in class developed to varying degrees (See Graph 6.7).
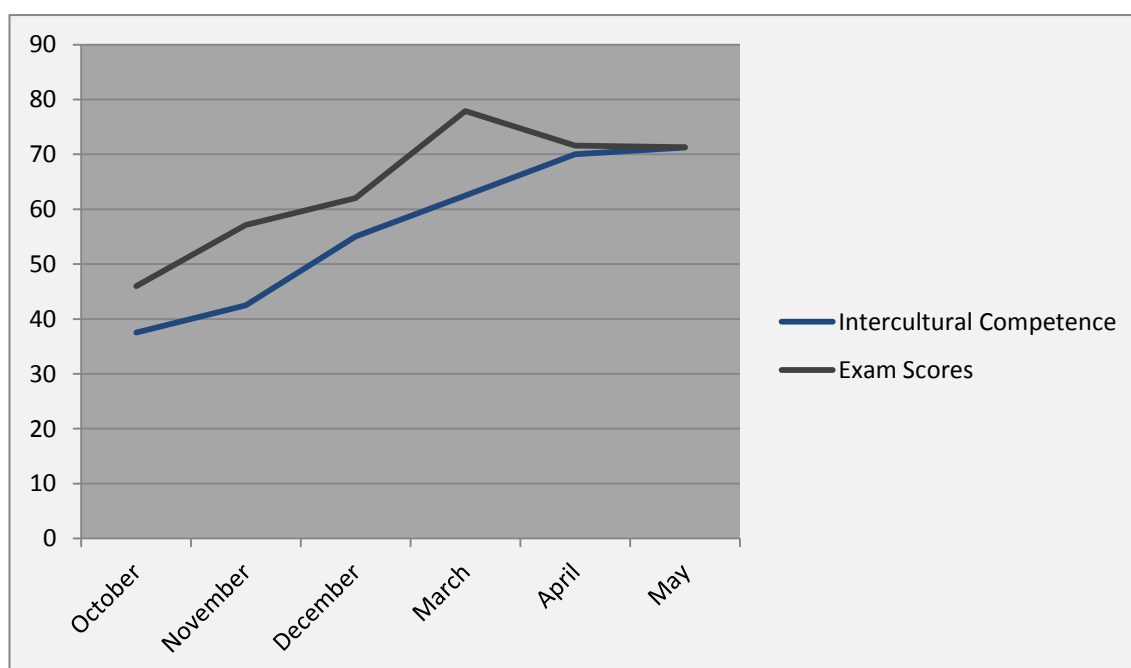
Graph 6.7 Intercultural competence and exam scores (in percentage) of students who underwent a learning process to varying degrees

Twelve students in this group came from a less 'traditional' background, and four come from a more 'traditional' background (three from religious Jewish-Israeli

backgrounds and one from Arab-Israeli background). Most of these students were more familiar with a democratic learning approach, encouraging student participation and dialogue. They were accustomed to asking questions and to questioning their learning process. Moreover, they were part of the dominant mainstream culture and could more easily integrate within the classroom culture. For this reason, the transition in their learning process was not as dramatic for them as for students who had never been exposed to such a teaching approach before. This may explain why most of these students benefitted from the programme, though not to the same degree as those students who were given such tools for the first time.

All three students from Jewish religious homes began with higher than average levels (David, 74%, Rachel, 66%, and Tamir, 52%). All of them underwent a certain process of transformation. Although English was a second language for them, they shared certain characteristics with their immigrant and Arab-Israeli peers. Their choice to study in a secular institution a field that is not typically chosen in the religious sector required that they bridge between the more 'traditional' culture they came from and the classroom culture they entered. A successful integration process in the programme led to their successful progress throughout the course of the year.

In fact, reading strategies seemed to be easily grasped by all three students who had grown up in religious Jewish homes. While in class observations I made several notes regarding the rather advanced reading comprehension and text analysis that they repeatedly showed in class, I only learned that Rachel and David grew up in religious homes during interviews at the end of the year. This was not evident in class, as they were no longer observant Jews. When this shared background was revealed in interviews, I was interested how it had influenced their reading comprehension.

When trying to explain what these students received in religious education that helped them succeed in the programme, three factors seem to stand out. First, all three students spoke of the discipline they received in the religious education system, which was described as an outcome of reverence for teachers, though not

out of fear or distance. A second factor that seemed to stand out was their strong intrinsic motivation. The principal aim was learning for the sake of gaining knowledge, rather than to pass an exam.

Third, both male students explained that in the *yeshiva* most of their studies focused on Bible studies. In Talmudic studies, which only male students learn, the level of reading analysis is extremely profound. Each word, sentence and verse is examined from several angles. Behind every word there are several alternative meanings. Students must learn not only the texts, but also the debate surrounding their different meanings. While these students received less direct English teaching, this kind of learning provided both of them with excellent text analysis skills and advanced reading comprehension that were apparent in the classroom.

Tamir

(See also pp. 92, 119)

The study of the Talmud teaches a much deeper analysis of texts. The need to examine the text from so many different angles using different techniques takes a person to a different level of analysis. It teaches more than the text. Students must also learn who disagrees with the argument of which critics and according to what argument.

According to classroom observations, text analysis seemed second nature and at a much higher level than the rest of their peers. In addition, former experience teaching students of religious background has been similar. It appears that the strong emphasis on the written word, especially the complex readings of the Talmud, from such an early age instils in students sophisticated reading skills and strategies, which they can transfer to other languages and different types of texts. Consequently, David and Rachel both reached a commendable achievement of 88% on their final exams, and Tamir reached a 78%. However, Tamir's final exam did not reflect the remarkable process he underwent (he received 100% on the three exams prior to the final). He was in army reserve duty during the last critical month of studies, which apparently affected his performance.

For the other students, the transition process from superficial reading of a text to a deeper text analysis was partial. Many of the students in this group had

some difficulty in applying the new strategies when reading and in unlearning some of their more ineffective reading approaches.

Sarit

(See also 113, 116)

Sarit started at a very weak level (28%), and received extra tutoring lessons at the start of the year. She underwent a substantial learning process and made significant progress finishing the programme with a 67% (a 39-point increase). She invested a great deal of work and was strongly committed to the transition process in her learning, as reflected by the high commitment and investment scores (80%). Yet, the most significant progress made was in her vocabulary and basic grammar knowledge. The reading strategies taught were not yet fully internalized by the end of the year, as the reading passages still posed significant challenges for her in terms of vocabulary and grammar level. As Sarit commented,

> *…vocabulary work contributed the most to me. The strategies were also helpful, but I don't feel I've fully grasped them. I don't use them automatically, but I try to apply them. I summarize the main ideas of each paragraph. The connectors also help me. I see that the techniques are useful when I answer the questions.*

Thus, it appears that even those students with weak vocabulary and grammar at the beginning of the programme were able to benefit from reading strategies, though not to the full extent as did students at higher levels. Those students, who participated in the extra tutoring lessons provided at the start of the year to boost their vocabulary and grammar level, all mentioned the benefit these lessons afforded them and expressed regret that they were discontinued. This emphasizes the importance of more resources and tutoring needed for students entering at lower levels.

6.5. Summary

The data presented in this chapter examined the diverse learning processes students experienced in the programme. An examination of their entry levels revealed that in general the whole group entered at a low average level and used a variety of ineffective reading strategies, such as copy-paste techniques and heavy translation. Engagement with the text in any meaningful manner was absent and students did not employ effective reading strategies, such as identifying main ideas and text organization, or using marking techniques to help them construct meaning from the text. Moreover, certain patterns emerged when levels and approaches were examined by cultural influence, more or less 'traditional' family structures, and whether English was a second or third/fourth language. Immigrant and Arab-Israeli students, learning English as a third/fourth language, had lower entry levels, and students from more 'traditional' family structures also tended to have lower entry levels. Learning English as a second language and coming from a less 'traditional' family structure seems to have placed students at a higher entry level.

In terms of learning approaches during the programme, cultural background seemed to play an important role. Students of Ethiopian background sought out stronger students for assistance, while students from the Former Soviet Union reached out to weaker students. Students from the Arab-Israeli sector typically displayed isolationist and collectivist behaviour in the classroom, while students from the native Jewish-Israeli sector tended to display more integrationist and individualistic behaviour.

This chapter presented data regarding students' commitment to and investment in their learning process, their reading comprehension progress as reflected in their exam scores, and progress in their general reading strategies. These indicated that students' entry levels and diverse learning approaches when arriving at the programme were not determining factors of their progress and achievement.

The determining factor in students' progress was related to their intercultural competence, as reflected by their ability to integrate within the classroom culture and to appropriate a diversity of approaches new to them. These

students underwent significant processes in their learning which was reflected in their progress and achievements in reading comprehension in general (reading strategy exercises) and in English (test performance). The next chapter will further explore and discuss the issues that emerged in the data analysis.

PART III

REACTION: MAKING MEANING

Part Two presented and analysed the data that was constructed for the purpose of the current study. Quantitative data reflecting their progress and achievements through exams, exercises, and student assessment were examined. Qualitative data regarding their family, school and language background, as well as their development of intercultural competence and integration within the classroom culture were analysed alongside their learning process. The following section aims at better understanding the significance of these data. In chapter 7 I present my interpretation of the findings and discuss their significance in EFL methodology, especially in terms of reading comprehension skills, and the implications for teaching multicultural classes. In chapter eight I come to the end of this journey, presenting my reflections, limitations and final conclusions.

Chapter 7

Discussion

7.1 Introduction

Because adult EFL learners possess a variety of diverse approaches to learning English, three main questions have guided this inquiry:

1. How do differing cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds impact upon adult students' approach to and process of learning reading comprehension in English?

2. How do these backgrounds impact upon progress and achievement in reading comprehension in English?

3. Which teaching approach or approaches can best address the various needs of a culturally diverse student group?

To address the first two research questions, I conducted interviews with my students about their **family background**, their **language experience**, and **post-school experience**. The rich life stories students shared with me were analysed and examined in relation to how they influenced the way students approached learning, reading, and EFL. This was further related to how students acquired new reading strategies, their progress and achievements over the course of the year.

To address the third research question, the impact of students' background on their progress in the matriculation preparation programme was examined in relation to the teaching approach I implemented in the programme based on elements from CLT and TBLT methodologies. The specific aim of the programme was to improve students' reading comprehension of academic texts in English with emphasis on top-down skills. For this purpose, the programme focused on equipping students with reading strategies that enhance their ability to analyse

texts through engagement with the text, metacognition and critical thinking. The discussion below examines the complex interrelationships between these concepts within the wider framework of **EFL methodology** in general. The implications of teaching in a **multicultural classroom** on EFL methodology are then presented. The discussion concludes with the effects of the programme on improving **EFL reading comprehension** of academic texts within the context of EFL methodology in the multicultural classroom.

7.2 EFL Methodology

Chapter 2 presented the main divide in EFL methodology. The audio-lingual and direct methods of teaching a foreign language place emphasis on form and accuracy. Teaching is mainly teacher-centred and students are encouraged to learn through rote memory and repetition. In contrast, CLT methods developed in the West during the 70's and 80's replaced emphasis on accuracy and form by the importance placed on conveying a message. Rote memorisation exercises were replaced by communicative activities, such as role plays, so that lessons became learner-centred with emphasis on group work. The new teaching methodology was considered at the time successful in Western countries, but came under criticism when it failed in non-Western countries, such as South Korea (Li, 1998), Pakistan (Shamim, 1996), Indonesia (Coleman, 1996), and China (Yu, 2001).

In recent years EFL methodology has reached the understanding that EFL teaching methods must take into consideration the context of the learning situation (Kumaravedivelu, 2006). EFL methodology has entered the post-method era with the realization that one ultimate method appropriate for all teaching settings is non-existent (Canagarajah, 2006). EFL theorists have called for language programmes to be tailored to the needs of the specific local learning context. However, such a feat is not a simple one, as each teaching situation is unique and constantly changing.

As an American teacher trained in teaching language using CLT methodology, this approach which was successful when I taught in the United States, proved incompatible in the Israeli learning environment. The methodology

needed to be adapted when I realized that students in the Israeli classroom were not reacting to it in the same way as my students in the American classroom and were not making the same progress. My teaching situation has been further complicated by the fact that the Israeli college classroom is not a single distinct culture, but a cultural melting pot of students with diverse backgrounds. One teaching methodology, an American Western one in particular, turned out to be ineffective in such a context.

This study explored the different native language contexts of my students and found that in general, family experience reflected school experience, which in turn reflected the EFL methodology in which students were exposed and trained. Students were generally raised in either a more 'traditional' or less 'traditional' background. Those students who came from a more 'traditional' background came from larger families with a patriarchal family structure. They were typically raised in homes which were either religious or maintained religious traditions and grew up in rural areas. They included the students from Muslim Arab-Israeli background, religious Jewish-Israeli background and one of the three students of Ethiopian background. These students more typically came from disciplinarian school systems and were educated with more traditional teaching methods. They described teachers who were considered undisputable figures of authority, especially if they were male, and in some instances used corporal punishment as a disciplinary tool. Lessons were teacher-centred and little dialogue or discussion was encouraged. The main forms of learning in which students were trained were rote memorisation and reproducing the same information they were transferred by their teachers (the empty vessel model). These students typically learned EFL in a similar fashion. In those few instances where more modern EFL teaching methods were introduced, they appear to have failed and were described by students as ineffective.

As the data suggests, students from a more 'traditional' background were typically less engaged or involved in classroom discussion at the start of the year. They were reluctant to ask questions or make any comments in class that are considered a contribution to classroom dialogue in Western culture. They were

extremely concerned with getting good marks, or the right answer (the result), rather than how to reach it (the process of getting there).

Similar teaching environments have been described in EFL literature. Li (1998) found that EFL students in South Korea showed resistance to participating in the English classroom which encouraged them to behave in a way counter to the one in which they had trained.

> *…they have become accustomed to the traditional classroom culture, in which they sit motionless, take notes while the teacher lectures, and speak only when they are spoken to. After so many years of schooling in traditional settings, students rely on the teacher to give them information directly, making it very difficult to get the students to participate in class activities…To play it safe, students usually chose to behave traditionally in English class* (Li, 1998, p.691).

When teachers with Western teaching methods have come to teach English using CLT methodology which necessarily requires more 'democratic' forms of teaching, the disconnect between the two mindsets has often led to failure in language acquisition. Like Li, Shamim (1996) attempting to introduce innovative communicative methodology in the Pakistani classroom found resistance rooted in the clash between cultural beliefs and assumptions of the students and the methodology introduced. She describes the same more traditional learning approaches that Li observed in South Korea. This kind of learning background yielded the same resistance to Western designed communicative approaches.

Shamim (1996) 'confesses' to her frustration when her students failed to accept the innovative teaching methods aimed at encouraging more democratic learning. She became caught in the constant dilemma between abandoning the innovation and succumbing to her students' learning preferences, contradictory to her pedagogical ideology, or adhering to her futile attempts at making a change. Her experience taught her that students in the classroom are socialized and acculturated in certain behaviours determined by their environment and expecting them to behave in a contrary manner in the language classroom is counter-productive.

> *Learners in Pakistan, as in any other community, do not live in a social vacuum. In fact, before taking up their role in the classroom, they are participants in a cultural milieu and their beliefs and assumptions about modes of behaviour and*

knowledge are structured by the culture of the community in which they operate.
***The question here is not whether the cultural patterns of the community are
good or bad or whether they should be encouraged or reversed in the
classroom. The fact is that they are there as important variables that influence
the way learners perceive, classify and judge (and often reject) the innovative
methodology.*** (Shamim, 1996, p. 114, my emphasis)*.*

When Coleman (1996) examined attempts at innovations in teaching EFL in the

Indonesian classroom, he also discovered the incompatibility of Western

methodology with traditional Indonesian culture and ideology.

> *…teachers found that they were constantly slipping back into the old ways,
> despite genuine efforts to 'teach' more effectively. Largely, it seemed that this
> was because the students were not prepared to behave any differently from
> the way they had always done in English lessons. Indeed, as the students saw
> it, if they had behaved any differently…they would have been guilty of
> showing a lack of respect. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the
> conventions of the lesson were so strong that all the participants involved –
> both teacher and students – found it impossible to act outside the roles with
> which they were familiar…* (Coleman, 1996, p. 80).

Those students in my classroom who come from more 'traditional'

backgrounds expressed similar beliefs and assumptions which shaped their

classroom behaviour and perceptions of learning. Despite cultural differences that

may exist among them (Muslim Arab-Israeli, native religious Jewish-Israeli,

Ethiopian), they shared a common set of beliefs and assumptions as those of South

Korean, Pakistani, or Indonesian students described in the studies above. This

system of principles clashed with that of their American-educated and trained

teacher, the aims of the matriculation preparation programme, and the ideology of

the college in which they chose to study. This 'clash' of systems is a complex one. I

entered an environment that is not necessarily the same one I was raised in, but on

the other hand, unlike Li, Shamim and Coleman, I have not attempted to enter the

'traditional' milieu of this group of students to introduce innovations in their

community. Rather, they have entered an environment that is unfamiliar to them.

In order to succeed in this setting, which is their objective, they must re-examine

those beliefs and assumptions with which they have been raised and learn to

accept new ones as well. Moreover, unlike Li, Shamim and Coleman's experiences,

these students share the classroom with other students who come from a less

'traditional' background and were raised with a different system of principles. At the same time, for this transformation to take place successfully, this study has taught me that it was crucial as their teacher to understand their system of beliefs and assumptions without judgment and introduce the new ones gradually, in a non-threatening way, as has been suggested elsewhere in literature on multicultural learning settings (Westbrook, 2010).

Those students who came from a less 'traditional' background typically came from smaller nuclear families with either a more egalitarian or matriarchal family structure. Parents of students from less 'traditional' families had more years of education than those from more 'traditional' families, especially mothers. The more egalitarian family structure was reflected in the school system in which they were educated. These students were typically educated in secular schools with more 'democratic' teaching methods which encourage student-centred classrooms and greater dialogue in class, with the teacher becoming more of an equal partner in the learning experience. As Bensoussan, (2009) describes teacher-student relations in the typical secular Jewish-Israeli classroom,

> *…our teachers welcome questions, and even arguments, from students. On our tests, there may be more than one correct way to answer a question* (p. 3).

In support of Bensoussan's description of the secular Jewish-Israeli school system, students from this sector more often described a learning experience that was less authoritarian and more democratic. They typically described more 'open' classrooms, encouraging dialogue. According to Hofstede (1980), Israeli society was found the least hierarchical among the 51 nations he surveyed, with regard to power relations. Accordingly, students from a secular background described relations with their teachers as either very close and personal or, on the contrary, characterized by mutual disrespect and disregard. These characterizations reflected the environment in which they were raised, and they described similar relations with their parents.

Nevertheless, students depicted the more democratic and open learning environment with its pretences of encouraging independent thinking and creativity, as often becoming over permissive, leading to classrooms that were 'out of control'

with very little discipline enforced. Students described classrooms with disruptive students, and many teachers unable to enforce their role as moderators and discussion leaders. These teaching methods were, to a large extent, reflected in the way these students acquired EFL. Many students described an unruly English class, with disruptions and either an uncaring teacher or one without tools to control the class. Many explained that they eventually stopped going to class altogether due to the class conditions.

Over the course of the year, students from such a background were typically more involved in classroom discussion and activities, if not over involved at times. Unlike their more 'traditional' counterparts, they were uninhibited to ask questions, in general, and critical questions, in particular. They took an active role in their learning process. This seemed to be facilitated by the fact that their concept of teacher-student relations was an equality relationship. While this contributed to their learning process, as it permitted them to be more participatory, at times students over-stepped that teacher-student boundary and many times involvement was excessive and had to be restrained. That is, these students lacked tools to conduct an orderly disciplined dialogue.

Diagram 7.1 presents the shared experiences described by students from more 'traditional' and less 'traditional' backgrounds and the links between family structure, school, and EFL methodology they described.
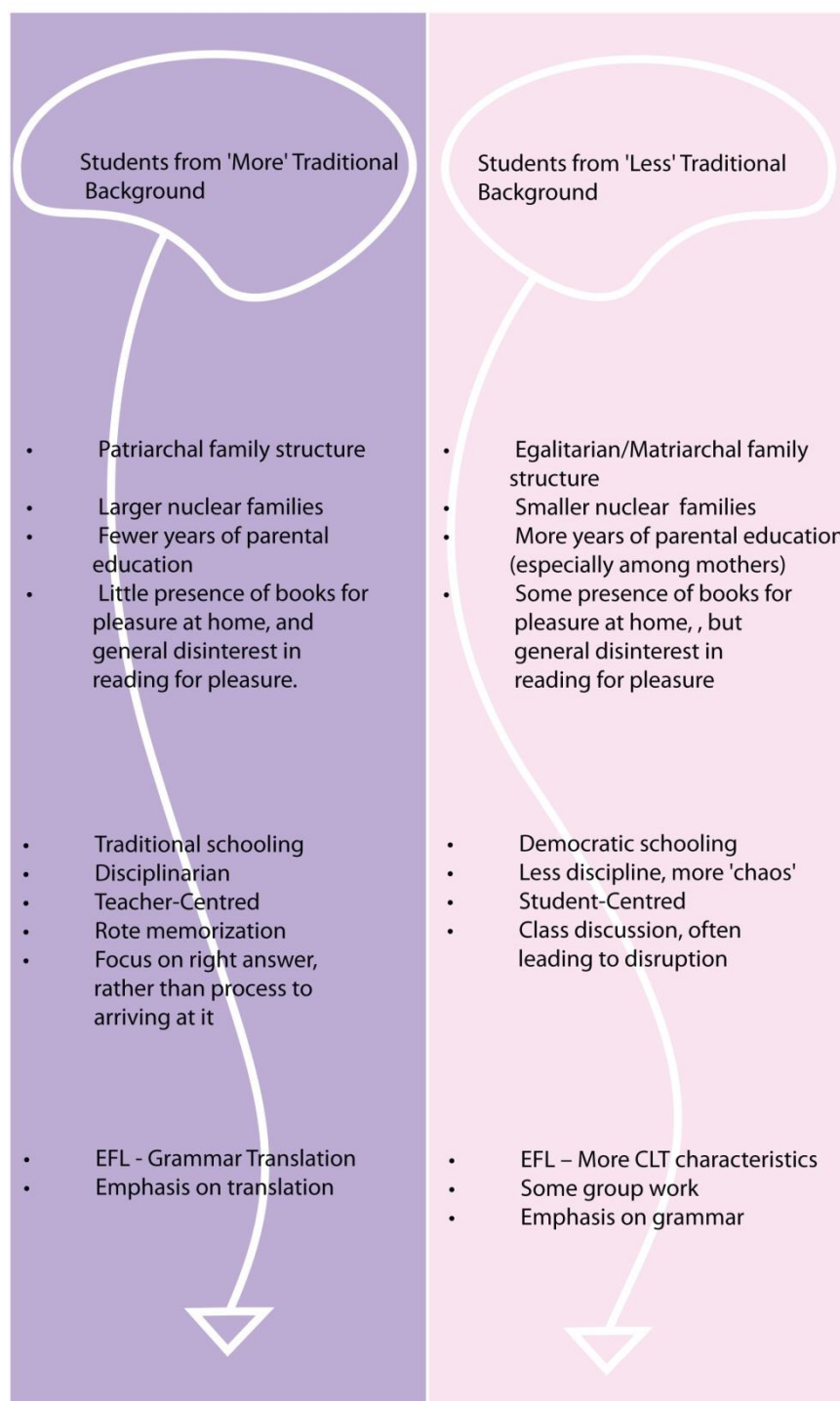
Diagram 7.1 Patterns of family, school and EFL experiences perceived by students from more 'traditional' and less 'traditional' backgrounds

Thus, what occurred in my classroom was a 'clash' of cultures. As Ballard (1996) observed**,**

> *In a society that emphasizes respect for the past and for the authority of the teacher, the behaviour of both teachers and students will mirror these values. A society that rewards independence and individuality will produce a very different classroom etiquette* (p.154)*.*

In my teaching context, both societies and mindsets existed within the same classroom and same society, with my role as a teacher to moderate between them and create an environment that permits learning to take place. This position naturally placed me in the position of moderator and orchestrator with the aim of conducting 'the orchestra' of different systems of beliefs and assumptions which students held in an attempt to unify them, not by producing one voice, but a united harmony of voices for attaining the shared goal of a successful learning process. The 'clash' of cultures must become a fruitful meeting of cultures in order for learning to take place.

Despite cultural and conceptual differences, all the students who came to prepare for their English matriculation exam, whether they came from more 'traditional' or less 'traditional' backgrounds and educated accordingly, had not acquired English at an adequate level to pass the national exam. Both the more 'traditional' and the less 'traditional' systems of education failed these students alike. While all students equally shared weaknesses, their weaknesses were distinct, often to the culture they came from (See Diagram 7.1). Still, the vast majority of all the students in the class equally lacked effective reading strategies, and their reading skills both in English and their respective native languages were weak.

My teaching, clearly influenced by my Western upbringing and American education, had to be modified to enable my students to gradually accept the teaching methods I 'imported'. For this to occur, I also had to adopt certain methods that students were more familiar with in order to accommodate their learning process. This involved taking a semi-disciplinarian role in order to manage the class effectively, while still encouraging dialogue and discussion in an organized fashion.

7.3 Cultural Differences in the EFL Classroom

As explained in chapter 1, Israeli society is under continual influence and transformation as a result of dynamic cultural encounters between diverse immigrant and native populations which make up Israeli society. The classroom I teach is a microcosm of this encounter, presenting the challenge of integrating the diverse cultural backgrounds that each student imports to the classroom. The level of integration they showed in Israeli society, in general, and in the language classroom, in particular, played a significant role in their involvement within the classroom culture and the extent to which they became active members in their learning process.

Literature has shown that students' integrationist behaviour heightens their motivation to learn and facilitates language acquisition (Gardner, 1985; Dörnyei, 1990). Dörnyei (1990; 2003) has further found that when the student's self-concept is a construct of his/her identification with the target language culture, motivation to learn the language increases. The motivating factor in their language learning is related to their construction of an ideal self as integrated within that culture (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009). However, this body of research has focused on the level of students' integration within the target language culture. Lamb (2004) has extended these constructs and has found that students are more motivated to learn English if their ideal self is integrated, not with any particular culture, but a more global English-speaking community. The current study has found that integration within the classroom culture, rather than the target language, was instrumental to language learning. Integration within the classroom culture was further found to be related to students' level of intercultural competence.

The development of intercultural competence over the course of the year clearly enhanced students' learning process and language acquisition. According to Byram (2000), intercultural competence comprises five elements: attitudes (an open attitude to other cultures), knowledge (of other social groups), skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural

awareness/political education. In order to develop intercultural competence in the programme emphasis was placed on developing these elements. Discussions were conducted in class regarding the different cultures students came from, either spontaneously as the issues were raised in class or through structured texts that were taught in class (e.g., food representative of culture, gender roles in society) via the 'neutral' language of English, as it was the language foreign to all of them. Students were encouraged to learn new vocabulary by translating it to their native languages in addition to Hebrew. Comparisons were made between certain structures in English and their native languages. Thus, students' cultural backgrounds were respected and celebrated in class so that they would be able to more easily accept and integrate new ones. These opportunities for questioning one's own system and that of the other cultures were intended *'to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange'* (Byram, 2000).

The process of integration within the classroom culture as a result of the development of intercultural competence was unique to each cultural group, as each shared a pattern of learning behaviour which required similar adjustments necessary for integration. The process each group experienced is presented below.

7.3.1 Students Learning English as a Third/Fourth Language

7.3.1.1 Students of Ethiopian Background

<div align="right">

ቀስ በቀስ ዕንቁላል በግራ ይሄዳል

Slowly, slowly, the egg begins to walk

(Amharic Proverb)

</div>

In their study of Ethiopian students in Haifa University, Barkon & Avinor (1995) found a link between academic difficulties of students from Ethiopian background and their deprivations of early childhood exposure to reading. Because more often their parents have no formal education, the written form of language is typically acquired relatively late. They typically are not read to as children and are not exposed to the experience of book reading as children. As such, Barkon & Avinor concluded that these students have missed out on the significant experience

of exposure to reading skills and strategies, the 'building blocks' necessary for academic success later in life. Moreover, their immigration process leaves them without a strong command of any language. They are caught without a strong mastery of their mother tongue, as it is often abandoned once they migrate to Israel, while they struggle with the acquisition of the new language of Hebrew. In contrast to their mother tongue which was taught orally, they are taught Hebrew through written form with which they have little or no experience.

> *This lack of LI maintenance has resulted in a temporary 'language displacement', i.e. the younger immigrant generation appears to be in the process of losing their LI before mastering a second one, resulting in a lack of native-like command of any language* (Barkon & Avinor, 1995, p.4).

Sever (1994) contends that due to the oral transmission of information that Ethiopian children are accustomed to, written texts should be introduced orally so that they become more familiar with literary conventions and written forms through a mode with which they are more familiar.

> *The problem with learning to read on the basis of an oral native tongue is that analogies for literary expressions used in written texts are not readily identifiable* (p.3)*.*

When learning English, language learning is further complicated. These students translate into Hebrew, but as they do not fully command Hebrew, they are unable to refer to their native language to comprehend what they read.

The three students of Ethiopian background who participated in the programme shared similar childhood circumstances as those described by Barkon & Avinor. Their parents were illiterate, had no formal schooling, and were unable to read to them as children. All emphasized the strong oral, rather than literary, exposure to language they had at home. They began the year with the lowest averages among all the students in the programme. All of them relied heavily on their listening skills and displayed decoding difficulties. They all showed at the start of the year a loss of orientation when presented with written material. Their diagnostic level tests indicated not only weak language skills, but also weak problem-solving skills. Sever (1994) suggests greater emphasis on teaching reading orally to Ethiopian children in order to familiarize them with literary conventions.

In order to facilitate the process, reading aloud, hearing literary texts and having the expressions explained not only in their lexical sense but in their social and cultural significance can make the process easier (p.4)*.*

Thus, an effort was made to capitalize on my students' advanced listening and oral skills to enhance their reading. More reading aloud and hearing literary texts were used with these students. They would record the list of vocabulary to be learned for quizzes and were encouraged to study them orally alongside the written list. This was a rather simple procedure, as all students are now equipped with cell phones with recording features. Students were also exposed to texts on online websites with listening features (e.g., http://kidshealth.org).

Another characteristic that facilitated learning for two of the students was their active seeking out a stronger partner from whom to learn and get assistance. This characteristic was indicative of their desire for integration within the classroom culture. This behaviour also indicated these students' understanding that actively seeking assistance is beneficial to their learning process. This proved to be a very useful and significant strategy for their progress.

Interestingly, Tamar, who immigrated at the oldest age, had the strongest grasp of Amharic. Still, this stronger mastery of her L1, including reading skills, did not aid her in the acquisition of English as a third language. In fact, she showed the greatest difficulties and resistance to the programme. Of all three, she opted for the separation strategy. In her interview she revealed her disappointment and failure in diverse education programmes in Israel, in comparison to the education she received in Ethiopia. Her high rate of absenteeism and lack of cooperation when present in class indicated a lack of attempt at integration. This pattern of behaviour echoed her reports of lack of integration within Israeli society in general.

On the other hand, Miriam, who immigrated as a child, seemed to have acquired Hebrew well, and her love for reading in Hebrew when she learned to read equipped her with good reading strategies which she applied in the course. While she had severe decoding difficulties in English, the listening exercises and tools used throughout the course helped her improve these skills. She compensated for this difficulty with her stronger Hebrew reading strategies. Her strategy of seeking help from one of her Russian peers was also instrumental in her

progress. Her integration within the classroom culture reflected her full integration within Israeli society, as she defined herself as an Israeli, but proud of her Ethiopian roots.

Yoni, who was born in Israel, showed the greatest amount of progress among all three students. Starting the course with difficulties in decoding or understanding literary conventions, he nevertheless, overcame them with his complete integration within the classroom culture. He sat in the front row and was an active participant in class. He actively sought out partners to work with who were the strongest students in class. He also fully embraced and appropriated all the strategies taught. These abilities led to his complete engagement with the text when reading. Within Israeli society, Yoni believed he was fully integrated, defining his identity as clearly native born Israeli, while still expressing pride in his Ethiopian background.

Thus, it appears that the level of integration within the dominant Israeli culture, dependent on birth in Israel or age of immigration, played a role in the progress each of these students made.

7.3.1.2 Students from the Former Soviet Union

Без труда́ не вы́тащишь и ры́бку из пруда́

Without effort, you can't even pull a fish out of the pond

(Russian Proverb)

The significance of literacy, education and thereby language for immigrants from the Former Soviet Union has been recognized in the Israeli classroom, as students from this population often display high linguistic awareness, great concern with grammar and high reliance on dictionary translation (Lehrer Bettan, 2007; Bensoussan, 2009). However, many students who migrated from the Former Soviet Union have learned no English at school before coming to Israel and have had no exposure to the language.

Although Soviet high school students were required to study at least one foreign language (not necessarily English), this usually amounted to deciphering texts with a dictionary and making lists of vocabulary, while

conversation and writing skills were minimal…general motivation to acquire
English and other foreign languages was low (Lehrer Bettan, 2007, p. 69-70).

Bensoussan (2001) similarly found that in general immigrants from the Former
Soviet Union have advantaged educational status that permits them to enter Israeli
universities, but at the same time they struggle with language difficulties, beginning
with deficiencies in both Hebrew and English in comparison to their peers. In a later
study she and her colleagues compared this population of students with native
speakers of Hebrew and Arabic. She found that native speakers of Russian who
began at a lower level in comparison to the other two groups of students
outperformed both groups by the end of the Pre-Advanced English course taught at
Haifa University. She concluded,

> *One contributing factor of their success may have been their prior education*
> *and highly literate background before coming to Israel. Another is the*
> *growing support that the Russian language is receiving due to the large*
> *Russian speaking community in Israel* (Bensoussan *et al.*, 2009, p.229).

In fact, in her study, the native speakers of Russian showed impressive scores in
both their English and Hebrew courses. They were able to make gains in both
languages, indicative of a link in the success of both.

As the data suggest, the students from the Former Soviet Union who
participated in the programme shared some of the characteristics described above.
They described a difficult immigration process when arriving to Israel, involving
language difficulties, and all spoke Russian at home with their families.

However, the relationship between age of immigration and degree of
achievement was reversed among the students with Former Soviet Union
background from those of Ethiopian background. Paulina, who immigrated at the
oldest age, never learned English at school, arrived at the programme with virtually
no knowledge of the language, but made the most progress in her exam scores.
Elana learned English as early as first grade in Russia. When she came to Israel at
the age of eight, like Boris, all efforts turned to the acquisition of Hebrew. Boris,
who immigrated to Israel at the youngest age, made the least progress on exam
scores.

Among all three, only Paulina displayed advanced reading skills in her native language, as indicated by her reading strategy exercises. While she entered with the lowest level of both English and Hebrew at the start of the year, she made the greatest gains, closing the gaps with her peers and outperforming many of the non-immigrant students in class who began the year at a higher English level. It appears that Paulina, who had a firmer grasp of language structure and more advanced reading skills in her native language, had an advantage over her peers in class. Elana and Boris who spent their early childhood maintaining their native Russian and acquiring Hebrew were proficient in neither. This linguistic confusion seems to have affected their reading in general and hindered their acquisition of English as a third language in particular.

In terms of learning approaches, regardless of age of immigration, all three students shared a number of characteristics. All began the programme with heavy reliance on dictionary work. Also, despite their inter-individual differences, they were committed to and invested in their learning process. Homework preparation and participation in class were highly regarded by these students and a strong sense of discipline was observed among them. Consequently, all three underwent a transformation which involved the gradual process of acquiring and applying the reading strategies taught in class and weaning translation techniques.

Another common characteristic was the role they assumed as tutors to their peers in class. Each student worked with a student who was weaker than they were, from a culture different from their native one, and assumed the position of reader, explainer and/or tutor. In Elana's and Paulina's case, this may be due to the teacher model they received at home from their parents. Yet, even Boris, whose parents did not have post-secondary education or teaching professions, took on a similar role. All seemed to realize that the process of learning involved figuring out the path to arriving at an answer, and that the need to explain that path to a weaker student, mediating it in terms that the other student can understand, only strengthened their own comprehension. This is a realization that was distinct to this group of students. Perhaps co-teaching/co-learning behaviour is rooted within

the former Soviet education system which these students have acquired, either in their childhood in the Former Soviet Union or at home from their parents.

While these students shared learning approaches specific to their background, all three were well integrated within the classroom culture, as exhibited by their cooperation with other students and their continuous engagement with their classmates and teacher. They often shared with me their process of learning, relating to me the materials they were reading and the vocabulary lists they were preparing. They were willing to share their approaches with their classmates and at the same time adopt new ones indicative of the high intercultural competence they possessed. This classroom integration reflected their integration within Israeli society as well. They defined their identities today as clearly Israeli with much pride in their Former Soviet Union culture, displaying their integration of both cultures within their identity.

7.3.1.3 Student from Argentinian Background

Un hombre educado nace dos veces

A man who is educated is twice born

(Argentine Proverb)

Alberto was the only student in the class who immigrated to Israel from Argentina. Like many Argentinian immigrants in Israel (The Jewish Federation, 2002), he came from an educated middle class background. He grew up in a home with books and a rich literary background.

Like the other students who immigrated as teenagers, Alberto concentrated on integrating within Israeli society. The language barrier had to be overcome for integration to succeed. While he had studied English at school in Argentina, when he arrived at the programme, any previous knowledge he had of English was eroded. He entered at an extremely low level with very few reading strategies, mainly translation, like his peers from the Former Soviet Union.

Alberto's strong early life exposure to reading and language seemed to have played a significant factor in the progress he made over the year and the achievements he reached. Although his English level was one of the weakest at the

start of the year, his proficiency in his native language and possession of general reading skills were crucial, it seems, to his ability to reach one of the highest grades in the class.

Another factor that must be taken into account is that his native Spanish was a distinct advantage over his classmates. The similarity in orthography between Spanish and English, the left to right reading direction, and the large number of cognates the two languages share, clearly facilitated his language acquisition, in comparison to the native speakers of other languages in class (Geva, *et al.*, 1997).

As was found with all the immigrant students who succeeded in the programme, integration within Israeli society was also reflected by integration within the classroom culture. Alberto had a strong sense of belonging to Israel, while clearly maintaining his native Spanish and ties to Argentina where his parents still reside. This experience contributed to his integrative skills and intercultural competence in class. He was engaged with me and his classmates throughout the process of his learning. He entered a negotiation of learning and reading approaches early in the year, which led to his engagement when reading a text in English.

7.3.1.4 Students of Arab-Israeli Background

اينما يحل المعلم تنمو الزهور

Repetition teaches even a donkey

Much has been written on teaching EFL in the Arab world. The vast majority of the literature has raised the problems of teaching English to native speakers of Arabic. The failure of the EFL endeavour has most often been blamed on cultural differences and the implications these have on knowledge acquisition and teaching strategies in general. The division outlined earlier in this chapter between more 'traditional' and less 'traditional' societies is especially emphasized in discussions on EFL in the Arab world. According to Fareh (2010), who examined EFL teacher training in many Arab speaking countries, successful acquisition of English in these

regions is hindered by flawed pedagogy which still clings to Grammar Translation

methods with teacher-centred methodology.

> *… teachers talk most of the class time and they rarely give students a chance to speak or ask questions. This practice can be attributed to the fact that teachers need to maintain discipline in the class by not allowing the students to talk or interact with each other. As a result students get bored and are less motivated to learn, and thus they become passive listeners* (Fareh, 2010, p.3602)*.*

Similarly, Mourtaga (2006) who examined teaching EFL in the Gaza strip, noted

schoolteachers asking students to repeat after them as they read out loud.

Students are required to read out loud, one-by-one, and translate into Arabic.

Authority is always maintained by the teacher who is reluctant to allow any

student-student interaction for fear of the disruption and disorder this may

introduce. Rote memorisation is an integral tool of this kind of pedagogy, which is

described as

> *… a paternalistic and authoritative system that emphasizes imitation and memorisation of fixed patterns rather than learning of research skills and the ability to develop solutions to problems* (Mourtaga, 2006, p. 2).

Thus, these students do well on exams which require rote memorisation, but fare

poorly on exams which require analysis, creativity, critical thinking or problem

solving (Fareh, 2010).

In Israel, students from the Arab-Israeli sector typically get lower scores on

national exams which are pre-requisites for acceptance to university studies

(Svirsky & Dagan-Buzaglo, 2009; Abu Asba & Abu Nasra, 2010). In 2009, only 41% of

Arab-Israeli high-school students were eligible for taking the national matriculation

exams, and 31% among these met university entrance requirements, in comparison

to 52.4% of students from the Jewish education system who were eligible to take

the exams, of which 47.3% met university entrance requirements. In addition, in

the 2010 national psychometric exams, Arab-Israeli students scored 97 points

lower in the Arabic version of the test than Jewish-Israeli students scored on the

Hebrew version of the exam (468 as opposed to 565, respectively) (National

Institute for Testing and Evaluation, 2010). The exam has been criticized for being

culturally biased. In a study conducted by Abu Asba & Abu Nasra (2010), 120 Arab-

Israeli university students were interviewed about their perceptions of the factors responsible for the low achievements of students in the Arab sector and found that students believed that the exam was fair and reflected their intellectual abilities. However, they felt that the Arab-Israeli school system did not equip them with appropriate skills for succeeding on the exam, and hence, for succeeding in higher education.

> *The majority of the students interviewed place blame on their schools, which still adhere to traditional teaching methods based on rote memorisation and not on critical and deep thinking which fosters creative thinking among students.* (Abu Asba & Abu Nasra, 2010, p. 11).

Bensoussan (2009) made similar observations in her comparative study of native speakers of Russian, Hebrew and Arabic. In their comparative study of Muslim Arab, Jewish Ultra-Orthodox, and secular Jewish classrooms of English, Leshem & Trafford (2006) found the Muslim Arab classroom they observed was teacher-centred, and the teacher's reactions involved repeating the student's answers and elicitation of factual information from student texts rather than open questions and discussion. The kind of pedagogy described in the literature was clearly experienced by the students from the Arab-Israeli sector who participated in the programme.

اينما يحل المعلم تنمو الزهور

Where the teacher strikes roses will grow

(Arabic Proverb)

Another issue raised by four of the Arab-Israeli students who participated in the programme was corporal punishment. They reported corporal punishment as a teaching tool used in class by their teachers to maintain the authority of the teacher and discipline in class. Mourtaga (2006) also raises the negative effect of corporal punishment applied on students on the learning process.

> *Unfortunately, many schoolteachers find it hard to believe that effective teaching/learning might take place without physical punishment* (p.10)

It should be noted that corporal punishment is against the law in Israel. However, two sectors where it is still practised and accepted by the community are the Arab and the Jewish Ultra-Orthodox sectors (Benbenishty *et al.*, 2002).

In support of the literature, Arab-Israeli students in the programme came with learning approaches resulting from such pedagogic training. They were reluctant to take part in classroom discussion and dialogue, and inexperienced with student-centred learning. This behaviour was most apparent at the start of the year when virtually all the students of Arab-Israeli background sat in the very last row of the classroom, as occurs every year. Rote memorisation was the main learning strategy these students possessed when entering the programme.

The lack of early life reading experience is another issue that has been addressed in the literature. According to Mourtaga (2006), students in the Gaza Strip arrive at university without having been exposed to reading books for pleasure.

> *Neither public nor private libraries exist. At home, fathers are more concerned about financing their big families than buying books, while mothers are always busy in their housekeeping. If some books are at home, they are always in Arabic and about Islam. Then how can we imagine developing students' reading comprehension with such little exposure, which is not enough to build a threshold for reading?* (p.6)

Mourtaga further explains that this phenomenon is related to the regard this population has to the Quran. The Quran is a holy text that cannot be questioned. It is recited out loud, word by word, and learned by rote memory. Thus, reading experience is learned as a process of recitation, and literary analysis is rarely practised.

> *The sanctity of the text should be mentioned with the Quran being the prime example that is not to be disputed, criticized, or contested. This attitude towards Arabic and the Quran makes Arab students inclined neither to survey an English text to see whether it is worth reading, nor distinguish between important and unimportant information* (p.6).

Among the students with Arab-Israeli background in the programme, only one spoke of exposure to books at home and a love for reading for pleasure. The rest of the students said they were not exposed to reading for pleasure as children, nor

enjoyed reading books for pleasure. As my Arab-Israeli colleague, Tariq, who is married to a native Jewish-Israeli, explained

> *Opening and reading a book for pleasure is not in our culture. My wife, for example, can sit and read a book for pleasure. The first time I saw my wife sitting down to read a book, it was a strange sight for me. We do not have parents sitting and reading a book before bedtime to their children.*

When students without literary background come to study reading comprehension at the programme, they are ill-equipped to cope with the reading material and tasks required of them. They cling to ineffective rote memorisation techniques in which they had been trained at school. As their diagnostic level tests illustrated, they used copy-paste techniques that clearly indicated they had not understood what they copied. They were concerned with 'getting the right answer' without necessarily understanding it, or the process to getting it. What is important, they have been taught, is the result, not the process.

This perception results in another ineffective learning behaviour of copying work from peers. In her doctoral dissertation, Jubran (2005), an Arab-Israeli English teacher writes:

> *…this rush for the Bagrut ［matriculation exam］ has come at a cost of the level of English in the Arab sector. No means was spared in the frenzy for the mark, including unethical considerations. The English Bagrut exam…has more evidence of cheating than any other subject* (p. 55)

In their attempt to produce the right answer, many of the students in the programme would submit work that was clearly not done by them, as it did not reflect their level. In quizzes and exams they would go to great lengths to copy answers. Even in reading strategy exercises, which were not for a grade, the majority of the students among this group would not work alone and attempt to share answers despite my request for the work to be completed individually. In interviews, several students reported of the rampant copying practices in their schools.

In the programme such practice is completely counter-productive, as their exam grades bear no weight, but are only indicators of their progress. It was explained to them on many occasions that their only grade would be their matriculation exam grade. There are several possible explanations for the

continued practice of copying work. The desire to succeed, especially as Arabs in a Jewish community, may be a driving force to succeed at any cost, led by the concept of the end justifies the means. The pressure on these students by their parents, in particular their fathers, to do well in their studies is significant, especially as they are younger than the rest of their peers in class, and still living at home with parents. Many have also arrived at the programme, not out of an independent mature decision, but out of parental pressure. The fear of failure and absence of internal motivation may explain why they opt to copy others' work, without attempting to understand the work on their own or seek help to understand. Moreover, if they have been trained by rote memorisation and have learned that the teacher is not to be questioned, their fear of raising questions or participating in discussion becomes understandable. If they have learned that not knowing the right answer results in getting hit by the teacher, the concern with getting the right answer rather than understanding how to reach it becomes clear.

Another possible explanation for copying work is the collectivistic nature of the environment in which they were raised. In a comparative study of cheating practices in three Lebanese and seven American universities, McCabe *et al.* (2008) found that cheating was much higher and more tolerated in Lebanese universities than American universities. They found that Lebanese students admitted to cheating on exams (66%) three times more than American students (21%). The differences were especially apparent for collaborative cheating, when one student willingly cooperates with another copying from him/her. McCabe *et al.* associated this behaviour with the collectivist culture of the students.

> *…we believe these data provide significant support for the view that Lebanese university students are strongly influenced by the norms of the collectivist society in which they are raised.* (p. 464).

The researchers raise the problem of judging non-Western practices with Western standards.

> *…viewed through a collectivistic lens one could argue that the Lebanese students are behaving exactly the way they were raised to behave—working together to navigate a difficult task. A better solution will probably be found by developing collectivistic-appropriate teaching strategies that emphasize and take advantage of the power of collaborative work* (p.465).

If these students are to succeed in a learning institution with Western standards, the process of teaching them to capitalize on the collaborative strategies they are familiar with while gradually introducing individualistic strategies is necessary. Rather than chastising my students for copying, the classroom culture that was developed opened up discussion regarding such behaviour, (the utility of group work versus the counter-productivity of copying), and the negotiation of alternative approaches for the purpose of their progress was conducted.

As was observed among immigrant students, those Arab-Israeli students who developed intercultural competence underwent a process of integration within the classroom culture. The gradual shift to become participant members of classroom dialogue, asking questions, adopting new reading strategies, and shifting focus from outcome to process, resulted in significant progress among the students who were willing to appropriate and integrate these approaches. One example is Samir, who at the start of the year moved his chair back so as not to sit too close to me and copied his first exam, and by the end of the year learned that the process of learning was linked to his involvement and participation in class, and to his engagement with me as his teacher. This in turn led to greater engagement with the text. At the end of the year, I received an email following his final exam, sharing with me how well it went. This gesture is indicative of his ability to adopt the more 'democratic' form of communication with teachers that we encourage in our college, while at the same time the email message reflected his cultural world, written in formal language of respect to his teacher.

Gender differences played an important role in the willingness to enter the process of change. The integration process described above was observed only among the male students in this group. None of the female students underwent a similar process. Their reluctance to change the cultural norms they were raised in was much stronger. One of them, with the highest level of English among the native Arab speakers at the start of the programme, had made almost no progress by the end of it. Although she was one of the only students to report having a reading background, she also expressed her dissatisfaction with the strategies taught in the programme and persisted on the continued use of the Grammar

Translation method and rote memorisation techniques she was trained to use as a schoolgirl.

Gender-based difficulties of Arab females were the subject of a study conducted by Abu-Rabia-Queder & Arar (2011). In a comparison they conducted between female Arab-Israeli students attending Israeli and Jordanian universities, they found that they were more successful academically in the Muslim institutions they attended in Jordan where they shared a common ethnic and national ideology than in Israeli institutions with Western ideology where they were the minority. In their study they explain that female Arab students have to cope with greater patriarchal pressure when attending Western universities. They are expected to stay close to home and when studying and/or living on campus with mixed genders they are under constant tension and scrutiny to act 'appropriately'.

The female Arab-Israeli students attending the programme appear to be confronted with similar tensions. This may be the reason they persisted to remain 'silent' members in the class, interacting very little with students from other sectors in the class, and reluctant to adopt any of the reading strategies taught in class. This appears to explain why they kept a distance from me, a female Western teacher, as I may have been regarded as a negative figure attempting to lead them to break those codes. Despite many attempts to include them in classroom activities and discussion, placing them in groups with students of other cultures, and conducting discussions with them and the programme student advisor, no significant change took place, and they failed to make any real progress.

To change the above-described situation so that female Arab-Israeli students make progress similar to their peers, several lessons are to be learned from this study. Teachers with a Western background must first understand the cultural circumstances these students are coming from and the emotional difficulties they are struggling with in a mixed-gender Western institution. As a teacher in this context for many years, I had not realized how difficult the transition to such a learning environment may be for them. This means that more time should be spent individually with them before placing them in groups with other students, especially male ones. In addition, an external body of support in the college may be

of significant value. Abu-Rabia-Queder & Arar (2011) suggest the establishment of a support group to help these students with the adjustments necessary for successful integration.

> *To alleviate the sense of isolation, an auxiliary social network, institutionalized at the university level, should be set up for women, offering personal mentoring of instructors and students, assistance with language and official procedures and bureaucracy that Bedouin and Palestinian women students had not encountered previously, as well as emotional and economic supervision and support* (p. 367).

As a consequence of the current study, discussions have begun to be conducted with our programme director, and the College Academic Committee, on the subject of offering support to our students from the Arab-Israeli sector, especially females, to ease transition and make them feel more integrated within the campus community.

In addition, as parents have such a strong influence and interest in the academic success of their children in this student population, it may be beneficial to involve parents in the students' learning process. Perhaps if parents learn more about the programme and the significance of the student's engagement in the process, rather than on results, they will become instrumental partners in helping the students undergo the transition necessary for their academic success.

While they share many of the characteristics described in the literature regarding Arab speakers learning English, these issues are further complicated in the Israeli context. In the background of a long history of conflict between native Jewish-Israelis and Arab-Israelis, these students are brought together, in many cases for the first time, in one classroom with one shared aim, to gain an education. As the largest minority group in Israel, and perhaps carrying certain conflicting emotions or even animosity regarding studying together with Jewish students and vice versa, the teaching situation is a sensitive one. As a minority group, these students arrive to this encounter at a disadvantage regarding English. According to Jubran (2005), Arab pupils are not exposed to English in the same way that their Jewish counterparts are, in particular secular Jewish ones. Schools don't have an 'English Room' as is customary in Jewish schools, and English books are not available in libraries. Another important point she raises is the fact that virtually all

English teachers in the Arab sector are native Arab-Israelis, while some 40% of the English teachers in the Jewish sector are native English speakers, immigrants from English speaking countries, who use Western teaching practices. She raises the fact that the English curriculum written by the Ministry of Education is replete with Jewish culture content (e.g., Yitzhak Rabin's assassination, or Jewish holidays) which has no relevance to Arab-Israeli students and is therefore hardly motivating. When these circumstances are taken into consideration, it becomes understandable why students from the Arab-Israeli sector prefer to sit in the back row, together, as if attempting not to be seen or heard. Any encounter with the 'Other', especially an advantaged 'Other' for whom they may feel animosity or conflict, is bound to heighten these fears and suspicions.

Jubran (2005) found another important distinction between Arab-Israeli school children who grew up in exclusively Arab-Israeli villages and children who grew up in mixed Arab-Israeli and Jewish-Israeli urban centres. Those students who grew up in mixed communities were found to be more integrated within mainstream Israeli society and were more motivated to learn English, as they had a more positive attitude to the language and the culture it represents. In contrast, those students growing up in Arab-Israeli villages expressed a negative attitude to English, as representative of Western culture and values. All the students attending the programme came from Arab-Israeli villages, and many exhibited separationist behaviour at first and a negative attitude to English, supporting Jubran's findings. As one of the students from this group shared with me, '*I want to be a PE teacher. What do I need English for?*'

For these reasons, all efforts must be made to integrate these students within the classroom culture. Group work becomes an excellent format for this cultural exchange. As students from this sector have strong collectivistic learning skills, this strength should be capitalized. Despite their collectivistic nature, many do not know how to work in groups in class, as they have rarely experienced such classwork. For this reason, this learning approach must be carefully introduced and structured. As a first stage, these students need to be separated and placed in mixed culture groups, so that they do not stay in the habit of relying upon their

peers for the 'right answer'. In a new group, they become active members who must contribute to solving a task. Each student in the group is given a defined role, so that the group can effectively complete the task only if all its members take an active role.

When students of different backgrounds were required to complete a task together and had to 'join forces' to solve a problem, the result was often a better understanding and acceptance of the 'Other'. Those initial fears or sentiments of animosity dissipated for most students, as they expressed in interviews. As Ahmed recounted,

> *This is the first time I studied with students from different cultures. I liked working this way, because I realized that everyone has the same goal – everyone is here to learn, not like in school. And that we can learn from each other.*

Interestingly, a similar sentiment was expressed even more strongly by a native Jewish-Israeli student who grew up in a Jewish settlement where he witnessed a number of terrorist attacks which took the lives of several of his friends during his senior year in high-school.

> *At first it was extremely difficult for me to sit in class with Arab students. My initial instinct was to be very suspicious. But now, I can distinguish between anti-Israeli activist Arabs and Arab-Israeli citizens who are here to learn with the same aims as I have and to get on with their lives.*

As can be seen, the encounter with the 'Other' in the classroom, through group work that is at first 'imposed' on them led to a different view of the 'Other'. In the collaborative work needed to complete classroom tasks, they learned to be less suspicious of one another. In the unified aim to succeed in the programme, they eventually see each other less as 'Other' and more as members of the 'Same' group.

7.3.2 Students Learning English as a Second Language

לא הביישן למד ולא הקפדן מלמד

The shy cannot learn and the pedant cannot teach

(Ethics of the Fathers)

Unlike immigrant and Arab-Israeli students, native Jewish-Israeli students learn English as a second language. Twenty-one students of native Jewish-Israeli background attended the programme. Their average score at the start of the year was the highest of all the groups examined (46.90%), but was still below passing. As a group, the native Hebrew speakers received the highest average both at the start of the programme and at its end. This result supports other studies conducted on native Hebrew speakers. For example, in her comparative study on native speakers of Hebrew, Arabic and Russian, Bensoussan (2009) found that among the three groups, the native Hebrew speakers received the highest average scores in Haifa University's advanced English level course.

Several factors can explain why the average score of this student group is usually the highest in academic institutions in Israel. As discussed earlier, because these students are studying English as a second language, no other language has an interference effect on its acquisition. Native speakers of Hebrew did not have the same struggle as their immigrant and Arab-Israeli peers to become proficient in Hebrew, and they could focus their efforts on acquiring English from a young age. In addition, the importance of the English language is most strongly stressed in the secular Jewish-Israeli community, which attempts to emulate Western lifestyle and ideology (Leshem & Trafford, 2006). For the purpose of connecting with the Western world and succeeding in it, English is regarded as a key asset. Thus, parents and schools invest many efforts in the subject. The combination of learning English as a second language, which is privileged in terms of subjects at school, higher parental education, and greater exposure to books at home, seemed to have provided these students with a higher starting point.

Still, in relation to the rest of the native Jewish-Israeli population, this group of students had a low entrance mark. That is, one would expect that the

combination of factors described above would result in higher diagnostic level averages. One general common theme that emerged was their dislike of English class because it lacked order or discipline. Students repeatedly spoke of disinterested and un-motivating teachers or well-intentioned teachers who were unable to control an unruly class. That is, the 'democratic' classroom, with its more 'modern' teaching methodology lacked the discipline necessary for conducting a lesson.

In addition, their diagnostic level tests indicated that they were trained in school to 'pass a test'. They applied copy-paste techniques to answer reading comprehension questions which indicated they had not fully understood the text. They were able to answer simple questions showing superficial reading abilities, though the vast majority was unable to show they had in-depth reading comprehension. These students had slightly better comprehension of syntax and grammar than the other student groups, apparently due to the massive emphasis placed on grammar in school. However, despite many years of having grammar 'pounded into their heads', as they reported, they did not have a strong grasp of English grammar either.

The process of appropriating new reading strategies which the majority had not been exposed to previously and breaking away from practising 'unseens' for the purpose of passing an exam, involved their need to integrate within the classroom culture, like their peers from other cultures. Not surprisingly, this group was the most easily integrated within the classroom culture. The majority of them had encountered language classrooms conducted in a student-centred approach, with group work activities, and open dialogue in the classroom which are employed in the language classrooms of the secular schools system (Bensoussan, 2009). Virtually all the students in this group were active participants in classroom dialogue and extremely involved in discussion about the material they read. Many were uninhibited in terms of expressing their thoughts and feelings regarding the materials taught and methods used in class. They would ask questions frequently and would not hesitate to seek assistance outside of class, whether by coming to

my office hours or communicating with me by email. Others felt just at ease to question and criticize certain activities or strategies taught in class.

In the Jewish tradition there are two teachings which children repeatedly hear growing up, 'the opposite of the wise is the one who doesn't know how to ask questions' which is read from the *Hagaddah* every Passover, and 'the shy cannot learn' from the *Mishna*. The typical 'Jewish mother' is supposed to ask her child every day after school, not 'what did you learn today?', but 'what question did you ask your teacher today?' In other words, the art of asking questions is one that is rooted within Jewish culture. This mentality observed by the behaviour of the native Jewish students supports the findings in Leshem & Trafford (2006), who reported that in the secular Jewish school open dialogue was practised and students were encouraged to partake in classroom discussions and ask questions in class. Rather than short question-answer exchanges, open-questions leading to fluent discussion in the target language dominated the lesson.

Still, the fact that most active participation and involvement came from the native Jewish-Israeli students, more so than the immigrant Jewish students, indicates another cultural dimension. The *sabra* (Heb: cactus) is a term used to refer to the native Jewish-Israeli as a metaphor alluding to the rough and prickly plant on the outside which is filled with a sweet fruit deep inside (Sela-Sheffy, 2004). The image and ethos of the *sabra* was born with the establishment of the State as a construction of the new Jewish image (the modern Israeli), in contrast to the old image of the European Jew (the weak exile in the Diaspora). The ethos of the *sabra* and the form of dialogue that it evolved is the subject of a study conducted by Katriel (1986). According to her, the linguistic exchange known as *dugri* talk represented the new *sabra* image. Semantically, *dugri* talk refers to speaking straight and to the point, or speaking honestly, in the sense of being true to oneself.

> *Dugri speech in Hebrew involves a conscious suspension of face-concerns so as not to allow the free expression of the speaker's thoughts, opinions, or preferences that might pose a threat to the addressee…In Hebrew, dugri speech is contrasted to lack of sincerity, hypocrisy, talking behind one's back, or at times diplomacy* (Katriel, 1986, p.11-12).

This speech developed as a form of defiance against Jewish European style of speech characterized by extremely polite discourse, as a way of adapting to the non-Jewish world in which Jews in the Diaspora lived. European stylistic and polite speech came to symbolize defensive and passive language, which would be replaced by anti-stylistic, anti-passive, natural and assertive speech. As such, Israeli *dugri* speech is by nature confrontational. While seeming disrespectful to an outsider, it is considered respectful to the insider in that it regards the addressee highly enough to be candid with him/her.

It is this cactus-like *dugri* speech that led this particular group of students to be engaged in the class and thus to be active participants in their learning process. These students often expressed resistance to strategies that they encountered for the first time, sometimes in ways which may be perceived by outsiders as offensive. Comments, both supportive and critical, and questions, were usually made in class in an explosive manner which would by American or European standards be viewed as disruptive, impatient and lacking in manners.

In her comparison between dinner talk among Jewish American and native Jewish-Israeli families, Blum-Kulka (1997) found that exchanges at the dinner table among American Jewish families reflected the more conventional patterns of American ritual conversation, with parents guiding the discussion and cuing their children's turn to speak. Such formal ceremonious speech differed from the dinner talk observed among the native Israeli families, where children and parents alike spoke on equal footing, one interrupting the other, as a reflection of lack of distance and equality which characterizes native Jewish-Israeli society, and children becoming equal co-participants in dialogue. Similarly, the English lesson became a cooperative endeavour among equals.

When examining narratives told at the dinner table, Blum-Kulka found that when Israeli families talked about their experiences, all the members took part in constructing the story, in contrast with American families who permitted one of the members to tell the story (Blum-Kalka, 1997). Similar discourse was reflected by behaviour of the native Jewish-Israeli students in the classroom. The joint performance of the students within the classroom discussion was pronounced. The

lesson was not 'owned' by me, the teacher, and I did not have 'authorship' of the lesson, rather it was jointly 'owned' and performed by all participants.

This raises the issue of appropriate classroom conduct and disruptive behaviour in the classroom. That is, as an American teacher accustomed to students who wait their turn to speak by being called upon by the teacher, I found myself in a teaching situation with students who have not been socialized to 'wait their turn'. On the contrary, they have learned that it is socially acceptable and desirable to produce a narrative together. In the classroom, similar to the conversational patterns observed by Blum-Kulka (1997), students felt free to interrupt the lesson to make a comment or ask questions when the thought occurred to them. Raising one's hand to wait for permission to speak is not necessarily a convention adhered to in the classroom. This behaviour was clearly viewed as rude by students of other sectors, as they reported in interviews.

Another interesting aspect of *dugri* speech which was observed in class is the seemingly direct, confrontational, manner of speaking (Katriel, 1986). Blum-Kulka observed that when children made a request from their parents, it would be followed by immediate negation by parents, followed by a gradual persuasion process until parents finally yielded to the request. Similarly, in class students first rejected a new idea or reading strategy, which was then followed by a negotiation process to convince the students of the benefits of the strategy. At the end of the process, more often than not, the majority of students from this group would eventually 'yield' and attempt the new strategy. Thus, the anticipated ceremony with this group of students was presentation of the new strategy, argumentation, negotiation, and compliance. It appears that the native Jewish-Israeli students have been socialized to conduct dialogue in this manner. They are not arguing or confrontational to reflect any real underlying conflict, rather this is a form of discourse necessary for reaching cooperation.

In order to reach these students, as with students of other sectors, a certain middle ground, a third space, had to be reached. By raising the issue of what can be discussed in class and how, students were required to enter a certain orderly civil manner of participation, rather than the more explosive and impatient discourse

they were accustomed to. I, on the other hand, accepted and welcomed their expressions of resistance, criticisms or general complaints as a way to enter into a dialogue regarding what was being taught. This most often permitted me to enter negotiation with them, to 'convince' them of the utility of the strategy.

When examining their progress throughout the year, what stands out is that in relation to students from other sectors, as a group, these students underwent a transition to a certain extent, but not as dramatically as the students studying English as a third/fourth language. Since these students began the programme at a higher average, the progress they can make is necessarily not as great as students starting with lower averages. Nevertheless, these students could have potentially made greater gains. While certain individuals did make impressive improvements, as a group, the transformations were not as pronounced. It appears that for students already familiar with more 'democratic' learning, their integration into the classroom culture was the smoothest. Unlike students for whom the methodology offered a completely new way of learning and growing which allowed them to undergo a dramatic transformation from what they had been accustomed to, students already familiar with it to a certain extent had less of a transition to undergo. Thus, their progress was not as powerful.

7.3.3 Conducting the Multicultural Orchestra of Students

Teaching a class of students from diverse cultures poses a particular challenge to a language teacher who also comes from a different culture. The creation of a third space where the teacher's and the students' cultural worlds can meet prepares important ground for comprehending one another's cultures as well as one's own. It is from this place that language learning can begin.

The journey of learning about my students' cultural backgrounds and worldviews has been instrumental in accessing their needs and capitalizing on their strengths. The strong oral skills and weak literary skills the students of Ethiopian background in class shared led to working through their oral skills to strengthen their reading skills. These students were aided by their peers to improve their literacy skills. While on the one hand the native Russian speaking students and

native Spanish speaking student had a strong grasp of language and syntax, on the other hand, they relied heavily on translation rather than global reading comprehension. These students learned from their peers how to rely less on their dictionaries and to access reading more directly, while at the same time they modelled for their peers dictionary skills and effective vocabulary learning skills. The native Arabic speakers in class who began the year as uninvolved spectators learned from their classmates the value of taking greater part in lessons by asking questions and contributing to the class, not necessarily by producing a correct answer, but by participating in the construction of a possible one. On the other hand, their collectivistic nature of working to complete a task was an important model for their classmates. The high involvement of the native Hebrew speakers was an equally important model for their initially non-participatory classmates. The array of learning behaviours and strategies, which were rooted in the cultural background of the students, were thus observed, shared, and modelled for one another. Clearly this process was not free of conflict, and while some students easily drew from and benefitted from the exchange with their peers, other students resisted the process and clung to old familiar learning habits, regardless of how effective or ineffective they were.

For this reason, conducting this exchange required a delicate balancing act, based on respect for one another, which would provide all students with an equal sense of belonging and a sense of security to share their cultural worldviews in class. Still, as the conductor of this orchestra of diverse cultures, while celebrating this diversity and encouraging an exchange of worldviews, a teaching approach which sought unison was attempted. Students were encouraged to undergo a learning process that required engagement in the lesson. Engagement required involvement in the learning process through open dialogue in class, based on civil discussion guided by the teacher. Students were expected to take an active part in the process of learning and emphasis was continually placed on the process, rather than the outcome. All students were guided to engage with the text when reading and to apply the specific reading strategies that were taught in class in order to develop critical thinking when reading. Thus, my students' local and context-

specific needs were recognized and addressed, while at the same time, they were balanced with a global EFL reading comprehension teaching methodology.

Promoting cultural diversity, while teaching a uniform learning approach, is a seeming paradox. However, as Wang and Byram (2011) found in their study of Chinese students learning in a British University, students with apparently dichotomous learning approaches to Western ones were able to adopt and integrate the new approaches, combining the two.

> *This means that in the practice of teaching, rather than adopting an assimilation approach or deprecating students' inherited learning resources, educators should encourage students to mobilise strategies transferable from their inherited learning culture whilst exploring and benefiting from alternative or new ways of learning* (Wang and Bryam, 2011, p. 421).

Similarly, the current study has found that it is this integrative ability that benefited students. The most surprising finding at the end of this exploration of the impact of cultural background on progress and achievement was that cultural, religious and linguistic background did not play the most significant role in students' success. Regardless of cultural background, those students who were most integrated within the classroom culture were also those students who underwent the most significant transition in their learning. Those students with the greatest intercultural competence were able to gain the most out of the exchange taking place in the third space, to adopt as many of the effective learning styles offered in it and appropriate them into their learning behaviour pattern. These students were also the most engaged in the classroom, which further impacted upon their engagement with a text. These students made the greatest gains between the start and the end of the programme (See Model 7.1).

Integration within Israeli society

Development of Intercultural Competence

- Through immigration process
- Through living in a multicultural community

Integration within 'classroom culture'

Engagement in classroom dialogue

- Adoption and acceptance of 'other' in class
- Adoption and acceptance of new learning and reading strategies

Engagement with text

- Marking the text to hi-light its structure and connection between key ideas
- Applying critical analysis when reading a text

Progress and Achievement in Reading Comprehension of Academic Texts in English

Model 7.1 Integration Model

As their teacher, a more profound understanding of these students' cultural backgrounds provided me with better tools for creating with them this third space where a productive exchange could take place. While at the start of this project I feared that such a process may lead to greater stereotyping or labelling of my students, at its end I realized that the opposite had in fact occurred. Rather than pre-judging students based on their cultural background, respect for their diversity increased as I came to know more about their personal experiences and general cultural background. As a result of the process, my intercultural competence was in fact enhanced alongside that of my students.

According to Byram and Feng (2004),

…it is not the purpose of teaching, we would contend, to change learners into members of another culture, but to make them part of the group who see themselves as mediators, able to compare, juxtapose and analyse (Byram, 1997b)…The process of researching this would therefore be focused on how teachers and learners interact… (p.164).

As the model above suggests, those students who progressed and reached achievements in the programme were those who became members of the group, each maintaining their distinct cultural background and learning approaches, but with the shared desire to mediate the multiple cultures in class and integrate within the classroom culture. The role of the teacher in moulding the classroom culture becomes instrumental for this process to occur.

7.4 Teaching Reading Comprehension in EFL

Reading models that have been offered in the literature have basically focused on the relationship between bottom-up (micro-level) skills, which refer to reading at the semantic, syntactic and grammatical level of the text, and top-down (macro-level) skills, which refer to reading at the global comprehension level of the text (Grabe & Stoller, 2002; Eskey, 2005; Hinkel, 2006). Some contend that when reading in a foreign language, students will compensate for their lack of comprehension at the bottom-up level (the gap between their vocabulary or grammar proficiency in the L2 in comparison to their L1) by using top-down

strategies they possess in L1. Both the **Psycholinguistic Guessing Game Model of Reading** (Goodman, 1967) and the **Interactive Compensatory Model** (Stanovich, 1984) assume that students will activate their reading skills from L1 to comprehend a text. The Psycholinguistic Guessing Game Model suggests that readers do not decode every word they read, but rather scan a text and pick up cues to make hypotheses about what they will read. The Interactive Compensatory Model suggests that readers process information by activating both bottom-up and top-down skills simultaneously. Others maintain that a minimum level of vocabulary and grammar is required in order to access global reading skills to understand a text (Paran, 1996; Birch, 2002; Koda, 2005).

The problem with the above debate is that in the programme examined in the current study, the majority of students arrive with neither strong bottom-up nor top-down skills. Their vocabulary and grammar skills are as weak as their global reading skills. That is, they are unable to rely on semantic recognition or activate a strong grammar foundation, nor able to compensate for their weak vocabulary and grammar by accessing global reading strategies, as they don't possess these either. With only one year to prepare them for the matriculation exam, for practical reasons, the programme is unable to gradually build their bottom-up skills before introducing top-down skills. Nor can we afford the time to teach basic reading skills before getting down to the business of building vocabulary and grammar. However, not only for practical reasons, but also for theoretical ones, students are taught from the first day of class to build and activate stronger general reading strategies alongside vocabulary and grammar acquisition. The assumption is that these skills are not divorced from one another, but work together to produce meaning. One necessarily depends on the other, regardless of directionality. That is, students should build vocabulary and grammar with the help of reading strategies, and enhance their reading strategies by activating vocabulary and grammar knowledge. These skills complement one another in the complex task of reading comprehension.

Thus, the programme is constructed in an interactive manner to teach vocabulary, grammar and syntax, and reading strategies alongside one another

(See Appendix D for sample unit). For example, the strategy of comparison and contrast is developed both for comparing and contrasting between groups of words or grammatical structures at the micro-level, as well as comparing and contrasting between ideas at the macro-level of a text. In order to develop these strategies, great emphasis is placed on the process of reader engagement with the text. Students are taught to enter a dialogue with the text, using several marking techniques (i.e., circling terms and underlining definitions, using arrows to identify cause and effect, summarizing ideas in the margin of the text, etc.). These techniques also provided students with problem-solving tools. They were able to approach a task equipped with strategies and a plan for applying them in order to solve the task at hand. This approach to teaching reading comprehension in English proved beneficial to those students who appropriated and applied these strategies when reading. Similar to engagement in class discussion, engagement and involvement with the text became an important indicator of student comprehension.

Analysis of student practice tests showed a strong correlation between student engagement with the text and comprehension of the text at a micro- and macro-level, as indicated by their test results. Those students who made significant progress, such as Yoni, Alberto, and Paulina, developed their vocabulary and grammar alongside their reading strategies. Reading comprehension was thus enhanced both at the micro- and macro-level simultaneously. These students' progress indicates that it is not necessary to strengthen bottom-up skills before top-down skills, or vice-versa, but rather to present both simultaneously as complementary aptitudes. Nevertheless, other students, like Sarit, commented that they felt a major improvement in their vocabulary and grammar, but had not yet felt confident to use the reading strategies. They had difficulty applying the strategies in their native languages as well. For students with more difficulty developing problem-solving skills and reading strategies, more resources are required for strengthening them in these areas.

While most students entered the programme with weak reading skills, varying levels of L1 reading abilities were distinguished, most often due to early life

reading experiences. The value of childhood literacy has been recognized as an important factor in the student's reading comprehension abilities in a second language (Reese *et al.*, 2000; Gonzalez & Uhing, 2008; Hammer *et al.* 2003; 2009; Roberts, 2008). Similarly, this study found that childhood literacy, often influenced by cultural background, played a significant role in the reading comprehension skills of the students who attended the programme. Their parents' literacy and reading habits, as part of the environment they came from proved important. The students of Ethiopian background were all raised in homes where books were absent, as parents came from rural African villages where they had no access to literacy. In sharp contrast, for two of the three native Russian speakers and the native Spanish speaker in the programme, literacy played an important role at home. The parents of these students were middle-class professionals, with university degrees, working in the field of education. As such, they arrived at the programme with reading fundamentals in their native languages.

Literature on reading in the Muslim Arabic world has emphasized the significance of sacred texts in reading. Sacred texts, which are not to be contested, are usually learned by rote memorisation and recitation. Moreover, reading for pleasure is not highly valued (Mourtaga, 2006; Fareh, 2010). Among the eleven native speakers of Arabic in the program, this attitude to reading was reinforced both at home and in school. Only one student reported reading for pleasure in her childhood. Most grew up in homes with a mother who was a non-reader, which meant they did not grow up with the bedtime story ceremony. They arrived at the programme with heavy reliance on rote memorisation and lack of experience with text analysis or critical reading.

Among the native Hebrew speakers in the programme, the two male students coming from a religious background showed excellent reading fundamentals and a strong ability to read critically and analyse texts, apparently from the *Talmud* education they received in the religious school system. However, the majority of the secular native Hebrew speakers seemed unequipped to critically read and analyse texts. While, in general, reading for pleasure is advocated in the Israeli culture and the school system, the reading abilities of students in the Israeli

school system reached alarmingly low levels in the year 2000 (Sasson-Forstenberg, 2001) and have only recently shown a slight upturn (Zemer, 2009). The slight improvement shown by the 'Meitzav' exams (Hebrew acronym of School Efficiency and Growth Measurements) has also come under criticism as skewed by school attempts to exclude weak students from taking them and that they do not in fact reflect students' knowledge (Kahan, 2009). Universities and colleges around the country have persistently reported to the Ministry of Education that incoming students with matriculation certificates are unprepared for academic studies (Rashi & Ben Simon, 2010). The Ministry of Education has come under attack for not equipping students with necessary reading skills for coping with academic reading (Bluestein, 2011). In the 2008 international PISA exams, 10th grade Jewish-Israeli students scored an average of 456 on the reading section, well below the OECD average of 492 (Svirsky & Dagan-Buzaglo, 2009).

Of the 19 secular native Hebrew speakers in the programme the vast majority displayed weak general reading skills and reported they did not read extensively as children. These students either came from low or middle-class families, and all described literate parents, some of whom held first and second degrees. Nevertheless, the majority of students reported that reading for pleasure did not play an important role in their homes or in their childhood. This was evident by the weak reading skills in Hebrew these students presented upon arrival at the programme.

When examining inter-individual differences, an important observation made by Grabe & Stoller (2002) is that a student's L1 reading skills are essential for L2 reading acquisition. They point out that teachers too often do not take into consideration their students' L1 reading abilities. As a beginning teacher, I had made the same mistaken assumption that all students had been brought up with the same reading strategies I was taught and that my role as teacher was to merely provide them with the linguistic tools they were missing. However, as this study illustrates, teachers must take into account their students' L1 reading strengths and weaknesses. As such, these individual differences are often rooted within the students' cultural background.

For this reason, before each reading strategy that was presented to students as part of the curriculum, they were given a reading exercise that first assessed their ability to utilise that particular strategy in Hebrew or in their native language. This was a tool that was initially designed for the purpose of identifying which strategies students possessed and applied when reading in their L1 in the framework of this study. However, this turned into an effective teaching tool as well. Each reading strategy exercise sparked a class discussion which led to the introduction of the strategy to be taught. Structured scaffolding exercises followed, so that students would begin to become familiar with the strategy through simple, undemanding problem-solving tasks, before attempting more complex exercises, until the strategy was applied when reading a text. At the end of each unit, students took a practice exam modelling the matriculation exam, where the application of the strategy taught was needed to comprehend the reading passage.

The usage of reading strategy exercises supported the above argument in two ways. First, students studying English as a third language completed these exercises twice, once in their native language and once in Hebrew (their second language). The outcome of this process indicated that students' reading skills in their native language were very often similar to their skills in Hebrew. Similar errors were conducted in both versions, indicating they did not comprehend the concepts rather than the language used, and they lacked certain reading strategies to reach understanding.

When examining these initial reading strategies, what becomes apparent is that those students who made the most significant progress in the programme also showed improvement in their reading comprehension in Hebrew and their native languages. By the last reading strategy exercise, which demanded the most out of students in terms of comprehension, these students showed their ability to apply complex reading strategies to understand implied meaning, make connections between ideas, and read critically. In addition, much to my surprise, these students transferred the marking techniques taught in class when reading a text in English to texts in their native language. The process of engagement with the text had been fully appropriated and applied, regardless of language. More significantly, students'

early life reading experience, while playing a role in students' entry reading comprehension level, did not determine their success in appropriating reading strategies and enhanced reading comprehension. Such that, students like Yoni and Ehab who grew up with illiterate parents and an absence of books at home appropriated and applied reading strategies as well as students like Omer and Paulina who grew up with parents with university degrees and a richer reading background. As described above, these students' high level of intercultural competence was the key factor in their learning process.

7.5 Summary

This chapter discussed the findings of this case study in the broader frameworks of EFL methodology and multicultural studies in general, and in relation to EFL reading frameworks in multicultural settings in particular. Students' upbringing in more 'traditional' and less 'traditional' backgrounds was discussed in terms of current challenges of teaching EFL in such environments. This discussion established the need to create a classroom culture that enables students from diverse cultures to develop intercultural competence and to bridge between different learning approaches. The effect of students' cultural background on their approaches to learning, in general, and learning English, in particular, were discussed in relation to current literature on each group. The discussion then offered a model for teaching in multicultural contexts so that students gain from this unique learning encounter through integration within the classroom culture. The discussion concluded with the implications of this encounter on advancing students' reading abilities in English. In the following chapter this study comes to its conclusion. The research questions posed at the start of this inquiry are revisited and this study's contribution to knowledge is presented. Reflections and limitations of the process of conducting this research project are discussed, and practical implications of the findings are presented.

Chapter 8

Conclusions

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter I revisit the research questions posed at the start of this journey and relate to each with the insights I have gained in the attempt to address them. The contribution this thesis offers to the wider scholarly community is presented. I then reflect upon the paths I took and the limitations which I faced on the way. I conclude by presenting the implications of the study and courses of action that might be taken in future.

8.2 Addressing the Research Questions

This study began with my quest to find a teaching approach that would best address the diverse needs of my multicultural student group. For this purpose, I attempted to better understand the impact of culture upon diverse learning styles and approaches, and its impact on progress and achievement in EFL reading comprehension.

8.2.1 The impact of culture on approaches to learning EFL

In terms of the first research question that has guided this study, differing cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds showed an important impact on adult students' approach to learning English in various dimensions. This study has found that parental influence was most often echoed by a similar school influence and environmental influence shaping students' worldviews, as a result of either a more 'traditional' (and more religious to varying degrees) or less 'traditional' (and more secular) upbringing. These, in turn, established among students deeply rooted learning styles and expectations, in language acquisition as well. Students from a more 'traditional' background who more often grew up in patriarchal family structures learned in more authoritarian school systems, where English was

typically taught by teacher-centred methods. Students from a less 'traditional' background who more often grew up in egalitarian or matriarchal family structures learned in more 'democratic' school systems, where English was typically taught by student-centred methods. These contradictory learning styles met within the same classroom and were for the first time challenged and examined in the new learning environment of the programme.

The particular cultural background of students, whether immigrants from Ethiopia, the Former Soviet Union or Argentina, native Muslim Arab-Israeli, or native Jewish-Israeli, also played an important role in students' entry level, preferred learning styles, classroom and study behaviours. Certain patterns were discernible among students sharing the same background (See Table 8.1). Classroom observations and information students shared in interviews supported literature describing the experience of each sector in Israeli and other societies.

Cultural Background	Religious Background	Family Structure	Study Partners	Learning Styles at Start of Programme
Argentinian	Secular	Less 'traditional'	Cooperated with all student groups	• Over- translation • Highly engaged
Ethiopian	Secular	1 student - More 'traditional' 2 students - Less 'traditional'	Sought out stronger partners	• Strong oral skills • Decoding difficulties
Former Soviet Union	Secular	Less 'traditional'	Took role of peer tutor	• Strong grasp of language structures • Over-translation • Self-discipline
Muslim Arab Israeli	Maintained religious traditions (neither secular, nor religious)	More 'Traditional'	More collectivistic group work	• Greater isolationism from other classmates and teacher • Little participation • Greater concern with outcome rather than process • Rote memorisation
Native Jewish Israeli	3 students - Religious 19 students -Secular	3 students - More 'traditional' 19 students - Less 'traditional'	More individualistic working style	• Highly engaged • Asked questions frequently • Higher level of disruption • Higher level of open resistance, criticism expressed • Continuous dialogue with classmates and teacher

Table 8.1 Students' shared experiences, learning styles at programme entry, and observed classroom behaviours according to cultural background

Several factors emerged which were not rooted in cultural differences, though cultural background did play a role to a certain extent. **Age and level of maturity** played an instrumental role in the students' motivation to learn and their choice to continue and invest in their studies. A discernible age difference was found between students from the Arab-Israeli sector (average 21.2 years) and the rest of the students in the class (average 24.7 years) due to the army service Jewish students were obliged to complete prior to their studies. While most of the students from the Arab-Israeli sector were still living at home and reported the mainly paternal influence, and often pressure, to continue and succeed in their studies, most of their peers in the programme had undergone a maturation process in their army service followed by an extensive trip abroad on their own. Most of them were no longer living at home and made an independent choice to continue their studies. This difference had an important impact on the extrinsic versus intrinsic motivation to learn. While maturity level and motivation to learn are not cultural factors, in this particular teaching environment, culture differences necessarily played a role.

Parental influence also played a significant role on students' learning process. Maternal influence proved to be a strong predictor of a successful learning process. Regardless of cultural background, those students who reported strong maternal involvement in their education also made very impressive gains. The moving stories of Miriam and Tariq about their mothers, who despite their lack of education, encouraged their children to study, had a strong relationship with the efforts they invested in their learning process and their final achievements. In general, however, a pattern based on culture also emerged. Stronger maternal influence was found among students from less 'traditional' backgrounds, where parents shared more equal roles at home and at work, and particularly among students with divorced parents who came predominantly from the secular Jewish sector. Among these students, many reported the important role their mothers played in their education. Those students generally outperformed students who did not report a strong maternal influence in their education. Students from more

'traditional' patriarchal families spoke of a demanding father figure and less maternal involvement in their education or lack of parental involvement whatsoever. Those students who reported they had parents who were disinterested in their education performed very poorly throughout the year and their achievements remained low.

As expected, **parental education** was also linked with students' entry level. Parents in less 'traditional' families had more years of schooling in comparison with parents in more 'traditional' families. Secular mothers enjoyed more years of schooling than any other group of parents which may be one of the reasons for the finding described above. Also, students whose parents enjoyed more years of schooling were more exposed to early life reading experiences. These students typically showed better reading comprehension in their native languages on reading strategy exercises, which impacted upon their reading comprehension in English.

Another key issue was prior experience with languages. Students learning **English as a second language** entered at higher entry levels than students who were learning **English as a third/fourth language**. As the latter had concentrated most of their efforts at becoming proficient in Hebrew, English became a last priority. According to students, schools also played a role in reinforcing this condition by 'excusing' students from the added 'burden' of learning English alongside Hebrew. This 'excuse' has done them a great disservice, as the gap between them and learners of English as a second language only widened with time.

Thus, the inter-relationships between cultural (including social-familial and school experience), religious and linguistic (previous language experience) factors in students' background had a substantial impact on how students approached learning and reading, in general, and EFL reading comprehension, in particular, when they arrived at the programme.

8.2.2 The impact of culture on progress and achievement

Clearly those factors outlined above which influenced students' entry level and approach to learning also played a role in their progress and achievement. However, none of these factors had a determining role. Regardless of the background they came from or their entry level of English, virtually all students were required to undergo a process of adopting new unfamiliar approaches, which ran counter to how they had been taught formerly in their cultural milieu and to integrate them within their learning framework. In order to undergo this process successfully several significant factors were identified as necessary.

A third space as described by Kramsch (1993) grew out of the intersection of different cultures and worldviews to produce a 'classroom culture'. This space, not only allowed, but also invited students to express their cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds in a non-threatening and accepting fashion through both structured and unstructured activities. Students who did not share the same culture were required to work together to solve tasks and these repeated mini-encounters gradually exposed them to new learning styles, approaches, and worldviews. Within this space students also experienced classroom interactions and behaviours different from the ones in which they were socialized.

Students entered this dialogue and exchange at different levels. Some were integrated within this classroom culture from the onset of the programme, others resisted integration at the start but gradually entered the dialogue and eventually accepted and integrated within it, while others resisted integration throughout the entire year and opted for separation. Those students who integrated within the classroom culture showed greater intercultural competence, as outlined by Bryam (2000). The ability to appropriate learning approaches and behaviours of the 'Other', turning them into their own, was linked to their transformative learning process in which discovering the 'Other' led to discovering oneself.

This integrationist approach was linked to students' integration within mainstream secular Israeli society, as they expressed in interviews as well as their observed behaviour in class. Those immigrant students who reported a successful integration process within Israeli society and accepted both their native and

immigrant cultures as part of their identity showed a high level of intercultural competence. Similarly, those students who grew up in more 'traditional' environments who were able to successfully adopt less 'traditional' learning styles also showed high intercultural competence. Those students coming from less 'traditional', mainstream Israeli society, were also required to integrate within the classroom culture, which required them to accept viewpoints that do not conform to the mainstream, and to adopt new reading strategies and discourse behaviour.

This process proved to be an intrinsic part of students' progress in reading comprehension in English. In fact, all the cultural factors, including family, religion, environment, and language, which were found to strongly impact students' English reading level and learning style upon programme entry, did not pre-determine students' ability to improve and make progress. Rather, students' intercultural competence and ability to integrate within the classroom culture proved key to their progress and achievement.

8.2.3 Teaching EFL reading comprehension in the multicultural classroom

As the data indicated, the majority of students in the programme gained from the learning process and at its end reached impressive achievements in English reading comprehension, as reflected by their final exams. The average score of the class increased by 36.52 points, from 29.1% to 65.62%. Of the twelve students who made the most significant progress (41-point increase or more), eight were studying English as a third language and had either immigrant or Arab-Israeli background, indicating that those students of minority status who typically perform poorly, especially benefitted from the programme.

In order to reach these achievements several elements were necessary which required integration on several dimensions. The programme was based on exposing students to new reading strategies when reading academic texts. The strategies included teaching students to preview a text, to identify main ideas and differentiate them from supporting details, to identify text structures (lists, comparison and contrast, cause and effect, and research), and to understand implications. Students developed problem-solving skills when applying these

strategies, first in Hebrew or their native languages and then in English, in order to construct meaning from a text. For this purpose, students learned to become engaged with a text in order to arrive at a critical and in-depth reading of the text. Alongside the development of these top-down skills, students increased their vocabulary and improved their grammar in English as well. These bottom-up skills were taught as tools to complement reading strategies, rather than as separate unrelated units of learning. Thus, the reading task required students to integrate both bottom-up and top-down skills simultaneously in an interactive manner to construct meaning, as has been suggested in the literature (Stanovich, 1984). The focus of learning for the majority of students thus shifted throughout the course of the year from passing a test to successful reading comprehension.

A second important element in the programme required integration of EFL methodologies (Stern, 1992; Allwright, 2003; Kumaravedivelu, 2003). As students arrived with different English learning experiences at school, a middle ground was necessary. Seemingly dichotomous teaching styles, such as teacher-centred and student-centred learning, were integrated. Lessons were partially taught in front of the class as a whole, while other parts of lessons required students to work in groups. Group work was introduced gradually until students inexperienced with such a form of learning became more familiar with it. Group work in which mixed culture groups were assigned by the teacher became instrumental in achieving the aim of integration and development of intercultural competence. It is in this close encounter that students must exchange approaches, styles and ideas to solve a task.

In terms of language used in class to teach, English was used in order to practice certain constructs or vocabulary, alongside Hebrew to clarify and explain certain concepts. Students were continually encouraged to relate the material learned to their native languages, such as comparing certain vocabulary or grammar between the two or three languages, and to their native cultures, such as comparing certain concepts presented in texts. This allowed students to appropriate other ideas, styles, and approaches by making them part of their own.

As such, integrating the languages and cultures in class becomes a fruitful learning experience for all participants.

A third element in the programme refers to the integration of the students in class by providing a third space which invites them, regardless of background, to share their unique cultural identities in a safe non-judgmental environment. Some students have been socialized not to participate in class discussion and are unfamiliar with this form of learning. Permitting them to sit as uninvolved spectators of the lesson because of a misconceived notion of respect for their culture hinders their learning. Similarly, allowing students to disrupt lessons by being over-involved because this is the accepted discourse in their culture equally hinders their progress. The teacher, as the orchestrator of the diverse cultural approaches and discourses, must bring each approach closer to the other, by creating a middle ground where the diverse styles are continuously negotiated and agreed upon by the participants. This process aims at integrating students into a more harmonious discourse, encouraging each to make their voice heard in a discussion led by the teacher. The teacher must create a balance between freedom and discipline. It is from this process that intercultural competence can be taught and developed.

It should be reiterated that integration by no means implies abandoning one's own cultural background or worldview. Rather, it refers to re-examining one's own background or worldview in a critical fashion, in the same way that one should engage within a classroom culture in a critical fashion questioning the programme (content, methods, etc.) being taught and thus re-examining the learning styles and approaches with which one was brought up. This in turn leads to engagement with a text, reading it critically and re-examining one's own assumptions about the text being read, and being able to question the content, organization and argument presented in it. This process of *'making the strange familiar and the familiar strange*' (Bryam, 2000), leads to students' enhanced reading comprehension, in general, and in EFL, in particular.

This three-dimensional integration teaching approach, thus, refers to integrating reading models, integrating EFL methodologies, and integrating

students in order to meet the diverse needs of the multicultural group of students. It refers to the art of orchestrating diversity in unison.

8.3 Contribution to Knowledge and Understanding

<div align="right">

Век живи́ — век учи́сь

Live for a century — learn for a century

Never cease to learn new things

(Russian Proverb)

</div>

The initial aim of this study was to enhance my professional skills as an EFL teacher. The research questions grew out of my personal concerns as a teacher who intuitively sensed that her students were not reaching their full potential because of conflicting cultural backgrounds shaping their diverse assumptions and learning approaches. By addressing these questions I hoped the findings of this study would be of practical benefit to practitioners in other teaching contexts facing similar challenges. By being able to theorize this practical knowledge I hoped to contribute to knowledge in the field of EFL reading comprehension in multicultural settings.

The argument developed in this thesis maintains that cultural, religious, and linguistic background plays an important role in students' assumptions and approaches to learning, in general, and in EFL reading comprehension, in particular. Students' family, school and post-school experiences are largely shaped by either a more 'traditional' or less 'traditional' background. Early life reading experiences are often influenced by these backgrounds as well, particularly by maternal education. An additional factor playing a role is whether English is the second or third/fourth language students are learning. While all of these inter-relationships impact upon students' approaches to learning, general reading, and EFL reading comprehension, they did not play a significant role in their progress and achievement.

The 'integrativeness' model has been researched and developed in the literature, and integration has been shown to be a motivational factor in language learning. Three forms of integration have been examined thus far: the learner's

desire to integrate within the target language culture in which he/she is in contact (Gardner, 1985); the learner's desire to integrate within a target language culture in which he/she might not be in contact, but with which it identifies (Dörnyei, 1990; Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009); or the learner's desire to integrate within a more global English-speaking community rather than any specific culture (Lamb, 2004). This thesis contends that students' perception of their integration within dominant mainstream society, especially among minority and immigrant students, facilitates their integration and engagement within the EFL classroom culture, which further facilitates their ability to engage with a text.

In the unique multicultural setting examined in this study, student motivation is not necessarily to integrate within any English speaking culture, but rather to integrate within their new learning environment. This process is enabled by the establishment of a classroom culture by the students and guided by the teacher who must present opportunities to develop students' intercultural competence. Through the shared aim of becoming proficient readers in the 'neutral' language of English, the encounter with the 'Other', especially in the background of a society in conflict, teaches students to examine their identity, their learning style, and their cultural assumptions by entering a dialogue with their 'other' peers. This self-discovery process teaches students to develop critical reflection. Critical reflection is further encouraged as a way for students to examine their learning process. The development of critical thinking is then extended when reading academic texts. Thus, integration within the classroom culture through intercultural competence triggers a cycle of criticality which leads to enhanced reading comprehension in English.

While student integration is vital for this process to succeed, a three-dimensional integration teaching approach facilitates the cycle described above. Rather than endorsing one EFL teaching methodology which may not be suitable for all, teachers should negotiate with students a middle ground where seemingly contradictory approaches and learning styles can be integrated. Moreover, both bottom-up and top-down reading strategies need to be integrated so that students learn to approach a text at both levels in order to construct meaning. Most

importantly the teacher has a key role in integrating all students into the classroom culture so that each becomes a contributing member. The integration of each unique student to the class as a whole, the integration of diverse teaching approaches, and the integration of diverse reading skills and strategies all converge to make a diverse but unified class in order to achieve the aims of the programme.

8.4 Reflections

הרבה למדתי מרבותי, ומחבירי – יותר מרבותי, ומתלמידי – יותר מכולן

I have learned much from my teachers, more from my colleagues, and the most from my students

(Ethics of the Fathers)

This research project has been a process of growth and development to me both personally and professionally. After 15 years of experience teaching reading comprehension in multicultural classrooms, those patterns which I had initially identified among students sharing a common cultural background, were merely the tips of threads that slowly unravelled a rich texture of interwoven cultural, religious, and linguistic factors influencing my students' learning process.

The choice of conducting an action research using a case study approach proved to be vital for carrying out this project. This experience proved to be not only significant as a research methodology, but also a valuable pedagogic tool. Keeping a reflective diary with notes following each lesson became an important asset which enabled me to reflect upon the process taking place in class throughout the year. I was able to notice patterns of behaviour, reactions and developments in class. I was also able to better identify links between individual student difficulties or progress and their learning behaviour and strategies. This process of writing and reflection led me to decision-making and actions in response to those needs identified.

Also, for the purpose of this action study, a written qualitative account was kept of each student, including notes as to the student's performance on each exam. This practice proved to be an essential teaching tool as well. I was able to monitor and follow-up on each student's strengths and weaknesses from one exam

to the next, to identify the effective or ineffective strategies each student was using and to address them in time before the next exam. The cyclical nature of action research, of reflection leading to action and again to reflection (Elliott, 1991; Thomas, 2009) became a critical component not only of this study, but of my teaching practice.

The development of reflection on my practice and raising my tacit knowledge to the level of awareness has enabled me to theorize on my teaching practices and as a result enhance them (Stenhouse, 1975; Elliott, 1991). By conducting this study, I hope to have achieved Schön's (1983) 'reflection-on-action'. The ability to step back and reflect upon my practice has provided me with better tools and skills to return to practise and apply them within the classroom. Thus, in accordance with one of the aims of action research this study has enhanced my practice as well as enriching the environment in which I teach (Somekh, 2006).

Most importantly, the participatory nature of the case study action research approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Elliott, 1991; McNiff & Whitehead, 2006; Somekh, 2006; Altrichter *et al.*, 2008; Reason and Bradbury, 2008) allowed me to be present in every aspect of my students' growth and progress throughout the year, from my interaction with them on a weekly basis in the classroom, followed by continued relations with them outside the classroom, whether in my office, during interviews, or via email. This level of interaction, as an insider, clearly had an impact on my objectivity as a researcher, as was expected and discussed at length in the methodology chapter of this thesis. The high level of involvement with my students has resulted in a subjective view of the students' process of transformation and the programme I implement. It is precisely this subjectivity which has allowed me to delve so deeply into the life stories and views of my students, thus becoming an active and influential part of their lives, as they have become in mine. The current inquiry weaves their stories and views with mine. The aim which I hope to have achieved is a valuable account which reflects the complex process that takes place when teaching a multicultural class. Current literature argues that 'small story' narratives are lacking in EFL studies and may have a significant contribution to the field (Vásquez, 2011; Norton & Early, 2011;

Menard-Warwick, 2011). This account brings forth my students' 'big stories' (their autobiographical accounts) as told by them, alongside my presentation of their 'small stories' (incidents in the classroom, learning behaviour patterns, etc.), with my personal story interpolated among them.

> *As language teachers and language learners, we story our lives in many different ways. And the particular forms that our stories take inevitably vary by the setting we are in, the other participants involved, our purpose(s) in telling the story, as well as the larger speech activities we are engaged* (Vásquez, 2011, p. 543).

I hope that the quilt that has been sewn together by the multiple narratives told and shared by me and my students about our English reading comprehension course in a teachers' college in Israel, our interactions as individuals, as members of different cultural backgrounds, speaking different native languages, offers EFL research an additional view of the EFL learner and teacher experience.

Alongside this subjective dimension I have applied objective tools to measure my students' performance, namely, reading strategy exercises and practice tests. In addition, students' final exams were graded by two external markers. These tools yielded valuable information as well regarding student progress and achievement. An analysis of the diverse kinds of data gathered in the process of this inquiry, both quantitative and qualitative, produced a multi-dimensional view of the multicultural EFL classroom experience and the process leading to achievements examined.

8.5 Limitations

This case study examined one class with 39 students. The profile of the students taking part was very specific. These students were young adults, typically weak learners, who had not completed their high-school matriculation exams. They intended to continue their B.Ed. studies in physical education following the programme and the vast majority of them were athletes. For this reason, these findings cannot be generalized to all multicultural classroom settings. However, this was not the intention of this inquiry. As the study was constructivist in approach, it aimed at transferability rather than generalizability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As

such, many of the patterns discerned from the data analysis support much of the literature on EFL methodology, teaching EFL in diverse cultural settings, and reading comprehension in English. Thus, I hope that the insights regarding the teaching approaches I implemented to integrate my students within the multicultural classroom and to develop their intercultural competence can be transferred to other multicultural contexts.

While one of the strengths of this study was my role as insider participant researcher, it is at the same time a limitation which must be acknowledged. Issues of trustworthiness and authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) are raised by the fact that I was both the teacher of the programme and the researcher conducting an evaluation of it. As such, I have a stake in presenting the programme as successful. Still, I have a greater stake to improve it so that future students can benefit from it, and this has been the impetus behind the study. For this purpose, I have done my utmost to conduct a rigorous study aimed at achieving trustworthiness and authenticity. By being aware of my position as both researcher and teacher, I have attempted to minimize researcher bias by keeping notes of student records and class observations in a systematic fashion, conducting peer debriefing on a regular basis, and member-checking of interviews. I have attempted to give students every opportunity to make their voices heard and present all the viewpoints expressed.

An additional limitation that needs to be recognized is the power relations inherent in the teacher-student bond I formed with my research participants. As their teacher, students are necessarily dependent upon my guidance, and my role is to a certain extent a maternal and protective one. Every effort was made to make these relations as equal as possible, so that students would feel at ease to share with me their life stories and experiences throughout the process. Nevertheless, complete equality cannot be achieved, as responsibility still rested on me, as their teacher, to provide them with the necessary skills for achieving a certain English level. Despite the complexity of this relationship and its effect on the data constructed, I believe this same relationship was one of trust with the vast majority of the students who confided in me and shared with me experiences, views and thoughts they would not have otherwise shared with an external interviewer. An

external interviewer or observer would not have been able to make the same connections between events in class, student performance, and the information they related in interviews. Still, the inclusion of class observations by other professionals, in addition to mine, may have provided a richer account of the processes taking place.

8.6 Implications

As the data indicated, the majority of students in the programme gained from the process and reached impressive achievements. Nevertheless, this programme was not successful with all students. Eight of the 39 students made less than a ten-point increase from the start of the year and did not undergo the kinds of transformations experienced by other students in the class. Those students who were the least involved in classroom discussion and were not integrated within the classroom culture also progressed the least and fared poorly on the final exam. Of these eight, six had either immigrant or Arab-Israeli background. It appears that these students opted for separationist approaches which hindered their progress. In future, more should be done to help such students integrate within the classroom culture. As was found and discussed above, the female students from the Arab-Israeli sector remained separationist throughout the year and resisted integration. One outcome of this study has been discussions with the programme coordinator to offer a support group or a student counsellor from this sector to facilitate the difficult process of integrating within the college environment. Another plan of action for the upcoming academic year is to involve these students' parents, who still have a significant influence on them, to better understand the programme's process and aims.

Moreover, due to the unusually large number of students in the programme, the class was divided into two groups, each receiving four academic hours, once a week, rather than the six academic hours (three hours, twice a week) they should have received. Two meetings a week and an extra two academic hours would have clearly benefitted these students, and perhaps some of the weaker students would have made greater gains had they received the proper amount of

hours they deserved. Students who received tutoring hours at the start of the year reported of the benefit and wish that they be continued. Administrators responsible for programmes geared to weaker learners, especially those who have met failure in the past, should provide such students with a real second chance for success by providing them with an adequate number of hours and appropriate sized groups.

Despite these setbacks, in general, the programme proved successful and the majority of the students showed varying levels of improvement in their English reading comprehension. Nearly all of the students reported that they had never been introduced to the reading strategies taught in the programme and most felt these benefitted their reading comprehension. These findings suggest that the Israeli Ministry of Education should consider incorporating within its curriculum fundamental reading strategies, so that younger students in all Israeli schools learn and apply these in EFL and in their respective native languages.

Another finding is that a very small number of students reported they enjoyed reading for pleasure and an alarmingly low percentage of the students reported a rich early life reading experience. This privation may have repercussions on their general academic failure prior to their arrival in the programme and more specifically in their linguistic abilities in their respective native languages further impacting upon their EFL reading comprehension. This study suggests that more efforts should be invested by the Ministry of Education to instil early reading experiences among children of all sectors, and to encourage reading to continue in adulthood.

The main finding of this study is the significance of intercultural competence and integration in the learning process, in general, and in EFL reading comprehension, in particular. In Israel, the ability to accept the 'Other', to appropriate approaches from other cultures, and integrate them within one's own becomes possible in the college or university setting when students from diverse cultures often meet for the first time. It is unfortunate that in a melting pot such as Israel, students from different cultures are not generally exposed to multicultural learning experiences before reaching the higher education setting. This is especially

pertinent in a society such as Israel with a history of political-cultural conflicts, including the Arab-Israeli conflict and religious-secular tensions. EFL may be an excellent learning opportunity for bringing together students from diverse and often conflicting cultures with a shared aim of learning a different language representative of a unified global community.

8.7 Future Research

The programme examined here was an annual course, preparing students for their 4-pt English matriculation exam, which exposed students to a new learning approach. On the whole, the programme proved successful in reaching its objectives. However, it was only an initial stage in developing these students' academic reading competence in English, an essential skill for their future academic success. Findings from this preliminary study raise a number of questions for future research.

First, these students should be followed to further examine whether the transition they underwent in the programme has long-lasting effects during their college EFL courses, and whether the seeds that have been planted in the programme bear fruit in their future academic studies. Follow-up is needed in order to examine whether they continue to use the reading strategies they learned in the programme in the college EFL programme. How they can best develop the transition they began to undergo in the programme should also be investigated. These students should be compared with students who have entered the college and have completed their high-school matriculation examinations, without having studied in such a preparatory programme. Findings from such a study may be informative regarding the benefits of the preparatory programme and whether any additional reforms should be made. This initial inquiry, for example, indicates that for weaker students who attended the programme, an increase in tutorial hours may have benefitted them. This assumption needs to be substantiated by further research.

Second, the patterns that were discerned in this specific local context may have implications for other learning settings. A comparative study between regular

EFL high-school classes and high-school classes taught using an intervention based on the programme examined here, with a focus on reading strategies, is recommended. The assumption is that providing pupils at an early age with reading strategies and text analysis skills will enhance their future academic reading comprehension. Findings from such a comparative study may inform education policymakers on the cost effectiveness of the programme and whether introducing such a programme in schools in Israel may assist pupils, particularly weaker ones at risk of failure, to succeed in their high-school matriculation exams. Consequently fewer students would need to attend matriculation preparation programmes. As many of the preparatory programmes in Israel are government funded, a programme that succeeds in helping a greater number of pupils complete their high-school matriculation exams will be highly cost effective.

Third, intercultural competence proved to play the most significant role in students' process of learning and achievements in EFL reading comprehension. Intercultural competence, as referred to in this study, was assessed using a scale that was informed by the data collected and analysed for the specific purposes of this inquiry. This scale needs to be further verified for future assessment in this and other multicultural contexts, including different EFL levels and other foreign language courses. As many factors, in addition to intercultural competence, interacted and impacted upon students' learning process and achievement, these variables, including socio-economic, familial, gender, cultural, linguistic and religious background, need to be controlled in future research to better understand the specific role of intercultural competence in language learning, particularly in reading comprehension. The scale developed in this study should be refined and further developed in order to find which methods and tools can enhance and deepen intercultural competence, particularly of weak students such as those who showed high resistance due to a number of factors that prevented them from succeeding in the programme. Findings of this inquiry indicated, for example, that young female students from the Arab-Israeli sector showed weak intercultural competence and the greatest resistance to the programme, in general. Examination of the preparatory programme's plans to provide greater assistance and attention

to this particular group of students by form of a support group, may inform other programmes of the benefits of such initiatives. Further research should aim to identify which student groups show greatest resistance, the reasons for their difficulty to integrate in mixed settings, and possible solutions.

A fourth important line of research is the value of action research as a form of increasing our knowledge of intercultural competence in the classroom. The current inquiry supported the view that action research enables the teacher-researcher to monitor the intervention under examination in real time and to receive an on-going situation report. This enables the teacher to provide immediate remedial action in response to any concerns that arise from the intervention. The interactive and dynamic nature of action research was shown in this inquiry to improve the abilities of both the teacher and students collaborating on this project, thereby enhancing their intercultural competence as a result. The accumulation of data from further action research studies conducted by other teachers of multicultural classes, in different learning contexts, including other language classes, other academic subjects, both in the humanities and in the natural sciences, and other age groups, of different levels, sharing similar challenges is vital to expanding our knowledge and understanding of how to address the different needs of our culturally diverse students.

8.8. Coda

In conclusion, it is my hope that my future students will benefit from the knowledge I have gained regarding their cultural backgrounds, learning process and integration within the classroom culture. I intend to continue to implement the action-reflection cycle process in my teaching. I also intend to consciously and systematically work to create a productive third space in which my students can engage within the classroom culture and develop their intercultural competence. Furthermore, I hope that teachers in other multicultural teaching contexts benefit from this study's findings so that other students in similar contexts can undergo a process of learning intercultural competence and succeed in the complex venture

of learning. I hope that such teachers join me in celebrating the diversity of our students by finding harmony in their multitude of distinct voices.

The end of this thesis brings us back to its start. As Weinreb (2010) noted, *'every snowflake is unique. No two snowflakes are alike'*, but each contributes to the beauty of snow as a natural phenomenon. Similarly, no two students are alike. Each has a unique cultural, religious, and linguistic background. But each contributes to the class a necessary element for composing the whole. Moreover, each EFL class is a unique encounter of diverse cultures, but the experience of each encounter shared with the professional community can contribute to our body of knowledge of the EFL learning process.

Bibliography

Abu Asba, H. & Abu Nasra, M. (2010), The Pyschometric Exam from Students' Perspective: Cultural Bias or Faulty Education System?, *Educational, Literary and Scientific Islamic Research*, Al Qasemi Academic College of Education, 15: 211-232

Abu-Rabia-Queder, S., Arar, K., (2011), Gender and higher education in different national spaces: Female Palestinian students attending Israeli and Jordanian universities, *Compare*, 41(3): 353-370.

Akbari, R. (2008), Postmethod discourse and practice, *TESOL Quarterly*, 42(4): 641-652.

Alderson, J.C. (2000), *Assessing Reading*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Alexander, P.A., & Jetton, T.L. (2000), Learning from text: A multidimensional and developmental perspective, In M.L. Kamil, P.B. Mosenthal, P.D. Pearson, & R. Barr (Eds.), *Handbook of Reading Research*, Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Al-Haj, M., (1987), *Social change and family processes: Arab communities in Shefar-Am*, Boulder: Westview Press.

AI-Haj, M. (1989), Social research on family lifestyles among Arabs in Israel, *Journal of Comparative Family Studies,* 20: 175-195.

Al-Harthi, A. (2005), Distance Higher Education Experiences of Arab Gulf Students in the United States: A cultural perspective, *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, 6(3): http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/263/406.

Allwright, D. (2003), Exploratory practice: Rethinking practitioner research in language teaching, *Language Teaching Research*, 7: 113–141.

Altrichter, H., Feldman, A., Posch, P. & Somekh, B. (2008), *Teachers investigate their work: An introduction to action research across the professions,* (2nd Ed.), NY: Routledge.

Altshuler, L., Sussman, N. M., & Kachur, E. (2003), Assessing changes in intercultural sensitivity among physician trainees using the intercultural development inventory, *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 27*, 387-401.

Austin, J.L. (1960), *How to do things with words,* London: Oxford University Press.

Ballard, B. (1996), Through language to learning: Preparing overseas students for studies in Western Universities, In H. Coleman (Ed.), *Society and the Language Classroom*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Barkon, E. & Avinor, E. (1995), Academic difficulties and early literacy deprivation: The case of Ethiopians in Israel, Language, *Culture and Curriculum*, 8(2):201-209.

Bassey, M. (1999), *Case Study Research in Educational Settings,* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Benbenishty, R., Zeira, A. & Astor, R.A., Khoury-Kassabri, M. (2002), Maltreatment of primary school students by educational staff in Israel, *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 26: 1291–1309.

Bennett, J. M. (1993), Toward ethnorelativism: A developmental model of intercultural Sensitivity, In R. M. Paige (Ed.), *Education for the intercultural experience* (pp. 21-71), Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural.

Bensoussan, M. (2001), Language Issues for Immigrant Students from the Former Soviet Union in Israel and Germany, In J. Cenoz, B. Hufeisen & U. Jessner (Eds.), *Trilingualism, Looking beyond Second Language Acquisition: Studies in Tri- and Multilingualism*, Tuebingen: Staufenburg Verlag.

Bensoussan, M. (2009), Reading preferences and expectations of multilingual Israeli University students, *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 30(6): 465- 480.

Bensoussan, M., Kreindler, I. & Avinor, E. (1995), A description of language attitudes and achievements of Russian immigrant students at Haifa University, *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 8(2): 211-230.

Berry, J. (1997), Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation, *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 46 (1): 5-68.

Bhawuk, D. P. S., & Brislin, R. (1992), The measurement of intercultural sensitivity using the concepts of individualism and collectivism, *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 16*, 413-436.

Birch, B. (2002), *English L2 Reading: Getting to the Bottom,* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Bluestein, I. (2011), How to improve students' reading comprehension*, Ha'aretz*, http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/how-to-improve-students-reading-comprehension-1.334725.

Blum-Kulka, S. (1997), *Dinner Talk: Cultural Patterns of Sociability and Socialisation in Family Discourse*, Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Byram, M. (1997), *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence,* Philadelphia, PA: Multilingual Matters.

Byram, M. (1988), Foreign language education and cultural studies, *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 1(1): 15-31.

Byram, M. (1998), *Language Learning in Intercultural Perspective: Approaches through Drama and Ethnography*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Byram, M. (2000), Assessing Intercultural Competence in Language Teaching, *Sprogforum*, 18: 8-13.

Byram, M. (2012), Language awareness and (critical) cultural awareness – relationships, comparisons and contrasts, *Language Awareness*, 21(1-2): 5-13.

Byram, M. & Feng, A. (2004), Culture and language learning: teaching, research and scholarship, *Language Teaching*, 37: 149-168.

Byram, M. & Grundy, P. (2002), Context and Culture in Language Teaching and Learning, Language, *Culture and Curriculum*, 15 (3): 193-195.

Byram, M., Kühlmann, T., Müller-Jacquier B., & Budin, G. (2004), Intercultural Competence Assessment Project (INCA) http://www.incaproject.org/index.htm

Canagarajah, S. (2006), 'TESOL at forty: What are the issues?' *TESOL Quarterly* 40(1): 9-34.

Carhill, A., Suárez-Orozco, C., & Paez, M. (2008), Explaining English language proficiency among adolescent immigrant students, *American Educational Research Journal*, 45: 1155–1179.

Carr, W. & Kemmis, S. (1986), *Becoming Critical: Education, Knowledge and Action Research*, London: Deakin University Press.

Chiseri-Strater, E. (1996), Turning in Upon Ourselves: Positionality, Subjectivity and Reflexivity, In P. Mortensen, and G. Kirsch (Eds.), *Ethics and Representation in Qualitative Studies*, Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English.

Chomsky, N. (1965), *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*, Boston: MIT Press.

Cohen, L., Morrison, L. & Manion, K. (2007), *Research Methods in Education*, (6th Ed.), NY: Routledge.

Coleman, H. (1996), *Society and the Language Classroom*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Deardorff, D. K. (2004), *The identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization at institutions of higher education in the United States,* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC.

Denzin, K. (1970), *The Research Act in Sociology: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods*, London: Butterworths.

Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.) (2003), *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry* (2nd Ed.), Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Dey, I. (1993), *Qualitative Data Analysis: A User-Friendly Guide*, London: Routledge.

Dixon, L.Q., Zhao, J., Shin, J., Wu, S., Su, J., Burgess-Brigham, R., Gezer, M.U., Snow, C. (2012), What we know about second language acquisition: a synthesis from four perspectives, *Review of Educational Research,* 82(1): 5–60.

Dörnyei, Z. (1990), Conceptualizing motivation in language learning, *Language Learning,* 40: 46-78.

Dörnyei, Z. (2003), Attitudes, orientation, and motivations in language learning: Advances in theory, research, and applications, *Language Learning,* 53(2): 3-32.

Dörnyei, Z. & Csizér, K. (2002), Some Dynamics of Language Attitudes and Motivation: Results of a Longitudinal Nationwide Survey, *Applied Linguistics*, 23(4): 421-462.

Dörnyei, Z. & Ushioda (2009), *Motivation, Language Identity and L2 Self*, Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Dunne, M., Pryor. K. & Yates, P. (2005), *Becoming a Researcher: a research companion for the social sciences*, Berkshire: Open University Press.

Elliott, J. (1991), *Action research for educational change*, Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Engle, L., & Engle, J. (2004), Assessing language acquisition and intercultural sensitivity development in relation to study abroad program design, *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, *10*, 253–276.

Erlam, R. (2003), Evaluating the relative effectiveness of structured-input and output-based in foreign language learning: Results from an experimental study, *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, *25*: 559–582.

Eskey, D. (1988), Holding in the bottom, In P.L. Carrell, J. Devine, and D. Eskey, (Eds.), *An Interactive Approach to the Language Problem of Second Language Readers*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Eskey, D.E. (2005), Reading in a Second Language, In E. Hinkel, *Handbook of Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning*, Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Fareh, S. (2010), Challenges of teaching English in the Arab world: Why can't EFL programs deliver as expected?, *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2: 3600-3604.

Flybjerg, B. (2006), Five misunderstandings about case-study research, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(2): 219-245.

Fontana, A. & Frey, J. H. (2005), The interview: From neutral stance to political involvement, In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (3rd Ed.), Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Gardner, R. C. (1985), *Social Psychology and Second Language Learning: The Role of Attitudes and Motivation*, London: Edward Arnold.

Geva, E., Wade-Woolley, L. & Shany, M. (1997), The development of reading efficiency in first and second language, *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 1: 119-144.

Goldman, S. R., & Rakestraw, J. (2000), Structural aspects of constructing meaning from text, In M. L. Kamil, P. B. Mosenthal, P. D. Pearson, & R Barr (Eds.), *Handbook of Reading Research, Vol. III*, Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Gonzalez, J. E., & Uhing, B. M. (2008), Home literacy environments and young Hispanic children's English and Spanish oral language: A commonality analysis, *Journal of Early Intervention*, 30: 116–139.

Goodman, K. (1967), Reading: A psycholinguistic guess game, *Journal of the Reading Specialist,* 6(4): 126-135.

Grabe, W. & Stoller, F., (2002), *Teaching and Researching Reading*, London: Pearson Education Longman.

Grellet, F. (1981), *Developing Reading Skills: A Practical Guide to Reading Comprehension Exercises*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994), Competing paradigms in qualitative research, In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research,* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Gubrium, J. & Holstein, J. (2003), *Postmodern Interviewing*, London: SAGE.

Haj-Yahia, M. (1995), Toward culturally sensitive intervention with Arab families in Israel, *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 17(4): 429-447.

Halliday (1973), *Explorations in the Functions of Language*, London: Edward Arnold Publishers, Ltd.

Hammer, C. S., Davison, M. D., Lawrence, F. R., & Miccio, A. W. (2009), The effect of maternal language on bilingual children's vocabulary and emergent literacy

development during Head Start and kindergarten, *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 13: 99–121.

Hammer, C. S., Miccio, A. W., & Wagstaff, D. (2003), Home literacy experiences and their relationship to bilingual preschoolers' developing English literacy abilities: An initial investigation, *Language Speech and Hearing Services in Schools*, 34: 20–30.

Heath, S. (1983), *Ways with Words: Language, Life and Work in Communities and Classrooms*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Heaton, J.B. (1990), *Classroom Testing*, NY: Longman, Inc.

Hedge, T. (2000), *Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom*, Oxford: Open University Press.

Hellerstein-Yehezkel, D. & Rosenberg, M. (2003), *STAR: Steps to Academic Reading*, Ra'anana: Eric Cohen Books, Ltd.

Hinkel, E. (2006), Current perspectives on teaching the four skills, *TESOL Quarterly*, 40(1): 109-131.

Hoffman, S., (2003), *Russia's Diasporas: The Case Of The Russian-Speaking Community in Israel*, http://www.princeton.edu/~lisd/publications/wp_russiaseries.html.

Hofstede, G. (1980), *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values*, Beverly Hill: SAGE.

Holliday, A. (1996), Large- and small-class cultures in Egyptian university classrooms: A cultural justification for curriculum change, In H. Coleman (Ed.), *Society and the Language Classroom*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Horowitz, T. (2005), The integration of immigrants from the Former Soviet Union, *Israel Affairs*, 1 (1)117-136.

Howatt, A. (1988), From structural to communicative, *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 8: 14-29.

Hymes, D.H. (1972), *On Communicative Competence*, Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Press.

Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (2005), Israeli census data, http://www1.cbs.gov.il/reader/?MIval=cw_usr_view_SHTML&ID=705.

Jean, M. & Geva, E. (2009), The development of vocabulary in English as a second language children and its role in predicting word recognition ability, *Applied Psycholinguistics,* 30: 153–185.

Jin, L. & Cortazzi, M. (1998), The culture the learner brings: a bridge or a barrier?, In M. Byram & M. Fleming (Eds.), *Language Learning in Intercultural Perspective: Approaches Through Drama and Ethnography*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jones, L. and Somekh, B. (2005), Observation, In Somekh, B. and Lewin, C. (Eds.) *Research Methods in the Social Sciences*, London: SAGE.

Jubran, H.E. (2005), Learning English as a Fourth Language: The Case of the Arab Pupils in Israel, Doctoral Thesis, Anglia Polytechnic University.

Kahan, S. (2009), Who needs the Meitzav exam?, *Kav Panim*, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, http://kavpnim.huji.ac.il/articles.asp?cat=14&artID=892.

Katriel, Tamar (1986), *Talking Straight: Dugri Speech in Israeli Sabra Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Koda, K. (2005), *Insights into second language reading,* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Koester, J., & Olebe, M. (1988), The behavioral assessment scale for intercultural communication effectiveness, *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 12*, 233-246.

Kozulin, A. & Garb, E. (2001), Dynamic Assessment of EFL Text Comprehension of At-Risk Students, Paper presented at the 9th Conference of the European Association for Research on Learning and Instruction, Fribourg, Switzerland.

Kramsch, C. & Sullivan, P. (1996), Appropriate Pedagogy, *ELT Journal*, 50(3): 199-212.

Kramsch, C. (1993), *Context and Culture in Language Teaching*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kramsch, C. (1995), The cultural component of language teaching, *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 8(2): 83-92

Kramsch, C. (2010), The symbolic dimensions of the intercultural, *Language Teaching* 44: 354-367.

Kumaravedivelu, B. (2003), *Beyond Methods: Macrostrategies for Language Teaching*, London: Yale University Press.

Kumaravedivelu, B. (2006), TESOL Methods: Changing Tracks, Challenging Trends, *TESOL Quarterly*, 40(1): 59-81.

Kvale, S. (1996), *Interviews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Lamb, M. (2004), Integrative motivation in a globalizing world, *System* 32: 3-19.

Larson-Freeman, D. (2000), *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Legutke, M & Thomas. H. (1991), *Process and Experience in the Language Classroom,* Harlow: Longman.

Lehrer Bettan, S. (2007), *Bedouin and Former Soviet Union Immigrant University Students in Israel: Language, Identity and Power*, Tucson: University of Arizona Press.

Leshem, S. and Trafford, V. (2006), Unraveling cultural dynamics in TEFL: culture tapestries in three Israeli schools, *Teachers and Teaching*, 12(6): 639-656.

Li, D. (1998), It's always more difficult than you plan and imagine: Teachers' perceived difficulties in introducing the communicative approach in South Korea, *TESOL Quarterly*, 32(4): 677-703.

Lincoln, Y. & Guba, E. (1985), *Naturalistic Inquiry*, New York: SAGE.

Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1986), But is it rigorous? Trustworthiness and authenticity in naturalistic evaluation, In D. Williams (Ed.), *Naturalistic Evaluation*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Manning, K. (1997), Authenticity in constructivist inquiry: methodological considerations without prescription, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 3(1): 93-115**.**

McCabe, D.L., Feghali, T., Abdallah, H. (2008), Academic dishonesty in the Middle East: Individual and contextual factors, *Research in Higher Education*, 49:451–467.

McNiff, J. & Whitehead, J. (2006), *All You Need to Know About Action Research*, London: SAGE.

Menard-Warwick, J. (2011), A methodological reflection on the process of narrative analysis: Alienation and identity in the life histories of English language teachers, *TESOL Quarterly*, 45(3): 564-574.

Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of English Usage, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/traditional.

Ministry of Education (2010), Matriculation Exam Results, education.gov.il/netuney_bchinot/.

Miralpeix, I. (2007), Lexical knowledge in instructed language learning: The effects of age and exposure, *International Journal of English Studies*, 7(2), 61–83.

Mourtaga, K. (2006), Some reading problems of Arab EFL students, *Al-Aqsa University Journal*, Al-Aqsa University, Gaza.

National Institute for Testing and Evaluation, (2010), Statistical Data on Psychometric University Entry Exam, Research Department, https://www.nite.org.il/index.php/he/publications/statistics/graphs-2010.html.

Norton, B. & Early, M. (2011), Researcher identity, narrative inquiry, and language teaching research, *TESOL Quarterly*, 45(3): 415-439.

Norton, B. (2000), *Identity and Language Learning: Gender, Ethnicity and Educational Change*, Harlow, England: Longman/Pearson Education.

Nunan, D. (1985)**,** Content familiarity and the perception of textual relationships in second language reading, *RELC Journal* 16(1): 43-51.

Nunan, D. (1987), Communicative language teaching: Making it work, *ELT Journal*, 41(2): 136-145.

Nuttall, C. (1996), *Teaching Reading Skills in a Foreign Language*, London: Heinemann Educational Books.

Omaggio, A. (2001), *Teaching Language in Context: Proficiency-Oriented Instruction* (3rd ed.), Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.

O'Malley, J. & Chamot, U. (1988), The Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA), *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 9(1-2): 43-60.

O'Malley, M. & Chamot, A. (1990), *Learning Strategies in Second Language Acquisition*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

O'Malley, M., Chamot, A., Stewner-Manzanares, G., Russo, R. & Küpper, L. (1985), Learning strategy applications with students of English as a second language, *TESOL Quarterly*, 19(3): 557-584.

Paran, A. (1996), Reading in EFL: Facts and Fictions, *English Language Teaching Journal,* 50: 25–34.

Pearson, P. D., & Fielding, L. (1991), Comprehension instruction, In R. Barr, M. L. Kamil, P. B. Mosenthal & P. D. Pearson (Eds.), *Handbook of Reading Research: Volume II*, White Plains, NY: Longman.

Pines, A. M., & Zaidman, N. (2003), Israeli Jews and Arabs: Similarities and differences in the utilization of social support, *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 34: 465–480.

Prabhu, N.S. (1987), *Second Language Pedagogy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Prasad, A. (2011), Are examinations the best way to evaluate students?, *Central Board of Secondary Education,* http://www.cbseguess.com/articles/best_way_to_evaluate_students.php.

Rashi, H. & Ben Simon, M. (2010), Do Meitzav exams reflect knowledge?, *Yedioth Ahronot*, http://www.mynet.co.il/articles/1,7340,L-3890069,00.html.

Reason, P., & Bradbury, H. (2008), *Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice* (2nd Ed.), London: SAGE.

Reese, L., Garnier, H., Gallimore, R., & Goldenberg, C. (2000), Longitudinal analysis of the antecedents of emergent Spanish literacy and middle-school English reading achievement of Spanish-speaking students, *American Educational Research Journal*, 37: 633–662.

Risager, K. (2007), *Language and culture pedagogy: From a national to a transnational paradigm,* Buffalo, NY: Multilingual Matters.

Roberts, T. A. (2008), Home storybook reading in primary or second language with preschool children: Evidence of equal effectiveness for second-language vocabulary acquisition, *Reading Research Quarterly*, 43: 103–130.

Robson, C. (2002), *Real World Research: A Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner-Researchers*, (2nd Ed.), Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Ruben, B. D. (1976), Assessing communication competency for intercultural adaptation, *Group and Organization Studies*, *1*, 334-354.

Ruben, B. D., & Kealey, D. (1979), Behavioral assessment of communication competency and the prediction of cross-cultural adaptation, *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 3*, 15-48.

Rubinstein, A. (2011), Teachers, 2011, *Israel Today*, http://www.israelhayom.co.il/site/newsletter_article.php?id=12699&newsletter=02.09.2011.

Sagy, S., Orr, E., & Bar-On, D. (1999), Individualism and Collectivism in Israeli Society: Comparing Religious and Secular High-School Students, *Human Relations*, 52(3): 327-348.

Sasson-Forstenberg, S. (2001), Reading Committee Report, Jerusalem: Knesset Centre of Data and Research.

Schön, D. (1983), *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*, New York: Basic Books.

Schumann, J. H. (1976), Second language acquisition: The pidginization hypothesis, *Language Learning,* 26: 391-408.

Schumann, J. H. (1986), Research on the acculturation model for second language acquisition, *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development,* 7: 379-392.

Sela-Sheffy, R., (2004), What makes one an Israeli? Negotiating identities in everyday representations of 'Israeliness,' *Nations and Nationalism*, 10(4), 479–497.

Sever, I. (1994), Promoting reading among immigrants from an oral culture: Ethiopian Jews in Israel, *World Libraries*, 5: 1.

Shamim, F. (1996), Learner resistance to innovation in classroom methodology, In H. Coleman (Ed.), *Society and the Language Classroom*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Simons, H. (2009), *Case Study Research in Practice*, London: SAGE.

Sinicrope, C., Norris, J. & Watanabe, Y. (2007), Understanding and Assessing Intercultural Competence: A Summary of Theory, Research, and Practice (Technical Report for the Foreign Language Program Evaluation Project), *Second Language Studies, 26*(1), 1-58.

Somekh, B. (2006), *Action Research: A Methodology for Change and Development*, Buckingham: Open University Press.

Stake, R. (2003), Case studies, In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry* (2nd Ed.), Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Stanovich, K. (1984), The Interactive-Compensatory Model of Reading: A Confluence of Developmental, Experimental, and Educational Psychology, *Remedial and Special Education,* vol. 5, 3, pp. 11-19**.**

Stenhouse, L. (1975), *An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development*, London: Heinemann.

Stern, H. H. (1992), *Issues and Options in Language Teaching*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Straffon, D. A. (2003), Assessing the intercultural sensitivity of high school students attending an international school, *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *27*, 487–501.

Svirsky, S. & Dagan-Buzaglo, N. (2009), Segregation, inequality and weakened control: a situation report of Israeli education, Tel Aviv: Adva Center.

Swan, M. (1985), A Critical Look at the Communicative Approach (1), *ELT Journal,* 39(1): 2-12.

Swan, M. (1985), A Critical Look at the Communicative Approach (2), *ELT Journal* 39(2): 76-87.

Tamir, I. & Galily, Y. (2010), Women's sports coverage in Israel: Perception versus reality, *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 3(1): 92-112.

The Israeli Association for Ethiopian Jews (2011), http://www.iaej.co.il/newsite/content.asp?pageid=42andlang=he.

The Jewish Federation (2002), Argentina status report on *aliya*, http://www.jewishfederations.org/page.aspx?id=32088.

Thomas, G. (2007), *Education and Theory: Strangers in Paradigms*, Berkshire: Open University Press.

Thomas, G. (2009), *How to Do Your Research Project: A Guide for Students in Education and Applied Social Sciences*, London: SAGE

Tight, M. (2010), The curious state of case study: A viewpoint, *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 13(4): pp. 329-339.

Triandis, H.C., McCusker, C., Hui, C.M. (1990), Multimethod probes of individualism and collectivism, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 59: 1006-1020.

Uzan, A. (2011), Going back to school, *Nana 10 News*, http://news.nana10.co.il/Article/?ArticleID=826175.

Vásquez, C. (2011), TESOL, Teacher Identity, and the Need for 'Small Story' Research, *TESOL Quarterly*, 45(3): 535-545.

Vygotsky, L. (1986), *Thought and Language: Revised Edition*, Kozulin, A. (Ed.), Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Wang, L. & Byram, M., (2011), But when you are doing your exams it is the same as in China' – Chinese students adjusting to western approaches to teaching and learning, *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 41(4): 404-424.

Waters-Adams, S. (2006), Action research in education, University of Plymouth http://www.edu.plymouth.ac.uk/resined/actionresearch/arhome.htm.

Weinreb, T. H. (2010), Torah Column, Parashas Vayechi, *Orthodox Union*, http://www.ou.org/ou/print_this/64158

Westbrook, J. (2010), Diversities within English: An Inclusive Approach, in S. Clarke, P. Dickenson & J. Westbrook (Eds.), *The Complete Guide to Becoming an English Teacher* (2nd Ed.), London: SAGE.

Widdowson (2003), *Defining Issues in English Language and Teaching*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Yin. R.K. (2009), *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Yu, L. (2001), Communicative Language Teaching in China: Progress and Resistance, *TESOL Quarterly*, 35(1): 194-198.

Zemer, E. (2009), Meitzav 2009: A moderate, but still low, increase in scores, *Maarriv*, http://www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART1/970/499.html.

APPENDIX A: COURSE SYLLABUS

Unit 1: The Reading Process

A. Prepare
   1. Previewing
   2. Pre-Reading
      Text: Between Friends

B. Read
   Text: The Importance of a Best Friend

C. React
   Text: Sex: Male or Female?

Unit 2: Building Vocabulary

A. Understanding Vocabulary
   1. Educated Guessing
   2. Definition
      Text: The Blood System

   3. Examples
      Text: The Brain and the Nervous System

   4. Comparison and Contrast
      Text: Witchcraft

B. Building Vocabulary
C. Grammar: Parts of Speech
   Text: Childhood Obesity

D. Multiple Meaning Words
E. Integrating Strategies
   Text: The History of Apartheid in South Africa

Unit 3: Main Ideas and Supporting Details

A. Main Ideas
   1. Levels of Specificity
   2. Main Ideas in a Paragraph
   3. Main Ideas in a Text
      Text: They Finally Found an Answer to Overcrowded Prisons: Smaller

      Prisoners

Text: Computer Violence

B. Grammar: The Basic Sentence (Main Subject and Main Verb)

Unit 4: Text Structures

A. Listing

Text: Eating Disorders

Text: Growing Up with a Learning Disability

GRAMMAR REVIEW OF TENSES: Simple Tenses

B. Sequence

Text: The Sleep Cycle

Text: Martin Luther King, Jr.

GRAMMAR REVIEW OF TENSES: Progressive Tenses

C. Comparison and Contrast

Text: The Evolution of Sports

Text: Euthanasia: The Right to Die with Dignity

Text: Euthanasia: The Sanctity of Human Life

GRAMMAR REVIEW OF TENSES: Perfect Tenses

D. Cause and Effect

Text: Heart Disease

Text: Why Have Americans Stopped Growing?

GRAMMAR REVIEW OF TENSES: Passive Voice

E. Research

Text: Women in Advertisements in Medical Journals

Text: Following Orders

Text: Marathons and Hearts

Unit 5: The Writers Intentions

A. Inferences and Implied Meaning
B. Facts and Opinions
   1. Differentiating Between Facts and Opinions
   2. Techniques in Expressing Opinion
      a. Figurative Language
      b. Adjectives of Assessment
      c. Verbs of Reporting

Text: The Power of the Mind

Text: Race and Sports

Text: Career and Your Genes

C. Debate: Two Sides of an Argument
Text: Common Reasons For/Against Capital Punishment

Text: Sports Competition and Aggression

APPENDIX B: ENGLISH DIAGNOSTIC TEST

September 2010

Length of test: 3 hours

I. Grammar and Vocabulary Section _____ **50 points**

This section is to be completed without a dictionary.

Please hand in this section once you have completed it.

II. Reading Comprehension _____ **50 points**

A dictionary may be used to complete this section.

Total: _____ **100 points**

This test booklet consists of 10 pages.

I.   Grammar and Vocabulary Section

This section is to be completed without a dictionary.

A. Circle the correct answer.

הנכונה התשובה את הקף בעיגול

1. What is his name? _____
    a. My name is Tom.   c. His name is Ron
    b. He lives in Jerusalem.   d. Dina.

2. Are you happy?
    a. No, they are not   c. Yes, I am sad.
    b. No, he is not   d. Yes, I am.

3. Where do Sue and Jane live? _____
    a. They live in Tel Aviv.   c. She lives in Tel Aviv.
    b. They are in school.   d. She is in the house.

4. When did he come back?
    a. Tomorrow.   c. Yesterday.
    b. Still.   d. Home.

5. How often does he play tennis? _____
    a. He played last week.   c. He is playing.
    b. He plays every day.   d. He is playing at 4 o'clock.

6. John and I _____ students.
    a. am   c. is
    b. are   d. be

7. The man has _____ friends.
    a. a   c. some
    b. any   d. none

8. _____ is Mr. Smith?
    a. When   c. Who
    b. What   d. Why

9. _____ is this? It's a pen.
    a. Who   c. How
    b. Whose   d. What

10. _____ is a good movie.
    a. It   c. He
    b. She   d. They

11. The book was_____.
      a. funny   c. comfortable
      b. tall   d. hungry

12. Dogs _____ fly.
      a. can   c. can't to
      b. can to   d. can't

13. Mr. Walker couldn't _____ his hat.
      a. found   c. find
      b. finding   d. did find

14. We go to the movies _____ .
      a. every week   c. today
      b. now   d. tomorrow.

15. Today _____ cold.
      a. it makes   c. it does
      b. it is   d. it doesn't

16. _____?
      a. Is eating your father?   c. Eating is your father?
      b. Is your father eating?   d. Does your father eating?

17. I have a new_____.
      a. pair of shoes   c. pairs of shoe
      b. pair of shoe   d. pairs of shoes

18. Every _____ new books.
      a. student have   c. student has
      b. students have   d. students has

19. _____ he have the ball?
      a. Does   c. Has
      b. Is   d. Isn't

20. They have two _____.
      a. happy   c. child
      b. children   d. boy

21. They are meeting _____ eight o'clock.
      a. on   c. at
      b. in   d. to

22. Mr. Johnson goes to work _____ train.
      a. on   c. at
      b. in   d. by
23. A _____ boys walk to school.
      a. much   c. many
      b. little   d. few

24. Mary has _____ money.
    a. much of   c. many
    b. a lot of   d. few

25. Mary hurt _____.
    a. her knee   c. the knee of her
    b. hers knee   d. knee hers

26. Can you give _____ the pen.
    a. him   c. his
    b. to him   d. himself

27. How much _____
    a. the books cost?   c. do the books cost?
    b. cost the books?   d. are the books cost?

28. He doesn't have _____ for you.
    a. something   c. anything
    b. nothing   d. thing

29. She buys _____.
    a. her own clothes   c. its own clothes.
    b. his own clothes   d. your own clothes.

30. We _____ go.
    a. must   c. must to
    b. ought   d. can to

31. He asked _____
    a. me for the money.   c. money to me.
    b. to me the money.   d. for me the money.

32. My mother _____ yesterday.
    a. spoke to him   c. is speaking to him
    b. speaks to him   d. will speak to him

33. _____ you see him last night?
    a. Did   c. Does
    b. Do   d. Were

34. The purse was lost. The girl _____ is in the other room.
    a. found it   c. who found it
    b. she found it   d. find it

35. We _____ waiting here since two o'clock.
    a. did   c. have
    b. has been   d. have been

B. Circle the correct answer.

<div dir="rtl">

הקף בעיגול את התשובה הנכונה.

</div>

1. I can't open the door because I lost my _____.
    a. key   c. money
    b. monkey   d. hat

2. I am going to my friend's birthday _____.
    a. present   c. pretty
    b. invitation   d. party

3. Most people sleep _____.
    a. at night   c. all day
    b. in the morning   d. on Mondays

4. She always _____ sandals in the summer.
    a. eats   c. walks
    b. tries   d. wears

5. The students didn't _____ the question.
    a. enter   c. speak
    b. answer   d. sit

C. Put each group of words into a logical sentence. Use all the words.

<div dir="rtl">

חבר/י משפט הגיוני מכל קבוצת מילים. השתמש/י בכל מילה.

</div>

Example: in Israel live I. <u>I live in Israel</u>.

1. book give that me big

   _____

2. crying why she is now

   _____

3. played children ball with the a red

   _____

4. supermarket he didn't the to go

   _____

5. study year you next will where

   _____

D. Circle the correct answer.
הקף בעיגול את התשובה הנכונה

1. You must pay _____ in class.
    a. advantage   c. education
    b. attention   d. vacation

2. I am not _____ for what happened to him.
    a. separate   c. responsible
    b. different   d. difficult

3. She could not understand the _____ of her problems.
    a. cause   c. security
    b. progress   d. increase

4. He is _____ in sports. He reads the sports section every morning.
    a. universal   c. general
    b. interesting   d. interested in

5. _____ he studied hard, he didn't succeed on the test.
    a. Also   c. Because
    b. Therefore   d. Although

You have completed **Section I** of this test.

Please hand it in and begin **Section II**.

Name _____

ID _____

II.   **Reading Comprehension**

Answer the questions following the text.

You may use a dictionary to complete this section.

Exercise Your Brain

A.   We all know that our bodies need exercise to keep them <u>fit</u>. According to scientists, so do our brains. How can we exercise our brains to make sure that they will keep working efficiently, even into old age?

5   B.   Researchers have long known that hobbies such as playing chess or solving crossword puzzles can stimulate the brain. But it seems that even activities that are mainly physical, for example gardening or dancing, can also stimulate your brain and help you think better.

10 C.   Now a new study has revealed another way to keep the brain active – speaking a second language. Dr. Ellen Bialystock studied 154 older people in Canada, where many people are bilingual, speaking both English and French. She wanted to see if those who regularly spoke two languages would perform better than monolinguals on tests that measure memory and concentration. She particularly wanted to discover whether the

15 benefits of bilingualism continued into old age.

D.   One kind of test that Dr. Bialystock used is called a "Simon task", a test that gets more difficult as the subjects pass to each new <u>stage</u>. By the end of the test, subjects have to identify many squares as <u>they</u> change position and move across a computer

20 screen. At the easiest level, subjects simply have to press a key when <u>they</u> see a red or a blue square. Most subjects had no difficulty doing this. The test becomes more difficult when the <u>coloured</u> squares begin to move, and when more shapes are added to the task.

Dr. Bialystock found that the bilinguals did much better on this test than the monolinguals.

25

E.   How can we explain the superior performance of bilinguals? One theory is that people who speak two languages may have developed a special ability: they have learned to keep the vocabulary and grammar of the two languages separate. It seems that this ability is transferred to other intellectual areas as well; the brains of bilinguals

30   stay sharp because of this ability to divide information into separate compartments.

F.   An alternative explanation for Dr. Bialystock's findings is that bilinguals may have developed better memories for storing and processing information. This ability allows them to handle two languages. "Every time you have to put together a sentence,

35   you have two possible ways of saying things, and your brain has to choose how to react," says Dr. Bialystock.

G.   Earlier researchers had already found many benefits for bilingual children. They tend to be more creative, better at problem-solving and they score better on literacy

40   tests. Dr. Bialystock, however, is the first to study the effects of bilingualism on older people, showing that the advantages of bilingualism continue as they age.

H.   So the next time you memorize irregular verbs in English class, struggle to read an article in English (such as this one), or puzzle over the words of an English song,

45   don't despair. Think of it, instead, as taking your brain to the gym and giving it a good workout!

The Times, June 15, 2004

Reading Comprehension Questions

Instructions: Answer questions 1-7 and 9-11 in ENGLISH. Answer question 8 in HEBREW.

(points)

1. Complete the following sentence according to the information in **paragraph A**.

Both brains and bodies _____. (3)

2. From **paragraph B** we can understand that both _____ and

_____ types of hobbies stimulate the brain (2)

3. Why was Canada a good place for Dr. Bialystock to do her research?

_____ (3)

4. Fill in the information about Dr. Bialystock's research on bilinguals as described in paragraphs C and D. (10)

Purposes of the experiment:

a.   To find out _____

b.   To find out _____

Groups compared:

a.   _____

b.   _____

Result of experiment:

_____

5. Give two specific abilities of bilinguals which may explain why their brains "stay sharp." (line 30) (6)

a.   _____

b.   _____

6. Fill in the following chart to show how Dr. Bialystock's study is different from earlier research on bilingualism. (8)

	Dr. Bialystock's study	Earlier research
People who were tested		
One kind of test used		

7. By using the phrase "taking your brain to the gym" (paragraph H) the writer wants to tell us that (4)
       a. learning a second language improves your mental ability.
       b. it is hard to memorize irregular verbs in English class.
       c. you should exercise regularly in the gym.
       d. the words of English songs are puzzling.

8. Translate TWO of the following words into HEBREW as they are used in the text.
(4)
fit (line 1)   _____
stage (line 18) _____
handle (line 34) _____

9. The word 'they' in line 19 refers to _____ (4)
   The word 'they' in line 20 refers to _____

10. What is the main verb of the following sentence (lines 17-18)? (3)

"One kind of test that Dr. Bialystock used is called a "Simon task", a test that gets more difficult as the subjects pass to each stage."

a.   used
b.   pass
c.   gets
d.   is called

11. Write the letters N (noun), V (verb), Adj. (adjective) or Adv (adverb) next to THREE of the following words according to their function in the text. (3)

____ coloured (line 22)   ____ age (line 41)
____ benefits (line 38)   ____ puzzle (line 44)

APPENDIX C: READING STRATEGY EXERCISES

Reading Strategy Exercise 1 - Previewing

I.   Read the title and sentences below. They are the first sentence of each paragraph from a text. Answer the questions that follow.

The Age of English

A.   Over the past few years the Israeli Language Academy has become painfully aware of the threat to Hebrew from the spread of English in the country.

B.   Surprisingly, English is only fourth when counting the number of native speakers of the world's various languages.

C.   English is widespread and popular not because it is a "better" language but for other reasons. One is economic.

D.   Another is entertainment.

E.   Next is the area of intellectual life.

F.   And a final consideration is the practical one.

G.   In brief, English is an essential language in a large number of areas that affect our daily life.

H.   In all likelihood, the future of English will be tied to the fortunes of the United States.

Questions:

1. Give a sentence that summarizes the main idea of the text.

    _____

2. a. In how many areas that are listed in the text is English dominant? _____

    b. List and number them:

3. What does paragraph G give?

    a. a summary
    b. an example
    c. an argument
    d. research results

4. a. Does the writer think that English will be the main international language forever?   Yes / No (Circle one)

    b. Why?

    _____

5. Do you think the writer is for or against the spread of English? Why?

    _____

    _____

    _____

Name _____

Reading Strategy Exercise 2 – Main Ideas and Supporting Details

Read the passage below. In each paragraph underline the sentence with the main idea of each paragraph. Then, answer the questions following the text.

Telephones in Cars – More Accidents on the Road

A.   The British Research Laboratory found that most people accept that talking on a telephone while driving is distracting, but many drivers don't realize just how dangerous it is. Talking on a telephone while driving is actually more dangerous than driving when drunk. Drivers talking on a telephone had a 30% slower reaction time than those who had been drinking. In addition, they missed significantly more road warning signs than those who were drunk. And when asked to stop when driving at 112 kilometers an hour, those using a hands-free phone stopped in 39 meters, while drunk drivers stopped in 35 meters. The control group stopped in 31 meters. Obviously, this means that some of the injuries and deaths on the road are being caused by the use of modern communication technology while driving.

B.   In view of the growing evidence linking cell-phone use with accidents, what laws have been passed to restrict the use of cell-phones by drivers? Very few laws regarding cell-phones have been passed in the USA. In general, Americans have almost total freedom to operate their phones while driving. This total freedom does not exist in Europe. Most countries, including Switzerland, Italy, and Hungary require a hands-free device for car-phones, and the position is the same in Israel. Some countries in Europe have laws forbidding drivers from placing calls or participating in phone conversations while vehicles are in motion.

C.   It is unrealistic to completely ban cell-phones since they provide an important safety benefit. Every day thousands of calls are made from cars to emergency numbers. These calls save lives by decreasing the time it takes for emergency services such as ambulances or police forces to respond to emergencies.

D.   Keeping in mind their safety benefit, the cell-phone industry issued several recommendations for using cell-phones responsible. Drivers should avoid emotional conversations while driving and try to stick to simple and necessary conversations only. In addition, the use of hands-free features is strongly recommended. Even better, drivers are warned against using cell-phones when cars are in motion. They are advised to pull over to the side of the road before making calls.

E.   The use of even more sophisticated technology in cars is likely to increase in the future. Before the use of new technology such as fax machines, televisions and wireless internet access becomes widespread among drivers, it is essential for the public to become aware of the dangers of using communication technology in cars. Hopefully, drivers will then adopt safety measures for the responsible use of communication technology while driving.

Questions:

1. What is the purpose of the statistics mentioned in paragraph A?

    a. To show that drivers talking on the telephone had a 30% slower reaction time than those who had been drinking.

    b. To show that drunk driving is dangerous.

    c. To show that drivers talking on the telephone missed significantly more road warnings than those who were drunk.

    d. To show the connection between talking on the telephone while driving and accidents.

2. Explain the main idea of paragraph B in your own words.

    _____

3. Give three different types of legal positions regarding cell-phone use in cars around
the world.

    a. _____

    b. _____

    c. _____

4. Explain the connection between paragraphs B and C.

    _____

    _____

5. Which word best connects the ideas in paragraphs C to paragraph D?

    a. In addition

    b. Therefore

    c. However

    d. Because

6. How many recommendations are mentioned in paragraph D for using cell-hones
responsibly in cars? _____

    List and number them.

7. What is the writer's purpose in paragraph E?

    a. To point to future problems expected in driving as communication
       technology develops.

    b. To summarize the ideas of the text.

    b. To present a contrast to the main idea of the text.

    c. To give additional recommendations to using cell-phones while driving.

Name _____

Reading Strategy Exercise 3 – Text Structures and Connectors

A.   Read the following passage. Fill in the missing connectors with an appropriate connector from the list below.

as a result	however
but	such as
for example	

Zoos: Myth and Reality

Six hundred million people visit zoos every year, _____ zoos have recently become the target of intense public criticism. There is a growing feeling that if wild animals are kept in captivity, their needs must be properly met. Research organizations _____ *Zoocheck* and *Animal Watch* claim that most zoos do not provide even the most basic necessities to ensure the physical and psychological health of the animals in their care. Zoo environments are seldom complex enough to compensate for the lack of freedom, or to enable natural behavior. _____, animals suffer, both physically and mentally. Intellectually complex species are more likely to suffer from captivity than less intelligent ones. _____, a tortoise, protected from food shortages and natural predators, is probably just as happy as it would be in the wild. _____ undersized cages, inadequate veterinarian care and lack of mental stimulation for the more intelligent animals are all too common in many zoos.

B.   Below are a number of text titles. Match the title to the appropriate text structure (Write the letter next to the title). Each structure can be matched only once.

Structures
a. Cause and Effect   c. Listing
b. Sequence   d. Compare and Contrast

Titles
1. Methods of Preventing High Cholesterol ____
2. Advantages and Disadvantages of Western Diets as opposed to Eastern Diets____
3. Smoking and Lung Disease ____
4. The Evolution of Sports: From Hunting to Team Games ____

Name _____

Reading Strategy Exercise 4 – Implied Meaning

Read the following text and answer the questions below.

Slow Learners Can Still Make the Grade

A.   At age 14 I was 1.50 meters tall. Bobby, my best friend and one month younger than I, was 1.70 meters. He used to comfort me by reminding me that I had reached Napoleon's height. At age 17, while Bobby stayed at the same height, I had grown to 1.78 meters. My slow growth rate during those teenage years didn't influence my life in any major way. I played football instead of basketball – a normal option for an Uruguayan kid. My intellectual development, on the other hand, was very fast, while Bobby's was rather slow. This story is about Bobby and others like him.

B.   After many months of receiving weekly admonitions from the teachers: "Work harder," "Make an extra effort," "Don't be lazy," Bobby was finally defeated by chemistry, physics and mathematics. Aged 16, he dropped out of high school.

C.   Sometimes I wonder about the effect on my motivation, status among my peers and attitude toward school had I been urged weekly by my teachers to "Grow faster. What would it have done to my social development had I been constantly told: "You could be taller," "Make an effort to grow" and "Don't be lazy."

Questions:

1. What two types of growth are mentioned?

   _____ and _____

2. "Bobby was defeated by chemistry, physics and mathematics" means that

   _____

3. Which type of growth were Bobby's teachers concerned about?

   _____

4. a. What kind of comparison does the author make in the par. C?

   _____

   _____

   b. What reaction are we expected to have?

   _____

5. Who is the writer criticizing in this text?

   _____

APPENDIX D: SAMPLE UNIT

UNIT 1: The Reading Process

How do you expect to succeed in life? By getting an education! How do you expect to succeed in learning? By **reading!** Reading is the main way to gain information so that you can advance yourself. Reading in English allows you to gain information from all over the world, not just information limited to your native language. Reading in English is therefore a **key** that opens many doors of knowledge for the reader. In order to become a good reader in English, you need to plan your reading carefully. Because reading is a thinking activity, reading should always be active, not passive. That is, as a reader you should always activate your mind before you read, during your reading and after your reading.

Steps in the Reading Process

1.   Before you read **prepare**: look at all the data provided, make connections and predict what you will read about.

2.   When you **read**: check if your predictions are correct, write main ideas or summaries on the margins of the text, and define key words needed for understanding.

3.   After you read **react**: think about what you've read, review the ideas so that you can remember them, and ask yourself if you agree or disagree with the information based on your knowledge and based on the way the material was presented to you.

1. PREPARE

Prepare your reading by **previewing** (looking at all the data available and identifying it) and **pre-reading** (looking for main ideas in the text). Use this information to make **predictions** about the topic of what you will read about, how the writer will present it and what the purpose of the writer is. Previewing takes you half way to understanding the text!!!

ACTIVITY 1:1

1.

2.

a. What kind of movie is this?

_____

b. Who will probably go see it?

_____

c. What do you expect it to be about?

_____
_____

a. What kind of movie is this?

_____

b. Who will probably see it?

_____
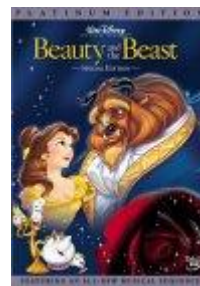
c. What do you expect it to be about?

_____
_____

3.
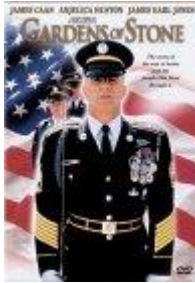
a. What kind of movie is this?
_____

b. Who will probably go see it?
_____

c. What do you expect it to be about?
_____
_____

4.

a. What kind of movie is this?
_____

b. Who will probably see it?
_____

c. What do you expect it to be about?
_____
_____

5.
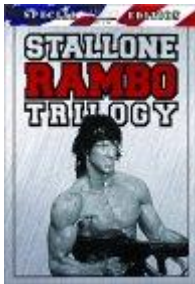
a. What kind of movie is this?
_____

b. Who will probably go see it?
_____

c. What do you expect it to be about?
_____
_____

6.

a. What kind of movie is this?
_____

b. Who will probably see it?
_____

c. What do you expect it to be about?
_____
_____

Which movie would you choose to see? Why?

_____

ACTIVITY 1:2

Look at the following CD covers.

What can you guess about each one?

Write down as much information as you can:

a.   What kind of music is it?
b.   Who probably listens to it?
c.   What do you think the music or songs are about?
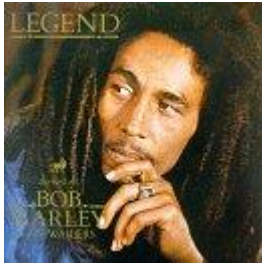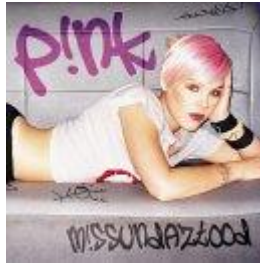
1.   2.   3.

_____   _____   _____

_____   _____   _____

_____   _____   _____

4.   5.   6.

_____   _____   _____

_____   _____   _____

_____   _____   _____
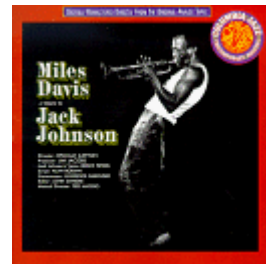
ACTIVITY 1:3

Fill in the chart using the following information as clues:

title, name of authors, and eye-catching features

Name of Book	Kind of Book	Author	Probable Readers	Check with a (√) if you would read it
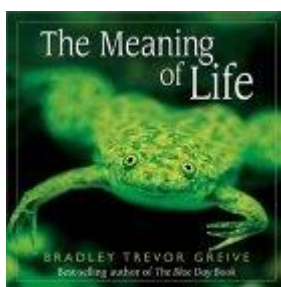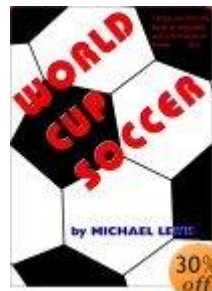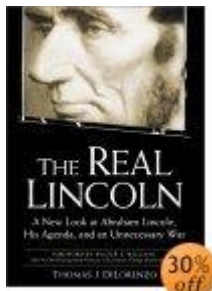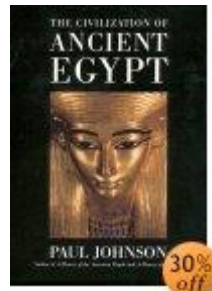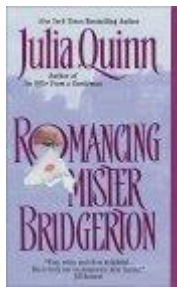
PREVIEWING

Imagine this: You go to a movie with a friend. You know nothing about the movie you are going to see. You do not know the name of the movie. You don't know who the actors are. You don't know what kind of movie it is or what it is about. Sounds crazy? It is quite the same to read a text without knowing anything about it before you begin to read it. Would you go to see a movie without knowing its name, its actors or what it's about? Would you buy a CD without knowing who the artist is or what kind of music it is? Would you buy a book without knowing its title, who its author is, or what it is about? The answer to all of these questions is probably no! For the same reason, when you read a text you want to know as much as you can about it before you begin to read it. You can do this by **looking at all the data** provided and **looking for clues**. This is your **starting point** for understanding the text.

---

7 STEPS TO PREVIEWING A TEXT:

1. Identify the title

2. Identify the author

3. Identify the source (what book or magazine did the article come from?)

4. Identify the date (is the article from a different period or is it recent?)

5. Identify eye-catching features (pictures, graphs, diagrams, etc.)

6. Make predictions:

   a. What type of text is this? (historical, scientific, economic, social, political, etc.)

   b. Who would probably read this text? (students, children, men, women, businessmen, etc.)

   c. What is the topic, or subject, of the text?

7. Use your previous knowledge (What do you already know about the subject?)

ACTIVITY 1:4

Look at the following information provided on each of 8 different texts. What can you predict about each one? (What do you think each one will be about?)

a.   What type of text is this?
b.   Who would probably read this text?
c.   What is the topic of the text?

Use the information provided and your own general knowledge.

1. "The Importance of a Best Friend" by Rinat Marom (*Education Issues*, 1997)

_____

_____

2. "The Brain and the Nervous System" by Dr. Habib Kumari (*Health Issues*, 1999).

_____

_____

3. "The History of Apartheid in South Africa" by Jim Robins (*South African Historical Journal*, 2002)

_____

_____

4. "Growing Up with a Learning Disabilities?" by Antonio Marquez (*Newsweek,* 2000)

_____

_____

5. "Race and Sports: Athletes of African ancestry are better than the competition" by Jon Entine (*Sport Sciences*, 2002)

_____

_____

6. "Women in Advertisements" by Janet West (*Gender Studies Journal*, 1990)

_____

_____

PRE-READING

When you take a trip, you usually take a map with you. You look at the map and plan your trip before you get into your car. You know the way you will take before you actually drive to your destination. Reading a text is very similar. Before you actually read the text, you should plan your reading and know what direction the text is going. When you find the **main ideas** of a text before you begin reading it, the rest of the way is much easier and you will be less likely to get lost while reading.

To find the main ideas of a text, read the first sentence of each paragraph. Then predict what you will read in each paragraph.

ACTIVITY 1:5

Between Friends

By Miriam Chase, America Today, 2001

I.   PREVIEWING: Look at all the data and look for clues!!!

1. Identify the title: _____
2. Identify the author: _____
3. Identify the source (what book or magazine did the article come from?)
    _____
4. Identify the date (is the article from a different period or is it recent?)
    _____

This is your starting point to understanding the text.

Now use the clues to make connections!!!

5. Make predictions:
a.   What type of text is this?

_____

b.   Who would probably read this text? (students, children, men, women, businessmen, etc.)

_____

c.   What is the topic of the text?

_____

6.   Use your knowledge (What do you already know about the subject?)

_____

_____

_____

II.   PRE-READING
The text has four paragraphs. Read the first sentence of each paragraph. **Predict** what each paragraph is about.

A.   Good friendship gives meaning to our lives.

B.   Are friendships between men different from friendships between women?

C.   Differences between men's and women's friendships are the subject of a study of 12 to 14 year-old boys and girls.

D.   Men's and women's friendships may be different, but we all need them.

Paragraph A. Prediction:
_____
Paragraph B. Prediction:
_____
Paragraph C. Prediction:
_____
Paragraph D. Prediction:
_____

III. READ THE TEXT.

Check your predictions. Were your predictions correct?

Answer the questions following the text.

Between Friends

By Miriam Chase, America Today, 2001

A. Good friendship gives meaning to our lives. Experiences are made more meaningful when they have been shared and talked about with a close friend. If we experienced situations, both happy and sad, with a friend, we will form an important close connection with that friend. "Do you remember the day we didn't go to school and went
5   to the beach instead?" "Do you remember when we met in Bangkok?" All the highs and lows – the first day of the army together, the first time your heart got broken, the trip to the Far East together – build a friendship for a lifetime.

B. Are friendships between men different from friendships between women? Some psychologists believe that women get emotional support from talking. Talking, whether
10 over a meal, when taking a walk or over a telephone, is an important part of women's friendships. This is in contrast to friendships between men. Men usually prefer to share activities rather than share emotions. For example, playing football together or watching a basketball game together on television is a way in which men build friendships.

C. Differences between men's and women's friendships are the subject of a study of
15 12 to 14 year-old boys and girls. When questioned what they wanted to know about boys, girls asked: ''Why don't boys cry?'', ''Why do boys hit each other?'', ''Why don't they talk much?'', ''Why don't boys talk about anything interesting?'' Boys, on the other hand, wanted to know: ''What do girls do all day?'', ''Why is everything such a big deal?'' ''Why do girls gossip all the time?''

20 D. Men's and women's friendships may be different, but we all need them. All of us, whether we are men or women, need good friends. Without someone to be there when we fail, we will fall, and without someone to be there when we succeed, we will not enjoy our success.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Paragraph A

1.   How do people become friends?

_____

2.   There are two questions in the paragraph. What are they examples of?

_____

3.   The paragraph talks about "highs and lows" we have with friends. Give an example of each.

HIGH	LOW

Paragraph B

4.

	♀ WOMEN	♂ MEN
How do they build friendships?		
Give examples.	a. ………………………. ……………………… b. ………………………. ……………………… c. ……………………….	a. ………………………… ……………………… b. ………………………… ………………………..

Paragraph C

5.   a. In general, what do girls think about boys? (Do not copy from text)

_____

      b. In general, what do boys think about girls? (Do not copy from text)

_____

Paragraph D

6.　　What two things can happen to people who don't have good friends?

　　a. _____

　　b. _____

ACTIVITY 1:6

Answer the questionnaire about one of your good friends.

Friendship Questionnaire

Question	Answer
What is the name of one of your best friends?	
How long have you been friends?	
Where did you meet?	
Give an example of a "high" you experienced together.	
Give an example of a "low" you experienced together.	
What do you enjoy doing together?	

Share your answers with a student in the class.

Do you agree with the main ideas of the text "Between Friends"? Why or why not?

2. READ

Now that you know how to prepare for reading and how to make good predictions, reading the text should be much smoother and easier to comprehend. Instead of going blindly into the unknown, you are fully armed with knowledge before you read. However, you must continue to be an active reader while reading the text. You should always read with a pen or pencil and a highlighter in your hand so that you can make notes as you are reading.

Mark as you Read

1. Circle, underline or highlight key words or ideas in the text. In this way they will stand out from the rest of the information so they will be easy to come back to. Key words or ideas include connecting words, important names, key terms, etc.

2. When you look up a word in the dictionary, make a star * next to the word and write its' definition in the margin, or write it directly in your notebook with the definition next to it. Do not write the definition directly above the word! If you do so, you will immediately look at the translation and ignore the new word. You will not be able to learn and remember it.

3. Summarize and organize the information given in each paragraph at the margin of the text. Write the topic of the paragraph in the margin, so that you can easily see the organization of the text. Summarize the key ideas of the paragraph in the margins. For example, if the paragraph provides two explanations, number them in the margins and give a short summary for each. This helps you better understand the structure of the paragraph.

ACTIVITY 1:7

Look at the text **on page 16** called "The Importance of a Best Friend".
1. Preview the text using the 7-step model from page 6.
2. Pre-read the text.
3. Answer the questions that follow.

I.   PREVIEWING

1. Identify the title: _____
2. Identify the author: _____
3. Identify the source (what book or magazine did the article come from?)
    _____
4. Identify the date (is the article from a different period or is it recent?)
    _____
5. Identify eye-catching features (pictures, graphs, diagrams, etc.)
    _____
6. Make predictions:
    a. What type of text is this?
    _____
    b. Who would probably read this text? (students, children, men, women, businessmen, etc.)
    _____
    c. What is the topic of the text?
    _____
7. Use your knowledge (What do you already know about the subject?)
    _____
    _____
    _____

II.   PRE-READING
The text has four paragraphs.
Read the first sentence of each paragraph.

A. All it takes is one best friend to prevent the loneliness and depression of a child.

B. Many studies have shown that children who are rejected by their peer group are at risk of emotional problems as adults.

C. It is widely recognized that children's friendships are preparation for important adult relationships, including marriage.

D. Researchers say that positive adult and family involvement in the lives of children is necessary for good friendships between children.

Make predictions.

1.   Which paragraph discusses the role of parents? _____
2.   Which paragraph discusses the importance of childhood friendships in becoming an adult? _____
3.   Which paragraph discusses why friendship is important for a child? _____
4.   Which paragraph discusses what happens to a child who is not accepted?   _____

C.   Read the text.

    Check if your predictions are correct.

    Answer the questions following the text.

The Importance of a Best Friend

By Mary Smith,

Sociology Today, May, 2001

A.   All it takes is one best friend to prevent the loneliness and depression of a child. The key is in helping children to establish strong friendships that provide intimacy, companionship and an ability to solve conflicts. "Even if a child is not accepted by the larger group, one close friendship can help to prevent loneliness and depression," says Cynthia Erdley, professor of psychology.

B.   Many studies have shown that children who are rejected by their peer group are at
10   risk of emotional problems as adults. New studies show that children who are not accepted by their peers don't always grow up with emotional problems. If they have one best friend, they can grow up to have good relationships in the future.

Childhood friendships are not simply child's play but powerful predictors of social adjustment in adulthood.

C.   It is widely recognized that children's friendships are preparation for important adult relationships, including marriage. Close friendships among children are characterized by affection, a sense of trust and intimacy — the sharing of secrets and personal information. The experience of having a friend in which to confide can promote feelings of trust and acceptance, and a sense of being understood.

D.   Researchers say that positive adult and family involvement in the lives of children is necessary for good friendships between children. Good friendships don't just happen. It is important for parents to play an active role. Studies show an association between parental involvement in their children's friendships and the social and academic
25   development of their children. Parents who arrange for their children to play together, enrol their children in activities, and monitor peer interactions appear to have more socially happy kids.

I. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Paragraph A

1.   What will happen to a child who does not have friends?

_____

2.   What three things does a good friendship give a child?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

Paragraph B

3.   Paragraph B mentions two types of studies. What did each study find?

a. Fill in the table.

Old Studies	New Studies

b. In which way is the new study similar to the old one?

_____

c. In which way is the new study different from the old one?

_____

Paragraphs C and D

4.   How can friendship prepare a child for adult relationships?

_____

5.   What can help children to develop better socially and academically?

_____

6.   Give three ways in which parents can take an active role in their children's friendships.

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

III.   VOCABULARY

A.   Match the word in Column A with its meaning in Column B.

Start with those that are easiest for you.

Column A

1.	to establish	___	
2.	to accept	___	
3.	to reject	___	
4.	to prevent	___	
5.	a risk	___	
6.	peers	___	
7.	a secret	___	
8.	an experience	___	
9.	a role	___	
10.	a development	___	

Column B

a. people of the same age or group

b. a danger

c. the act of growing

d. to stop from happening

e. something others don't know

f. to say no

g. to say yes

h. what a person is supposed to do

i. an event that affects you

j. to build

B. Nouns and Verbs

Look at the word in column A. Which are **nouns** and which are **verbs**? Mark the nouns with **N**, and the verbs with **V**.

What clues helped you to decide? **Underline the clues.**

C. Fill in the sentences with one of the words from Section III, A., Column A. Make any changes necessary to fit the sentence.

1. The _____ of a teacher is to help a student to understand.
2. Most children cannot keep a _____.
3. Danny _____ cigarettes, because he doesn't smoke.
4. The university _____ five hundred students every year.
5. In college many students _____ very good friendships.
6. Most students have _____ in college that they will always remember.
7. The little girl is very popular among her _____.
8. Driving too quickly is a _____.
9. We must do everything to _____ war.
10. The _____ of the business was quick and it continued to grow for many years.

3. REACT

After you read, you must continue to be an active reader. You've read a text. You answered questions. So what? What do you think about it? Do you agree or disagree with the ideas or opinions presented in the text? Was the text convincing? Was the text well organized? A good reader reflects on what has been read. The reader may be asked to either make connections between several texts that have been read on a certain subject or to express his or her ideas in writing.

ACTIVITY 1:8

Compare the texts "Between Friends" and "The Importance of a Best Friend".

1. a. Do you think the authors agree on the subject of friendship? YES / NO

       b. Copy one sentence from each text which proves your choice.

"Between Friends"

_____

"The Importance of a Best Friend"

_____

2. In what way are the two texts different?

"Between Friends" discusses

_____

BUT

"The Importance of a Best Friend" discusses

_____

ACTIVITY 1:9

Writing

      Do you agree with the texts in this unit? Do you think best friends are necessary or not to succeed in life? Explain why or why not. Use at least five words from the vocabulary on p 18.

      _____

      _____

      _____

      _____

      _____

      _____

APPENDIX E: FORM OF APPROVAL (MINISTRY OF EDUCATION)

Permission to conduct a research in the subject of 'The significance of cultural differences on reading comprehension processes of the young adult EFL Learner in a matriculation preparation programme classroom in Israel' by the Ministry of Education's Chief Scientist.

Permission is granted for the academic 2010-2011 academic year.

The framework within which the research is conducted: for the purpose of a doctoral degree at Sussex University, UK.

מדינת ישראל
משרד החינוך
לשכת המדען הראשי

היתר לעריכת מחקר בנושא
"The Significance of Cultural Differences on Reading Comprehension Processes of the young adult EFL (English as a Foreign Language) Learner in a Matriculation Preparation Program (*Mechina*) Classroom in Israel"
בביצוע גב' דבורה הלרשטיין

ההיתר בתוקף החל מהתאריך הרשום לעיל ועד לסיום שנת הלימודים תשע"א בלבד.

במסמך זה ההתייחסות לכל מי שאינם מזוהים לפי שם היא בלשון זכר. זאת מטעמי נוחות בלבד, והכוונה היא גם לנקבה אם לא מצוין אחרת.

לצורך הכניסה למכללה להכשרת מורים יומצא העתק של מסמך זה למנהל המוסד.

המסגרת שבה נערך המחקר: לימודיה של עורכת המחקר לקראת תואר שלישי בחינוך באוניברסיטת 'ססקס' שבבריטניה.

מטרת המחקר: בחינת תהליך הלימוד של השפה האנגלית כשפה זרה בקרב סטודנטים במכינה במכללות להכשרת מורים, תוך התייחסות להבדלים בתהליך הלימוד בין סטודנטים מרקע תרבותי שונה.

אלה עיקרי המרכיבים של המחקר לעניין היתר זה:

הנבדקים: סטודנטים במכינה של המכללה להכשרת מורים

הליך איסוף המידע יכלול: מילוי שאלונים הבוחנים את אופן הלימוד של השפה האנגלית כשפה זרה במסגרת המכינה . בנוסף, יתבקשו הנבדקים למסור מידע על ארץ מוצאם, ההגדרה העצמית שלהם מבחינה דתית והרקע התרבותי שלהם.

הבקשה לביצוע המחקר הנ"ל נבדקה על ידי לשכת המדען הראשי, ונמצאה עומדת בכל התנאים הנוגעים בדבר הקבועים בנוהל "אישור איסוף מידע במוסדות החינוך". לאור זאת הוחלט להתיר את איסוף המידע המבוקש, לצורכי המחקר הנדון בלבד, בקרב סטודנטים במכינה של מכללות להכשרת מורים במחוז מרכז. זאת בכפיפות לכל התנאים שלהלן אשר אותם על עורכת המחקר לקיים, בשיתוף עם הנהלת המוסד החינוכי הנוגע בדבר, אלא אם כן בסעיף עצמו נקבע אחרת:

1. המועמדים להשתתף במחקר אינם כפופים לצוות המחקר או לכל אדם אחר הפועל מטעמו ואינם תלויים בהם בכל דרך אחרת.

2. איסוף המידע לא ייערך בפועל על ידי חבר צוות של המוסד החינוכי או על ידי בעל תפקיד אחר הפועל במסגרת המוסד החינוכי או על ידי תלמיד הלומד בו.

3. תכובד זכותו של כל מי שמועמד להשתתף במחקר לבחור לא להשתתף בו בפועל, וכן תכובד זכותם של הנבדקים להפסיק את השתתפותם בכל עת שירצו במהלך המחקר, בלי שייפגעו המועמדים להיבדק או הנבדקים בעקבות החלטתם באופן כלשהו. נקודות אלה יובהרו לכל המועמדים ליטול חלק במחקר ע"י עורכת המחקר.

מדינת ישראל
משרד החינוך
לשכת המדען הראשי

4. **הנבדקים לא יתבקשו למסור מידע כלשהו שיאפשר את זיהויים, ולא יירשם כל פרט מזהה על אודותם.**

5. **במהלך איסוף המידע תכובד זכותו של הנבדק לפרטיות.**

<u>עוד יובהר כדלהלן :</u>

- עורכת המחקר התחייבה בכתובים לפני לשכת המדען הראשי לא לפרסם את ממצאי המחקר באופן שיאפשר את זיהוי הנבדקים או את זיהוי המוסדות שבמסגרתם נאסף המידע הנדון.

- ההיתר ניתן אך ורק לאיסוף המידע באמצעות כלי המחקר שהוצגו לבדיקה בלשכת המדען הראשי, במתכונת שהותרה לשימוש.

- אין במכתב זה משום חיווי דעה של לשכת המדען הראשי על איכותו של המחקר.

- לא נדרש היתר נפרד מטעם המחוז.

_____
רנה אוסיזון
מרכזת בכירת (בקרה ומעקב)

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT SAMPLES

Transcripts of two of the 35 interviews are presented below. The categories and sub-categories, and the 'Notes' written in blue *(Notes)* were added during the data analysis process. The interviews present examples of two students who immigrated to Israel during their adolescence. Alberto immigrated to Israel from Argentina and underwent a successful immigration process. His interview reveals his sense of biculturalism and integration within Israeli society. In the programme he showed highly developed intercultural competence and made significant progress in his EFL reading comprehension. In contrast, Tamar who immigrated to Israel from Ethiopia has not had a successful immigration process. Her interview reveals her sense of isolationism. Her resistance to the programme is also apparent in the interview as well as her lack of intercultural competence. Consequently, her EFL reading comprehension did not develop and she did not benefit from the programme.

Interview #17 (38 minutes)

ALBERTO (Argentinian, traditional, male)

D: I want to thank you for coming in to speak with me. The main purpose is to improve this programme by learning about your experience this year. So, it's really important that you tell me what you think and not what you think I want to hear. If there are any issues you prefer not to talk about, just say so.

A: No problem.

D: From my point of view, you made very nice progress this year. You began very weak and you finished with one of the highest grades in the class. Can you tell me, in general, from your point of view how you see this year?

CATEGORY: Student reflections on the programme

A: At the start of the year I thought English was the hardest subject. Physical education wasn't a problem because I have the background, and in math I'm fine, but English, that was my biggest fear, because I forgot… when I immigrated to Israel I knew English, because I studied English in Argentina, and when I came to Israel I managed with what I knew, I spoke English and everything, until I learned Hebrew and then my English just disappeared, completely disappeared. It's like my English was erased! In school I did 3-pts, and I didn't get a very good mark, 70, because I wouldn't study. I wouldn't study for tests because…, I got a 71 in my report card without studying. I didn't make any effort. I went to the exam with the knowledge I had, I'd get whatever I'd get, not because I studied for it. It's not like I invested in it or anything. In the army, I didn't touch English either, nothing, nothing at all. So when I got here I was terrified…Now, when I heard about the programme, to tell you the truth, I wasn't very impressed with it. I thought you weren't touching those points I'd needed to understand a text.

Notes:

- *Hebrew affected English acquisition. Focus turned to Hebrew proficiency.*
- *Didn't invest in subject at school*
- *At start of programme - negative view of programme*

D: What are those points?

A: I thought we need to translate the whole text and then to try and understand it. I thought, how does she want us look only at the first sentence of a paragraph, to mark a few connecting words in a sentence, and from that to figure out what the text means? Until I began to practice, and practice, those strategies you gave us, to mark with different colour markers, key words, anything that I thought was important to mark, to write ideas in the margins, and then suddenly everything became clear. I'd look at a question, immediately I knew where the answer was, what colour marker to go to…

Notes: change in attitude to programme from practice; applied the strategies

D: That's great.

A: So, yes, it was really helpful.

D: So, as far as you're concerned, were these strategies helpful for answering questions, or also for understanding the text?

Sub-Category: Student investment

A: For both, for understanding the text, too, definitely…And I've told other people that this is a really good technique…Because now I don't have to translate every word. I did three of four texts, and gained confidence, to read directly, to go to the ideas… When you get into the pace of it, there was a period when we did loads of texts, one after the other, I got really good at it, and I reached a ninety something in one of the last practice tests.

Notes:

- *Invested in homework assignments - practice identified by student as key for refining strategies.*
- *Student found programme beneficial*

D: Yes, you did a great job. I was really proud to see the progress you made and how you incorporated a lot of the strategies in your reading.

A: Yes, I think that now I automatically read that way.

D: Do you apply them when you read only in English, or when you read texts in Hebrew as well?

A: Actually, I realized I started marking my Hebrew work as well. I didn't do it consciously. I just noticed that I was taking my markers out when I did my reading for other classes too.

Notes: Transfer from English to Hebrew

D: That's great. Now, I'd like to go back a little, if we can. Can you first tell me a little about yourself? How old are you?

CATEGORY: Student Background

Sub-Category: Personal details

A: I'm 25.

D: And where do you live?

A: I live in Tel-Aviv these days.

D: And how old were you when you came to Israel?

A: I was 16. I immigrated to Israel with the 'Na'ale' programme.

Sub-Category: Immigration

D: Can you tell a little about your immigration process?

A: I studied Hebrew in Argentina and my mother is a Hebrew language teacher. In Argentina I learned in a school where we studied for three hours a day things related to Israel and Judaism, Hebrew.

D: Did that influence your reason for immigrating to Israel?

A: I immigrated to Israel for Zionist reasons, not because of any economic crisis or anything. Actually, my family was doing fine economically.

D: So having the background you had in Judaism and Hebrew, did you have an easy immigration process, or did you experience any difficulties?

A: My brother came to Israel two years before I did. He immigrated to Israel with the 'Na'ale' programme, and then I came to visit him, and I saw how he was in the boarding school, that he was doing well there and he was happy, he was studying, in a good atmosphere. Now, in Argentina, you study but there's not too much of a future in studies, also because of the environment. So, I said to myself, either I pick myself up and immigrate to Israel and become something, or I stay and 'flow' with life, so I came and said, we'll see whatever will be, will be. So I immigrated to Israel, to do some soul searching. I left everything, friends, family, everything I know.

Notes:

- *Immigrated alone with a youth programme at age 16*
- *Claims reasons were not financial, but ideological - but says he did not see a future in Argentina. Reasons may be personal - family issues due to parents' divorce?*

D: You immigrated by yourself, without your family?

A: Yes, I came on my own. I only had my brother, and I was in a boarding school in a kibbutz by the Jordan River and he was in boarding school about two hours away.

D: I imagine that's very difficult.

<div align="right">

CATEGORY: Language experience

Sub-Category: Hebrew

</div>

A: In terms of the language, I knew how to read and write. But, to speak I couldn't.

D: Everyday language is a bit different from what you learn at school, isn't it?

A: Right, so at first they put me with the 'smart' students, those who know Hebrew, but it was very difficult for me. I don't like to start from the top, because even if I know the material, I prefer to start from the bottom and work up from there. I feel more confident that way. And then I was put at a lower level, and I began to study. I managed, also because of sports. I played basketball, and also football, so I was always around Israelis. So I had to speak in Hebrew with them. There were pupils who stayed in the boarding school the whole time, who spoke Spanish with each other the whole time and wouldn't connect with the people in the kibbutz.

Notes:

- *Student attributes his acquisition of spoken Hebrew to his integration with other Israelis*
- *Attributes sports as the key reason for integration - student plays team sports where cooperation and teamwork are essential*
- *Developed good intercultural competence skills*

D: So, what you're saying is that you integrated within Israeli society more easily because of sports.

A: Yes, exactly. Everything was easier for me because of that, with Hebrew and with integration.

D: That's interesting. Now, what can you tell me about your parents?

CATEGORY: Family structure

Sub-Category: Parental occupations

A: My father is an electrician and he teaches electricity in school, in, eh…, in Argentina, eh…., he teaches in, kind of schools in villages that don't have any means. They are very poor. So, instead of going to school - these are adults - they learn a practical skill so they can get a job afterwards.

D: It's a vocational school for adults, then.

A: Yes, exactly. So he teaches them electricity, and things like that, so they'll have something when they finish.

D: I see, and you said your mother is also a teacher.

A: Yes, my mother is a Hebrew language teacher in a Jewish school, the community school.

D: And I understand you went to the Jewish school as well?

A: Yes, it's the school that the Jewish community goes to in Santa Fe.

D: So, did you have a religious upbringing?

A: I wouldn't say religious, but traditional. We kept Jewish traditions at home, the holidays, Shabbat.

D: Are you still traditional or would you characterize yourself as secular in Israel?

A: No, I'm still traditional. I also went to a traditional boarding school here. I keep kosher and I keep Shabbat, but that's it. I'm not religious.

Sub-Category: Parental education

D: So, I understand both of your parents have teaching degrees?

A: Yes.

D: And are they still living in Argentina?

A: Yes, but we are planning my mother's immigration process these days.

Sub-Category: Siblings

D: And you have one brother?

A: Yes, that's right.

D: And what does he do?

A: He works with me. We both work in security for the Ministry of Defence.

D: And is he also a student?

A: Yes, he's studying business management in Rishon Lezion.

Notes:

- *Both parents are teachers, with a first degree.*
- *Small nuclear family – 1 sibling*
- *Identifies himself as traditional*

CATEGORY: Family influence on education

D: And what was it like to grow up with parents who are both teachers? How did it impact you? I imagine there was a lot of emphasis to succeed in school.

A: Yes, there was a lot of emphasis on studying, they were always 'on top of us' to study, but we would always run away to sports.

D: So sport is not from home, not from your parents.

A: No, not at all. I think it came from the community because in the community we have the youth club, Maccabi Santa Fe. And there are players who came from that club who made it to the NBA, so basketball was very important for us to be accepted everywhere.

D: It gave you social status?

A: Yes, at first in the neighbourhood I'd play football, and my mother was approached by different teams who wanted to recruit me.

D: Really?

A: Yes, but I went after my big brother, whatever he did, I wanted to do as well. So I followed him to basketball. I was really bad at first, but then I improved and even made it to the city team.

D: How did your parents react to this passion for sports?

A: They weren't too happy, and they kept telling us, it's important to study. I told my mother 'what do I need Hebrew for, I'll never use it' (laughs)

D: (laughs…)

A: But they kept on and on about school.

D: And would they sit and help you with homework?

A: Yes, they'd sit with us, up until they got a divorce, and then everything kind of disappeared.

D: How old were you?

A: I was seven.

D: You were pretty young, do you think their divorce affected you in terms of school?

A: Yes, it did have an effect. Because, how can I put it, a little boy doesn't sit at home with his mother. And I wasn't one of those kids who'd stay home in front of the computer.

D: You preferred to be outside with your friends?

A: Yes, I'm not the kind of person who likes to sit around…I liked to be with my buddies.

Notes:

- *Parents encouraged learning at home*
- *Sports played a bigger role than school*
- *Parents' divorce at age 7 - impacted student's learning; preferred not being at home*

Sub-Category: Reading

D: So would you say reading books is also something you didn't enjoy doing?

A: Actually, I did like to read books that interested me?

D: And what interested you?

A: I like to read about history and art.

D: Do you?

A: Yes, I especially like to read biographies. I read about Salvador Dali, about Argentinian figures, the history of the Jewish people, the history of Israel.

D: And does this come from home? Is there a presence of books at home and encouragement from your parents to read?

Influence of Mother

A: Books came from Mum. She had loads of books and read all the time, novels, history, art, you name it.

D: Do you remember your mother reading books to you when you were young?

A: Yes, she'd read a lot to us when we were young. So, there were books around us all the time.

<div align="right">

CATEGORY: School experience

In Argentina

</div>

D: Now, can you tell me about your school experience in Argentina and then in Israel?

A: In Argentina it's not like here that you go up from year to year. There are 15 subjects and if you don't pass a minimum of 10 you don't pass the year. You have to repeat the year.

D: And you have to do all the 15 subjects again or just the five?

A: Well, you have the summer and you can make up the work and take exams again. If I don't pass the first exam, I have a second make-up test. If I don't pass the second, I have the next year to make them up in addition to the subjects of the next year.

D: And were you in that position, or were you a good student?

A: I was very stubborn and I'd always argue with the teachers.

D: (Laughs) were you a troublemaker?

A: (Laughs) yes, I was a real troublemaker. But I've grown up since then and realize that it's not a good idea.

D: So you didn't invest in your studies?

A: I wouldn't study all year. Except for a few things that I liked, I wouldn't study all year, the teachers would be angry the whole year that I don't do my homework, that I disturb class, so I'd get 60's all year. I'd make up everything in the summer and get 90's. And the teachers would be upset with me, 'why do you have to let it get to that'?

D: If you think about it now, in retrospect, why did you let it get to that? Wouldn't that ruin your summer vacation?

A: It was like, I'll show you. I'll prove to you that without studying all year, I can still do well. Now that I think about it, I had this need to show them, to prove to them, to my Mum too. In one year I took 16 subjects in the summer, and I succeeded in all of them. It was a way of saying, see I can do it.

Notes: School in Argentina - contrast of student self-description as an 'underachiever' during school year, but and succeeds when invests to make up work

D: And then you came to Israel and completed 11th and 12th grade?

In Israel

A: Yes, first I went to Ulpan and then 11th and 12th grades.

D: And when you came here did you change your attitude to learning or were you the same kind of student?

A: No, I underwent a major change.

D: Did you take school more seriously?

A: It's not that I took it more seriously, but I knew what I had to do to pass. I knew I couldn't study alone, so I'd sit with the girls, because before exams they were the most serious and they'd study together. So, I'd join them. That's how I'd get 90's on tests, and they'd get 80's and then they'd be upset with me (laughs).

D: (laughs). Did you like school here? Did you like the subjects?

A: It was OK, but again, I preferred playing sports and hanging out with friends. I'd only invest what I needed to pass exams, not more.

Notes:

- *Shows good integration skills for the purpose of learning*
- *Still maintained 'underachiever' character (passing by investing the minimum)*
- *Describes good social skills*

Category: Post-School Experience

Sub-Category: Military Service

D: And when you graduated from high-school you went to the army?

A: Yes.

D: What did you do in the army service?

A: I was in a combat unit, like my brother.

D: And how do you think the military experience influenced you in general, and in your studies, in particular?

A: Well, it was a really good experience. That's where I felt like I really belonged to the country, that everyone is the same, no matter where they come from, if they're immigrants or not, if they come from wealthier or poorer families, it doesn't matter…In terms of my studies, well, I think I did a lot of growing up in the army. Coming here to complete my matric exams came from a completely different place, from a more mature place.

Notes:

- *Army is seen by student, as by the consensus in the country, as a melting pot - a place for integration; gave him a sense of belonging, becoming bicultural. Here he seems to have fully developed intercultural competence*
- *Army seen as a place for undergoing maturation process*

Sub-Category: English

D: Now, I'd like to discuss your experience with learning English. You told me that your English was good when you came here, and then it disappeared.

A: I have a tendency to put things away that I don't need. If I have an aim, I focus on that aim. I had an aim, to be proficient in Hebrew, and English was in the way, so I put it aside.

D: So, what happens in English class? Describe a lesson to me.

A: Actually, my teachers were very nice. I always say that my English teachers in Israel are very sweet, they want to help; they're always really nice.

D: And what would you do in English class?

A: I remember it was fun. We were all guys, except for two girls. It was the lowest level.

D: It was the 3-pt class?

A: Yes, 3-pts. And we had a good time. We'd laugh a lot. The teacher invited us to her home for Shabbat dinner.

D: Sounds very intimate and personal.

A: Yes, it was. And we were a small group, so there was a good atmosphere.

D: And in terms of learning English, what did you actually do?

A: We read some texts.

D: And how did you learn to read them? Did you learn any strategies?

A: No, there were no techniques to reading. We basically translated them in class together.

D: Did you work on your own, in groups, as a whole class?

A: Well, we were such a small class that we did everything together, we'd go over the texts together. Each student would read a sentence, explained what they understand, like that.

Notes:

- *English class in a boarding school in a kibbutz in Israel described by student as a small class; more of a social encounter than learning experience*
- *No group or individual work*
- *Amounted basically to translating texts*

D: Was this kind of learning similar or different to how you learned in Argentina?

A: In Argentina we were a much bigger class. What I mostly remember was doing lots of grammar exercises.

D: And did you do much reading in English?

A: We had some reading, but I usually didn't do it. But mostly I remember grammar work. It was terribly boring.

D: Was this done in groups, or individually?

A: Basically it was the teacher in front of the whole class going over exercises.

D: So, you did mostly rote work?

A: Yes, like I said, very boring.

D: Did you learn any reading strategies in English?

A: No, I never learned any reading strategies before coming here.

Notes:

- *English in Argentina: larger class*
- *No group or individual work; mostly whole class, frontal teaching*
- *Emphasis on grammar*

- *No reading strategies*

D: So if you compare this form of learning with what we did this year, how would you say things were similar or different?

CATEGORY: Student reflections on programme

A: The programme here, what we did this year, it's a question of believing in the programme– you either believe in it or you don't. Because there are some people who don't believe in it and they insist on using their methods, and they don't get it. If you don't come with a previous method, like me – I didn't have a method - then you don't have a choice but to adopt this one. For me, it was excellent.

Notes: attributes success of programme to his willingness to adopt it, to be open to trying and applying the new methods.

D: And how much do you think your Spanish contributed to your English progress?

A: My Spanish?

D: Yes, because Spanish and English share so many similar words.

A: I don't think I had an easier time than other students, because I might have a larger vocabulary, but they have a bigger basic vocabulary. I was missing that. I could figure out the 'bigger' words more easily, but I'd get stuck on the simple ones, the small words, the prepositions, the central words. And that I had to make up.

D: In terms of group work, I noticed that you worked well, and that you always contributed to your group. I also noticed that you liked working with different students from different backgrounds?

A: I like to work with students from different backgrounds, and because of the 'Na'ale' programme and spending time on a kibbutz I'm used to being with people from different backgrounds, who speak different languages. I think we all learn from each other that way.

D: So you saw group work as a positive way of learning?

A: Yes, definitely.

D: When you were in school did you ever work in small groups like we did, as a way of learning?

A: No, never. We always worked as a whole class. I think working in small groups is a good way to learn.

D: Why is that?

A: Because, well, I worked with Paulina for example, and I saw at the start she was working like me. She'd translate everything. And then I saw how she was using the strategies, and that it was working for her. So then, I tried to do what she did. I also worked with Ehab. He was a very serious student, too. I think that's because we're not native Hebrew speakers we had to communicate and understand each other to do the activities, so you really have to make yourself understood, you know? I think if I had to do these activities with other Spanish speakers, we'd probably end up using Spanish more than English…Even when I worked with Miriam, who needed a lot of help. Having to explain things to her helped me understand things better.

Notes:

- *Group work presented a good opportunity for intercultural competence.*
- *Student worked with students from other cultures, particularly non-Hebrew speakers; especially the 'more serious' students (Paulina, Ehab, Miriam)*
- *The student shows high intercultural competence – ability to work with others from different cultures, enjoys the experience and is curious to learn about them and from them.*

D: Great, I'm glad you found it a good experience. So, what are your plans for the future?

A: Well, I've got some problems. I don't know if I'll come to study here next year.

D: Why's that?

A: I've committed myself to working full time at the Ministry for the next year or year and a half. And I'll have to take the psychometric exam and I don't have time to prepare for it. And I'm in training in the national rugby team. Next year we

might get financial support from the government, which would be great, but it would mean more hours training. So, I'll have to see how I manage with that.

D: I understand. But, I strongly suggest that you think of a way to fit in your education. You should really think seriously about how you can work towards your degree. You've made such progress, it would be a shame if you didn't continue.

A: Yes, I'm dying to find a way to do it. But if I begin, I want to be committed and to be able to attend classes, to do it properly.

D: I hope you'll find your way and I hope to see you here as a student in the future. I want to thank you for the interview and I wish you luck in whatever you choose to do.

Notes:

- *Student presented many examples of his good integration skills – expressed feeling part of Israeli society*
- *Student shows developed intercultural skills – interest in other cultures and ability to learn from others*
- *Student was open to try new learning approaches (group work) and reading strategies*
- *The programme needs to find ways to help such students continue their education and the process they began here.*

Interview #22 (34 minutes)

TAMAR (Ethiopian, secular, female)

(This original interview took place in Hebrew. It should be noted that the student spoke with many language errors in Hebrew. The following transcript is an edited translation without the original errors, as these cannot be translated appropriately).

D: First, I'd like to thank you for taking the time to meet with me. The purpose of this conversation is to learn from you about your experience this year, what you think about the programme, how you would improve it. I want to stress how important it is that you feel free to speak your mind because the aim is to improve the programme for future students.

T: All right.

D: Can you start by telling me in general about your year?

CATEGORY: Student reflections on the programme

T: This year was very difficult for me. I'm going through a difficult period. In general, since the start of the year, I've had a difficult time. Why is it difficult and why am I continuing? Because I really want to study and to progress, not only in English, but I want to be accepted to the college, that's my dream. That's what I think, and that's what I really want. But I can't meet all the demands, and studies are difficult for me. Despite all the difficulties, I'd like to see myself studying here.

D: What subjects were most difficult for you?

T: English, Hebrew and math. These are the three subjects that have always been difficult for me in life.

Sub-Category: Student investment

D: And which subjects are your strongest?

T: Only, physical education. That's also a subject I really like and in which I invested.

D: And did you invest in the other subjects like you did in P.E.?

T: I try to invest in the other subjects, like English, but I invested in P.E., because I understand it much better.

D: And what happened when you tried to invest in English?

T: I'd sit and read and I didn't understand anything. I would try to translate and I couldn't. I know the letters, I try to connect them, but what they mean, I don't know,

I don't understand anything. I tried to sit in the dorms with the girls from first year ［names of students at the college］.

Notes:

- *Student emphasises desire to succeed*
- *Student emphasises major difficulties*
- *Her attempts to improve English – only by translation*
- *Asked for help from college students*

D: What did you go over with them?

T: The material you gave us in class. I also have a book in English translated in Amharic.

<div align="right">Sub-Category: Language Background</div>

<div align="right">Amharic</div>

D: Can you read Amharic?

T: Yes.

D: Where did you learn to read Amharic? At home? At school in Ethiopia?

T: At home? Who can teach me at home? I learned first in school in Ethiopia, and then here in Israel.

D: Do you speak with your family in Amharic at home?

T: A little, but mostly we speak in Hebrew at home.

Notes:

- *Hebrew is spoken at home; Amharic, native language, is not maintained with family at the home*
- *Student makes reference to parents' illiteracy*

D: So, you were saying you sat with your friends at the dorms who helped you with English. How did they help you exactly?

T: We'd sit with the material. They'd read to me, and then they'd translate for me.

D: They translated what they read to you?

T: Yes.

D: Was that helpful?

T: I'd understand the material. But I don't feel I'm getting any better. You'd be surprised, I go to the computers and into Google. And I sit and try to translate each sentence.

D: Do you mean using Google Translate?

T: Yes. I put in a sentence and use Google Translate to try and understand the sentence. But, still it's not very useful.

D: Do you remember when I explained in class that this is not a very effective tool? Did you try to implement any of the strategies we worked on in class?

T: Well, I felt that I needed to translate to really understand.

D: So, what you are saying is that you did not ignore English this year, but you tried mainly to invest in translating word for word.

Notes:

- *According to the student, she invested and worked to improve her English. This is in contradiction to her behaviour in class. She arrived unprepared to lessons, often without any materials.*

- *Shows resistance to the programme aims; did not apply or attempt any of the strategies taught. Insisted on trying to translate.*

T: Yes, I did invest. I really want to do well, to succeed. I just don't seem to get ahead.

Notes: Student repeatedly expresses strong desire to succeed and failure to do so.

D: Now, I'd like to go back a little with you. Can you tell me a little bit about you? Your age, where you live, etc.

CATEGORY: Student Background

Sub-Category: Personal Details

T: I'm 25. I live in Nes Ziona.

D: And how did you get to the programme?

T: I finished the army service.

CATEGORY: Post-school Experience

Sub-Category: Military Service

D: What did you do in the army?

T: I was in a special programme for athletes where I continued my training. After the army, my dream was to go and study. When I was released, when I was 21 I wanted to go and study. My plan was to have my degree by the age of 25.

D: So what happened?

Sub-Category: Work/Studies

T: I went to [name of matriculation preparation programme], but I left after four months.

D: Why? What happened?

T: At first, I worked and saved money, and went to study at the same time.

D: What kind of work did you do?

T: I worked as a security guard at a school. Every day, I'd go to work and from work I'd go to study. But all the travels to and from, and when I'd get there, only two students would show up, and then the teacher would let us go. It wasn't serious. I was paying money, working to pay for these studies, and I would get nothing out of it. So, I left. I told them, what is this? Out of the 30 or 40 who registered, three or four would come to class. They told me I was right but that they couldn't force the students to come and study. So after some thinking, I decided to come here, because this is a known place, it's more serious. And it's the right place for me, because of my sports background.

Notes: Student description of the programme doesn't sound accurate. From familiarity with the programme and teachers in it, the student's description raises doubts. Perhaps she is trying to present a former failure as the programme's fault, rather than speaking about difficulties she may have faced?

D: You said that in the army you were in a programme for athletes. What is your sports background?

T: I'm a marathon runner. I'm a long-distance runner. I've loved running as long as I can remember and I have a good record. I was national champion all throughout my school years, and when I was in the army. I still compete and I have a trainer, but less now, because I want to study to become a trainer. That's my dream.

D: Is that your dream, to become a trainer?

T: Yes, that's my dream. I know it will take me time, but that's what I want to be.

D: I see. So it's not necessarily to become a P.E. teacher.

T: No, I'd like to see myself here working as a trainer at the ［name of sports institute］.

D: You know that you can get a training certificate; you don't necessarily need a B.Ed. degree for that.

T: Yes, I might do the training certificate instead.

D: That might be a good idea. I suggest you speak with [name of counsellor] about your options.

T: Yes, I will.

Notes: She is a long-distance runner which is an individual sport, done alone. A repetitive theme is her sense of being alone and her lack of integration in various frameworks.

CATEGORY: Family structure

D: Now, can you tell me a little about your family?

T: I have great parents.

D: What do they do?

Sub-Category: Parental occupations

T: They don't do anything. They don't work.

D: Are they unemployed or retired.

T: My father is sick, so he can't work. And my mother is at home.

D: Do they have any education?

Sub-Category: Parental education

T: No, in Ethiopia they never went to school. They can't read or write.

D: You know it's very common for Israeli parents to read stories to their children. If your parents couldn't read stories to you, did they tell you stories when you were children?

Influence of Mother

T: Yes, my Mum especially would tell us stories, sing a lot at home.

D: Do you remember a lot of music at home?

T: Yes, all the time. She still likes to sing to my younger brothers and sisters.

Notes:

- *Parents are both illiterate and unemployed*
- *Grew up with verbal communication background*

Sub-Category: Reading

D: And did you have any books at home? For you, or your brothers or sisters?

T: No, not really. Books at home were from school.

D: Did you like to read when you were younger?

T: The truth is that it is still a little hard for me to read in Hebrew, so I avoid it.

D: What about in Amharic? You said you read and write in Amharic.

T: Yes, but not that well. And I never really had a lot of time for reading, because I was in training a lot of the time.

Notes:

- *The student came to Israel at an age in which she did not possess a strong proficiency in Amharic, nor has she become proficient in Hebrew. She has not been able to get a strong grasp of any language.*
- *It appears that sport is a haven to escape from difficulties at school; she uses it often as an excuse not to read, study, etc.*

CATEGORY: Family influence on education

D: Now, you said earlier that you have 'great' parents. How is that expressed?

T: I have wonderful caring parents who give me whatever support and attention they can. They help me financially as much as they can, even though they don't have much to give. They call all the time to ask how I'm doing. The main thing is my desire to study, but all the encouragement comes from them. I wish everyone parents like mine, really. They are so caring.

D: Did they push you to continue your studies?

T: The desire to study comes from me, but once I decided to study, they do what they can to support me. They are always inquiring about how I'm doing and when I return home they shower me with a lot of love. They look up to me because I'm going to study. I'm the eldest of seven children and I feel I have a responsibility as their role model. I have two siblings that could have already served in the army and gotten somewhere by now, but they're not doing anything. My younger sister didn't want to serve at all. She went and did national service for only a year. And my other sister wouldn't even do national service or serve in the army. She dropped out of school in the 11th grade. She hasn't finished her matriculation exams; she's done nothing, nothing. If I succeed in my studies, I could have a positive influence on my younger brothers and sisters. So, my parents look up to me. They know that when I was younger I always made an effort too. But I always had difficulty.

Notes:

- *Gets a lot of emotional support from parents*
- *Has 6 siblings; she is the eldest - she sees herself as their role model, but has no role model herself. Her desire to succeed in school comes from being a source of pride to her parents*
- *Younger siblings not doing well in terms of school and future*

D: And when you were at school, who would help you if you needed help with schoolwork?

T: I was on my own.

D: On your own? Who could you turn to if you didn't understand something, or needed help?

T: There wasn't anyone.

D: Were there any afterschool programmes to tutor students who need help?

T: No, nothing.

T: When I needed help with school work, there was no one to really help me, other than teachers at school. But they could sit with me a few minutes before class or after. There wasn't any programme that gave lessons or anything.

Notes: Her sense of being alone in the school system is repeated here.

<div align="right">Sub-Category: Immigration</div>

D: Now, can you tell me about your immigration process?

T: I came at a relatively older age. I was 12,…13. I was taken straight to Ulpan and then I began 9th grade here in Israel. I barely knew Hebrew so I barely managed to learn anything…I finished 12th grade and went straight to the army.

<div align="right">CATEGORY: Language experience</div>

<div align="right">Sub-Category: Hebrew</div>

D: And how long did it take you to learn Hebrew?

T: I learned Hebrew relatively fast. I knew how to read and write in Amharic so I wrote down all the new words I heard and I wrote down what it meant in Amharic. You see, it's easier when you can write in your own language and then you can translate.

Notes: Sees acquisition of Hebrew as translation process to Amharic; not as process of integration.

D: So, you knew how to read and write Amharic when you came to Israel.

T: Yes, I did. I improved it here, but I began learning it there. I only studied four years of high-school in Israel.

D: Can you describe what learning in school in Ethiopia was like?

T: I'd love to go back there. I miss school in Ethiopia and I would have preferred to continue my studies there and not here in Israel.

D: Why's that?

T: It's a totally different type of education. Totally different from Israel! In Israel, you can't do anything if someone doesn't want to learn. If you want, you can stay in class, if you don't want to, you can leave class.

D: And what was it like in Ethiopia?

T: There's no such thing in Ethiopia! ［emphatic］ If you're late you get punished. You know what to expect. The discipline is, forget about it. There's no such thing as showing up late to school. There's no such thing as coming to school untidy. There's no such thing! You arrive on time, you go into class, you don't disturb the lesson, there are no cell phones ringing, they're all off inside the bag. A student doesn't even turn around to talk to his classmate behind him. If I turn around, they immediately, they have this stick with which they hit you on the hand. He tells you, go out, I kneel down on my knees and he hits me on the hand.

Notes:

- *Corporal punishment at school – student views this as a good pedagogical approach*
- *Highly unlikely students had cell phones in Ethiopia. She is probably imagining what the discipline would be like if they had cell phones like Israeli children have.*

D: So what you're saying is that this is a positive way of teaching, because it teaches discipline?

T: Yes, very positive. There was so much more discipline in school! You see, school is considered a privilege in Ethiopia and students who don't want to learn, can't stay. They can't be there in the framework of school. Only children who want to study seriously are in school in Ethiopia. I believe that is why so many Ethiopians don't

know how to read or write Amharic here in Israel, why they have not adjusted to Israeli society, why they do so poorly at school here. They know what kind of discipline there is over there. They don't want to study here, because they can get away with it. In Ethiopia they'd be thrown out of school. In Ethiopia, everything was in Amharic, I was really good at school, I understood all the material.

D: You've just said that you think because of the cultural differences, the lack of discipline here, many Ethiopians have not adjusted well. Do you think you integrated well into Israeli society?

T: What can I tell you? I wish I could go back to Ethiopia. I was very happy there. But I can't go back there. My life is here. But I don't really belong here either.

Notes: student clearly expresses her feeling of lack of integration, of not belonging. She ties this feeling to different school approaches.

D: You were happy in Ethiopia because you were a good student?

T: Yes, I was. I was an excelling student every year. I wish I could have continued to study there. I think that if I had continued all my studies there I would have succeeded much more easily.

D: Did you live in Addis Ababa?

T: No, we lived in Quara, that's where all the,…the good Jews, the traditional Jews, live.

Notes:

- *From conversations with an Ethiopian colleague, Quara, unlike Addis Ababa, is a rural pre-industrial area with no running water or electricity. The school system is very rudimentary.*
- *Student describes herself as a good student in a highly disciplinarian framework.*

Sub-category: Religious Background

D: And did you have a religious upbringing there?

T: Well, like everyone there in the community, we kept Shabbat. You know that cooking was on fire. And we wouldn't light fire on Shabbat, so we'd eat food cold on Shabbat.

D: And did you keep kosher?

T: Yes, all the dietary laws were kept.

D: And now, are you religious? Do you keep kosher and Shabbat.

T: I'm secular now. But you know, we keep all the holidays and that kind of stuff. My parents still keep Shabbat, but I don't any more.

<div align="right">

Sub-category: Language Background

English

</div>

D: Now, you were telling me that school in Ethiopia was very disciplinarian. Did you study English as well?

T: Yes, when I came to Israel, I was fluent in English. But when I came here, my English was completely erased.

Notes: Interference of Hebrew in learning English. Focus on proficiency in Hebrew.

D: Why did that happen? Did you not have English at school here?

T: At first, I was in a boarding school for Ethiopian immigrants. I'd go to class and no one would show up to class. Everyone would say about me 'look at how she studies all the time, how she invests', but I was the only one, they'd be outside with their cigarettes, no one took the classes seriously. I'd be the only one who showed up to class. That's why, no matter what I did, I didn't manage to succeed. It's not that I didn't try, I couldn't. You see, in Israel there's schools that are good, that care, that teach and there's schools, that according to the population, according to the parents, don't care…don't even try.

D: So, if I understand you correctly, you blame the school system for your lack of progress at school. You did your best, invested in school work, but the school failed you.

T: Yes, absolutely, because in Ethiopia I did well.

Notes:

- *Student again depicts herself as 'on her own' as a pupil in Israel.*
- *Criticises school for making no effort to teach or to invest in her because she is Ethiopian*
- *Lack of integration within Israeli society stands out; sense of discrimination because of her ethnic background*

D: Now, can you compare how English was taught in Ethiopia with how we teach in the programme here?

CATEGORY: Student reflections on programme

T: To be honest, even if I look back at what we did in Ethiopia, or what we did in school here, it was very different from what we did here. I mean that in the positive sense, because you really cared about us. And I've said that to people. They ask me how I'm doing in English, and I tell them, 'if it were for the teacher, I could have really succeeded.' You know, it's difficult for me, but you still tried to help me, you approached me with a good attitude, you tried to explain whatever we don't understand. That helps me. You wouldn't give up, if I didn't come to class, you'd ask where I was and talk to me after class.

D: I'm glad you feel that way. But from my point of view, you've said several times in this conversation how difficult English is for you and how much you invested in different programmes including this one. You said you tried; you sat with the girls at the dorm, you went to the computer room. But you missed a lot of class. You didn't come regularly. You didn't prepare the homework. As far back as the tutoring lessons we had at the start of the year, you would not participate. When I asked you to participate, you wouldn't. The different strategies that are taught in the programme, you didn't try, and even now you've told me that you tried to translate texts with Google Translate, which I continually explained how ineffective that is.

T: You're 100% right. I agree, but it's not because I didn't want to. On the contrary; but I had training so I missed a lot of classes in all the subjects, not just English. Still,

I'd go from practice to study in my room. On weekends I'd take work home. It's not that I didn't want to come, I just couldn't. I did whatever I could.

D: So looking back do you think you improved your English in any way?

T: No, not at all. I'm in the same place. The texts you gave us, I sat with the girls, they'd explain the texts to me, but alone afterwards, I can't remember if I don't write down what they said. But, I'm telling you, Debbie, there it's not that I don't want to do well. There are days that I go to sleep without having eaten, because I spent all the time I had studying, because I really do want to do well.

Notes:

- *Student partially accepts that she didn't invest and that her lack of success is due to her absenteeism, but insists that she did invest outside of class*

- *Student admits she did not try to apply any of the strategies and insisted on clinging to translation*

- *Repeats to express her strong desire to do well, without really understanding that she cannot succeed as long as she maintains resistance to different learning approaches and doesn't attend or participate in class.*

D: You know your head can't think without food. That's not a good idea. Tell me, what do you think could have been done differently? How do you think the programme could have helped you to overcome your difficulties?

T: I really don't have any complaints towards anybody. I did my best, but with the training and all the other things, I couldn't.

D: If next year another student, who has difficulties like you had, arrives in the programme, what would you suggest we do to help her from the start of the year, so she doesn't 'get lost' in the middle of the year?

T: I don't know. With everything you've said, it ultimately depends on her. If she doesn't come to class, you can't really do anything. If she doesn't give up, I think she'll get the right tools from you.

D: Tamar, I really want to thank you for sharing your story with me. It's been really interesting. I know you are facing many difficulties and thank you for talking about them with me. I've learned that you don't give up easily. I hope you find your way and that you eventually realize your dream to become a trainer. If I can be of any help in the future, let me know.

Notes:

- *Failure of absorption – from pre-industrial to modern society, oral to literate society; language issues – she is not proficient in any language, as at home her parents did not continue to speak Amharic with her, and her Hebrew is not proficient either. She studied English in Ethiopia but abandoned it when she came to Israel to focus on Hebrew.*

- *The student expresses she feels she was discriminated against in school, and despite her service in the military, does not feel a part of Israeli society.*

- *In general, the student repeatedly expressed her lack of integration within Israeli society; her sense of being 'on her own' and failing to integrate in her boarding school, in the former matriculation preparation programme she attended, in this one, and in the army, is reiterated throughout the interview.*

- *She presented several examples of her insistence that language learning means translation and her resistance to the strategies offered by the programme*

- *The student repeatedly express her strong desire to succeed, but has no tools to achieve those aims.*

- *Although she accepts accountability to her failure in the programme, helping her at the start of the programme to feel more integrated within the classroom culture and providing her with tools to develop her intercultural competence may have helped her make a more successful transition.*

- *While she was unable to close the academic gaps in the programme to reach a level that will permit her to be accepted at the college (in other subjects, not just English), her talents in sports may be the path for her to successfully integrate within Israeli society and reach other achievements. The programme needs to assist her in guiding her to find the right direction.*

APPENDIX G: CLASSROOM OBSERVATION SAMPLES

Two classroom observations are presented in this appendix. They were selected to show an observation of a lesson that took place at a relatively early stage of the year and an observation of a lesson that took place two months later. The first shows the beginning of students working in mixed culture groups and the apprehension of some of the students. It also shows the early stages of teaching a reading strategy to students who are unfamiliar with learning in this manner. The pace of the lesson was much slower and students had a difficult time understanding the structure of the lesson and how it was taught. The second shows that at a later stage in the programme, they became more accustomed to working with students from cultures different from their own. They were also becoming more accustomed to learning reading strategies, appropriating them more easily. They also worked at a faster pace and more work could be accomplished at this stage (more independent group work could be given, and less frontal teaching was necessary).

The observations were recorded within 24 hours following each lesson. The 'Notes' section in blue *(Notes)* are notes of my reflections of the lessons. During the data analysis process, the Categories and Sub-Categories were added. The 'Notes' section in brown *(Notes)* were added. Student names were hi-lighted in different colours according to cultural background: Argentinian, Ethiopian, Former Soviet Union, Arab-Israeli, native Jewish-Israeli.

Lesson 9 – October 17, 2010

Lesson – Building Vocabulary: Terms and Definitions

Lesson Plan

1. Introduction of Unit 2: Building Vocabulary (about 1 hr. and 30 min)
   a. Read introduction and first section on terms and definitions – paragraph on Israeli food (whole class).
   b. Activity (8 sentences) – students circled the term and underlined the def. in each sentence.

    c. Activity – students had to provide a def. to six terms (i.e., shwarma, kaffiya, kippa)

    d. Short text 'Ethiopian Food' – students had to identify 12 terms and their def in the text, give the topic discussed in each of the 3 paragraphs, and write two similarities and two differences between Ethiopian food and Israeli food.

2. Reading on 'The Brain and the Nervous System' (about 1 hr and 15 min)

    a. Students were divided into 6 groups.

        i. Each group worked on a section: terms coloured in yellow, def. coloured in green, and signal words or punctuation indicating term or def in blue.

        ii. Students then prepared a table with the terms and definitions provided in the text.

        iii. They also prepared a list of new vocabulary words.

        iv. They matched the parts of brain or nervous system to diagram.

        v. We then went over the reading on computer screen with each group presenting what it prepared.

        vi. Watched short video on brain and nervous system

3. Wrap-Up – Review points of lesson and vocabulary

4. Assigned hw: Finish text 'Ethiopian Food', Vocabulary Quiz (list of words from lesson), Writing: What is the ethnic background of your parents? What kind of food is associated with these ethnic groups? Use the text 'Ethiopian Food' as a model and write a short composition about the food representative of your or your parents' ethnic group.

Lesson in Action

1.   Introduction and Terms and Def.

<p style="text-align:center; color:red;">Sub-Category: Difficulty decoding</p>

a.   Read intro and par. on Israeli food together. I called on diff students to read to class. Most cooperated (Yoni, Omar, Noa), some declined (Nabil, Tamar, Bushra, Sara). I explained need to practice reading out loud, so I can see where their problems lie and help correct them, explained that we are all in the same boat and they are in a supportive environment - managed to convince Iris and Habib to read. Many in class have decoding problems (especially Yoni, Miriam, Tamar, Nabil, Habib, Ahmed, Nina) – we stopped to look at difference between short and long vowel sounds on board and practiced.

Notes: need more work on strengthening decoding skills, particularly among students of Ethiopian background.

<p style="text-align:center; color:red;">Sub-Category: Lack of basic reading skills</p>

Students had difficulty grasping that a text can have the definition of a term in the text. We went over the table in book with different ways of identifying definitions – very slow! Students asked a lot of questions and some still failed to understand – this was completely new to many of them! I told them we'd practice it until they've grasped the technique.

Notes: students have no basic reading skills of this kind – need a lot of practice.

Notes: students needed to strengthen both bottom-up and top-down skills simultaneously to cope with the tasks at this early stage of the programme.

<p style="text-align:center; color:red;">Sub-Category: Group Work</p>

b.   Students began to practice (free to work alone, in pairs, or groups). Some students haven't gotten their books yet. This actually turned out well, as I rearranged those without books to sit with those who have them. Some students took initiative and called those without books to sit with them (Boris and Nina called Omar to sit with them, Yoni called Ahmed to sit with him), I asked Narmeen and Bushra to share their book with Nurit.

Notes: glad to see students starting to feel comfortable with one another and sitting with others. This is one of the first situations in which students are starting to sit with students from other cultures.

Notes: initial stages of developing intercultural competence - Positive reactions from students.

Students had a lot of difficulty understanding the activity. Some circled clue words rather than the term, ignored the definition. I went around the room and had them read the instructions until they could explain them.

Notes: most of the students seem to be accustomed to teacher telling them exactly what to do, to be spoon fed, without having to figure out what the problem is on their own.

Notes: attempt to develop among students learner autonomy.

-Yoni and Ahmed worked well together. Yoni began to look up vocab in dictionary - I showed him that by the definition 'double-humped camel' he could figure out what 'dromedary' meant without going to the dictionary, he was very pleased – commented 'Wow, that's great'. Similar reactions by other students.

-Tamir asked whether he should look up the term in the dictionary to make sure he understood the def. given in the text. I asked him 'what on earth for?' He then commented about how distracting it is to look for vocab in dictionary all the time and how useful this technique can be to minimize dictionary work.

-After all the explanations and discussion, three students still asked what is 'diabetes' – did not get that the point was to find the definition in the sentence 'high sugar level in the blood' (Noa, Sarit, Habib).

-Several circled 'sunflower' as the term instead of 'tryptophan' (e.g. Yoni, Ehab, Narmeen, Bushra, Nurit)

-Majority of class underlined the first part of sentence (Education has been under attack for a number of years) as def. of 'ethnocentrism', missing the def. that follows the term.

Notes: as this is still a new tech. students are working mechanically without analysing the meaning.

Sub-Category: High involvement / Lack of participation

c.   Students wrote their definitions on the board, seemed to repeatedly use the same format for every def. they wrote ('term' is 'def'). I explained that for each one they can give a different form of presentation (use 'refers to', 'is called', commas, etc.). The most interesting discussion revolved around definitions students gave for 'kippa' and 'kaffiya'. At first, students were very neutral, writing for both 'a piece of cloth'. I explained that 'a piece of cloth' is too general and doesn't convey meaning of word. For 'kippa' students then refined definition to piece of cloth religious people wear on their heads, to which I asked, 'all religious people?', Tamir replied, 'no, Jewish religious people', to which I asked, 'are you sure, all Jewish religious people?', to which Yoni answered, 'No, Jewish religious men'.   Then when discussing definition of 'kaffiya', 'Halil' gave the def. 'a symbol of Palestinian freedom'. That opened up a discussion of the different meanings (functional, religious, cultural, etc.) a word can carry. Students were very engaged in discussion, though got a bit out of

hand when all began to speak at once. I stopped the discussion and explained that I'd like to hear all of them, but they have to listen to each other. I then called each one to express their ideas separately. Some students (Iris, Nurit, Esti) very impatient, attempting to break into others words. I repeatedly stopped them and had them wait their turn. Some of the students who usually don't participate in class discussion became involved in this one, though spoke very softly and seemed hesitant about speaking freely in class (Ahmed, Susane, Halil).

Notes: Student discussion revolved around cultural differences, sparked an animated discussion. Native Jewish-Israeli students speaking very explosively, impatiently. Arab-Israeli students, who are usually silent in back row, began to take part in discussion. It appears that as the issue was close to them - they were the experts - this invited their participation.

Notes: Discussion led to 'ensuring social relevance 'and 'raising cultural awareness '(Kumaravadevilu - macrostrategies)

d.   We began the text on 'Ethiopian Food', but ran out time, so students were asked to finish at home. Students worked in same way they worked earlier (some alone, some in pairs, some in groups). Seemed to begin to grasp the concepts. Most were circling the terms in the text well and underlining the definitions correctly. Most students did not get to the questions that followed – assigned for hw.

BREAK

2.   Students received the text 'The Brain and the Nervous System'. I assigned them to groups of 4 to perform the tasks which were outlined and explained on the board. Each student in the group had a specific role (reader, resource manager – responsible for looking up vocab in dictionary, looking for info in the book, etc., writer and reporter). The students were really interested in the text – something that related closely to them.

<div align="right">

Sub-Category: Group Work
</div>

Group Work:
-   Alberto, Ali, Iris, Omar: Worked well together. Ali (reader), Iris (resource manager, but Ali also looked up vocab in Eng-Arabic dictionary), Omar (writer), Alberto (reporter). Alberto led the group. Good dynamics, Omar had trouble, others in group helped in writing. The group successfully found the terms and def. in their section.

- Miriam, Paulina, Halil, Nurit: Paulina (reader), Nurit (resource), Miriam (writer) and Halil reporter. Miriam had difficulty writing so group helped her. Also found the terms and def. quite well and completed the tasks. Paulina takes on role of 'teacher', explaining to others what she understands, even though her level is not very high. Nurit not used to group work.

- Yoni, Ehab, Ben, Boris: Very strong group. Ben (reader), Boris (resource), Ehab (writer), Yoni (reporter). All worked very well together. Completed the tasks without much trouble. All seem very open and cooperative, attentive to one another – a pleasure to observe them working. Yoni benefits from being read to at this stage due to his difficulty in decoding.

- Sarit, Narmeen, Habib, Tamir: Narmeen (reader), Sarit and Habib (both provided dictionary meanings to help group understand in both Arabic and Hebrew), Tamir (writer), Sarit (reporter). Tamir seemed uneasy to work in group. Narmeen also seemed like she was not at ease in this group, very timid. Interesting dynamics in group - Habib and Sarit led the activity, though Tamir and Narmeen have stronger level of English.

- Susane, Nina, Anat, Bushra: Susane (reader), Nina (resource manager – though Susane also looked up vocab in Eng-Arabic dictionary), Anat (writer), Bushra (supposed to be reporter, but left early). The group had difficulty in completing the tasks, I guided them at the start and they continued on their own.

- Ahmed, Nabil, Noa, Tamar: Could not do the activity on their own. I put them together as a group so I could sit with them for the majority of the activity. I assigned them the shortest and easiest section. Each read a sentence and I guided them as to how to mark each element, how to look for the terms and to identify their definitions. Their vocabulary at this stage is too small for them to understand the definitions provided in the text. Ahmed and Noa made a genuine effort to understand and expressed a sense of accomplishment at figuring out and completing the task. Nabil was more resistant, seems detached and uncomfortable when I asked him to read or asked him guiding questions, waited for others to answer. Tamar was very uncooperative. Refused to read, even in small group where all have trouble decoding.

Notes: In general, good activity - most students began to grasp the concept of terms and definitions. Group work was overall effective, students are exposed to learning approaches of students of other cultures. This way of working seemed motivating to most students. Also students had to negotiate meaning among the different languages, Hebrew speakers explain to Arab speakers certain meanings and vice-versa -lots of cross-lingual comparisons. Still, some

students seem uncomfortable working this way (especially Tamir, Narmeen, Bushra, Nabil and Omar).

Notes: Working on developing 'intercultural competence' – came more easily to some students than others; Development of negotiated interaction; development of language awareness by comparison and contrast to other languages in class.

Following group work, the reporter of each group was asked to present the section on the computer screen. After four groups, the concept seemed to clear to the class, so we decided to stop there. Each group gave five words from its list of new vocabulary and we put them on the board. Students copied the vocabulary to study for quiz the following lesson.

Students watched the short video on 'Brain and Nervous System' where they were able to see and hear what they had just read about. Students were pleased that they were able to understand.

Notes: Integrating language skills (Kumaravadevilu – macrostrategies); integrating students

Lesson 19 – December 24, 2011

Lesson – Main Ideas and Supporting Details
Lesson Plan
1. Reading Strategies Exercise 1 (Main Ideas and Supporting Details) in Hebrew – students were asked to work individually on the exercise and hand it in. It was explained that it was not for a grade. (about 15 minutes)
2. Main Ideas and Supporting Details Activities – worked in groups I assigned (about 1 hr and 15 min)
   a. Students were given a list of items. They needed to give the list a general title (group work).
   b. Students were given a title and needed to give a list of items that belong in the general category (group work).
   c. I went back to the Reading Strategy Exercise to connect the practice exercises to what they had done at the start of the class and we discussed their answers and in this way introduced the strategy (whole class).
   d. Students were given sets of three sentences which they had to put in order from most general to most specific. Each group (6 groups) put one set of sentences in a pyramid shape on board (from top of pyramid, most general, to bottom, most specific).
   e. Students read three different paragraphs. For each paragraph they had to compose the missing first sentence with the main idea.
3. Worked on the text Computer Violence. (1 hr)
   a. Previewing – discussion of a table with statistics regarding which technological devices American teenagers have in their bedrooms (radio, TV, computer, internet access, etc.). Students compared these with what they had as children in their rooms and what they have today (whole class).
   b. Students received the paragraphs of the text out of order. They worked on each paragraph separately and had to choose the main idea of each from a choice of three sentences (group work – I assigned groups).
   c. Then they had to put the paragraphs in a logical order.
4. Basic Sentence – Main Subject and Main Verb (about 20 min)
   a. Whole class – explanation of concept.
   b. Activity – Eight sentences extracted from the Computer Violence text. Students needed to identify the Main Subject and Main Verb in each. Students worked in pairs which they chose.
   c. Activity - Students had eight sentences. In each sentence either a part of the subject or verb was missing. Students had to identify which part was missing and provide a logical one.

5. Wrap-Up: Discussion of how the concept of Main Ideas and Supporting Details in a text is related to the concept of Main Subject and Main Verb. (about 10 min)

6. Assigned hw:

   a. Read text 'Computer Violence' and answer comprehension questions

   b. Writing assignment: Do you agree with the ideas presented in the text? What do you think is the effect of the computer on children? Write a paragraph which includes a topic sentence (with main idea), a body and a summary sentence.

Lesson in Action

CATEGORY: Learning techniques

Sub-Category: Isolationist and Collectivist

1. **Reading Strategies Exercise.** Most of the students worked on the exercise alone. Ahmed and Omar sat next to each other and tried to work together. Nabil, Habib and Bushra came in a few minutes late and sat together. Tried to work on exercise together as well. I went over to them and explained again that it was not for a grade, that they should just do what they can and it's OK if they can't answer some of the questions. Didn't help – they persisted on trying to work together, so I separated them.

Notes: 5 of the students of Arab background attempting to work together on a task which they were asked to work on individually.

2. **Main Ideas and Supporting Details Activities**

a. Students who finished the reading exercise began the first exercise - no frontal explanation to allow them 'to figure out' what the task requires of them – worked well they were busy throughout.

b. They continued to the second activity. They seemed to enjoy the activities. Were very involved, worked with dictionaries to figure out the answers.

Group Work:

-Ahmed, Nabil and Omar – struggling with understanding the instructions. I sat with them and worked on how they can figure out the task by looking at the information provided in the exercise (problem-solving).

-Narmeen, Bushra and Susane – worked together. Narmeen seemed to be doing the work and Bushra and Susane were not very involved.

Sub-Category: Co-teaching and learning

-Paulina and Miriam worked together very nicely – Paulina doing most of the reading out loud

-Yoni, Ben and Ehab – good group – Ehab doing much of the dictionary work. Yoni offering the group good ideas, lots of items. Ben doing most of the 'practical' work – getting the activity done – what to actually write down and how.

-Boris and Nina worked together. Boris doing most of the reading out loud and explaining.

-Alberto, Iris and Sarit worked together. Alberto did most of the reading out loud. Alberto and Iris doing much of the dictionary work. Sarit mostly asking for explanations.

Sub-Category: Individualist behaviour

-Tamir – worked alone. Seems to prefer working alone

-Nurit – also worked alone. Once in a while she would check the meaning of word with Boris who sat next to her.

- Anat – worked alone, sometimes calling me over to help her. Had difficulty with finding the category for the specific items.

Notes: Most of group work very productive. Some of the students naturally work with students of other cultures – seems very useful

Notes: development of intercultural competence? Students picking up different techniques from one another. Still using those they are familiar with, but each bringing approach and 'sharing' with group.

Notes: Some of the native Jewish-Israelis still prefer working alone. That's a shame – they are missing out on a good opportunity to work with others.

c.   I put the reading strategy exercise on computer screen and began to go over it with the class.

Sub-Category: High level of involvement

-Noa asked 'what's the point of doing this stuff in Hebrew?' Anat and several others joined in.

-Esti replied to them 'Oh, it's to check if we can do this stuff in Hebrew, so we think about these things, before we have to do it in English'

I then explained that Esti was right – that we were working on understanding how to use the strategy in a more familiar language to make it easier to use in English later.

Students shared the answers that they handed in. I colour-coded the levels of specificity for them on the screen – from MI – theories of personality (yellow), more specific Nature and Nurture (green), most specific- studies supporting each (blue) so that the links could be clearly seen. Then we discussed how these helped answer the questions.

Notes: discussion of the purpose of activity in Hebrew criticized and then discussed only by students of native Jewish-Israeli background.

Notes: native Jewish-Israeli form of dialogue - criticism, persuasion and eventual acceptance of method.

d. and e. Students continued working in more or less the same groups on the two exercises. The majority were very engaged (exceptions ==Bushra==, ==Susane==, and ==Sara==). ==Nabil== and ==Omar== had a difficult time understanding the actual sentences – still very weak vocab, I sat with them. ==Ahmed== went to sit next to ==Ehab== and worked with him). In general, class as a whole had difficulty figuring out the main ideas and putting sentences in correct hierarchy – exercise was useful for them to start thinking about the relationships between the sentences.

BREAK (30 min)

Sub-Category: High level of involvement

Lack of civil discussion – students interrupting one another

3.   Text 'Computer Violence

a.   Previewing – open discussion about technological devices in students' rooms when they were children. Students raised the issue of having a computer in the room, advantages and disadvantages. Most of native Jewish-Israeli students did majority of talking at this stage. Some still don't wait for student speaking to finish – I intercepted to allow each to finish, reminded them of need to listen to one another.

Sub-Category: Lack of participation

Arab-Israeli and immigrant students did not say much (exception: ==Yoni==). In order to encourage discussion from others, I asked who shared a room with their siblings, many of these groups of students raised their hands, so I directly asked individual students what that was like and whether they had/shared tech. devices in room. This led to a good discussion about the closeness between siblings which is established when sharing a room together (I shared with them that I also shared a room with my sister when we were children and how close we are today). (==Habib==, ==Ehab==, and ==Miriam== spoke about sharing rooms).

Notes: opportunity to include minority and immigrant students in discussion - students seemed interested in each other's relations with siblings, lively discussion.

b.	Students worked on identifying the MI of each par and putting them in order. I assigned them to work in groups, each had a role (reader, resource manager, writer and reporter):

-Paulina, Alberto, Miriam and Nabil – all very weak. Had a lot of trouble understanding at first – Alberto read out loud, Miriam (writer) asked a lot of guided questions, Paulina (resource manager) did the translating; Nabil (supposed to be reporter) quite passive – communicated most of the time with his friends at back of room. Eventually left the group and went to back of room to sit with Narmeen and Bushra.

-Yoni, Nurit, Ehab, Sarit – worked very nicely together. Nurit read out loud, Ehab looked up vocab in dictionary, Yoni did a lot of analysis, put ideas together; was one of the only students who figured out contrast in the par. Sarit asking others in group to explain to her, despite difficulty of text level for her, she was engaged in group making attempts to understand it.

- Esti, Narmeen, Nina – Narmeen and Esti worked very well together – both have good level – figured out the main ideas well and the proper order of par.

Sub-Category: Collectivistic behaviour

- Boris, Habib, Omar, Tamir – Tamir seemed uncomfortable working with others (used to working alone). Habib wandered off from group to group checking his answers with his friends. I worked with the group on a question they had problems with, I guided them to reach the answer. When I moved on to the next group, I noticed Habib going around the room to his Arab-Israeli friends explaining the answer to them.

Notes: beautiful example of collectivistic behaviour of student of Arab-Israeli background - it was so important to him that if he's got the right answer, his other friends have it.

Sub-Category: Co-teaching and learning

Boris understood concepts well – explained to the others. Showed a lot of patience with weaker students.

Student of Former Soviet Union background showing 'teacher-like' behaviour, took time to make sure students in his group understand.

-Bushra, Nina, Omar – Omar was not very engaged. Nina and Bushra worked well together and figured out the answers despite the difficulty. It was important for Bushra to show me she was working after the conversation we had with [name of advisor].

- Ben, Halil, Ahmed, Iris – Halil read aloud, Iris – dictionary work, Ben (writer-reporter) did much of the explaining to others in group. Ahmed, not very involved.

Notes: integration of students from different cultural backgrounds

General work in class:

-Many of the students had trouble figuring out MI of par. with statistics. Many chose conditions were improved – didn't get that the point is the opposite, electronics isolate children.

-Many chose taking computer out of room as MI of par. – did not distinguish it as one example of what parents can do.

-Yoni and Boris–the only students who figured out that par. A is an example without needing help.

Alberto and Miriam figured out that the first two par. begin the text – but mixed them.

Narmeen and Esti – wrote that par. A is the main idea and rest of text brings examples – instead of par. A being the example to introduce ideas in rest of text.

Notes: I was very proud of the class as a group - worked really well together; were very involved and engaged for the most part in this activity.

4.   **Basic Sentence**

Sub-Category: High level of involvement

a.   Went over explanation in book together. While going over the explanation, Anat said 'you see, this is what we need. The grammar'. We opened it up to a short discussion. Some students believe that English class means that they need a lot of grammar. I explained that I agreed that some work was needed on it, and that is why we were working on it now, but good grammar, like a large vocab, is not necessarily what makes a good reader. That these things, like we will see later, connect to the activity we did earlier with MI.

Notes: another example of discourse pattern of student from native Jewish-Israeli background, critical tone of statement - this is what we need to work on.

b. and c. Students worked in same groups. Most students seem to have understood the concept. Sarit commented that she 'guessed everything', but her answers were

correct, boosted her confidence. She said one of her problems was confidence and that she's gaining more and more of it.

5. Wrap-Up – I asked the students what the connection between what we did at the start of the lesson and the last. Tamir said 'in both we need to differentiate between the important and the unimportant'. We spoke about the need to look at the sentence level – the relation between the MS and MV and the other details in the sentence, the need to look at the par. level – at the MI of the par. and supporting details in the par., and the need to look at connection between par and MI of text.

Notes: integration of bottom-up and top-down skills and integration of teaching methods - group work, frontal teaching, individual work/ problem-solving tasks, reading text, grammar exercise/ usage of both Hebrew and English to teach in class.

After class:

Sarit – came to tell me she has begun to find songs in English on the internet to translate them.

Miriam – also has begun to choose songs to translate. Says she knows she has a major gap, still feels very weak but is determined. I told her she has a head on her shoulders, she needs to work really hard, but she'll eventually close the gap. I recommended that she work on one par. a day, rather than whole text. Invited her to office to read text to her which she can record if she wishes.