

BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE IN EFL READING COMPREHENSION: LECTURERS' PERSPECTIVE & CLASSROOM STRATEGIES

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Abstract: This article aims to find out three main sectors related to background knowledge in reading comprehension. The lecturers' perspective about the role of background knowledge, the instructional strategies they employ to activate students' background knowledge, and the difficulties they encounter when activating students' background knowledge. The research design of this study was descriptive qualitative study. Eleven reading lecturers from five different universities in Indonesia participated in this study. Two instruments were used: an online Google Form questionnaire adapted from Al-Jahwari and Al-Humaidi (2015), and an online semi-structured interview. The researcher analyzed the summary, conclusion based on the online data from the online Google Form questionnaire and online interview session. The results of this research indicated an intense agreement about the role of background knowledge in text comprehension, a serious reliance on some techniques and a clear connection about the difficulties of resources such as students' low linguistic competence and lack of lecturers training on background knowledge theory and its instructional techniques.

Keywords: background knowledge, classroom strategies, and reading comprehension.

INTRODUCTION

As we know that reading is a very complex process which educators, psychologists, and linguists are interested for decades. Because of the complex reading process, a number of theorists are devoted to defining or developing reading models of reading process. Reading comprehension is the process of making meaning from text. The goal, therefore, is to gain an overall understanding of what is described in the text rather than to obtain meaning from isolated words or sentences (Wolley, 2011). Reading comprehension is attained through successful interaction between the reader and the text. This interaction is the major factor that plays the most important role in comprehension. Accordingly, background knowledge will be of primary importance for EFL readers. So schema-based, pre-reading activities should be used for activating such background knowledge. It is assumed that background knowledge activation requires pre-reading activities.

The concept of the role of background knowledge in reading process serves perceptions into why students might succeed or fail when comprehending text. For instance, Murray (1980) showed that schema affects reading comprehension in some ways. It affects the information recall as well as the storage information. It converts recall after reading and

seals out irrelevant information. Anderson (1994) also sure that in reading comprehension the schemata allow readers to make inferences and add some other information in the text. The readers use clues in the text and the stored knowledge in their minds to decide knotted information.

Neuman, Kaeferand and Pinkham (2014) believe that background knowledge is essential to reading comprehension; the more you know about a topic, the easier it is to read a text, understand it and retain the information. Lenski (1998) describes people as “natural synthesizers”. That means people tap into their background knowledge for experiences they have had with other texts about a similar topic. Tapping into background knowledge can also motivate a student to read a novel. Wigfield, Guthrie, Tonks, Perencevich (2004) express that motivation “is crucial to reading engagement”. When students are engaged, “they comprehend better and have strong reading outcomes than when they are not engaged”.

For this reason, the researcher is interested in conducting a research about the background knowledge on lecturers’ perspective accordingly, this research is entitled: Background Knowledge in EFL reading Comprehension: Lecturers’ perspective & Classroom Strategies.

PREVIOUS STUDY

The researcher has found some previous studies that related with this research. The first study was conducted by Alhaisoni (2017) entitled “Prior Knowledge in EFL Reading Comprehension: Native and Nonnative EFL Teachers’ Perceptions, Classroom Strategies and Difficulties Encountered.” This study investigates the perceptions of EFL native and nonnative teachers about the role of the prior knowledge in EFL reading comprehension, the instructional strategies used to activate students’ prior knowledge, and the difficulties encountered when activating students’ prior knowledge. The results showed a very strong agreement of the role of prior knowledge in text comprehension. Furthermore, teachers expressed strong agreement on the teacher’s role in fostering text comprehension with the use of students’ prior knowledge mainly by asking questions before, during and after reading, and providing students with suitable prior knowledge if they lacked it.

The second previous study is conducted by Al-Jahwari and Al-Humaidi (2015) entitled “Prior Knowledge in EFL Reading Comprehension: Omani Teachers’ Perspectives & Classroom Strategies”. The study investigated three main aspects related to prior knowledge in EFL reading comprehension in Oman: teachers' view of the role of prior knowledge, the

instructional strategies they use for activating students' prior knowledge, and the difficulties they face when activating students' prior knowledge. To this end, three instruments were used: a questionnaire, an observation checklist, and a semi-structured interview. The findings of the study showed a strong agreement of the role of prior knowledge in text comprehension.

Next study The next study was conducted by Mansor, Nurhidayah, Zuldin and Rahim (2017) this study examined the effect of background knowledge reading strategy among ESL learners as well as to identify the pre-reading strategies that are commonly used by the students. The sample comprised of 160 form one students from one of the schools in Kuala Terengganu. The quasi-experimental design was used in the study. Students were divided into experimental and controlled groups. The findings of this study had revealed that there was significant improvement in the reading comprehension performance of the lower secondary students after being exposed to activation of background knowledge reading strategy.

From those previous studies above, this research was different. This research was conducted to the qualified reading lecturers on university level in Indonesia. The researcher used qualitative method to collect the data from the participants. In addition, the researcher also focused on the lecturers' perspective of background knowledge in reading comprehension, the instructional strategies and the difficulties faced.

METHOD

This research aims to investigate the lecturers' perspective about the role of background knowledge, the instructional strategies they employ to activate students' background knowledge, and the difficulties they encounter when activating students' background knowledge. Therefore, the researcher used qualitative research as the research design. Bolderston (2006) stated that qualitative research is an approach which tries to get the insight about the social phenomena or the perspective of the participants' experience.

The participants of this study were eleven reading lecturers from five different universities in Indonesia, nine females and two males. The age of the lecturers ranges from 30 - 40 years old and they had been teaching reading for approximately 1 to 15 years of teaching period. The participants for the online interview consisted of two lecturers, one male and one female. The online interview conducted via WhatsApp messenger and the interview time is around 20 minutes for each. The interview participants were chosen because they had been teaching reading at least two courses or more and it is based on comparison above and

below 10 years teaching experience. In the interview, the researcher wants to know more about the lecturers' experiences and their opinion about background knowledge in reading comprehension.

In this research, the researcher used questionnaire questionnaire adapted from Al-Jahwari and Al-Humaidi (2015) and a semi structured online interview. The questionnaire comprises 33 items and is divided into three parts. The first one deals with teachers' view about the role of students' background knowledge in reading comprehension and the role of teachers in activating students' background knowledge. The second part deals with the strategies used by teachers to activate students' prior knowledge. The last part deals with difficulties related to background knowledge activation. The qualified and approved reading lecturers were selected to fill out the questionnaire in order to obtain the information. The researcher distributed the questionnaire via online Google Form. Then, if it was possible the researcher would conduct semi-structured interview via online video call in order to get detail information. The researcher conducted the online interview by providing question, discussion, and voice recorder. The researcher used an online Google Drive to help saving the data sources effectively which would be analyzed as the research data later.

After completing all the data collected from the questionnaire, the researcher analyzed the data. The qualitative analysis used three processes; data reducing, data displayed, and conclusion (Miles and Huberman, 1994:10).

Data Reducing was the process of selecting, abstracting and summarizing the data from the questionnaire in written notes or transcriptions. The researcher focused on the important data that had been collected, then the researcher categorized the data about the lecturers' perspective about the role of background knowledge in reading, the strategies used by lecturers and the difficulties encountered.

After reducing the data, the researcher conducted Data Displayed. The researcher described the data into the description or narrative form. After that, the researcher also analyzed the data by using some expert theories.

The last step was Conclusion. The researcher drew the conclusion based on the data displayed. After that, the researcher presented the results of the research.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

In this research, the researcher analyzed the data using percentages. According to the results of the questionnaire, the researcher found that every lecturer had his/her opinion on

the role of background knowledge in reading. However, majority of the lecturers had the same perspectives and they do agree on students who have sufficient background knowledge they can understand text better, recall information easily, read text quickly, link the ideas in the text easily, focus on main ideas, overcome limited linguistic knowledge, relate text to their own prior knowledge, predict text content easily, confirm predictions based on background knowledge. This is proven by the results of the data that students will comprehend reading text better if they have enough background knowledge. These findings appropriate with Al-Humaidi's (2015) about students will comprehend reading text better if they had sufficient background knowledge.

Part One: Lecturers' Views

In this section the researcher will discuss the views about the role of background knowledge in reading, especially students' characteristic when they have enough background knowledge.

Table 4.1 The Characteristic of Sufficient Background Knowledge

No	Answer	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree to some extent	Agree	Strongly agree
1.	Understand text better	0%	0%	0%	45.5%	54.5%
2.	Recall information easily	0%	0%	0%	45.5%	54.5%
3.	Read text quickly	0%	9%	45.5%	45.5%	0%
4.	Link the ideas in the text easily	0%	0%	0%	81.8%	18.2%
5.	Focus on main ideas	0%	0%	36.4%	45.5%	18.2%

The percentage of question number 1-5 in table 4.1 showed that most of the lecturers agree and strongly agree if students had sufficient background knowledge about the text topic they will comprehend reading better. The lecturers (45.5%) agreed and (54.5%) strongly agreed if students had enough background knowledge about text topic they could understand text better. It can be drawn that the more students understand the background knowledge they could comprehend the text better. The data number 2 showed 45.5% of the participant agreed and 54.5% strongly agreed. It can be drawn that majority of the students would be easier to recall the information about the text topic when they had enough background knowledge about the text. The next answer of number 3 showed the data about reading text quickly. Nine percent of the lecturers disagreed and said that the students would not be able to read the text quickly although they had enough background knowledge. The lecturers (45.5%) agreed and agreed to some extend that the students were able to read fast when they had sufficient background knowledge. It could be said that the students who had enough background

knowledge were able to read the text quickly. Next answer of number 4 showed that 81.8% of the participants agreed that the students could link the ideas in the text easily. It is clear that having sufficient background knowledge about the text helped the students to link the ideas in the text easily in order to have a better reading comprehension. The last answer from number 5 showed 45.5% of the participants agreed if the students could focus on main ideas if they had enough background knowledge. It can be concluded that having enough background knowledge made the students focus on main ideas about the text topic.

Table 4.2 The Characteristic of Good readers

No.	Answer	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree to some extent	Agree	Strongly agree
1.	Use their personal knowledge of the topic of the text to make sense of the text.	0%	0%	9.1%	54.5%	36.4%
2.	Are able to activate their prior knowledge to create meaning of the text.	0%	0%	9.1%	63.6%	27.3%
3.	Use text's title, illustrations and other clues to predict the content.	0%	0%	9.1%	36.4%	54.5%
4.	Use the directions provided by the text to construct meaning.	0%	0%	18.2%	63.6%	18.2%

The good readers must have several characteristics to be mastered in order to comprehend the text better and in this chapter the researcher will describe what it takes to be the good readers.

The table above showed about the views of good readers. In answer number 1, the result showed 9.1% of the participants agreed to some extent but 54.5% of the participants agreed and 36.4% of the participants answered strongly agree. It can be drawn that the good readers used their personal knowledge of the text topic to make sense of the text. Next, in answer number 2 showed 9.1% of the participants agreed to some extent and 63.6% of the participants agreed if good readers were able to create meaning of the text. From all the data above, it can be concluded that the good readers were able to activate their prior knowledge to create meaning of the text. Next, the answer number 3 is about using text's title, illustrations and other clues to predict the content. Various answers were gained by the researcher therefore, 36.4% of the participants agreed and 54.6% of the participants strongly agreed if text's title, illustrations and other clues would help students to predict text content. It can be drawn that the good readers used text's title, illustrations and other clues to predict the content. Next, the answer number 4 showed that the participants 18.2% agreed to some extent, 63.6% agreed and 18.2% strongly agreed if the good readers used the directions

provided by the text to develop meaning. It can be concluded that the directions given by the text to draw up meaning were used by the good readers and guide them to comprehend the text better.

Table 4.3 The Role of Lecturer

No.	Answer	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree to some extent	Agree	Strongly agree
1.	Provide students with appropriate background knowledge	0%	0%	18.2%	45.5%	36.4%
2.	Activate available prior knowledge	0%	0%	0%	54.5%	45.5%
3.	Identify the absence of knowledge	0%	0%	18.2%	63.6%	18.2%
4.	Raise students' awareness of the role of prior knowledge	0%	0%	0%	72.7%	27.3%
5.	Ask questions before, during and after reading	0%	0%	9%	45.5%	45.5%
6.	Encourage students to summarize what they have read	0%	0%	9.1%	54.5%	36.4%
7.	Elicit background information related to the reading topic	0%	0%	18.2%	63.6%	18.2%

The table above showed the data about the role of the teacher in reading comprehension to foster text comprehension with the use of students' background knowledge. The results of research from number 1 showed if it is important for lecturers to provide students with appropriate background knowledge. The participants (18.2%) agreed to some extent and 45.5% of the participants agreed to provide appropriate background knowledge. It can be concluded that providing students with appropriate background knowledge is important for lecturers in teaching reading. Number 2 answers showed 54.5% of the participants agreed if the lecturers should be able to activate available prior knowledge and 45.5% of lecturers strongly agreed about it. It can be said that activating available prior knowledge made the students easier and comprehend reading text better. Next, the answer number 3 is around 63.6% of the respondents agreed if it is important for the lecturers to identify the absence of knowledge in order to foster text comprehension with the use of students' background knowledge.

The next is the answer from number 4, around 72.7% of the respondents agreed to raise students' awareness of the role of prior knowledge. It can be said that it is important for teachers to improve students' awareness about the role of prior knowledge. The answer number 5 showed that asking questions before, during and after reading to the students become important for the teachers in teaching reading. It can be seen from the data that

45.5% of the participants agreed and the rest 45.5% of the participants strongly agreed. Answer number 6 showed that 54.5% of the participants agreed and the rest 36.4% strongly agreed if it is important to encourage students to summarize what they have read. Making summarizing from the text made the students easier and guide them to understand also memorize well about the text topic. The last answer from number 7, it is important for lecturers to elicit background information related to the reading topic. When students obtain background information related to the reading topic, they can understand well about the text topic. As shown by the data that 63.6% of the lecturers agreed and the rest 18.2% of them strongly agreed.

Part Two: The Instructional Practices.

Strategy is an important thing in teaching. How good we use the strategy will determine the learning result. Here are the several strategies that help the lecturer in activating students' background knowledge in text comprehension.

Table 4.4 The Instructional Strategies

No	Answer	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1.	Brainstorming the text topic	27.3%	54.5%	27.3%	0%	0%
2.	Class discussion about text topic	36.4%	63.6%	9.1%	0%	0%
3.	Organize the ideas on the board under headings to create relationships	9.1%	27.3%	45.5%	18.2%	0%
4.	Call students' attention to specific signal words, main idea, sentences, highlighted phrases, headings and subtitles	54.5%	27.3%	18.2%	0%	0%
5.	List some statements on the board that are related to the reading topic to guide students' reading	0%	45.5%	36.4%	18.2%	0%

The table above showed the data about the instructional strategies use by the lecturers in reading comprehension and how often they use the strategies to activate students' background knowledge in text comprehension. The results of research from number 1 showed 27.3% of the participants always used brainstorming strategy and 54.5% of the participants usually used it. It can be said that most of the lecturers usually used brainstorming to activate students' background knowledge. In number 2 it is clear that the lecturers 63.6% usually used class discussion about text topic and the rest 36.4% of the lecturers always used it to foster the activation of students' background knowledge. Answer

number 3 showed that 45.5% of the lecturers sometimes organized the ideas to create relationship between prior knowledge and background knowledge of the students. The answers number 4 showed that the lecturers called students' attention to specific signal words, main idea, sentences, highlighted phrases, headings and subtitles to activate students' background knowledge in text comprehension. It is 54.5% of the lecturers always applied that. Next number 5 showed that 45.5% of the lecturers usually listed some statements on the board that are related to the reading topic to guide students' reading in text comprehension, and 36.4% of the lecturers sometimes did that.

Part Three: Difficulties Related to Background Knowledge Activation.

Difficulty is a problem faced by a people when they are doing something. In educational field, especially teaching reading, the lecturers will face several problems and they have to be able to fix it. Here are some problems that mostly faced by lecturers in teaching reading.

Table 4.5 The Activation Difficulties

No	Answer	Strongly agree	Agree	Agree to some extent	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1.	Lack of knowledge about the role of background knowledge	18.2%	27.3%	36.4%	9.1%	9.1%
2.	Lack of knowledge about its instructional implications	27.3%	27.3%	27.3%	18.2%	0%
3.	Lack of training on a variety of techniques	9.1%	27.3%	45.5%	18.2%	0%

The table above showed the data about the difficulties related to background knowledge activation in text comprehension. The results of research from number 1 showed 27.3% of the lecturers agreed and 36.4% agreed to some extent if lecturers lacked of knowledge about the role of background knowledge. It became one of the biggest problems faced by the lecturers. It can be said that most of the lecturers agreed to some extent that the problem of activation is lack of knowledge about the role of background knowledge.

Next, number 2, the lack of knowledge about its instructional implications became the next problem faced by lecturers. The participants (27.3%) voted strongly agree, agree and agree to some extent. But, 18.2% of the participants disagreed about it. It can be said that the lecturers did not know how the instructional intention to help the activation of students' background knowledge.

The research data from number 3 showed that lack of training on a variety of techniques that prevent lecturers from activating students' background knowledge. Around 45.5% of the lecturers agreed to some extent and 27.3% of them agreed. It can be concluded that sometimes lack of training on variety of techniques became the problem for lecturers in teaching reading, especially when activating students' background knowledge.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The purpose of this study is to find out the lecturers' perspectives about background knowledge in EFL reading comprehension and classroom strategies. The research design of this study was descriptive qualitative research. The study was conducted in five different universities in Indonesia. The participants of this study were seven reading lecturers of University of Islam Malang, one lecturers of STAIN Tulungagung, one lecturer of STAIN Kediri, one lecturer of UIN Malang, and one lecturer of Kalimantan State University. In total the researcher had eleven research participants. The instrument that used in this research was Google Form online questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of three parts. The first part, there were nine questions about the views of the role of the background knowledge, four questions about views of good readers and seven questions about views the role of the lecturer. The second part, there were ten questions about the instructional practices. The third part, there were three questions about the difficulties related to background knowledge activation. In total the researcher have thirty three online questions.

The data were analyzed by using percentage in a table and the result of the research showed that every lecturer had their own view on background knowledge in reading comprehension. However, majority of the lecturers had the same perspectives and they do agree on students who have sufficient background knowledge they can understand text better, recall information easily, read text quickly, link the ideas in the text easily, focus on main ideas, overcome limited linguistic knowledge, relate text to their own prior knowledge, predict text content easily, confirm predictions based on background knowledge. This is proven by the results of the data that students will comprehend reading text better if they have enough background knowledge.

To foster text comprehension with the use of students' background knowledge, it is important for lecturers to provide students with appropriate background knowledge, activate available prior knowledge, identify the absence of knowledge, raise students' awareness of the role of background knowledge, ask questions before, during and after reading, encourage students to summarize what they have read, and elicit background information related to the reading topic.

The last part of this research was about the difficulties related to background knowledge activation. There were three problems were faced by lecturers. The first problem was lack of knowledge about the role of background knowledge. It can be inferred that lack of knowledge about the role of background knowledge was one of the difficulties faced by teachers in encouraging students' background knowledge. The second was lack of knowledge about its instructional implications. And the last was lack of training on a variety of techniques. The result of this study indicated that although teachers had been teaching reading for some long periods of time, they still had the difficulties in activating student' background knowledge in reading comprehension.

According to the results of this study, the researcher expects that the result of this study can be the additional information for the future researchers who are interested to conduct the study in similar topic. The researcher also realized that this research has some limitations, therefore the researcher highly expects that the future researcher can explore more deeply about this topic.

Next, It is known that the students still have the problem in reading comprehension. Thus, it is important for the teachers or lecturers to focus on teaching of reading. It means that they have to emphasize the aspect of determining the proper explanations and exercises in teaching and learning process especially learn more about teaching technique variety in order to activate students' background knowledge better. The teachers also can apply the various strategies found from this research in order to assist them in teaching reading.

The last, the researcher highly expects that the students can use the results of this study to pay more attention in learning and understanding the role of background knowledge in reading comprehension. The students can also apply the various strategies found in this research in order to help them in reading.

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