The Effect of Topic Familiarity on Improving EFL Saudi Female Students` Reading Comprehension

Afaf Ayed Alrowaithy

Ministry of Education || KSA

Abstract: This study investigates the effect of topic familiarity on the reading comprehension performance of Saudi EFL students. Forty EFL Saudi female students on second year high school performed two tests: familiar versus unfamiliar topics in a multiple-choice format reading comprehension test each have 10 points with four texts two familiar and two unfamiliar texts. Quantitative analysis was undertaken in this study as a T test applied for both paired samples. The descriptive statistics shows that the arithmetic averages the students` performance on familiar topic larger than the arithmetic average on unfamiliar topic. The analytical statistics that identified the differences between both arithmetic averages shows that the differences among the students' performance on familiar and unfamiliar topic were large and have statistical significance in favor of their performance on familiar topic. Further replication of similar studies is necessary to determine the potential impact of topic familiarity on reading instructions and assessment design.

Keywords: familiar topic, texts, unfamiliar topic, reading comprehension, English curriculum.

تأثير النص المألوف لقطع القراءة في تطوير فهم الطالبات السعوديات الدارسات للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

عفاف عايد الرويثي

وزارة التعليم || المملكة العربية السعودية

الملخص: هدفت الدراسة إلى معرفة أثر نصوص القراءة المألوفة بالمقارنة مع النصوص غير المألوفة على مستوى الفهم لدى الطالبات السعوديات الدارسات للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. وقد شاركت في هذه الدراسة أربعين طالبة من المستوى الثاني بالمرحلة الثانوية وكانت أداة الدراسة اختبارين لقياس أداء فهم المحتوى لديهن على نوعين من النصوص المألوفة وغير المألوفة وقد أظهرت نتائج العينتين المترابطتين أن نصوص القراءة المألوفة لها أثر هام على مستوى الفهم لدى الطالبات أكثر من النصوص غير المألوفة وجاءت توصيات الدراسة بأن تكرار المزيد من نصوص القراءة المألوفة ضروري لتحديد تأثيره على تطوير المناهج وتصميم البرامج التدريسية في مادة القراءة في اللغة الإنجليزية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: قراءة مألوفة، نصوص، قراءة غير مألوفة، فهم المقروء، مناهج لغة انجليزية.

Introduction

When a student reads any kind of text or writing, the primary goal is to understand what is written, while learning something new in the process (Sadoski &Paivio, 2013). Reading comprehension is a similar activity presented to students, with purpose of testing the readers' overall comprehension skills in

a specific language (Krashen, 1981). Similar to first and second language education, reading comprehension is also carried out in foreign language studies. Non-native and foreign language speakers find it difficult to decode the hidden messages within the text as argued by Pulido (2003). Although to native speakers of the language, answers to reading comprehension is plain sight, while for EFL students it can be a difficult task (Johnson & Newport, 1989).

When English or any other language is learned as a foreign language, many barriers manifest themselves. Unlike learning a second language, foreign languages are often taught to students who are much older; hence, their ability to fully understand the language is quite limited (Cook, 2013). EFL students not only face difficulty conversing in English, but also in comprehension (Taglieber, Johnson & Yarbrough, 1988). Often such students undertake strategies to improve their comprehension abilities, such as, improving reading skills and expanding their vocabulary. A general belief regarding foreign language learners is that topic familiarity can positively influence these strategies (Sadoski &Paivio, 2013).

This study is based on hypothesis, and will explore literature as well conduct tests to determine whether this is factual. Several studies (Haus& Levine, 1985) have been conducted in the field of language studies to understand whether background knowledge can aid in understanding or processing of text. Saudi Arabia being country rich in culture and steeped in religion has not prioritized the use of English in their society (Rahman &Alhaisoni, 2013). As a result, Arabic remains the dominant language spoken within the region. However, the country has just started to embrace western culture resulting in making English to become a second language in most schools as stated by Khan (2011). Many schools, however, do not make English a compulsory second language, instead, a foreign language alternative in higher grade.

Statement of the Problem

In recent years, the importance of English Education in Saudi Arabia has grown considerably, and the country is providing some of the best scholarships to promote this trend. Schools in Saudi Arabia offer English as a second language and a foreign language. The problem is those students who opt for English as a foreign language are unable to cope with comprehension requirements. This is primarily due to the lack of understanding how background knowledge affects reading ability and comprehension. Moreover, there is insufficient evidence to directly relate background or subject familiarity with EFL students' comprehension. Consequently, the current study attempts to explore this problem by attempting to examine the extent to which background knowledge affects students' reading comprehension abilities in Saudi Arabia schools.

Research Question

In this section, the study puts forward one major research question in an attempt to answer it: To what extent does topic familiarity have an impact on Saudi EFL students' reading comprehension?

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of topic familiarity and background knowledge of students` reading comprehension. There is a long ongoing debate among on the impact of topic familiarity, with regarding to reading comprehension strategies.

Reading comprehension is an activity presented to students, with the purpose of testing the reader's overall comprehension skills in a specific language. There have been several studies conducted in the past about understanding language learning, and how it can be enhanced to facilitate better learning of foreign languages amongst non-native speakers. Although research on second language learning studies go back to the early 19th century, foreign language learning has only recently come into the limelight. This means there are significant unknowns with regard to learning foreign languages, which have not been answered yet (Pae, 2004).

Significance of the Study

Reading and comprehension abilities are key factors towards achieving academic success in foreign language studies. Furthermore, the majority of studies have been conducted on speakers of European, Asian and South American native speakers. Since, people of different ethnicities, backgrounds and culture can demonstrate different abilities with regard to comprehending English, a study to be conducted on Saudi EFL students may produce different findings on this subject matter.

Limitation of the Study

In this section, the researcher aims to point out the limitations of the current study being undertaken. The study has two primary limitations, which are both related to the participants themselves. With only 40 participants their ages around 16 and 17 years old from a 2nd grade private high school taking part, the research is narrow. Apart from this, the study will be conducted during the first semester of 2016, which is another limitation.

Review on Foreign language reading comprehension

Although major effort has gone into understanding what impacts foreign language or L2 reading comprehension, only two theories proved most relevant and convincing in the field namely cognitive schema theory and threshold hypothesis. The schema theory describes human memory as a large collection of schemata, each of which may possess several slots, components or parts. Furthermore, these individual "slots" are linked via a hierarchical structure. According to the theory, information on topics may be stored in these schemata, which the reader utilizes when attempting cognitive tasks like comprehension. The lack of prior knowledge within these schemata often results in reading problems for foreign language learners. However, when the appropriate schemata regarding a topic is present, the learner is able to quickly decode the text and overcome basic linguistic difficulties (Mandler, 2014).

Studies on first language or L1 learners have revealed similar findings as suggested by the schema theory. The research (Droop &Verhoeven, 1998) on L1 comprehension stated that if text possessed cultural similarity, it is likely to have a positive impact on performance. Findings from this research suggested learners were able to recall prior knowledge and perform sentence-recognition tasks, such as, searching for answers within the text, more effectively. Learners in the experiment improved their reading scores when asked to read similar topics prior to taking the test. However, the research is limited in a sense that it only applies to topic familiarity based on cultural similarity. Hence, the research does not take into consideration text that do not possess cultural similarity.

Since readers pursue different disciplines, measuring their reading comprehension skills accurately was difficult, leading to biased results. However, studies have indicated that foreign language students with domain-specific or discipline specific similarity to the text recorded higher performance. In addition, this improvement was noticed in reading comprehension as well as listening comprehension (Fang, 1994). This finding backed up earlier research conducted by Haus & Levine (1985), where they provided substantial evidence to suggest being domain-specific, low ability learners were able to perform just as well as those who possessed high language proficiency. From this discussion, it is clear, that being domain- specific is a major contributor towards better reading comprehension in EFL or 2L learners.

However, all the earlier discussed studies had a major drawback; while students did record better performance when pre-reading tasks were assigned, a large number of students did not improve. Since the number of students that did demonstrate improvements were not significantly enough to draw an outright conclusion; these studies remain far from being conclusive. This is the primary limitation of most studies conducted on foreign and second language learners, where positive results did not manifest in entirety. Another famous study called the Hudson (1998) study, conducted in 1988 shed light on this subject. The study was conducted on students of three levels; beginner, intermediate, and advance. Although beginner and intermediate students demonstrated positives when made to familiarize themselves with the topic, there was no effect on advanced level students as described by Pae (2004). Another interesting observation from Hudson's study was related to domain specific knowledge. Students that possessed domain specific knowledge in social science and humanities demonstrated improvements, while no effect was observed when the domain was science and technology. This makes sense since disciplines like humanities and social science do not require creativity or intensive cognitive thinking while solving text based on them, while on the other hand, text based on science and technology requires a higher level of thinking. From this observation, it can be hypothesized, that reading comprehension tasks, which require creativity, and thinking do not benefit students even if they possess prior knowledge or topic familiarity.

A commonly accepted fact in L2 or FL studies is the fact that foreign language learners or second language learners are linguistically bound due to a lack of proficiency with the language. Since, second or

foreign languages are taught much later in life, expertise and fluency are nearly impossible to achieve in the short span of time allotted. This means that non-native speakers or readers of a language require a higher cognitive function and attention just to read the read, as when compared to first language users. Often this prevents them from using background knowledge and interpretation, as their cognitive function is solely on reading the words and sentences itself (Ridgway, 1997). Since reading comprehension requires more than just recognizing words and sentences, EFL students are said to possess a 'threshold level', beyond which they are unable to process the information. The threshold hypothesis suggests that every EFL learner possesses this limitation over the foreign language that "caps" or "limits" their performance while undertaking cognitive intensive studies. The hypothesis also states that different threshold levels may exist in different learners who possess different levels of linguistic abilities. Hence, the threshold level dictates the learner's vocabulary, reading, speaking and comprehension skills of foreign language (Roller, 1990).

The threshold hypothesis also explores the possibility of the text structure itself playing a role in the learner's reading comprehension ability. When the text includes abstract ideas or obscure words, it becomes difficult for learners to understand and hence related to what is already known. This is obvious, as the learner's ability to understand text is directly influenced by vocabulary. As a result, those with extensive vocabulary would perform better, even if they possess lower level linguistic ability in that foreign language. From this hypothesis, it can be deduced that learners must attain a specific level or threshold level in vocabulary and structure, in order to effectively utilize background knowledge, skills and reading strategies (Lee &Schallert, 1997).

Reviewing types of language learning

The need for developing effective and efficient ways of teaching foreign languages has led to several methods, theories and approaches being formulated in rapid succession in past years. Majority of theories related to teaching or learning of languages have been shaped by developments in psychology, linguistics, sociology and anthropology. Applied linguistics takes its roots from the study of such theories and how they are applied to enhance learning as stated by Seidlhofer (2013). One of the primary issues related to learning, is to understand how to maximize language acquisition over language learning. Learning theories suggests that there are two different ways for an individual to "learn" a language; learning and acquisition as described by Karshen (1981) in his theory of language acquisition. According to Karshen (1981), acquisition of a language refers to learning a language through "natural" ways. In other words, acquiring the language unconsciously through natural communication. First and second languages are acquired using this manner when individuals are placed in social spaces where the language is predominantly spoken (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 2014). For example, a child is most likely to learn the

parents' first language via natural processes of listening and conversing. Similarly, a person belonging to a social group will naturally pick-up the most dominantly spoken language, as a second language.

Reviewing mental processes related to reading comprehension

Researchers Sadoski &Paivio (2013), who have studied general comprehension in the past, have suggested that the task requires a dynamic interaction between reader and text at various levels. At a superficial or topmost level, the learner reads the text to understand certain linguistic code features, which is translated into written text, while also storing some knowledge into memory. It is important to note that knowledge gained during the comprehension exercise is short term, which quickly fades away. This may be due to a number of reasons; firstly, the learners don't not see the task as a learning opportunity, but rather as a compulsory activity that he or she needs to complete. As a result, little attention is paid to the core details of the text; instead, the focus solely lays on finding the answers quickly. Secondly, the subject of the text may not be interesting enough to learners, for them to exert deeper understanding of the text as stated by beyond the superficial level, readers or learners attempt to study the text in a manner to decipher deeper meaning and possible relationships between what is being proposed. This is done to enhance the coherence and relevance of written text to the original text. That being said, reading comprehension activities undertaken at different levels does not guarantee learning, even if the learners exhibits interest in the text or possess high-level linguistic capabilities. Apart from identifying words and sentences to gather explicitly stated information, skilful readers are able to pick out hidden relations between elements through advanced level of reasoning. Researchers believe that this is usually possible when the reader combines high-level cognitive functions with prior knowledge or topic familiarity to make well-judged and reasoned observations (Borella, Carretti, &Pelegrina, 2010).

According to McVay& Kane (2012), during compression activities like text processing, associations, explanation and predictions, three inferences may occur, all of which may be distinct or unrelated to one another. Firstly, explanation may be backward- oriented, serving to join the reader's previous knowledge with focal sentences as described by Keenan, Baillet & Brown (1984). Secondly, text associations occur when the reader elaborates text stated in the focal sentence as argued by Myers & Duffy (1990). Lastly, predictions made are future-oriented, to describe future consequences of the event stated within the focal text (Fletcher & Bloom, 1988). It is important to note, that while these three interferences may occur while undertaking comprehension activities, some are beneficial to the process. For example, are largely elaborative and often erroneous and irrelevant to the text. While, on the other hand, explanations are more useful as they contribute to the recall of factual and narrative paragraphs (Cornoldi& Oakhill, 2013).

Previous research

Chen & Graves (1995) investigated the impact of proving background knowledge on comprehension ability of Taiwanese students. They used American short stories as the comprehension material for conducting this study. The total sample of 240 first year college students were divided into four groups, each of which were treated differently. According to the results, three of the four groups that were given pre-test instructions and background knowledge were able to undertake comprehension relatively better than the group with no assistance. In fact, the group that was given a preview that helped build background knowledge within the students performed the best. A clear indicator that background knowledge is an influential factor in reading comprehension ability.

Zhaohua's (2004) research focuses on investigating the influence of previewing and background knowledge on EFL reading comprehension. Students belonging to Yangzhou University, China formed the sample group. Seventy-eight students in their second year who are currently pursuing non-English majors at the University were selected as research subjects. In addition, Zhahua used MCQ and True/False questions to test reading comprehension skills. One group of students were given previews while the other possessed background knowledge. A third group of 26 students acted as the control group to help make direct comparisons. Using Kruskal-Wallis to conduct a one-way ANOVA, Zhaohua identified significant differences between scores of the three different groups. Students with preview recorded a mean rank of 42.46, while students possessing background knowledge achieved 46.27 mean rank. The control performed significantly lower with a mean rank of just 29.77. The results demonstrated that although students with background knowledge were able to outperform the control group easily, they were not able to "significantly" outrank students with previews. Hence, the impact of preview and background knowledge was both significant with regard to EFL reading comprehension.

Al-Shumaimeri (2006) was one of the first scholars to study the impact of topic familiarity on EFL learners within Saudi Arabia. In this study, he measured language proficiency and topic familiarity as potential factors that could influence reading comprehension ability. The total sample size for the experiment was 132, composed of both female and male EFL learners. The experiment simply measured the changes in performance when topics were familiar to students. The results pointed out that topic familiarity did have a positive influence on scores, where students demonstrated a tendency to perform better when they were familiar with the topic. This result backed up the Schema theory, where comprehension tasks are better performed when topic-relevant knowledge or schemata is present. The influence was significant enough to raise low-level ability students to point where they could match their high-level ability counterparts. While, also notable is the influence of language ability over reading comprehension. There was a significant performance difference between different level students when scores from the unfamiliar text were compared, which points out that those possessing high-language abilities in English found it less difficult to understand texts.

Erten&Razi, (2009) in their study attempted to decode the influence of cultural familiarity of text on reading comprehension. In order to question of language ability in altering results. The researchers selected 44 advance level students from a state level university in Turkey to make the sample. Four groups were formed to help make clear comparisons, which involved two groups where pre-reading activities were instructed. The concluded experiment was strongly in favor of the cultural familiarity hypothesis, where possession of cultural-related schema enhanced reading comprehension score. This is mainly because students attempting the comprehension with cultural-similarity felt more comfortable, and could rely on their previous knowledge with regard to their own culture to make better choices.

Rouhi&Asghari (2011) conducted an experiment on Azari students of English, to understand if topic familiarity and pre-reading activities had an impact on comprehension performance. The sample consisted of 78 female EFL English learners who were currently studying in high school. Rouhi&Asghari then conducted a proficiency test on all the students, and help form 4 groups of students with similar proficiency levels. Using SPSS and MANOVA testing, groups that got familiar topics achieved higher mean scores than those who did not. Since the results were statistically significant as per the null hypothesis; the study was significant in the field linguistic research. However, pre-reading activities to familiarize students with the topic did not have much effect on comprehension proficiency, and was proven statistically insignificant.

Tabatabaei &Shakerin (2013) investigated the influence of content familiarity among Iranian students, while also assessing the potential impact of gender on reading comprehension. Students aged between 20 and 35 of equal gender were selected for the experiment, from the Najafabad Branch of the Islamic Azad University. The total sample size of the experiment was 60, whose participants were selected by an Oxford placement exam. The MC close and C-test were the primary analytical instruments. In MC cloze test, students with familiar text achieved a mean score of 82.83, while those with non-familiar text only managed to achieve 63.17. Since, both groups were significantly different from one another; topic familiarity did positively influence comprehension results as per the MC cloze test. Results from the C-test also proved the same, where performance was significantly better when familiar text was presented to students. Furthermore, results from both tests show no significant difference between males and females with regard to comprehension, despite female students showing a slightly better performance.

Jalilehvand& Samuel (2014) attempt to study the role of content familiarity on gender- neutral texts in order to identify possible difference among male and female students. The sample, which consisted of 37 males and 86 females, belonged to high school students within Iran. Four groups were randomly selected and given separate text, of which two groups were given familiar topics. Jalilehvand& Samuel used a 'two-way' MANOVA and 'between- subjects' design test to conduct this study. While to assess the results, testing measures using cloze test and recall protocol were selected. The test indicated that a relationship existed between gender and topic familiarity. Females with familiar topics performed

well not only to the students with unfamiliar text, but also to males in general. Hence, the experiment proved that topic familiarity had a strong influence on reading comprehension, with gender altering these results significantly.

LahuertaMartínez's (2014) study explored how topic or content familiarity and gender influenced Spanish EFL students. Sixty-eight undergraduate students studying English as a foreign language made up the experiment sample. Since the sample contained a mix of male and female students, it allowed Lahuerta Martínez to make gender specific observations if any were to arise. Both texts used during the experiment was either familiar or unfamiliar to both men and women, which helped keep the study as accurate as possible. Results from bath passages showed a relationship between gender and comprehension ability, with 9.9% mean

variance witnessed. The observations showed that males in this experiment performed significantly better. Furthermore, students performed significantly better demonstrating a variance of 8.8% with familiar topics when measuring results from the multiple-choice questions. These results further strengthen the topic familiarity hypothesis with regard to comprehension ability.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

The present study aims to unravel strategies for reading comprehensions employed by Saudi Students learning English as Foreign Language (EFL) by observing the relationship between familiarity and non-familiarity of topics during the reading process. Quantitative methodological approaches have gained momentum in recent years especially while attempting to answer complex research problems empirically (Creswell, 2014).

Research Instruments

The materials used in this study comprise of two familiar and two unfamiliar non-simplified unabridged versions of texts. The first familiar text focusing on Sultan of Egypt Salah-Al-Din — A True Hero and a second familiar text used was Lone Man Survives Crash Unharmed with Climbers Survive the worst from their KSA — English Language student book (Traveller, 2016). The researcher also ensured that familiar and unfamiliar texts should possess different cultural elements with the notion to make comprehension process as difficult and incorporation of cultural cues in the text.

Sampling and Population

The study involved all 2nd year female students from the Saudi private high school. In order to conduct the investigation, 40 female Saudi EFL students were involved. Female students belonged to the same age group and from same school but bilingual with the first language of Arabic.

Research design

The present study employed a design that suits the aim of the study to assess the role of topic familiarity on comprehension reading among Saudi students by recruiting quantitative method. To achieve this purpose, the participants (N=40) were given two tests that was designed in this study. Students were not informed about the familiarity of tests. In this study, the dependent variable is the quantitative data based on familiar and unfamiliar texts that was received from Saudi female students who participated in the study.

Data Collection methods

The study employs empirical data collection methods for executing the quantitative research. Quantitative data are gathered using multiple choice questions to evaluate the comprehension text reading ability of EFL students. There are totally four texts used for the study (2 familiar and 2 unfamiliar). Familiar Text 1 consists of 166 words, familiar text 2 consists of 161 words, unfamiliar text 1 comprises of 160 words and finally unfamiliar text 2 comprise of 165 words.

Test Procedure

The study tests used two passages from familiar and unfamiliar comprehension in each with totally 4 texts used in comprehension testing. Based on the goal of the study, two reading tests were executed for the study participants who were tested with two familiar texts on the first day of the week.

Instrument validity

The validity of the research instrument was evaluated using Chi-Square test goodness of fit. This is the best method to observe the dependency of variables present in the data. Chi square test is used to determine the relationship between observed and expected frequency in a dataset.

The validity of the test was verified by submitting it to a number of linguistics professors who made their comments and the due corrections were made.

Validity refers to the degree to which a study accurately reflects or assesses the specific concept that the researcher is attempting to measure.

Data Analysis methods

Quantitative data was statistically measured to observe the effect of topic familiarity while reading English comprehensions among Female Saudi EFL students. Independent Sample t-test were used to observe the effect of topic familiarity on reading ability among students. Rokshari (2012) also employed similar statistical tests to observe the effect of text nativisation and pre-reading on comprehension readability among EFL students.

Ethical considerations

The present study involved the participation of human subjects. The study was conducted after receiving proper consent from the subjects and ethical clearance from the Ministry of Education. It was ensured that no participants were forced for the participation in the present study and obtained formal consent after providing a proper explanation about the study. No personal information of subjects was disclosed and confidentiality of responses was maintained throughout the research.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Findings

This part is related to analysing the research question which seeks to identify up to what extent does topic familiarity has impact on Saudi EFL students' reading comprehension. In order to analyse the research question, the researcher has presented the outcomes of the tests that were performed on the SPSS program. In the given test, the researcher had taken the final total of the achievements of each student in the case of the two sections of the test, i.e. in the case of the total scores on the familiar topics and total scores that had been obtained by the students in the case of the unfamiliar topics. Both samples were taken into consideration for conducting the tests. The results are shown in the following table:

Descriptive statistics:

Table (1) Paired Samples Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Familiar	40	4.33	0.797
Unfamiliar	40	2.50	1.240

From the above given table, it can be inferred that the total number of female students who have undergone the test were 40. All the students provided their answers for the questions that were asked related to the familiar topics and unfamiliar topics. In case of the answers that were provided by the female students of the familiar topics it was found that the arithmetic average of the familiar topics was 4.66 out of 5, and the standard deviation was 0.797. Whereas, in case of the answers that were received for the questions from the unfamiliar topics, it was found that the arithmetic average was 2.50 out of 5, and the standard deviation was 1.240. This showed that the arithmetic average of the performance of the students on familiar topics is much better than the arithmetic average of the performance of the performance of the students in case of the unfamiliar topics.

For analysing the differences between the sizes of the arithmetic average in both cases the researcher performed the paired sample t- test of which the outcomes were provided in the below given table:

Analytical statistics:

Table (2) Paired Samples Test

	N	Paired Differences		DF	T	Sig.
		Mean	**Std. Deviation**			
Familiar-Unfamiliar	40	1.825	1.107	39	10.429	0.000

From the above table, it can be seen that the total number of students who had performed the test that comprised of both the familiar and the unfamiliar topics was 40 students. The mean of the arithmetic average of the performance of the students in the both cases was around 1.825, and the standard deviation of the difference was 1.1074. The degree of freedom of the test was found to be 39, and the calculated t-test value was found to be 10.429. The statistical significance was found to be 0.000 which was under 0.05. This points out that the differences among the performance of the students on the familiar and the unfamiliar topics was large and it was statistically significant in favour of the performance of the students in the case of the familiar topics. Further, the findings of the results given in the above showed the performance of the female students in case of the familiar topics was significantly higher than the performance of the students in case of the unfamiliar topics. The researcher has determined the Omega square value which has been calculated from the equation that has been provided below:

$$W^2 = t^2 - 1 / (t^2 - 1) + N \ (N = \text{the number of cases in both groups are equal})$$

In the above given equation, the W^2 value stands for the Omega square value and, 't' represent the calculated t-test value and the 'N' shows the number of students who have taken the two tests. The calculation for the omega square value is given below:

$= 108.764 - 1 / (108.764 - 1) + 40$

$= 107.764 / 147.764 = 0.729$

Thus, from the above given calculation it can be seen that the Omega square value which has been obtained was 0.729. This shows that there are statistically significant differences between the performance outcomes of the students in case of the familiar topics and the performance outcomes of the same group of students in case of the unfamiliar topics.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Discussion

The findings of the research study have showed that there was a positive impact of the familiarity of the text as familiar reading texts helped them understand the context of the comprehension passages. The knowledge of the culture and the background knowledge regarding the text has also helped them to understand texts as compared to when they read the comprehension text with very little or no familiarity. Further the students also gave positive responses for using the familiar comprehension texts that showed their background knowledge could be improved.

It has been found that while learning any foreign language, there are various barriers that are being faced by the Saudi students. The main problem was the foreign language is taught to the Saudi students very late, thus it limits their ability to understand and comprehend the language. The most important fact based on the findings of the study is that the EFL students face problems when they read unfamiliar reading comprehension texts.

In the process to determine the impact of the familiarity of the text on improving the EFL Saudi female students' reading comprehension abilities, the researcher has utilised such a research strategy of exposure to familiar texts, which may help the participants to improve their reading comprehension of the given the topics. The methodology that has been used for the research study can be defined as the main determinants of the research design and can be explained in terms of the procedure that is followed by the researcher to address the predefined objectives of the research. On the basis of the evaluation of the aims and objectives of the research it has been found that the familiar texts are more suitable to improve the participants' reading abilities (Cobeño et al., 2002). The familiar-text approach found to be significant in developing the proper generalizations of the current research findings as it identifies the primary relationships between text familiarity and students' performance (Lee and Lee, 2015).

The next step is related to the review of the literature which is necessary to acquire the knowledge about the various works that has been done by the earlier researchers on this topic. In order to conduct this research successfully and to find answers on defined research questions, primary and secondary data was critically reviewed and analysed (Habidin and Yusof, 2012). Academic journals were the primary source of secondary data for this research. An in-depth literature review of the areas of interest was conducted in order to investigate what is already known and what remains to be learned about improving the familiarity of the EFL students with the text so that their reading comprehension strategy can be improved. Information contained in academic journals, peer-reviewed articles were largely utilized for this research study. This helped the researcher to develop a sound base for conducting the research and would allow to formulate the research strategy in a better manner. The research strategy and the epistemological standpoint are developed in the next phase.

From the research studies that have been conducted by earlier researchers have also showed that there was somewhat positive influence of the familiarization of the texts on improving reading comprehension performance of the EFL learners. Hudson (1988) conducted one of the most important tests that was conducted in this direction, whereby the studies were conducted on three different groups of the students; beginner, intermediate and the advance

level. The researcher found that there was positive influence of the familiarization of the text on the beginner and intermediate students.

The most important fact that has been found by the different researchers regarding the L2 learners or the FL students is that the foreign language students are bounded linguistically because of the lack of the proficiency of the language and unfamiliarity of the text. The main reason behind this fact is that as the second or foreign language is taught much later in life, thus, expertise and fluency in reading are nearly impossible to achieve in a short span of time. This shows that the non-native students require a high cognition level and function in order to read and comprehend unfamiliar texts as compared to the students of the first language. This also restricts the second language learning students from utilising their background knowledge and their interpretation as their cognitive function solely relies on reading the words and the complete sentences (Ridgway, 1997). As it has been found that the reading the comprehension is more than just the recognition of the words and the sentences, thus it has been found that the EFL students have threshold level for processing the information of unfamiliar texts after which they are not able to process the information completely. This same fact was proved from the descriptive and the analytics test that were performed on the students in order to perform on the students when they were asked to provide answers to questions that were asked from the familiar and unfamiliar texts. The descriptive tests of the research study have shown that the female students scored an arithmetic average on the familiar topics of 4.66 out of 5, and the standard deviation was 0.797, Whereas, in case of the answers of the unfamiliar topics, the mean score was 2.50 out of 5, and the standard deviation was 1.240. This showed that the arithmetic mean of the performance of the students on familiar topics was much better than the arithmetic average of their performance on unfamiliar topics. Further the analytics tests were performed on the outcomes of the students on their test results in case of the familiar texts and the unfamiliar texts. The statistical significance was found to be 0.000 which was under 0.05 this points out that the differences among the performance of the students on the familiar and the unfamiliar topics was large and it was statistically significant in favour of the performance of the students in the case of the familiar topics. Further in order to validate the findings of the test result the researcher has also did calculations to determine the Omega square value which was found around 0.729. This figure was quite high and suggests the fact there is significant difference in the test result which were obtained by the students in case of the familiar texts and in case of the unfamiliar texts.

Conclusion:

1- When the students were subjected to the tests with the familiar texts their performance improved as compared to the test outcomes when they were subjected to the unfamiliar texts.

2- The cultural familiarization also had a positive influence on reading and understanding the comprehension texts.

3- This background knowledge helped to improve the understanding of EFL students regarding the comprehension text.

4- It was also found from that the pre-reading of the comprehension was also important for the students to understand the comprehension text, but cultural knowledge and the background information were found to be more important.

5- The main implication of the findings of this research study is that the textbook writers will target the cultural knowledge and the background information which will help the EFL learners to develop the necessary cultural knowledge and the background information so that they are able to make up for the lack of the cultural familiarity when the schemata of the readers do not match with that of the writers.

6- This research study will also help the language teachers to choose which text they should choose for the students so that they are able to learn the second language in a more proper manner.

Recommendations for the Future Research

Following are recommendations for the future research studies:

1- There has to be more comprehensive study of the impact of the degree of cultural familiarity on the understanding of the comprehension texts.

2- The effectiveness of the background information has also to be further analyzed both in respect of the male and the female students so that the familiarity can be improved.

3- Future studies can also incorporate the role that is played by the cultural familiarity and the background information in the case of the improving the understanding of the comprehension texts across the different levels of second language proficiency for the Saudi students.

4- The role that is played by the familiarity in other processes of language learning such as listening, speaking and writing should also be analyzed by the future research studies.

5- The future research studies can also incorporate the impact of the other factors and schema on increasing the understanding of the comprehension text for the Saudi EFL students.

6- The future research projects attempts could also analyze which language is more important for the pre-reading so that the netter understanding of the comprehension can be achieved.

7- The future research studies could also incorporate into their research study the medium in which the pre-reading materials are presented.

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