
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Investigating the Influence of Cultural Background Knowledge on Reading Ability among Arabic Speaking EFL Learners in a Saudi College

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| ABSTRACT

Reading skills are the most prominent skills in language learning, particularly in foreign language learning (FLL). It is one of the essential elements in language learning that needs mastery to grasp the required comprehension. Prior knowledge and cultural background greatly influence comprehension processes. Students may comprehend information better when they are culturally familiar with the information. With this assumption, the present study investigates the impact of cultural background knowledge on reading ability among English as Foreign Language Learners (EFL). The study adopts an experimental hypothesis-testing method between two groups of students-control and the testing group. The research adopts Schema Theory and its role in easing reading comprehension among the target EFL learners. The participants belong to the entry level in a Saudi college at Wadi Addawasir. The control group of students is given a comprehension passage based on foreign culture, while the testing group is given an Arabic culture-based passage. The results reveal that the testing group of students performs better than the control group of students. Therefore, the study concludes by recommending the introduction of course books with cultural background information among the students from Applied College at Wadi Addawaser affiliated with Prince Sattam Bin AbdulAziz University.

| KEYWORDS

Reading Skills Foreign Language Learning (FLL) English as a Foreign Language Learners (EFL); Schemata Theory; Testing method...

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

Reading fluency in English has long been regarded as the most crucial of the four language skills for academic success. The goal of reading research has always been to pinpoint the characteristics that distinguish proficient readers from less proficient ones based on reading behaviors and components. Reading skills are the aptitude for reading, comprehending, interpreting, and decoding written language and texts. Outstanding reading abilities can be very helpful in understanding and responding to written communications, including emails, messages, letters, and other written correspondence.

Saudi Arabia's large, transient international labor force and visitors from around the world have caused English to emerge as a lingua franca for communication between Saudis and the multiethnic, multilingual, non-Arab expatriate community working for Saudi official and non-official establishments. In Saudi Arabia, English is taught as a foreign language and as a compulsory subject from grade seven onwards. Many universities and colleges in Saudi Arabia offer English language courses, both as standalone courses and as part of degree programs.

The social and political landscape of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has undergone great changes in recent years, and due to this development, the need to continue teaching English and modernizing current facilities is required to maintain global standards.

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This idea is supported by Al-Nofaie (2010), who further underlines the importance of learning a second language, in particular English, for the transfer of knowledge from one community to another because of the importance of globalization. Along with transferring knowledge, people are able to communicate their regional cultures and traditions more efficiently to a foreign audience (Assulaimani, 2019).

The English language has various forms, such as British English, American English, or Australasian English (Jenkins, 2009); however, regardless of these different types, English is taught as an International Language (EIL) in Saudi Arabia's secondary schools. This study addresses the significance of the English language in Saudi Arabia and also presents an introduction to the definition of a variety of English and its relevance to Saudi Arabia's secondary schools. Afterward, the study gives an account of what EIL is and its significance for Saudi Arabia.

1.1 Importance of English Language for Saudi Students

In Saudi Arabia, English is taught as a foreign language and as a compulsory subject from grade seven onwards. Unfortunately, there has been a culture in which Saudi students choose to learn English as a "gap filler," which is a redundant subject studied for advancing to the forthcoming year. This culture has fortunately been changing for the past few years as more students have chosen to learn English for academic and employment-related purposes (Mahibur, 2011). There has been a non-stop effort by the government of Saudi Arabia in aid with certain experts who try to provide students with a suitable curriculum, depending on their level of development. Moreover, the decision makers have decided for a long time to teach British English and American English in the curriculum (Khan, 2011).

A study suggested that the education system in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is improving rapidly; however, this is not true for learners of English as a foreign language (Mahibur and Alhaisoni, 2013). As a result, emphasis has been put on improving the education system to supply a more widespread and efficient method for teaching English as a foreign language. One movement has been to introduce compulsory English language learning from class six onwards to the university level. The Ministry of Education suggested that they may reduce it to class four with the intention of encouraging students to start learning English at an early age (Mahibur and Alhaisoni, 2013).

The expectation of students who learn English as a foreign language (EFL) is to participate in the sharing of knowledge with colleagues across the globe. This knowledge is expected to take all forms, such as technological, scientific, cultural, and financial (Liton, 2012). The importance of finding a job is also an encouraging factor for students learning English as a foreign language, as language skills are moving from desirable skills to essential skills in obtaining employment in both public and private sectors (Mahibur, 2011).

Alqurashi (2011) conducted a survey on a number of students who learned English as a foreign language. He found out that the majority of participants wanted to learn English for communication purposes with people all over the world. Alqurashi also reported that some students were learning English in order to travel abroad for academic, business, and tourism purposes. Mahibur and Alhaisoni (2013) supported similar ideas. They tried to outline specifically how students learn the language.

They pointed out that the student must obtain basic language skills for international communication goals. The students must be encouraged to develop a positive attitude towards learning English. This would help them obtain the required linguistic proficiency in different settings such as social, academic, or business.

This could also help the students tackle cultural and social issues within their society and involve them in inter-faith discussions with people from all over the world. Moreover, being linguistically proficient in English to enhance concepts such as international cooperation would develop the understanding between nations with cultural differences (Elyas and Al-Ghamdi, 2018).

In reference to the global community, Saudi Arabia is the center of the second-largest religion-Islam- in the world. Thus, it is important for Saudi Arabia's students to acquire English in order to communicate with foreign pilgrims who come to Saudi Arabia for religious festivals and ceremonies (Parris, Estrada, and Honigsfeld, 2018). This is important both on an economic scale and on a social scale. For the economy, as pilgrims come to Saudi Arabia, local businesses can gain the market by offering quality products to the traveling pilgrims at a fair price.

Reading in an additional language requires a cultural background specific to the type of text for learners to comprehend. The comprehension of English texts will depend on the availability of cultural schema on that particular content of the text. If the texts are not familiar to the learners, comprehension can fail. It may not always be practicable for learners of English as an additional language to comprehend every text like their counterparts, that is, those who use English both at home and at school. English language in schools assesses certain standards, and learners are required to reach certain levels or achieve certain outcomes. This

is sometimes not applicable because learners hail from different home backgrounds; hence, different approaches to reading and interpretation of texts occur.

Both linguists and anthropologists have described the concept of culture as a pattern of behaviour and others as a pattern of thought and feelings. Harris (1993:3) mentions that culture can be continued by means of enculturation and diffusion, where enculturation is the passing of cultural traits from one culture to the other. Culture is, therefore, pertaining to a particular society. The language a particular society uses forms part of its culture. It is thought that the readers' cultures can affect everything from the way readers view reading itself, the content and formal.

Schema they hold, right down to their understanding of individual concepts. It is apparent that language is interwoven with culture. The culture that a learner acquires from home will be part of the background that he brings into the learning environment.

Al-Issa (2006:41) mentions that the reader brings information, knowledge, emotions, and culture into a text. A text on its own does not carry meaning. When a reader and writer share cultural assumptions and knowledge about social systems and rituals, there is a much higher level of interaction of the reader with the text than occurs when such assumptions and knowledge are not shared.

The new view of reading places emphasis on the process rather than the product of comprehension; it also places the learner at the center of the whole reading process. He mentions that the process in which the learner searches for information is interactive in that the learners' prior knowledge and experience continuously interact with the information in the reading process. Comprehension refers not only to the process of reading but also, more specifically, to the quality of reading comprehension.

1.2 The Schema Theory

This study looked at the extent to which cultural background could influence comprehension of English texts read by learners of English as an additional language. Language cannot be divorced from culture, so it is important to note that when learners learn a language, culture is also acquired. This study is theoretical in nature since it is informed by the schema theory, which illustrates that background knowledge is important in the comprehension of texts. Schema theory is the process by which readers combine their own background knowledge with the information in a text to comprehend that text. He states that all readers carry different schemata (background information), and these are also often culture-specific. Huang (2006:139) describes schemata as cognitive constructs that allow for the organization of information in long-term memory. He distinguishes between content schema and formal schema.

Content schema is the readers' background or world knowledge that provides readers with a foundation, a basis for comparison. It is also called cultural orientation. Formal schemata, often known as textual schema, refers to the organizational form and rhetorical structures of written texts. Cultural schema, in particular, is a factor that influences the learning of languages such as English as an additional language. According to Marshall (2001:81), schemata function as a checklist for the readers. The readers use the schemata to confirm that they have understood the message in the text. Thus, schemata are crucial to comprehension. This is an important concept in English for foreign language teaching because, in the process of reading, comprehension of texts entails drawing information from both the texts and the internal schemata. The reading process involves the identification of genre, formal structure, and topic, all of which activate schemata and allow readers to comprehend the text. He explains that readers sometimes feel that they comprehend the text but have a different interpretation from the author.

Lyons (1981:329) states that someone from a different cultural background might interpret the statements differently from implied meaning. Carrell and Eisterhold (1983:80) point out that the most obvious reason why a particular content schema may fail to exist for a reader is that the schema is culturally specific and is not part of a particular reader's cultural background.

1.3 Culture in Language Pedagogy

Culture can be defined from an individual's viewpoint. Culture includes various dimensions of society. It includes the way of living, dress, food variations, local traditions, moral values, etc. Broadly speaking, culture is an environment created by humans.

Culture and language obviously cannot be separated. One always reflects the other in the form of many different aspects. Rajabi and Kertabi (2012) identify culture as systems of knowledge, such as values, beliefs, attitudes, notions of appropriate behavior, statuses, role expectations, and worldviews shared by a group of people.

Many researchers have discussed the issue of cultural integration in language pedagogy. One of them is the view that suggests that target language culture should be used in English language teaching to introduce language learners to the cultures of English speaking countries (Byram and Flemming, 1998). In this case, students would spend the majority of their time reading and discovering life in native-English-speaking countries, such as the United States, Great Britain, and Australia. However, there seems

to be less encouragement to promote target cultural content in teaching materials, and there is a growing recognition of the importance of including the local or source culture (McKay, 2003).

To elucidate the roles of culture in language learning and teaching, it is necessary to demonstrate the functions of culture in the components of language learning and teaching, for example, listening, speaking, writing, and reading. Language is the provider of culture, and vocabulary is the basic substance of language. Cultural differences will undoubtedly be exhibited in the vocabulary, and the description of vocabulary will also emulate the national or cultural differences.

Reading is known as a process of interaction among the reader, the text, and the context. Reading is an active process by which the readers interact with the text to reconstruct the message of the author. In addition, Nunan (2003) defines reading as a fluent process of readers combining information from a text and their background knowledge to build meaning. Based on this definition, the author believes that when the readers recognize the topic of reading, it will result in students' positive attitudes toward reading, and the process of combining the information from the text with their background knowledge will be easier.

1.4 Familiarity with Local Culture-Based Reading Materials

Mahabadi (2013) studied the role of localized materials in the learning of EFL students in Iran. The study concluded that the localization of materials would be beneficial to learners as it would make the materials more familiar and, thus, more entertaining for them. Erten and Razi (2009) conducted a study on the effects of cultural familiarity on reading comprehension. The study has two conclusions: first, cultural familiarity promotes comprehension; second, although reading activities stimulate schematic knowledge and encourage strategic reading behaviors, the influence of cultural familiarity remains unchanged.

1.5 The purpose of the study

The purpose of the current study is to investigate how learners' understanding of their cultural background affects their performance in reading comprehension. The need for a study that can do the following was highlighted by the dearth of adequate research on the precise role that linguistic knowledge plays in reading comprehension, as well as the severe limitations of the few studies that have been done.

1. Assess the cultural knowledge of the student to determine its precise contribution to each area of reading comprehension as well as its overall role. (Mecarty, 1994; Dwaik, 1997)
2. Distinguish between evaluating students' knowledge and text comprehension in order to depart from the traditional method of gauging their understanding of the language's linguistic components. He states that answers to the study's questions should also result in the following outcomes:
3. Because this study identifies the critical factors influencing students' achievement in reading comprehension, it is expected to be beneficial to English teachers.
4. It is projected to help students improve their level of reading comprehension.
5. It is anticipated to support and highlight the kinds of texts that should be included in textbooks for those creating English language curricula.

1.6 Statement of the Research Problem

The need to explain and take into account a wide range of processes and factors adds to the complexity of the phenomenon of studying foreign language comprehension. The knowledge that the reader brings to the process is one of the many variables. Strong comprehension skills are known to help readers understand the material they read. Faraj, 1998: 53).

Of the four skills that require development, reading is probably the one that is tested the least and practiced the most. However, there are a few things to be aware of because testing reading can be difficult. Conventional reading evaluations, for instance, frequently employ short prose sections and pose general comprehension queries. These often do not cover the variety of texts that test-takers may encounter or the range of reading skills that are necessary.

1.7 Knowledge of Cultural Background

Students' comprehension of what they read and the amount of knowledge they pick up are greatly influenced by culture. Culture is defined as "a historically unique configuration of the residue of the collective problem-solving activities of a social group in its efforts to survive and prosper within its environment." A person's culture is the result of a dynamic fusion of their unique identity and experiences throughout their life (Trainor & Robertson, 2022).

Culture is difficult to operationalize because it is so pervasive, complex, and shaped by personal experiences. It is possible to investigate the influence of culture on educational outcomes by using demographic identity markers as stand-ins for culture within

social systems (Trainor & Robertson, 2022). For example, Garth-McCullough (2008) investigated the effects of culturally bound prior knowledge on African American students' reading comprehension of texts that were similar and dissimilar to their culture. The results suggest that culturally bound prior knowledge plays a major role in aiding the comprehension of African American students, particularly those in medium- and low-skill reading groups.

In a similar vein, Kelley et al. (2015) found that among a Latinx population, students' self-efficacy improved in tandem with improved comprehension scores for texts that were culturally familiar. These findings align with a more thorough comprehension of how past knowledge improves reading comprehension. Even though it's not ideal, using demographic identity markers to analyze culture allows us to assess educational practices critically and pinpoint the ways that various cultural groups are impacted in unique ways (Artiles, 2019).

Tsai (2007) asserts that reading is a cultural act, particularly when it comes to narrative reading. When reading stories, students are drawn into a world of culture that may resemble or differ from their own (Galda & Beach, 2001).

The reader's reading comprehension outcomes are influenced by how closely the text's cultural world and their own cultural background match. Thus, it can be concluded that culture has an impact on reading comprehension because a student who is more familiar with the text's culture will likely comprehend it more thoroughly (Snow, 2018).

It is the responsibility of educators to serve as intermediaries between the cultural worlds of their students and the text, bridging gaps between them (Gay, 2018). Culturally responsive practices are intended to support teachers in their role as mediators.

According to some research, narrative texts may be more influenced by cultural knowledge than explanatory texts (Dray, 2018). While the comprehension of narrative texts may be influenced by the reader's grasp of the social norms surrounding the text's characters, the comprehension of expository texts may be influenced by the reader's knowledge of the subject matter being presented (e.g., shared knowledge, motivations, and common social experiences, Dray, 2018).

2. Background of the Study

Instructors ought to acknowledge the distinct distinctions among pupils according to the culture to which they belong. In addition, they need to be extremely sensitive and culturally qualified to respond when instructing students on various cultures.

It is actually important that administrators and curriculum designers collaborate to spread knowledge about cultural competence to teachers, students, and other supporters of cultural awareness at the highest possible level.

In teaching and learning, the reading process seems contentious and important. Numerous studies have been conducted on the process of reading in both the mother tongue and the foreign language, the challenges involved in reading a foreign language, and the related characteristics and problems of these languages. An examination of the problems preventing reading is necessary. English is considered a foreign language in Saudi Arabia, and this study investigates the issues that hinder the learners' reading abilities and skills. The principal concern has been the challenges faced by the learners and the solutions.

Hypothesis

H1- The Influence of cultural Knowledge affects EFL learners' reading ability.

H2- The cultural background knowledge helps the reading ability among the EFL learners

H3- There are many differences between English and Saudi Arabian culture.

2.1 Schema Theory

One of the fundamental theories of learning that is used in the teaching and learning of language skills is schema theory. In this sense, the philosopher Kant (1781) and the British psychologist Bartlett (1932) are credited with coining the term schema. The idea of schema was employed by philosopher Kant (1781). He proposed that ideas could only make sense to someone if they were connected to something they already understood. In other words, the person has broad notions to which he alludes to more detailed concepts. Rumelhalt (1980) subsequently introduced the term in reading. In a similar spirit, the schema theory makes the assumption that written texts lack meaning on their own.

Rather, a text offers suggestions to readers about how they should interpret the text using the knowledge they have already learned. This previous information is referred to as the readers' schema or background knowledge, and it is essential to the comprehension process. From this angle, schema can be understood as the relationship between mental structures that indicate how readers understand commonplace activities (Brown, 2001; Harmer, 2001; Nassaji, 2013) also emphasizes the part that schema

theory plays in reading comprehension. She suggests that a reader participates in the process of creating meaning by interacting with textual elements and relevant schemata.

2.2 Schema Theory and its Implication on Teaching Reading Comprehension

Many investigators conducted various experimental studies, and the results demonstrated that the theory makes a substantial contribution to students' reading skill development. Previous knowledge helps the reader set expectations for the text and aids in its comprehension and interpretation. This study examines the literature on the impact of cultural schemata on EFL learners' reading comprehension.

Gagné, Yarbrough, Ueidemann, and Bell conducted a study in 1985 to examine how text familiarity affects memory recall. They found out from this experiment that they were able to learn and remember information in a meaningful way and that they were able to understand the reader's explanation of very familiar passages. To absorb the information more effectively, they read in Arabic. Thus, to comprehend a text, appropriate cultural schemata and scripts are considered necessary.

2.3 Research Questions

The present research study attempts to answer the following research questions.

1. Does the cultural familiarity of EFL learners affect the process of reading comprehension?
2. Does the lack of cultural background knowledge of EFL learners affect their reading comprehension ability?
3. Does the learners' familiarity with the cultural context affect their comprehension of the text?

2.4 Limits of the Study

The researcher acknowledges the following limitations of the study. For the academic year 2024, this study only includes Prince Sattam Bin AbdulAziz University first-year Applied College students. The subjects' reading comprehension skills were assessed using just one kind of test, a multiple-choice exam. It was not possible to extrapolate the study's findings beyond these bounds. The subjects are all non-native English speakers. Only other comparable circumstances could be used to extrapolate the study's findings.

2.4.1 Participants

The participants are 60 Foreign Language Learners (FLL) belonging to Applied College affiliated with Prince Sattam Bin AbdulAziz University (PSAU) at Wadi Addawasir in Saudi Arabia. They are divided into two different groups- Group A (30) administered **the** General English Reading Test, and Group B (30) attempted **the** Arab Culture Reading Test to reveal the differences between the two groups' performance.

2.4.2 Design

The research used in the present study has been with an experimental design. In this design, the existing groups with their own specific cultural background were compared to their performance in two different passages based on General English and Arab Culture passages. The study intends to reveal the reading easiness of students' performance in their own culture based passages comparatively better than the other group students' performance in General English based passages.

2.5 Significance of the Study

The study is important from a theoretical, social, and educational standpoint. It can be pertinent to the education community, particularly language policy makers, as it is ingrained in the study of cultural and linguistic issues. Additionally, it can help English teachers and contribute to future research on comprehension, the connection between language and culture, and the schema theory.

3. Literature Review

As a subset of background and topic knowledge, cultural knowledge has been highlighted by many academics as being important for understanding texts. Cultural models, also called cultural schemas, are schematic representations of concepts that are shared by members of a particular culture.

Because the target language and the native tongue have different cultures, EFL learners need to understand the literature on a cultural level. For example, reading the sentence "I found coal in my stocking, cocked the tree over which started a fire, and my grandfather wore a red suit" will be challenging for someone who was not raised in American culture.

The degree of difficulty of the authentic material is evaluated, which may add to students' workload and stress levels when it comes to understanding the texts. Then, troublesome problems like superfluous vocabulary words and complex linguistic structures turn

into extra disadvantages of having actual reading materials. They asserted that simplification would be one possible tactic to address the previous disputes. This paradigm states that producing comprehensible input can be achieved effectively through language simplification.

The schema theory maintains that relevant information from other sources, real travels, and personal experiences is supported by the following concepts. Students are more likely to be interested in topics related to their home, community, or source culture than in those related to the target culture. This is consistent with McKay's (2003) suggestion that exposure to source/local culture can encourage students to develop a deeper comprehension of their own culture, enabling them to discuss it with friends from other countries when speaking English. Several studies have shown that having a cultural acquaintance improves one's comprehension of what they read.

It is now challenging for foreign language instructors and students to assist each other in using English. English is widely used in schools as a language for teaching and learning. Talking in the language one feels most at ease in enables people to communicate coherently and understandably. Given that their comprehension of information differs from that of native English speakers.

Learners of the English language do not have equal access to information. Their background's cultural content would either aid or impede their ability to understand the texts. In reality, individuals who are learning English as a second language carry with them a plethora of cultural background knowledge about their native tongues. There is no other way for them to just ignore them when they start learning English.

It's one thing to learn English texts related to a subject; it's another to learn texts that are influenced by English culture. Numerous ethnolinguistic research projects have been conducted to investigate the ways in which the cultural background of English language learners influences their comprehension of English texts. Creating literature to bolster this is the aim of this chapter. It aims to illustrate the fundamental ideas of comprehension and culture.

Everybody is affected by the idea of culture. Each person has a culture that influences how they interpret the situation they are in at any given time. Haviland (1996:32) claims that the term "culture" was first used by anthropologists towards the end of the 1800s. British anthropologist Sir Edward Burnett Taylor offered the first comprehensive and accurate definition of culture in 1871. He defined it as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, law, morals, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man or member of society." Since Taylor's time, definitions of culture have expanded, claims Haviland (1996:32). The anthropologists Kroeber and Kluckhohn in North America were able to gather over a hundred definitions of culture. From published works by the early 1950s.

According to Kriger and Zegeye (2001:45), the word "culture" comes from the Latin verb "colo, colere," which meaning "to tend," "look," or "live in a place." The past perfect participle of the word "colo," which is where the actual word "culture" originates, can be used to describe the state of some business or the act of tending, maintaining, and residing in a location. This is significant because, when one thinks of culture, one might conjure images of a specific group of people's way of life. Culture is specific to a group of people and is not something that one is born with. According to Harris (1993:104), behaviour, in addition to thought and emotion patterns, make up the definition of culture. According to him, culture is a way of thinking because it encompasses both the behaviour and the ideas that people have in their heads.

Harris (1993:325) states that culture consists of socially acquired ways of thinking, feeling, and acting of the members of a particular society. This idea is supported by Haviland (1996:32) that a set of rules or standards shared by members of a society, which, when acted upon by the members, produce behaviour that falls within a range of variations the members consider proper and acceptable.

Therefore, a society's culture is one of its characteristics. According to Lyons (1981:02), culture is the knowledge that an individual possesses simply by virtue of belonging to a specific society.

4. Methodology

To investigate the viability of the previously mentioned research inquiries, empirical investigations were conducted within the English language teaching division to examine the relationship between cultural familiarity and schema activation and learners' reading comprehension abilities.

4.1 Procedures of the study

The researchers attained the permission of the head of the department to conduct the research with first-year EFL students.

4.2 General Reading Test

The reading passage is extracted from a book entitled *Interactions- Reading*, written by Pamela Hartmann and Elaine Kirn. This test consists of three different sections, namely, complete the sentences, True or False statements, and multiple choice queries based on a general passage extracted. The passages were all about general topics. This test served as a test to identify whether the participants found it to comprehend completely new background reading passages or not so that the researchers could generalize any possible differences between the groups to the role of cultural familiarity.

4.3 Culture Specific Test

A reading comprehension test consisting of an Arab culture-based reading passage extracted from an Arabic passage, the book entitled, was written by Abbas Al-Akkad. It consists of three different sections, namely True or False statements, choose the best, and match pictures with phrases.

4.4 Advantages of Culture Based Vocabulary

Every language has a unique vocabulary with distinctive characteristics. However, the meaning is also connected to the regional culture. The way a word is used in context matters more than when it is taught in isolation using translations and dictionary definitions, as the context can help students grasp concepts more fully. Internet resources are a valuable tool for drawing comparisons between the two cultural contexts. While the goal of a reading lesson should be to meet the vocabulary targets, using images to help create a familiar environment can be helpful as well.

Teachers use a variety of tactics, such as translation, visual aids, and contextualizing new vocabulary with the aid of online resources, when a target text has too many technical terms for the intended audience. Context-based learning is one of the methods of teaching reading through a simple but pertinent dialogue in order to ensure the vocabulary is known.

Selecting pertinent resources that don't conflict with the local way of life is crucial. The text that follows serves as an illustration of how to teach English using regional resources.

4.5 As an illustration:

In Saudi Arabian cuisine, staple foods include rice, bread, lamb, chicken, yoghurt, potatoes, and dates. Falafel and Shawarma are two popular dishes that have Levantine and Egyptian origins, respectively. These two dishes serve as illustrations of how foreign residents have influenced Saudi Arabian cuisine. Typically, yoghurt is blended into a beverage known as "Laban."

For thousands of years, the Arabian people have eaten the same kind of food. Along with rice and chicken or lamb, some Arabs also consume some dry fruit and boiled eggs. Oranges are also consumed by some people.

Some of the most well-known foods in Saudi Arabia and the Arab world at large are as follows: Asidaa, Harisaah, Mutabbaq, Haneeth, Hininy, Mande'e, Mansaf, Jalamah, Qursan, Kabsa, Khameer, Markook, etc. Kabsa (rice and mutton) Dajaj-mandi, or rice and chicken fried seafood Al-baik-broast

4.6 General English Reading Test

4.6.1 Education in Japan and Britain

4.6.1.1 Japan

Education is highly valued in Japan. This is demonstrated by a statistic that shows how important education is to the Japanese people: 88% of all students finish both primary and high school. All students in public schools are taught the same curriculum and are treated equally; they are also free. It is socially significant that a student graduate from college, especially from "the right university." In order to accomplish this, students must endure "examination hell." All universities, many of the better primary and secondary schools, and even some kindergartens require challenging entrance exams. Japanese students require a great deal of self-control to give up hobbies, sports, and other extracurricular activities in order to make time for their studies and social life. Results of these exams affect the entire family because there is high status, or social position, for the whole family when the children have high test scores.

4.6.1.2 Britain

In the United Kingdom (Britain), the educational system reflects the class system. All state schools-primary, secondary, and universities are free, and the first nine years are egalitarian; all students learn the same material. At age eleven, students take an important national exam. After this, they attend one of three possible secondary schools: college preparatory, vocational (for job training), or comprehensive (with both groups of students). However, 6 percent of British students attend expensive private schools. These are students from upper-class families. Half of the students at Oxford and Cambridge universities come from such expensive secondary schools. It might seem that anyone can afford to go to a university because all universities are free, but only 1 percent of the lower class goes to university. Because graduates from good universities get the best jobs, it is clear that success is largely a result of one's social class.

4.6.2 General English Test

4.6.2.1 Choose the best

- "One statistic reflects this. "what does **statistic** mean?
a. Anecdote b. Quantitative c. Data Individual d. Data Observation
- "The Japanese value education highly." what does **value** mean?
a- Importance or worth b- Regardless c- Worthlessness d. Devaluation
- "Results of these exams affect the entire family because there is high status." what does **status** mean?
a. Obscurity b. Position c. Anonymity d. Inferiority
- "The first nine years are egalitarian" what does **egalitarian** mean?
a. Equalitarian b. Hierarchical c. Elitist d. Authoritarian
- "It might seem that anyone can afford to go to a university" what does **afford** mean?
a. Deprive b. Capable c. Lack d. Forbid
- "They attend one of three possible secondary schools: college preparatory, vocational," what does **vocational** mean:
a. Academic b-.Theoretical c. Occupational d. Non-occupational

4.6.2.2 Tick either TRUE or FALSE

- In Britain, at age nine, students take an important national exam: True/False.
- In Britain, students from upper-class families attend expensive private schools: True/False.
- In public Japanese schools, students do not have to pay: True/False
- In Britain, 88 percent of all students complete high school True/False
- In Britain, only 1 percent of the lower class goes to university. True/False
- The Japanese students are disciplined; they use their time for studying True/ False
- The results of the exams affect the family's social position True/False
- In Britain, one's success doesn't depend on their social class True/False

4.6.2.3 Complete the following sentences

- The Japanese place such importance on education that ____ of all students complete not only primary school but also high school.
a- 88 percent b- 45 percent c- 55 percent d- 23 percent
- ____ of British students attend expensive private schools.
a- 5 percent b- 6 percent c- 90 percent d- 15 percent
- In Britain, only →→ ____ of the lower class goes to university.
a- 1 percent b- 30 percent c- 60 percent d- 43 percent
- Half of the students at ____ and Cambridge universities come from such expensive secondary schools.
a- Oxford b- Harvard c- Stanford d- Cornell

4.7 Culture Based Reading Test

Arab culture is considered the mirror that reflects the nature of social and intellectual life among Arabs and contributes to clarifying the components of Arab society and its inherent values. Arab culture also constitutes an integrated system of foundations that works to enhance the role of the Arabic language in conveying the true image of the Arab peoples to other peoples.

4.8 The Saudi uniform:

The official Saudi national uniform is the dress that expresses the identity of citizens in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and is formed to be in line with different environmental and climatic conditions.

4.9 The most famous traditional Saudi dishes:

Kabsa is the most famous and popular Saudi dish, and this dish is one of the most desirable dishes throughout the regions where Kabsa gives its distinctive and delicious taste. A variety of spices are added to Kabsa, including black pepper, carnad, saffron, cinnamon, cloves, dried lemon, lury leaf, and nutmeg.

4.10 Religious landmarks in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia:

In Mecca is the Kaaba, the most important religious monument, and in Medina, you visit the Prophet's Mosque, the Prophet's Tomb, and the Quba Mosque, the first mosque in the history of Islam. Medina is a city in western Saudi Arabia. In the city center, the vast Al-Masjid an-Nabawi (Prophet's Mosque) is a major Islamic pilgrimage site. Its striking Green Dome rises above the tombs of the Prophet Muhammad and early Islamic leaders Abu Bakr and Umar. The Masjid al-Qiblatain (Qiblatain Mosque) is known as the site where the Prophet Muhammad received the command to change the direction of prayer to Mecca.

I. TRUE (T) or FALSE (F)

1. Kabsa is the most famous popular Saudi dish. _____
2. Al-Ghatra is a white shawl covers the legs and headband used to stabilize the gumos. _____
3. Kabsa is consists of crushed wheat cooked with flesh or boiled chicken. _____
4. The most important religious monuments In Mecca is the Kaaba _____
5. Al-Diriyah represents a prominent national symbol in the history of the _____
6. Sinai is distinctive in Egypt with its special costume _____

II. Choose the best option

1. The has a wide range of beaches.
 - a. KSA
 - b. USA
 - c. UAE
2. Burj Khalifa is the landmark of
 - a. Dubai
 - b. United States
 - c. Africa
3. is one of the most famous buildings in KSA
 - a. Burj Khalifa
 - b. Al-Diriyah
 - c. Riyadh Tower
4. is one of the most famous Arab musical instruments
 - a. The oud
 - b. Aljaz
 - c. Piano

III. Match the pictures with phrases





1. Al Diriya		
2.Oud		
3. Masjid al-Qiblatayn		
4.Chicken Kabsa		

Table-1

4.11 Analysis of The Reading Tests

The present chapter discusses the results scored individually by Group A and Group B students in the reading proficiency test, comparing the general English and cultural background knowledge between the two groups. Further, it presents the comparative results of the two groups of students and statistical analysis. The following table represents the scores of Group A students who were administered a general English passage and Group B students who were exposed to an Arab culture-based passage.

General English Test Results- Group A

Students	Question 1 6 marks	Question 2 4 marks	Question 3 8 marks	Total 18 marks
1.	1	3	1	5
2.	2	2	0	4

3.	0	3	0	3
4.	1	2	1	4
5.	1	3	2	6
6.	0	2	0	2
7.	1	2	1	4
8.	1	2	0	3
9.	1	3	1	5
10.	1	3	3	7
11.	1	3	2	6
12.	0	3	2	5
13.	2	3	0	5
14.	2	3	2	7
15.	2	3	2	7
16.	0	3	2	5
17.	1	3	1	5
18.	2	4	2	8
19.	4	1	0	5
20.	1	0	2	3
21.	2	0	2	4
22.	0	3	3	6
23.	3	0	0	3
24.	1	6	2	9
25.	1	1	1	3
26.	0	0	0	0
27.	2	1	0	3
28.	0	2	2	4
29.	0	2	1	3
30.	0	2	1	3

Table-2

Arab Culture Test Results- Group B

Students	Question 1 6 marks	Question 2 4 marks	Question 3 4 marks	Total 14 Marks
1	5	4	4	13
2	4	4	4	12
3	5	4	4	13
4	5	4	4	13
5	5	4	4	13
6	5	3	4	12
7	5	3	4	12
8	5	3	4	13
9	6	4	4	14
10	6	4	4	14
11	6	4	4	14
12	5	4	4	13
13	6	4	4	14
14	6	4	4	14
15	6	4	4	14
16	6	4	4	14
17	6	4	4	13
18	5	3	4	13
19	5	3	4	13
20	6	3	4	13
21	6	3	4	12

22	5	4	4	13
23	6	4	4	14
24	6	4	4	14
25	6	4	4	12
26	6	4	4	13
27	5	3	4	14
28	6	4	4	13
29	6	4	4	13
30	5	4	4	13

Table-3

5. Findings

The main aim of the present study is to explore whether the reading ability of the students is comparatively better due to their similar cultural background than the general English knowledge. It is illustrated in the following table. The study presents the comparative test scores obtained by both groups of students.

Total Test Scores- Group A & Group B

Students	Group-A	Group-B
1	5	13
2	4	12
3	3	13
4	4	13
5	6	13
6	2	12
7	4	12
8	3	13
9	5	14
10	7	14
11	6	14
12	5	13
13	5	14
14	7	14
15	7	14
16	5	14
17	5	13
18	8	13
19	5	13
20	3	13
21	4	12
22	6	13
23	3	14
24	9	14
25	3	12
26	0	13
27	3	14
28	4	13
29	3	13
30	3	13
Total	137/540	395/420

Table-4

It is evident that the performance of Group B students is comparatively better than that of Group A students.

6. Conclusion

This study also emphasizes the implications of teaching reading to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners based on the research findings. The research study reveals obstacles that prevent EFL students and teachers from improving their reading

abilities. The difficulties include students' lack of interest, inadequate vocabulary, curriculum problems, and other similar problems. In addition, this study presents the solutions to the difficulties, such as carrying out teacher training, changing up the ways that reading is taught, identifying the learning preferences of the students, inspiring them, holding extra classes, and a host of other things such as carrying out teacher training, changing up the ways that reading is taught, identifying the learning preferences of the students, inspiring them, holding extra classes, and a host of other things. Education experts can now adjust the curriculum based on student concerns thanks to this study, which will also help Arab EFL learners' reading skills.

6.1 Based on the findings of this investigation, the study draws the following conclusions.

- First, the reading process is impacted by cultural schema. Readers can read the text with ease if they are familiar with the topics covered.
- Secondly, the first step towards comprehension is to activate learners' prior knowledge. Because of this, using pre-reading and while-reading activities helps students get ready for the text's content while also enhancing their reading comprehension. Post-reading activities allow readers to confirm and elucidate any ambiguities in the final step. In spite of this, reading exercises help and support the process of reading comprehension. Cultural schema relevance is a crucial element in ensuring comprehensible input.

In summary, the study's findings appear to support and validate the stated hypotheses while providing a positive response to the research questions. The study's findings point to a beneficial correlation between students' cultural knowledge and reading comprehension. Put another way, if the student's prior knowledge of Western customs, attitudes, and ways of life is strongly activated, their comprehension ability will increase, and they will perform more consistent with McKay's (2009) findings that target and local culture have a significant influence on EFL classes. In particular, EFL learners are primarily restricted in their ability to regularly practice using the target language.

The primary objective of this study was to support the idea that using the target language that students have learned to promote their culture while also improving their learning outcomes is a benefit of using locally culturally-based materials in English instruction.

This study has expanded on earlier research to support the use of reading materials with a focus on local culture in the teaching and learning of English. In order for students to learn the target language with a cultural background and be able to communicate in real-world settings, EFL teachers should teach English to their students with a cultural background. However, since local culture-based materials provide cultural familiarity that will facilitate reading comprehension, learning must be maintained through their use. The results of this study also imply that the onus of creating locally relevant culturally based teaching resources for English language learners should fall on the instructors.

The study reveals that there are significant differences in performance in reading comprehension between subjects who have cultural background knowledge and those who do not have any knowledge. The results of the study revealed that the null hypotheses have been rejected; however, the hypotheses that concern the effect of lexical, grammatical, and cultural background knowledge on students' performance in reading comprehension according to sex have been confirmed.

To conclude, it could be said that reading comprehension plays an important role in teaching the English language. Lexical, grammatical, and cultural background knowledge affects reading comprehension, so teachers of English should emphasize these three factors. This implies that they should have sufficient preparation in vocabulary, syntax, and cultural background knowledge. Also, it implies that students who lack knowledge of vocabulary, syntax, and cultural background tend to have difficulty with reading comprehension. The results of the present study revealed the following:

1. A statistically significant difference exists in the reading comprehension performance of subjects with and without any prior knowledge of culture.

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