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**THE ROLE OF SCHEMA ACTIVATION IN HELPING TO IMPROVE READING
PROFICIENCY AMONG ESL LEARNERS IN A RURAL PRIMARY SCHOOL**

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Abstract

Schema theory describes the process by which a reader combines his own background knowledge with the information found in the text to comprehend the text. Schemas are culture-specific and different readers carry background knowledge about the information found in a text. A reader's problem in reading is not only caused by the limitation of his own background knowledge but also by his inability to activate existing schemata to comprehend reading. Thus in achieving an immediate goal in reading, we must strive for an optimum balance between the background knowledge presupposed by the text and the available background knowledge of the reader. Therefore, schema theory is an important concept in ESL reading methodology, and pre-reading tasks are designed to accomplish both goals that is to build new background knowledge as well as to activate existing ones. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of schema theory in the context of improving reading proficiency among the 30 Year Four pupils of the school. The information, ideas, attitudes and belief enable the reader to make predictions that determines the expectation the reader will develop as he reads. Nevertheless, skills in reading depend on the interaction between linguistic knowledge and knowledge of the world.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Like all the other schools in the rural areas, I find out that the Year 4 pupils of SK Gumbang are generally weak in learning English language. They have limited exposure to the language and their only source may be from the television and radios. Their problem with the English language makes it difficult for them to achieve the desired skills and one of their problem is reading comprehension, As a teacher, it is my duty to find out the roots to their problem so that I could come devise learning strategies to help them overcome the problem.

So, one way to help them is by helping them to activate their schemata before a reading comprehension is assigned. Schema theory describes the process by which readers combine their own background knowledge with the information in the text in order to comprehend the text. All readers carry different schemata and are often culture-specific and to help build or activate their schemata, pre-reading tasks are designed. It is very important that the text presented must be within the experience and cultural knowledge of the pupils. This kind of text will induce pupils to generate and contribute information that are related to the content of the text.

The pupils do not have adequate background knowledge to comprehend the various types of reading texts that are presented to them. It could be because of the geographical location whereby they are not much exposed to the outside world. The socio-economy status of the parents of which almost all of them are farmers, could also be a contributing factor towards their learning process. As a teacher, it is my duty to find a way to overcome their weaknesses. The use of pictures and life objects could help them to at least understand a bit about the content of the text. Furthermore, the use of teaching aids could build their confidence as they are able to speak about something that is known to them. They

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Reading and Reading Comprehension

Carrell et al (1988, p.12) defines reading as a receptive language process and it is a psycholinguistic process in that it starts with the linguistic surface representation encoded by a writer and ends with meaning which the reader constructs. It is necessary for the reader to be efficient to maintain constant focus on constructing the meaning throughout the process, always choosing the most direct path to meaning, always using strategies for reducing uncertainty, always being selective about the use of cues available and drawing deeply on prior conceptual and linguistic competence. Readers lacking the attributes are considered inefficient and are most unlikely to comprehend a text presented to them.

According to Rummelhart (1980, as quoted by Long and Richards), 'comprehending a text is an interactive process between the reader's background knowledge and the text'. Therefore, a reader has to learn to deal with linguistic material over which they have no control. They must learn to interact with the reading in a productive fashion so as to determine meaning. To read effectively, a reader has to have confidence in his own ability and to continue reading even when he faces problem while in the course of negotiating a text. Readers should learn to understand that reading is a source of information or enjoyment and it is the teacher's responsibility to inculcate reading habit among school children.

Chitavelu (1995, p. 92-93) mentioned that one of the Barret's Taxonomy is best known for developing comprehension skills among the students and he had simplified the taxonomy as follows.

1. Literal recognition on recall

Literal comprehension focuses on ideas and information which are explicitly stated in the selection.