



## The Impact of Cultural Schemata on EFL Reading Comprehension: The Case of First-Year Moroccan University Students

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DOI: <http://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v7i5.2295>

**APA Citation:** EL KOUAR, B.& Hdii, S. (2025). The Impact of Cultural Schemata on EFL Reading Comprehension: The Case of First-Year Moroccan University Students.. *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies*. 7(5).77-90. <http://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v7i5.2295>

**Received:**

10/07/2025

**Accepted:**

27/08/2025

**Keywords:**

Cultural  
schemata,  
reading,  
comprehension,  
and Moroccan  
EFL learners.

**Abstract**

*The prime objective of the study was to investigate the effects of background knowledge on reading comprehension among Moroccan EFL learners at the tertiary level. The hypothesis tested was that the experimental group would perform better than the control group on the grounds of providing cultural background knowledge prior to reading. To meet this objective, the study made use of two types of instruments: a test comprising structured test items and a post-reading feedback questionnaire. A cohort of sixty-eight university students took part in the study. The participants were divided into two groups: the control group and the experimental group. The study adopts a mixed-method experimental design to triangulate data on both the effect of background knowledge and students' perceptions of the intervention on EFL learners' reading comprehension. The results show that the experimental group performed better than the control group on the basis of providing cultural background knowledge. The major pedagogical implication of the study is that pre-reading activities, in general, and providing background knowledge, in particular, are useful instructional tools for teachers in the EFL context to facilitate students' reading comprehension at the tertiary level.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In light of the continuous research that has been devoted to reading comprehension, there is ample evidence for the current deficiencies that single out EFL reading comprehension. Recently, however, the major development in literacy research has outgrown the simple views on reading (i.e., reading as a mere process of decoding the linguistic input) towards a schema interactive model that has been adopted as an adequate theoretical basis for the current study. According to this view, a text does not carry meaning per se, but it only provides direction as to how the readers should construct meaning from their prior knowledge (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983)

As a matter of fact, language learning in an EFL context like Morocco appears to expand. Moreover, account has generally not been taken when it comes to the sociocultural factors that come into play as far as L2 learners are concerned. Most L2 readers lack the cultural knowledge presupposed in texts written in a foreign language. Noteworthy, is that in EFL contexts, L2 readers often come with various cultural backgrounds, which results in an

implausible interpretation of the author's intended meaning since the topic might lie outside of their base knowledge.

Despite its pedagogical significance, this research area has received little attention from previous studies. Other than a handful of research studies, the literature remains silent or insufficiently explored as far as cultural schemata on reading comprehension are concerned (Khartite (2021). A recent study conducted by Biboussi (2022) paid lip service to this issue through an investigation of the impact of pre-reading activities, which offered limited insights into how learners experienced the treatment.

The present study advances beyond this earlier work by integrating a feedback questionnaire to bring to the learners' perceptions and attitudes towards cultural schemata, and thereby providing a comprehensive account of the issue at stake.

. It goes without saying that EFL readers are often in a dilemma since most of them lack an intuitive foundation in the structure of L2. This factor is coupled with the lack of appropriate background knowledge or the failure to activate it. Noteworthy, the fact that the content of texts written in foreign languages is mostly culture-specific, a factor that contributes to raising our awareness of the importance of the issue.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The theory of reading comprehension has undergone major developments, for reading comprehension is no longer perceived as a mere process of decoding the linguistic data from a written text. Nevertheless, a full-fledged theoretical model of reading is yet to be developed. It is of considerable importance to provide the unfamiliar reader with a definition that is useful to the research paper.

Traditionally, reading comprehension is viewed as a mechanical linear operation in which the reader begins processing the visual information input exhibited in a written text. Recently, however, the theory of reading has moved from quite simple views to more elaborate frameworks that involve cognitive aspects. Reading is now viewed as an 'Interactive process' involving a text, a reader, and a social context.

The underlying assumption about the bottom-up models lies in that reading is a mechanical, linear operation in which the reader begins processing the visual information exhibited by a written text in a series of stages. However, this view maintains that reading starts from the smallest elements or the perceptual level i.e. lower-level processing of the printed text) to the conceptual level (i.e. higher-level processing). LaBerge and Samuels (1974), and Goughs (1972).

In complete opposition to the aforementioned representations of reading as a bottom-up process, Goodman (1967) and Smith (1971) attempt to refute the idea that reading is a linear, mechanical operation centered on precise letter identification<sup>1</sup>. However, Goodman (1967) maintains that reading is a psycholinguistic guessing game inasmuch as the reader is constantly hypothesizing about the conceptual meaning of a text.

Amidst the limitations and the mounting criticism against the aforementioned models of reading, subsequent research has led theorists to develop a new approach referred to as the 'interactive model'. The basic assumption behind this approach is that readers are said to be drawing simultaneously upon both bottom-up and top-down information before setting an interpretation of a given text. McClelland & Rumelhart, (1981), Stanovich's (1980)

### **2.1.An overview of schema theory**

The impact of the cognitive revolution in the field of literacy research is widely seen with regard to the development of learning theories. More specifically, the impact is marked in the development of schema theoretic research and its foremost role in exploring the effects of background knowledge on reading comprehension. Recently, however, there has been a widespread reliance on schema theory due to its resilience in the field, and its implications are now acknowledged in foreign language teaching.

The concept of "schema" was first used in psychology by Barlett (1932) as "an active organization of past reactions or experiences" and is said to be the first psychologist to have utilized the concept of schema in order to describe a stored knowledge of various past experiences and reactions. This implies that schemas embody our higher-order structures, which serve the role of facilitating recall and retention of the newly acquired knowledge. According to Bartlett (1932), schemas are more than phenomena in the head. This being the case, emphasis is on the reciprocity between culture and memory. Put differently, schemas contribute to exploring the consecutive role of culturally organized experiences in individual sense making, McVee et al (2005). Thereafter schema was introduced in reading by Rumelhart (1980), Carrell (1981) when discussing the important role of background knowledge in reading comprehension. In this regard, Rumelhart (1980) defines schema as "a data structure for representing the genetic concepts stored in memory ". In the same vein, Anderson and Pearson (1984) define it as "an abstract knowledge structure". Similarly, Carrell & Eisterhold, (1983) argue that new information, new concepts, and new ideas can be meaningful only when they are related to something the individual already knows.

Building on Bartlett (1932), Ausubel (1963) emphasized the central role of existing cognitive structures in learning and advanced the notion of the 'advance organizers' with the ultimate aim of providing the necessary pre-existing knowledge to facilitate the integration of new information. Advanced organizers are instructional tools presented before the learning process to link new information to relevant prior knowledge.

Following the development of schema theory, Shank and Abelson (1977) developed a theory of 'scripts' while Minsky (1975) advanced the notion of frames. Scripts refer to the typical sequence of events in a given situation. In other words, an event script tends to define both procedural and sequential aspects of expected actions. This being the case, a popular example of scripts is the 'restaurant', which contains all that is associated in one's memory with going to the restaurant. On the other hand, Minsky (1975) introduced the concept of 'frames' to refer to the knowledge structure that represents expectations of a situation or details specific to that situation. Subsequent research points to the fact that schema is an organizing structure that stands between the external world and the mental structures. Hence, the schema both shapes and is shaped by the experiences. McVee et al, (2005)

In order to understand the comprehension, a theoretical distinction is drawn between content schemata (i.e. background knowledge of the content area of a text) and formal schemata (i.e. background knowledge of the rhetorical structures of different types of texts)

Content schema is generally defined as background knowledge or world knowledge, which the readers bring to a text. This background includes knowledge about people, the world, culture and the universe Al-Issa, (2006). However, it would be illuminative to further separate content schemata into cultural schemata and content area schemata. The former is defined as the reader's cultural knowledge that may be relevant to the content of a particular text. Conversely, the content area schemata stand for the content and the domain of the text being read. This amounts to saying that, content area schemata and cultural schemata equally have a facilitative function in the text at hand.

Formal schemata also known as 'textual formal schemata' is defined as the background knowledge relating to the organizational form and rhetorical structures of different types of texts. In addition, formal schemata include vocabulary, sentence structures, and the level of formality. As a case in point, the vast array of research in rhetorical structures of English discourse generally bears on 'story grammar'. Readers approach a story with expectations, a set of rules and the sequence of its organization. However, a well-formed narration introduces, time, location, characters and surroundings. Likewise, research bears on English expository texts that are reported to have some specific organizational principles which facilitate comprehension and recall Maan, (2000).

Building on schema theory as theoretical framework for the present study, it is a considerable importance to examine the related research that has investigated the impact of cultural schemata on EFL reading in different contexts. Amid this theoretical and empirical analyses; a pedagogical question arises: "Can we improve students' reading by helping them to build background knowledge on the topic prior to reading?" Existing pedagogical studies and pedagogical research in English as in the EFL context suggest an affirmative answer, as the following section highlights. Yet, the present study is situated within the Moroccan higher education context, targeting first-year university students.

## **2.2.Previous studies**

As suggested in the literature, schema theory stipulates that the reader's previous knowledge plays a fundamental role in the construction of meaning. However, readers may not have prior knowledge about the content, or they need help to activate it. This calls into question the teacher's role in providing the relevant schema and activating pre-existing knowledge. Carrell (1988) maintains that the pre-reading activities play a vital role in activating the reader's background knowledge and points to the fact that they provide background knowledge to comprehend the text material. This involves building a background knowledge base to deal with potential linguistic and conceptual difficulties and to determine the purpose of the reading text at hand. In this regard, numerous pre-reading activities are in the literature for the provision of activating appropriate knowledge (Ajideh, 2006; Khartite, 2003).

The claims advanced by the proponent of the schema theoretic view are straightforwardly illustrated in a study entitled 'A cross-cultural perspective on reading comprehension' by Steffenson, Joag-Dev, and Anderson (1979). Following the same line of research, Pitchard

(1988) investigated the relationship between ‘cultural schemata’ and the reading process in order to identify the strategies used by proficient readers in understanding culturally familiar and unfamiliar passages. Similarly, Taglieber, Johnson & Yarbrough (1988) investigated the effects of three pre-reading activities in activating background knowledge and facilitating reading comprehension.

While international scholarship on EFL reading yielded a significant contribution Khataee, 2018), research conducted at the local or regional level remains limited. Recently, Bensalah et al (2020) investigated the impact of cultural schemata on the process of reading culturally-loaded texts in order to examine if the use of pre-reading activities compensates for the absence of cultural familiarity. Interestingly, subjects from the experimental group scored significantly higher in the comprehension test than those in the control group. The study’s major finding indicates that there is a correlation between activating students’ background knowledge and the increase in reading comprehension ability among EFL Ibn Khaldoun University (Tialet, Algeria).

Another important study conducted by Biboussi (2022) in order to test a hypothesis using students' test score data to measure and compare the performance of the treatment group and the control group. The findings from this study show that the impact of content schema activation on reading comprehension is positive, as assumed.

Drawing on these empirical findings, the study contributes to the worldwide debate in EFL pedagogy by demonstrating how Moroccan EFL learners’ existing knowledge allows for the construction of meaning while facilitating access to culturally specific texts written in English. Additionally, examining the impact of cultural schemata in the EFL context allows for situating this instructional method in the Moroccan higher education context. By doing so, the current study addresses a significant gap in the literature. Such orientation is particularly novel in Moroccan EFL classrooms, which have relied on teacher-centered practices for decades.

Based on the discussion above, the following section presents the research design, participants, and the instruments mobilized for data collection in the present study.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. Research design**

It is commonplace for every single research paper to subscribe to the quantitative or the qualitative paradigm, depending on the object of inquiry (Litosseliti, 2010). It is assumed that there is a causal relationship between the independent variable—background knowledge and the dependent variable—learners’ reading comprehension. In other words, the experimental hypothesis, this study tests claims that learners' reading comprehension is, in some predictable way, affected by background knowledge prior to reading. Thus, the present study adopted a mixed-method experimental design to examine not only the impact of activating cultural background knowledge, but also students’ perception of the intervention through a feedback questionnaire.

#### **3.2. The participants**

The study was conducted at the Faculty of Letters and Humanities in Rabat. A cohort of 68 subjects participated in the study from two different classes. The first group consisted of 40 students (28 female and 12 male) from the same class. Two participants were excluded from

the group since they were repeaters. Thus, the number of participants from this group was reduced to 38. Most of the participants shared the same origin (Moroccan) except two students—one from the U.S and the other from Palestine.

The second group consisted of 31 students from the same class (20 females and 11 males). All the subjects from this group shared the same origin (Moroccan) and the same level of education. The overriding characteristic of the subjects was that more of them were female than male.

A number of considerations have been taken to shun any intervening variables other than the treatment condition. In this respect, the choice of the sample evolves from the fact that the participants' level of English is adequate for the purpose of the study –the subjects share the same level of education, which is an important factor per se. Prior to their admission to the English department, students who took part in this study passed their baccalaureate exam, which often measures languages and writing skills in particular. Moreover, their admission is based on their grade in the English language.

In their first year, students in the English Department typically take grammar and reading comprehension courses, which expose them to a wide range of texts and help build their reading proficiency. These foundational courses require a solid command of English. As a result, linguistic variability among the participants was largely controlled.

### **3.3. Instrumentation**

Since the present study is concerned with the effects of cultural schemata on EFL reading comprehension, the instruments mobilized for the data collection did not depart from those used by previous EFL researchers. Thus, the instruments developed for the study included a text and test items, as well as a feedback questionnaire. Actually, researchers who have dealt in depth with the issue at stake have had recourse to recall as an instrument for data collection. Test items are likely to serve this end in our study since the subjects were not allowed to refer back to the text while answering questions.

The reading selection

### **3.4. The feedback questionnaire**

Being aware of the importance of some qualitative data in enhancing the quantitative data, a two-page feedback questionnaire was developed as a secondary instrument and administered at the end of the session. The rationale behind using a feedback questionnaire as an instrument stemmed from the need to interpret the qualitative data and assess the subject's overall impression concerning the study.

In the two groups, the participants had to answer seven questions--- the questions were similar for the two groups, of course. The first question asked the participants to rate the text difficulty in order to know whether their performance was affected by the text difficulty. The second and third questions were of a two-category scale (Yes-No). They were formulated to elicit information about the appropriateness of time and the degree of familiarity with the reading text. - was the time sufficient for reading the text? Yes/No - was the reading familiar to your culture? Yes/No. Furthermore, four further open-ended questions were formulated. The first two questions were used to have an idea about the difficulties encountered and the

strategies used to overcome these difficulties, if there were any. The last two questions concerned the value of the presence of pre-reading activities in EFL reading classes, and the possibility of adopting pre-reading activities by the subjects' own teachers. The reason behind adopting open-ended questions was to allow students to express their ideas far from the constraints of any available choices.

### 3.5. The reading selection

The reading text was about the wedding traditions in China. The text included a title, 'Chinese wedding ceremony', which helped the subjects situate the major concern of the reading text. The title included three key concepts: 'Chinese', 'Wedding', and 'Traditions', which stood for the cultural specificities of the Chinese culture, and helped activate the subjects' schemata or background knowledge about the wedding customs, in general, and Chinese wedding traditions in particular. In addition, the text was divided into three major paragraphs.

As concerns the administration and collection of the research instruments, it is noteworthy that the study involved two separate groups with the same level of education. The experimental group was exposed to some form of pre-reading activity as a treatment, while the control group did not receive any form of treatment.

### 3.6. The statistical measure

The statistical measure that was deemed appropriate for analyzing the data collected is the independent sample t-test. The reason behind adopting the independent sample t-test as a reliable statistical measure has its strengths in that it allows for the comparison between the performances of the two groups on the presence or absence of pre-reading activities.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Prior to the inferential statistical analysis, it is of paramount importance to provide a preliminary description, say, an exploratory analysis of the features displayed by the data. It is obvious that descriptive statistics are indices that give information about the general shape of certain data. Furthermore, it allows for familiarity with the trends in the data, as well as screening it for anomalies. Ostensibly, there is a general tendency to tactfully choose the statistics to include, involving the mean (i.e., average) and the standard deviation, which are agreed upon as measures of central tendency.

Subsequently, inferential statistics, on the other hand, will attempt to uncover the degree of significance, if any, among the groups concerned. Noteworthy is the fact that inferential statistics are designed to determine whether the apparent patterns in the data are really patterns and make predictions about their validity. At this level, inferential hypothesis testing will be the focus

### 4.1. Descriptive statistics

A full-brief glance at the table (1) below will reveal considerable differences in the mean performances of the groups concerned.

**Table (1). test scores of the experimental and the control group.**

| Groups | N | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|--------|---|------|--------------------|
|--------|---|------|--------------------|

|                    |    |      |      |
|--------------------|----|------|------|
| Experimental group | 38 | 9.89 | 2.27 |
| Control group      | 31 | 8.64 | 2.83 |

According to Table 1) displays, there is a considerable difference between the mean performance of the experimental group and the control group on the short answer test. This said, subjects who received the pre-reading activity--treatment obtained a higher mean than those who did not receive the instructional component (i.e., the control group). Accordingly, the experimental group obtained ( $X=9.89$ ,  $SD=2.27$ ,  $N=38$ ), whereas the control groups scored an average of ( $X=8.64$ ,  $SD=2.38$ ,  $N=31$ ).

This state of affairs shows, in general terms, an interesting result. This, however, may not be subject to any inferences since the mean summarized in the table (1) above provides only descriptive information concerning the performance of each group considered separately. Thus, it is obvious that a further step is necessary to decide on whether those patterns truly exist in some kind of meaningful way. To serve this end, an inferential hypothesis testing will be dealt with subsequently

#### **4.2. Inferential statistics**

Granted that the table (1) above revealed considerable differences among the groups concerned, it is, still unclear whether the differences are really significant. To achieve this, we made use of the Independent Samples Test below.

**Table 2: The Independent Samples Test**

| Group              | Mean | T-value | Sig(2-tailed) |
|--------------------|------|---------|---------------|
| Experimental Group | 9.89 | 2.219   | .030          |
| Control group      | 8.64 |         |               |

As shown in Table 2, there is a significant difference among the means of the groups considered. The two groups have, on comparison, yielded a t-value of 2.219, a value that is significant at (0.03). Accordingly, one may make the claim that the observed patterns in Table (2) above are truly patterns and they do exist in some kind of meaningful way. As a rule, one can also be 95% confident that the differences are, by no means, the result of the treatment provided for the experimental group. Most significantly is the affirmative answer in favor of the experimental hypothesis the research puts to test. In this situation, we reject the null hypothesis and conversely support the research hypothesis.

In a nutshell, the preliminary description of the data indicated that the experimental group scored higher than the control group without being subject to any inferences. However, the Independent Sample Test was run at the inferential level, which uncovered the degree of significance between the groups considered.

At the descriptive level, the comparison established between the two groups indicated that the two groups differ in their mean performance. Being unable to determine, in conclusive terms, the significance of the observed differences the t-test was run on the subjects' scores. Thus, the t-test further uncovered the degree of significance which permits to wind up with the claim that the groups considered did differ significantly.

Given the theoretical underpinnings adopted and the review of the literature to which we do not claim exhaustiveness, it is the belief that the schema theoretical framework is a proving ground; for it has offered insights about how prior knowledge of text content significantly affects EFL reading comprehension.

Granted that the schema theoretic research attributes a fundamental role to the readers' background knowledge, Floyd & Carrell, (1987) have it that EFL teachers must provide students with the appropriate background knowledge they lack. They further argue in favor of teaching students how to integrate the new knowledge into the old one, Ajideh, (2006).

#### **4.3. Research question (1)**

At the outset, it was forecast that the experimental group would perform better than the control group. The difference was theorized to be due to the effects of background knowledge prior to reading to the experimental group and its complete absence for the control condition's subjects. To serve this end, the following question was formulated in order to provide some empirical findings.

- 1) Will the experimental group perform better than the control group on the grounds of providing background knowledge?

On the grounds of such question the students' comprehension scores from the two groups were subjected to the appropriate statistical measure, respectively. In light of the research results, a preliminary look at the table (1, 2) indicates, in general terms, that the experimental group scored significantly higher than the control group as anticipated.

At the descriptive level, the comparison established between the two groups indicated that the two groups differ in their mean performance. Being unable to determine, in conclusive terms, the significance of the observed differences the t-test was run on the subjects' scores. Thus, the t-test further uncovered the degree of significance. which permits to wind up with the claim that the groups considered did differ significantly

To recapitulate, subjects from the treatment condition managed to score significantly higher than did their counterparts from the non-treatment condition This is, however, may be interpreted as being due to the positive effects of providing background knowledge to the experimental group. Thus, the above claims reject the null hypothesis and conversely support the experimental hypothesis. Therefore, one would be certain that a relationship does, in fact, exist between the independent and the dependent variable, at least 95%, as it is the convention in social sciences and humanities.

This state of affairs requires a logical explanation and arises a fundamental question as to how this should be the case. It bears repeating that, prior to data collection, the following question was formulated to address this concern.

#### **4.4. Research question (2)**

- 2) How can we explain the difference, if any, between the participants from the two groups considered?

Given the theoretical underpinnings adopted and the review of the literature to which we do not claim exhaustiveness, it is the belief that the schema theoretical framework is a proving ground, for it has offered insights about how prior knowledge of text content significantly affects EFL reading comprehension. The present study, per se, does not depart from the general tendency in EFL research. Its prime objective was to determine the impact of providing background knowledge as an aid in activating or building students' schemata. Moreover, the finding of the study run in parallel with the large body of empirical research to which we will return subsequently.

In order to account for the findings of the study, it is worth mentioning that schema theory views reading comprehension as matter of activation or constructing a schema that provides a coherent interpretation of the objects and events motioned in a discourse Anderson, (1984). This view simply attributes a fundamental role to the readers' schema in comprehension, as Anderson (1984) maintains that the reader comprehends the intended message if he is able to bring to mind a good account of the event described in the message. Moreover, the underlying assumption is that the process of understanding is interactive, involving the readers' background knowledge and the text which solely provides guidance as to how the intended meaning should be constructed on the basis of the reader's previously acquired knowledge This said, the divide-rule conception of the bottom up and the top-down models must give away to an interactive model of understanding.

Granted that the schema theoretic research attributes a fundamental role to the readers' background knowledge, several empirical studies carried out showing the facilitative effects of pre-reading activities, say, background knowledge in foreign language comprehension, corroborate the findings of the present study.

Zhaohua (2004) investigated the value of providing background knowledge and previewing in improving EFL reading comprehension. The study took place in an EFL context—China, as is the case for the research we undertake. The major finding was that providing background about a text that presupposes culturally specific information yields satisfactory results in comparison with previewing and the control condition. This lends further support for the findings of the present study.

Likewise, another experimental study, Taglieber et al (1988) investigated the effects of three pre-reading activities (pictorial contexts, vocabulary teaching, and pre-questioning) in facilitating the reading comprehension of Brazilian undergraduate students. The study yielded similar results. It was found that all the pre-reading activities resulted in significantly higher scores than the control condition. Accordingly, the findings of the study are in conjunction with the vast array of empirical research under the rubric of schema theory, in general, and this research paper in particular.

The finding of the study corresponds to those documented in earlier research with cumulative insights through the examination of students' perceptions in the feedback questionnaire, Biboussi (2022). Steffensen, Joag-Dev & Anderson (1979) conducted a study investigating the effects of cultural schemata in EFL reading comprehension. The major findings indicate among, other things, that schema embodying background knowledge about the content of a text facilitates the comprehension of the intended meaning, Pitchard (1988)

From the previous empirical studies discussed above, it seems clear that there is an outstanding convergence between the major findings of these studies as none of them did stray from the general tendency in EFL reading comprehension. The study, on its part, comes to solidify the bond between the student's background knowledge and the reading comprehension of culturally unfamiliar texts. The question that arises itself is whether the findings of the study do really correspond to something meaningful in the real world.

#### 4.5. Analysis of the feedback questionnaire

Despite the fact that this paper subscribes to the quantitative paradigm, insofar the nature of the data collected can only be measured statistically, the subjects' responses in the feedback questionnaire provide further support for the study's finding. To serve this end, analysis of the subjects' responses from the experimental group revealed that the vast majority of the participants expressed their positive attitudes as concerns the facilitative effects of background knowledge prior to reading. However, most of the students reported that their teachers should provide them with knowledge necessary to facilitate the comprehension of culturally unfamiliar texts. Concerning the degree of text familiarity most of the subjects' indicated the unfamiliarity of text information. The time sufficiency was also elicited through a yes/No question and the participants' responses indicated that the time allotted for the reading comprehension was sufficient.

However, an identical feedback questionnaire was distributed to the participants from the control group. Interestingly, despite the fact that they did not receive any form of treatment, most of the subjects from this group indicated that they would need to do some pre-reading activities to facilitate the comprehension of the text.

In summing up, recourse to the qualitative data in this research intended to enhance the quantitative data obtained from the participants' performance on the short test items.

### 5. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The revealing results of the study seem to support the growing body of empirical research that dealt in depth with the issue at stake. The results point clearly to the educational value of providing background knowledge as a pre-reading activity to enhance EFL reading comprehension of culturally unfamiliar texts. This is, however, clear since the subjects' who received the treatment obtained higher scores in comparison with their counterparts from the control condition.

Nevertheless, it is the belief that Moroccan EFL teachers would help their students to build their background knowledge through pre-reading activities which correspond to students' needs and fit particular situation (i.e. text to be read). In addition to this, EFL teachers must at all times be aware of the beneficial effects of prior teaching and sensitive to the reading comprehension deficiencies, which emanate from either the lack of implicit knowledge schema presupposed in foreign texts or the failure to activate it.

Further implications of the study stem from the students' responses in the feedback questionnaire. Initially, two questions were designed to target students' perception of pre-reading activities in the real world. Unexpectedly, subjects from the experimental group said that prior instruction would have a facilitative effect on their understanding of culturally unfamiliar texts. Noteworthy is the fact that even the subjects who did not receive any treatment

said that their comprehension would be maximized if any form of treatment were provided prior to reading.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

While the findings demonstrate a functional relationship between the intervention and reading comprehension of first-year university students, these findings cannot be generalized to all EFL learners. Yet they offer valuable insights into how cultural background and prior knowledge influence EFL reading comprehension. At the outset, the obvious limitation is purely methodological in that a sample of 68 students from first-year university students does not permit the generalization of the findings to cover other Moroccan EFL students of the same level of education. Yet, the sample permits a reliable generalization of students in the institution where it was conducted. As the study claims no broad generalization of the findings, it is recommended that future research on this issue include EFL students from various Moroccan universities with the aim of expanding the representativeness of findings.

Coupled with sample size and generalizability, it is important to point to the fact that students' interaction with a single text could differ if they responded to other types of reading texts with different cultural backgrounds, topics, and genres. Thus, investigating how cultural schemata impact comprehension across various reading materials would undoubtedly yield significant results. While the study offers valuable insights, investigating how cultural schemata could offer EFL reading comprehension over time could further track changes in the learner's development rather than providing a single snapshot of the status quo. This being the case, longitudinal research would serve to assess long-term effects on EFL students' ability to effectively activate cultural schemata.

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that cultural familiarity in the EFL context has a significant effect on reading comprehension. Texts that are consonant with the readers' native culture are better comprehended than those that are not.

Given the result of the study, the position is taken, as we wind up this research paper, that comprehension of culturally loaded texts is based on the instructors' role in providing students with the relevant and implicit cultural knowledge presupposed in a foreign text. Unless this requirement is fulfilled, EFL learners would flounder helplessly in the process of constructing the author's intended meaning.

In addition to the methodological limitations discussed above, we suggest that future studies on the impact of cultural schemata incorporate a pre-test and then an intervention program whereby the respondents are given exposure to the target culture of the text, and then finally a post-test. This provides better support for the research to indicate the presence of cultural schemata and their impact on reading comprehension.

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