

The Contribution of Writing Recall Summary Protocol and Gender-Specific Background Knowledge of EFL on Reading Comprehension: A Case on Saudi EFL Students

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ABSTRACT

Cultural schemata mediate an interaction between a text and the reader which ultimately facilitates reading comprehension and recall of the text content. This interaction between a text and a reader requires reader's cultural knowledge in making meaning and understanding of a text. This study investigates the contribution of cultural familiarity, language proficiency and background knowledge on reading comprehension of culturally familiar and unfamiliar texts of Saudi EFL learners by employing qualitative and quantitative approaches for data collection and analysis. Respondents were 30 male and 30 female undergraduates from Majmaah University in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Data were collected using two main instruments which were four culturally familiar and unfamiliar expository English texts and written recall summary reading protocols as a measure for reading comprehension. The findings from the written recall summary protocol and gender-specific text analysis revealed that respondents performed well on familiar texts than texts of unfamiliar contents. In addition, the study found that cultural background knowledge had a significant impact on recall and reading comprehension based on gender. The findings suggest that background knowledge and language proficiency were significant constructs on meaning inferences and predictions. The results also indicate that there was a significant relation between language proficiency, cultural knowledge, and its impact on reading comprehension. Overall, this study recommends that critical variables like cultural background knowledge and language proficiency could enhance learners' reading comprehension level and thus need to be considered by EFL reading teachers.

Keywords: *Cultural schemata, Gender-specific background knowledge, Reading comprehension, Language proficiency, Written protocol*

1. INTRODUCTION

The capabilities of learners to read English texts help them to learn a second language and may lead to enrich their linguistic awareness effectively [1]. The key component of academic disciplines is the ability of a learner to read. It is also categorized as an essential element to achieve good grades as associated with the learning of all languages. Likewise, Mart (2017) pointed out that reading literary and non literary texts develop language proficiency and maximize the learners' self-containment in language [2].

Reading is considered a complex process reflecting learners' cognitive thinking abilities, which helps them the selection of materials and drawing meaning from the written contents [3]. Similarly, it is used to incorporate multiple variables either belonged to linguistics or not, that improves the abilities of a learner from the lower level to the higher one [4]. Integrating prior-knowledge and cultural schemata with reading skill, may lead to develop readers' conceptual understanding and comprehension of the text effectively [5].

The best way to improve writing is to provide readers the text data input that a reader can extract from the content. Reading comprehension is considered a holistic process as it allows the reader's motivation and attitude to make his/her interaction meaningful and promote self-concept of understanding the text. Multiple factors may assist to make readers' negotiation meaningful and constructive by understanding the actual concept hidden in the text. For instance, background information that a reader has on the particular topic that he/she is supposed to be read or learn along with the capability to grasp its meaning. In this regard his/her competencies are exercised to analyze the text with the accomplishment of language proficiency. This effective understanding can be possible with reading comprehension [6].

This study was conducted in Majmaah University, kingdom of Saudi Arabia on males and females EFL undergraduate students of English major. In the context of Saudi Arabia, the universities provide separate separate educational system due to their religious, traditional and cultural set up. Higher Education, in the kingdom, has been categorized into two separate sections, namely universities for boys and universities for girls. In addition, the government has given equal opportunities to all citizens, the wealthy and the poor, to get education in various disciplines and to prepare them for life and work in the global economy.

Majmaah University, in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia is located in the south part of Majmaah City where teachings and researches are delivered in thirteen colleges. The university is established to serve a wide area including Majmaah, Zulfi, Remah, Ghat and Hawtat Sudair. The university has around thirteen colleges and out of which only four colleges offer BA degree program to the students in the discipline of linguistics and literature. After collecting these degrees, they are entered into private as well as public sectors for jobs. The researcher has chosen this country for the study because majority of the students have no exposure to English language. They study in EFL context who depend only on English textbooks for their academic success.

In the local context of Arab, it is observed that they face certain problems in reading texts. In Arab culture, they do not have the letter "p" in their dialects. They pronounce the letter "p" as "b" which may create misunderstanding and ambiguities in communication. This kind of cultural phenomena exists both in oral and written discourses which is the result of their native language influence on their pronunciation. Sometimes they face difficulties to pronounce the words "p" which in return say "b". Likewise, they sound "bark" rather than "park". Therefore, they are not habitual to pronounce those words (like /p/, /d/, /t/). This deficiency reduces their reading competency due to limited cultural knowledge regarding the alphabet and their sounds in learning the target

Gender-specific texts indicate that individuals possess particular information regarding the text which is gender-oriented, and help them understand the meaning based on their background knowledge. According to Carrell (1984), if individuals possess inappropriate information due to

cultural restrictions, they may have poor reading proficiency in reading comprehension [7]. Both experiences of an individual related to their cultural context along with the support of information on the relevant topic provide significant assistance to develop a cultural discourse that specific to their gender as well as the proficiency in the language. These things provide a baseline to interpret the information in textual form [8].

Just like the background information, the experiences of people that they acquire being a part of society proves as helping agent to demonstrate competency in reading comprehension. Therefore, the individuals belonged to different cultures perform differently considering the text that has a contradiction in terms of familiar cultural topics or that is not familiar to them [9]. Despite the availability of literature on the given topic, there is still a need to identify the effect of the English text that is supposed to be unfamiliar and specific to the gender on the reading competencies of the students. Because such text may become the reason to have a diverse effect on the readability of students. Therefore the current study was carried out to identify the effect of cultural schemata, gender-specific textbooks, and L2 language proficiency that may contribute to reading comprehension. For that reason, this study was mainly concerned with the identification of three aspects that were familiarity of text in cultural perspective, proficiency of a student in language, and supportiveness of background knowledge to have reading proficiency in the Saudi context. Where as the findings of this study may provide sufficient evidence to influence theoretical, conceptual, and practical aspects of reading in EFL context in different ways.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous EFL readers are provoked with definite issues and obstacles while reading comprehension, named cultural background knowledge and unfamiliar written texts. English foreign texts are linguistically, culturally, conceptually, and structurally very difficult to stumble block in reading and comprehension. It may seem too demanding to drive for non-native English learners which can create a schizophrenic situation during reading process. Hence, the disparity has been developed between what English language learners know and what they do not know. Researches affirmed that certain culturally unfamiliar contents online references, ethical morals, and social values are crucial at the tertiary level for undergraduates' academic [10].

Social foundation knowledge assumes a basic function in understanding cognizance. Numerous perusers depend on their experience knowledge to connect what they know to the text they are perusing. Foundation knowledge incorporates both a peruser's true encounters and scholarly knowledge. The social pattern is the capacity of people to see each other through commonly settled upon regular qualities and communicative experiences which can shape their considerations and practices [11] and are the result of an individual male and female desperate educational

experiences. Social diagrams are traditional coherent and organized stories of people made and inserted in the cerebrum as mental representation of story telling [12]. Patterns are firmly built-in social and social acts of a particular discourse network and firmly connected with intellectual and social practices and which are firmly rooted in structure. Social diagrams are world knowledge of socially mediated product [13]. Social foundation knowledge incorporates deep-rooted social and social encounters, instructive practices, knowledge of texts logical structure, and knowledge of the language.

In reading comprehension, earlier knowledge assumes a critical job. It is the knowledge of student which may contribute them by initiating their earlier knowledge. As indicated in ref [14], youngsters can interface their encounters with the text when they get it; they make an association between the external world and what they read. Schematic knowledge, as indicated by hypothetical methodologies, is huge for new data including vast body of words, multivariate correlational images and ideas. The examinations show the impact of earlier knowledge on the results of individual exhibitions who have discovered that earlier domain of knowledge has a significant function in text development by interfacing individual life to the text. Earlier general relevant knowledge may appear to be productive when understudies interface it with a text to advance their reading comprehension in making deductions, anticipating importance, making synopsis, and assessing the text.

Zhang (2008) reported the effect of 26 male and 55 female EFL Chinese understudies on their reading comprehension levels [15]. The scientist applied two examination apparatuses to quantify their degree of comprehension utilizing short inquiry addresses and numerous decision question design. The after effect of the examination showed that there was no huge contrast between the gender' scholastic accomplishment. Wei (2009) led an exploration concentrate in china on auxiliary level male and female understudies and the discoveries demonstrated that there was a steady connection between reading comprehension level between gender orientations [16]. In this manner, these examinations need to inspect the commitment of social schemata, gender orientation explicit social knowledge, and composed convention rundown to Saudi EFL college understudies on reading comprehension.

3. METHODOLOGY

A written recall summary reading protocol test was employed as a research tool in this study to measure the reading comprehension ability of students. Recall written summary protocol method has been used by many researchers to measure reading comprehension ability of learners. This method has been found more suitable research instrument for many subjects. In recall written summary protocols, the participants reading comprehension ability was measured by giving scores to

their recall protocol in the written form. In this method, the participants put down on the empty paper whatever they understood about familiar and unfamiliar texts after in-depth reading. The statistical analysis techniques are appropriate to have law-like findings as a result of such analysis [17].

The purposive sampling procedure was proposed in this study as a judgmental and subjective sampling for valid data collection. In this purposive and non-probability sampling, the researcher relied dominantly on the judgment when he was choosing participants of the population to participate in the study. The researcher selected samplings for the study based on prior-knowledge and the participants' common features. The goal of choosing suitable samplings was to access to all participants of the study due to their similar academic profile. Purposive sampling is convenient, accessible and can establish balance of population sizes among groups. Similarly, several researchers have employed purposive sampling in mixed-method research due to the participants' cohort features [18].

Thus, in this study, students from the faculty of education (girls and boys) undergone BA linguistic program were chosen as participants in this study. The sampling was chosen non-randomly as according to University system of regular enrollment of the students for BA degree program. There were thirty 30 second year male undergraduates and thirty 30 female students for each intake BA program were selected for this study.

In recall protocols, the data of the participants' scores gathered were on the bases of the ideas accurately presented on the papers from the original texts. For recalling on text passages, both familiar and unfamiliar texts, 100% marks were distributed between texts to measure the participants' reading comprehension level of competence. In this study, the data obtained from the participants on comprehension test, written recall summary protocol on both familiar and unfamiliar texts, were scored and were transformed into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This quantitative section of writing recall summary protocol has addressed the findings of the following research questions:

Research question 1: What is the contribution of Gender-Specific background knowledge of EFL undergraduate students to reading comprehension on two cultural texts of familiar and unfamiliar nature?

Research question 2: What is the contribution of EFL learners' language proficiency to reading comprehension? The data collected from the participants' summary protocols on four culturally familiar and unfamiliar texts and their language proficiency were statistically analyzed to indicate its correlation to their reading comprehension.

Table 1 Data Analysis regarding Written Protocol of EFL Students

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	30	50.0
Female	30	50.0
Total	60	100.0

This study was conducted to investigate written protocol of EFL students. Table 1 show demographic information related to gender of participants. There were 60 participants of very study. Male respondents were 30 in number. Female respondents had equal participation of 30. Due to the equal size of both participated groups i.e. male and female responses can be easily compared.

Table 2 represents participant’s achievements in grade. Grading consisted of six (6) letter; A+, A, B, C, D, and F. Every grade was awarded according to the test score and pre decided grading criteria.

According to the grading system criteria accepted and practiced by the universities in Pakistan, A+ represented 95-100 marks or 90-100% score on an achievement test. A grade shows 90-94 % marks on a test. And like it grade B+ represented 85-89%, grade B represented 80-84%, grade C+ 75-79%, grade C 70-74%, grade D+ 65-69%, grade D 60-64% and grade F represented below 60% score on an achievement test.

Table 2 Grade Frequency of Respondents

Grade	Frequency	Percent
A+	1	0.2
A	6	10.0
B	15	25.0
C	9	15.0
D	12	20.0
F	17	28.8
Total	60	100.0

According to these results familiar students had more significant, positive, and strong relationship with written protocol as compare to unfamiliar students.

Table 3 Comparison of cultural familiarity and proficiency of EFL students

Cultural Familiarity	Proficiency	N	Mean	Sd. Dv	T	df	P
Familiar	High	46	3.52	1.18	-16.48	58	.000
	Low	14	8.85	.36			
Unfamiliar	High	46	7.39	1.34	-4.46	58	.000
	Low	14	9.00	.00			

The research study regarding EFL student’s written protocol had two groups of respondents: familiar and unfamiliar. Table no. 8 shows the comparison of both groups for cultural familiarity and proficiency. The high achiever of familiar group had 3.52as mean value and 1.18 as standard deviation. The low achievers had mean value of 8.85 with standard deviation of .36. Unfamiliar high achiever students had mean score of 7.39 with standard deviation of 1.34 and low achievers had mean score of 9.00 with sd. Deviation of .00. It can be noticed that means scores of high achiever and low achievers of familiar and unfamiliar groups had difference.

According to these results male students’ relationship with written protocol is more significant, positive, and strong as compare to female student reading written protocol.

Table 4 shows the relationship between students’ achieved score and proficiency level on the basis of gender. The value of coefficient of correlation should lie between -1 and +1. The positive value shows positive relationship and negative value shows negative relationship between constructs etc. If values lie between 0.10 - 0.29, it shows weak relationship between constructs. When values lie between 0.30 - 0.49, it demonstrated moderate relationship and the values between 0.50 - 1.0 shows strong relationship between constructs of interest.

These statistics which are mentioned in table 4 evidenced that a highly significant relationship existed between EFL student’s written protocol and their gender and which is strong and positive too in nature.

Table 4 gender wise Correlation Analysis of Written Protocol of EFL students

N = 60		
Group	Variable	Proficiency
Male	Students’ Score	.593**
Female	Students’Score	.581**

The co-efficient correlation value for male student was $p=0.593^{**}$ which shows that there is a highly significant, positive, and strong relationship was found between male students and written protocol. For the female students, the co-efficient correlation was $p=0.581^{**}$ which shows that a highly significant, positive, and strong relationship was also found between female students and written protocol.

5. CONCLUSION

The data of the research revealed that male and female respondents have good linguistics knowledge and language proficiency skills, were outperformed in reading comprehension. In this study, it was found out that there was a close relationship between Gender-Specific background knowledge and reading comprehension on specific texts related to their cultural narratives. Therefore, the overall, results of this study, revealed that cultural schemata, language proficiency and gender-specific knowledge offer a guarantee to EFL learners to support their reading comprehension.

The current study investigated relationship between Gender-Specific texts and reading comprehension. For EFL readers, text manipulation is consistent with conceptual cultural knowledge. Genders' conceptual knowledge on unfamiliar texts has led the respondents to better understanding of cultural beliefs and values. This study has revealed that Gender-Specific previous cultural knowledge has played an important role in reading comprehension. In this study, gender respondents (males and females) who had high level cultural background knowledge demonstrated high performances on unfamiliar texts in reading comprehension than those who had low level of cultural experiences. The results have shown that female respondents were outperformed on familiar texts in relationship with their cultural background knowledge than those texts on which they lacked cultural narratives. Similarly, the male groups performed well on culturally familiar contents that facilitated them in analysis and interpretations.

The application of this study for the future of EFL learners may stress on their exposure to inter-cultural and cross-cultural linguistic competencies without losing their own identities. Although, the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education justifies English language teaching which may tend to advocate culture and spread Islam to English speaking countries. This study will help other students at different levels and other foreign languages if replicated. The current study may be expanded into varieties of subjects for different levels and groups which can be done through cross-cultural communications and understanding.

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