

The Role of Cultural Schemata in Learning English Language Skills

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Abstract

The current study aims to find out the effect of the cultural schemata on learning English language skills and investigate the activation of background knowledge of learners to ensure a better understanding of learning the English language. To conduct the study and fulfil its aims, the following hypotheses are set: 1) there is no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group's achievements at the recognition and the production levels in the post-test. 2) to achieve the aims and confirm the hypotheses, the experimental design which is a non-randomized experimental group pre-test–post-test design. The sample of the current study consists of (50) pupils in the fifth literary stage, derived from Al-Barudy preparatory school for girls. Both groups have been equalized in such variables from the educational level of parents, age, English grades achievement in the fourth stage, and the post and pre-test of both groups. The experiment lasted two months; the researcher taught the two groups during the academic year 2021-2022. To analyze the obtained data, different statistical means have been used for many t-tests for two independent samples to measure the pupils' post-test achievement. After the statistical treatment of the data, the results expose that teaching pupils by using cultural schemata has provided it is effective in background knowledge activation in reading, listening, speaking and writing and also raises pupils' motivation to learn the English language. Based on the results, the obtained conclusions in this study, suitable "recommendations and suggestions for further studies are put forward.

Keywords: Cultural schemata, Activation Schemata, Respective Skills, Productive Skills.

1. Introduction

English language is considered as an international language of world, because it is the language of information, technology, business and trades. For this reason, many learners attempt to study English language and master all the four skills which are reading, writing, listening and speaking (White, 1988). The major important problem that pupils faced in learning English language are lack of vocabulary, grammar, poor pronunciation, and shyness to speak, therefore they have nothing to say (Maulana et al, 2016). Culture schemata are useful to facilitate the acquisition and activation of information as much as possible to enhance the understanding of new culturally unknown information. Cultural schemata consider as a guides for pupils to make sense of new experiences and also aid them to make predication about what they might expect to experience a given context (Forsyth and Altarriba, 1993). It is important for pupils to construct cultural background knowledge and apply it in their skills. If pupils have enough cultural background knowledge, they will have a better understanding of a text. It will be complex for pupils to understand the hidden meaning of passage without related cultural background knowledge (Lu, 2018).

1.1. The aims of the study

This study aims at:

- 1- Finding out the effect of the cultural schemata on Learning English Language skills.
- 2- Investigate the activation of background Knowledge of Learners ensure a better understanding of Learning English Language.

1.2. Hypotheses of the Study

This study hypothesized that:

1-There is no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group's achievements at the recognition and the production levels in the post-test.

1.3. Limits of the study

The current study is limited to the use the cultural schemata on teaching English Language in Al-Baurdy preparatory school for girls during the academic year 2021-2022). The sample of the study consists (50) pupils in the fifth preparatory school. The experimental group was taught by the cultural schemata and the control group was taught by the traditional method.

1.4. Value of the study

This study is expected to be valuable for:

- 1-This study will be valuable for English language teachers, it will help them to teach English textbook by suggestion different teaching methods to be used by the teacher.
- 2-This study will be beneficial to the preparatory pupils, it will help pupils to interpret, predict or understanding the text by using cultural schemata.

1.5. Procedures of the study

The following procedures are applied in this study:

- 1- Assessing randomly two groups: control and experimental group as the sample of the study.
- 2-Applying a pre-test for both groups.
- 3-Applying a pre-test on experimental and control groups in order to achieve equalization between other variables such as academic level of the father and mother variable.
- 4-Applying a post –test to both groups to discover whether there are any statistical significance differences among the subject of both the experimental and control groups.
- 5- The result of the post –test and the data have been presented and have been analyzed through using suitable statistical methods.

1.6. Definitions of Basic Terms

1.6.1. Cultural Schemata

Cultural schemata mean "as mental structures that organize knowledge consisting of components that work together to process information " (Strauss and Quinu ,1998: 49). On other hand, Ketchum (2006) defines cultural schemata as " an extension of content schema which is culture – specific. It refers to cultural membership that is needed to fully understand the meaning intended by the writer".

2.Theoretical Background

2.1. Cultural Schemata

Ozyake (2001) defines the cultural schemata as culturally specific world knowledge, to understand a text suitable cultural schemata and scripts are believed to be important. Yule (1996:87) points out that cultural schemata are developed "in the context of our basic experiences". Cultural schemata or abstract schema (Oller ,1995) it includes cultural familiarity which assists people to reconstructing the story through referring to more personally and culturally relate scripts. Cultural schemata refer to thematized, widely share schemata and it is a smallest unit of culture that can be analyzed (Dimaggio, 1977).

Garro (2000) says that culture is shaped by the internalization of social activity through learning processes. The person has repeated experience in the life, their cultural schemata developed and become more tightly organized. The information, behaviors, and experiences that acquired from surrounding are saved in the long-term memory. Cultural schemata are considered an instrument in helping learners to acquire better second language, because of the schemata structure as well as prior knowledge principles (Carrell, 1987).

2.1.2. The Role of Cultural Schemata in Education

Many instructional strategies can follow from cultural schemata. The most relevant implications of cultural schemata to teaching are the role of prior knowledge in pupils processing information. When the pupils have ability to effectively process information, they need to activate their cultural schemata related to the new context. For instance, it would be unlikely that pupil would be able to completely interpret the implications of Jacobinism without an existing schema around the existence of the French Revolution (Widmayer, 2001).

Another way of pre-activating schemata heartens the use of analogies and comparisons to pay attention to the pupil's existing schema and help them to link between existing schema and the new information (Armbruster, 1996; and Driscoll, 1997). Several teachers use metacognitive strategies designed to activate the pupil's schemata especially before reading such as reading a heading and the title and making predictions about the text based on the title and pictures (Widmayer, 2001).

Price and Driscoll (1997) refer to in their studies that the pupils use problem solving in known and unknown context and the study of the relative influences of familiar of the topic and the pupils use their maps to recall the information. They found that some participants have ability to solve a specific problem in unknown context. However, that other participants have ability to solve similar problem in known context.

2.1.3. The Development of Cultural Schemata

When one interacts with individual of the same culture over and over again, or talks about specific information with them many times, cultural schemata are created and stored in their mind. Subsequent similar instances because the cultural schemata to become more organized, abstract, compact and communication become easier and quickly. Nishida (1999) simply explains that experiences in the force which certes cultural schemata. As an individuals have more experiences their developing cultural schemas become more tightly organized. The information not only become more difficult, but become more useful among members of culture.

The development of cultural schemata begins with the construction of simple behavioral action schemas, which are learn through organization and concert experiences, and proceeds to cognitive schemas by means of the functional incorporation of the regular structure of actions into the memory. Cultural schemata such as scripts or frames, can be acquired either directly through a long – term memory process of learning and confirmation through repetition, or indirectly through adaptation to stories, myths, films movies, conversations, and role models (Beck, 1967).

The unknown information material becomes more familiar materials may create a separate schema to organize the information from the foreign culture. Therefore, it may be the case that materials first attempt to incorporate unknown information into their schema and later create a separate schema when they have consolidated all of the foreign information (Forsythe and Altarriba, 1993).

2.1.4 Activation of Cultural Schemata

Schemata reflect how person perceive the world and the things around them. According to Roe, et al (2008:212) schemata are a people's organized clusters of aspects related to objects, actions, places or events. Each schema represents a person's knowledge about a special concept and the interrelationships among the well-known pieces of information.

Cook (1989:69) states that "the mind stimulated by the key words or phrases in the text or by the context activates a knowledge". This view explains that schemata are activated in one of two ways:

1-New information from the outside world can be cognitively received and related to already familiar information stored in the memory through recall or remembering. In this case, new aspects are assimilated into existing schemata which can be changed or expanded.

2-New information can be demonstrated by a new mental structure. In this case, in the absence of already existing schemata, new knowledge builds up new schemata. Carrell and Floyed (1987) maintain that second language teachers must provide their students with suitable schemata that they lack, and must help them to construct a bridge between their existing knowledge and new knowledge. Teachers should teach their students to activate and use their background knowledge to facilitate them to better understanding. Forsythe and Altarriba (1993) demonstrate that technology can be useful in teaching a second language. Technology can help the students to learn more about unfamiliar culture and activating schemata by watching video. The use of video helps the students to set up the particular sequence he /she wishes to study. This ability helps each student to work individually towards understanding the material. An (2013) presumed that schemata activation by using some words or groups of words or the title of a text, are highly suggestive and can clue a main schema. When students were given the words lists, they can build the idea which that came to their mind related to the word meaning in the list at the same time.

2.1.5 The Effect of Cultural Schemata on Skills (Respective and Productive skills)

2.15.1 Respective Skills (Listening and Reading)

Many researchers focusing on listening and reading as respective skills, that cultural schemata constructing activating to improve listening and reading understanding in an EFL context. Listening considered as the most important skill to be improved since it is the most frequently employed skill in our daily lives. Listening comprehension happen when listeners can successfully mix their pre-existing knowledge and experiences with the listening texts (Bilokcuoglu, 2014).

Cultural schemata play a very significant role in developing listening comprehension. Listening is complex process that contains sensing and attending, understanding, interpreting, remembering and responding, a successful activation of background knowledge leads to successful listening comprehension (Goh ,2002).

The unfamiliar materials are increasable to low –level students' cultural schemata that will be activated by connecting new information to the previous knowledge, they will be able to guess answers to some questions and perform better in their listening. Another factor is language proficiency of the listeners high -level can understand even new topic, because they have linguistic knowledge including vocabulary knowledge, and knowledge of form (Mohamadi, 2017).

Reading is an essential part of English teaching, is the most important one of the four skills used in the learning of English as a foreign language (An, 2011). Malik (1990) highlights that cultural schemata play an essential role on reading process, that the student's depends on his / her ability to relate the information he / she gets the text with prior knowledge. Formal schemata play an important function in reading, some applies to content schemata which consider as the key in understanding the text. Background knowledge helps the learners to interpreted the content of the passage, and it allows the learners in enhancing their reading understanding of the text, and background knowledge activation in reading process also raises students' motivation in learning which may causes in better performance in language classroom (Dörnyei and Csizer, 2005).

James (1987) views about questioning that the teacher should give the question before reading so that task more carefully reflects what happens in the real world. The teacher when asks questions about the text, the teacher give a chance of knowing what they think of the text. The teachers should also use approaches to develop students' linguistic knowledge by teaching them vocabulary, sentence structures, and functions to increase their reading abilities (Carrell ,1984).

2.1.5.2 Productive Skills (Speaking and Writing)

Speaking is one of the most needed skills in English. It is used by people to communicate with each other. Syarifudin (2017:3) states that speaking English is difficult, especially for EFL students, because oral communication needs the ability to use language appropriately in social interconnection students to be fluent, should often practice it with the people around them.

Students use their cultural schemata and linguistic knowledge to make a message that will be meaningful to the intended audience. They activate relevant schemata from specific text to carry meaning which intended in students' mind (Chastain, 1988).

Jamasbi and Bagher (2017) found in their studies that the pupils be unsuccessful to transfer their skills and strategies in their speaking, because of lack of vocabulary, linguistic, and background knowledge in the target language and they did not have enough information about the target culture. Therefore, the pupils also concur that their motivation in acquiring the English was either to travel abroad or develop strategies that would allow them learn the target language and about the target culture.

According to Chastain (1988) consider writing is a process of encoding messages or connection meaning with letters of alphabet. Writing is also an active process in the sense that when a pupil writes on a topic, he/she uses his/her prior knowledge and language proficiency containing knowledge of vocabulary, grammar and writing mechanics. In order that the pupils to transfer their ideas and achieve their goals in a second language, they need to have background knowledge of the topic which they are going to write.

Allen (1987) shows that in the writing process, the writer needs to develop strategies for providing new information into existing schema. Many compositions teacher help pupils to choose their own topic, and most pupils select to write about subjects which interest them and which they have background information or schema. Teachers need to aid pupils develop strategies and techniques to allow them acquire information for which they have not yet developed. This skill should be an important of any writing pedagogy. As Chastain (1988), and Brown (2007) maintain that is a strong positive relationship between the students' productive skills, because, the two skills have a lot of characteristics in common and their development go through relatively the same process.

3. Methodology and Procedure

There are many scholars describe the experimental design in different definitions and opinions such as Creswell (2012) defines the experimental design as the tradition method to conducting quantities research or testing in idea (or practice or process) to be decided whether it effects on result or dependent variable. In additional, Van (1962:320) states that the chosen of appropriate experimental design for checking the deduced consequences of the hypothesis is fundamental part for organizing a study.

Of the fifth literary preparatory school pupils are the sample of the study. Table (1) shows the study's experimental design.

Table 1. The Experimental Design.

Group	The Test	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	The Test
EX.	Pupils' achievement in pre-test	Cultural Schemata Strategy	Pupils' Achievement	Pupils' achievement in post-test
CO.	Pupils' achievement in pre-test	Traditional Strategy	Pupils' Achievement	Pupils' achievement in post-test

3.1. The Population

According to Lodico et al (2006) the population can be defined as a large group of people to whom the researcher needs to generalize the finding of the study. The current study consists of EFL Iraqi preparatory pupils of the fifth literary stage for girls in center of Tikrit city for academic year 2021-2022. The sample consists of (50) pupils will divide into two sections. The first section (A) has randomly chosen to be the experimental group, and the second section (B) will be the control group. Each section consists of (25) pupils. The total number of the fifth-class pupil's population (446) girls.

3.2. Equalization

The two classes should be equalized on the basis of the following variables before the experiment begins: the academic level of pupils' father variable, the academic level of pupils' mother variable, pupils' achievement in the previous schooling year and pupils' achievement in the pre-test.

3.2.1 Fathers' Educational Level

In order to find out whether there is any significant difference between the educational level of the students' fathers, the chi-square formula has been utilized. Results show that the chi-square of the calculated value is (4.267a) which is found to be lower than the tabulated value (9.48), at the degree of freedom (4) and a level of significance (0.05) which means that there is no significant difference between the two groups in fathers' educational level, as shown in table (2).

Table 2: The Chi-Square Value of Fathers' Educational Level.

Level of Education	Group		Total	Chi-Square Value		DF	Level of Significance
	EG.	CG.		Calculated	Tabulated		
Diploma	1	0	1				
Higher studies	1	1	2				
Primary	1	4	5				
Intermediate and Secondary	14	16	30				
Total	25	25	50				

3.2.2 Mothers' Educational Level

To find out whether there are statistically significant differences between the two groups in this variable, the chi-square formula has been applied. The two groups are found to be equal in the mothers' educational level. The calculated value is (0.392a) which is lower than the tabulated value which is (7.81) at the degree of freedom (3) and the level of significance (0.05). This means that there is no significant difference between the two groups concerning this variable, as shown in table (3).

Table 3: The Chi-Square Value of the Mothers' Education Level

Level of Education	Group		Total	Chi-Square Value		DF	Level of Significance
	EG.	CG.		Calculated	Tabulated		
Bachelor	1	2	3	0.392a	7.81	3	0.05
Diploma	5	5	10				
Primary	9	8	17				
Intermediate and Secondary	10	10	20				
Total	25	25	50				

3.2.3 Ages of the Pupils

The pupils' age in months for the two groups are counted till the first of January 2022 to find out whether there is any difference between their ages. By applying the t-test- formula for two independent groups, it is found that there is no significant difference between the pupils in experimental group and the control group in their age since the means (\bar{x}) value of the experimental group is (214.56) and the standard deviation is (6.92) and that of the control group is (215.88) and the standard deviation is (6.67). The Calculated t-value is (0.686) which is found to be lower than the tabulated value which is (2.01) at the degree of freedom (48) and the level of significance (0.05). This means that the students of the two groups are equal in their age, as shown in table (4).

Table 4: The Mean, Standard Deviation, T-Value of Students' Age

Groups	No. of students	Mean	SD.	T-Value		DF	Level of Significance
				Calculated	Tabulated		
EG.	25	214.56	6.92	0.686	2.01	48	0.05
CG.	25	215.88	6.67				

3.2.4 Pupils' Previous Year Degree in English

Pupils' achievement in the final exam of English during the previous academic year (2020-2021) has been reviewed and compared. The mean scores value of the experimental group achievement is (55.84) while that of the control group is (57.64) with standard deviations, (8.21) and (8.85), respectively. The calculated t-value is found to be (0.745) which is less than the tabulated value (2.01), at the degree of freedom (48) and (0.05) level of significance. This result indicates that there is no significant difference between the two groups in their previous achievement, as shown in table (5).

Table 5: Mean scores, standard deviations, and t-value for the Students Previous Year Degrees in English.

Groups	No. of students	Mean	SD.	T-Value		DF	Level of Significance
				Calculated	Tabulated		
EG.	25	55.84	8.21	Calculated	Tabulated	48	0.05
CG.	25	57.64	8.85	0.745	2.01		

3.2.5 Pupils' Scores in the Pre-Test

The pre-test has been conducted for equalization. Both the experimental and control groups were submitted to the same pre-test. The pre-test questions are constructed from the textbook, which is a title is "the English for Iraqi 5th Preparatory " that both groups have already studied. The mean score value of the experimental group is (51.08) while that of the control group is (48.92) with standard deviations of (6.08) and (8.71), respectively. The t-test results show that there are no statistically significant differences between the two groups in this variable since the calculated t-value is (1.016), which is less than the tabulated value (2.01), at the degree of freedom (48), and (0.05) level of significance as it is illustrated in the table (6).

Table 6: The T-Test Value of the Two Groups in the Pre-test.

Groups	No. of students	Mean	SD.	T-Value		DF	Level of Significance
				Calculated	Tabulated		
EG.	25	51.08	6.08	Calculated	Tabulated	48	0.05
CG.	25	48.92	8.71	1.016	2.01		

3.3 Test Scoring Schema

Heaton (1988:148) indicates that the analytics method based on the formulation and evolution of scoring scheme which has been design carefully by the researcher. The Post-test contains five questions, each question has different items. Question one is subjective test, it contains five items. This question is to measure the pupils' knowledge and comprehension. The total score is twenty marks, the test item which is correctly answered is given two marks while the wrong is given zero. Question two is subjective test, it contains five items. This question is to measure pupils' ability in grammar, comprehension and Applying level. The total score is twenty marks, the test item which is correctly answered is given two marks while the wrong is given zero. Question number three contains five items, it is an objective test and the total score is twenty marks. This question is to measure pupils' ability in adding synonymous words. The item that answers correctly has been given two marks while the wrong answer is given zero. Question four is subjective test. This question is to measure the pupils' thinking and creative level. The total score is twenty marks, the test item which is correctly answered is given two marks while the wrong is given zero. Question five is semi-objective test, it contains five items. This question is to measure the pupils' comprehension, production and creative level. The total score is twenty marks, the test item which is correctly answered is given two marks while the wrong is given zero.

3.4 The Experimental Material

The current study is concerned with investigating the Effect of Cultural Schemata on Improving Iraqi EFL Pupils Achievement. The researcher based on the textbook which is used in all Iraqi schools as material to teach the English Language at the fifth preparatory classes in which pupils have been studying English for at least eight years. As stated previously, the fifth literary grade of AL- Barudy preparatory school for girls in Tikrit, Salahaldin Governorate have been chosen as a sample of the experiment. The researcher herself has taught the experimental group. The lessons are arranged to be on every Saturday, Sunday, Wednesday and Thursday in the classroom for experimental group. The

materials of the experimental group include: English of Iraqi for fifth class (Student book, activity book, and teachers' guide), White board, Colored pen for white board, drawing picture, Data show, video, you tube, and Game. while the materials of the control group include: English of Iraqi for fifth class (Student book, activity book, and teachers' guide), White board, Colored pen for white board.

3.5 Application of the Experiment

The application of the experiment started on the 22 November of 2021. On that date, the pre-test has been applied by the researcher. Finally, the post-test has been applied. The control group has been taught the same units by employing traditional methods of teaching while the experimental group has been taught by the cultural schemata strategy.

The researcher uses the following procedures in teaching cultural schemata:

1-The working steps are explained the meaning of cultural schemata strategy in order to make pupils have background of what they are going to do.

2-The lesson are presented with a color pen, pictures and list of key words, in order to enhance the information and to activate the pupils' knowledge.

3-The cultural schemata have been explained by using different tools such as Data –show, you tube and video to make pupils emphasize on concepts, values and information of authentic materials.

4-The pupils are asked to work individually and in group to discuss the questions.

5-The pupils are asked to write the new vocabulary and other materials in notebook.

6-The pupils are motivated to use English language fluently as much as they can especially in discussion.

7-The pupils are discussed the questions, they have finished distributing the material and listen to their ideas then correct the mistakes that pupils do.

4.0 Analysis of Data and Discussion of Results

4.1 Results related to pupils' achievement at the Recognition Level and Productive Level

In order to obtain the mean scores of the experimental group's accomplishments at the recognition level and at the production level are computed and compared to see if there is a significant difference between them. The acquired data indicate that students' mean production scores are (38.84) and their mean recognition scores are (35.44). The t-test formula is used for two paired samples, and the calculated t-value is (2.598), while the tabulated t-value is (2.06), at the degree of freedom (29) and level of significance (0.05), as shown in table (7).

This means that there is a significant difference between students' achievement at the recognition level and that at the production level and for the benefit of the production level.

Table 7: Students' Mean Scores, Standard Deviation and T-Value of the Experimental Group Performance at the Recognition and Production Levels.

Group	No. of students	Mean	SD.	T-Value		DF	Level of Significance
Production	25	38.84	4.54	Calculated	Tabulated	24	0.05
Recognition	25	35.44	8.29	2.598	2.06		

4.2. Discussion of Results

The superiority of the experimental group's pupils, which is studied according to the Cultural Schemata, leads to the following results:

1-Cultural Schemata helps the pupils to understand, comprehend and interpreted the new information surrounding them.

2-Cultural Schemata can help the pupils to learn and think more quickly and recall the information effectively without effort.

3-Using Cultural Schemata in teaching –learning process allows the pupils to be active, monitor, self-confidence which lead to rise their learning and solving problems.

4-Cultural Schemata makes the pupils able to save the new information in their memory.

5-Using questions keeps the pupils motivated especially when the pupils asked to make a comparison between the pupils' cultural schemata and pupils' prior knowledge with new information, it considers one of the important ways to build their background knowledge of the new concepts.

6-Collaborative learning will enhance pupils to work in small group and discussion the questions and help them to communicate, review, and convey their ideas to each other not only in the classroom, but in real life situation.

5.1. Conclusions

Building on the results of the current study, the following conclusions have been drawn:

1-The achievement of the pupils of the experimental group is better than that of the pupils' achievement of the control group which shows that those pupils motivate in learning through Cultural Schemata than the traditional method to learn English as a foreign language in Iraqi preparatory schools.

2-The use of Cultural Schemata allows the pupils to increase an atmosphere of collaboration between pupils and teacher.

3-The use of Cultural Schemata encourage pupils to engage in the activities of classroom and aids them to have better understanding in learning English Language.

4-Learning new information through teamwork make it easier and quicker for pupils to understand, interpreted the content of the text, recall the information and connect in different situation of interaction.

5- Using pictures, and new technology in the classroom help the pupils to recognize other Cultural Schemata and lifestyle.

5.2. Recommendation

Several recommendations may be made in light of the current study's results:

1-Iraqi English Language teacher should support the pupils' confidence in order to express themselves clearly and participant in the lesson by using the application of Cultural Schemata in classroom.

2-EFL pupils should be aware of the importance of their achievement in learning another Language and background knowledge.

3-Teacher should work to activate the pupils' Cultural Schemata in teaching four skills.

4-Curriculum designers in Ministry of Education can focus on the Cultural Schemata in designing the curriculum of teaching English Language.

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