Not dumbing down but stimulating up: Reading in the reformed GCSE modern foreign languages classroom.

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August 2014

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank our colleagues in OCR and the Research Division for their helpful guidance and advice: Katherine Smith, Ellen Weavers, Sylvia Green, Simon Child and Martin Johnson. We would also like to thank the teachers who engaged with the research and participated in the focus group.

Executive Summary

Modern foreign language (MFL) skills in England are a cause for concern, because of a fall in uptake of these subjects in recent years, despite an economic need for people who speak languages other than English. The current programme of reform for the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and A level qualifications in MFL aims to address this issue. In this report we focus on one aspect of the reform to MFL GCSEs: changes to the reading component. These changes include a greater emphasis on a wider range of authentic texts, including, but not limited to literary texts.

This study has three main aims:

- To review the literature on reading in a native and second language and the implications for pedagogy.
- To examine the extent to which current GCSEs in MFL support the development of reading skills.
- To seek teachers' views on curriculum support resources which would support the teaching of the reformed GCSE curriculum.

Reading in a native and second/foreign language

Reading is a complex cognitive process which requires the integration of low and high level processes. Expert readers are able to decode visual symbols to recognise words, and integrate these words to construct meaning, while using knowledge of text structure and context to interpret the text as a whole.

Reading in a second or foreign language (L2) can be considered to be similar to reading in a native language, except that L2 learners' reading may be inhibited by a lack of linguistic knowledge. Furthermore, since linguistic processing in an L2 is less efficient, L2 learners may have fewer attentional resources, leading to difficulties integrating the necessary cognitive processes.

Reading in an L2 can benefit language learning, by providing input in the L2, which can support the acquisition of (morpho-)syntax and vocabulary. This may be particularly important for learners who do not have access to other forms of input.

MFL teachers need to incorporate activities which promote both low and high level processes. A focus on form can support incidental learning which occurs during reading.

Development of reading skills at GCSE

At GCSE, reading has been identified as a key area for improvement by Ofsted. However, current GCSE specifications and textbooks do not support the acquisition of enough vocabulary, nor the most appropriate vocabulary for reading authentic texts.

Teachers' views on curriculum support resources for reading.

Nine MFL teachers participated in a focus group exploring different approaches to teaching reading. Before the focus group, teachers were sent five sets of resources, which exemplified different types of texts and teaching activities.

Overall teachers were very positive about the use of a wider range of authentic text types, including literary texts at GCSE because they felt that it was important to give students the opportunity to read such texts. They expressed the view that this would increase engagement and motivation for students, potentially leading to greater uptake of MFL at A level.

Teachers thought that their teaching was constrained by current GCSE specifications, and that the need to prepare students for GCSE assessments, particularly controlled

assessments in speaking and writing limited the extent to which they were able to integrate authentic and literary texts into their teaching.

Teachers suggested that the use of authentic texts would make it easier to make links with other curriculum areas, such as history, or PSHE. Furthermore, it would be possible to collaborate more with English departments to develop students' literacy skills in both English and MFL.

Some challenges with the use of authentic materials at GCSE were identified. In particular, there were concerns about making such texts accessible to less able learners.

Teachers reported that the textbooks that they currently use are uninspiring, and do not provide students with the opportunity to read interesting texts in the MFL. However, they valued textbooks for the role that they play in preparation for assessments. Some teachers stated that they were reducing their textbook use, and using resources and texts that could be found online. However, these resources were often expensive or time consuming to develop.

Teachers thought that it would be helpful if there were a central source of suitable, interesting texts which could be used for GCSE students. These texts should be provided with teaching activities which exploit the texts, to teach vocabulary, grammar and reading strategies, and can be extended to speaking, listening and writing activities. Furthermore, it was felt that examination boards could play an important role in providing guidance about suitable reading materials.

Implications

- The introduction of more authentic (including literary) texts at GCSE is likely to be received positively by teachers. This may lead to an increase in uptake at A level.

- Currently students do not learn enough, or the most appropriate, vocabulary at GCSE to support reading. The vocabulary which is taught and learned at GCSE should be reviewed.

- The syntactic structures which are used in some authentic texts may not be taught at GCSE. Teachers will therefore need to select texts carefully, and/or provide students with strategies for coping with structures which they are not familiar with.

- Current textbooks seem unlikely to provide suitable texts for the new GCSEs. There is therefore a need for the provision of resources which provide such texts, and teaching activities to accompany them.

- The selection of texts in curriculum support resources should take into account:
    - The need to provide opportunities for the recycling of vocabulary.
    - Both the language level and maturity of students, so that texts are accessible both linguistically and thematically.
    - The need to allow students an element of choice in their reading material, so that they are able to read texts which interest them.
    - The benefits of reading a range of different text types for different purposes.

- Teaching activities should be accompanied by notes for teachers explaining the purpose of activities. This may help teachers adapt the activities to different texts. Teaching activities should include those activities which:
    - Allow students to develop language knowledge, such as vocabulary and grammar.

    - Allow students to develop their use of reading strategies.

- The use of authentic texts is likely to be very demanding for less able students. Curriculum support resources should allow for effective differentiation, and include texts which are suitable for a variety of different levels.

Note on terminology used in the report

In this report we distinguish between “second language” and “foreign language”. A second language is an additional language which is acquired in a context where that language is widely spoken, for example, the acquisition of English by a native German speaker living in England. A foreign language is learned in a context where that language is not widely spoken, such as a native English speaker learning German while living in England. We use “L2” as an umbrella term for any additional language, irrespective of the context of acquisition. Unless otherwise specified, we focus on second language acquisition which takes place from around the onset of puberty, after the end of the putative Critical Period for language acquisition (Birdsong & Molis, 2001), and not child second language acquisition, nor simultaneous bilingualism. “L1” is used to refer to the native language, and is used interchangeably with this term. The “target language” is the language which is the subject of instruction, or the language to be learned, e.g. German is the target language in a German language class. We do not distinguish between language learning and language acquisition.

1 Introduction

Modern foreign language (MFL) skills in England have become a cause for concern. In a recent CBI/Pearson survey, only 36% of employers were satisfied with school/college leavers' foreign language skills, while 70% valued foreign language skills in their employees,(CBI/Pearson, 2013). Within Europe, England has one of the highest percentages of citizens unable to hold a conversation in a language other than their native language (Coleman, 2009), indicating that many people in England are not benefiting from the economic and cultural benefits of being able to use a foreign language. Furthermore, uptake of MFL at GCSE and A level has been falling over the last 20 years (Malpass, 2014), partly as a result of societal and cultural factors, such as a shift in public opinion against greater European integration or the perception that English speakers do not need to learn a foreign language, but also due to the removal of MFL from the core curriculum at KS4 in 2002 (Coleman, 2009; Macaro, 2008). Additionally, the transition between GCSE and A level is considered to be particularly difficult in MFL (Ipsos Mori, 2014), indicating a mismatch between the skills and knowledge taught at these levels. This may lead to fewer students deciding to continue the study of foreign languages post-16.

The current programme of reform for GCSEs and A levels in MFL aims to address these issues. New performance measures for schools, such as the EBacc, which requires students to study at least one language[1], have already led to an increase in the number of students studying languages at GCSE (Truss, 2013). Planned reforms to MFL GCSEs will increase the level of demand of the qualifications, and include changes to the content and assessment. In particular, the type and demand of texts which students are expected to read will change. It is hoped that these reforms will increase the foreign language competence of 16 year olds, and facilitate transition to A level. In this study we focus on one aspect of the reform to GCSEs: the increased focus on reading authentic texts at GCSE, and investigate how teachers may be supported to adapt to this change.

Historically the importance given to reading in a foreign language has been influenced by trends in language teaching pedagogy, and the theories of language acquisition on which they are based. In the 1940s and 50s the Grammar-Translation Approach was widely used, with a focus on rote learning of grammatical rules, and an emphasis on translation both into, and from the target language. In general, the emphasis was primarily on written forms of the language, and students were assessed in reading, writing and translation, to the exclusion of speaking and listening skills. The ability to read texts written in a foreign language was considered to be an important skill. For example, until 1949, all students who were entered for the Higher School Certificate, regardless of their subject choices, were entered for a subsidiary paper which tested reading in a foreign language (Brammell, 2011).

From the 1960s, theories of first language acquisition started to have a greater impact on the theory of second language acquisition, leading to the development of new foreign language teaching methods. In 1957, B.F Skinner published "Verbal Behavior" (Skinner, 1957), which proposed a behaviourist theory of first language acquisition, hypothesising that language learning is a matter of habit-forming and repetition. This was then applied to second language acquisition (Lado, 1957), ultimately leading to the development of the Audio-lingual Method, which focused on audio and spoken drills, often using a language laboratory. In response to behaviourism, nativist approaches to first language acquisition emerged (see e.g. Chomsky, 1959) which propose that children learning their native language have an innate ability to learn language, providing they are exposed to input in their native language because they are born with (subconscious) knowledge of the grammatical principles underpinning all languages (Universal Grammar). In the 1970s, this led to the Communicative Approach to language teaching, which assumed that the principles of

[1] This may be an ancient or a modern language.

Universal Grammar were (to some extent, see White, 2003) available to second language learners. In particular, the Communicative Approach emphasises the need to provide second language learners with comprehensible input, and opportunities for communication, parallel to those which a child learning their native language might experience (Krashen, 1981). Just as with Audio-lingualism, spoken language was taught first, because children learning their native language learn to speak and comprehend spoken language before reading and writing. To some extent both approaches attempted to address the need of many second language learners to be able to speak and aurally comprehend their foreign language, skills which had been neglected in traditional approaches to MFL teaching.

Neither the Audio-Lingual method nor the Communicative Approach fully take into account the differences between child first language acquisition and post-puberty second language acquisition. A typical second language learner is not only more cognitively mature than an infant, but is likely to be literate in their first language. Furthermore, the quality and quantity of input which a foreign language learner receives is likely to be very different from the input received by infants, so theoretical approaches based on theories of first language acquisition need to be adapted carefully. If second language learners are able to access written material in their second language, then there seems to be little reason why they should not use it as an important source of input from the earliest stages of acquisition.

The planned reforms to GCSE aim to redress the balance between reading and the other skills of speaking, listening and writing. At GCSE, reading is often a neglected skill, which attracts less teaching time because it is considered to be easier than speaking, listening or writing (Brammell, 2011). Students often consider their reading skills to be stronger than other skills, even though their examination performance does not necessarily reflect that view (George, 2013). Ofsted has highlighted the teaching of reading to be a weakness in many schools, with schools often limiting reading materials to short texts found in textbooks or past examination papers (Ofsted, 2011). Currently the Ofqual GCSE subject criteria specify equal weighting in the assessment to each of the four skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening (Ofqual, 2011). However, there is some flexibility. For example, the OCR MFL GCSE specification gives a weighting of 30% each to speaking and writing, and only 20% to reading and listening (OCR, 2012). Furthermore, currently, students are expected to read and comprehend a variety of forms of short text. These include signs, instructions, messages, emails, postcards, letters, internet sources, articles and brochures in the GCSE assessment. Although this may seem to be a wide range of text types, these texts are typically short, simple, and inauthentic (written for non-native speakers). At the time of writing the assessment model for the reformed GCSEs in MFL has not been finally decided. However, the new subject criteria state that learners should:

> *Deduce meaning from a variety of short and longer written texts from a range of specified contexts, including authentic sources involving some complex language and unfamiliar material, as well as short narratives and authentic material addressing a wide range of relevant contemporary and cultural themes.*
>
> (Department for Education, 2014)

It seems, therefore, that students will be expected to read a much wider range of texts during their GCSE course, including some literary texts. Furthermore, these texts are much more likely to be authentic materials, originally written by native speakers for a native speaking audience, rather than texts targeted specifically at language learners at this level[2]. Although the weighting of reading (25%) in the reformed GCSE will be relatively similar to the current GCSE, the change in the types of text which students will read is likely to require significant

[2] See Gilmore (2007) for a discussion of the definition of an authentic text for use in an MFL classroom.

changes to the way in which reading is taught and learned, with implications for the whole MFL curriculum. This reform therefore provides an opportunity to re-examine the role of reading in the MFL curriculum, and to explore how different approaches to teaching reading might best support students' language learning.

In this report we first examine theoretical aspects of reading in both the native language and a second or foreign language, and discuss the implications for pedagogy. We then focus on the GCSE and A level context, and explore how the current GCSE course could be reformed to support the development of reading skills in a foreign language. We then present the findings from a focus group study which explored the views of MFL teachers working in an English context on different approaches to teaching reading. Finally, the implications of these views for the development of curriculum support resources is discussed.

Summary Boxes

At the end of each section of the literature review, a summary box listing the main points is provided.

2 Theoretical Background

2.1 L1 reading

Reading is a complex skill, which requires the integration of lower and higher level cognitive processes to recognise words, and interpret the meaning of the text as a whole. In this section we present a brief overview of the cognitive processes involved in reading.

When reading, it is necessary to interpret visual symbols (e.g. letters, words), and associate these symbols with words (or lexical items) in the mental lexicon. This process is known as visual word recognition. Visual word recognition uses lower level cognitive processes, which rely on phonological and orthographic knowledge. Phonological awareness is necessary for reading, because readers need to understand that speech can be broken down into units, such as syllables or phonemes, and that these smaller units can be represented visually (Goswami, 2008). Orthographic knowledge includes not only the recognition of visual forms, but also knowledge about the combinations of letters which are likely or not in different positions in the word; this type of information is generally assumed to be acquired through extended exposure to writing (Nassaji, 2014). Furthermore, readers must know the grapheme-phoneme correspondences; this may vary from language to language. In Japanese, for example, characters (Kana) represent syllables (often more than one phoneme), while in Spanish, one letter represents one sound (Goswami, 2008). The level of representation (e.g. word level, syllable, phoneme) is known as the "psycholinguistic grain size" of reading (Goswami, 2008). Languages also differ with respect to the regularity and consistency[3] of grapheme-phoneme correspondences (Frost, 2005). Children learning to read languages with highly consistent grapheme-phoneme correspondences, such as Spanish or German (also known as shallow orthography) tend to do so more quickly than those learning languages which are less consistent, such as English or Danish (Goswami, 2008).

As readers access the phonological representation (the sound) of a word, readers must link this to its semantic representation (meaning). With practice, these processes can become fast and automatic. However, it is not necessarily the case that visual word recognition must always depend on phonological representations. The dual route model of word recognition (Balota, Yap, & Cortese, 2006) proposes that there are two routes to word recognition: either through the visual properties of the word (assumed to be faster), or through phonological information. Repeated exposure to common words may facilitate the development of the faster, visual route. However, the dual route model is not the only model of word recognition. The single route connectionist perspective proposes that phonological, visual and semantic information are integrated to recognise words. For further discussion of models of word recognition, see Balota et al. (2006).

Visual word recognition skills have been shown to be a strong predictor of reading comprehension, for both L1 and L2 reading (Nassaji, 2014). However, studies of primary school aged children with reading difficulties have shown that children with effective word recognition skills may still have difficulty with reading comprehension, because they do not have efficient higher level reading processes (Cutting & Scarborough, 2006). A skilled reader must do more than recognise words. As with all language comprehension, readers must combine words to develop a representation of the propositional content of the sentences in the text. This process involves the integration of (morpho-)syntactic, semantic, and real world knowledge (Kamide, Scheepers, & Altmann, 2003). Furthermore, since texts (typically) consist of more than one sentence, readers must integrate their representation of each sentence with other sentences in the text to construct meaning. This process is likely

[3] Consistency is the uniqueness of pronunciation of a letter combination. For example, "oth" in moth and "both" is inconsistent, because "oth" is pronounced differently. Regularity is the conformity of a given letter cluster to rules. For example, the pronunciation of "ch" in "yacht" and "chef" cannot be determined from grapheme-phoneme correspondence rules (Frost, 2005).

to involve the use of linguistic information to track repeated mentions of entities referred to in the text (e.g. in a story, characters will be referred to repeatedly, using a range of linguistic forms such as proper nouns, nouns and pronouns) (Wilson, 2009), and understanding the relationship between the propositional content of each sentence, for example, to build an argument, or to order events in time.

Approaches to reading which focus on the primacy of phonological and orthographic information are generally referred to as “bottom up” approaches, while “top down” approaches focus on the role of conceptual and background knowledge in reading. One top down approach, Schema Theory (as related to text comprehension) states that we use schemata, or pre-existing knowledge structures when comprehending text, and that to comprehend a text a reader must map the information from the text on to existing schemata. Schemata may include information about text structures, and background knowledge about a topic. For example, a schema for a recipe might include the knowledge that the list of ingredients is usually to be found at the beginning of the recipe, followed by instructions for how to combine the ingredients. Schemata then allow the reader to predict the features of upcoming text (Nassaji, 2007). This perspective is supported by research demonstrating the sophisticated role that higher level processes can play in prediction, even at the word level, by facilitating efficient word recognition by eliminating semantically or syntactically implausible options (Altmann & Mirković, 2009). For example, when reading, knowing that the text is about crochet rather than pirates would lead to more efficient access of the appropriate semantic representation for “hook” (tool for crochet rather than a type of prosthetic limb). Alternatively, an information processing perspective views reading as a complex task relying on the integration of both lower and higher level processes (see e.g. Perfetti 2007). However, this perspective proposes that the two levels are not used entirely reciprocally, because if low level processes underpinning word recognition do not occur, then higher level processes cannot be used, because there is no data for higher level processes to use (Nassaji, 2014). An information processing account of reading further emphasises the fact that processing resources are limited, so that if lower level processes are inefficient and require a lot of processing resource, then there may be insufficient processing capacity for higher level processes, reducing overall text comprehension levels (Torgesen, 2000). However, lower level processes leading to word recognition have the potential to be automatized, leading to lower processing resource costs, because word forms and orthography are relatively invariant, and so are likely to be encountered many times with practice (Fukkink, Hulstijn, & Simis, 2005). Skilled readers, therefore, must successfully integrate both low and high level processes.

Although all reading requires a combination of bottom up and top down processes, not all reading is the same. Readers read many different types of texts, and for different purposes. Grabe (2009) lists six academic purposes for reading:

1. To search for information (scanning and skimming)
2. For quick understanding
3. To learn
4. To integrate information from different sources
5. To evaluate, critique and use information
6. For general comprehension

(Grabe, 2009, p8)

While some processes underpinning reading, such as word recognition, may be important across text types, and different purposes, Horiba (2000) notes that effective readers need flexible control over their own processing, to allocate attentional resources appropriately according to the task. Older, and more proficient readers are better able to control their own processing. For example, when reading to search for information, a reader may not fully parse every sentence, but rather search for specific words or phrases. Furthermore, Zwaan

(1994) has demonstrated that readers vary their level of attention to lower level relative to higher level features of texts, depending on the genre of the text (e.g. news story vs narrative).

Summary of L1 reading

- Reading is a complex skill, which requires the integration of different cognitive processes:
    - Readers must understand how visual symbols (e.g. letters) relate to sounds, and use this information to recognise words when reading, and then understand the meaning of those words. This is a low level, or bottom up process.
    - Readers also use pre-existing, global knowledge (Schemas) knowledge about the type of text (e.g. poem), and the topic of the text, to predict the features of the text. This is a high level, or top down process.

- These processes require attentional resources. Skilled readers can effectively direct attentional resources to facilitate text comprehension.
    - Extensive practice in reading can help to make processing fast and automatic, reducing processing load.
- People may read for different purposes. This may affect how attentional resources are allocated.

2.2 L2 reading

Models of reading development are frequently developed with respect to a child learning to read in their L1. However, a child learning to read in their native language, even at age five, is different from an L2 learner learning to read in their L2. Firstly, children learning to read in their L1 are generally fully fluent in their L1: they are assumed to know (most, if not all of) the words which they will read, and have acquired the phonology and syntax of their L1. In contrast, an L2 learner starting to read in their L2 will normally be fully literate in their L1, but will not have acquired the phonology, vocabulary, or syntax of their L2. A major question in L2 reading research, therefore, centres around whether L2 learners are able to make use of their L1 reading skills.

The Linguistic Threshold Hypothesis (LTH) (Clarke, 1980; Pichette, Segalowitz, & Connors, 2003) proposes that L2 learners are not able to use L1 reading skills until they have reached a certain level, or threshold, of proficiency in their L2. As such, low proficiency L2 learners should show a weak, or no correlation between their L1 and L2 reading skills, but higher proficiency L2 learners' reading skills would be correlated across their two languages. If this were the case, then one potential implication is that L2 learners would need to have some command of their L2 before reading instruction could begin (Bernhardt & Kamil, 1995). However, the Linguistic Threshold Hypothesis neglects the role that reading can play in language development as a source of input (See Section 3.1). In contrast, the Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis (LIH) (Bernhardt & Kamil, 1995) states that reading skills are shared across languages, and are immediately available across languages. L2 reading would therefore depend to a large degree on L1 reading skills. In a meta-analysis, Jeon and Yamashita (2014) found that L2 proficiency was a stronger predictor of L2 reading abilities than L1 reading comprehension skills, however, they note that L1 comprehension skills were significantly correlated with L2 reading, indicating that both proficiency and L1 reading abilities are important for L2 reading. However, the LIH does not specify the cognitive

mechanisms underpinning transfer, nor whether such transfer is equally available at all levels of proficiency.

Both the LTH and the LIH are, to some extent, intuitively appealing. Word recognition in an L2 text would indeed be difficult, if no words have been acquired in the L2 which might be recognised. However, it is also the case that, for example, a native English speaker attempting to read a Spanish newspaper might use higher level processes to construct at least some meaning from the text, by using their knowledge of text structure, how paralinguistic features such as pictures might relate to the text, and an ability to use strategies such as cognate identification[4]. However, where the two languages, and the forms of text used in those languages are very different, such top down strategies may not be as effective. Given the role that L1 knowledge may play in reading development, it is therefore necessary to consider what knowledge and skills related to reading may be transferred from the L1 to the L2.

As discussed above, there are cross-linguistic differences between the writing systems used in individual languages. Where the L1 and the L2 use different writing systems, learners will not be able to use their L1 knowledge of grapheme-phoneme correspondences when reading the L2, and will need to learn the L2 correspondences. Similarly, an L2 learner needs to acquire the psycholinguistic grain size of their L2: whether a written symbol relates to a whole word, syllable or phoneme. Furthermore, even where two languages use the same writing system, e.g. both English and German use the Roman alphabet, there are differences in the grapheme-phoneme correspondences, both with respect to the level of consistency, and which phonemes are mapped to which graphemes. For example even though Spanish and English both use the same alphabet, the grapheme-phoneme correspondence is not the same in both languages: in Spanish, the grapheme "i" is linked to the phoneme /i/ as in "libro", but in English "i" is more usually linked to the phoneme /ɪ/, as in "big". In part, this is a natural consequence of the fact that different languages have different phoneme inventories which must be represented in the writing system. For example German has both /u/, a high, back rounded vowel[5], and /ʏ/, a high front rounded vowel, represented as "u" and "ü" respectively. English, however, does not have front rounded vowels, and so English L1 learners of L2 German may struggle to perceive the contrast between these two vowels. L2 learners may therefore not be able to learn appropriate grapheme-phoneme correspondences if they have not acquired the necessary phonological knowledge. Differences in the consistency of grapheme-phoneme mapping may lead to further difficulties in L2 reading. Learners whose L1 has a relatively shallow orthography tend to rely on phonological processes for word recognition, even though that may not be an appropriate strategy in the L2, while L2 learners whose L1 has a deep orthography, with less predictable phoneme-grapheme correspondences use primarily visual processes in word recognition (Schwartz, Share, Leikin, & Kozminsky, 2008).

The extent to which top down information, such as from schemata may be transferred from L1 reading to L2 is also likely to vary depending on the L1 and the L2, and the cultures associated with those languages. For example, in Japanese newspapers, a form of essay is frequently used which uses a specific structure called the ki-sho-ten-ketsu "introduction - follow-up – change – conclusion". An L2 learner of Japanese is unlikely to have a schema which matches this type of text, and instead may (at first) try to apply a schema based on the

[4] A cognate is a word which is the same, or very similar in two languages. For example, "Hamster" is the same in both English and German, with only minor differences in pronunciation. Near cognates may also be used to determine meaning. For example, in German "Hund" (dog), is similar to the English "hound". However, such strategies rely on students being familiar with the relevant vocabulary in their native language.

[5] High and back refer to the position of the tongue in the mouth when producing the vowel. Rounding refers to whether the lips are rounded or not.

structure of newspaper texts in their L1 (Horiba, 2000). Alternatively, a native speaker of English learning L2 German is likely to find the structure of German fairy tales (Märchen) familiar, because German fairy tales are widely read in English. However, it should not be assumed that the experience of native speakers is uniform: if a learner does not have experience of a specific text type, then they will not have developed a schema in their L1, which they would be able to transfer to their L2. An understanding (whether implicit or explicit) of the structure of diverse text types requires substantial experience with diverse text types (Koda, 2007). Particularly if an L2 learner is intending to use their L2 in a domain (e.g. business) in which they don't use their L1, then their L1 schemata may not be useful.

It is tempting to assume that where there are differences between the L1 and the L2, that there will inevitably be difficulties in acquisition, and the greater the differences, the greater the difficulty. Indeed, this was the basis for the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, one of the earliest (though now widely criticised) theories of second language acquisition (Kramsch, 2007; Lado, 1957). In the context of L2 reading, L1 and L2 differences have been shown to be related to non-targetlike reading in some contexts (Hamada & Koda, 2008; Koda, 2007). However, this is not necessarily the case. Taking an example from L2 phonological development, the Perceptual Assimilation Model (Best, McRoberts, & Goodell, 2001) of L2 speech perception proposes that sounds which are phonetically similar in the L1 and L2 may be more difficult to acquire, because it is more difficult to acquire a targetlike L2 phonological category, because the L2 sound is approximated to the L1 sound. When applied to reading, the similarities between two writing systems may disguise the fact that the grapheme-phoneme correspondence is slightly different between two languages, even though such similarities make text more accessible in the earliest stages of L2 reading development. Furthermore, where there are differences between the L1 and the L2, the level of difficulty may not be symmetrical. For example, English has a deep orthography, while German has a relatively shallow orthography. It would be expected that, after the initial stage of acquisition, that an English L1 learner of L2 German would find it easier to learn to read in their L2 than a German L1 learner of L2 English.

At each level of processing, from low level orthographic-phonemic processing, to the use of top down information from schemata, there is the potential for knowledge developed as a result of L1 literacy to be transferred to the L2. However, this does not necessarily mean that an L2 learner is able to make use of this information. Reading is a complex process which requires the integration of many processes, and as a result has a high demand on attentional resources. Competent readers are able to allocate attentional resources flexibly according to the demands of the reading task. L2 learners, particularly those of lower levels of proficiency, have had less exposure to individual words, leading to slower and less automatic processing (Fukkink et al., 2005). Additionally, linking the phonological representation of an L2 word may be slower, because access to semantic representations may be mediated through the L1 translation equivalent, until a direct link to the semantic representation is made (Kroll, Van Hell, Tokowicz, & Green, 2010). Furthermore, L2 learners may not have fully developed syntactic representations for the syntactic structures used in a text. It has been demonstrated that L2 sentence processing is slower (Wilson, 2006), and less computationally efficient, particularly for inflectional morphology (Hopp, 2010), and may even be qualitatively different from native speaker processing (Clahsen & Felser, 2006, but see Hopp 2010), even for highly proficient L2 learners. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that L2 learners may have less efficient processing for linguistic features which span more than one sentence, for example, L2 learners exhibit non-nativelike processing and interpretation of pronouns, even at very high levels of proficiency (Pretorius, 2005; Wilson, 2009).

What might be the effect of such processing inefficiency on L2 reading? The Inhibition Hypothesis (Segalowitz, Watson, & Segalowitz, 1995) proposes that inefficient low level linguistic processing inhibits the use of top down, conceptual information, which may hinder

L2 learners from developing an understanding of global text content. However, the Compensation Hypothesis states that learners may be able to compensate for deficits in linguistic processing by increasing their reliance on top down strategies (Stevenson, Schoonen, & de Glopper, 2007). Horiba (2000) found that L2 readers allocated more attentional resources to lower level processing, and a limited amount to higher level processes compared to L1 readers. However, L2 learners were able to adapt the processing strategies used according to the type of text (relying more on their knowledge of text structure for some types of texts), and the reading task (reading for coherence, or free-reading). This suggests that while less efficient lower level processing may indeed inhibit L2 reading to some extent, L2 learners are still able to flexibly allocate attentional resources while reading.

The LTH (Linguistic Threshold Hypothesis) is parallel to the Inhibition Hypothesis and the Compensation Hypothesis. Both the LTH and the Inhibition Hypothesis emphasise that at low levels of proficiency, L2 learners will not be able to read fluently, either because L2 learners have not acquired the necessary L2 knowledge (vocabulary, syntax, etc.), or they are not able to access that knowledge quickly or automatically enough. The LIH (Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis) in contrast, emphasises the role that L1 literacy skills may play in L2 reading at all levels. These skills may be lower level skills, such as a knowledge of grapheme-phoneme correspondences, or higher level skills, such as the use of schemata. Furthermore the Compensation Hypothesis states that an L2 learner can compensate for deficits in one area of reading by employing other skills to a greater extent. For example, an L2 learner might compensate for a deficit in lower level processing by relying more on top down strategies. McNeil (2012) extends the Compensation Hypothesis by integrating the LTH, LIH and Inhibition Hypothesis. She proposes that at very low levels of proficiency, L2 learners' reading is limited by their lack of L2 proficiency. However, as proficiency increases, the role of L1 literacy skills increases. As L2 processing becomes more efficient, L2 learners have more attentional resources which can be allocated to compensate for any deficits. McNeil notes that as L2 proficiency increases, L1 reading ability, becomes a stronger predictor of L2 reading than L2 language knowledge. She further distinguishes between linguistic knowledge, and strategic knowledge. Under her definition, strategic knowledge is a type of metacognitive knowledge, and includes the ability to plan, repair, evaluate and monitor comprehension processes. This strategic knowledge is argued to be language independent, and used in both the L1 and L2.

To summarize, L2 reading may be considered similar to L1 reading, to the extent that it is a complex process which requires the integration of many different cognitive processes. However, unlike an L1 beginning reader, an L2 reader does not have a fully developed language system, which may limit their ability to read in their L2. However, depending on the similarity between their L1 and their L2, and their level of proficiency in the L2, L2 learners may be able to use L1 reading skills and knowledge, at least to some extent while reading their L2. Furthermore, although less efficient lower level processes may take up attentional resources, L2 learners are still able to use top down processes flexibly when reading.

Summary of L2 Reading

- L2 learners are different from children learning to read, because L2 learners are typically already literate in their native language, but do not have fully developed knowledge of their L2.
- Writing systems vary across languages. Where the L1 and the L2 writing systems are similar, L2 learners might be able to transfer L1 reading skills to the L2 (similarity of bottom up processes).
- Where the L1 and L2 are culturally similar, L2 learners may be able to apply background knowledge, and knowledge of text types to reading in their L2 (similarity of top down knowledge)
- The extent to which L1 reading skills are available for L2 reading is not clear:.
    - The Linguistic Threshold Hypothesis proposes that L2 learners are not able to use L1 reading skills until they have reached a threshold level of proficiency.
    - The Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis, in contrast, proposes that L1 reading skills are available from the earliest stages of L2 learning.
- Reading is a complex process which requires attentional resources.
    - L2 readers may have slower and less efficient low level processes (e.g. word recognition), which reduce the attentional resources available for top down processing (Inhibition Hypothesis), particularly at low levels of proficiency.
    - Particularly at higher proficiency levels, L2 learners may compensate for weaker low level processing, by relying more on top down processing (Compensation Hypothesis).

3 Reading and language learning

3.1 Linguistic benefits of reading

It has been demonstrated that reading practice in an L2 can lead to the development of more automatic visual word recognition, and greater reading fluency (Grabe, 2010; Nation, 1997), and that training can facilitate this process (Fukkink et al., 2005). However, as Nation (1997) notes, the development of L2 reading fluency is not the only benefit which may arise from reading in an L2. In this section we discuss the effect which reading may have on second language learning.

The importance of input, or exposure to the target language, for second language acquisition is well established. Without exposure, or input, in the L2, L2 learners have few opportunities for implicit learning, which is necessary for the development of fast and automatic language processing (Erçcetin & Alptekin, 2013). Input may lead to the acquisition of new language features, such as new syntactic structures, or provide further practice in processing features of the L2 which have already been acquired, leading to more automatic processing. It is beyond the scope of this report to discuss exactly how input may become intake[6], though it is clear that without input, intake is not possible. Although input may be spoken or written, written input may provide exposure to certain grammatical forms which are relatively infrequent in speech. Furthermore, while some syntactic structures may be relatively transparent (e.g. pre-verbal negation in Spanish), and straightforward to acquire from the input, other structures are more complex. For example, to understand a pronoun, learners must integrate syntactic, semantic and contextual information. Across languages, even those with apparently similar pronominal systems, these factors are used differently for different types of pronoun (e.g. personal pronoun, null pronoun, anaphoric demonstrative pronoun), and thus require many examples, in context, for acquisition (Filiaci, 2011; Wilson, 2009). Particularly for those learners in a foreign language learning context, who do not otherwise have access to large quantities of spoken input, reading may be a very important source of L2 input. A further advantage of written input compared to spoken input is that L2 learners are (usually) able to control the speed at which they read, so that they are still able to process input, even when processing is relatively slow. As such, written material may be more accessible to learners, assuming that they have the appropriate literacy skills to read the text. Reading may therefore support the acquisition of syntactic structures, and lead to more targetlike representations of those structures.

Reading may also contribute to the acquisition of vocabulary (Nation, 1997). The Incidental Learning Hypothesis (Coady, 1996) proposes that the vocabulary can be effectively learned through multiple exposure to each word in a variety of discourse contexts, much as children learn vocabulary in their native language. Furthermore, since written texts are typically richer in vocabulary than spoken language, reading can provide a particularly rich source of input in terms of vocabulary (Horst, 2005). Since learners are not directly exposed to the L1 translation of the word, this may facilitate the development of a representation which is not mediated by the L1 translation, leading to faster processing (Kroll et al., 2010). However, since repeated exposure to a new vocabulary item, possibly as many as between 10 and 30 exposures, are needed for learners to make the form-meaning connection (Schmitt, 2008; Waring, 2006), it would be necessary to read a large volume of text to achieve sufficient exposure for incidental vocabulary learning. Unless L2 learners rely on another source of information, such as a dictionary, when reading, learners must make inferences about the meaning of unknown words. To do this, they may use information such as morphology[7], knowledge of cognates, and knowledge inferred at the level of the sentence and discourse, as well as background knowledge. However, learners' inferences may not always be correct,

[6] Intake is used to describe those features of the input which are acquired.

[7] In morphologically rich languages, morphology can give information about word class and gender. For example, a word ending in "ung" in German, such as "Sendung", is very likely to be a feminine noun.

leading to incorrect form-meaning connections, though L2 learners with a wider, and richer vocabulary are more likely to make correct inferences (Nassaji, 2004). Nassaji (2003), for example, found that in a think aloud task, only 25.6% of learners' inferences were correct, with a further 18.6% that were partially correct. Similarly, Waring (2006) suggests that incidental vocabulary learning is only likely to occur when an L2 learner is already familiar with approximately 98% of the vocabulary used in a text.

Yamamoto (2011) found that incidental vocabulary learning did not contribute to the acquisition of vocabulary which could be used productively (i.e. in speaking and writing), though it did support the retention of vocabulary which had previously been learned. However, Horst (2005) found that a group of adult L2 learners of English, ranging from elementary to intermediate levels of proficiency did acquire new vocabulary items incidentally when reading graded readers targeted at their level of proficiency. This finding is consistent with Pulido (2007), who shows that incidental learning of vocabulary is more likely to occur when low level reading processes are efficient, because L2 learners have attentional resources which can be allocated to the acquisition of new vocabulary. The fact that Horst's learners were reading texts targeted at their proficiency level may have allowed incidental vocabulary learning to occur. Furthermore, when comparing the efficacy of reading compared to listening, Vidal (2011) found that reading led to greater incidental vocabulary gains, and better retention of that vocabulary after one month. Despite this, M. Hu and Nassaji (2012) found that even where L2 learners were able to make correct inferences about the meaning of words in context, that there was an inverse relationship between ease of inferencing and retention: vocabulary which was easy to infer the meaning of was less likely to be retained, possibly because learners did not need to engage with such words to the same extent, leading to less retention.

Making the connection between the form of a word, and its meaning is an important component in vocabulary learning, and it is clearly important for L2 learners to acquire a wide range of vocabulary (breadth). However, vocabulary learning involves more than a simple form-meaning connection (Qian, 2002). For learners to understand, and use words in a fully targetlike manner, they also require "deep" lexical knowledge. For example, "excellent", "awesome", "ace", "fine", "hunky dory", all mean "good", but would only be felicitously used in different contexts, possibly by different social groups. Furthermore, L2 learners must also learn the appropriate collocations, or words which are commonly used together. In English, we "commit murder", but do not "do murder", or "make murder", though we "do homework" and "make a phone call". Waring (2006) argues that L2 learners will only fully acquire such deep lexical knowledge through extensive and repeated exposure over time to L2 vocabulary in written texts. Furthermore, Schmitt (2008) notes the need to encounter vocabulary items in different contexts to develop a full representation of the item. Reading may therefore lead to benefits for vocabulary development.

Reading has many potential benefits for language learning. However, there are some aspects of language which may not be learned most effectively through reading. For example, if learners' primary means of vocabulary acquisition is through reading, then they may not develop appropriate phonological representations of vocabulary items. This is particularly the case for languages with a deep orthography, where the phonological form of a word is not reliably obtained from its spelling. Furthermore, if there is no focus on linguistic form, either for the acquisition of grammatical structures or vocabulary, then learners may not engage sufficiently with them for successful acquisition (Harris, Burch, Jones, & Darcy, 2001; Schmitt, 2008). In the case of vocabulary, Schmitt (2008) argues that initial explicit instruction in the form-meaning relationship (including phonological representations as well as the written form) is likely to facilitate acquisition, with subsequent meaning focused exposure allowing learners to develop deep lexical knowledge. In contrast Harris et al. (2001) propose an inductive approach to teaching grammar, allowing learners (planned) exposure to grammatical forms, with an initial focus on meaning, before subsequently

focusing on the (morpho-)syntactic form. It seems, therefore, that reading can play an important role in second language learning, particularly when used in combination with other, form focused activities.

Summary of the linguistic benefits of reading

- Reading in an L2 may support language development, by providing input, or exposure to the L2. This may be particularly important where spoken language input is limited.
- Reading may provide exposure to grammatical forms which are infrequent in spoken language.
- Written language typically uses a wider range of vocabulary than spoken language. Reading may facilitate the acquisition of vocabulary by providing exposure to vocabulary in context, allowing learners to develop breadth (quantity) and depth (knowledge about usage) of vocabulary.
    - Incidental vocabulary learning is more likely to occur when texts are targeted at learners' proficiency levels.
    - L2 learners are not always able to accurately infer the meaning of new vocabulary from the context.
- Not all aspects of language can be acquired through reading. For example, reading alone is unlikely to help learners develop knowledge about the pronunciation of vocabulary items (phonological representations).

3.2 Other benefits of reading

Reading in a second language may have benefits which extend beyond purely linguistic development. An L2 is typically associated with a culture which is different from the native culture of the L2 learner[8]. As Grabe (2009) notes, in most societies it is necessary to be a good reader to be successful. As such, in order to participate fully in another culture, L2 learners must become good readers. Furthermore, reading offers the opportunity to access another culture. If L2 learners read authentic texts, that is, texts written (typically) by native speakers of the target language primarily for native speakers, then they are able to access at least some aspects of that culture without the need for travel. This might include developing an understanding of attitudes towards specific issues in that culture, or might be informationally focused, such as learning facts about the flora and fauna of a particular area or country. For example, the attitude towards domesticated animals, such as goats, may be very different across cultures. Such knowledge may allow students access to a very different perspective, and may be useful if they travel to that country. Although authentic materials may provide the most obvious access to another culture, modified materials may serve the same purpose, even if perhaps to a lesser extent. Developing an understanding of the culture in which an L2 is used is not entirely separate from language development. If students develop background knowledge related to a specific culture, and have exposure to text types (and text structures) used in that language, then they will be able to develop L2 related schemata, which may facilitate further reading, leading to a virtuous circle.

[8] This is not always the case. For example, it is not clear to what extent a long-term resident of Wales would access a different culture by learning Welsh.

3.3 Pedagogical implications

Thus far we have shown that L2 reading is a complex process, requiring the integration of different types of bottom up and top down processes. These processes may be facilitated by L1 literacy skills. The extent to which an L2 learner relies on these components varies as proficiency increases. Furthermore, reading in an L2 can benefit language development, by providing a source of target language input, leading to benefits for both lexical and syntactic development. In this section we examine the pedagogical implications for these findings. We explore how teachers might help L2 learners to become proficient L2 readers.

Developing fast and automatic lower level processes is important for L2 reading. More frequent words are read more quickly, indicating that increased exposure to vocabulary items facilitates word recognition (Nassaji, 2014). Fukkink et al. (2005) investigated the effect of word recognition fluency training on L2 reading comprehension and speed. Participants in his study completed speeded translation tasks, and cloze tasks. While training had a positive impact on lexical access, this did not translate into an improvement in reading speed nor comprehension. This finding may be due to the fact that the L2 learners in Fukkink et al's study already had strong lexical access skills, and so further training did not have a large impact on their L2 reading abilities. However, it is not clear whether or how training in isolated words relates to word recognition in connected texts. It may be the case, that training is helpful when vocabulary items are first encountered, to develop the initial form-meaning connection, but that exposure to words in meaningful contexts is necessary to develop lexical access skills which support L2 reading. Exposure to vocabulary items in meaningful contexts is also necessary to develop deeper knowledge about those items, such as collocations.

Nassaji (2014) recommends the use of extensive reading to support the development of automatised lower level processes. Extensive reading programmes typically aim for students to read a large volume of material, on topics chosen by themselves, at a level which they find relatively undemanding in terms of vocabulary and syntax (Day & Bamford, 1998). It is generally considered necessary for students to be familiar with at least 98% of vocabulary in a text for successful extensive reading[9] (Hirsch & Nation, 1992; M. Hu & Nation, 2000). Extensive reading of this kind provides the opportunity for repeated, meaningful exposure to the L2, which enables students to practise decoding (the orthography-phonology link), and lexical access (linking the phonological representation to the meaning of the word). Extensive reading is frequently promoted as a means for allowing incidental vocabulary learning. However, since the evidence for substantial gains in vocabulary through incidental learning alone is weak, and this is typically restricted to receptive vocabulary, a combination of extensive reading with activities which have an explicit focus on vocabulary is likely to be more effective (Nation, 1997). This may be difficult within a conventional extensive reading programme, where students have free choice about what they read, and are likely to be reading different texts. Using a combination of approaches to reading may therefore lead to greater learning gains overall. However, Beglar, Hunt, and Kite (2012) investigated the effect of extensive reading compared to intensive reading[10] for pleasure on reading rate, which they used as a proxy for reading fluency. They found that reading rates increased most in those learners who only read for pleasure (extensive reading), compared to those learners who combined both types of reading, and those who only did intensive reading activities. It seems, then, that teachers need to evaluate the needs of their learners: for some

[9] A distinction between receptive vocabulary, which is understood, but not used in production, and productive vocabulary, which is both used and understood is often made. Here we focus on receptive vocabulary, as this is required for reading. However, receptive vocabulary may become productive if encountered frequently enough, or acquisition is supported with teaching activities which encourage production.

[10] Intensive reading activities include activities such as comprehension questions, translation activities, etc.

groups prioritising fluency might be beneficial, whereas others may benefit more from additional focus on form.

The Linguistic Threshold Hypothesis states that a lack of linguistic knowledge of the L2 prevents very low proficiency learners from using L1 literacy skills and knowledge when reading the L2. If learners are unable to access L2 texts, then they are not able to use reading as a source of input in the L2. There are several possible solutions. Firstly, using texts which are modified to match the level of L2 learners would allow learners to start to practise lower level skills, leading to greater efficiency of processing. However, sourcing appropriate texts which are of interest to learners may be challenging. Secondly, developing a programme of study for L2 learners which includes the vocabulary which is most likely to be encountered in authentic texts would facilitate reading. While some vocabulary is likely to be common across different contexts (e.g. closed class words such as prepositions, wh-words, etc.), a learner who wishes to read academic articles on chemistry is likely to need different vocabulary compared to a learner who wishes to read newspapers. Teachers also need to consider the balance between teaching vocabulary which is mostly used in writing and that which is primarily used in speaking.

Expert readers in both their L1 and L2 use a range of top down strategies to facilitate reading comprehension. Instruction in the use of such strategies can help learners to become better readers in both their L1 and L2 (Janzen & Stoller, 1998). For example, the teacher can explain and discuss why reading strategies can help reading comprehension, and enable students to do the same. Across the curriculum, the teacher should provide opportunities for strategy use, by embedding "authentic" reading activities, in which reading has a meaning focus. Janzen and Stoller (1998) further recommend that teachers should choose texts which are challenging, so that the use of strategies is justified, and that students should be taught to use a range of strategies.

It has been shown that more proficient learners typically make more use of top down strategies than less proficient learners, because more proficient learners have more efficient lower level processing, which leaves more attentional resources available for top down processing. However, this does not mean that less proficient learners should not be trained in the use of top down strategies. In particular, the use of strategies may make texts more accessible to less proficient learners, who are more likely to suffer from a break down in comprehension due to a lack of linguistic knowledge. Making texts more accessible can play an important role in developing learner confidence in reading texts in their L2 (Wright & Brown, 2006). Harris (2007) trained near beginner learners of L2 French (mostly L1 English) aged approximately 12-13, in the use of reading strategies over a nine month period, and found that learners were able to learn to use strategies, but instruction needed to take the proficiency of the learners into account. The strategies included top down strategies, such as using the layout of a text to work out what type of text it is, or using background knowledge to work out the meaning of words. Harris used a progression of strategy instruction over time, starting with short, textbook texts combined with supported practice of a limited number of strategies, and moved towards the use of authentic texts, with independent use of a wider range of strategies. Learners preferred the use of activities which focused on one strategy. However, there were considerable individual differences in the way that they used the strategies. For example, one student commented that they used some strategies more than others, because they felt that they were easier to remember and more effective. Over half of learners preferred to read authentic material compared to textbook texts, because they felt it was a more useful activity. This is perhaps surprising given the low level of proficiency of these learners. It seems therefore, that including reading strategy instruction may be useful even for less proficient learners.

The term "reading strategy" is often used to include top down strategies, but can include strategies to facilitate word recognition, such as the use of morphology to determine the part

of speech of a word. Furthermore, strategies can be classified in different ways. Appendix A lists three different classifications of strategies. These strategies include tasks which may be carried out before, during and after reading. Importantly, however, these strategies can be applied to both L1 and L2 reading. As such, if learners are also studying their native language (e.g. English if their L1 is English), then there is an opportunity for cross-curricular strategy instruction to take place: if similar strategies are taught in both the L1 and the L2, then students will become more skilled readers in both languages.

The use of top down strategies relies, to some extent, on learners being able to access appropriate schemata and background knowledge for the text which they are reading. Since L1 schemata and background knowledge relevant to a learner's native culture will not always be applicable to an L2 text, learners need to have the opportunity to develop this knowledge. This is unlikely to occur through one exposure to a particular text type, or one text on a topic. Instead, learners need to be given repeated exposure to different texts within the same genre across time, or multiple texts (potentially of different types) on the same topic. However, such repetition may help learners to develop efficient lower level processes. For example, if a student reads multiple texts on the theme of football, they are likely to read the same vocabulary (e.g. goal, referee, ball, etc.) in multiple contexts. Similarly, if a student reads multiple poems, then they may become more efficient at processing the syntactic forms (e.g. non-canonical word order) used in such texts, as well as the global structure of the text.

A teacher must choose the level of demand of a text. Frequently this is presented as a dichotomy between authentic and inauthentic texts, with authentic texts typically considered to be more demanding. However, this is not necessarily the case: there are undemanding authentic texts, and highly demanding texts written specifically for L2 learners. In general, if the aim is to develop fluent, efficient processing, then relatively undemanding texts are preferable, because learners are able to practise reading more quickly. However, for reading strategy instruction, more demanding texts would be more appropriate, to allow students to benefit from using strategies. Nuttall (1982), cited in Coady (1996), proposes that there is a vicious and a virtuous circle for reading. If texts are too difficult, then reading is very slow, and little is understood, so reading becomes less enjoyable, so students read less, and so do not practise reading, and hence do not become faster. On the other hand, if learners can comprehend texts successfully, and read faster, then reading is likely to be more enjoyable, and so learners will be motivated to read more, and so will improve their reading skills. Similarly, if learners have the opportunity to read texts which interest them, then they may be more motivated to read, and more motivated to acquire the vocabulary needed to access the text. Since it is unlikely that every member of a class will share the same interests, allowing students some choice of reading material is beneficial. However, since a focus on form is also beneficial for vocabulary learning, and this may be easier to arrange if all students in a class are reading the same text, there are benefits to restricting choice.

To summarize, to allow learners to become expert L2 readers, teachers need to incorporate activities which promote both low and high level processes. While supporting low level processes such as visual word recognition may be particularly important for less proficient learners, top down reading strategies may be taught at all levels. However, for gains in reading proficiency, extended practice is needed over a period of several months and years. As such, a progression of reading activities should be planned as an integral part of the L2 curriculum.

Summary of the pedagogical implications

- L2 learners must develop effective bottom up and top down processing skills.
- Bottom up skills (e.g. visual word recognition) can be developed through:
    - Word recognition training
    - Extensive reading of texts which are relatively undemanding for learners to promote fluency.
    - A focus on form may promote vocabulary development, leading to the development of sufficient vocabulary to support extensive reading.
- Top down strategies can be developed through
    - Explicit training in, and practice of different top down strategies.
    - The provision of meaning focused reading activities which support top down processing skills, and allow students to apply L1 knowledge to the L2 context.
- Reading strategies may support both bottom up and top down processes, and have been shown to be successfully taught to both low and high proficiency learners.
- Choosing the appropriate level of demand of a text is important for motivation.
    - If texts are too difficult, then readers may become demotivated, and read less, and so get less practice.
    - If texts are at an appropriate level of difficulty, then learners are more likely to enjoy reading, and want to read more.

4 GCSE and A level context

Ofsted (2011) has identified the teaching of reading as a key area for improvement in MFL at secondary level, because it is frequently not taught well. Often, schools do not exploit the range of authentic reading materials which are available, and typically rely on short texts in textbooks or past examination papers. Furthermore, Ofqual found that opportunities for students to read for pleasure or develop intercultural understanding were rare. However, the blame for these perceived weaknesses should not necessarily be given solely to teachers. Teachers' practice is shaped by the GCSE course which they are teaching. If current GCSE specifications (and assessments) do not support good practice in teaching reading, then it will be difficult for teachers to build effective reading activities into their teaching.

The planned reforms to MFL GCSEs will require students to study a wider range of text types than at present, including some literary texts. These texts are likely to be longer, and more demanding, due to an increased emphasis on the use of authentic texts than those which are currently used at this level. Students will be expected to respond to these texts in a variety of ways. For example, they will be expected to understand general and specific details in texts, identify the overall message and themes in a text, be able to scan for particular information and draw inferences in context (Department for Education, 2014). In this section we evaluate current GCSE specifications with respect to their suitability for supporting the development of reading skills, and suggest ways in which the specifications could be reformed to support the new subject criteria for reading, with a particular focus on vocabulary.

Hirsch and Nation (1992) show that it is necessary to know approximately 98% of vocabulary in a text for adequate comprehension, and that for English, a vocabulary of approximately 2,000 words is needed if the most frequently used words are taught and learned. However, more recent analysis indicates that this may be a conservative estimate. Instead, it has been suggested 2,000 words would provide only 80% coverage, and 6,000-8,000 words is needed to reach the coverage needed for comprehension (Milton, 2007). However, such estimates are dependent on the texts used to sample vocabulary; it is possible that the texts used as the basis of Milton's estimate used very complex texts. The Common European Framework of References for Language Learning and Teaching (CEFR) places GCSE foundation tier at level A2 (basic user, Waystage), and higher tier at B2 (Independent user, Threshold). For B1, a vocabulary of about 2,000 words is specified, and A2, 1,000 (Council of Europe, 2001; Milton, 2007). Since the move from A2 to B1 marks a shift towards independent language use, this suggests that a vocabulary of 2,000 words can be considered a minimum for relatively independent text comprehension.

At GCSE, vocabulary lists which specify the vocabulary which students will be expected to know in the examination[11] are provided by examination boards (e.g. OCR, 2009). For foundation tier, students are expected to know 1,400 words, with an additional 520 for higher tier, a total of 1,920 words, consistent with the CEFR level. Although it is difficult to compare counts of vocabulary, because there may be differences in what are considered to be different vocabulary items for the purposes[12], for the higher tier, at least, this approaches the level of vocabulary specified by Hirsch and Nation (1992) and the CEFR. However, even if these levels of vocabulary are specified for the GCSE assessment, it is not necessarily the case that students will be taught this vocabulary. Tschichold (2012) analysed the vocabulary featured in a series of French textbooks, Encore Tricolore, which is widely used at Key Stage 3 and GCSE. Overall, Tschichold found that learners were exposed to more than 2,500 word families (which includes different morphological forms of the same root word), again indicating that learners potentially have the opportunity to acquire sufficient vocabulary

[11] At higher tier some unfamiliar vocabulary which students are expected to understand from the context is included in the assessment.

[12] For example, masculine and feminine forms of professions may or may not be treated as one item.

for reading authentic texts. Since we might expect that students would be exposed to additional vocabulary in other contexts, such as other reading and listening materials, then this can be considered to be a conservative estimate of the vocabulary which students may encounter. However, the fact that students may have been exposed to a vocabulary item, doesn't entail that they will have learned it, particularly if they only see or hear it a small number of times.

Milton (2006) estimated the vocabulary levels of students in each year of French study in a school in England (Table 1). In this school, students start learning French in Year 7, and have the opportunity to continue to study French to A level. Milton used a meaning based task combined with a lexical decision task, in which students were asked to decide whether words presented in the task were genuine French words or not. Vocabulary levels were estimated based on the probability of correct responses in relation to a list of the most frequent words in French. Since there are likely to be discrepancies between the input which students had received and the words which are most frequent in French, these may be conservative estimates of the vocabulary which students actually knew. However, since the estimate is based on the most frequent words in French, the estimate provides an indication of whether students are developing a vocabulary suitable for reading authentic texts.

Milton (2006) found that student vocabulary levels do not increase at the same rate from year to year. Between Year 7 and Year 9, students on average acquire only about 150 new words. There is then a larger increase over the GCSE course. However, on average, students taking the GCSE only know about 852 words, substantially less than the vocabulary list specified for the foundation tier, and less than the 2,000 words suggested by Hirsch and Nation (1992). Even the maximum vocabulary level reached by any student, 1,800 falls short of this level. Furthermore, vocabulary levels increase dramatically between Year 11 and Year 12, the start of A level and AS courses. This indicates that one cause of transitional difficulties might be the differences in vocabulary required at each level.

Table 1: Vocabulary scores in each year of study of French, adapted from Milton (2006) p192.

	School year	Number of learners	Hours/year	Mean	Max	Min	SD
	7	80	78	311	900	0	193
	8	78	58.5	411	1150	0	228
	9	106	58.5	460	1150	0	261
	10	57	78	592	1350	50	263
GCSE	11	49	78	852	1800	0	440
	12	10	175.5	1555	2000	1100	349
A level	13	69	117	1930	3100	650	475

If learners of French are exposed to about 2,500 word families by the end of their GCSE course, why, on average, do learners acquire less than half of these words? Repeated exposure to vocabulary is necessary for acquisition to take place (Schmitt, 2008). Tschichold found that for many vocabulary items there were insufficient opportunities for recycling of vocabulary to support acquisition. This is consistent with George (2013), who reported that pupils felt that they did not have sufficient opportunity to revisit vocabulary. Furthermore, Milton's (2006) estimate was based on word knowledge relative to a list of the most frequent words. This might suggest that the vocabulary which is commonly taught at GCSE does not correspond to the most frequently used words. Tschichold (2012) compared the vocabulary presented in Encore Tricolore with the français fondamental, a list of words which are

accepted as representing the most frequently used French words, with the limitation that the list is based on oral speech recorded several decades ago. Overall, while 65% of the vocabulary in Encore Tricolore was included in the français fondamental, 35% was not. Additionally, 40% of the vocabulary in français fondamental was not covered by Encore Tricolore, indicating that Encore Tricolore does not provide good coverage of the most frequently used French words. Furthermore, this is not limited to French: Häcker (2008) conducted a similar analysis of German textbooks, and obtained very similar results. It is perhaps not surprising that teachers do not use authentic reading materials more widely at GCSE, since it is unlikely that students' prior vocabulary learning would enable them to access many authentic texts easily.

Why don't GCSE courses teach students the most frequent vocabulary? Current GCSE courses are organised into topics, such as Health and Sport, or Travel and the Wider World (OCR, 2012), so students' vocabulary learning is focused on a limited set of contexts. Textbooks frequently present vocabulary in a series of mini-dialogues, such as in (1), where students are presented with what is effectively a list of vocabulary from the same semantic (sports) and syntactic (nouns) category (Häcker, 2008). It is highly unlikely that all of the sports that are presented are among the most frequently used vocabulary in a language.

(1a) Machst du Sport? "Do you do sport?"

(1b) Ich spiele …Fußball "I play football"
…Basketball "basketball"
…Tischtennis "table tennis"
…Tennis "tennis"
…Volleyball "volleyball" etc

This approach does have some advantages. It is important for motivational reasons for students to be able to talk about themselves, and their own context, and allows students the opportunity for genuine communication in the target language (Harris et al., 2001). Such a list does provide a reasonable chance that most students will learn the vocabulary for the sport that they are interested in, although this is still somewhat limiting. Häcker (2008) suggests that textbooks are unlikely to present, for example, the word "Spielfeld" (playing field), "Tor" (goal), or "Spiel" (match or game), which restricts further communication on the topic. However, these vocabulary items (or similar items) are on the vocabulary list specified by OCR for GCSE German (OCR, 2009). Further work would be needed to determine the extent of any mismatch between textbook coverage and the GCSE specification. However, since textbooks are designed, at least to some extent, with the goal of preparing students for examinations (Ofqual, 2012), then it is plausible that a lack of coverage in the textbook may be related to what is perceived to be commonly assessed.

Teaching vocabulary in the form of a list of semantically related words, such as a list of sports, or a list of pets is intuitively appealing, because students learn words which are related. However, presenting lists of semantically related words which share the same syntactic category (e.g. a list of nouns) can lead to lexical interference, making the vocabulary more difficult to learn. Instead, it is easier to learn words which are semantically related, but from a mixture of syntactic categories (Tinkham, 1997). As a result, the form of presentation of new vocabulary may be unintentionally impeding students' acquisition of vocabulary. However, there are different approaches to the presentation of new words. In many German Bundesländer, foreign language teaching is based around the reading of longer texts than those used in foreign language teaching in England. For example, Gruber and Tonkyn (2013) found that the average length of text in a French textbook in Germany was 1394 words, compared to 727 words for a French textbook in England. Furthermore, these texts typically cover more cognitively challenging topics, and a wider range of vocabulary and syntax (Gruber & Tonkyn, 2013). Such an approach allows students to

acquire vocabulary which extends beyond their own context (e.g. related to the other culture), but, depending on the text, may not help students to talk about their own interests or context (e.g. a text about visiting Bavarian castles may be culturally relevant, but students may not learn vocabulary relevant to their own leisure interests). Vocabulary is frequently presented in conjunction with a text (see, e.g. the Green Line textbook used in Bavaria (Beile, Beile-Bowes, & Dick, 2001)), such that vocabulary is semantically related, but from a mixture of syntactic categories (Gruber & Tonkyn, 2013). Presenting vocabulary in such texts may facilitate the acquisition of deeper lexical knowledge, such as collocations, and level of formality. In a comparison of the writing skills of 14-16 year old English L1 and German L1 learners of L2 French, Gruber and Tonkyn (2013) found that the German L1 learners had a larger vocabulary, and showed greater lexical diversity, even once total learning hours had been taken into account. However, the syntactic complexity of writing was not significantly different across the two groups.

It seems therefore, that reforms to GCSEs will need to change to teach more, and more appropriate vocabulary to support reading development. Furthermore, if students are to read authentic texts *during* their GCSE course, then they will need to have acquired sufficient, and appropriate vocabulary before the end of the course, so that reading activities do not become primarily focused on vocabulary. Additionally, if students are to develop reading fluency, then they need to be able to access at least some of the texts which they read relatively easily. However, not all authentic texts are equally demanding. It would be possible, for example, for authentic texts to be graded by level, to allow a progression of texts throughout the course. It is likely that teachers would need considerable support to compile a list of such texts, and maintain a list of texts which are up to date. Milton (2006) noted that students moving from GCSE to A level study showed a large increase in vocabulary level; if reforms to GCSEs include changes to the quantity and nature of vocabulary, then this may facilitate transition to A level.

Thus far we have focused on the role of vocabulary at GCSE, because previous work in this area has focused on vocabulary. However, it seems plausible that a similar analysis could be undertaken for morpho-syntax (grammar). This may be more dependent on text type. For example, if students are expected to read narratives, then it is likely that they will encounter different forms of the past tense more frequently than other tenses. In French, for example the past historic, or passé simple tense is predominantly used in written narratives, and so may be particularly useful if students read this form of text frequently. In German, for example, a form of the subjunctive, Konjunktive I, is used for reported speech, and may support the comprehension of newspaper articles. However, these structures are not included in the subject criteria (Department for Education, 2014; Ofqual, 2011), so teachers may need to provide strategy instruction to help students to access texts which use these structures.

In summary, the current GCSE courses do not fully support the development of reading skills, by not providing students opportunities to acquire sufficient, and appropriate vocabulary to access authentic texts. If students are to read a wide range of authentic texts, then the reformed GCSE should take a different approach to vocabulary, focusing on the most frequently used vocabulary. However, reading more lexically diverse texts can, if appropriate support is given, support the acquisition of vocabulary. Similarly, the relationship between the morpho-syntax which is taught, and that which is likely to be encountered by students when reading should be considered.

Summary of the GCSE and A level context

- Ofsted has identified the teaching of reading as an important area for improvement in MFL because schools do not use authentic reading materials, and rely on short, assessment focused texts.
- Planned reforms to GCSEs will require students to read a wider range of texts, including literary texts.
- The vocabulary currently taught at GCSE does not support the reading of authentic texts.
    - Not enough vocabulary is learned.
    - Vocabulary is often presented in a way that does not facilitate learning.
    - The most frequent vocabulary found in authentic texts is not taught.
- Some of the syntactic structures which students are likely to encounter in authentic texts are not taught at GCSE.
- At A level, students are expected to read authentic texts, but have not been prepared for this at GCSE, leading to transitional difficulties between GCSE and A level.

5 Teachers' views on teaching reading

The tripartite model of curriculum separates the curriculum into the intended, enacted and achieved curriculum (Valverde, Bianchi, Wolfe, Schmidt, & Houang, 2002). The intended curriculum represents the goals of the curriculum (that students are able to read a wider range of authentic texts etc), the enacted curriculum is the teaching and learning activity which actually occurs, and the achieved curriculum represents what is learned. The planned changes to the reading component of MFL GCSEs represent a significant change to the curriculum for MFL at Key Stage 4. As a result, there are likely to be changes to the enacted curriculum, with respect to the types of text read, and the language skills which will need to be taught to support this. Furthermore, since students will be reading relatively demanding texts, there may be an increased role for the use of top down strategies. If the achieved curriculum is to reflect the intended curriculum, then teachers will require appropriate support resources to make the necessary changes to the enacted curriculum. During times of change, curriculum support resources can provide opportunities for teacher learning which can help teachers to deepen their existing content and pedagogical knowledge, and enable them to adapt their existing knowledge and skills to navigate change (Loewenberg Ball & Cohen, 1996; Remillard, 2000). The provision of high quality resources is particularly important for the current context, because it seems to be the case that the textbooks which are currently used do not adequately support the teaching of reading, because they typically provide short, inauthentic texts (Ofsted, 2011), and do not present the most appropriate vocabulary for this purpose (Gruber & Tonkyn, 2013; Häcker, 2008; Tschichold, 2012).

In Sections 2 – 4 we explored theoretical approaches to reading in a first and second language, and the resulting implications for language teaching pedagogy. However, it is also important to seek the views of teachers who are currently teaching MFL GCSE courses, because they will be required to deliver the new curriculum. Teachers are likely to have a deep understanding of the context in which they are working, and can provide insights into the type of curriculum support materials which will be most helpful in the delivery of the new MFL GCSE courses.

5.1 Method

This section of the report is structured as follows. Firstly, we describe a typology of the various dimensions of reading activities, which is drawn from the discussion of theoretical and pedagogical aspects of L2 reading in Sections 2-4. This typology was used to develop five sets of resources which exemplified different aspects of the typology. These resources were then shown to MFL teachers; their views on these resources were gathered through feedback forms on each resource set. The same teachers' views on these resources, and the teaching of reading were then further explored in a focus group. The use of feedback forms allowed an insight into teachers' views independent of their peers in a focus group

5.2 Typology of reading activities

On the basis of the review of theoretical and pedagogical discussion of reading (Sections 2-4), a typology of different approaches to reading was developed. These categories span both theoretical and pedagogical aspects of reading. The first two categories are primarily theory based, and focus on psycholinguistic aspects of reading. The remainder are more pedagogically based, and refer more explicitly to the types of activity which learners may undertake.

- **Text Type**
    - The new GCSE subject content requires students to read authentic materials, including literary texts, which can include "extracts and excerpts, adapted and abridged as appropriate, from poems, letters, short stories, essays,

novels or plays from contemporary and historical sources" (Department for Education, 2014, p4). For the purposes of this study we focus on newspaper/magazine articles, poetry, and short stories.

- **Language focused** (e.g. teaching/revising vocabulary, syntax, etc) or **strategy focused** (e.g. use of paralinguistic features)
    - Language focused activities provide input into the linguistic form (rather than meaning). They may be focused on vocabulary, or syntactic structures. Such activities may promote the retention of vocabulary, beyond what is retained from incidental vocabulary learning.
    - Strategy focused activities may be implicit or explicit. For example, an implicit strategy based activity could be to ask students to look at the pictures, and think about what the text may be about. An explicit strategy based activity would ask students explicitly how they would tackle an unseen text, e.g. by looking at the pictures.

- **The level of demand of the text**
    - The level of demand could be somewhat lower than the level of learners, at about the same level, or slightly above their level. Less demanding texts can be read easily, and so may help promote fluent reading, while more demanding texts provide more opportunities for the acquisition of new vocabulary and syntax.

- **Activities may be pre-reading, during reading, post-reading**
    - Pre-reading activities may present language features, revise/re-activate previously learned language, or promote the use of reading strategies.
    - During reading activities could include finding certain pieces of information.
    - Post-reading might be a check that reading has occurred, a comprehension check, or a spin-off task which relies in some way on the text.

- **Short texts** or **longer texts**
    - The proposals for the reformed MFL GCSEs indicate that students should read a range of different text types, including shorter and more extended texts. In this context we consider extended texts to be those which might be most appropriately read over more than one lesson.

- **Choice: no choice, limited choice** (e.g. 2 texts from 5), **unlimited** (e.g. students find own texts to read)
    - Allowing students choice may promote motivation, because students are more likely to choose to read texts which interest them. However, if students read different texts, then it may be more difficult to provide appropriate language support.

- **Paralinguistic features.**
    - Paralinguistic features, such as layout, pictures provide additional information, and clues relating to text types.

- **Bottom up or Top Down focused**
    - Bottom up focused activities develop low level processing skills, such as developing efficient visual word recognition skills by extensive reading.
    - Top down focused activities develop knowledge which is useful for top down processing, such as an awareness of text structures, and paralinguistic features.

Some dimensions combine more easily than others. For example, reading strategy activities may more naturally lend themselves to becoming pre-reading activities, and might favour texts with paralinguistic features. It should be noted that these categories are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, resources designed for classroom use are likely to combine these categories.

5.3 Method

A focus group was carried out to collect the views of MFL teachers on different approaches to reading resources. The teachers were sent resources prior to the focus group session in order to familiarise the teachers with different types of curriculum support resources available and to elicit their views on the different types of resources during the focus group session. However, it was not possible to determine how representative these views were of the wider teaching community.

5.3.1 The focus group

Nine teachers participated in the focus group, which took place on 10th July 2014 in Cambridge. These included specialists from three of the most commonly taught modern foreign languages, French, German and Spanish, who taught in a range of schools including state comprehensive, academies, and independent schools located across different regions in England. The majority of teachers reported teaching more than one language. Across the group, seven taught French, three taught German, and six taught Spanish.

The main facilitator was responsible for the discussion and the timing of each focus group, in addition to ensuring that all participants had an opportunity to respond to each question. The co-facilitator made notes and was responsible for the collating of administration forms and results from the resource evaluation task (see Section 5.3.2). The discussion schedule was generated by the research team based on discussions with the MFL subject team (See Appendix B). The focus groups were conducted using broad, open-ended questions which aimed to encourage a free discussion between the participants.

The rules for the discussion were established at the beginning of each focus group. Participants were asked to take turns when speaking, and were asked not to worry about whether points of information they spoke of were accurate (e.g. the examination boards their school currently uses or has used in the past). The focus groups were audio recorded and participants provided their consent for this.

5.3.2 Resource evaluation task

In order to facilitate discussion of different approaches to teaching reading, the teachers were sent five sets of resources prior to the focus group session for evaluation. These resources map on to the typology as shown in Table 2. These resources exemplify different dimensions of the typology, and as such may be more limited in scope than resources designed for classroom use. For example, Resource 4 only includes pre-reading activities, while a complete resource would probably feature both pre- and post-reading activities.

Each resource set contained an example of an approach to teaching reading in each of French, German and Spanish, to ensure that the texts and activities used in the resources were accessible to all participants. Participants were advised that they should read at least one example for each set of resources. Feedback forms were also provided with the resources which included sections for teachers to comment on different aspects of the resources such as its content, format/structure, approach and usefulness.

The resources were designed by the research team on the basis of the typology of approaches to reading described in Section 5.2. Resource set 1 was developed by a

researcher. Resource set 2 was based on a selection of reading activities used in Foundation Tier GCSE reading assessments. The teaching activities used in Resource set 3 were developed by a researcher, and the texts selected by two developers. Resource sets 4 and 5 were written by two developers based on a template specified by the research brief. A researcher provided further information about reading strategies which accompanied Resource set 5.

The full set of resources is available on request.

5.3.2.1 List of resource sets

Resource set 1. This resource is an adaptation of a traditional extensive reading activity. Students are directed to a newspaper/magazine website in the target language, and asked to select articles to read which interest them.

Resource set 2. This resource is taken from GCSE foundation tier papers. Students are given a short informational text, which is undemanding in terms of vocabulary and grammar, and answer comprehension questions on the text. This resource was used because it was assumed that it would represent a type of reading activity which all teachers would be familiar with.

Resource set 3. Students are provided with a set of five short newspaper articles. Each newspaper article has a headline and picture. After brief discussion about which articles look interesting, students choose two or more articles to read, and write short quiz questions about information in the texts. These questions are then used in a class quiz.

Resource set 4. Students are given some language focused activities, to pre-teach vocabulary, etc before reading a poem.

Resource set 5. Students are given reading strategy focused activities before reading a short story.

Table 2: Dimensions of reading resources.

	Resource 1 Extensive reading	Resource 2 GCSE question (from Foundation Tier paper)	Resource 3 Quiz questions from authentic texts	Resource 4 Language focused poetry activity	Resource 5 Short story, strategy focused
Type of text: • informational text • short story • poem	Any –students choose	Informational.	Informational. Authentic newspaper articles.	Poem.	Short story
Types of supporting activities: • language focused – e.g. to teach necessary vocab/structures • strategy focused – e.g. to develop reading skills	None	None	Some strategy, to facilitate reading of texts.	Teaching of vocab e.g. from Harris et al 2001, Chpt 2	Strategy focused – use of paralinguistic features, such as pictures. Teachers provided with information about strategies, and how to make them explicit.
Demand – may vary in terms of vocab and (morpho-)syntax. Levels to include texts which are: • accessible after KS3, • targeting KS4 • beyond KS4	If authentic texts, likely to be high, but choice offers varying levels.	Low	High	Medium-High	Medium to high.
Surrounding activities: • pre-reading activities – e.g. to teach necessary vocabulary • during and post-reading activities – to structure reading activity • post-reading activities – which give the reading purpose	No – or just a minor post-reading check that reading has occurred.	Post-reading comprehension questions	During and post-reading activities – identifying information suitable for generating quiz questions, then using quiz questions in a class quiz.	Pre-reading.	Pre-reading
Length:	Any	Short?	Short	Any	Longer

• shorter • longer					
Choice: • unlimited choice of text • limited choice • no choice	Unlimited	No choice	Limited choice	No choice	No choice
Paralinguistic features: • Some texts with e.g. pictures • Some without.	Possibly.	No, or very restricted	Picture for each text.	No	Yes pictures related to text.
Top down/bottom up	Bottom up	Low demand, so may support development of fluency, but somewhat short for this purpose	Not specified, but may develop background knowledge for top down processing.	Bottom up	Top down

5.4 Analysis

The audio recordings of the focus groups were transcribed by an external transcription company. Two researchers coded the transcriptions. Initially, the coding scheme was based on the structure and content of the questions specified in the schedule. This coding scheme was then modified to take additional themes into account.

5.5 Results

The results section is divided into a number of sections which include the main themes that were identified from analysis of the focus group sessions. These themes include: the use of different text types, how teachers integrate reading activities into their teaching, their use of resources, the impact of the current GCSE specifications on reading instruction, the transition to A level, and cross-curricular issues. Teachers were also asked to fill in feedback forms on each resource. Where relevant, comments from these forms are also included in the analysis.

Teachers' views on the resources which they were shown before the focus group are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3: Teachers' views on resource sets.

Resource	Positive	Negative	Other comments
1. Extensive reading. Free choice of articles from news website.	Allowing students choice of articles means that they can read something which is of interest. It allows students to select articles which might be at a higher level of demand than expected by the teacher. Allows students the opportunity to acquire useful, frequent vocabulary in an authentic context. Develops cultural awareness.	May not be suitable for weaker students. Unfamiliar language could make texts inaccessible at KS4. Relies on self-motivation. There is the risk of students using google translate. Too much choice can be overwhelming. Requires access to ICT.	Requires additional teacher support and direction. Students may need to do this type of activity several times to learn how to read this type of article. Preferable to choose a selection of articles which were appropriate in terms of content and demand.
2. GCSE foundation tier reading comprehension.	Accessible. Good exam preparation. Highly controlled language. Text can be adapted for more useful activities.	Inauthentic. Very low demand. Not very interesting.	Very similar to exercises found in current textbooks.
3. Five short authentic news texts used as a basis for a quiz activity.	These authentic texts are challenging, but accessible. Paralinguistic features are helpful. The element of choice supports student engagement. The texts are interesting. Useful for getting KS4 students to read more authentic texts.	The tasks might be too demanding for less able learners. Needs careful classroom management.	Texts such as these normally used at A level. Different from activities currently used at GCSE.

		Encourages reading skills, such as for gist. The task supports group work.		
4.	Poetry, with language focused pre-reading activity.	Poems provided are accessible. Poetry is generally short. Useful for developing grammatical and lexical knowledge. Motivating, because it is an activity that a native speaker might do. Pre-reading tasks encourage students not to be intimidated. Poetry provides opportunities for cross-curricular work e.g. with history. Develops same reading skills as used in English. Provides opportunity to be creative, develops critical and independent learning.	Poetry is not popular with all students, so it needs careful introduction. German poetry can use complex linguistic forms. Current GCSE specifications do not support the use of poetry.	
5.	Short story, with reading strategy pre-reading activity.	Challenging, but appropriate support activities could make it accessible. Good to develop reading strategies. Many ways in which this type of text could be exploited.	The language is challenging, and students would need support. Not directly relevant to GCSE topics.	Longer text than students are used to, so students may need some support. Possible to combine this with homework. Different from texts in textbooks.

5.5.1 Use of different text types

The subject criteria for the reformed GCSEs in MFL state that students will be expected to read a wider range of different authentic texts, including literary texts of different lengths. Before the focus group, participants had been shown resources which used different text types, including authentic online news articles, poetry and a short story, as well as a text used for GCSE reading assessment. Teachers' views on these text types are discussed below.

5.5.1.1 Poetry

Participants were very positive about increasing the use of poetry in MFL teaching at GCSE, because it supported the development of language skills. Poems were also valued because they are short, and so can be read relatively quickly. However, they felt that it would be necessary to choose poems which are engaging for students. The teachers indicated that using poetry would be a significant departure from their current practice at GCSE, and so would need to be introduced carefully, but that the benefits of reading poetry would make this worthwhile.

A return to exemplary teaching – not dumbing down but stimulating up [Feedback form]

It's refreshing, because we've gone so far away from this over the last ten years, well, my teaching has and it's probably partly my fault. … it's short and sweet, you can pick nouns, adjectives, verbs, whichever handle you like particularly learning. It's so accessible, it's so easy, my only little criticism is it's a miserable poem, I would quite like something a bit more cheerful and it panders to that stereotype of miserable French lyricists, that I don't particularly want, but it's fabulous for that, I hope we can have more of this actually.

Because in a poem, essentially, the words are chosen so carefully, because there are so few of them, the language skill leads into the reading skill anyway.

Going back to the point of getting the class involved, when you've got a resource that's so short and sweet and accessible, it doesn't take long to say something basic about it and then let them interpret it in their own way. That's a language skill in itself, because it doesn't matter if, in your opinion, they are way off with their interpretation, they are practicing their language and if it's a good poem, they will have their opinion on it, won't they?

Absolutely, using in poetry in language lessons. Poetry is not necessarily favoured by students, but I think we could exploit it to the extent that they fall in love with poetry.

I think, not because, well, particularly because it's poetry, but because also it's so removed from anything really that they're familiar with and I think that again they would need a lot of training with how to use something like this and how to get the best out of it.

I think they would be really proud, I think they would feel real pride being able to tackle something like this and you know, the thought of them going home and saying we studied a French poem, rather than we've learnt some vocab, you know what I mean, something just a bit more interesting for them.

5.5.1.2 Literary texts

Participants were enthusiastic about the use of literature in general, because they can extend students' cultural experience. Additionally, literature can be used as a starting point for a wide range of activities in the MFL classroom.

It makes people realise that they can read literature, they can read books, they can read short stories and get something out of it.

I think the charm of this resource is also that language is actually secondary in here and it's everything else that comes first, i.e. enjoying literature, enjoying maybe different ways of exploiting a longer piece of work, well, not so long a piece of literature and do something with it, i.e. you know, design a story board or read it aloud, act it out, work with the drama department and do something together or design, this is just an idea off the top of my head, but design a poster advertising the story as a play for instance, so many different ways of enjoying this piece.

Good to try to encourage students to read authentic literature. [Feedback form]

Yes, and I also think we use the excuse too often, 'there's no time in the curriculum', I think we just have to make the time, because making the time to exploit cultural, you know, methods like this, will enable them to then go further, because they've enjoyed their learning experience.

There are thousands of stories like this already out there in target language, they are not a bridge made up for kids, they are real, adult pieces of literature. They are perfect, they are accessible, if they can do this, there are thousands of resources like that we can use, which we shouldn't be frightened of using.

5.5.1.3 Authentic news stories accessed online

Participants thought that using authentic newspaper and magazine articles (accessed online) gave students the opportunity to read a variety of text types which were up to date, and addressed themes which they would encounter in other curriculum areas.

Yes, it does come across more extensive and it has the advantage on like text books, it does stay contemporary, because the issue with textbooks is somebody was cool ten years ago, when you bought the text book and nobody knows who they are. Even Thierry Henry was a classic and in five year's time, some people won't know who Thierry Henry is.

I clicked actually on the sports section, just to have a look at who won the step, you know, the stage in Sheffield and even with quite high language with cognates, with the gist, with pictures and titles, they could actually get the main idea, the main information without knowing subjunctives, structure or past perfect. They could understand who won, who fell over.

I think also, as well as the sports report, you've also got adverts, or you've got stories. There is the scope of having a lot of different style of writing and that the pupils would have access to.

I think also about the wider context as well, you know, we are having to encourage students to engage with the news and what's happening in the world throughout school anyway. Even being able to build that into your language lessons, I think for them, makes maybe language learning a bit more purposeful as well, because it's happening here, but it's happening over there as well and it's being reported, so I think it, you know, ticks quite a few boxes.

Despite these advantages, some teachers expressed concern about the high level of language that students would need to access authentic newspaper articles, which might lead some students to use online translation software. The length of some articles was also of concern.

I have, but again, just with A-level, as I said before, and even then, it still needed a lot of preparation and selecting articles that were relevant to perhaps the topic that we were studying at the time, so even if there was a much more higher level language in there, that they wouldn't necessarily be familiar with, that they would still be able to access what was being said in the text.

The issue about length is a big one, the students see this huge article and immediately some of them will turn off to an extent. I think there is a great potential with that if we can get to that level.

Some of them would actually try and go through the text and see what they know, seeing what they each know, but some of them probably just copy and paste it onto Google Translate to try and find out what it is without actually doing the work themselves.

Some participants felt that choosing appropriate articles could overcome some of these challenges. In particular, paralinguistic features such as pictures could support students to access texts. Furthermore, appropriate classroom activities could increase the accessibility of texts.

I think the big possibility about it, is that it mixes and I found quite a lot of, what you would call prose narrative material, but it was backed with data, it might be graphs or pictures, which to me makes it accessible to more people, more instantly. On a very simple level, you read a sports report, the students may at least understand the score or the result and then that gives them immediate access to the writing, which may be above them in itself.

Some of the articles in the Spanish ones lend themselves better to the activity, it suggests that any others, looking at the pictures and what do you think this is about? I can see the pictures are of the libra one and the mobile one, you can make something of that. Of the blog one, there is a picture of a women there on a road trip, not really sure what I would make of that if I was even a higher ability GCSE student or A-level student, what's this article going to be about? I wouldn't know where to start on that.

Could I just say one thing, quite a lot of newspapers and other journals are now putting what are essentially a bridge version of articles and other things online. There's a potential to me, if they develop a bespoke site which essentially dilutes what has been put on the main site for this purpose, that would be very interesting.

What I really like is resource…however the level of the articles were quite high and I would probably choose it for a high ability GCSE class, but more an A-level class, but I did like the sequence of the plan of how to go about the quiz, really nice, because they do like group work, they do like to collaborate. I think if you divide the groups very carefully, then they would be able to tackle a task like this.

5.5.1.4 GCSE assessment style texts

Participants felt that the GCSE assessment texts were very accessible to less able students, and a good test of basic understanding, which provided a basis for more interesting texts.

The ones doing foundation, reading and listening, they need very structured and limited text, they need to understand to get confidence. For some less able, it's good, they can do days of the week

I think a lot of it depends on the text as well, because I don't think there's any harm in these type of questions. If you had a text where you were trying to introduce a particular cultural aspect or something a bit more meaty, then these types of questions are a good way to see that the pupils have understood the text. I think it's only because this text is so basic, that it just comes across as a typical comprehension style question that they are all probably fed up of, but I think there is scope for using that, but with a bit more of an interesting text perhaps?

I think this would be really useful for anyone starting GCSE from scratch, you know, starting at that more basic level.

I think the expectations are very clear as well of this type of resource. The children will know exactly what's expected of them, there's no ambiguity at all. It is a real basic test of understanding, there's no more complex skill involved really. From that point of view, it's a good solid, you know, mixed in with other resources, it's good, used all the time, it's probably a little bit boring.

Even the length of the text, it doesn't really scare the low ability students, it's quite short, it's got a lot of useful words.

That's right, these might not be the most exciting texts around, it's not like finding something in Spanish that you might pick up twenty words of after half an hour of reading and thinking that that's very contemporary. If you don't know the regular verbs of a language, if you don't know that this is the noun, if you don't know basics like that, and you can't do basically that, then accessing stuff that's more exciting is not going to happen. You just can't forget that as well.

This type of text was felt to be very limiting, both for students and teachers, because it isn't very interesting, and doesn't allow students to develop as learners.

This is very much used at the moment and it's very well set up for either GCSE students and this is something I would like to get away from, this artificial, you know, from a pen friend, that talks about his interests and expecting that

As you get through the course of the GCSE, I don't think it's meaty enough, there's just not quite enough there.

I also think that this kind of reading is not going to encourage or excite students to want to read the topic language more often for their own pleasure or for their own purpose. It is very much an exam style reading task with a very clear idea of what it is I need to demonstrate that they have understood. I think we are trying to get away from that, aren't we, that they are reading to purely demonstrate understanding? What we want them to do is to be able to start reading to improve not only…yes, their understanding of German, but that they become better independent learners and better at using the language independently for themselves and I think that this kind of task doesn't enable them to do that and doesn't really encourage them to do it either.

I think if teachers cannot come up with something more interesting than that, after teaching for ten years, then it's a shame on us really and it makes our life less interesting as well as the students.

5.5.2 Integrating reading activities into teaching

Participants stated that they used reading activities as a way of introducing new language to students, rather than for developing reading comprehension skills.

It's also, kind of, a safe start as well, because everybody can look at it, you can see it as many times as you want to, it's not the listening that disappears. You are not doing anything actually, it's always the passive and so it's a really easy entrée into whatever you…and I think that's what a lot of teachers use, isn't it and textbooks? Old textbooks as well as new work on that basis, there's an article and you read the article and then it goes from there, it's that kind of thing, isn't it?

I do quite a lot personally, I think I do more reading and writing than listening and speaking to be honest. I think every introduction of vocab would be through reading, I mean, most of the time, not every single time, but most of the time I do it through reading. I would give them a text and I would get them to find out what it's about and maybe pick up key vocab and I would start from the night before and do everything else most of the time

I think also, depending on regardless of what the story is, you could put in that core line or that core vocabulary that they need to know, to be able to do well at the GCSE quite easily, so you don't have to pick a text that is, 'Oh, well, we haven't done environment yet, so we need to find a short story that talks about somebody recycling.'

We integrate the reading more for what they can then take out of the reading for their controlled assessments, particularly for their writing and their speaking, rather than reading for reading comprehension sake. That really is actually secondary and the primary focus of the reading is for them to be able to identify high level language and structures that they can use to put into their controlled assessments.

Participants found that reading activities were useful as a homework activity, which could be used as the basis for other activities in class.

I separate it for homework a lot and then have a starter very soon after the next lesson or the lesson after that, based on something similar and that was a reading one, so then everyone can get onto that straight away.

Teachers in the focus group identified challenges with integrating very up to date texts into their scheme of work.

I think if you are preparing a long time in advance, it steals quite a lot of the impact of it. As my colleague said here, the point is that it's contemporary, that it's now that the kids are engaged with it, because they know it's happening in the world now and building it in to a curriculum would be quite difficult, you would lose something by doing that, would you not?

I think if we think teachers are going to use this within their scheme of work and within their day-to-day teaching, it needs to hang on something, otherwise it just becomes a standard alone lesson and then a bit off-topic and people won't necessarily use it.

Within individual lessons, teachers used texts in different ways, either giving students the text to read first, followed by post-reading activities, or by using activities before reading to support comprehension of the text.

I just find with my courses it's better to give them a bit of reading and a bit of preparation in groups and then say, 'Right, what do you think?' Come up with something and again do an example of one of the articles with the students and show them that it's actually, if I say to you, 'What do you think?' That's so open-ended, they haven't necessarily got the presence of mind to think, 'Right, I need some justification adjectives, I need the word boring, I need the word interesting, I need the word engage,' I would have to give them some examples and draw that out of them, that would come at the end to me, not the beginning.

I disagree, I think presenting them with the images themselves, take away the text, pre-empts what's in the text, it helps them to think.

Participants said that they used activities which helped students to develop reading strategies which were related to strategies they might use in English, but which they find challenging to teach in MFL.

I do like the fact that there is some nice titles and some pictures, getting them to think about what's the article about.

They are trying to get away from 'what does this mean, what does this mean, what does that mean'? Which is often the danger, because to get a, you know, you get faced with 'I don't understand all the words in this, I'm not going to be able to understand it.' Yet when they are doing English literature, they don't understand all of the words of what they are reading and they manage perfectly well. Instead of it being a wholly linguistic exercise, or questions, or there to, sort of, guide them as to what sort of text they think it is, if they think it's, they think it's language, literature, or English language angle, what sort of things might happen, what do you think from first impressions? What the background is, or what's going to happen, what do you think after reading this, what's going to happen?

The only thing I would say, like just to build up confidence to my students, I would ask them also, for example, to highlight all the words they know, so like, they realise that actually, even if it's a narrative and it's a real story, they are still able to know some words or to identify names, so they can achieve meaning by reading for the gist, but also by not getting a mental block from, 'Oh, lots of words I have never seen'.

if they are aware of what's in the British press, then would then have some context, they would then have some handles to grab to access more difficult reading material, which then leads onto the skill we all struggle to teach which is the top-down, the bottom-up, guessing what you don't know, from what you do know and that's the hardest part of reading teaching to me at least.

Participants valued being provided with teaching activities with texts which provided new ideas for teaching activities.

First of all, it'll lend itself obviously to group work, which I like, because I don't find a lot of work that we do, lends itself to group work necessarily. You could do so many things with this much text and I really like it and I really think it's testy, which is a good thing.

I think it's very interesting, it's a nice idea, it's a nice task and it's something you would do to be a bit different. It would be every so often, I don't know if it would be something…it moves very much away from stuff we do at GCSE

When participants examined resources with texts which they found interesting, they spontaneously generated several additional ways of using the texts, highlighting the importance of providing high quality texts. For example, these are among the activities which participants suggested could be used with Resource set 3 (Quiz based on authentic online texts)

I think there's actually quite a lot you could do with a resource like that and not just a quiz, you could even get them to find certain phrases, which synonyms, the kinds of stuff you would do at A-level, you could quite easily adapt to GCSE for them as well

and then maybe even producing their own sort of GCSE style examination questions, what kind of questions could you be asked in an exam, based on a text like that?

I did think one thing you could do with it, but that would go into the writing element, is that if one of the tasks would be to identify the kind of language used in reporting news stories. Because they are quite unusual ones or perhaps comical ones, that with some support, there could be a couple of lessons on there that they could then select their own comical news story that's happened in the English news and actually put that into German, translate that into German with their own, sort of, headline.

Exactly, some of the text, you can use that for debate, for example, 'would you throw yourself into a gutter, just to pick up your phone, because you are so addicted to technology'? What I really like about this Spanish one, it's so cool, you got text about Tarantino and his new movie, you've got a text about it's better to rent a DVD or just go online, or how addicted are you to your book, to your kindle or whatever.

Teachers also indicated that some tasks could be used flexibly with a variety of different texts.

There are so many generic exercises one could pick and then ask the student to find an article and the exercise were it generic, would elicit the same type of answer. Therefore you are enabling the student to pick their fight, which I think I'm very keen that we look at that.

5.5.3 Introducing new types of reading activity

The proposed reforms to reading in GCSE modern foreign languages will require teachers to change the way that they approach reading. Students would need time to become familiar with the new approach, and would benefit from using shorter, relatively accessible texts at first. A role for exam boards to provide guidance in this area was also identified.

I think maybe they need a bit of training, don't they? Maybe the first time you do this it probably would fall flat, but then another time, it might be from the word go, they are able to come up with their ideas, because they know what they were expected to say last time.

They do need training, because we are training them in a different way at the minute, because we have to meet everything that's on the exam and make sure that they can pass the exam and cover the spec as best that we can.

Of course you would have to gently ease them in, so you could start off with a shorter book, a really short book, or maybe a collection of short stories and actually get the book version of it, rather than it being a printout. then you can gradually get to something a bit bigger and a bit bigger and a bit bigger and then they are not going to see…rather than just giving them a really nice bit of literature that is in book form, they are going to go, 'Well, I can't read all of this.' Then if they've already had three other kinds of books before, that haven't been quite as thick, they might think, 'Oh, this is nothing,' they might not even notice that there are more pages.

We shouldn't try and be highbrow about it, I don't think it should be your, sort of, very serious, classical literature to begin with, because they need to see modern, they need to see short novels and things like that. I think it's about the literature we choose and also I think it's about guidance, because I think we won't all want to be off on our own thing, off on a tangent, reinventing the wheel. I'm not saying we want

set texts from the exam boards necessarily, but I do think there will need to be a bit of guidance.
I think that, you know, you could start off a little bit easier, I mean, I think presenting song lyrics instead of a poem, you don't have to tell them it's a song, but something that they… and they might even want to go home and listen to it.

5.5.4 Level of demand

As discussed above, the language level of authentic texts written for native speaker audiences was considered to be demanding for GCSE students, particularly for less able students. However, the topic or theme of such texts was also considered to be an issue, because students do not necessarily have the maturity or experience to engage with certain topics.

I think that's the problem with more able, it's not always suitable, because they are not A-level yet, they are still GCSE, so they are still fifteen, but they could cope with A-level standard, but they are not ready to read about, I don't know, homelessness or politics or…do you know what I mean? So the language level and the content isn't always suitable.

And they haven't got the experience to really talk about certain things as well, I mean, I've done early entry GCSE with some students and one student who was so incredibly bright, really, really outstandingly bright, but some of the topics even that came up at GCSE, I thought, I'm asking her to talk about this, this text, it was an AS level text I was doing with her, but it was something that could be used for higher level GCSE as well. Asking her to talk about some of the issues in there, and at fourteen, how has she got any opinion on relationships and future plans and having children?

Some participants found that their students enjoyed reading books in the target language written for much younger children.

Can I come back to the maturity level, just for a second, exchange schools, partner schools, we've got this arrangement whereby every year they come, they bring kiddies books for free and we take our English kiddies books there. We've developed a bank of children's books and even Year 11 students, they love it. They read Horrid Henry with pleasure and okay, it's not necessarily tied in with the curriculum, but they enjoy the reading of it.

5.5.5 Use of the target language

In the last twenty years, MFL teachers have been encouraged to use the target language as much as possible in the classroom, to provide opportunities for students to speak and hear as much as possible in the target language. However, participants noted that there may be disadvantages associated with target language use, if students are not able to express themselves in the target language.

I agree, because I think target language in a way, the obsession with the target language over the last few years has kept us at a level, you know, it keeps you at a certain level, because the children haven't got the access to the language that they need to develop the higher level thinking skills.

And let us be brutally honest, unless you are a [native] speaker and forgive me for those people who are here, we all know the reality and that is that when Ofsted walk in the door, we go into target language. When Ofsted walk out the door, we slip into

English far too often, far too easily. Even with A-level, in fact it's worse in my experience, because there's this…and it isn't actually happening, this push for target language, I think like you say, it really hasn't achieved anything.

5.5.6 Motivation and engagement

Participants emphasised the importance of choosing texts and activities which interested and motivated students to read. The use of authentic texts was seen as potentially motivating and engaging, and would allow students to feel a sense of achievement.

We do realise that we have to encourage reading in the target language as much as possible. That's going to help them with their language learning and hopefully the love of learning the language throughout the time at school

I agree with you entirely, the key with reading is to get them to read something they want to read and we have to be at least seen to give them a choice.

The fact that teaching literature poems to A-level students or high ability GCSE is great, just to show them how interesting the language studying can be.

I was going to say the idea is something as well that conceivably somebody who actually speaks these languages might do, which is appealing.

I think it's also a nice achievement for them, in a short story, for them to be able to go home to their parents, or to friends and other language classes and say, 'Well, I actually just studied a short story in German and I'm fifteen.'

But there is quite a lot of dialogue and I like that as well, because it gives the students a feeling that they are engaging with personalities as well as the language, which is another tool we can use to get them more interested. In the first couple of paragraphs, it's 'what's going to happen to Ricky, what's his relationship with his brother'? They can engage with that, I like this resource a lot

However, one participant also noted that choosing texts which are of interest to students is difficult.

When I talk to my students, they are not interested in talking about a mobile phone, they are just interested in using the thing on a daily basis as a tool. It's not interesting as an academic or as a linguistic exercise at all and we perhaps fall into that trap of thinking we know what they are interested in and I don't know what they're interested in. I mean, I've got 30 kids in my class and I don't know what they are interested in and I probably never will know for all of them.

5.5.7 Benefits of teaching reading

Participants highlighted that reading activities can have benefits for both language learning, and learning development more generally.

And of course it feeds directly into their spoken and written ability then, doesn't it?

Firstly, they noted that reading provides an opportunity for students to learn vocabulary in context, and appreciate that some core vocabulary is very useful.

And the amount of vocabulary you pick up and it's there and they are all in the GCSEs now and about vocabulary, it's all about structure, that's true but in some ways it's not true as well, even if they say they don't know the vocabulary, they don't get anywhere and we follow this example to the ground, if there's a key word you didn't know, then don't give the answer. We are not going to have time to teach them all the vocabulary, even if we just stuck on the specification list, we can't do that. If you give them a weekly test, they don't always do that well anyway, words are in total isolation, you learn them for that test, you forget them for next week and they don't transfer. Reading gives you a chance to use it in context to see it down and pick up a wider vocabulary.

Yes, and they pick up the high frequency vocabulary that comes up and time and time again and the core vocabulary that transfers, they pick up that and they realise. I think it gives a bit more gravitas than just the teacher saying, 'You need to learn these ten words.' When they see it coming up again and again, they believe that rather than believing you as a teacher.

Reading can also be used to teach grammar, providing opportunities for implicit learning, which can be supported with explicit grammar exercises.

I think it just helps, it reinforces what they've learnt in the lessons, but it helps them, you know, really see the language patterns, because we only teach it in isolation, sort of, single sentences or maybe very, very short paragraphs, but the more that they read and the longer of the text that they read, it's constantly back in their faces, being reinforced over and over again. It becomes second nature and I think, you know, as all of us as language learners, you know, we must all remember that time when we had a text that we really struggled with and then suddenly it all slotted into place.

I agree, because one of the hard things I find is getting them to really understand the difference between the perfect and the imperfect tense, so a story is a really good opportunity. I always end up writing a ridiculous story in English on the board, usually made up stuff, and I get them to pick out the imperfect and the perfect tense in English and then put that into German, but it doesn't always work that way, but if they have it, you know, in a text, you can use that as an exploitation exercise as well and see if they can define it themselves, come up with their own.

Reading also allows students the opportunity to access material beyond the syllabus, because they can read independently at home. Furthermore, this can help students to develop independent learning skills.

You don't necessarily need a teacher for that, you can direct them to find this sort of thing, you can do that at home, whereas maybe the ins and outs of grammar, you need to teach perhaps pronunciation you need a teacher, but you don't have to be constrained by what's on the syllabus. You don't have to be constrained by what your teacher's covering to do some reading and it's a great chance to open things out a bit and it's a bit more of a motivator, but if you are an able student or if you are less able student there should be something you should be able to read.

I think also it's encouraging, this sort of echoes what everyone else has said, but it's encouraging life language skills, rather than language skills preparing you for a GCSE examination at the end. This is more the sort of thing, that, you know, in later life, that they might read an article, read a book, it's going to be much more usable to them and they are going to be able to see the use, I think.

What we want them to do is to be able to start reading to improve not only…yes, their understanding of German, but that they become better independent learners and better at using the language independently for themselves.

5.5.8 Challenges of teaching reading

Although participants agreed that there were many benefits to teaching reading, they also stated that they faced several challenges:

Firstly, participants stated that they found it difficult to find reading activities that engaged their students, and that students were not often able to explain what they would find interesting.

Finding something to motivate them.

Giving them something that's interesting.

We don't really know what our students are interested in, we are just kind of, guessing and I think, you know, I've said this to my students before, what kinds of things would you like to do, what kinds of thing would you like to read, what kinds of things would you like to…what kind of listening activities would you like to…and they don't really know, because they are not really mature enough, they are not…to really know themselves.

That's the same for less able students, because of the text that they can access, but it tends to be very bland and boring like the holiday text in Spanish, there's not a lot of depth to them, they are not very interesting, they are not very motivated to read it, because it's dull.

Furthermore, there is a risk that reading is used as a classroom management tool, which leads students to see reading as a punishment.

I think there's a danger of reading as punishment as well, isn't there? Which is a totally counterproductive way if you need to quiet everybody down or just lose your rag with the class, it's easier just to say, 'Right, get your books out and shut up,' and that's the danger of presenting reading as a punishment, rather than as a pleasure.

Participants stated that some students have weak literacy skills, or do not enjoy reading in their native language, so encouraging them to read in a foreign language is particularly challenging.

And the mental barrier from the students, they are not used to reading in any language, so why in Spanish?

Our school really doesn't necessarily discriminate anybody from taking the language at GCSE. They will encourage that whether they are necessarily able or not and again that proves a bit more challenging, because if they find it still even at that stage, at fourteen, fifteen, sixteen to read well in English, to get them to do it in German, or in French, I mean word pronunciation is different to how its written, whereas German is a little bit more straight forward.

Finally, teaching reading was considered to be time consuming.

5.5.9 Links with other areas of the curriculum.

Increasing the use of authentic texts in the MFL classroom would provide greater opportunities for cross-curricular work. In particular, the potential for forming greater links with English departments to support the development of literacy skills was seen as advantageous.

> *How closely does your MFL department collaborate with the English department, because in schools I've worked in, they are two entirely separate entities which never work together, which rarely sit together, which rarely pull resources or even compare resources … We are helping them with their English skills, we are teaching them the rudiments of the language, which they may not be doing in English anyway. Looking at how English teachers teach English and reading English would help us enormously and vice versa, I think, because I don't think they are particularly well married.*

However, reading more challenging texts could also stimulate links with other curriculum areas, such as history, and support the development of critical thinking skills.

> *Absolutely, using in poetry in language lessons. Poetry is not necessarily favoured by students, but I think we could exploit it to the extent that they fall in love with poetry. Although this is quite sad, I'm looking at the German resource, a sad poem, it's open for, you know, it provides a lot of opportunity to go deeper into all sorts of topics and also cross curriculum with History, English, PSHE, Citizenship, you name it and it depends what you do with it.*

> *Allow them to have critical thinking, like behind every poem obviously you have some thinking, you can identify yourself to one of the characters or one of the people you are talking about in the poem, yes, analysis, like you said, I completely agree with you. The fact that teaching literature poems to A-level students or high ability GCSE is great, just to show them how interesting the language studying can be.*

5.5.10 Current use of reading resources

Teachers found that textbooks were useful for covering the material which students would need for their GCSE examinations, however, textbooks were considered to be expensive and boring.

> *I think you've just said it, as I understand it at the moment, we are still focussed on getting that A, that B, that C or whatever the 'target grade' is and that lends itself to me, to textbook use, because it delivers the grades. It knows where the grade boundaries are and it delivers the grades.*

> *A lot of the reading to do is based on textbook, because, one, it's there, they have spent thousands of pounds on them, what's the point to never use them and, two, they are tailored to the exam and that ultimately does end up being the be-all and end-all and not getting people into A-level because it's boring. That's partly why, it's difficult, but it's boring, so I see that as a fault, so try and move away from that and use other things.*

> *When you are introducing new topics, I tend to refer to the books and I cover what is exactly needed and then we can go more free.*

> *At the moment, you know, on a daily basis, they are offered something about school life or something about the environment or something about holidays, it's just dull for them.*

Two of the teachers commented that their use of textbooks is diminishing, because they can find resources which are more motivating and challenging for students. However, doing so is very time-consuming.

> *I find myself more and more making my own resources, because I don't want to use the textbooks, because they are dry and the authentic material doesn't always go with the curriculum and what's expected of you to teach them, so I think I'm making my own and it's taking much more of my time to do that.*

> *Increasingly, I'm not using textbooks at all and using the internet and using various other resources, literature and I'm gaining more confidence in doing that. It was almost a no-no, three or four years ago, in my eyes and now it is refreshing to see that, because it is something that I've been using and finding actually the kids quite like it. Rather than giving them an article that I think they might be interested in, you raise the bar and say, 'Can you come up to this level?' They really like the idea of reading something that's real, that's literature, that's quite challenging, so more and more, I'm not using the textbook.*

> *The thing I find is, if you're trying to be interesting and if you are trying to move away from the textbooks, you are working more hours than if you just stick to the textbook, do you know what I mean? It's so much harder work, if you are trying to be creative and trying to use authentic materials, that's why a central pool from OCR would be a really good idea, rather than each individual reinventing the wheel all the time.*

Participants mentioned that they use a range of resources which are not textbook based, from a range of traditional and modern sources.

> *I do have copies of Stern [a German news magazine] which I keep in my classroom for my more able GCSE students to look at, to read if they want to take it home.*

> *To try and integrate easy readers as something rather than the DEAR [Drop Everything and Read[13]] time they are using, well actually we are using the German books and the English word and the French books that we've got. They are so expensive and that I think is the other issue as well, is cost, I mean, you know, we are trying to get them to read, but what we can only do is produce something that is on an A4 piece of paper we can easily print out. Whereas actually it might even be more valuable if they do have an actual book that is their own that they can perhaps even take home, but how do you, as a school, enable that?*

> *There used there used to be a Mary Glasgow competition, I don't know whether you remember the poetry competition and there was always an anthology produced at the end of it and we kept those and we just took it apart and laminated those poems and we use a lot of them, but lower down the school.*

> *A resource for me, that's absolutely essential now is Twitter and the amount of resources that are posted, there's a group called MFL Twitterati and if you hash tag that, the amount of resources that are shared by language teachers is incredible. Really completely selfless people who will make brilliant resources and share a link, you know, nothing you have to pay for and I find a lot of my resources that way or a lot of ideas that way and then it's something I might adapt.*

[13] Drop Everything and Read is a reading programme for schools in which everybody in a school spends a few minutes reading together at a specific time during the day (Kanolik & Turker, 2011).

Could I just say one thing, quite a lot of newspapers and other journals are now putting what are essentially abridged version of articles and other things online. There's a potential to me, if they develop a bespoke site which essentially dilutes what has been put on the main site for this purpose, that would be very interesting. The issue about length is a big one, the students see this huge article and immediately some of them will turn off to an extent. I think there is a great potential with that if we can get to that level.

Cost was mentioned as an important restriction on resource use, particularly the cost of subscriptions to online resources.

Where we would invest in a new series of textbooks and those textbooks may last five, six, seven, eight years, depending on how well the kids look after them and how well written they are, we are now asked to pay annual subscription to online resources and there's no doubt that some of them are extremely good, particularly listening and reading exercises which you can then set as homework is very useful. We are now paying an enormous amount more than we were ten years ago on keeping up with the resources and if we are going to keep up with the contemporary, it has to be in a cost effective way. I cannot keep going back to my deputy head and asking for £600 a year just to renew my subscription to websites, which are only A-level friendly. That's something that's of a grave concern to the schools.

When there are so many free resources, you don't want to be paying, but you just want that direct link into those free resources, rather than having to pay subscriptions.

5.5.11 Views on the current GCSE specifications

Participants expressed dissatisfaction with current GCSE specifications, which they find restrictive and tedious. Furthermore, the pressure to prepare students for examinations limits the types of activity which they would like to do.

We are in a straitjacket … it's hard to break out of.

I think that that's a real problem, students in our school find real difficulty of applying previous learning in a different context and so as much as I would love to be able to use a lot of literature and a lot of poems and authentic material, if I just did that and didn't give them any kind of GCSE style text, they would be really thrown, not because they didn't understand the language, but because they've never come across this before. I think that, you know, I think that's a real difficulty, you want to make it as interesting and as authentic for them as you possibly can, but at the minute, we are still really held in constraints, because of the way that the exams work and the way that the questions are structured.

Just one more, what is GCSE for? One worry about all these things, yes, I'm tired of the same sort of things, everybody's tired, I'm tired of the same topics, I'm tired of the same 'pass this exam, get an A-star' and not be able to string together two words a month later, but at the same time, a lot of the stuff seems to have moved back to when only a certain percentage did languages.

We use quite a lot of poetry already, but mainly Key Stage 3, using it as an excuse at Key Stage 4, not to have time unfortunately.

The weighting of different components at GCSE, and the importance of controlled assessment also have an impact on the organisation of teaching, to the detriment of reading.

> *Well, the writing is assessed and they are all getting very high marks on their assessment. We've got people getting A's in their writing and D's and E's in their higher reading paper. I don't think it is particular of my school either, I think…*

> *I think it is neglected now, because of the controlled assessments, but obviously that will change with the new system, but I do think so much time has been spent on the controlled assessments, that it has probably become a weaker…*

> *You need to look at the weighting as well, at the minute it's 25%, if we want them to be able to read and read for pleasure, and read well in the target language, then it's only worth a quarter, well, it's not even a quarter, it's less than a quarter. The others marks are from writing and speaking and that's where they get all their marks from and we tell them, you know, if you get A-stars and you are writing, you essentially walk into the exam with a C grade under your belt and you've just got to pick up the rest of the marks from, you know, reading and listening. That shows to me and if I was a student, I would think, 'Well, obviously the reading and listening isn't that important,' when in fact, actually it's just as important, because if they are in Germany…*

The style of assessments at GCSE means that students can achieve high grades with relatively little language knowledge, which may lead to problems for those students progressing to A level. However, one teacher did state that ensuring that students have secure grammatical knowledge is beneficial for GCSE performance.

> *There were a couple of questions a couple of years ago and it was literally parts of the body and it might as well have just give ten spaces and said fill in ten parts of the body that you happen to know, it was as bland as that. We can find better ways of doing it, can't we? There are so many more resources out there to tap into to do it.*

> *I think that's the real challenge, because that doesn't matter at GCSE, it really doesn't, you can teach them set phrases, if you can get them to go home and learn, you know, fifteen really good, set phrases, that have three different tenses in there and some vocabulary and they can regurgitate and they can do reasonably well at GCSE, they can come out with probably a B grade, might not get an A-star, but they can get a B and that's enough for them to be able to do A-level and…*

> *You don't need vocab to pass the GCSE, you don't need vocab, you need structures, you need to be able to tackle any text, because you've covered the structures, you know the grammar, you know the language, then if there's the odd piece of vocab you haven't come across, you can work it out, it's easy. It's not about learning a list of a hundred items of vocabulary to do with the environment, it's about understanding how the language is put together and the structures. Actually we are not going off-topic by doing this, we are encouraging language skills to the level that they need.*

5.5.12 Views on proposed reforms to GCSEs

Participants felt that the reforms are an opportunity to improve MFL teaching and learning, to improve the level which students achieve, and to make it more enjoyable. Furthermore, they also recognise the need for resources to achieve that goal.

> *I want my pupils to be able to be competent to converse in a language that they've been taught for several years, rather than get to the point that they can pass the*

GCSE, possibly with a good grade, that their parents take them on holiday to France and they clam up and they don't want to speak. When French children come over here, or German or whatever, or meet my children on the beach and they start talking to them in English, I want that for our…I want our children to do that, to have that confidence, to have the structures and to have the language that they can get by in whatever subject, rather than that they know thousands words of a GCSE syllabus.

I understand the need at a very basic level to test certain aspects of grammar and vocabulary, but I think we can do it in a more interesting way than this. I think if teachers cannot come up with something more interesting than that, after teaching for ten years, then it's a shame on us really and it makes our life less interesting as well as the students.

I don't want a textbook, I want resources that help to prepare the kids for what sort of questions they are going to be asked and then I can give them the poetry and I can give them the literature and all those lovely things that I would love to give them.

However, one teacher felt that it was important to remember that language learning does involve learning vocabulary and grammar.

I think they probably are, or maybe it's just me doing it, but maybe we are in danger of talking down the merits of learning vocabulary, of learning grammatical structures. We do have to do that and my understanding is that the thrust of the new curriculum is going to be towards that, so we do have to teach vocabulary and make them learn it, I don't think we are going to get away from that and that's what this is, isn't it? It is a test of 'have you learnt your weather vocabulary, have you learnt your tourism vocabulary' or whatever it is. There isn't, however interesting we make it, we do ourselves and the students a disservice if we try to hide the fact that they are going to have to go home and learn some words, after all that's how I learnt my languages.

Despite the enthusiasm for the reforms, questions remained about how the reforms would work in practice, and there was scepticism that introducing a new grading scale would be beneficial.

What does literature means, does it mean enough or does it mean that poem, or does it mean four poems?

And what are the questions in the exam going to be, how are we examining a text, no matter what text, is it a linguistic, is it a reading, is it a bit of both, is it gist?

The danger with that, just as with the A-star, is it becomes a game and the game is get the 9 or get the A-star and the question you get from the student is not how can I progress and how can I do better in my French? It's how do I get an A-star? Then what we are trying to teach them, goes out of the window, they are playing the game and of course we are all playing a game, let us not be silly about it, we are all playing the game of 'get the results'. Nevertheless, it would be nice if it were through the teaching, rather than the other way around and by introducing that, I don't think it helps, just like the introducing the A-star, it didn't help.

5.5.13 A level and transition to A level

Participants highlighted that there is a gap between GCSE and A level that is hard to bridge, because of the jump in language demands, particularly vocabulary, between the two levels. If students read more authentic texts at GCSE, then this gap would be smaller.

Basically the length of text that they have to cope with and higher level vocabulary as well.

It's [the purpose of the resource] to give a bit more realistic reading and possibly to encourage them to be thinking of A-level or you might use this sort of activity a lot more when you would use authentic things a lot more, so that the jump in language might not be as much of an issue and the jump in vocabulary, because you have to understand quite complex vocabulary in these sorts of articles that doesn't really come up in GCSE at the moment.

When I was with my A-level group, I said, you know in Year 13, 'I can't believe that you have to wait seven years to actually to do any authentic material before it comes up on the syllabus and that's actually quite a shame, because they obviously made a conscious choice to continue four years early, so why do they have to wait so long for that? I think for them to already feel that sense of pride and achievement of having accomplished something like this much earlier, probably will, as somebody said, encourage them to probably choose it at A-level because they can. They can pack all that harder language, because they've already started doing it earlier.

However, even at A level, students' reading is also limited by weak English skills.

The lack of reading comes out at A-level, because they even have…some of my students, their biggest problem is translating from French into English, because their English isn't strong enough, because they don't read enough in English, never mind…so we can help them with that.

I think their English language skills are a limiting factor, quite markedly in some ways, certainly when we get to A2 and translating into English, I find that quite depressing.

Reforms to assessment at GCSE, which allow the combination of skills would also facilitate the transition.

I would like to come back to the combination of the skills, because at A-level, AS-level and A2, they've got the three skills together and it's a horrendously long exam, which takes time to prepare them for and to train them up for, so it would help with getting them to the lengthy exam that they will have later on.

6 Discussion

Reading in one's native language is a complex skill, which requires the integration of low and high level cognitive processes. Reading in a second language additionally requires knowledge of the L2, and the writing system used in the L2. Developing strong reading skills is important for becoming a successful user of a language in many contexts. However, reading in an L2 also has significant benefits for many aspects of language learning, including the development of lexical and syntactic knowledge. Since the 1960s, reading has become a somewhat neglected component of language learning in the MFL classroom in England; this is partly due to global trends in language teaching, but also more recently due to the emphasis on the assessment of speaking and writing through controlled assessment at GCSE. Planned reforms to MFL GCSEs aim to redress the balance, by changing the types of texts which GCSE students will be expected to read, and increasing the use of authentic texts, including literary texts of a variety of lengths.

The planned changes to reading in MFL GCSE represent a major change to the curriculum. The teachers who participated in the focus group felt that these changes, and the resulting impact on the wider MFL curriculum would have a positive impact on their subject. This is consistent with the views of the Association for Language Learning, which stated that the introduction of a wider range of authentic materials at GCSE would enrich students' linguistic and cultural knowledge, and had the potential to increase student motivation for language learning (Association for Language Learning, 2014). Teachers said that they felt that the topics (e.g. environment) currently taught at GCSE were boring for both students and teachers. They felt unable to teach more interesting material beyond the syllabus because they are constrained by the pressures of achieving good grades for their students. They further thought that the emphasis on controlled assessment for speaking and writing meant that reading was often not given priority, consistent with the findings from Ofsted's (2011) review of MFL teaching.

Currently, GCSE students are required to read short informational texts, which have typically been written specifically for GCSE students. The activities which accompany these texts are normally comprehension questions, often requiring knowledge of specific vocabulary. These texts are very different from the authentic texts which a user of an L2 might expect to read in everyday life, in terms of the quantity and nature of vocabulary which is used. To read a text fluently, it is considered necessary to know about 98% of the vocabulary in that text (Hirsch & Nation, 1992). The overall quantity of vocabulary listed on GCSE specifications (OCR, 2009) might be sufficient for students to access many authentic texts (approximately 2,000 words at higher tier), however, the average amount of vocabulary actually learned by GCSE students, even at higher tier, falls significantly short of this (Milton, 2006). The choice of vocabulary which students are currently taught at GCSE may also not be optimal for supporting reading authentic texts. Teaching students the most commonly used words in a language would seem to be a sensible strategy to ensure maximum coverage, and is used by many foreign language courses internationally (Häcker, 2008). However, even allowing for the fact that the most common vocabulary used may vary by modality (spoken vs written), the vocabulary taught at GCSE does not show a strong overlap with the most frequently used vocabulary (Häcker, 2008; Tschichold, 2012), so that the relatively small amount of vocabulary learned at GCSE is unlikely to provide maximum coverage. If students are to read more authentic texts, then the choice of vocabulary which is taught and learned at GCSE, and earlier, should be re-examined.

In the focus group, teachers examined resources which used a range of different types of authentic text, including literary and journalistic texts. Overall, they felt that such texts would be demanding, particularly for less able students. However, somewhat encouragingly, they felt that with appropriate support, GCSE students would be able to read such texts successfully. Teachers noted that by reading authentic texts, students would be exposed to

unfamiliar vocabulary which is not commonly taught at GCSE, consistent with Häcker (2008) and Tschichold (2012). It seems therefore that a focus on the most frequent vocabulary used in the target language would facilitate the inclusion of authentic texts in the curriculum, and may be particularly useful if students use or continue to the study the target language after the GCSE. However, since authentic texts may be demanding at first, an explicit focus on form may be necessary to promote vocabulary development (Nation, 1997), because students are unlikely to have sufficient vocabulary to support incidental learning of vocabulary (Waring, 2006). Additionally, exposure to common vocabulary through the use of authentic texts can facilitate acquisition as a result of meaningful repetition (Schmitt, 2008), and by promoting the motivation to learn vocabulary. One teacher suggested that if a student notices that some vocabulary items occur in several different texts, then they might appreciate the importance of learning those items. Similarly, repeated exposure to syntactic structures when reading allows opportunities for the implicit learning of those structures, particularly those which are complex to teach explicitly. For example, teachers indicated that students might be better able to acquire the distinction between tenses (e.g. perfect and imperfect) through repeated exposure to those tenses in context than through explicit instruction alone. This implicit exposure could then be further supported by explicit grammar exercises which exploit the text.

Teachers also noted that some authentic texts, such as online news articles may have paralinguistic features such as pictures and diagrams which can help students to access texts. Such features can help students to understand the gist of a text, even where the level of language is relatively high. Additionally, if students read a news article which is contemporary, then they may be able to use their knowledge of the news story from reporting in the British press to support their understanding of the text. Authentic texts may therefore require students to make greater use of top down processing strategies. If students become accustomed to reading authentic texts, then they are more likely to develop reading strategies, and become more confident at applying such strategies when they don't understand everything in a text. However, teachers may need support to teach such strategies, because there may be less need to ensure students are able to use such strategies in the current GCSE courses. Furthermore, students who have not developed effective top down strategies in their L1 may find this particularly difficult.

Although authentic texts have the potential to expose students to new linguistic forms (both vocabulary and syntax), texts which are relatively undemanding for students are also necessary for students to develop fast and automatic low level processes, such as visual word recognition (Day & Bamford, 1998; Nassaji, 2014). More efficient low level processes would have a positive impact on students' reading skills as a whole, because such skills would allow students to allocate processing resources to reading strategies which could help to compensate for other gaps in linguistic knowledge (McNeil, 2012). It is therefore necessary for teachers to use texts at a range of levels of demand, to allow students the opportunity to develop fluent reading skills, as well as acquiring new language. The provision of a range of texts at a range of levels of demand would therefore be helpful for teachers. Furthermore, since MFL teachers do not necessarily have expertise in developing literacy, resources which explain the benefits of reading less demanding texts may also be helpful.

The importance of L1 reading skills in an L2 varies according to the L2 proficiency level of an L2 learner, with more proficient L2 learners being better able to use L1 literacy skills in their L2, because they have more attentional resources available. The teachers in the focus group noted that the use of authentic, particularly literary texts, meant that the reading which students would do in MFL lessons would be similar to reading in their English (L1) lessons, and would contribute to students' overall literacy skills. Developing a greater understanding of the teaching of reading by English departments would facilitate the teaching of reading in an MFL. However, at present, there are relatively weak links between English departments

and MFL departments, and little sharing of expertise as a result. In addition to the benefits for students' literacy development, reading authentic texts in the L2 provides opportunities for links to other curriculum areas, such as history, and PSHE. For example, if students read a text about the First World War in German, then this may enhance, and be enhanced by, students' study of the First World War in history. Similarly, reading contemporary news articles in MFL lessons can contribute to students' understanding of current events, allowing comparison between their home culture and the culture(s) associated with the target language.

Participants in the focus group felt that the planned changes to reading in MFL GCSEs had the potential to increase student motivation. Firstly, they thought that students would feel a sense of achievement from reading authentic texts such as poems, because these are activities that a native speaker of that language might realistically do. They felt that there were different benefits associated with different text types. For example, reading contemporary news articles which were up to date was felt to be interesting for students, particularly if students were allowed some choice in what they read, so that they had the opportunity to read articles on subjects which interested them. Poems were felt to be useful because they are typically quite short, and so they don't take much time to read, which may be beneficial if students do not like reading longer texts. Teachers also thought that a short story might provide a gateway to reading longer literary texts; once students have developed the confidence to tackle short stories, then they might be more likely to read novels or plays. The teachers in the focus group acknowledged that many students may initially not be enthusiastic about reading poetry, or other literary texts. However, they felt that it was an important part of their role to expand students' horizons, and give them the opportunity to enjoy reading literature in a foreign language. Furthermore, exposure to a greater range of text types would help students to become more independent learners, and develop critical thinking skills.

Despite the enthusiasm for teaching a wider range of texts, teachers in the focus groups identified several challenges for the successful implementation of the reform. Firstly, teachers found it difficult to find texts which were interesting, and to identify which topics would be interesting for their learners. Finding texts suitable for less able learners may be particularly challenging. Furthermore, it is necessary to consider the level of demand of a text, not just in terms of the linguistic level, but also the topics covered, because students may not have sufficient maturity to engage with some themes. For example, in German, the language of some works by Bertolt Brecht[14] may be accessible to fifteen year olds studying for GCSEs, but the themes would not be. Teachers also identified that many less able students have weak literacy skills in English, so learning to read in a foreign language, particularly one with a deep orthography, such as French, is particularly challenging. For such students it may, therefore be beneficial to provide additional opportunities to develop low level reading skills, such as visual word recognition, to improve reading fluency by providing additional instruction in this area (Nassaji, 2014). For example, students might benefit from reading activities which allow them to read, and re-read relatively undemanding texts at speed. Furthermore, if students have not developed reading strategies in their native language, then they may need additional support to develop strategies which can be used in their L2.

The provision of appropriate curriculum support resources is important in times of curriculum change (Loewenberg Ball & Cohen, 1996; Remillard, 2000). Currently, teachers' resource use is strongly linked to the GCSE assessment: even though they thought that GCSE textbooks were not very interesting, they still valued them because they provided good preparation for assessments. However, teachers in the focus group suggested that they are already moving away from using current GCSE textbooks to using more authentic materials,

[14] For further information on Brecht, please see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bertolt_Brecht

that they often sourced online, either directly from, e.g. online newspapers, or through MFL teachers who publish materials through social media (e.g. Twitter). However, it is not clear how widespread this change in practice is. Sourcing materials in this way is much more time consuming than using a textbook. Furthermore, annual subscriptions to some websites are very expensive, and may be hard to justify if they are used infrequently. Teachers also highlighted the difficulties in using very up to date texts (such as news articles) in their teaching, because they often planned their scheme of work months in advance. However, if the GCSE became less topic focused, and instead focused on the most frequently used vocabulary, this might allow more flexibility.

In the focus group, teachers discussed five sets of resources, each taking a different approach to the teaching of reading. They appeared to value the teaching activities which were included with each resource (in addition to a text), particularly those which provided new ideas for teaching, such as activities which used group work. They valued activities which were both language focused, and strategy focused, though they indicated that they found teaching reading strategies more challenging. Since it has been shown to be possible to teach reading strategies successfully, even to near-beginners in a foreign language (Harris, 2007), the provision of resources which help teachers to teach reading strategies might be particularly helpful. Language focused teaching activities are likely to help reinforce incidental learning of vocabulary and syntax, by providing a focus on form (Nation, 1997). Furthermore, while proponents of extensive reading argue that it is necessary to know 98% of vocabulary for fluent reading, an explicit focus on vocabulary may be likely to help students acquire the breadth and depth of vocabulary for that to be possible. In contrast, one of the resource sets which allowed students the freedom to select online articles, was considered to be inaccessible to many students without supporting activities, although this was partly because students were unaccustomed to such free reading.

For many of the texts which were part of the resource sets, teachers suggested several additional teaching activities which would allow them to exploit the texts further, for example to include writing or speaking activities. Many of these activities could be used with a wide range of different texts, of different types and on different topics. This suggests that teaching activities which could be adapted to a wide range of different texts would be valuable to teachers, as would the provision of an anthology of texts which teachers could select from based on topic and linguistic features. For example, a teacher might choose a short story linked to a specific topic, such as family relationships, which also has frequent examples of the use of different past tenses (e.g. perfect and imperfect). This might be particularly suitable for literary texts, which do not become out of date.

Both teachers and students will need to become accustomed to different approaches to reading activities. Teachers indicated that students will need training, and that some types of activities would not be successful when first used, though if teachers persevere, then students will rise to the challenge. Furthermore, the choice of texts which are used is of importance. Students may find modern, and shorter texts more accessible at first. Curriculum support resources may play a crucial role in guiding teachers' choices of texts, and providing ways of allowing students to successfully engage with texts from the earliest stages. Even though the use of a range of text types was felt to have benefits for language learning, one teacher suggested that there was a danger that teachers would not focus on "the basics", i.e. vocabulary and grammar. It might therefore be helpful for curriculum support resources to provide information about how reading, and the teaching activities related to reading promote the learning of vocabulary and grammar. Furthermore, any collection of texts should provide the opportunity for the recycling of vocabulary, so that students are exposed to vocabulary items in more than one context. This might be achieved by providing several texts on similar topics, but which might be of interest to a range of students. For example, a collection of texts around the theme of football could include

match reports, a short story about being a football supporter, biographies of players, and articles about the history of the sport.

6.1 Progression to and from GCSEs in MFL

Thus far the discussion has focused primarily on learning and teaching at GCSE. However, reforms to the National Curriculum at KS2 and KS3 may have an impact on students' achievement at GCSE. Since January 2010, children at KS2 have been entitled to study a modern foreign language as part of the curriculum (and not limited to extra-curricular activities). In 2011, Ofsted found that the majority of primary schools were making good progress towards this (Ofsted, 2011), though weaknesses in the teaching of reading were identified. Furthermore, the revised Programme of Study for Languages in England now specifies that foreign (either ancient or modern) language study is now compulsory for the four years of KS2 (Department for Education, 2013). At this stage the emphasis for reading is on developing phonological and orthographic knowledge, as might be expected for students' who are still developing literacy skills in their native language. However, children will be expected to "appreciate stories, songs, poems and rhymes in the language", indicating that under the new Programme of Study, they may be more likely to read a wider range of materials in the target language (Department for Education, 2013). Despite this, there is no guarantee that students will continue to study the language(s) which were offered in their primary school at secondary school.

A revised programme of study has also been published for KS3. At KS3, students will be expected to:

- *read and show comprehension of original and adapted materials from a range of different sources, understanding the purpose, important ideas and details, and provide an accurate English translation of short, suitable material*
- *read literary texts in the language [such as stories, songs, poems and letters] to stimulate ideas, develop creative expression and expand understanding of the language and culture. (Department for Education, 2013)*

This represents a change from the previous Programme of Study (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2007), which did not emphasise the reading of original or authentic materials. As a result, if these reforms are implemented, then students starting a GCSE course may, in future, be better prepared to read authentic texts in the target language. However, in the focus group, teachers stated that they already used poems and short stories at KS3, but felt that they were unable to do so at GCSE because of the pressures of preparing students for GCSE examinations. It is therefore unclear whether changes to the Programme of Study at KS3 for reading will have a large impact on progression to KS4. However, further work would be needed to explore this issue in more detail.

Reforms to the GCSE are likely to have an impact on progression to A level. Currently, there is considered to be a large gap between GCSE and A level, in part because students are expected to engage more with authentic texts, but have not been prepared to do so at GCSE. Richards, Malvern, and Graham (2008) argue that the move from GCSE to AS level is "an abrupt transition from more basic transactional, survival language with a concrete lexis to more complex linguistic functions" (p208) which means that students frequently struggle to make the transition, leading to high dropout rates after AS. Milton (2007) found large increases in vocabulary levels in students of French between Year 11 and Year 12 (See Table 1, Section 4). While these might, in part, be explained by the fact that only the more able students, who are likely to know more vocabulary, progress to A level, a large increase in vocabulary still seems to be necessary. Furthermore, teachers expressed the view that it is possible to achieve a high grade at GCSE with very limited language knowledge, which is insufficient for starting an A level course. Teachers in the focus group thought that the use of more authentic texts at GCSE would help to reduce transitional difficulties by exposing

students to more complex language earlier, and would lead to the development of better language skills in general. Furthermore, one teacher noted that if students are able to read more interesting texts at GCSE, then they might be more likely to decide to study MFL at A level, and find it less challenging if they do.

6.2 Limitations

The majority of the teachers who participated in the focus group are already engaged with an examination board, and have an interest in the development of the GCSE. It is possible, therefore, that they were more positive about the reforms than some other teachers. However, the teachers did outline some concerns and challenges with they felt would be associated with the reform to reading in MFL GCSEs, which suggests that this was not wholly the case.

6.3 Implications

The introduction of more authentic (including literary) texts at GCSE is likely to be received positively by teachers, because it will be more interesting for both teachers and students, leading to an increase in engagement and motivation. This may lead to an increase in uptake at A level.

Currently students do not learn enough, or the most appropriate, vocabulary at GCSE. The way in which vocabulary is taught and learned, and the nature of that vocabulary should be re-examined to ensure that students are taught the most frequent words used in a range of authentic texts.

The syntactic structures which are used in some authentic texts may not be taught at GCSE. Teachers will therefore need to select texts carefully, and/or provide students with strategies for coping with structures which they are not familiar with.

Current textbooks seem unlikely to provide suitable texts for the new GCSEs. There is therefore a need for the provision of resources which provide such texts, and teaching activities to accompany them. For example, an anthology of texts, with accompanying teaching activities, could be particularly useful. Regularly updated selections of contemporary texts, such as news reports, would be of benefit.

The selection of texts in curriculum support resources should take into account:

- The need to provide opportunities for the recycling of vocabulary.
- Both the language level and maturity of students, so that texts are accessible both linguistically and thematically.
- The need to allow students an element of choice in their reading material, so that they are able to read texts which interest them.
- The benefits of reading a range of different text types for different purposes.

Teaching activities should be accompanied by notes for teachers explaining the purpose of activities. This may help teachers adapt the activities to different texts. Teaching activities should include those activities which:

- Allow students to develop language knowledge, such as vocabulary and grammar.
- Allow students to develop their use of reading strategies.

The use of authentic texts is likely to be very demanding for less able students. Curriculum support resources should allow for effective differentiation, and include texts which are suitable for a variety of different levels.

7 Conclusion

In this report we have shown that reading in an L2 is a complex activity, which requires both general literacy skills and knowledge of the L2. At GCSE, reading has been a relatively neglected skill, partly because of the structure and nature of the assessment, but also because textbooks do not typically include particularly engaging reading material. The planned introduction of the use of a wider range of authentic texts, including literary texts at GCSE is likely to have a positive impact on student engagement, and may support increased uptake of languages at A level. However, current textbooks do not support the use of authentic material at GCSE, by not exposing students to the most appropriate vocabulary, and by typically using relatively short texts. There is therefore a need to provide teachers with appropriate curriculum support materials, which provide easy access to a range of suitable texts for GCSE students, with accompanying teaching activities.

Appendix A: Reading Strategies

Table A1: Reading strategies. Adapted from Janzen and Stoller (1998) p 256.

Strategy	
Identifying a purpose for reading	The reader defines a purpose for reading a specific text.
Previewing	The reader examines a text before reading, e.g. looking at paralinguistic features.
Predicting.	The reader predicts what the text will be about.
Asking questions	The reader asks questions of the text.
Checking predictions or finding an answer to a question	The reader checks whether their predictions were correct, or the answers to their questions.
Connecting text to background knowledge	Using background knowledge to check the plausibility of an answer
Summarizing	The reader restates the main ideas.
Connecting one part of the text to another	The reader links the part of text being read at the moment to a section previously read.
Paying attention to text structure.	Reader uses their knowledge of text structure to guide comprehension of the text.
Rereading	The reader rereads the text for a purpose.

Table A2: Reading strategies and teaching examples. Wright and Brown (2006) p25

Strategy	Teaching Activity
working out meaning from context according to knowledge of text format and linguistic content	• sentences end with full stops • punctuation clues (question marks and exclamations) • transfer of cognates • knowledge of print convention (layout and genre)
prediction	• using headlines/visual stimuli to anticipate the type of information which will be encountered • prediction of the language which may be used in the text before reading it
use of reference materials	• teaching alphabetical order • dictionary skills training
use of sources from outside the classroom	• product labels • posters • adverts • foreign language assistant
guessing/deduction	• guessing within context • self-questioning using who, what, when, where, how triggers • identification of parts of speech
whole text reading	• use of 'jigsaw' texts

	• matching headlines to texts/paragraph • theme search • reorganising text with typographical layout removed • initial skimming for specific details • use of open-ended tasks to show pupils that reading is never finished • mixed-skill tasks which avoid pupils merely searching for specific answers: gap-filling, unjumbling sentences etc. • true/false exercises(including open-ended choice to avoid guessing) • matching paraphrases with text (pair work) • pr6cis/translation of a paragraph (group work) • follow-up written exercises in the target language
developing narrative awareness	cartoon-based exercises: anticipating story-line before reading original • exploiting existing knowledge by using familiar mother tongue texts in the target language

Table A3. Reading strategy checklist: adapted from Harris (2007) p201

Before reading
I work out from the layout what I am reading, e.g. if it's instructions, or a short paragraph or a letter, or even an advert or a brochure
I try to get clues from any pictures and the title to help me guess what it will be about
I try to predict all the words and information that I might find in the text
While reading
I don't panic and switch off but I just tell myself it's OK and keep reading even if it is hard
I just try to get the main ideas first and then read it again for the details
I skip over words that I do not understand
I try to spot familiar words that I do understand from when we learned them in class
I look out for cognates
I look out for the names of people or places and for punctuation clues
I think about all the possible things it could mean
If I don't understand, I use my common sense to guess the meaning from the rest of the words in the sentence and what I have worked out so far
I say the difficult bits out loud or in my own head
I say in English what I have worked out so far in the sentence and substitute 'something' for the words I don't know
I break the word or sentence up into bits that I may recognize
If I don't understand one bit, I go back to it and read it over several times slowly
I try to use grammar clues to spot what kind of a word it is—a noun, a verb, etc.
After reading
I try to remember everything that I have read and then fit it altogether so that it makes sense
I check back to see if my first guesses still make sense

Appendix B: Focus Group Schedule

Focus Group Schedule (Curriculum support resources – MFL 10th July 2014)

Duration of focus group: Allow up to 2 hours for this session.

Group size: At least 8 to 10 participants in the focus group session.

Role of the facilitator: The facilitator meets and greets the participants. The facilitator remains neutral and objective while chairing the discussion. He/she ensures that all the participants are included in the discussion. The facilitator must be aware that participants may take more or less time than planned for the discussion of particular topics / sections. Additionally, he/she must accept the views of the group without contesting their accuracy.

Role of the co-facilitator: The co-facilitator meets and greets the participants. He/she introduces the objectives and the format of the session. The co-facilitator also makes notes and ensures that all or most of the questions in the schedule are covered in the focus group.

Focus group administration and introduction (10 minutes)

- Welcome and thanks
- Practical/venue issues (fire alarm, exits etc.)
- Consent forms
- Participant introduction

Facilitator sets the context and overall objective of the session:
"You may be aware that the Government has decided to reform the GCSE qualification in a number of subjects including Modern Foreign Languages. This is to make them more suitable for later education and employment, and includes changes to the content, such as the introduction of literature, the move to linear assessment and the removal of controlled assessment. Reforms to the grading system will lead to the introduction of a new, more stretching grade for the most able students. We believe that it is important to collect the views of various stakeholders, including yourselves, as this will be valuable in informing the support that we provide to teachers. During this session, we are interested in hearing your views on resources you use when teaching reading."

One facilitator seeks the participants' permission to audio record the discussion:
"We plan to record the discussion. We hope that this is okay with you. The data will be used in an anonymous form for research purposes. We will not share your personal information with anyone."

One facilitator sets the rules for discussion:
"Thank you again for taking the time to attend this focus group. We are interested in all your views. I would like to emphasise that there are no right or wrong responses – all responses are equally welcome. It will be helpful if you could take turns while speaking. When we begin recording could you please state your name, school, and language specialism for the benefit of the audio tape. For this session we would like you to relate your comments mainly to GCSEs, but where appropriate you may discuss A levels or Key Stage 3."

NOTE: For all question sets, the main question is supplemented by probes (indicated by a dash) which can be used at the discretion of the facilitators.

Question set A: Views on each stimulus resource (10 minutes per resource, 50 mins total)

The facilitator begins the session by thanking participants for taking the time to read through the provided resources and for making notes prior to the session. The facilitator then outlines that each of the resources will be discussed in turn:

"As you will recall, before the session we asked you to read through some resources we had selected, and asked you to make some notes. For the first part of this focus group, we would like you to spend some time discussing each resource in turn."

The facilitator then introduces the first resource (resource A), giving a short overview of the resource, based on the background information given to the teachers before the session. For each resource the following questions are asked:

Would you use this resource? Why? How?

What did you think about the type of text or texts used in this resource?

What purpose do you think the teaching activities have?

- Language Focus, Reading Strategy Focus,

Have you used similar resources in the past?

Question set B: Types of texts used (10 minute)

Once the discussion on the resources selected by the subject teams has been completed, the facilitator introduces the next section of the focus group which probes teachers' use of resources:

"Thank you for your comments on the resources we provided. We would now like to investigate your views further on the kinds of resources you use and value when teaching reading. The first area we would like you to discuss is what sort of texts you use, and how you access them. Throughout the session feel free to reflect on resources that are relevant to your thoughts and opinions."

What types of texts do you currently use to teach reading?

What influences your choice of texts?

How and where do you find these texts?

Is there a format that is most useful? (web based, booklet, etc)

Question set C: Teaching activities surrounding reading (10 minutes)
Once the discussion on teachers' use of resources is complete, the facilitator introduces the next topic of discussion: teachers' views on the ideal format and presentation of resources:
"Thank you for the views you have provided so far. We would now like to know more about how you integrate reading activities into your teaching"

How do you currently integrate reading activities into your teaching?
-time set aside each week for reading, incidental

What types of activities do you use?
-Language Focused
-Reading Strategy Focused

How important is it to allow students a choice of reading material?

Do you think that it is useful to link reading activities to the other skills (listening, writing, speaking)?

Question set D: Challenges of teaching reading

Question set D: Challenges for teaching reading (15 minutes)
Once the discussion on teachers' views on the format and presentation of resources is complete, the facilitator introduces the next topic of discussion: teachers' views on the different approaches resources take:
"Thank you for your views on how you integrate reading activities into your teaching. Further to our previous discussions on the resources we provided to you, we would now like to know more about some of the challenges of teaching reading in MFL, and how they might be overcome."

What are the challenges of teaching reading to GCSE students?

Are there specific challenges for less able students?
Are there specific challenges for more able students?

Do you think that the introduction of literature at GCSE will introduce any new challenges?

How do you think that the introduction of a more demanding grade, grade 9 will affect how you approach reading?
Are there any changes to the GCSE specification or assessment which would make it easier to teach reading skills?
Content, style of assessment

Question set E: Benefits of reading in a foreign language (5 minutes)
Once the discussion on teachers' views on the challenges of teaching reading is complete, the facilitator introduces the next topic of discussion: the benefits.

"Thank you for the views you have provided so far. We would now like to discuss your views on the possible benefits of reading activities."

What do you think the benefits of reading activities for second language learning are? (linguistic, cultural, motivational)

Which types of texts or activities do you think are particularly beneficial for developing reading skills?

The facilitator introduces the final section of the focus group which explores teachers' views on transition to A level:

"We have discussed teaching reading at GCSE. Now we would like to focus on the transition to A level. Current plans for reforms to A levels include the introduction of a compulsory literature element. Students will be required to read at least one book during their A level course."

If you teach A level courses, what are the challenges faced by students moving from GCSE to A level at the moment?

What changes to the GCSE course would make the transition easier?

Do you think that the introduction of a compulsory literature element at A level will introduce additional challenges?

Do you think that the introduction of a compulsory literature element at A level will introduce additional benefits?

Concluding remarks and thanks (10 minutes)
Facilitator gives some time to the participants towards the end of the discussion to comment on anything else that they feel has not been covered by the schedule:

"Is there anything else that you would like to discuss that you feel is relevant to the topics we have discussed in this session?"
The facilitator and co-facilitator thank the participants for their contributions, and state that they may be in touch for further research opportunities at a later date.

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