

# Role of Content Schema in Reading Comprehension Among Saudi EFL Students: EFL Teachers' Perspective and Use of Appropriate Classroom Strategies

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## Abstract

This empirical survey investigates the perceptions of English language teachers towards the role of content schemata in reading comprehension among Saudi EFL learners. Furthermore, it also attempts to explore the use of appropriate classroom strategies employed by English language teachers to activate content schemata to enhance learners' reading comprehension. A modified Likert-scale strongly-agree to strongly-disagree questionnaire was administered to 61 male and female EFL faculty from English Language Center (ELC), Taif University to generate data. The findings have reinforced that background knowledge of Saudi EFL learners help them significantly in reading faster with better understanding. It has also been reported that pre-reading strategies of brainstorming, classroom discussions about the topic and questioning are the most favored ones to activate Saudi EFL learners' background knowledge. It has also been learnt that while-reading strategies of directing the students' attention to signal words, main idea, important phrases, titles, subtitles and effectively linking the target text to their students' cultural and social experiences also contribute towards reading comprehension. The findings have also revealed that English language teachers consider low English language proficiency and poor reading skills of Saudi ELF learners as well as the lack of appropriate teaching aids as the major obstacles in activating the content schemata. Several recommendations have been forwarded which have significant pedagogical implications in materializing much sought-after goal of effective ELT in the KSA by ensuring better reading skills among Saudi EFL learners.

**Keywords:** reading comprehension, content schemata, classroom strategies, perspective, EFL students

## 1. Introduction

The role of efficient reading is well established for good English as a foreign language (EFL) learners and it has become rather extremely important after the proliferation of information technology that demands enhanced reading skills not only to cope up with their academic needs but also to keep themselves abreast of the vast knowledge around them. It has been reported by the International Reading Association that "adolescents entering the adult world in the 21st century will read and write more than at any other time in human history" (Moore et al., 1999, p. 3). This situation demands that EFL students should have the potential to go through this storehouse of knowledge efficiently. Venkateswaran (1995) has defined reading as a psycholinguistic process by which a reader reconstructs a message which has been encoded by a writer. He has further posited that schemata play an important role in enhancing reading comprehension.

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

A growing mass of research seems to emphasize that role of content schemata is important in enhancing reading comprehension in an EFL context (Al-Jahwari & Al-Humaidi, 2015; Alhaisoni, 2017). Review of relevant research has offered significant insights regarding the role of readers' previous knowledge in their failure or success in understanding the written text. It has been reported that majority of the studies have investigated the effect of content schemata on learners' reading comprehension (Nassaji, 2002; Nezami, 2012) and there seems a gap related to investigating English language teachers' perceptions about the role of content schemata in reading comprehension and what strategies they exploit in their reading classes in this regard. Chen (2003) has suggested

that there is a need to have more empirical data to understand the procedures and practices to maximize reading comprehension pedagogy especially in EFL contexts. This lack of empirical studies to investigate English language teachers also seems to exist in the EFL context of Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, it has also been revealed that most of the research conducted to investigate Arab EFL learners is related to writing whereas there is a scarcity of research on reading (Mourtaga, 2006). Review of relevant research informs us that several studies have been conducted to investigate Saudi EFL learners' preferred reading strategies (see for example Al-issa, 2006; Nezami, 2012; Al-Qahtani, 2016), role of pleasure reading in enhancing their reading speed and comprehension (Javid & Al-Khairi, 2011) and reading-related problems of Arab EFL learners to differentiate between L1 and L2 (Block, 1992). But there seems a gap of studies which have investigated English language teachers regarding the role of context schemata, suitable strategies to activate Saudi EFL learners' content schemata and the sort of problems they face in their schemata activation efforts.

## 2. Literature Review

A growing mass of research has suggested that majority of models of reading comprehension pedagogy has highlighted the role of background knowledge or schemata in reading comprehension. Al-Khatayabeh & Al-Masri (2008) have posited that "reading is a language activity that includes a variety of skills" and it has been noticed that "some learners who are good at language are not good readers" (p. 370). Khanam, Zahid, & Mondol (2014) have reported that during reading process "sometimes, there remain certain gaps of information in the writing and it is assumed that the reader fills up those gaps with the assumptions which are shared by both the writer (encoder) and the reader (decoder)" (p. 84). It has been further suggested that "the more the shared assumptions are, the more effective the reading is" (p. 85). These assumptions are termed as schemata. Schemata are interlocking mental structures which comprise readers' background knowledge of everyday events (Nasaji, 2002). It is further stated that during the reading process, new information is integrated from the target text into already pre-existing schemata (Wallace, 2001). Schemata theory rests its foundation on the principle that written text itself does not carry meaning but it only directs a reader towards retrieving or constructing meaning with the help of their previously acquired knowledge (Al-Jahwari & Al-Humaidi, 2015). According to them "this previously knowledge is called the readers' background knowledge (prior knowledge), and the previously acquired knowledge structures are called schemata" (p. 131). It has been reported that schemata of a reader work in a hierarchical manner in which the most general information are conceived through top down approach and the most specific information are at the bottom. Anderson, Reynolds, Schallert, & Goetz (1977, p. 369) have stated that "every act of comprehension involves one's knowledge of the world as well"; therefore, schemata theory based on the assumption that understanding a written text involves an interaction between the written text and the background knowledge of the reader.

Carrell & Eisterhold (1983) have emphasized the significance of background knowledge in reading comprehension and have stated that all spoken or written texts do not itself carry meaning. Jahwari & Humaidi (2015) have suggested that significance of schemata provides deep insights into "why students may fail or succeed in comprehending text content" (p. 170). Murray (1980) has informed that schemata affect comprehension by influencing information recall as well as information storage. It also helps filter irrelevant information as well. Anderson (1994) has also posited that schemata help readers to make inferences and fill in the missing information in any text. Review of published research (i.e., Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983; Lipson, 1983 cited in Dayze, 2004; Al-Issa, 2006) has indicated that content schemata is directly related to reading comprehension. It transpires that comprehension increases when the content is familiar.

Schemata is closely related to reading comprehension and it has been divided into three major types which are linguistic schemata, formal schemata and content Schemata. Linguistic schemata play an important role in decoding and understanding a written text. Xiao-hui, Jun, & Wei-hua (2007) have defined "linguistic schemata" as "readers' existing language proficiency in vocabulary, grammar and idioms. They are the foundation of other schemata" (p. 18). Formal schemata have been defined as organizational forms and rhetorical structures of a written text (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983). It has been reported that "the knowledge of what type and genre the text is can facilitate reading comprehension for readers because the type of the text will offer detailed evidence of the content of the text" (Xiao-hui, Jun, & Wei-hua, 2007, p. 18). Content schema comprises of the readers' pre-existed knowledge of the world (Anderson, Picher, & Shirey, 1983) or embodies readers' knowledge about the topic presented in the written text (James, 1987). Information about the topic, cultural familiarity and readers' previous knowledge related to the field builds the basis of content schemata. All these factors facilitate the readers to understand the written texts. Semantics and pragmatics considerations inform that language is not merely an interplay of lexemes and grammatical structures but culture of the language is also vital that plays an important role in constructing the meaning. It has been reported that content schemata can compensate for the

weaknesses of a reader's linguistics schemata as well.

A growing mass of research has revealed that content schema has a strong positive relationship with reading comprehension as compared to formal or linguistic schemata (Al-Issa, 2006; Jahwari & Humaidi, 2015; Alhaisoni, 2017). Familiarity of the content increases readers' comprehension significantly and they can comprehend a written text much better about a topic which is familiar to them. Dayze (2004) has reported that if readers bear higher culture-familiarity with the written text, it becomes much easier for them to effectively comprehend implicit propositions of the text; thus, increasing the possibility of reading comprehension and reading speed. The study of Johnson (1981) has revealed that Iranian EFL learners understood stories much better when they were given stories related to known culture though the texts were syntactically and semantically above their level.

It has been posited that content schema is not a constant phenomenon and it changes with the cognitive development of a reader. The existing schema is modified through the readers' new experiences they went through while reading or being engaged in other daily affairs. Nuttall (1996, p. 8) has informed that "a schema grows and changes throughout our lives, for as long as we retain the capacity to learn." This building and modification of readers' schema is caused by the psychological and social experiences through a process called "constructivism". It is because of this constructivism that different readers perceive the same text differently. Like constructivism, "sociocultural theory" also posits that readers extract meaning from a written text through their cultural and social background (Vygotsky, 1978). He has further explained that exposure of a variety of texts to the readers increases their social and cultural understanding which resultantly increase their reading comprehension. Khanam, Zahid, & Mondol (2014) have stated that efficient readers "make connections to their reading by keying into associations, feelings, attitudes, and ideas providing the deepest interaction between reader and text" (p. 85). Therefore, it transpires that social, cultural, historical and religious schemata enhance readers' ability to understand the target text manifold.

Review of relevant research has offered valuable insights into the fact that activation of background knowledge of readers increases their reading comprehension. A host of studies have reported various teaching techniques that have been experimented and showed positive results in this regard. These investigations include use of pre-reading activities (see Hudson, 1982; Floyd & Carrell, 1987), use of cue picture and questioning (Hudson, 1982) and use of lectures, discussions and slide presentations (Floyd & Carrell, 1987) to activate readers background knowledge and results have revealed a significant increase in the participants' reading comprehension. Furthermore, implementation of a systematic pre-reading plan by Langer (1981) and pre-planned text preview by Graves, Prenn, & Cook (1985) have also been identified as effective schemata activation strategies. All these investigations have emphasized the need of schemata teaching to increase readers' comprehension.

Abraham (2002) has reported that teaching reading "demands that the teachers activate the students' schema during the prereading phase by helping students recognize the knowledge that they already have about the topic of a text" (p. 6). Chen (2003) has also emphasized that it is important for English language teachers to be informed of their students' background knowledge and experiences so that they may be able to activate their learners' content schemata prior to the reading tasks. This information will enable them to effectively exploit schemata-activation strategies like brainstorming of key vocabulary and ideas, accumulation of text-related information, making predictions and narrowing down the purpose of reading. Al-Issa (2006) has also recommended that it is unavoidable for reading teachers to know their students' content schemata related to the target text they are going to read. Carrell & Floyd (1987) have also highlighted the significance of content schemata activation by providing them with suitable schemata they lack to bridge the gap between readers existing knowledge and the required target knowledge. Therefore, it seems extremely important for English language teachers and learners to understand the significance of the role of content schemata in reading comprehension and pedagogical implications of implementing various schemata activation strategies to enable their students read effectively and efficiently.

### **3. Methodology**

#### *3.1 Research Objectives*

This empirical survey has the following research objectives:

- a. Identifying the perceptions of English language teachers regarding the role of content schemata in reading comprehension among Saudi EFL learners

- b. Identifying various classroom strategies used by English language teachers to activate content schemata among Saudi EFL learners
- c. Identifying the difficulties faced by English language teachers in activating content schemata among Saudi EFL learners

### 3.2 Research Questions

The following research questions have been set for this empirical study:

- a. What are the perceptions of English language teachers regarding the role of content schemata in reading comprehension among Saudi EFL learners?
- b. What are various classroom strategies used by English language teachers to activate content schemata among Saudi EFL learners?
- c. What are the difficulties faced by English language teachers in activating content schemata among Saudi EFL learners?

### 3.3 Research Design

This one-shot intervention has a survey design in which 61 male and female English Language teachers from English Language Center (ELC), Taif University have been investigated through quantitative paradigm. The participants of this survey have responded to a 24-item strongly-agree to strongly-disagree Likert-scale questionnaire which recorded their perceptions regarding the role of content schemata in reading comprehension, the classroom strategies used by English language teachers to activate content schemata and the difficulties faced by them in activating content schemata among Saudi EFL learners.

### 3.4 Instrumentation

The researcher has reviewed several similar studies to develop an appropriate instrument to record the perceptions of the participants of this survey (See for example Khanam, Zahid, & Mondol, 2014; Al-Jahwari, & Al-Humaidi, 2015; Alhoisoni, 2017). The researcher adapted the questionnaire used by Al-Jahwari, & Al-Humaidi (2015) which has four sections with a total number of 32 items. The questionnaire items which were related to teachers' views of "good readers" and "the role of the teacher" were not included in the instrument for this survey. The initial version of the questionnaire had three sections in accordance with three research questions set for this empirical study. The initial version of the questionnaire was sent to three senior professors at Taif University for the sake of face validity. The feedback received from these experts has been incorporated in the relevant sections of the questionnaire and the final questionnaire consisted of 24 items.

### 3.5 Validity and Reliability

Reliability and validity are of fundamental significance for scientific investigations. Face validity was sought through feedback from the experts. The following steps were taken to ensure content validity:

- 1) to ensure that every sentence was checked grammatically and semantically
- 2) to ensure that all items must have a clear and obvious meaning
- 3) to ensure that every item has been included in the appropriate subcategory of the questionnaire
- 4) to ensure that all items are relevant to the research questions set for this survey

According to Bush (2007, p. 97) validity "is used to judge whether the research accurately describes the phenomenon that it is intended to describe". The final version of the questionnaire was piloted to 16 English language teachers who had the same characteristics of the participants. The reliability was measured by Cronbach's alpha that generated the following results.

Table 1. Reliability coefficient

Number of Cases	16
Number of Items	24
Alpha	.851

The questionnaire bears high level of reliability with reliability coefficient alpha value of .851.

### 3.6 Data Collection

After following the standardized procedure to determine the validity and reliability of the instrument, the final

version of 24-item strongly-agree to strongly-disagree Likert-scale questionnaire was generalized to the randomly selected English language teachers from ELC Taif university. The researchers briefed them regarding the survey purpose and the ethical issues. They were requested to complete the survey and return them the next day.

### 3.7 Data Analysis

The data generated by the questionnaire were coded, manually entered and descriptive statistics in terms of means, range and standard deviations of the responses of the participants were calculated using version 20 of SPSS. The data were tabulated to analyze and discuss with the help of the previous studies in the section of “results and discussion”.

## 4. Results and Discussion

This section details the results and discussion related to the data generated through the participants’ responses to the three sections of the questionnaire.

Table 2. Teachers’ perceptions regarding the role of content schemata

No	Questionnaire items	N	Range	Mean	SD
<b>Students with sufficient prior knowledge about text topic can:</b>					
1	understand text better.	61	3.00	4.6721	.59781
2	recall information easily.	61	2.00	4.5574	.53306
3	read text quickly.	61	2.00	4.3279	.72391
4	link the ideas in the text easily.	61	4.00	4.2951	.80300
5	focus on main ideas.	61	4.00	3.9180	1.0213
6	overcome limited linguistic knowledge.	61	2.00	4.3279	.67630
7	relate text to their own prior knowledge.	61	2.00	4.3770	.66242
8	predict text content easily.	61	4.00	4.2295	.82449
9	confirm predictions based on prior knowledge.	61	2.00	4.2295	.76143

The first section of the questionnaire was meant to elicit English language teachers’ perceptions regarding the role of content schemata of the students towards various factors which help increase reading comprehension. In line with the previous research findings, the participants of this survey have assigned the highest mean to the first item which was about the role of content schemata to understand the target text better. Likewise, the second highest mean of 4.55 has been recorded for the second item stating that if readers have sufficient prior knowledge regarding the topic, it becomes very easy to recall the relevant information about the target text that ultimately facilitates the reader in comprehending the text better. Both these items confirm the previous research which has also reported that familiarity of the content schemata is instrumental in increasing the reading comprehension (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983; Nasaji, 2002; Dayze, 2004; Al-Issa, 2006; Jahwari & Humaidi, 2015). The respondents of this survey have allocated third highest preference to the item stating that content schema is instrumental in relating the target text to the own prior knowledge of the reader which positively affects the comprehension. The findings are completely in line with the results presented by Alhaisoni (2017) who has investigated native and non-native EFL teachers at Hail university and these three items have been the most favored factors in this category. Interestingly the fourth highest mean of 4.3279 has been allocated to two items which have been about the role of background knowledge in “reading the text quickly” and “overcoming limited linguistic knowledge”. The results related to these two items partially confirms the study of Alhaisoni (2017) who has reported that the participants of his survey have assigned quite lower values of 3.81 and 3.57 to these factors respectively. Alhaisoni (2017) seems to suggest that content schemata do not help overcome the lacking in linguistic knowledge of the readers to make them read the target texts quickly. A low value of SD of less than .6 for both these items indicates higher interrater agreement. The SD for the other three items has been reported in the medium low range of .66 to .72 that also indicates that the interrater differences among the participants were not significant.

There has been only one item with a mean value of lower than 4 in this category. This item with the least preference from the participants states that content schema helps the readers on focusing the main ideas as a strategy to increase reading comprehension of the target text. The next least preferred item was related to the role of background knowledge in “linking the ideas in the text easily” to help them understand the target text. Alhaisoni (2017) has also reported that the participants of his study have also assigned medium high mean values to these two items confirming the results of the study in hand. The third lowest mean has been recorded for the

last two items of this category which are related to “predicting text content easily” and “confirm predictions based on prior knowledge”. Though these items have been among the least preferred by the respondents, mean of 4.2295 indicates that content schema do play an important role in making pre-reading predictions and confirming them while reading is an important strategy that helps in increasing the comprehension of the target text. The findings are in line with the previous research as Smith (1994) has contended that making predictions plays an important role in enhancing reading comprehension. He further comments that this also helps to understand the world around us as well. It has been reported that “prediction brings potential meaning to texts, reducing ambiguity and eliminating in advance irrelevant alternatives” (Smith, 1994, p. 18). Khanam, Zahid, & Mondol (2014) have also posited that during reading process “sometimes, there remain certain gaps of information in the writing and it is assumed that the reader fills up those gaps with the assumptions which are shared by both the writer (encoder) and the reader (decoder)” (p. 84). The SD for all these items have been calculated higher as compared to the SD for the most preferred items that indicates that the respondents bore higher differences in their perceptions about these least preferred items.

Table 3. Teachers’ perceptions regarding their instructional practices for schemata activation

No	Questionnaire items	N	Range	Mean	SD
<b>To increase text comprehension with the use of students’ prior knowledge, teachers should:</b>					
10	brainstorm the text topic.	61	2.00	4.5574	.53306
11	have class discussion about text topic.	61	4.00	4.5246	.69777
12	organize the ideas on the board under headings to create relationships.	61	4.00	4.2295	.98984
13	call students’ attention to specific signal words, main idea, sentences, highlighted phrases, headings and subtitles.	61	2.00	4.4918	.53613
14	list some statements on the board that are related to the reading topic to guide students’ reading.	61	2.00	4.2131	.66118
15	use visual-based questions.	61	2.00	4.3115	.64655
16	use supporting materials to display prior knowledge.	61	4.00	4.2951	.80300
17	develop inquiries about the text to create a purpose of reading.	61	4.00	4.2623	.85443
18	select key words from the text that require the students to infer text topic.	61	4.00	4.3443	.70440
19	link the topic to students’ culture and previous experience.	61	4.00	4.4754	.82879

This subcategory of the questionnaire seeks to elicit the participants’ responses towards schema-activating classroom strategies in increasing the target text comprehension by EFL learners and all the items of this category have been allocated mean value of higher than 4.29 which indicates that generally speaking all these schema-activating strategies are instrumental in increasing EFL readers’ comprehension of the target texts. The participants have ranked the first two items of this category the highest showing their significant role in enhancing reading comprehension. English language teachers represented by the participants of this study are of the opinion that “brainstorming the text topic” and having “class discussion about the topic” are the most important classroom strategies used by them which facilitate reading comprehension among Saudi EFL learners. The participants of this survey have reported that directing readers’ attention to “specific signal words, main idea, sentences, highlighted phrases, headings and subtitles” is a classroom strategy that significantly helps in activating readers’ background knowledge; thus, increasing comprehension of the target texts. Like the previous section, the results have exhibited strong similarities in the findings of the present study with that of Alhaisoni (2017) who has also reported highest ranking by the participants for the above-mentioned three items. This unanimity of findings strongly suggests that English language teachers working in the KSA tend to use brainstorming and class discussions most frequently to activate background knowledge of Saudi EFL learners so that they may be able to comprehend the target texts in a better manner. Furthermore, other than these pre-reading strategies, they also make their students pay special attention to specific signal words, main idea, sentences, highlighted phrases, headings and subtitles during the while-reading phase to maximize their students’ reading comprehension. Schema-activation strategy of “linking the topic to readers’ culture and previous experience’ has been ranked fourth on the participants’ most favored item in this category. Review of relevant literature has transpired that the role of students’ past knowledge and cultural experiences play an important role in enhancing their reading comprehension. “Sociocultural theory” presented by Vygotsky, (1978) has posited that readers extract meaning from a written text through their cultural and social background. He has further explained that exposure of a variety of texts to the readers increases their social and cultural understanding which resultantly increase their reading comprehension. Khanam, Zahid, & Mondol (2014) have also stated that

efficient readers “make connections to their reading by keying into associations, feelings, attitudes, and ideas providing the deepest interaction between reader and text” (p. 85). Therefore, it transpires that social, cultural, historical and religious schemata enhance readers’ ability to understand a written text effectively and English language teachers should try to activate their students’ social and cultural experiences to enhance their abilities to understand the target text in a better manner.

The strategy of “listing some topic related statements on the board” has remained the least preferred strategy by the participants followed by “organizing ideas on the board under heading” to facilitate readers to comprehend the target text in a better way. The findings confirm the results of the first section of this study in which the participants have also assigned the lowest mean values to the items which elicited their perceptions regarding the role of readers’ background knowledge in focusing on the main idea and linking the ideas in the text easily. In line with the previous trend, the participants of Alhaisoni (2017) have also exhibited least preferences for these two items reinforcing the pedagogical implication that Saudi EFL learners as represented by the participants of this survey do not prefer to exploit the relationship of the main idea with the secondary ideas to increase comprehension of the target text. This implies that English language teachers should train their EFL learners to get benefit from the relevant information provided to them by their teachers to help them enhance their reading comprehension through establishing links between the material in the target texts and the cue words provided to them by their teachers. The participants have assigned third lowest mean to the strategy of developing enquiries about the target text to link it with the background knowledge followed by the item eliciting responses about using supporting material for this purpose. Alhaisoni (2017) also suggests that Saudi EFL teachers should inculcate inquisitive attitude among their Saudi learners so that they set clear purpose for reading before the actual reading activity by using questioning technique as recommended by SQ3R technique to become efficient readers. The participants’ medium high mean to the role of using supporting material to activate content schemata corresponds to the suggestion presented by Carrell & Floyd (1987) that EFL teachers need to help their students to identify their background knowledge about the target topic and the information they lack in order to facilitate them to fill the gap between the present and new knowledge.

Table 4. Teachers’ perceptions regarding the difficulties in implementing the instructional practices for schemata activation

No	Questionnaire items	N	Range	Mean	SD
<b>Factors/Difficulties that prevent you from activating students’ prior knowledge.</b>					
20	Lack of knowledge about the <b>role</b> of prior knowledge	61	4.00	3.6066	1.20109
21	Lack of knowledge about its instructional <b>implications</b>	61	4.00	3.4918	1.17789
22	Lack of <b>training</b> on a variety of techniques	61	4.00	3.5902	1.10117
23	Lack of teaching aids in classroom.	61	4.00	3.7541	1.19242
24	Low English language proficiency of the students.	61	4.00	4.0164	1.20405

The last section of the questionnaire sought the responses of the participants about the factors and difficulties that hinder English language teachers to activate their students’ content schemata. Generally speaking the participants have assigned comparatively lower mean of less than 4 to all items excluding the last one. This indicates quite an encouraging trend among English language teachers that negative factors which prevent them from activating their students’ content schemata do not have significant value. The highest mean value to item 24 has strongly exhibited that low English language proficiency of Saudi EFL learners is a major hindrance in activating background knowledge. The result confirms a growing mass of research conducted in the KSA about the English language proficiency of Saudi EFL learners and there seems an unanimity of findings that Saudi EFL learners lack the required proficiency in the target language. The study of Javid (2010) have informed serious lacking in required English language proficiency of Saudi English-major university undergraduates. Al-Qahtani (2016) have interviewed Saudi English language teachers who have reported that reading skills of EFL learners were not satisfactory and they are “unmotivated”, “struggling” and “in constant need of help” when they are taught reading courses. The second highest mean has been reported for the unavailability of appropriate teaching aids in classes that pose problems for English language teachers in implementing schema-activating strategies. The results align the previous research conducted in the same academic context by Javid (2010) who has reported that one major cause of ineffective English language teaching in Saudi universities is the lack of the use of appropriate teaching aids in language classes.

The remaining three items of this section have been assigned quite low mean. These items have been related to English language teachers’ lack of knowledge about instructional implications, lack of training on a variety of

techniques and lack of knowledge about the role of prior knowledge respectively. All these items are related to teachers' professional skills and the respondents have assigned quite low mean value to all these items indicating that English language teachers working in the KSA are well trained and qualified in teaching English as a foreign language. The results are in line with the findings of Javid (2016) who has revealed that Saudi university undergraduates have reported that their native as well as non-native teachers are competent and have sound professional knowledge.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

This empirical survey was meant to elicit responses of English language teachers from a Saudi university towards the role of content schemata in enhancing reading comprehension of Saudi EFL learners, use of various strategies during reading skills teaching to activate content schemata and the problems faced by English language teachers in implementing these strategies. The findings have emphasized the notion that comprehension of a target text is not limited to the readers' linguistic knowledge but activation of the content schemata also plays an important role in facilitating the readers to understand the written text. The data generated through the responses of the participants towards various items of the questionnaire have revealed that background knowledge of Saudi EFL learners help them significantly in recalling information and relating the target texts to their prior knowledge which enable them to read faster with better understanding. It has also been highlighted that English language teachers believe that pre-reading strategies of brainstorming, classroom discussions about the topic and questioning are the most effective ones to activate their students' background knowledge. It has also been learnt that while-reading strategies of directing the students' attention to signal words, main idea, important phrases, titles and subtitles and effectively linking the target text to their students' cultural and social experiences enhance reading comprehension significantly. The findings have also reported that English language teachers consider low English language proficiency, poor reading skills of Saudi ELF learners and the availability of appropriate teaching aids as the major obstacles in activating the content schemata. This situation makes it rather challenging for them to enable their students to construct meaning effectively while reading the target material with good speed. In conclusion, we can say that the role of teachers is quite instrumental in enhancing Saudi EFL learners' reading skills by effectively implementing before, while and after reading strategies of activating their students' prior knowledge.

Several recommendations may be forwarded which have significant pedagogical implications in materializing much sought-after goal of effective ELT in the KSA by ensuring better reading skills among Saudi EFL learners. It seems important that the target reading texts should match the students' English proficiency level. Considering consistent support from lots of research studies in favor of content schemata role in reading comprehension, it seems appropriate that the teachers should try to provide their students with a schema-theory based reading instruction with a major emphasis on the activation of readers' background knowledge. Effective implementation of this kind of pedagogy will compensate for low linguistic proficiency and will facilitate Saudi EFL learners to be efficient readers. It is also very important that teachers should ensure to use a variety of pre, while and post reading activities to enhance reading comprehension of their students. It is highly recommended that teachers should train their students to link their background knowledge to the target reading material. This can be materialized by introducing appropriate pre-reading activities. There is no denying of the fact that this may overburden the teachers in terms of the additional time and efforts required in the development and implementation of these activities but considering the effectiveness of these activities in enhancing reading comprehension, it is strongly recommended that teachers should try their level best to exploit audio visual material including online resources, slides, pictures, movies etc. to activate their students content schemata at this crucial pre-reading phase to enable them to read with better understanding. In a similar fashion, it is also of great pedagogical value to design and implement while and post reading activities according to their students' proficiency level and interest to ensure smooth progress in achieving the goal of effective and efficient reading. It is also important that teachers should identify the students' reading difficulties and try to help them individually and as groups to minimize these issues through activating their background knowledge by providing them enough practice with familiar reading content in terms of information and culture. It is recommended that the teachers should also ensure to enable their students to become independent self-sufficient readers by teaching them suitable skills and providing them with additional assignments. It is highly recommended that English language teachers in the KSA should be provided with in-service training about appropriate strategies of content schemata activation.

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