The Effects of Cultural Familiarity on Reading Comprehension of Iranian EFL Learners

Mohammad Davoudi

Assistant Professor.
Department of English Language and Literature.
Hakim Sabzevari University, Sabzevar, Iran.
davoudi2100@yahoo.com

Hoda Ramezani

MA student of Teaching English,
Hakim Sabzevari University, Sabzevar, Iran
Hoda_Ramezani_86@yahoo.com

Abstract: *This study explores the role of cultural familiarity on reading comprehension of Iranian EFL learners. On the basis of the Michigan test scores, 60 EFL (English as a Foreign Language) university students were divided into two roughly equivalent groups who constituted two intact classes. Both the experimental and the control groups received one of the three short stories, while the experimental group also received the background knowledge passage of the administered short story. In order to assess reading comprehension, they were asked to write freerecall protocols based on what they had read. Scoring of the recall-protocols was based on propositional analysisaccording to which two stages of analysis, qualitative and quantitative, were undertaken in this study. The results show that familiarity with culture of target language facilitates reading comprehension significantly.*

Keywords: *cultural familiarity, cultural schemata, reading comprehension, background knowledge*

1. INTRODUCTION

There are a number of definitions of reading in the literature. For Carrell (1988a), Grabe and Stoller (2001), it is the most important academic language skill. Grabe and Stoller (2002, p. 9) define reading as "... the ability to draw meaning from the printed page and interpret this information appropriately".

Widdowson's (as cited in Ajideh, 2003) view of how meanings can be negotiated in discourse is consistent with Goodman's comments on the reading process. According to Widdowson (as cited in Ajideh, 2003), recent studies of reading have represented it as a reasoning activity whereby the reader creates meaning on the basis of textual clues. In his view, reading is regarded not as a reaction to a text but as an interaction between the writer and the reader mediated through the text.

Kim (2010) argued, "a text by itself does not carry meaning, but rather guides readers in retrieving meaning based on their own prior knowledge" (p. 36). Therefore, readers may differ in the meaning that each associates with a given word. Although reading was once viewed simply as series of skills that are sequential and hierarchical, with the widely accepted role of active readers, they construct meaning by directing their own cognitive resources and prior knowledge to relate to the text (Garner, 1987; Logie, 1995). Many researchers in the L2 field (Bernhardt, 2005; Carrell, 1985; Grabe, 2009; Urquhart & Weir, 1998) acknowledge this interactive component of the reading process. Moreover, research in this field is increasingly considering the variables of each individual reader, such as gender (Brantmeier, 2005; Oxford, 1993), language proficiency (Anderson, 1991; Huang, Chern, & Lin, 2006; Phakiti, 2003), and sociocultural background (Singhal, 1998; Upton & Lee-Thompson, 2001).

Even though there are various kinds of definitions, Goodman (1967), as one of the most prominent researchers in the field, defines reading as "a psycholinguistic guessing game" through

which the reader is exposed to a reading text, makes hypothesis about upcoming ideas or facts with the use of available minimal language cues, syntactic constraints and semantic constraints, while sampling the text in order to confirm or reject the hypothesis.

Although the psycholinguistic model of reading is seen as an interaction of factors, it has generally failed to give sufficient emphasis to the role of background knowledge. Recent studies demonstrate that what the reader brings to the reading task is more pervasive and more powerful than what the general psycholinguistic model suggests:

More information is contributed by the reader than by the print on the page. That is, readers understand what they read because they are able to take the stimulus beyond its graphic representation and assign it membership to an appropriate group of concepts already stored in their memories . . . The reader brings to the task a formidable amount of information and ideas, attitudes and beliefs. This knowledge, coupled with the ability to make linguistic predictions, determines the expectations the reader will develop as he reads. Skill in reading depends on the efficient interaction between linguistic knowledge and knowledge of the world. (Clarke and Silberstein, 1977, pp. 136-137).

Widdowson (1983) defines schemas as "the cognitive constructs which allow for the organization of information in long-term memory" (p. 34). Because schema allows the reader to relate new information to the already existing one, Rumelhart (1980) calls it as "building blocks of cognition". Moreover, schemata "reflect the experiences, conceptual understanding, attitudes, values, skills and strategies… (we) bring to a text situation" (Vocca and Vocca, 1999, p. 15).

To sum up, modern schema theorists state that schema is a data structure of general ideas stored in memory which consists of variables and slots. According to such a principle, any text, either spoken or written, does not, by itself, carry meaning but it only provides directions for listeners or readers as to how they should retrieve or construct meaning from their own, previously acquired knowledge. This previously acquired knowledge is called the reader's background knowledge, and the previously acquired knowledge structures are called schemata (Bartlett, 1932; Adams and Collins, 1979; Rumelhart, 1980).

In spite of different tendencies toward classification of schema by many reading researchers, most of them make a distinction between formal and content schema in order to illustrate the impact of background knowledge on reading comprehension (Carrell and Eisterhold, 1983; Carrell, 1987; 1988b; Alderson, 2000).

Formal schema, also called *textual schema* (Singhal, 1998), comprises the knowledge of language and linguistic conventions: knowledge of how texts are organized and what the main features of a particular genre of writing are (Carrell&Eisterhold, 1983; Carrell, 1987, 1988b; Alderson, 2000).

Content schema comprises background knowledge of the content area of the text that a reader brings to a text (Carrell, 1983; Carrell and Eisterhold, 1983; Carrell, 1987; Alptekin, 1993, 2002, 2003; Singhal, 1998; Stott, 2001). It includes what we know about people, the world, culture, and the universe (Brown, 2001). Carrell and Eisterhold (1983) propose that appropriate content schema is accessed through textual cues.

One particular subclass of knowledge of the world (i.e., content schemata) is "cultural knowledge". According to Alderson (2000), since the knowledge of the world refers to every specific person's world, it is idiosyncratic. Each person's world is different from others because every person has unique personal history, feelings, ideas, interests, and experiences not necessarily experienced or possessed by others. However, we may share aspects of our experiences, knowledge of the world, etc. with other people in our community and/or nation.

Although understanding a culture necessitates considering its language or languages, Kramsch (1995) believes that understanding a language includes understanding a culture within which it is used; that is, ''language and culture are not separate, but are acquired together, with each providing support for the development of the other'' (Mitchell and Myles, 2004, p. 235). "If language is described as a mode of human behavior and culture as 'patterned behavior', it is evident that language is a vital constituent of culture. You cannot learn a new language unless you have a sympathetic understanding of the cultural setting of that language" (Trivedi, 1978, pp. 92-93).

In spite of the fact that ''being able to read and speak another language does not guarantee that understanding will take place'' (Morain, 1986, p. 64) and there are lots of differences between cultures that makes it impossible to teach all the detailed differences that a learner encounter, it is conceivable "to develop cultural sensitivity and perceptual skills in a student that will enable him to be aware of cultural differences which, if undetected, could cause conflict" (Kelly, 1977, p. 203). This sensitivity of other cultures leads to facilitation of learning and communication among people of different cultural backgrounds (Bedford, 1981; Johnson, 1982; Hendon, 1980; Kelly, 1977). According to Cakir (2006), ''an analytic look at the native culture is as important as the learning of the target culture'' (p. 155), because it helps in achieving cross-cultural awareness, which involves paralinguistic aspects of behavior. Lado (1963) argues that foreign language results in ''changing the learner's behavior and injecting a new way of life and new values of life into his already settled behavior pattern'' (p. 110). Therefore, "If one wants to be successful in another social world, then one must learn the attitudes and behaviors of that other world but without denying one's own social self and world" (Morrison and Stoltz, 1976, p. 5).

Although idiosyncrasy cannot be ignored, one's cultural orientation appears to be a dominant force in shaping one's reading habits. In other words, since culture affects all aspects of life, it certainly has a major impact on all elements of reading.

As a result, since cultural schema is independent of the surface forms used in the formation of the text and involves more than a mere literal comprehension of the content of the text (Alptekin, 2006) a reader is most likely to fail if his/her cultural schema is different from the one proposed by the text. According to Steffensen et al. (1979), "an individual who reads a story that presupposes the schemata of a foreign culture will comprehend it quite differently from a native, and probably will make what a native would classify as mistakes" (p. II).

Culturally familiar texts are then literary texts that depict aspects of the readers' culture such as way of life, way of dressing, food, artifacts and others, which are unique to the readers' culture and are familiar to them. Brock (1990) explains that culturally familiar texts or what he calls as " localized literature" are texts that contain content, settings, cultural assumptions, situations, characters, language, and historical references that are familiar to the second language reader" (p. 23).

2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There is a growing body of literature examining the role of cultural schema in second language reading comprehension.

Bartlett's (1932) report is among the early studies of the influence of cultural schema. Kintsch and Greene (1978), Steffensen, Joag-Dev and Anderson (1979), Taylor (1979), Reynolds, Taylor, Steffensen, Shirey, and Anderson (1981), Carrell (1981), Johnson (1981, 1982), Markham and Latham (1987), and Winfield and Barnes-Felfeli (1982) designed studies to indicate the effect of using prior knowledge on reading familiar and unfamiliar texts. The interpreted results illustrated the pervasive influence of schemata embodying knowledge of the content of a discourse on comprehension and memory.

Kaplan (1966), Long (1989), and Nostrand (1989) also conducted an experiment to demonstrate that culturally specific schema affects comprehension. For example, Nostrand indicated that authentic texts from one culture may give a false impression of that culture to members of a second culture. To avoid this false impression, such texts should be presented in authentic context and students' appropriate schema should be activated. Kaplan asserts that cultural differences result in different approaches to teaching reading to L1 speakers and L2 speakers.

Koh (1986) studied the effects of familiar context on student's reading comprehension. His findings support the notion that one's comprehension of a text depends on how much relevant prior knowledge the reader has about the subject matter of that particular text. He went further to suggest that students must be made conscious of what is involved in successful reading. In other words, they must activate their content schemata for the recreating of meaning from the text rather than focus on the word-for-word deciphering which characterizes much ESL reading material.

Pritchard (1990) revealed a positive influence of cultural schemata on the processing strategies of students and the level of comprehension they achieve.

In an experiment by Bedir (1992), it was indicated that helping students to build background knowledge can improve their reading comprehension. The experimental group was trained through television, role-play, pictures, simulation games and a native speaker while the control group received their regular curriculum. According to the result of the post-test, the experimental group performed much better than they did in pre-test. That might be because of the use of cultural background. The subjects who were trained with cultural aspects were more successful than the others who were traditionally trained. The result also showed that cultural schemata are inevitable for successful reading comprehension.

In 1992, Kang discovered that L2 readers filter information through cultural background knowledge (as cited in Singhal, 1998). In her study, she used Korean graduate students with advanced English skills. This study was conducted solely on L2 adults. Several studies have also reported positive effects of cultural familiarity on reading comprehension and vocabulary learning (Pulido, 2003, 2004). Pulido (2004) examines the effects of cultural background knowledge on L2 incidental vocabulary acquisition through reading. The results indicated that there is a strong support for the hypothesis that the rich do indeed get richer when considering the impact of cultural familiarity on incidental vocabulary acquisition. She also finds that background knowledge does not help students with weaker levels of L2 reading proficiency and limited vocabulary knowledge.

Malik (1995) also conducted a study to show that helping readers build background knowledge through pre-reading activities helps improve their reading comprehension.

Miltiadous and Ohstsuka (1996) and Brantmeier (2003), Webster (2001), Salmani-Nodoushan (2003), Sharifian (2005) also conducted studiesto examine the effects of text familiarity.

While other studies used two texts of similar difficulty, Alptekin's (2006) made use of the same text in his work. He attempted to modify to the original English text by using more culturally familiar terms so that students can make better comprehension and inferences than when they read the original but culturally-remote story. He called this process *cultural nativization* and defines it as "sociological, semantic and pragmatic adaptation of the textual and contextual cues of the original story into the learner's own culture, while keeping its linguistic and rhetorical content essentially intact" (p. 499). Alptekin (2006) examined the role of culturally familiar background knowledge in inferential and literal comprehension in L2 reading. The results showed that readers' culturally bound background knowledge plays a facilitative role essentially in their inferential comprehension of the text rather than reading as a whole, yet does not affect their literal understanding.Razi (2004), Bock (2006), Erten and Razi (2009), Sasaki (2000), Jalilifar and Assi (2008), Rashidi and Soureshjani (2011), and Rokhsari (2012) investigated the effect of text nativization on reading comprehension which were based on the concept of nativization introduced by Alptekin (2002).

3. METHOD

3.1. Participants

A total of 65 EFL adult learners participated in the study. Participants, whose native language was Persian, were BA students majoring in English literature at Hakim Sabzevari University in Iran. The sample included both males and females whose age range ran between 19 and 21. To ensure the homogeneity of the participants, a sample of Michigan proficiency test was administered. On the basis of the Michigan test scores, five participants were excluded from the sample since their test scores were extremely low or high. All of the participants were randomly assigned into two groups, the experimental group and the control group. The data were collected during their regularly scheduled class times.

3.2. Instrumentation

3.2.1. Reading Materials

The materials employed in this study consisted of three non-simplified and unabridged short stories: *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities* by Delmore Schwartz (1978), *The Girls in Their Summer Dresses* by Irwin Shaw (1939), and *The Piece of String* by French writer, Guy de Maupassant (1922). The rationale behind selecting non-simplified stories was that they were supposed to be at the appropriate level of difficulty in terms of lexical and syntactic complexity for participants.

Two important factors were taken into consideration in selecting the above short stories. First, care was exercised to choose stories of manageable length to give the participants the chance of reading them without being frustrated. Second, the extent to which the stories had cultural elements, and therefore, could complicate the comprehension process was taken into account in the selection process. In other words, every effort was made to select the stories which contained more cultural cues, both textual and contextual.

3.2.2. Background Knowledge Passages

Three background knowledge passages were provided for the three short stories. These passages began with the story's title, the author, and the year of publication. Next, a paragraph provided the historical background of the time when the story took place as well as the necessary background knowledge relevant to the story such as themes and particularly culture-specific information that is needed to fully understand it. Then, the difficult words and phrases which had cultural load in the story and might make the comprehension of the short stories difficult were explained in details. These involved culture-specific customs, rituals, notions, structures, and values such as religious conventions, courting patterns, social festivities, interpersonal relationships, and home and family life. Settings and locations, characters and occupations were also included in these passages. Moreover, conceptual and lexical discrepancy in several areas such as food, currency, clothes, drinks, and institutions were also in these lists. The aim of providing these explanations was for readers to help them construct the appropriate schema.

3.2.3. Michigan Proficiency Test

A sample of Michigan proficiency test was administered to assess the students' level of proficiency in English. The intention was to ensure that the participants of the study were at the same level of proficiency.

3.3. Data Collection Procedure

To ensure the homogeneity of the participants, all the participants of the study took a sample of Michigan proficiency test. Equal numbers of students were then randomly assigned to one of the experimental group or the control group. Care was also taken to put the same number of males or females in each group.

In order to make the study manageable and avoid participant fatigue, each story was presented to the groups in three consecutive weeks, and the order of the presentation of the stories was the same for all groups.

Both the experimental and the control groups received one of the short stories, while the experimental group also received the background knowledge passage of the administered short story. Oral directions concerning the test were given to the students before they read the passages. Students were asked to read the passages carefully. Then, the researcher collected the short story from control groups and the short story and the background knowledge passage text from the experimental groups, in order to end participant's access to them when they do the free recall test. Participants were instructed to write down as much as they could remember from the short story on a blank page for the free recall test. They had already been informed that there was no time limit for their reading and writing in the instruction and also the grammatical and spelling

mistakes in their recall protocols were going to be ignored, in order to minimize the effect of any variation among the students' writing skills, as otherwise their writing skills would have been assessed rather than their reading comprehension.

3.4. Design of the Study

The study was based on a quasi-experimental design. This research design does not requrie random assignment and is used where true experimental designs are not feasible" (Ary, Jacobs and Razavieh, 1996, p. 343).Since the students were grouped into two separate classes, it was not possible to randomly assign each student to one of the two study conditions. Therefore, due to using intact classes and not randomly choosing the students, the research design of the present study was quasi-experimental.

3.5. Data Analysis

Scoring of the recall protocols was based on *propositional analysis* which many researchers on prose comprehension have recently used for representing the content of prose materials. This analytic technique was developed to represent meaning in texts, and the number of propositions contained in a text has been shown by Kintsch (1974) to determine reading times and subsequent comprehension. This method involves preparing a relatively formal representation of the semantic content of the material, expressed in the form of a list of propositions. This representation can then be used as a relatively rigorous characterization of the material, and so serves as a basis for evaluating and analyzing readers' performance in comprehension experiments since it is a more meaningful measure of recall than the number of words or sentences. A proposition (thought) contains a predicate (verb) and one or more arguments (e.g., subject, objects, and adjectives).

Hence, each short story was divided into specified propositions which were validated by four experts' opinions. A *proposition*is clause or phrase expressing an idea for the first time and has a major role in the development of short story. Therefore, the first short story, "In Dreams Begin Responsibilities" was portioned into a total of 30 propositions, while each of the two others short stories was divided into 15 propositions.

The present study also examined the quantities and qualities of the participants' recalls of the given short stories because these have been traditionally used as measures of reading comprehension in both L1 and L2 literature (e.g. Steffensen*et al.*, 1979; Johnson, 1981; Carrell, 1987; Floyd and Carrell, 1987; but see also McNamara *et al.*, 1996 for arguing the limitation of recalls as measures of text comprehension). For this purpose, each student's written recall protocol was scored via prepositional analysis, and they were awarded a score when the gist of a proposition was recalled. The total number of correct propositions represented the quantitative measure for the short story.

Each subject's recall was also analyzed qualitatively. To this end, each written recall was read one more time. The marking procedure in this phase was to reduce the distorted ideas or wrong order of events provided by the participants from a quantitative mark. In other words, if there was a distorted idea, an idea which deviated from the content of the given short story in some way, or if the student did not follow the sequence of remained propositions, 1 score was subtracted from the total of quantitative score. This procedure was used for the three short stories and 3 scores for each participant were obtained. The marks given to the students' papers by the two independent raters were analyzed through the Pearson Correlation Coefficient Test. A high correlation coefficient was found between the two sets of marks, $r = 89$, $p < .01$, which was considered to be consistent enough to proceed with further statistical analysis.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are presented in the context of this research question:

Does Iranian EFL learners' familiarity with the cultural content of short stories affect their comprehension?

This research question was transformed into the following null hypothesis to ensure its testability through the data acquired from the participants of the study.

H0: Iranian EFL learners' familiarity with the cultural content of short stories does not affect their comprehension.

Independent-sample t test was used to examine the differences between experimental and control groups regarding their familiarity with the cultural content of short stories. The mean scores of the experimental and control groups in text 1, text 2, text 3, and the total text are given in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1. *Group Statistics for Text 1, Text 2, Text 3, and Total Text*

	exp.cont	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
text1	experimental	30	18.8000	5.10848	.93268
	control	30	11.8000	4.80230	.87678
text2	experimental	30	9.4333	3.04770	.55643
	control	30	6.4000	2.31338	.42236
text3	experimental	30	8.8333	2.92532	.53409
	control	30	5.8667	1.90703	.34818
Total.text	experimental	30	36.7333	8.20401	1.49784
	control	30	24.0667	6.64329	1.21289

Note: N = Total number in a sample. Std = standard

Levene's test was used first to check for the homogeneity of the variances, and based on it, appropriate t was selected. Results of t-test showed that students differ significantly in text 1 (t = 5.46, df = 58, p < .000), text 2 (t = 4.34, df = 54.08, p < .000), text 3 (t = 4.65, df = 49.87, p < .000), and total text (t = 6.57, df = 58, p < .000).

This shows that the experimental group had a higher mean score than control group regarding text 1 (experimental mean = 18.88, control mean = 11.80), text 2 (experimental mean = 9.43, control mean = 6.40), text 3 (experimental mean = 8.83, control mean = 5.86), and total text (experimental mean = 36.73, control mean = 24.06). This result provides an affirmative answer to the research question; therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. Figure 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, and 3.4 show the graphs based on the results from Table 3.1.
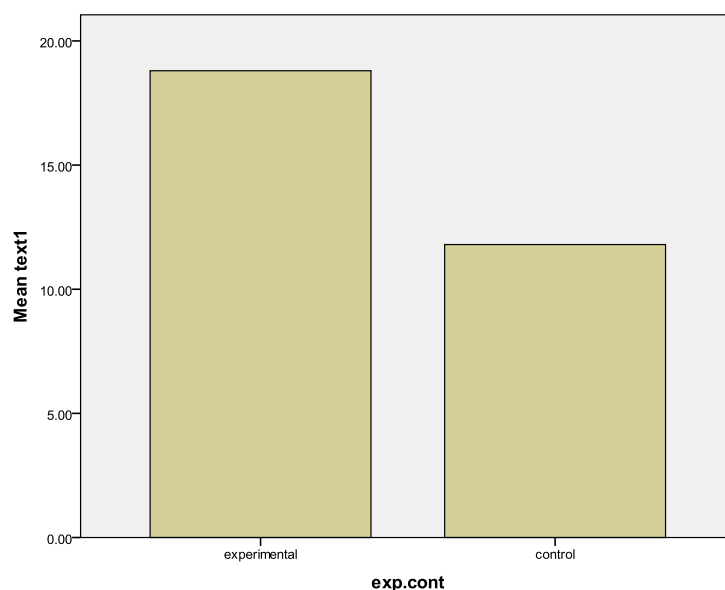

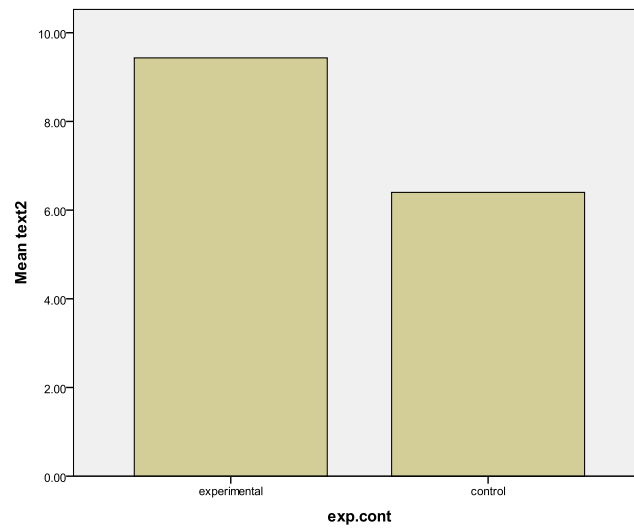**Figure 3.1.** *Mean Differences for Text 1 in Experimental and Control Groups*

Figure 3.2. *Mean Differences for Text 2 in Experimental and Control Groups*
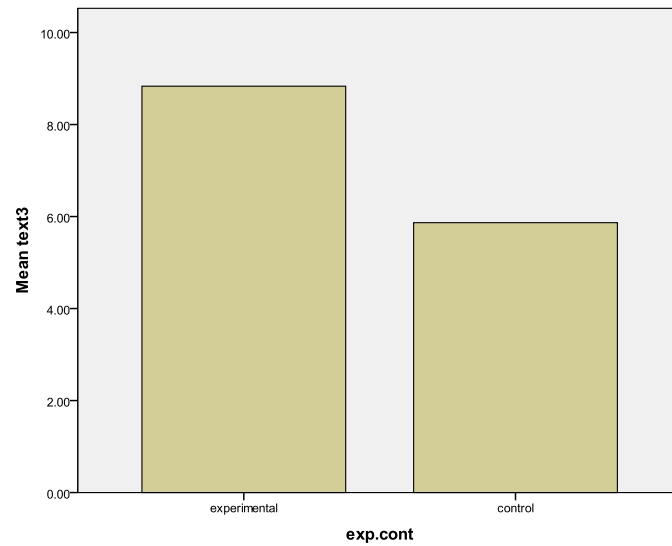

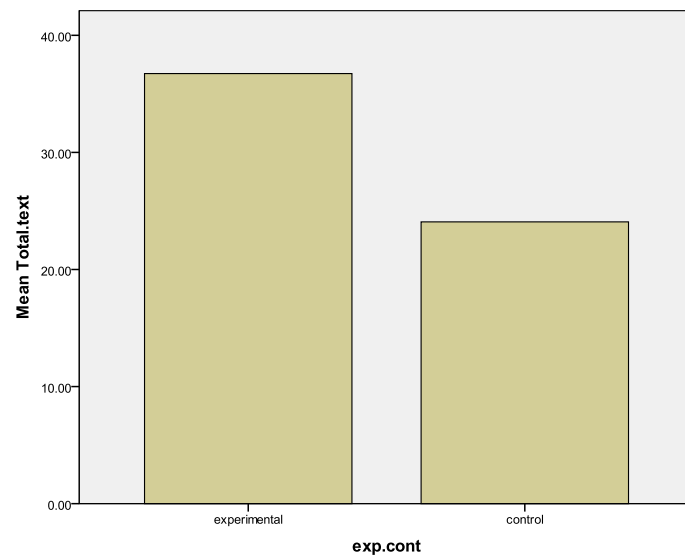*Figure 3.3* Mean Differences for Text 3 in Experimental and Control Groups

Figure 3.4. *Mean Differences for Total Text in Experimental and Control Groups*

The present study aimed at examining the effect of cultural familiarity on reading comprehension of Iranian EFL students. In general, the results point to the notion that readers' culture-bound background knowledge plays a facilitative role in their comprehension of short stories. Readers are expected to achieve the writer's intended meaning by combining existing information with what they read (Alderson, 2000; Anderson, 1999; Chastain, 1988; Eskey, 1988; Grabe and Stoller, 2002; Nassaji, 2002; Nuttall, 1998; Wallace, 2001). The results of current study revealed similar findings to the ones in the study of Alderson (2000), Alptekin (2006), Ketchum (2006), Oller (1995), Pulido (2003), and Steffensen et al. (1979) who highlighted that background knowledge has positive effect on reading comprehension. The difference between the experimental and control groups' performances in comprehension suggested a strong possibility that the students who read the background knowledge passages of the stories possessed relevant cultural background knowledge which reduced the cognitive load imposed by the complex reading procedures (Perfetti, 1985) on the memory system (Baddeley, 1997; Ellis, 2001; Kintsch, 1998; McLaughlin et al., 1983), as opposed to the students who had to deal with unfamiliar cultural content and visualize the script in their minds. The findings can be supported on the basis of the following reasoning.

One reason could be that the background knowledge passages of short stories enable experimental group readers to activate their appropriate schemata more efficiently than the control group readers. In other words, the pariticipants of the experimental group could activate their schemata regarding the content of the stories more successfully compared to the control group because the culture-specific textual and contextual cues which reflected the culture in the short stories were explained in the background knowledge passages received by experimental groups and consequently resulted in better comprehension of the stories.

Another support for the results of the study comes from Stanovich's (2000) interactive compensatory model. It is likely that the experimental group who read the short stories and background knowledge passages could compensate for their possible vocabulary deficiencies by drawing on their background knowledge in order to infer the meaning of the unknown words or phrases; as a result, their comprehension of the stories was enhanced and they could remember more propositional units in written recall protocols, compared to the control groups who were at a disadvantage because they read the short stories which took for granted the cultural assumptions of native speakers of English. This argument is supported by empirical research of Pulido (2004, 2007) who indicated that readers' background knowledge, and more specifically, their cultural background knowledge, can facilitate lexical inferencing during reading.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The study was, in fact, an attempt to shed light on whether cultural familiarity bears any significant impact on Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension. In conclusion, the results from the present study elucidate the nature of the impact of a type of background knowledge, that of cultural familiarity, on L2 reading comprehension. The participants in the experimental group, who were made more familiar with the cultures of short stories, scored significantly higher than the control groups. The findings were in accordance with the idea presented in the literature review, since the majority of the research existing in the field of reading and cultural familiarity suggests a positive relationship between reading comprehension and a student's cultural knowledge. The results also support the schema theory of reading, and research on L2 reading (Carrell, 1991; Hudson, 1982; Levin and Haus, 1985) which demonstrated that reading comprehension can be facilitate by knowledge of text content. By providing a knowledge structure during the encoding/decoding process, readers can compare and fit pieces of incoming information; therefore, making it possible to assimilate text information without the need to consider all the words and phrases in the text.

Some pedagogical implications can be drawn here. Probably the most noticeable finding of the study is that the background knowledge which the second language readers bring to a text is often culture-specific. According to Hudson (1982), "the reading problems of the L2 reader are not due to an absence of attempts at fitting and providing specific schemata . . . Rather, the problem lies in projecting appropriate schemata" (p. 9). In order to make sense of texts, second language reader attempts to provide schemata persistently and if the reader cannot access the appropriate existing schemata, or if the reader does not possess the appropriate schemata necessary to understand a

text, his or her efforts will fail. Therefore, one of the problems in the EFL/ESL reading classrooms is the implicit cultural knowledge presupposed by a text. As a result, teaching cultural materials and texts provide learners with `insights' and a meaningful comprehension of how a language functions. Moreover, understanding a foreign culture can lead learners to have positive attitudes towards the language of that culture which results in more motivation in order to perform better on the receptive skills.

The results of this study have another important pedagogical implication with regard to cultural factors in the text selection for the EFL classroom. The criteria for selection depend largely on what we want to achieve from teaching culture in the foreign language classroom. Reichmann (1970, p. 69) states three important ends to be accounted for "in the selection of `cultural studies' material: (1) the student must gain an understanding of the nature of culture; (2) his cultural bondage must be reduced; (3) he must achieve a fuller understanding of his own cultural background".

Suggestions for Further Research

No study is without its limitations. Future research may wish to consider the following proposals in an attempt to improve the effects of cultural familiarity on reading comprehension. The present study may be replicated or extended in different contexts and settings to include the effect of cultural familiarity on components of reading comprehension such as the speed of reading, reader perspective, critical thinking, main idea construction processes as well as other reading processes.

The groups of participants in the present study represented only adults EFL learners. Future research should include children and young learners of several proficiency levels to allow for cross-sectional generalizations.

Also, the role of cultural familiarity can be further explored by studying its effect on listening, speaking, and writing in English.

Finally, the study should be replicated and the results should be confirmed by other studies with different types of texts and learners. If possible, the present study should be replicated in different cultural contexts and consequently with different learners' cultural backgrounds in order to investigate how difference of learners' culture from the target culture has effects on learners' reading comprehension.

REFERENCES

Adams, M. J., & Collins, A. (1979).A schema theoretic view of reading. In R. O. Freedle (Ed.), New directions in discourse processing (pp. 1-22). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Ajideh, P. (2003). Schema theory-based pre-reading tasks: A neglected essential in the ESL reading class. The Reading Matrix, 3(1), 1-14.

Alderson, J. C. (2000). Assessing Reading.Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Alptekin, C. (1993). Target-language culture in EFL materials.English Language Teaching Journal, 47(2), 136-143.

Alptekin, C. (2002, Jun.). The effects of cultural knowledge on EFL reading comprehension. Paper presented at International Balkan ELT Conference, Trakya University, Edirne, Turkey.

Alptekin, C. (2003, May). The role of cultural nativization in L2 reading: The case of inferential and literal comprehension. Unpublished opening plenary speech at The Third International ELT Research Conference, ÇanakkaleOnsekiz Mart University, Çanakkale, Turkey.

Alptekin, C. (2006). Cultural familiarity in inferential and literal comprehension in L2 reading.System, 34(4), 494-508.

Anderson, N. J. (1991). Individual differences in strategy use in second language reading and testing.The Modern Language Journal, 75(4), 460-472.

Anderson, N. J. (1999). Exploring second language reading: Issues and strategies.Boston, MA: Heinle&Heinle.

Ary, D., Jacobs, L. C., &Razavies, A. (1996).Introduction to educational research. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Baddeley, A. D. (1997). Human memory: Theory and Practice (Rev. ed.). Hove, UK: Psychology Press.

Bartlett, F. C. (1932). Remembering: A study in experimental and social psychology.Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bedir, H. (1992). Cultural significance in foreign language learning and teaching with special emphasis on reading comprehension through cultural schema (Unpublished master's thesis).Çukurova University, Adana.

Bernhardt, E. B. (2005). Progress and procrastination in second language reading.Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 25(2), 133-150.

Bock, T. (2006). A consideration of culture in moral theme comprehension: Comparing native and European American students. Journal of Moral Education, 35(1), 71-87.

Brantmeier, C. (2003). Does gender make a difference? Passage content and comprehension in second language reading.Reading in A foreign Language, 15(1), 1-27.

Brantmeier, C. (2005). Effects of reader's knowledge, text type, and test type on L1 and L2 reading comprehension. TheModern Language Journal, 89(1), 37-53.

Brock, M. N. (1990).The case for localized literature in the ESL classroom.English Teaching Forum, 28(3), 22-25.

Brown, H. D. (2001). Cognitive science concepts and technology teacher education.The Journal of Technology Studies, 27(1), 33-42.

Cakir, I. (2006). Developing cultural awareness in foreign language teaching.Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education, 7(3), 154–161.

Carrell, P. L. (1981).Culture-specific schemata in L2 comprehension. In R. Orem, & J. Haskell (Eds.), Selected papers from the Ninth Illinois TESOL/BE Annual Convention, First Midwest TESOL Conference (pp. 123-132). Chicago: Illinois.

Carrell, P. L. (1983). Some issues in studying the role of schemata, or background knowledge, in second language comprehension. Reading in a foreign language, 1(2), 81-92.

Carrell, P. L. (1985).Facilitating ESL reading by teaching text structure.TESOL Quarterly, 19(4),727-752.

Carrell, P. L. (1987).Content and formal schemata in ESL reading.TESOL Quarterly, 21(3), 461-481.

Carrell, P. L. (1988a). Introduction:Interactive approaches to second language reading. In P. L. Carrell, J. Devine, & D. E. Eskey (Eds.), Interactive approaches to second language reading (pp. 1-7). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Carrell, P. L. (1988b). Some causes of text-boundedness and schema interference in ESL reading. In P. L. Carrell, J. Devine, & D. E. Eskey (Eds.), Interactive approaches to second language reading (pp. 101-113). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Carrell, P. L. (1991). Second language reading: Reading ability or language proficiency? Applied Linguistics, 12(2), 159-179.

Carrell, P. L., &Eisterhold, J. C. (1983).Schema theory and ESL reading pedagogy.TESOL Quarterly, 17(4), 553-573.

Chastain, K. (1988). Developing second language skills: Theory and practice. New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Clarke, M. A., & Silberstein, S. (1977). Toward a realization of psycholinguistic principles in the ESL reading class.Language Learning, 27(1), 135-154.

De Maupassant, G. (n. d.). The Piece of String. Retrieved from http://listentogenius.com/ author.php/351/352

Ellis, N. C. (2001). Memory for language.In P. Robinson (Ed.), Cognition and second language instruction (pp. 33-68).Cambridge: Cambridge University press.

Erten, I. H., &Razi, S. (2009). The effects of cultural familiarity on reading comprehension.Reading in a Foreign Language, 21(1), 60-77.

Eskey, D. E. (1988).Holding in the bottom: An interactive approach to the language problems of second language readers. In P. L. Carrell, J. Devine, & D. E. Eskey (Eds.), Interactive

approaches to second language reading (pp. 93-100). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Floyd, P.,&Carrell, P. L. (1987).Effects on ESL reading of teaching cultural content schemata.Language Learning, 37(1), 89-108.

Garner, R. (1987). Metacognition and reading comprehension.Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Goodman, K. S. (1967). Reading: A psycholinguistic guessing game. Journal of the Reading Specialist 6(1), 126-135.

Grabe, W. (2009).Reading in a second language: Moving from theory to practice. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Grabe, W., &Stoller. F. L. (2001). Reading for academic purposes: Guidelines for the ESL/EFL teacher. In M. Celce-Murcia (Ed.), Teaching English as a second or foreign language (3rd ed., pp. 187-203). Boston, MA: Heinle&Heinle.

Grabe, W., &Stoller, F. L. (2002).Teaching and researching reading. Harlow, UK: Pearson Education.

Huang, H. C., Chern, C. I., & Lin, C. C. (2006). EFL learners' online reading strategies: A comparison between high and low EFL proficient readers. English Teaching & Learning, 30(4S), 1-22.

Hudson, T. (1982). The effects of induced schemata on the 'short circuit' in L2 reading: Non-decoding factors in L2 reading performance. Language Learning, 32(1), 1-31.

Jalilifar, A. R., &Assi, R. (2008).The role of cultural nativization in comprehension of short stories in EFL reading contexts.The International Journal of Language, Society and Culture, 26, 62-79.

Johnson, P. (1981). Effects on reading comprehension of language complexity and cultural background of a text.TESOL Quarterly, 15(2),169-181.

Johnson, P. (1982). Effects on reading comprehension of building background knowledge. TESOL Quarterly, 16(4), 503-516.

Kaplan, R. B. (1966). Cultural thought patterns in intercultural education. Language Learning, 16(1),1-20.

Kelly, C. M. (1977).Developing cultural perception of students who will be involved in a multicultural milieu.Educational Horizons, 33, 201-204.

Ketchum, E. M. (2006). The cultural baggage of second language reading: An approach to understanding the practices and perspectives of a nonnative product. Foreign Language Annals, 39(1), 22-42.

Kim, M. (2010).Adult ESL Korean reader's responses about their reading in L1 Korean and L2 English (Doctoral dissertation).Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3402930)

Kintsch, W. (1974).The representation of meaning in memory. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Kintsch, W., & Greene, E. (1978).The role of culture-specific schemata in the comprehension and recall of stories.Discourse Processes, 1(1), 1-13.

Koh, M. Y. (1986). The role of prior knowledge in reading comprehension.Reading in a Foreign Language, 3(1), 375-380.

Kramsch, C. (1995). The cultural component of language teaching.Language, Culture and Curriculum, 8(12), 83-92.

Lado, R. (1963). Linguistics across cultures: Applied linguistics for language teachers. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

Levin, M. G., &Haus, G. J. (1985).The effect of background knowledge on the reading comprehension of second language learners.Foreign Language Annals, 18(5), 391-397.

Logie, M. (1995).An examination of comprehension processes used by readers as they complete multiple-choice tests (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Indiana University, Bloomington.

Long, D. R. (1989). Second language listening comprehension: A schema-theoretic perspective. The Modern Language Journal, 73(1), 32-40.

Malik, A. A. (1995). A psycholinguistic analysis of the reading behavior of EFL-proficient readers using culturally familiar and culturally nonfamiliar expository texts.American Educational Research Journal, 27(1), 205-223.

Markham, P., & Latham, M. (1987).The influence of religion-specific background knowledge on the listening comprehension of adult second-language students.Language Learning, 37(2), 157-170.

McLaughlin, B., Rossman, T., & McLeod, B. (1983). Second language learning: An information-processing perspective. Language Learning, 33(2), 135-158.

McNamara, D. S., Kintsch, E., Songer, N. B., &Kintsch, W. (1996). Are good texts always better? Interactions of text coherence, background knowledge, and levels of understanding in learning from text.Cognition and Instruction, 14(1), 1-43.

Miltiadous, M., &Ohtsuka, K. (1996, Nov.).The impact of cultural education on adolescents and their comprehension of culture-specific reading material.Paper presented at the Educational Research Association (Singapore)/Australian Association for Research in Education Joint Annual Conference, Singapore.

Mitchell, R., & Myles, F. (2004).Second language learning theories (2nd ed.). London: Edward Arnold.

Morain, G. G. (1986). Kinesics and cultural understanding. In J. M. Valdes (Ed.), Culture bound: Bridging the cultural gap in language teaching (pp 64–76). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Morrison, J. L., &Stoltz, R. (1976).The role of oral communication for the culturally different college student.College Student Journal, 10(spring), 4-7.

Nassaji, H. (2002). Schema theory and knowledge-based processes in second language reading comprehension: A need for alternative perspectives. Language Learning, 52(2), 439-481.

Nostrand, H. L. (1989). Authentic texts and cultural authenticity: An editorial. The Modern Language Journal, 73(1), 49-52.

Nuttall, C. (1998). Teaching reading skills in a foreign language. Oxford: Macmillan Heinemann.

Oller, J. W. (1995). Adding abstract to formal and content schemata: Results of recent work in Peircean semiotics. Applied Linguistics, 16(3), 273-306.

Oxford, R. L. (1993). Research on second language learning strategies.Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 13, 175-187.

Perfetti, C. (1985). Reading ability.New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Phakiti, A. (2003). A closer look at the relationship of cognitive and metacognitive strategy use to EFL reading achievement test performance.Language Testing, 20(1), 26-56.

Pritchard, R. H. (1990). The effects of cultural schemata on reading processing strategies.Reading Research Quarterly, 25(4), 273-295.

Pulido, D. (2003). Modeling the role of second language proficiency and topic familiarity in second language incidental vocabulary acquisition through reading.Language Learning, 53(2), 233-284.

Pulido, D. (2004). The effects of cultural familiarity on incidental vocabulary acquisition through reading. The Reading Matrix, 4(2), 20-53.

Pulido, D. (2007). The effects of topic familiarity and passage sight vocabulary on L2 lexical inferencing and retention through reading. Applied Linguistics, 28(1), 66-86.

Rashidi, N., &Soureshjani, K. H. (2011).The effect of teaching culturally-based texts on the Persian English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' motivation and reading performance.Journal of Languages and Culture, 2(8), 141-147.

Razi, S. (2004).The effects of cultural schema and reading activities on reading comprehension.The Reading Matrix, 5(1). Retrieved from http://www.readingmatrix.com/conference/pp/proceedings/razi.pdf

Reichmann, E. (1970). The teaching of German problems and methods. Philadelphia: National Carl Schurz Association.

Reynolds, R. E., Taylor, M. A., Steffensen M. S., Shirley L. L., & Anderson R. C. (1982).Cultural schemata and reading comprehension.Reading Research Quarterly, 17(3), 353-366.

Rokhsari, S. (2012).The effect of text nativization and schema-based pre-reading activities on reading comprehension of EFL students.Journal of Academic and Applied Studies, 2(5), 45-75.

Rumelhart, D. E. (1980). Schemata: The building blocks of cognition. In R. J. Spiro, B. C. Bruce, & W. E. Brewer (Eds.), Theoretical issues in reading comprehension: Perspectives from cognitive psychology, linguistics, artificial intelligence, and education (pp. 33-58). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Salmani-Nodoushan, M. A. (2003). Text familiarity, reading tasks, and ESP test performance: A study on Iranian LEP and non- LEP university students, The Reading Matrix, 3(1), 1-14.

Sasaki, M. (2000). Effects of cultural schemata on students' test taking processes for cloze tests: A multiple data source approach. Language Testing, 17(1), 85-114.

Schwartz, D. (1978). In dreams begin responsibilities. In J. Atlas (Ed.), In dreams begin responsibilities and other stories (pp. 1-9). New York, NY: New Directions.

Sharifian, F. (2005). Cultural conceptualisations in English words: A study of aboriginal children in Perth. language and Education, 19(1), 74-88.

Shaw, I. (2000). The girls in their summer dresses. In I. Shaw (Ed.), Short stories: Five decades (pp. 62-68). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Singhal, M. (1998). A comparison of L1 and L2 reading: Cultural differences and schema. The Internet TESL Journal, 4(10). Retrieved from http://iteslj.org/Articles/Singhal-ReadingL1L2.html

Stanovich, K. E. (2000). Progress in understanding reading: Scientific foundations and new frontiers. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Steffensen, M. S., Joag-Dev, C., & Anderson, R. C. (1979).A cross-cultural perspective on reading comprehension.Reading Research Quarterly, 15(1), 10-29.

Stott, N. (2001). Helping ESL students become better readers: Schema theory applications and limitations.The Internet TESL Journal, 7(11). Retrieved from http://iteslj.org/Articles/Stott-Schema.html

Taylor, B. M. (1979). Good and poor readers' recall of familiar and unfamiliar text. Journal of Reading Behavior, 11(4), 375-380.

Trivedi, H. C. (1978). Culture in language learning.English Language Teaching Journal, 32(2), 92-97.

Upton, T. A., & Lee-Thompson, L. C. (2001).The role of the first language in second language reading.Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 23(4), 469-495.

Urquhart, S., & Weir, C. (1998).Reading in a second language: Process, product and practice. New York, NY: Longman.

Vocca, R. T., &Vocca, J. L. (1999).Content area reading: Literacy and learning across the curriculum (6th ed.). New York, NY: Longman.

Wallace, C. (2001). Reading. In R. Carter, & D. Nunan (Eds.), The Cambridge guide to teaching English to speakers of other languages (pp. 21-27). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Webster, J. W. (2001). Effects of ninth graders' culture-specific schemata on responses to multicultural literature.The Journal of Educational Research, 95(1), 12-25.

Widdowson, H. G. (1983). Learning purpose and language use. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Winfield, F. E., & Barnes-Felfeli, P. (1982).The effects of familiar and unfamiliar cultural context on foreign language composition.The Modern Language Journal, 66(4), 373-378.