

The Importance Of Background Knowledge In Enhance ING Reading Comprehension in SLA

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Abstract : *This study explores the impact of background knowledge on reading comprehension among second-year English major students at Shakhrisabz State Pedagogical Institute. The research examines the role of summarization, oral discussions, and comprehension questions in understanding expository and narrative texts. Participants were divided into four groups: two experimental groups engaged in summarization and oral discussions, while two control groups answered comprehension questions. Pre- and post-tests were conducted to evaluate comprehension gains.*

Findings highlight the critical role of background knowledge, particularly in comprehending expository texts. Summarization improved students' ability to synthesize and integrate information, while oral discussions activated collective knowledge and fostered collaborative schema-building. Narrative texts, with their universal themes, relied less on prior knowledge but still required cultural scaffolding for deeper understanding. The results underscore the importance of pre-reading strategies, schema activation, and tailored instructional approaches to enhance reading comprehension in second-language learners. Implications for teaching practices and curriculum design are also discussed.

Key words: *Reading comprehension, background knowledge, summarization strategies, oral discussions, expository texts, second language acquisition.*

Introduction. The acquisition of reading comprehension skills in a second language (L2) is a complex and multifaceted process that relies on the interplay of various linguistic and cognitive factors. For English learners navigating the academic landscape, the development of strong reading comprehension goes beyond simply decoding words on a page - it requires the strategic application of a diverse array of skills and cognitive processes to actively construct meaning from textual content (Ntereke & Ramoroka, 2017) (Lesaux & Harris, 2017) (Bauer & Arazi, 2011).

Indeed, research has highlighted that for second language learners, reading comprehension encompasses not only a deep understanding of vocabulary and linguistic structures, but also the critical ability to integrate their prior knowledge and personal experiences with the information presented in the text (Ntereke & Ramoroka, 2017) (Valizadeh, 2021) (Bauer & Arazi, 2011) (Meskill & Mossop, 2000). As the literature suggests, the ability to effectively utilize specific reading strategies, such as making connections, engaging with the text, and engaging in active meaning construction, can significantly enhance second language learners' performance on measures of comprehension and recall (Valizadeh, 2021) (Ntereke & Ramoroka, 2017).

Background knowledge plays a significant role in reading comprehension. The ability to understand and interpret a text is deeply connected to what readers already know about the subject. Background knowledge and reading comprehension are two crucial components of effective learning and academic success. Reading comprehension is the ability to read, understand, process, and recall the content of a text (Oguntade, 2021) (Alali et al., 2020) (Sari et al., 2020). It is an interactive process between the reader's prior knowledge and the information presented in the text. (Sari et al., 2020) Oakhill et al. emphasize that reading comprehension is not just about understanding the meaning of the text, but also for broader activities like learning, educational success, and employment. (Khusniyah, 2020)

The purpose of reading comprehension can be manifold, including finding simple information, skimming quickly, and engaging in academic and professional tasks. (Sari et al., 2020) Students who struggle with reading comprehension may find it difficult to acquire knowledge and succeed academically. (Manggasang, 2021)

Reading comprehension involves various cognitive skills and abilities. Woolley suggests that it is the process of creating meaning from a text (Khusniyah, 2020). Comprehension can be categorized into different levels, with the literal level involving surface-level understanding, and higher levels requiring supporting ideas, supporting facts, and critical evaluation. (Manggasang, 2021)

Students' reading comprehension abilities have significant implications for their academic and professional futures. Rutzler argues that excellent reading comprehension skills are crucial as they enhance the enjoyment and effectiveness of reading, and support people's success in educational, professional, and personal endeavors (Oguntade, 2021).

Materials and Methods.

Our research focuses on expository and narrative texts, which interact with background knowledge differently.

Expository Texts:

a. **Dependence on Prior Knowledge:** Expository texts rely heavily on domain-specific background knowledge because they present factual, abstract, and often technical information. For example, a text about global warming requires knowledge of environmental science terms and phenomena.

b. **Comprehension Strategies:** To enhance comprehension of expository texts, students can benefit from pre-reading activities like:

-Activating schemas (e.g., brainstorming related concepts like "climate," "carbon emissions")

-Glossary work for technical terms.

-Watching short videos or presentations on the topic to build foundational knowledge.

c. **Role of Summarization:** Your focus on summarizing expository texts is particularly effective here, as it forces students to distill information and engage actively with the material, deepening their understanding.

Narrative Texts:

a. **Universal Themes:** Narrative texts often deal with themes like relationships, conflict, and moral dilemmas, which are relatable even across cultures. However, cultural-specific references may require scaffolding.

b. **Inferences from Familiar Schemas:** For instance, if a narrative includes a scene about a traditional family dinner, Uzbek students might relate it to their own family gatherings, enabling schema activation and enriching comprehension.

c. **Discussion-Based Strategy:** Encouraging oral discussions (as you plan for one of your groups) aligns well with narrative texts, as students can draw on their personal and cultural experiences to interpret the story.

The participants were second-year English major students at Shakhrisabz State Pedagogical Institute. At the beginning of the study, they completed a questionnaire addressing five areas: personal information, reading habits, reading strategies, self-assessed English comprehension, and vocabulary use in context. This initial survey provided insight into the students' backgrounds and their use of reading comprehension strategies. Following the questionnaire, a pre-test was administered to evaluate their baseline comprehension skills.

Four groups of students with similar comprehension levels were selected for the experiment, which was organized as follows:

- **Experimental Group N1:** The group was tasked with reading assigned expository and narrative texts and independently writing summaries to reflect their understanding of the material.
- **Experimental Group N2:** The second group was tasked with reading assigned expository and narrative texts and participated in oral discussions (pair discussions, group discussions and debates)to reflect their understanding of the material.
- **Control Groups:** Two other groups served as controls, reading the same passages and answering researcher-designed comprehension questions.

The first experimental group worked with texts from *Reading for the Real World, Second Edition* and the book Agatha Christies' short stories. After reading, they summarized the main ideas within a set timeframe. Initially, students found summarizing difficult, but after completing three to four passages, their ability to identify key points and logically organize their thoughts improved, leading

to faster writing. Over time, their summaries became more coherent and cohesive. Feedback on their summaries was provided in two stages: first, the instructor reviewed the work, offering motivational and constructive comments. Later, students participated in peer review, exchanging summaries for feedback.

The second experimental group worked with the same passages and participated in different oral discussions. Naturally, the questions for the discussions were prepared by the researcher. All the questions were designed to clarify students' deep comprehension of the texts and to fully impress their feelings and attitudes towards the cases and story characters.

The control groups also used the same passages but focused on answering comprehension questions. Students found scanning for answers challenging in the first few tasks, but their efficiency improved with practice. Their responses were reviewed in two ways: correct answers were shared by the instructor for self-checking, and at times, students conducted peer assessments by exchanging answer sheets.

Both experimental and control groups completed pre- and post-tests to evaluate the effect of summarization on reading comprehension. The results of comprehension tests and summaries were analyzed for accuracy, inclusion of key details, and coherence. Comparisons between pre- and post-test scores were used to measure improvements in comprehension skills.

Our methodology involving three groups (comprehension questions, summarization, and oral discussion) highlighted the role of background knowledge:

Group 1: Summarization

- Summarizing expository texts directly showed the interplay between background knowledge and comprehension. Students with prior knowledge likely produced more accurate, detailed summaries.
- This group provided rich data on how students internalize and synthesize new information when background knowledge was limited.

Group 2: Oral Discussion

- Discussions activated collective knowledge within the group, compensating for individual gaps. From the point of psycholinguistics, this fosters deeper engagement with the text through collaborative schema building.
- Narrative texts led to richer discussions as students connect the content to personal experiences.

Group 3,4: Comprehension Questions

- Background knowledge predicted accuracy in these groups, as students needed to infer and recall information.
- Expository texts revealed gaps in background knowledge, leading to more incorrect answers.

Results and Discussions

Our analysis showed how background knowledge interacted with comprehension outcomes.

Group 1 (Summarization): Summaries revealed that students effectively integrate background knowledge with text content. We look for:

-Accuracy: Were key points from the text correctly included?

-Depth: were there elaborations or inferences based on background knowledge?

Group 2 (Oral Discussion): We analyzed transcripts of discussions to observe:

- How participants used prior knowledge to clarify or elaborate on text content.

-The research showed instances of schema activation or collaborative meaning-making (e.g., "Oh, this reminds me of...").

Group 3,4 (Comprehension Questions): Students with strong background knowledge showed higher scores, especially for expository texts, as they inferred and retrieved specific details more effectively.

Conclusion.

This research was expected to demonstrate that **background knowledge significantly influences students' reading comprehension**, particularly when engaging with expository texts. Students with prior knowledge of the topic achieved higher comprehension levels by effectively activating relevant schemas, enabling them to process and integrate new information with greater ease. Conversely, students with limited background knowledge struggled to extract meaning,

particularly from abstract or technical content, as they lack the necessary cognitive frameworks to support comprehension.

For narrative texts, the role of background knowledge was expected to be less pronounced due to the universal structure of stories and the reliance on general rather than domain-specific knowledge. However, comprehension may still be impacted by culturally specific references that require additional scaffolding to bridge gaps in understanding.

In our discussion or conclusion, we connected our findings to teaching practices.

- We highlight for teachers:

a. Incorporate pre-reading activities like schema activation exercises.

b. Focus on summarization strategies for expository texts to bridge knowledge gaps.

- We highlight for curriculum designers:

a. Choose culturally relevant narratives and scaffold unfamiliar concepts in expository texts.

b. Build students' general knowledge in English by integrating interdisciplinary content into the curriculum.

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