

The Role of Input and Interaction in Developing EFL Saudi Learners' Reading Skills: A Literature Review

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Abstract

This paper highlights two prominent theories in second language acquisition: the Input Hypothesis and the Interaction Hypothesis. Numerous studies have explored the meanings, types, and effectiveness of each and their roles in developing language skills, which are central to language acquisition and learning. While many studies have discussed effective and meaningful approaches that incorporate input and interaction, few specifically examine their effects on reading skills, particularly concerning the Interaction Hypothesis. This paper aims to assess the impact of input and interaction on Saudi EFL learners' reading skills. The literature review indicates the effectiveness of the Input Hypothesis in enhancing reading skills and suggests that incidental learning facilitates language acquisition. It reveals the positive influence of interaction on reading skill development, mainly through interactionally modified input, which is perceived as an effective type. Previous studies show the importance of considering the cultural schema of learners as it works as a checklist for them during their reading to measure their knowledge, resulting in enhanced comprehension. The paper concludes with implications for future research, noting the limited studies available on the impact of the Interaction Hypothesis on the reading skills of Saudi EFL learners and in other contexts.

Keywords: input hypothesis, interaction hypothesis, L2 reading, reading skills, cultural schemata, Saudi learners

1. Introduction

Second language acquisition is a complex, demanding process that requires learners and educators to be persistent and determined. Since the advent of the second language field, several studies have been conducted on different aspects of language, aiming to provide compelling implications for teachers and learners to develop their learning process. However, two essential theories receive significant attention: the Input Hypothesis and the Interaction Hypothesis. Tran (2009) clearly articulated the distinction between input and interaction using Long's (1981) definition. Input is defined as the linguistic forms utilized, while interaction refers to the functions performed by those forms, such as expansion, repetition, and clarification. As Krashen (1985) established, the Input Hypothesis is regarded as one of the field's most essential hypotheses and approaches. It argues that comprehensible input is an inevitable factor that allows acquisition to take place. However, while many scholars support the work of various teachers and researchers, many question its efficacy alone. They argue that language acquisition occurs with the assistance of two critical factors that must exist to improve SLA learning, namely input and interaction, which Long (1996) later introduced.

In the realm of English language acquisition, reading skills hold paramount importance. Reading is the cognitive act of understanding the written content of a text, encompassing skills, and strategies that enable learners to grasp and engage with text effectively. Reading ability is the most crucial skill that assists in developing all four language skills and improving comprehension; learners become proficient in reading, writing, speaking, and listening (Sajib & Nahar, 2020). Nevertheless, the complexities of developing reading skills present substantial challenges for learners. Through scholarly inquiry, various strategies and theories have been explored to unveil practical approaches and hypotheses for developing reading skills in second language acquisition (e.g., the input hypothesis by Krashen, 1985, and the interaction hypothesis by Long, 1980). Thus, scholars have investigated reading skills from different angles, using these hypotheses to reveal educational implications for acquiring a second language. The input hypothesis has been extensively investigated in different contexts, showcasing its

efficacy in developing and enhancing learners' reading skills (e.g., Rodrigo et al., 2004; Marts, 2018; Namaziandost, Esfahani, & Ahmadi, 2019). Additionally, scholars have started perceiving the interaction hypothesis as a critical aspect of enriching the practices and skills of reading as it goes hand in hand with the input hypothesis in the trajectory of second language acquisition. (e.g., Baleghizadeh, 2010; Gass & Mackey, 2013; Sajib & Nahar, 2020).

Thus, this literature review presents and discusses both the Input and Interaction Hypotheses, believing that combining these theories to investigate their effectiveness in developing reading skills opens new avenues for further studies. The first part of this literature review defines the Input Hypothesis and states its goals and importance in second language acquisition before defining L2 reading, as it is the main subject of this paper. It then outlines the different types of comprehensible input and reviews studies that identify the effects of each type to understand that comprehensible input can come in various forms. Additionally, incidental learning is discussed to show how learners can learn incidentally through reading, a relevant and effective method that needs emphasis. Next, several studies outline how learners' reading skills develop through the utilization of the Input Hypothesis. The second part of this paper revolves around the Interaction Hypothesis, which is first defined by evaluating its developments to provide a clear understanding and highlight its importance as a second essential approach to developing reading skills. Finally, the paper discusses crucial cultural factors to consider in developing reading skills, such as schema theory and cultural familiarity with content, as it enhances reading comprehension in the second language.

2. Input and Development of L2 Reading

2.1 Defining Comprehensible Input Hypothesis and L2 Reading

Second language acquisition defines how people, whether adults or children, develop and use a second language other than their mother tongue. Many scholars have established critical theories and models in second language acquisition to understand and address the learning process. However, specific theories and models revolve around the essential aspect of second language acquisition, namely the input aspect. Therefore, acquiring or learning a second language occurs only once EFL learners receive rich, comprehensible input. The input theory, which Krashen first proposed in 1982, marks a turning point in the study of second language acquisition. According to this theory, there is only one way for humans to learn a language—not just their first language, but all languages—and that is by receiving comprehensible input (Permana, 2019). At the dawn of his hypothesis, Krashen (1982; 1985) employed a formula briefly describing its core meaning. Krashen (1982; 1985) claimed that learners should be exposed to linguistic items that exceed their current linguistic competence, which he explained as $I + 1$. Here, I refers to the learner's current level of proficiency, and the next level the student will reach is $I + 1$ (Kavanagh, 2006). When discussing the idea of the Comprehension Hypothesis, a plethora of studies agrees on the meaning of this term and what it stands for. Krashen and Bland (2014) believed that it is “the idea that we acquire language and advance the development of literacy when we understand messages” (p. 2). In other words, Krashen believed that learners can acquire a second language depending on the amount of input that is both comprehensible and at a higher level than their current linguistic competence (Ariza & Hancock, 2003). However, Krashen (1982) highlighted that, in understanding comprehensible input, one does not have to focus on the form of the input but rather on the meaning itself, with the assistance of contextual and extralinguistic knowledge. In other words, acquirers can depend on their previous experiences, world knowledge, and the input context to comprehend.

Further, Krashen (1977; 1980) claimed that the acquisition process requires learners to focus on meaning using comprehensible input, and he stressed the importance of the “simple codes” (Ellis, 1991). Nevertheless, Krashen made it clear that the language input that learners receive should not be far from their current level, “ $I + 2$,” or too close to their current level, “ $I + 0$ ”; otherwise, they cannot obtain enough comprehensible input (as cited in Gong, 2023). In other words, the provided comprehensible input should be adequately aligned with their existing level, and the possibility of it being too complex to acquire or even too simple should be considered.

Many scholars have adopted Krashen's hypothesis, acknowledging its importance and effectiveness. For instance, Ellis (1991) argued that Long (1983), in an article, adopted the input hypothesis as a vital one in second language acquisition, given the crux of the hypothesis, where he suggested three pillars of the hypothesis. First, comprehensible input is essential for genuinely acquiring a first and second language. Second, as Krashen claimed, a massive amount of comprehensible input is beneficial, leading to a faster acquisition process. Thirdly, Long (1983) suggested that the lack of comprehensible input might lead to little or no acquisition at all.

In contrast, Krashen underscored earlier that comprehensible input is a prerequisite for language acquisition. From this, “it can be deduced that SLA simply cannot take place in a vacuum without considering having exposure to some sort of language input” (Gass, 1997, as cited in Bahrani & Nekoueizadeh, 2015, p. 1714). In light of the first

language, he stated that “both first and second language acquisition results, in my opinion, support the view that comprehensible input is the major source of vocabulary and spelling competence” (Krashen, 1989, p. 144). Reading is a prime example of comprehensible input that EFL learners can access to acquire English as a second language. Of the four abilities required to learn a language, reading stands out. Grabe defined reading as “a complex ability to extract, or build, meaning from a text” (2014, p. 8).

Additionally, Kumar, Wani, and Bed (2007) revealed that reading is a skill that allows a learner to comprehend a language in written form to deduce the ideas, information, facts, and meanings intended to be conveyed. It is a passive but crucial language learning skill, where learning to read in a language involves deciphering the entire universe. Bamford and Day (2004) concluded, “Good things happen to students who read a great deal in the foreign language. Research shows that they become better and more confident readers, write better, improve their listening and speaking abilities, and enrich their vocabulary. In addition, they develop positive attitudes toward and increased motivation to study the new language” (p. 1).

2.2 Types of Comprehensible Input

Comprehensible input can be provided to EFL learners in different ways. One method to make the input comprehensible is by exposing second language learners to pre-modified input. This type of input refers to the adjusted language presented to learners. Ellis (2015) explained this as “input that is modified to make it more comprehensible prior to the learner’s exposure to it. It can involve both simplification and elaboration of the input” (p. 349). Further, Ellis (2015) illustrated how learners can be exposed to L2, noting that they can receive both simplified pre-modified and interactionally modified input. Learners can obtain comprehensible input from interactive situations, allowing them to avoid being passive.

Simply put, interactionally modified input revolves around learners engaging with native speakers or more advanced learners to negotiate the meaning or form of the input (Ellis, 2015). According to Ziglari (2008), “it has been assumed that language acquisition can be fostered by the modified input in the environment; i.e., when the native speakers as proficient speakers adjust their language to the level of low-level learners (foreigners) to make it more comprehensible. So, this linguistic environment is characterized by the input modified or simplified before the learner sees or hears it” (as cited in Maleki & Pazhakh, 2012, p. 129). Karimi and Ameri-Golestan (2013) conducted a study regarding the impact of pre-modified input on sentence processing among sixty Iranian EFL learners. In their study, they divided the students into four groups. The first group (A) received baseline input, meaning the sentence was unmodified. Group (B) got a sentence with simplified words. Group (C) received a sentence with both unmodified words and their synonyms. The last group (D) got an unmodified sentence in written form and did not use the software. The study results showed that group (B), which had simplified target words, and group (C), which received an elaborated input, achieved better results than the other two groups. This indicated that L2 learners often rely on the lexical items in the text rather than their grammatical knowledge. L2 learners’ input is often simplified and modified to make it comprehensible.

A noteworthy element of the study was the use of diverse input types and the focus on non-tangible aspects of reading skills, namely, how students would process different levels of comprehensible input, notably how simplified and elaborated sentences served as comprehensible input and which one would be faster in acquiring vocabularies. Thus, this highlighted the effectiveness of comprehensible input on the psycholinguistic aspects of language acquisition, including incidental learning and vocabulary comprehension and processing efficacy of learners. It can be deduced from Karimi and Ameri-Golestan’s (2013) study significantly that educators would benefit from modifying language input, namely, modification on the lexical level of their materials, as it facilitates sentence processing of learners, resulting in comprehension and improving the reading skills development outcomes acquiring. This echoed what Krashen (1989) called for in his input hypothesis as he showed the critical role of $(i + 1)$ comprehensible input. However, the study notably did not consider the grammatical level, such as grammatical features (passive or active voice), to explore the effect of comprehensible input in processing and comprehending. Thus, it would be beneficial to replicate the study considering it and also to include interactional input alongside other input types. Given the limited studies in the Saudi context, replicating the methods and allowing learners to engage with modified vocabulary in collaborative activities could further enhance comprehension and vocabulary retention among Saudi EFL learners and provide insightful implications.

Krashen (1985) claimed that the input hypothesis predicts that children can receive caretaker speech as it aims to simplify the input, resulting in comprehension. Ellis (1991) briefly explained, “Caretaker speech to young children is roughly tuned to the children’s receptive abilities and is motivated by the need to aid comprehension” (p. 13). Nevertheless, it is not a deliberate language teaching method; thus, acquirers might also receive the same input, which Krashen (1985) discussed: “teacher talk,” the language of classroom management in second-language

classes, and “foreigner talk,” the adjustments made by native speakers when talking to non-native speakers (Krashen, 1985, p. 8). In other words, Krashen (1985) stated that the input hypothesis stresses that using simplified language can help acquirers by providing them with $i + 1$ in a comprehensible context, thereby significantly contributing to language acquisition. Extensive reading can become a helpful tool in language acquisition when pre-modified. According to Krashen (1982), one way to ensure learners are exposed to comprehensible input is by adapting the extensive reading method. Krashen (1982) argued that extensive reading leads to language acquisition, provided certain preconditions are met. These include adequate exposure to the language, interesting material, and a relaxed, tension-free learning environment (as cited in Bell, 1998, p. 243). This method of reading gives learners the freedom to choose their own reading material and allows them to read independently without the teacher.

Moreover, the purpose of extensive reading is to combine knowledge and pleasure. Learners using this method can put the book down if it seems boring or too advanced for their reading level. However, they are highly encouraged to step out of their comfort zones and explore a different range of reading material (Bamford & Day, 2004). Furthermore, Ellis (2015) suggested that extensive reading can include graded readers, where input is comprehensible. Graded readers are books written for language learners to serve as sources of comprehensible input. Hill (2008, as cited in Albay, 2017) defined them as “books written for learners of English using limited lexis and syntax” (p. 185).

Additionally, students with comprehensible input outperform those in classes with less comprehensible input, according to Rodrigo, Krashen, and Gribbons (2004). Similarly, Day et al. (2011) mentioned the positive effects of the graded reading approach, stating that “the teacher gives students the freedom to choose the book they want based on their existing levels and interests. He guides the students in identifying their reading levels and choosing the right books, monitors their progress, and motivates them to read more. The students are in control of their own individual reading activities and are encouraged to keep reading logs or record sheets to ensure accountability” (p. 224, as cited in Meniado, 2021, p. 224). Meniado (2021) also examined different extensive reading programs with multiple approaches in higher education across the Arabian Gulf. This study showed that the graded readers approach is the most frequently used in higher education institutions. Furthermore, the results indicated that this approach is most suitable for higher education institutions in the Arabian Gulf since it allows learners to select their reading materials based on their reading level and L2 proficiency. Overall, “there is now clear evidence that massive exposure to comprehensible input through extensive reading is beneficial for acquisition, especially where vocabulary is concerned” (Ellis, 2015, p. 170).

2.3 Incidental Learning through Reading

“The term incidental learning is used, in applied linguistics, to refer to the acquisition of a word or expression without the conscious intention to commit the element to memory, such as ‘picking up’ an unknown word from listening to someone or from reading a text” (Hulstijn, 2013, p. 1). Nation (2014) believed that the ideal classroom for L2 learners includes some form of incidental learning. He claimed that incidental learning occurs when learners read, write, listen, or speak with a focus on the message rather than on what is actually happening. Even when learners do not consciously learn the new language, they still pick up parts of it, such as new words and phrases, or become familiar with certain grammatical structures. He asserted that incidental learning can take place under three conditions. The first condition is meaning-focused input, which occurs when learners listen or read in the L2. The second condition is meaning-focused output, which occurs when learners speak and write. Lastly, incidental learning can happen through fluency development activities in reading, writing, listening, or speaking.

Multiple studies regarding incidental learning agree that learners’ linguistic knowledge develops through receiving a large quantity of input within their linguistic abilities, even though their focus is mainly on comprehension (Aka, 2020). Similarly, Denhovska, Serratrice, and Payne (2016) claimed that “research on grammar learning under incidental conditions shows that learners can successfully acquire grammatical knowledge without being explicitly taught grammar rules” (p. 3). González Fernández and Schmitt (2015) conducted a study to test the most effective ways of acquiring collocations in English for L2 learners. The study is one of the most in-depth explorations of this topic. The results showed that out-of-class exposure to English and comprehensible input, such as extensive reading, watching TV, and social media, seems to be effective for acquiring collocations.

More recently, Alharthi (2020) conducted a study on the effectiveness of collocation acquisition through incidental reading for EFL students. The participants were Arabic-speaking sophomore students at KAU, Saudi Arabia. One of the main concerns in this study was how to test the participants’ pre-knowledge while ensuring that the collocations were unknown to them. To achieve this, the researcher used pseudo-words, multiple letters stacked together that may appear to be actual words but have no lexical meaning. Using non-words effectively addresses prior knowledge without alerting students to the target words of collocations since they resemble real words. This

study found that the participants have limited knowledge of collocations, but incidental learning through reading appears to be an effective way of learning verb-noun collocations. It is important to note that the frequency and recurrence of the given collocations may play a significant role in learning these collocations or at least influence the participants' responses.

One notable strength of Alharthi's (2020) study was its use of parts of speech to identify which categories of speech are acquired more quickly, which led to an important practical implication for educators. It showed the importance of incorporating various input types into classroom materials to enhance learner acquisition. Nevertheless, it would be promising if the study could be replicated with advanced students (level 4 and above) using a placement test. It would be beneficial to understand incidental vocabulary learning, as those students would have more exposure to the language. Additionally, including multi-word expressions could provide insights into both receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge. A shortcoming of the study was not stating the students' gender, as gender may influence vocabulary recall and retention.

Moreover, Aldukhayel (2022) conducted a study comparing vocabulary learning through different input types (listening, viewing, and reading). His study used an English documentary to test whether reading, listening, or viewing leads to the most vocabulary acquisition. The participants were 95 EFL Arabic-speaking male students at Qassim University, Saudi Arabia. They were divided into similar classes and into four experimental groups: the viewing group, who viewed the documentary; the listening group, who listened to the documentary; the reading group, who read a documentary transcript; and the control group. The target vocabulary words for this study were chosen based on their frequency in the BNC/COCA lists and their occurrence in the documentary. Checklists and multiple-choice questions measured the acquisition of the words. After conducting the study, the results showed that participants gained the greatest number of words through reading and viewing. The findings also indicated that EFL learners can acquire more words incidentally by reading graded readers than by listening to graded readers.

His study was one of its kind, as Aldukhayel (2022) cleverly used comprehensible input through audiovisual methods, demonstrating that incidental learning occurs in three modes: listening, viewing, and reading. The findings showed the essential role of Krashen's (1989) input hypothesis from a different perspective, which reveals that reading and viewing are more effective than listening, highlighting the role of reading in vocabulary acquisition and retention, which are crucial reading skills. However, a drawback of the study is the short assessment period for vocabulary retention, which takes place only one week after the treatment. Thus, extending this assessment period would provide a more comprehensive long-term view of whether Saudi EFL learners retain the acquired words incidentally. Further, the methodology was well-structured, and both ANOVA and ANCOVA were used to evaluate the effectiveness of the three modes. However, it would be insightful to include effect size. This information is crucial for understanding the impact of incidental learning on reading skills in the Saudi context, which guides future research and enables comparisons of the results effect.

2.4 Studies on Developing Reading Skills Using Comprehensible Input

Undoubtedly, the ability to read in English poses significant challenges for EFL learners. Many researchers have conducted studies to determine the most suitable and efficient ways to help foreign learners develop their reading skills in English. For example, Namaziandost et al. (2019) conducted a study comparing the ('i + 1') and ('i - 1') materials and their effects on Iranian EFL learners. ('i + 1') refers to reading materials slightly above the learner's level, while ('i - 1') refers to materials below their level of competence. Their study included 54 male and female Iranian pre-intermediate EFL learners at a private language institute in Iran. The participants were divided into two groups after being given a placement test. The first group read books from the Oxford Bookworm Series at levels 1 and 2, considered below their English competence level. The second group read more challenging books from the Oxford Bookworm Series at levels 4 and 5. The findings suggested that both groups increased their reading comprehension levels by the end of the course and after three readings. However, the second group, which had more challenging materials, achieved higher scores on a reading comprehension measure than the group that read the material below their level of L2 competence. These findings indicated that EFL students find reading material above their level highly beneficial. Despite the challenge, higher-level materials can encourage and help students develop their L2 reading skills.

The study's merit was using an adequate, reliable tool measurement for students' reading comprehension, namely, the Cambridge First Certificate in English (FCE, 2008). Given that it incorporated "macro and micro questions, such as the expression of opinion, attitude, purpose, main idea, detail, tone, and gist." (Namaziandost et al., 2019, p. 4). This can be conceived as a comprehensive, validated approach that dug into students' understanding of the texts and how they benefited from using graded readers (Oxford bookworms), which enhances the credibility of the findings. Despite the robust quantitative method used in Namaziandost et al.'s (2019) study, they could employ a

qualitative approach that could dive deeper into their experiences, perceptions, and how different levels of texts impact their learning engagement and reading development. For instance, they could use open-ended questions as part of the questionnaire to measure their motivation. Given that the measurement of motivation was a self-report, including a mixed-methods approach is crucial, using personal narratives and experiences regarding comprehensible input.

Moreover, Rodrigo et al. (2004) revealed that incorporating literature into L2 English teaching provides comprehensible input to learners. Similarly, Mart's (2018) study showed that literature proves to be a beneficial addition to English language teaching for language acquisition. Literature helps L2 learners in many aspects of the language, enriching their knowledge of language structure, reading proficiency, vocabulary, and more. The participants in the study included 96 senior-year upper-intermediate EFL university students in Iraq. For the study, students read *Lord of the Flies* and *The Great Gatsby* to determine whether literature can develop EFL learners' level of English. These two books were chosen based on their length and precise sequence. It is important to note that before this study, the learners did not experience the integration of literature and language in their university classes. The researchers collected data using a questionnaire consisting of the same questions before and after the involvement of literature in the learning experience. The results showed that students hesitated to incorporate literature into their curriculum in the pre-survey, but the post-survey suggested otherwise. After reading the novels, most learners revealed that literature positively affected their language skills, including reading.

The essential point in Mart's (2018) study was the use of placement tests to accurately determine the level of the students accordingly to receive comprehensible input, as Krashen (1985) suggested to be slightly above their level in his input hypothesis, which future studies should first consider. A crucial aspect of this study was students' attitudes towards those literature texts, as it adds value to reading comprehension instructional strategies by knowing how students respond to comprehensible input. Nevertheless, including a more diverse, larger sample of participants than 96 would be vital, especially for Saudi EFL learners, to investigate the impact of both comprehensible input and interactive input as educators have started viewing comprehensible input as an important factor in developing reading skills.

3. Interaction and Development of L2 Reading

3.1 Defining the Interaction Hypothesis

Krashen and Long developed critical theories that address significant problems in second language acquisition (SLA). Through these theories, they viewed the idea of comprehensible input from different perspectives. Tran (2009) stated, "Krashen claimed that input becomes comprehensible thanks to simplification and with the help of contextual and extralinguistic clues, whereas Long argued that interactive input is more important than non-interactive input" (p. 3). In other words, Krashen believed that second language acquisition happens through comprehensible input. Additionally, Krashen (1985) claimed that speaking or the production of language contributes only indirectly to language acquisition. According to Kavanagh (2006), speaking leads to conversations that provide comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982).

Further, Krashen (1982) assumed that speaking enables native speakers or advanced learners to notice learners' levels, which in turn adjusts their speech accordingly. On the other hand, Long claimed that SLA relies not only on comprehensible input. He asserted that "negotiation of meaning... facilitates acquisition because it connects input, internal learner capabilities, particularly selective attention, and output in productive ways" (Long, 1996, p. 451-452, as cited in Anani & Karimi, 2008).

When exploring Long's claims, the interaction hypothesis is a key factor. This hypothesis was initially associated primarily with Long's work (1980), which asserted the role of interaction in facilitating the comprehension of input (Ellis, 1991). Following this, Long (1983) embraced the input hypothesis, supporting it with three points. Thus, in the early version of the interaction hypothesis, "Long (1983) draws on the Input Hypothesis to suggest that the negotiation of meaning assists acquisition by making input comprehensible" (Ellis, 2014, p. 172). In other words, Long (1983) perceived that comprehensible input is insufficient, and interactive input is essential as it induces learners to negotiate meaning (e.g., clarification requests, rephrasing, and confirmation checks), where learners can learn. Therefore, he believed that negotiation, defined as simplifying and modifying linguistic interactional structures, is a second major factor in this process. These adjustments make the input more comprehensible for L2 learners (Ebrahimi, 2015). From this, Long's theory, the interaction hypothesis, can be identified as "conversational modification that is shared between the learners (i.e., native and non-native speakers), during which they have the opportunity to recognize their correct and incorrect utterances" (Van Patten & Williams, 2007, as cited in Al Khateeb, 2014, p. 295).

Long (1996) later introduced a second version of the interaction hypothesis. In the updated version, he included Schmidt's (1994) noticing hypothesis, stating that selective attention can facilitate acquisition (Ellis, 2015). Simply put, his focus shifts towards needing more attention and awareness during interactions because the input is no longer sufficient for acquiring the L2. This hypothesis also suggests the involvement of native speakers (Al Khateeb, 2014). Additionally, the interaction hypothesis is associated with Pica's (1987) work, where she investigated and evolved the hypothesis by highlighting the importance of relationships between speakers as a determinant of interactional modification. In their study, Pica, Young, and Doughty (1987) investigated the effects of interaction on comprehension among 16 non-native speakers (NNSs) of English by comparing two input conditions: pre-modified input (simplified linguistic features) and interactionally modified input (opportunities for interaction with a native speaker). They highlighted that comprehension improves significantly when NNSs engage in interaction, as the repetition and rephrasing of input during these exchanges facilitate understanding. The study emphasized the critical role of interactional modifications, such as clarification requests and comprehension checks, in enhancing comprehensible input for language learners. Ellis (1991) discussed the evolution of the hypothesis, adding Pica's (1987) remarks, and summarizes the interaction hypothesis as follows:

- (1) Comprehensible input is necessary for L2 acquisition (the input hypothesis).
- (2) Modifications to the interactional structure of conversations that occur when negotiating a communication problem help make input comprehensible to an L2 learner.
- (3) Tasks requiring participants to exchange information promote more interactional restructuring. A situation where conversational partners share a symmetrical role relationship affords more opportunities for interactional restructuring.

3.2 *The Effect of Interaction on Reading Skills*

Reading skills require much work because they are crucial for learning a second or foreign language. Thus, one way to develop reading skills is through interaction. Furthermore, Cotterall (1990) stated that with interaction, learners can have conversations to clarify the text's meaning while being offered a way to divide the task into manageable chunks. They can practice negotiating to restore meaning through interaction, which helps them improve their linguistic and cognitive abilities simultaneously.

"In oral interaction, whenever learners focus on unfamiliar vocabulary by asking for clarifications, they have a better chance of retaining these words than when they do not attend to words in this way" (De la Fuente, 2002; Ellis and He, 1999; Newton, 1993; et al., 1994, as cited in Gass & Mackey, 2013, p.170). Moreover, it is believed that student participation in negotiated interaction helps students understand the text more fully, draws attention to their knowledge, and raises the significance of novel or problematic input (Gass & Mackey, 2013). Even though numerous studies identified the impact of interaction on speaking skills, few studies investigated the impact of interaction on reading skills, specifically in the Saudi context.

For instance, an experiment conducted by Sajib & Nahar (2020) investigated the effectiveness of interaction in making reading comprehensible in the EFL secondary school classroom. In their study, the participants were 67 secondary school students aged 11–14. To obtain the desired data, they employed a pre-test to identify students' current proficiency level and a post-test to measure their reading comprehension to discover the effect of interaction on enhancing students' reading skills. They stated the effectiveness of interaction in developing and facilitating reading skills. As a result, we believe that interaction is an essential tool, alongside comprehensible input, that instructors may use to provide students with engaging reading assignments and encourage student interaction, offering them the chance to negotiate and enhance their reading abilities.

A key strength of this study was its importance as one of the few studies conducted about the crucial role of interaction in developing reading skills. Also, it showed how to examine the concept of interaction hypothesis in a practical investigation, describing in detail the quantitative method to address the problem. Nevertheless, the study needed to specify the criteria for selecting the 67 students and explain the type of class they were employed to understand the sample's educational background, affecting the study's generalizability. In addition, the participants' gender was not apparent, which may affect the applicability to female and male EFL learners' experiences. Thus, in the case of this study, it would be adequate to include a diverse sample of students from different grade levels, not just class VII, which would enhance the generalizability of the findings and provide a clear understanding of both genders considering female and male experiences.

Moreover, a study underscored the impact of interaction on the development of reading comprehension, highlighting the importance of social dynamics as a determinant of interactional modification (Pica, 1987). Naimat (2011) investigated the influence of teacher-student interaction on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) reading

comprehension among 150 university students in Jordan. The participants were divided into three groups exposed to different contexts: simplified input with linguistic support, unmodified input without support, and interactive input that allows for meaningful teacher-student communication. Ultimately, findings revealed that students in both the interactive and simplified contexts performed significantly better than those in the unmodified context, with the interactive group achieving the highest scores. This highlights the essential role of interaction in enhancing comprehension, as it provides necessary linguistic scaffolding and fosters a communicative environment that increases motivation and engagement.

A notable point of this study was the incorporation of both input and interaction hypotheses to develop reading comprehension, given the limited studies in this aspect. Also, the focus on determining the dynamics and effects of the initiated student-teacher interactions empirically proved its general effectiveness in developing reading comprehension and better learning outcomes for EFL learners. In other words, the results emphasized that integrating interactive teaching methods is crucial for improving reading comprehension in EFL settings. This supports the underlying knowledge of Long's (1980) interaction hypothesis that teacher-student interaction is fundamental to effective language acquisition. However, we can yield more insightful implications by investigating peer-to-peer interaction to enhance a more engaging learning environment related to the development of reading skills. Likewise, we can enrich the findings in this regard by investigating different contexts, such as online education platforms.

4. Cultural Factors Affecting Reading Skills

Building on the preceding discussion of how input hypothesis and various types of input can impact the reading skills of EFL learners, we recognize interaction hypothesis or interactional input as a crucial method for learners to negotiate the meaning of the input. It is essential to consider additional factors that could influence reading skills and learners' reading comprehension, including the pivotal role of schema theory. Reading comprehension is influenced not only by the methods of providing the input or types of input and opportunities for interaction to negotiate the meaning of the text but also by learners' background knowledge or what we refer to as schema. This schema represents concepts, experiences, and perceptions of the real world that are mentally constructed. Ajideh (2003) explained that schemas are developed through experiences involving people, objects, and events. Schema theory demonstrates that our interpretations of the world are guided by the notion that every piece of input is evaluated against pre-existing schemas or schemata, and all the elements of that schemata must align with the incoming information (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983). In simpler terms, "Schemata can be seen as the organized background knowledge, which leads us to expect or predict aspects in our interpretation of discourse." (Ajideh, 2003, p. 4).

Schema is recognized as the cornerstone of reading comprehension and should be a focal point in developing EFL/ESL reading skills. Carrell & Eisterhold (1983) asserted that "Comprehending words, sentences, and entire texts involves more than just relying on one's linguistic knowledge." (p. 557). Therefore, understanding a text requires an interplay between the reader's or learner's prior knowledge and the provided text. Language is the primary medium through which people convey many distinct cultural aspects and practices that influence their perception of the world and themselves. Conversely, learners' cultural background knowledge in the EFL/ESL context might be limited due to their modest experiences, which can impede their comprehension of the input. Carrell & Eisterhold (1983) underscored that effective comprehension hinges on the reader's ability to connect the textual material to their knowledge base. Hence, it is reasonable to discuss schema contributing to reading skills development, which should be evaluated alongside input and interaction hypotheses. To understand how the central aspect of schema theory—background knowledge—crucially affects reading comprehension, one must break it into two types: formal and content schematic knowledge. The former contains linguistic knowledge about texts, structure, organization, and language in general, and the latter holds readers' background knowledge, namely the extent of their familiarity with the given texts (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983).

Readers' comprehension is influenced by their identity, shaped by cultural background and personal experiences. Thus, when they struggle to connect with a text, it often highlights a disconnect between their previous experiences and the text due to the cultural contexts of readers as they come from different contexts whose cultural knowledge is varied. "Culture-specific values can be a significant factor in comprehension if the values expressed by the text differ from those held by the reader." (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983, p. 563). The scope of the learner's target cultural knowledge might be limited, and not familiar with various cultural aspects, which hinders the activation of the target-appropriate schema for text comprehension. However, we can tackle this challenge by promoting free voluntary reading among EFL/ESL learners, as extensive reading experiences lead to superior general knowledge, activating their schemas and boosting their reading skills. "Those who read more also do better on various measures of cultural knowledge." (Krashen, 2004, p. 36). Alongside free voluntary reading, those who have the

pleasure of reading extensively and voluntarily in their first language will profoundly accelerate the development of reading comprehension in their second language owing to their existing knowledge of the world. Through reading, one can enhance their knowledge of both the world and specific subject matter. Krashen (2004) affirmed that “The knowledge gained through the first language can make second language input much more comprehensible.” (p. 148).

According to Carrell & Eisterhold (1983), a reader might not have a specific content schema because it is tied to a culture that is not part of their own background. Thus, Saudi educators paid particular attention to this given that so many studies in the Saudi context have been conducted on how cultural schemata, including gender-specific knowledge and background knowledge, can significantly impact the reading skills and reading comprehension of EFL/ESL learners (e.g., Alrowaithy, 2021; Toti & Hamid, 2022; Shah, 2024). A recent study by Jamal, Ayedh, Fahid, Mohammed, & Hamad (2024) investigated the effect of cultural familiarity and the cultural background of Saudi EFL learners on reading comprehension. They recruited 60 EFL learners from the applied college affiliated with Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, divided into two groups. Their experimental study compared learners’ performance on general English reading comprehension tests and Arab cultural-based reading comprehension tests, including T and F and fill-in blanks questions. Their responses showed that learners with passages rooted in Arabic culture material performed better than those with general English materials. As Saudi traditional dishes, national uniforms, and religious landmarks are relatively main parts of the Saudi culture, Saudi learners could activate the relatively appropriate schemata, which resulted in comprehending the reading materials effectively.

In light of the findings from Jamal et al.’s (2024) study, one can perceive its significance as it considered cultural schema a crucial aspect of developing learners’ reading comprehension and language acquisition. It enriched the language acquisition field in the Saudi context and encouraged upcoming studies to consider schema theory as it contributes to enhancing learners’ knowledge of L2. However, it may fall short of addressing the students’ gender, which is a critical factor that should be stated. Thus, future studies can replicate the study by expanding the sample of the study and deciding the gender of the sample. It would be comprehensive to use different question types (e.g., open-ended questions) or a qualitative method using interviews with students to conceive their perspectives regarding culturally relevant materials. Cultural knowledge and familiarity within the same culture can vary between genders and reflect on their reading comprehension and acquisition; thus, it would be valuable to understand whether Saudi female and male learners draw upon different cultural schemata when processing gender-based texts that affect their comprehension.

5. Conclusion

EFL learners improve their reading skills in various ways, allowing them to reach a satisfactory level of development. Therefore, this brief literature review discusses the importance of input and interaction hypotheses for EFL Saudi learners to develop their reading skills, which is the subject of many studies conducted in and outside of the Saudi context (e.g., Namaziandost et al., 2019; Baleghizadeh, 2010; Rodrigo et al., 2004). The results of this review clarify, identify, and exemplify the debate over comprehensible input and interaction hypotheses by perceiving them as two sides of the same coin, from which learners can benefit in developing their skills, mainly reading. After reviewing this literature, it becomes clear that educators and stakeholders in Saudi educational institutions should not only focus on providing comprehensible input but also recognize the importance of interaction in developing learners’ reading skills.

As a rule of thumb, “For learners, language acquisition that provides only comprehensible input is mono-directional so that there is little opportunity to communicate and receive feedback, while bidirectional interaction can provide opportunities for learners and teachers to communicate and interact” (Liu, 2022, p.476). The former serves as an internal process of internalizing language information, while the latter is perceived as an external process of engagement and communication with the language. The results of these processes highlight the importance of incidental learning, which occurs through meaning-enhancing contextual understanding. Its crucial role stems from the fact that incidental learning happens when meaning-focused input or interaction prompts learners to concentrate on linguistic features or language forms (Ellis, 2015). Future studies should explore different types of comprehensible input and interaction, allowing scholars to use distinctive materials, particularly for Saudi learners, which can help educators identify authentic materials that enhance language acquisition. With the evolution of digital technology, future research promises to investigate the impact of comprehensible input and interaction in virtual environments (e.g., Blackboard).

This brief literature review contributes to future research since only some studies address the above topics, especially in the Saudi context. Therefore, further studies are needed to fill the existing gap in this subject. For

instance, after reviewing the existing literature on the current topic, it is clear that there is a research gap in investigating the impact of interaction on reading skills, as most scholars focus on the written form of comprehensible input and how it improves the reading skills of EFL learners. Future research can consider the shortcomings of current studies and seek to address them by integrating the concepts outlined in this paper as they provide additional insights. In addition, future researchers can employ case studies to investigate the effect of interaction on developing reading skills, as this approach allows for a deep exploration of its efficacy on Saudi EFL learners, given the limited studies in this regard.

Interaction is a crucial factor that enables learners to make sense of a second or foreign language, facilitating comprehension and bridging the gap between their native language and the new language. It also serves as a window for learners to structure their language knowledge, develop language skills, refine their communication methods, and even understand themselves better. In tandem with providing different types of input for learners to develop their reading skills, educators might minimize reading difficulties and enlarge reading development by using culturally-relevant input as it allows them to relate to them, which entails reading comprehension. Reviewing the role of schemata, background knowledge, or cultural knowledge of the second language in enhancing reading abilities and comprehension showed the importance of considering schemata and cultural knowledge of learners in structuring reading classes' materials. "Every culture-specific interference problem dealt with in the classroom presents an opportunity to build new culture-specific schemata that will be available to the EFL/ESL student outside the classroom." (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983, p. 569). Thus, educators should consider adjusting their teaching strategies to allow for more interaction to negotiate cultural knowledge and encourage students to engage in free voluntary reading for both poor and advanced ones. It would be worthwhile to research the cultural schemata that Saudi EFL learners hold and how it would affect their reading comprehension across different genres compatible with their Arabic readings.

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