Exploring Content Schemata Influence on L2 Reading: *The Hunted Fox* and *Twelve and Not Stupid*

Amizura Hanadi Mohd Radzi

Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA Perlis,

02600 Arau, Perlis, Malaysia

E-mail: amizura@perlis.uitm.edu.my

Noor Hashima Abd Aziz

School of Education and Modern Languages, Universiti Utara Malaysia,

06010 Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia

E-mail: noor934@uum.edu.my

Abstract

This paper will discuss the aspects of content schemata in second language reading among diploma level students who were taking a reading course in Universiti Teknologi MARA Perlis. In this qualitative case study, the researcher had selected two short stories that are categorized as content-familiar texts, i.e. *The Hunted Fox* and *Twelve and Not Stupid*. Six participants were asked to write a 150-word entry response on the short story and a grading criteria was used to assess the participants' level of comprehension. An in-depth interview was also conducted on each participant. The entry responses and the interview patterns were analyzed to determine whether content schemata had contributed to the learners' understanding of the text. This study discovered that content schemata had contributed to the learners' understanding of the text because the learners' comprehension was facilitated by their background knowledge on the content-familiar texts.

Keywords: Schema Theory; schemata; content schemata

1. Introduction

Second language learners utilize their schema when they connect their background knowledge to the content of a text. A second language learner who lacks schemata with regard to the context of the text would face difficulty to comprehend the reading text because depending only on the linguistic elements will not be sufficient for the learner to be an independent reader (Nunan, 1985, as cited in Amizura & Noor Hashima, 2013). This study is guided by schema theory and its primary focus is looking at the cognitive processes involved in second language reading where the participants were required to reflect on their L2 reading processes. Jones, Palincsar, Ogle and Carr (1987) stress that effective learners are aware of the processes underlying their own learning. Reading processes that learners undergo play an important role in reading comprehension. This is crucial since how learners utilize their background knowledge will influence their comprehension.

The researcher conducted a qualitative case study, exploring the influence of content schemata on the learners' comprehension of the two short stories. The following research questions guided this study:

a) How do the language learners process content-familiar texts?

b) What are the factors that contribute to the learners' understanding of the texts?

This study explored how content schemata contributed to the learners' understanding of the two texts by looking at how they processed the two short stories that are categorized as content-familiar texts. This research which specifically focused on the issue of content schemata among tertiary level students at UiTM Perlis unveiled learners' cognitive processes in coping with texts that require prior knowledge. The findings from this study could create awareness among material writers and developers on the importance of selecting reading texts with content areas which are within the schemata of ESL learners. Therefore, the findings from this study may encourage material writers to re-evaluate the level of difficulties of the reading texts of the current textbooks for ESP courses.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Reading Comprehension and Schemata

A reader interacts with the text as one associates the reading passage's structure and content with one's background knowledge while reading (Rumelhart, 1977). Widdowson (1979) states that as one reads, he or she builds a rational understanding of a reading passage by combining information in the text with the ones they bring to the reading

passage. Grabe (1988) clarifies further that the process of reading is simply not just an extraction of information from the reading passage but the process activates a collection of knowledge in the mind of the reader. This knowledge may then be developed and expanded by the new information discovered in the reading passage.

Goodman (1975) explains that reading is a hypothesis-generating process whereby readers who are proficient will form predictions and confirmation on the information during the reading process. Learners who are proficient in the language continuously form hypothesis in their mind and information that they come across while reading are matched with their background knowledge. Andersson and Barnitz (1998) believe that readers also bring to a text an extensive range of experiences that they utilize in order to construct a meaningful representation of the reading passage. Background knowledge of the readers, organized in clusters that are topical, enables the readers to comprehend what is being read (Anderson, 1977; Morgan, 1983; Spiro, 1980).

Anderson et al's study states that in a reading process, for certain information to be understood, information from the message as well as the internal schemata need to be drawn until sets are agreed as a single schema or message (as cited in Hudson, 1988). Perfetti (1985) emphasizes that one of the most significant comprehension components is when the reader builds a representation of the text meaning. Rumelhart (1980) also stresses that comprehension is the process of selecting the schema that illustrates input information and variable constrains. Reading comprehension involves the input of certain amount of information and finding the schemata which demonstrate the information. When the reader finds the schemata or fills the slots, one's comprehension is generated (Xie, 2005).

Stott (2001) suggests that during the process of reading, a reader does not only acquire all the schemata that are relevant to the text but also that his or her schemata actually are being activated. Swales (1990) proposes the idea that reading process involves readers identifying genre of the text as well as the structure and topic which activate the readers' schemata which allow them to comprehend the reading passage. Xie (2005) also states that in order to understand a text, a reader needs to activate relevant schemata to find information in memory and to reconstruct representation of memory. Carrell (1988) explains that readers may experience reading problems such as insufficient background knowledge. One factor that might contribute to the problem of why particular content schemata are nonexistent for a reader is that the schema is culturally specific, and thus absent from the reader's cultural background (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1988). Readers may also overcompensate for absent schema by making wild guesses. They may be overcompensating by slowing their reading speed in a text-bound manner in dealing with unfamiliar topics (Carrell, 1988). Anderson and Pearson (1988) assert that schema-theoretic notions are the driving force behind empirical research of basic processes in reading.

3. Methodology

The contextual condition, i.e. the participants' familiarity with the content area of the text is the primary element in this study. The sampling type for this study is purposive sampling. A total of six Part 2, Diploma of Accountancy, Universiti Teknologi MARA Perlis students who were taking ELC150 Integrated Languare Skills: Reading course were selected as participants. The participants consisted of three female and three male students, aged between 18 to 19.

3.1 Text Selection

The reading texts used in this study are two texts which are categorized as content-familiar to the participants, written by a local author, i.e. *Twelve and Not Stupid* by Zuraidah Omar (2006) and a foreign author, Shazwellyn Smith (2010), i.e. *The Hunted Fox*. The content areas of the two texts are regarded familiar to the participants as the story line of the short story, 'Twelve and Not Stupid' revolves on a family crisis and the story line of 'The Hunted Fox' is on teen bully cases at a secondary school. The two short stories were part of the collection of the eight short stories used for the Personal Reading Log Assessments for Part Two diploma level students taking ELC150 course. The researcher intended to explore whether the participants could comprehend the texts because the content areas are assumed to be familiar to them.

3.1.1 Readability of Texts

The researcher decided to choose two readability formulae to check both texts' readability, namely McAlpine EFLAW and the Fog Index. The Fog index, developed by Robert Gunning in 1952, measures the readability of text written in English. Another readability formula chosen is McAlpine EFLAW, which is a text analysis formula developed by Rachel McAlpine in 2004, and later was updated in 2006. This readability formula is specifically designed for EFL/ESL texts, focusing on two significant flaws: long sentences and a high proportion of miniwords which are considered to be challenging for EFL readers (McAlpine, 2012).

'Text Readability Consensus Calculator' from http://www.readabilityformulas.com/free-readability-formula-tests.php was utilized to help the researcher to find out the reading level of the participants based on the Fog Index Formula. For the short story, 'Twelve and Not Stupid' the Fog Index Formula scored 7.2 for text scale. It falls under the catagory fairly easy to read. However, the short story, 'The Hunted Fox', The Fog Index Formula scored 9.8 for text scale. It also falls under the category fairly easy to read.

The researcher calculated the McAlpine EFLAW Readability Score manually for both texts. For 'Twelve and Not Stupid', McAlpine EFLAW Readability scored 21 for text scale. It falls under the catagory quite easy to understand. However, McAlpine EFLAW Readability scored 24 for text scale, for the other short story, 'The Hunted Fox', which falls under the category quite easy to understand.

3.2 Data Collection

Three participants were asked to write an entry response of 150 words on the short story, 'Twelve and Not Stupid'. However, the other three were asked to write an entry response of 150 words on the short story, 'The Hunted Fox'. They were instructed to reflect on a single character portrayed in the short stories as well as on the issues discussed in the short stories.

The researcher also conducted one-on-one interviewing, i.e. in-depth interviews with the participants. The researcher constructed eight open-ended questions based on the framework of schema theory to explore the participants' reading processes on the texts that they had read. The in-depth interviews were audio taped, and later transcribed verbatimly using NVivo 10 software.

3.3 Data Analysis

The researcher analysed the participants' entry responses and the interview transcriptions to determine whether content schemata had influenced their understanding of the text. The researcher had used a rubric scale ranging from one to five marks as illustrated in Table 1 to analyse the six participants' entry responses. The researcher also analyzed the interview transcriptions for themes.

Table 1. Personal reading log (PRL) grading criteria, Universiti Teknologi MARA (2013)

5	4	3	2	1
Responses are very insightful, showing an excellent comprehension of the reading. All responses refer to specific text details.	Responses are adequately insightful, showing adequate comprehension of the reading. Numerous responses refer to specific text details.	Responses seldom insightful, showing below average comprehension of the reading. Several responses are vague –refer to few details.	Responses offer **NO** insight into the reading. Responses **DIDN'T** demonstrate comprehension of the reading. Responses **DON'T** refer to specific details.	Responses are **NOT** complete. Responses show no indication of having read the material. Responses are incomplete or incoherent.

4. Findings

4.1 Analysis of the Participants' Personal Reading Log Entry Responses (Twelve and Not Stupid)

The researcher had used the grading criteria above to assess the participants' level of comprehension of each short story. All three participants' entry responses scored 4.5 marks, for the short story, 'Twelve and Not Stupid', which falls under the criteria of being insightful. Their scores exhibited an excellent comprehension of the reading text. The participants' responses showed that they had referred to specific details in the short story. All the three participants wrote that they were attracted to the main character of the short story because of her obedient personality. Excerpts of the participants' personal reading log entry responses are as follows.

> [Sasha is an obedient daughter. She will obey whatever her parents asked her to do. This can be proven when she shook hands with Auntie May after her father asked her to do so. Besides, she obeyed her father's instruction by not telling her mother about Auntie May. As an evidence, for her obedient characteristic, she did not say even a single word about Auntie May at home.]

> (Participant1)

> [Sasha is only twelve years old girl but she is so matured. Sasha is a patient person. This is because even though she waited for her father to fetch her from school for two hours, Sasha never gets angry. She will wait until her father comes to fetch her…Other reason why I like Sasha is because she is very obedient to her father.]

> (Participant 2)

[She (Sasha) knows how to behave in front of other people and this character makes me like her so much. For example, Sasha did not ask too much about Auntie May in the car and just obeyed her father…I think if there is other children in the car, they will ask too much about who Auntie May is…I really love the character of Sasha when she was very worried because she had to lie to her mother about the reason why she came back late from school.]

(Participant 3)

4.2 Analysis of the Participants' Personal Reading Log Entry Responses (The Hunted Fox)

The participants' scores for the entry response on the short story, 'The Hunted Fox' ranged from 4 to 4.5, which falls under the criteria of being insightful. Their scores exhibited an excellent comprehension of the reading text. The three participants referred to specific details in the short story. All three participants addressed the issue of bully and admired how the main character dealt with her problems of being the victim. Below are samples of the participants' personal reading log entry responses.

[Patricia is a type of person who would stand up for the right of others. For example, Patricia never likes to see her close friend being bullied and if she ever watches her friends being bullied, she would stand up for them. As for me, I am not a very brave person but when it comes to my friend or family being bullied, I would not hold back to the bully and that's why I like Patricia because we share the same personality in a matter of friends.]

(Participant 4)

[Moreover, Patricia also is a strong girl… This can be proven in the short story. Although Patricia lived with bullying everyday, she continues to get good grades... As a student, we must have an extraordinary spirit in studying. When we find some subject that is hard for us, do not give up easily and continue our journey by working hard until we achieve our goals.]

(Participant 5)

[I like her characteristics. She has a good personality that is never give up. Every day, Patricia is bullied with her friend but she still focuses on her studies. She always gets good grades for every exam she takes. She is also a matured girl. She cannot stand injustice and her close friend being bullied. She will stand up for the rights. Besides, I also like her patience. Although she is constantly being bullied, she never fights back but she does the right things.]

(Participant 6)

4.3 Analysis of the In-depth Interviews (Twelve and Not Stupid)

The interview responses were analyzed for themes, to explore the role of content schemata that could facilitate understanding. Sample quotes to illustrate the points are stated as follows.

Interview Question 1: How do you describe your reading experience of this text?

The theme that emerged from question one is 'interesting or very interesting'. The participants found the short story to be interesting. Participant 1 said,

"From my opinion, the short story is very interesting. Because from the title itself, it says "Twelve and Not Stupid", after reading the story, then I know that the child whose age is just 12, can think...her way of thinking is very matured."

Participant 2 said,

"I think it is interesting because it shows that the situation in the short story relates to our lives because I think it's normal to us because there are many situations like this in our lives."

Interview Question 2: Do you look for cues in the short story to infer to certain background
knowledge?

The theme from question two that emerged is 'using cues to find the meaning of words'. Participant 1 and 3 stated that they looked for cues from the words in the text itself. Participant 1 said,

> "Of course I do that. I refer to the meaning of the words in the short story and relate them to my background knowledge."

Participant 3 said,

> "Yes. I look for cues in the words or the sentences. I do have some background knowledge about family issues."

Interview Question 3: Is the theme of the short story predictable?

The theme which emerged is 'unpredictability'. Participant 1 and 2 mentioned that they found the theme of the short story to be unpredictable. Participant 1 said,

> "I actually could not guess the theme because I think the guess that I thought in the beginning is not the same. At first, I thought may be Aunt May is her father's (Sasha's father's) second wife. But in the end, it was about something else."

Participant 2 said,

> "At first I predicted the story is about something else ... but the ending is different from my expectation. At first I predicted that Auntie May has a scandal with Sasha's father…especially from their conversation in the car."

Interview Question 4: How do you activate your background knowledge on the topic?

The theme that emerged from question four is 'triggered memory'. Participant 1 mentioned that the content in the text brought back memory from her past. She said,

> "After her father brought Aunt May, to pick up Sasha from school, and then her father asked not to tell her mom about Aunt May, it triggered something. Usually when someone, when guys don't want the child to tell the mother about some woman, there must be something, right? It actually happend in my family itself. It brought back that memory. It came to my mind."

Participant 2 said,

> "All the knowledge of scandal came to my mind. And at the end of the story, I realized that my expectation is wrong."

Participant 3 said,

> "All knowledge about family crisis or family issues… family problems come to my mind."

Interview Question 5: While reading the short story, do you constantly look for information to
verify or substantiate your background knowledge? If yes, can you
explain how.

The theme which emerged from question five is 'keep searching for familiar information'. Participant 1 admitted that that she kept searching for information in the text to substantiate her background knowledge on the issue. This is illustrated in the quotation below.

Participant 1 said,

> "Yes, I start checking about what I thought in the beginning, that is about this man probably is having another woman. I keep looking for other information in the short story to verify that."

Participant 2 said,

> "Yes..I read more and more to find more information about the scandal."

All three participants admitted that they checked or matched the information in the text against their background knowledge and experience. Participant 1 said,

> "Like I had mentioned earlier, it happened in my family. So, I matched it with the situation in my family."

Participant 2 said,

> "At first yes,but in the middle of the short story, it's different."

Participant 3 said,

> "Sasha simply followed her father's instructions, even when her father asked her to lie to her mother. She simply obeyed because she doesn't want to hurt her mother's feelings. I matched her actions with myself."

Interview Question 6: How do you connect the short story to your background knowledge?

The theme that emerged is 'forming association'. Participants 1 and 2 mentioned that their previous knowledge helped them to understand the short story. Participant 1 said,

> "Because it happens to my uncle's family, this incidence happens to my uncle's family. Everything that my mother tell me, the stories about my uncle's second wife, I think there are many things that happen in the same way as the story. I think by remembering those stories that my mother told me, it helps me a lot to understand the story. I associate the knowledge (about family conflict) that I have with the short story."

Participant 2 said,

> "The background knowledge that I have, accommodated my understanding. When I think it was about the scandal, I want to read more and more so I try to understand the short story more. I made some associations on scandals with the context of the short story."

It is important to note that participants 1 and 2 ignored certain information from their background knowledge when they found that the information from their background knowledge contradicted with the information in the short story. Participant 1 said,

> "After Aunt May said that her husband abandoned her, then I stop matching the story with my uncle's family because it's different. From that point, I just stop."

Participant 2 said,

> "After I realised that it is not about scandal, I read again…I refer again to the previous pages. I try to think more logically."

Interview question 7: Do you associate the character/characters in the short story with your personal experience?

The theme 'association with personal experience' has also emerged. All three participants had associated the characters in the short story with their personal experience. Participant 1 said,

> "I associate it with my uncle's family."

Participant 2 said,

> "I think yes. About how Sasha interacts with her parents and she always obeys her father not to tell her mother about what is the real situation, I think for me in my life, I will not tell my mother about something that will worry her. I don't want her to be worried so much."

Participant 3 said,

> "About Sasha obeying her father, I associate her character with my own personal experience."

Interview question 8: In your opinion, is background knowledge important to understand a text?

The theme that emerged is 'background knowledge as the basis of inference'. All three participants mentioned that their background knowledge became the basis of inference on the topic of the short story. Participant 1 said,

> "Oh yes. I base on that to understand the short story. It helps me a lot because I already know...like I already know that men who got married to his second wife, hmm...how he wants to keep the marriage a secret, especially from his first wife, why he wants to keep it a secret…a'aa…when I was reading, when Sasha's father was trying to tell her not to tell the mother, then I start thinking that may be Aunt May is the second wife because my uncle did something like that before, he did tell his child not to tell the mother."

Participant 2 said,

> "Yes it is so important because if we read the short story and we have no base, no basic knowledge about the short story, we cannot understand so much and we might expect about the other thing."

Participant 3 said,

> "Yes, because our background knowledge will help us to understand better, especially what the author is trying to convey in the story."

4.4 Analysis of the In-depth Interviews (The Hunted Fox)

The researcher analyzed the interview responses for themes. The themes that emerged indicated the role of content schemata that could assist understanding. Sample quotes to illustrate the points are stated as follows.

Interview Question 1: How do you describe your reading experience of this text?

Similar to *Twelve and Not Stupid*, the theme that emerged from question one is also 'interesting'. All three participants explained why the short story appealed to them. Participant 4 said,
> "Basically, it is about the problem of bully that happens in school."

Participant 5 said,

> "Yes, it is about Patricia who is being bullied…OK, Patricia is genius, um…a clever kid…But, she is always bullied by some of her school mates."

Participant 6 said,

> "About a girl being bullied…and she cannot forget."

Interview Question 2: Do you look for cues in the short story to infer to certain background knowledge?

All the three participants admitted that they looked for cues, from the words, while reading the short story. Therefore, the theme for question two that emerged is 'using cues to find the meaning of words'.

Interview Question 3: Is the theme of the short story predictable?

Unlike the short story, *Twelve and Not Stupid*, all the three participants for *The Hunted Fox* gave similar response to the question by stating that they could predict the theme of the short story from the beginning. The theme which emerged is 'predictability'.

Participant 4 said,

> "Hmm, I could guess the theme, which is a girl being bullied."

Participant 5 said,

> "Um, the theme, I think it is bully. It's about bullying."

Participant 6 said,

> "The theme is about bulling, right? From the beginning, I could already guess it."

Interview Question 4: How do you activate your background knowledge on the topic?

The theme that emerged from question four is 'using imagination or visualization'. Participant 4 said,
> "Since the short story describes how she is being bullied. Um, like she is always being teased…um at her school…um, I imagined those incidents."

Participant 5 said,

> "Um, I just read the text, and then I visualized a bit…visualized like…what I read, I visualized the story and the current situation…such as the issue of bully that is commonly occurring."

Participant 6 said,

> "It (previous knowledge) came to my mind, I think. When I read about bully, on the Internet, YouTube do have videos that were being uploaded on bully…I have watched them (chuckle)…quite often…they came to my mind."

Interview Question 5: While reading the short story, do you constantly look for information to verify or substantiate your background knowledge? If yes, can you explain how.

All the three participants mentioned that they checked or matched the information in the text against their background knowledge and experience by looking at the clues. The theme which emerged from question five is 'keep searching for familiar information'. The next quotation illustrates the point.

Participant 4 said,

> "Um…Patricia is a lonely girl. OK, so normally a bullied victim is a loner…When I saw the word 'lonely', I can already guess what will happen..."

Interview Question 6: How do you connect the short story to your background knowledge?

Another theme that emerged is 'forming association'. Participant 4 mentioned that his previous knowledge on bully helped him understand the short story. He said,

> "That's why I can detect the word 'lonely' in the short story...from the beginning of the story."

Participant 5 stated that he made some association of his previous experience with the short story. He said,

> "Um…a bit…But, since her problem is different from what I went through, I relate it only a bit…"

Participant 6 said,

> "Oh like bully, probably I did associate it with my background knowledge."

It is interesting to note that even though Participant 4 did not find any inconsistent information from his background knowledge in connection to the short story but he found that there is a missing link in the story line. He said,

> "The author did not state the reason why Patricia is being bullied…What she had done that was so wrong to deserve such treatment…to that extend...um...I found it strange."

However, Participant 6 found inconsistent information from his background knowledge, in relation to the context of the short story. He said,

> "Not the same. There is something not similar. The incidence of girls being bullied, we seldom hear. Patricia is a girl, right? If a guy, that is common. If it involves girls, we don't hear such cases so often."

Another theme that emerged is 'discovery of new information'. All the three participants expressed that they learned something new from the short story and for participant 4, it gave him a positive impact. He said,

> "There's something new…like normally those (students) who are victims of bully, they normally will not perform very well academically. She's clever, even though she is being bullied. That's something new that I got from this story. Do not make a problem as an excuse to stop you from achieving success."

Participant 5 said,

> "OK, in this story, Patricia seems to take some time before telling others that she is being bullied…When she cannot stand it anymore, then she told her mother that she is being bullied…If I were her, I would quickly tell...right after the incidence, I will definitely inform the matter to the discipline master."

Participant 6 said,

> "This bully problem, normally girls who bully other girls…the form of bully would be doing laundry, press the clothes…In the story, she was being chased…I don't know…like I've never heard anything like it before."

Interview question 7: Do you associate the character/characters in the short story with your personal experience?

The theme 'association with personal experience' has also emerged. From the interview responses, the three participants seemed to associate the characters in the short story with their personal experience. Participant 4 said,

> "I had stayed at the school hostel before. I think there were incidences of bully."

Participant 5 revealed that he matched the information in the short story with his personal experience because he was bullied when he was in school. He also emphasized that he understood what Patricia went through. He said,

> "Being bullied. Long ago, I was being extorted for pocket money. That was in primary school, year one like that. It happened long ago. So, it sort of brought back old memories. Patricia's character, she is a victim of bully and I was once too…Yes, I understood it very well."

Participant 6 said,

> "Relating it to my personal experience…probably a bit. (chuckle) I've never bullied anyone. Um…how should I say…Like my friends staying at the school hostel…I've never stayed at the hostel. But my friends told me…like they were being forced to help…like washing clothes for the seniors…like they were being bullied by the seniors…that kind of

experience."

Interview question 8: In your opinion, is background knowledge important to understand a
text?

The theme that emerged is 'background knowledge facilitates comprehension'. Participant 4 indicated that his previous experience staying at the school hostel has helped him to understand the story.

Participant 4 said,

> "The knowledge came to my mind. That's why I can detect that word
> (lonely)."

Participant 4 also stated that his background knowledge on bully became the basis for his understanding. He also stressed that background knowledge is important for him to understand the text. He said,

> "It makes me easier to understand (the story)…It helps me to have better
> understanding. Because I know more or less about bullying, and from my
> observation when I was in school…it influences my understanding."

Participants 5 and 6 also revealed that background knowledge is important for the readers in order for them to comprehend the text. The sample quotes below illustrate.

Participant 5 said,

> "To understand the story more, of course it is important. Yes, compared
> to people who have no experience regarding the subject, it would be quite
> difficult for them to understand... Yes, yes. Understand, I understand
> Patricia, her sadness…the bullying…um, it does help me to understand
> more."

Participant 6 said,

> "Um, very important…When we read we understand…when we are
> writing an essay or something. Because we can relate it to us…Because
> we always hear about bullying, right? Because that is a problem, because
> that is a problem that we always hear in the newspapers, etc. That's why
> it is easy to relate to it."

5. Discussion

Twelve themes had emerged in this study and five of them were similar for both short stories, i.e. 'interesting', 'using cues to find the meaning of words', 'keep searching for familiar information', 'forming association' and 'association with personal experience'. All the six participants found the short story that they had read as interesting. From the interview responses, it can be concluded that all the six participants made use of cues in the text to find the meaning of the words encountered and had associated the main character of both short stories with their personal experience. As stated by Nunan (1985), meaning itself eventually exists in the experiential world, and whether the reader will be successful or not in achieving comprehension will depend, at least in part, on his or her ability to map the textual content onto the extra-linguistic world it is representing. The participants also expressed that they were constantly looking for information in the text to verify their background knowledge while reading the short story. Nuttall (1982) states that readers who are alert and actively processing the ideas in the text, are able to activate the relevant schemata. Fowler (1991) also emphasizes that while reading, a reader is actively and creatively organizing his/her mental schemata in the process of making sense of perceptual data.

The themes that are not similar are 'unpredictability', 'triggered memory' and 'background knowledge as the basis of inference', for the short story, *Twelve and Not Stupid*. Nunan (1985) explains that in the instance where the readers and the writer share similar cultural backgrounds, the readers have more schematic prerequisites to comprehend a text as compared to the readers coming from another culture. The three participants had the same cultural background as the author of the short story and they were able to associate their background knowledge with the content area of the short story.

However, for the short story, *The Hunted Fox*, the themes emerged that are different from the ones that had emerged in the other short story are 'predictability', 'using imagination' or 'visualization', 'discovery of new information' and 'background knowledge facilitates comprehension'. All the three participants revealed that they had learned something new, such as a bullied victim is able to perform well in school, from the short story, *The Hunted Fox*. This is justified as Cook (1994) states, a reader's schemata interact with the text and this interaction is perceived as reciprocal and dynamic (as cited in Lang, 2009).

After cross analysing the analysis of the participants' personal reading log entry responses with the themes that had emerged in the interview data for both short stories, it can be concluded that the participants who are second language learners, who had no background knowledge or experience on the content area of the text experienced difficulties to

understand what they were reading. Therefore, content schemata can be regarded as indispensable because they play a very important role in reading comprehension. All the six participants agreed that prior knowledge on the content area of the text was necessary for them to understand the text.

6. Conclusion

This study explored how content schemata could influence the learners' understanding of the given text. Both data collection techniques, i.e. the entry response and the in-depth interviews had provided insights into the learners' cognitive processes that were involved in reading. It can be inferred from the two data that content schemata play a primary role in the learners' understanding of the text whereby the learners' comprehension of the content area of the short story is facilitated by content schemata.

References

Amizura Hanadi Mohd. Radzi & Noor Hashima Abd. Aziz. (2013). Of a village bomoh and the lottery: Content schemata influence on second language reading. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 4(1), January 2013. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.7575/aiac.alls.v.4n.1p. 42

Anderson, R. C. (1977). The Notion of schemata and the educational enterprise. In R. C. Anderson, Spiro, R. J., & Monatague,W. E. (Eds.), *Schooling and the acquisition of knowledge* (pp.415-431). Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Andersson, B. V., & Barnitz, J. G. (1998). Cross-cultural schemata and reading comprehension**.** International Reading Association, Inc., Reprinted from *Journal of Reading*, November 1984, 102–108.

Anderson, R. C., & Pearson, P. D. (1988). A schema-theoretic view of basic processes in reading comprehension. In P. L. Carrell, J. Devine & D. E. Eskey (Eds.),   *Interactive approaches to second language reading* (pp. 37-55). Cambridge: CUP.

Carrell, P. L. (1988). 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*. Cambridge: CUP.

Carrell, P. L., & Eisterhold, J. C. (1988). Schema theory and ESL reading pedagogy. In P. L. Carrell, J. Devine & D.E. Eskey (Eds.), *Interactive approaches to second language reading*. Cambridge: CUP.

Fowler, R. (1991) *Language in the news: Discourse and ideology in the press*. London: Routledge.

Grabe, W. (1988). Reassessing the term 'Interactive', in P. L. Carrell, J. Devine & D. E. Eskey (Eds.). (1988) *Interactive approaches to second language reading*. Cambridge: CUP.

Goodman, K. (1975). The reading process. In P. L. Carrell, J. Devine & D. E. Eskey (Eds.),*Interactive approaches to second language reading*. Cambridge: CUP.

Hudson, T. (1988). The effects of induced schemata on the 'short circuit' in L2 reading: Non-decoding factors in L2 reading performance. In P. L. Carrell, J. Devine & D. E. Eskey (Eds.), *Interactive approaches to second language reading*. Cambridge: CUP.

Jones, B., Palincsar, A., Ogle, D., & Carr, E. (1987). *Strategic teaching and learning:Cognitive instruction in the content areas*. Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Lang, A. (2009). Reading race in Small Island: Discourse deviation, schemata and the textual encounter. *Language and Literature* 2009 18(3). Retrieved from http://lal.sagepub.com/content/18/3/316

McAlpine,   R.   (2012).   *From   plain   English   to   global   English.*   Retrieved   from http://www.webpagecontent.com/arc_archive/139/5/#score

Morgan, A. L. (1983). Context: The web of meaning. *Language Arts*, *60*, 305–313.

Nunan, D. (1985). Content familiarity and the perception of textual relationships in second language reading. *RELC Journal*, 16 (43), Jun 1, 1985. Retrieved from http://rel.sagepub.com/content/16/1/43

Nuttall, C. (1982). *Teaching reading skills in a foreign language*. Oxford: Heinemann.

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

Personal Reading Log (PRL) Grading Criteria. (2013). Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA.

Rumelhart, D. E. (1977). Toward an interactive model of reading. In S. Dornic (Ed.), *Attention and Performance IV*. New York, NY: Academic Press.

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

Smith, S. (2010). *The hunted fox*. Retrieved from http://shazwellyn.hubpages.com/hub/The-Hunted-Fox-A-School-Bullying-Story

Spiro, R.J. (1980). Constructive processes in prose comprehension and recall. In R. J. Spiro, B. C. Bruce, & W. F. Brewer (Eds.), *Theoretical issues in reading comprehension* (pp. 245–278). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Stott, N. (2001). Helping ESL students become better readers: Schema theory applications and limitations. *The Internet TESL Journal*, Vol. VII, No.11, November 2001. Retrieved from http://iteslj.org/Articles/Stott-Schema.html

Swales, J. M. (1990). *Genre analysis*. Cambridge: CUP.

Text readability consensus calculator. Retrieved from http://www.readabilityformulas.com/free- readability-formula-tests.php

Widdowson, H. (1979). The process and purpose of reading. In H. Widdowson (Ed.), *Explorations in applied linguistics* (171-183). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Xie, X. (2005). The influence of schema theory on foreign language reading comprehension. *The English Teacher*. Vol. XXXIV, 67-75. Retrieved from http://www.melta.org.my

Zuraidah Omar. (2006). Twelve and not stupid. *Silverfish Books*. Retrieved from http://silverfishstories.blogspot.com/2006/09/twelve-and-not-stupid_115845283824241814.html