

Reading Expertise of Undergraduates in BIU: A Case Study in the Perspective of Schema Theory

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Abstract

This exploration is an endeavor to disclose the reasons of incompetence in English reading skill of the undergraduate learners of Bangladesh Islamic University and to reveal the relationship of schema theory with this inefficiency of the learners. It also strives to focus on the reading materials that are usually suggested to the learners of undergraduate level and how these materials sometimes act as obstacles in bridging the schemata of the learners and the content of the reading materials. In this connection, this study divulges how the inconsistency between the schemata of the learners and the reading materials stand apart to create poor readers. In this article some possible solutions of this problem are sought through data analysis and some suggestions have been made for designing reading materials incorporating the schema theory in improving the reading skill of undergraduate learners of Islamic University of Bangladesh.

1. INTRODUCTION:

That a good reader uses his/her schemata- to understand the contents of written texts to the full is obviously acknowledged and schema theory views that one's understanding of the world is based on his/her previous knowledge and experience. In our country, unfortunately, the learners at their school and college levels are deprived of developing English language skills properly. In short, the students sometimes do not achieve equal efficiency in all four skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening. In this paper, concentration has specially been given on the reading skill of English of the learners at undergraduate level of BIU. Attention in particular is given to the reasons of undergraduate learner's failure in attaining ample proficiency in the language skill of reading. It is tried to show the importance of schemata in developing the reading skill of the learners and the significance of using schemata in the reading skill at the undergraduate level of the university.

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2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Concepts of Schemata:

Linguists, cognitive psychologists, and psycholinguists have used the concept of schema (plural: schemata) to understand the interaction of key factors affecting the comprehension process. Simply put, schema theory states that all knowledge is organized into units. A schema, then, is a generalized description or a conceptual system for understanding knowledge-how knowledge is represented and how it is used. According to this theory, schemata represent knowledge about concepts: objects and the relationships they have with other objects, situations, events, sequences of events, actions, and sequences of actions.

A simple example is to think of our schema for dog. Within that schema we most likely have knowledge about dogs in general (bark, four legs, teeth, hair, and tails) and probably information about specific dogs, such as collies (long hair, large, Lassie) or springer spaniels (English, docked tails, liver and white or black and white, Millie). We may also think of dogs within the greater context of animals and other living things; that is, dogs breathe, need food, and reproduce. Our knowledge of dogs might also include the fact that they are mammals and thus are warm-blooded and bear their young as opposed to laying eggs. Depending upon your personal experience, the knowledge of a dog as a pet (domesticated and loyal) or as an animal to fear (likely to bite or attack) may be a part of our schema. And so it goes with the development of a schema. Each new experience incorporates more information into one's schema. What does all this have to do with reading comprehension? Individuals have schemata for everything. Long before students come to school, they develop schemata about everything they experience. Schemata become theories about reality. These theories not only affect the way information is interpreted, thus affecting comprehension, but also continue to change as new information is received.

As stated by Rumelhart (1980), schemata can represent knowledge at all levels-from ideologies and cultural truths to knowledge about the meaning of a particular word, to knowledge about what patterns of excitations are associated with what letters of the alphabet. We have schemata to represent all levels of our experience, at all levels of abstraction. Finally, our schemata are our knowledge. All of our generic knowledge is embedded in schemata. The importance of schema theory to reading comprehension also lies in how the reader uses schemata. This issue has not yet been resolved by research, although investigators agree that some mechanism activates just those schemata most relevant to the reader's task.

2.2. Schema Theory:

The knowledge that is organized or stored in the reader's mind is schema. Schema theory is very much significant and it contributes a lot to our knowledge of reading; Bartlett (1932) first used this term. According to him schema is that mental arrangement where knowledge is kept in a prearranged order to understand new idea and knowledge. "Schemata" is the plural form of 'schema'. Bartlett again says that Schema theory implies that how the knowledge that we have about our home and abroad is organized into interrelated patterns based on our

previous knowledge and experience. In this regard Anderson says that readers interpret a text using their schemata through the activation of “networks of information stored in the brain which act as filters for incoming information”. He further says: “Writers must make assumptions about their readers’ knowledge, since total explicitness would lead to enormously unwieldy use of language. If readers do not possess that writer’s assumption, then difficulties in literal understanding occur”.

Readers are supposed to activate their schemata to cope with new information and knowledge they comprehend. These schemata permit the readers to give a prediction what may happen. From this view, it can be said that schemata are related with prediction and prediction is based on previous knowledge and experience. When students at any level read something, they try to relate their previous knowledge which is already achieved with the content of the text they are reading.

According to McDonough and Shaw schema theory implies our idea of the interactive reading a bit further by suggesting that skilled readers can connect texts to their previous knowledge of the world. Background knowledge or the development of the Schemata is very important for being skilled and quick readers. Brown and Yule, McCarthy and Carter, Cook and David Nunan (1999) all try to prove how this background knowledge can affect the comprehension process. They explain that the previous knowledge or developed schemata facilitate the learners to comprehend what is coming next or at least these schemata help them providing with clues to understand the present context. If the readers find similarity between the current text and the text they have read earlier, they can activate their schemata accordingly. For example, a regular reader of newspaper already knows about the type, format and font of the newspaper. So, it becomes easier for them to find out important information and in this case it can be said that the schemata of the readers help them to be quick and successful readers (McDonough and Shaw, 1993; 97).

Cultural issue is very much vital here, if the readers can relate their cultural values with the content of the text, it becomes easier for them to understand their present topic of learning. McDonough and Shaw say in favour of cultural background related materials for the activation of schemata of the readers, In this respect, Nunan says, “We interpret what we read in terms of what we already know and we integrate what we already know with the content of what we are reading.” Tomlison (1998; 8) incorporates the schema theory with the usefulness of culturally related reading materials. In this regard Tomlison says, “Materials can help learners to feel at ease in a number of ways. For example, I think that most of the learners are more at ease with texts and illustrations that they can relate to their own culture than they are with those which are culturally exotic (and therefore potentially alien).” Carrell and Easterhold (1983; 553) affirm that reading comprehension involves in one’s knowledge of the world, which may be “culturally based and culturally biased”.

The four main concepts in the Schema Therapy model are: Early Maladaptive Schemas, Schema Domains, Coping Styles, and Schema Modes. The 18 Early Maladaptive Schemas are self-defeating, core themes or patterns that we keep repeating throughout our lives. The 5 Schema domains relate to the basic emotional needs of a child. When these needs are not met in childhood, schemas develop that lead to unhealthy life patterns. The 18 schemas are

grouped into 5 broad schema domains, on the basis of which core needs the schema is related to.

Coping Styles are the ways the child adapts to schemas and to damaging childhood experiences. For example, some children surrender to their schemas; some find ways to block out or escape from pain; while other children fight back or overcompensate. Schema Modes are the moment-to-moment emotional states and coping responses that we all experience. Often our schema modes are triggered by life situations that we are oversensitive to (our "emotional buttons"). Many schema modes lead us to overreact to situations, or to act in ways that end up hurting us. The goals of Schema Therapy are: to help patients to stop using maladaptive coping styles and thus get back in touch with their core feelings; to heal their early schemas; to learn how to flip out of self-defeating schema modes as quickly as possible; and eventually to get their emotional needs met in everyday life.

'Schema theory' however doesn't mean only background knowledge; it implies a broader concept of knowledge stored in our brain in an organized manner. It also emphasizes on the prior knowledge (schemata) and the new knowledge (would be acquired) and their connections. Carrell and Easterhold suggest that language teachers can apply the principles of Schema theory in their reading classes where the learners face difficulties to comprehend because of their insufficient general knowledge. Here are some characteristics of schemata according to Anderson:

- (a) Schemata are always organized meaningfully; can be added to and as an individual gains or experience, can develop to include more variables and more specificity.
- (b) Each schema is embedded in other schemata and itself contains subschema.
- (c) Schemas change moment by moment as information is received.
- (d) They may also be reorganized when incoming data reveals a need to restructure the concept.
- (e) The mental representations used during perception and comprehension and which evolve as a result of these processes, combine to own a whole which is greater than the sum of its parts.

2.3. Reading Comprehension as Cognitive-Based Processing:

There are several models based on cognitive processing. For example, Samuels Model of Automatic Information Processing (Samuels, 1994) emphasizes internal aspects of attention as crucial to comprehension. Samuels defines three characteristics of internal attention. The first, alertness, is the reader's active attempt to access relevant schemata involving letter-sound relationships, syntactic knowledge, and word meanings. Selectivity, the second characteristic, refers to the reader's ability to attend selectively to only that information requiring processing. The third characteristic, limited capacity refers to the fact that our human brain has a limited amount of cognitive energy available for use in processing information. In other words, if a reader's cognitive energy is focused on decoding and attention cannot be directed at integrating, relating, and combining the meanings of the words

decoded, then comprehension will suffer. "Automaticity in information processing, then, simply means that information is processed with little attention" (Samuels, 1994, p. 823).

Comprehension difficulties occur when the reader cannot rapidly and automatically access the concepts and knowledge stored in the schemata. One other example of a cognitive-based model is Rumelhart's (1994) Interactive Model. Information from several knowledge sources (schemata for letter-sound relationships, word meanings, syntactic relationships, event sequences, and so forth) are considered simultaneously. The implication is that when information from one source, such as word recognition, is deficient, the reader will rely on information from another source, for example, contextual clues or previous experience. Stanovich (1980) terms the latter kind of processing interactive-compensatory because the reader (any reader) compensates for deficiencies in one or more of the knowledge sources by using information from remaining knowledge sources. Those sources that are more concerned with concepts and semantic relationships are termed higher-level stimuli; sources dealing with the print itself, that is phonics, sight words, and other word-attack skills, are termed lower level stimuli.

The interactive-compensatory model implies that the reader will rely on higher-level processes when lower-level processes are inadequate, and vice versa. Stanovich extensively reviews research demonstrating such compensation in both good and poor readers.

2.4. Reading Comprehension as Socio-cognitive Processing:

A socio-cognitive processing model takes a constructivist view of reading comprehension; that is, the reader, the text, the teacher, and the classroom community are all involved in the construction of meaning. Ruddell states, "The role of the classroom's social context and the influence of the teacher on the reader's meaning negotiation and construction are central to this model [developed by R. B. Ruddell and N. J. Unrau] as it explores the notion that participants in literacy events form and reform meanings in a hermeneutic [interpretation] circle." In other words, this model views comprehension as a process that involves meaning negotiation among text, readers, teachers, and other members of the classroom community.

Thus, text without a reader is merely a set of marks capable of being interpreted as written language. However, when a reader transacts with the text, meaning happens. Schemata are not viewed as static but rather as active, developing, and ever changing. As readers transact with text they are changed or transformed, as is the text. Similarly, "the same text takes on different meanings in transactions with different readers or even with the same reader in different contexts or times" (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 1078).

Texts are constructed by authors to be comprehended by readers. The meaning is in the author and the reader. The text has a potential to evoke meaning but has no meaning in itself; meaning is not a characteristic of texts. This does not mean the characteristics of the text are unimportant or that either writer or reader is independent of them. How well the writer constructs the text and how well the reader reconstructs it and constructs meaning will influence comprehension. But meaning does not pass between writer and reader. It is represented by a writer in a text and constructed from a text by a reader.

In a transactional-socio-psycholinguistic view, the reader has a highly active role. It is the individual transactions between a reader and the text characteristics that result in meaning. These characteristics include physical characteristics such as orthography- the alphabetic system, spelling, punctuation; format characteristics such as paragraphing, lists, schedules, bibliographies; macrostructure or text grammar such as that found in telephone books, recipe books, newspapers, and letters; and wording of texts such as the differences found in narrative and expository text. Understanding is limited, however, by the reader's schemata, making what the reader brings to the text as important as the text itself.

The writer also plays an important role in comprehension. Additionally, readers' and writers' schemata are changed through transactions with the text as meaning is constructed. Readers' schemata are changed as new knowledge is assimilated and accommodated. Writers' schemata are changed as new ways of organizing text to express meaning are developed. According to Goodman- how well the writer knows the audience and has built the text to suit that audience makes a major difference in text predictability and comprehension. Intention is defined as "commitment to a plan for achieving one or more reading purposes at a more or less specified time in the future." All other moderator variables e.g. extrinsic motivation, involvement, prior knowledge, and purpose- are viewed as affecting the attitude- reading relationship by influencing the intention to read. Therefore, classroom environments that include well-stocked libraries, magazines, reading tables, and areas with comfortable chairs will enhance students' intentions to read.

2.5. The Schema Theory Structure:

While exploring the recall of Native American folktales, Bartlett noticed that many recalls were not accurate and involved the replacement of unfamiliar information with facts already known. In order to categorize this class of memory errors, Bartlett suggested that human beings apparently possess generic knowledge in the form of unconscious mental structures (schemata) and that these structures produce schematized errors in recall when they interact with incoming information. Thus, it is through schemata that old knowledge influences new information. So, basically, schemata are psychological concepts that were proposed as a form of mental representation for selected chunks of complex knowledge, which are then stored in the long-term memory.

2.6. The 4 Key Elements of a Schema:

- 2.6.1. An individual can memorize and use a schema without even realizing of doing so.
- 2.6.2. Once a schema is developed, it tends to be stable over a long period of time.
- 2.6.3. Human mind uses schemata to organize, retrieve, and encode chunks of important information.
- 2.6.4. Schemata are accumulated over time and through different experiences.

2.7. The Practical Aspects of Schema Theory:

Schema theory emphasizes on the importance of generic knowledge that will help the formation of mental representations. In the educational process, the task of teachers would be to help students develop new schemata and establish connections between them –something that will eventually improve their memory. Of course, background information and prior knowledge are vitally important, as well. Schema theory can be applied in various areas, such as: Mathematical problem solving, motor learning, Reading comprehension etc.

2.8. Schema Diagram: a Sample:

We need to look more closely and more precisely at the role of knowledge and how it interacts with language to create discourse. While a learner reads or hears any word, he tries to activate his schemata unconsciously. Many ideas related to that particular word come to his mind and these ideas totally depend on the background knowledge of the readers. For example, McDonough and Shaw explain the matter as, “the word wedding in a British context could bring about a complete schematic framework to accompany ‘a gentleman and a lady’, ‘sermon’, ‘wedding feast’, ‘last Saturday’, ‘registry office’, ‘Best Man’ and so on”. If the same word marriage is heard then some ideas will come into the mind of a Bengali reader like, ‘Bride’, ‘Bridegroom’, ‘Red Sari’, ‘Kazee’, ‘Gaie Holud’, ‘pagree’ and so on. A person’s schema of “egg” might refer to these components shown below:

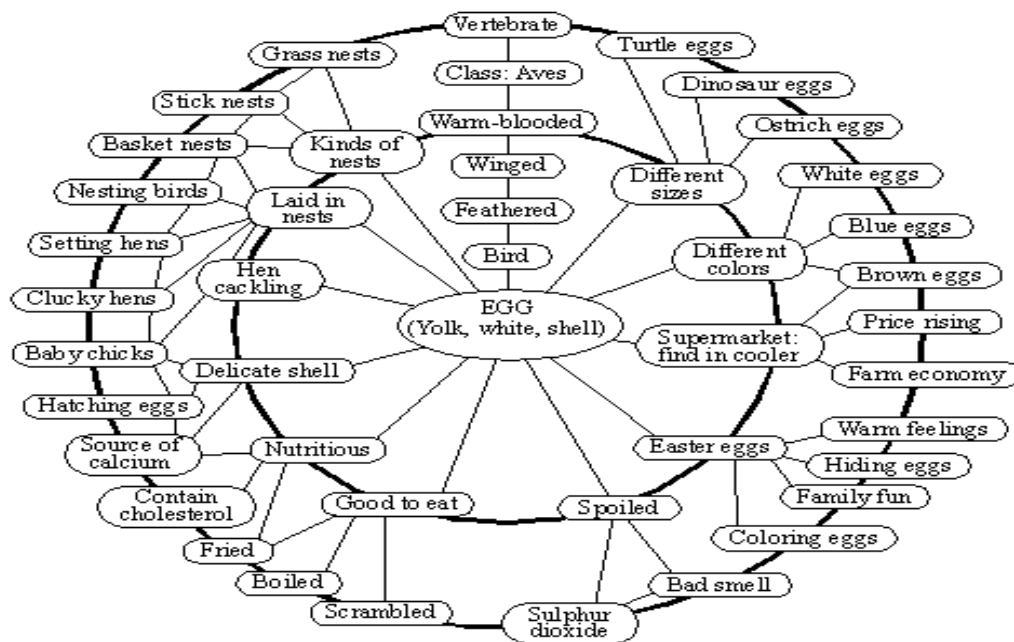


Diagram 1: Here is a diagram that describes how a person's schema of "egg" might include the components:

This research project builds on the cognitive theory about the acquisition and use of schema knowledge as described in *Schema in Problem Solving* (S, Marshall, Cambridge University Press, 1995). It extends the schema theory from its original emphasis on problem solving to

the related domain of tactical decision making. A central goal was to study the feasibility of using schema theory as the cognitive basis for understanding how officers use decision support systems as they make decisions. To this end, we have studied the performance of six teams of officers as they engaged in various computer simulation tasks as part of the TADMUS programme. Each team consisted of the Commanding Officer and his Tactical Action Officer. These officers were currently assigned to ships, who were highly expert in their performance, and the data collected as they participated in the tasks have yielded a number of important findings.

The data were analyzed to determine two things: (1) the types of schema knowledge that were most used by the experts and (2) the times in the decision-making process at which the different kinds of knowledge were most important. The investigation initially focused on the identification knowledge component of a schema because it is of primary importance in tactical decision making. Identification knowledge is the store of information in memory that allows the individual (or team) to make rapid recognition of patterns as they occur in the environment. For an officer in this study, the patterns that needed to be recognized were the characteristics that described the many aircrafts and vessels (i.e., tracks) surrounding his ship. It was clear from the officers' performance that an important early step in the decision-making process was the reliable reduction of all tracks to a manageable set of possible problems and/or potential threats. One of the demands of tactical situations such as those studied here is that tracks of interest need to be recognized as rapidly as possible.

Under schema theory, identification knowledge is modeled by a neural network and is considered to be chiefly pattern recognition. The decision maker sees a number of features in the situation, and the particular configuration that results in recognized as a pattern, not as isolated features. Details about context of the situation are not needed for this recognition. It is fast and automatic, requiring few additional cognitive resources. The advantages of such recognition in complex tasks with time constraints are obvious; the decision maker will be able to make more evaluations and to make them rapidly if the process is context independent.

2.9. Reading Proficiency That Should Be Acquired:

The language teachers expect the students to learn basic techniques of reading like scanning, skimming, prediction, inference etc. irrespective of their levels of understanding. Initially the students need to be able to scan the text when they search for any particular information. This skill does not involve the students in reading every single line or word in particular rather this approach inhibits students to go through in details. The next step is obviously the skimming stage where, like scanning the students are not supposed to go through the text deeply rather here the students are supposed to cast their eyes on the surface to get an overall idea about the written text. In this regard Greller (1981; 19) says: 'Both skimming and scanning are specific reading techniques necessary for quick and efficient reading. When skimming, we go through the reading material quickly in order to get the gist of it, to know how it is organized, or to get an idea of the tone or the intention of the writer. When scanning, we only try to do so. We simply let our eyes wander over the text until we find what we are looking for, whether it be a name, date or a less specific piece of information.'

Creller further includes that the teachers can contribute by teaching these two techniques in authentic reading situation as well as they can contribute to build up the students' confidence by teaching them how much they can learn simply by looking at some particular parts or words of a paragraph. Again he gives emphasis on the schema theory for using these reading techniques because according to him, the development of a reader's schema can only help the students to read successfully in this regard. However, Scanning or skimming depends on what kind of text the readers are reading or what type of information they are looking for. Students especially at undergraduate level are required to read for detailed comprehension. For total comprehension, Students need full concentration on the text to get complete ideas and this attempt of comprehension requires total involvement unlike scanning and skimming. This matter of total involvement refers to the idea of schema theory, where the students try to connect their schemata with the content of the text to comprehend it in the fullest or with hundred percent perfection.

Some aids to better comprehension which are suggested by Allen Etherton are also mention worthy for mental arrangement of knowledge. In the same way Harmer J. (1998: 70) has mentioned about the principles of teaching reading. If we consider those basic principles of teaching reading skill, we will find how schema theory is very much associated with it:

In standard 1, reading skill is shown as an active skill that is a kind of active Interaction. To interact properly readers have to understand what the words mean, they have to be able to see the pictures the words are illustrating and for doing so, readers (here the students) must relate their background knowledge and experience with the text they are reading.

In principle 2, students are suggested to involve themselves fully with the reading materials. If the other environments in the class remain the same, students who are not involved with the reading text fail to understand the contents of the text. For this involvement students need to connect their schemata with the reading text, unless definitely they will feel no interest.

In principle 3, students are asked to give feedback to the content of the text. In other words language and contents should be given equal attention. While reading any text students should look at the type of language used in the reading text, but more importantly the meaning and the message of the text should be comprehended by the learners. If the contents are familiar and matched with the background knowledge of the learners, it becomes easier for the learners to comprehend the meaning of the reading text.

In principle 4, the power of prediction has been given importance in the case of reading. When students or any other readers read any text, the illustration, the book cover, some highlighted words give hints about the book or text and their brains start predicting what they are going to read and obviously if the setting is familiar and connected with the previous knowledge of the readers, it becomes comparatively easier to predict and to set the comprehension process with ease.

In principle 5, it is found that if the reading materials are explored fully the students/readers can comprehend easily. A reading text will turn into a mere combination of sentences, ideas and description unless students are not fully absorbed in it. A good teacher exploits any reading text to the full by making the text understandable to the learners and for this, a connection between the reading material and the schemata of the learners is essential.

3. THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEMS:

We find most of the time our students are anxious about reading any text in English and behind this anxiety, they have shown many reasons like difficult bombastic language, content of the text describing something totally unknown to them, having no prior experience of reading etc. This reading problem is intense in the undergraduate level, where we find students from different educational background (students from both Bengali and English medium where Bengali medium students most of the time dominate in the class). Now, the question arises, why our students usually fail to activate their schemata in response to the texts they are prescribed by the university. From the small scale of survey that has been conducted in this respect, very interesting information has been accumulated.

Most of the students (specially from Bengali medium) are coming at tertiary level after completing secondary and higher secondary level and at these two levels students usually go through their English text books prescribed by NCTB (National Curriculum and Text Book Board); so, obviously they grow a habit of reading books that contain the text written in local setting, culture and therefore the context is familiar with the students. This situation is completely reverse in the case of the students who have English medium background where the prescribed books are mainly British and American. For this reason, students with English medium background from the very beginning grow or develop their comprehension process in a way that the foreign setting and text written in foreign context become very familiar with them. As a result, they can activate their schemata in response to the texts of foreign setting more easily than the students of Bengali medium can.

The opposite scenario is found in the case of the undergraduate students having Bengali medium background; when they are given reading materials of American or British origin, they really face problems as they cannot activate their schemata to cope with the materials and they struggle a lot. Apart than their educational background, some other factors also play vital role in building their schemata such as social background, extensive reading habit and exposure to different TV channels, different cultural activities and different kinds of social interactions. Bangladeshi undergraduate students usually get exposure to the surroundings they belong to, so, their schemata are consisted of the background knowledge of native culture. In this study, we have considered few language materials (used in fundamentals, composition or advance level) where students confront with cultural conflict and sometimes fail to understand because they cannot bridge between their schemata and the content of the text. For example, in one class of BIU (in which the survey is done), Langan's 'English Skill' is set as a reference book for language development. If we consider some passages from that book (English Skill: 2001), it will be clear why our students struggle to use existing schemata to cope with the content of the text:

(A) Asking Girls Out: There are several reasons I have trouble asking girls to go out with me. I have asked some girls out and have been turned down. This is one reason that I can't talk to them. At one time I was very shy and quiet and people sometimes didn't even know I was present. I can talk to girls now as friends, but as soon as I want to ask them out, I usually start to become quiet and a little bit of shyness comes out. When I finally get the nerve up, the girl will turn me down and I swear that I will never ask another one out again.....

(B) My Senior Prom: My senior prom was nothing like what I expected it to be. From the start of my senior year; I had pictured getting dressed in a sleek silvery slip dress that my aunt would make and that would cost \$200 in any store. No one else would have a gown as attractive as mine. I imagined my boyfriend coming to the door with a lovely deep-red corsage and I pictured myself happily inhaling its perfume all evening long. I saw setting off for the evening in his brother's 2000 BMW convertible. We would make a flourish as we swept in and out of a series of parties before the prom. Our evening would be capped by a delicious shrimp dinner at the prom and by dancing close together into the early morning ours...

(C) Let's Ban Prom: While many students regard proms as peak events in high school life, I believe that high school proms should be banned. One reason is that even before the prom takes place, it causes problems. Teenagers are separated into "the ones who were asked" and "the ones who weren't." Being one of those who weren't asked can be heartbreaking to a sensitive young person. Another pre-prom problem is money. The price of the various items needed can add up quickly to a lot of money. The prom itself can be unpleasant and frustrating, too. At the beginning of the evening, the girls enviously compare dresses while the boys sweat nervously inside their rented suit...

If we analyze these extracts taken from different passages, we understand why our students struggle to use their schemata to comprehend these types of texts. In addition to that, if we consider the content of the text we find that there is a possibility of cultural conflict. For this reason, it can be said that sometimes some prescribed reading materials can act as obstacles; as a result poor reader is created. Our native students at undergraduate level usually find these reading materials totally unfamiliar with them; so, in most of the cases, they fail to activate their schemata to get into the reading materials. Here, the students usually find no match with their background knowledge and experience and the texts suggested to them. And, this inconsistency of 'no match' leads them to feel uncomfortable and inconsistent as readers.

4. STUDY AND DATA ANALYSIS:

It is desired to examine whether there is any relationship between the schemata and reading skill of undergraduate students in our country. This paper focused on 100 students taken from undergraduate programmes of different departments of Bangladesh Islamic University. Most of the students were from Bengali medium background and it was their first experience for most of the students to face English instructions and going through American/British language books. They were from different social background but having almost same cultural values and thus having schemata of almost same standard. A sample questionnaire was set before them and before attempting the questionnaire they were given a briefing on schemata. A short interview was also taken. Based on students' response to the questionnaire and the interview we have categorized their answer into ten different tables. Among 100 students, 18 students did not complete the questionnaire properly. For better analysis and understanding numeric data have been shown in percentage of the information collected.

Table-1

Topic	Bangla Medium	English Medium
Medium of Instruction at School and College	92%	8%

Table-2

Topic	Bangla	English	Mixture of Bangla & English
Current Medium of Instruction at University	0%	24%	76%

Table-3

Topic	Yes							No
Use of Extra Reading Materials	Newspaper	Story Books	Magazine	Journals	Comics	More Than one Materials	other	4%
	34%	4%	4%	0%	2%	50%	2%	

Table-4

Topic	British Books	American Books	Indian Books	Confused/not Attempted
Prescribed/Followed Language Books	18%	42%	32%	8%

Table-5

Topic	Bengali	Hindi	English	More Than One Channel	Others
Channels Usually Watched	28%	24%	12%	30%	6%

Table-6

Topic	Yes	No	Sometimes	Others
Comfortable with Text in Foreign Setting	6%	30%	60%	4%

Table-7

Topic	Yes	No
English Language Books in Local Setting	94%	6%

Table-8

Topic	Love	Real Life Situation	Aadventure	Sports	All	Others
Theme in Reading Materials Preferred	4%	50%	2%	0%	40%	4%

Table-9

Topic	Yes	No	Sometimes	Rarely
Easily cope with the foreign reading materials	16%	14%	60%	10%

Table-10

Topic	Complex language	Text on Different Culture	Anxiety about Unfamiliar Text	All	Others
Cause of Being Uncomfortable with English Text	40%	16%	2%	32%	10%

The first question of the questionnaire was set to know the medium of instruction of the students' school and college level and it was found that 92% students are from Bengali medium background and only 8% students are from English medium background (see table).

The second question dealt with the current medium of instruction of the students at the university level and the findings were that only Bengali is not used as a medium of instruction; only English is the medium of instruction in the case of 24% students and both Bengali and English are used as the medium of instruction in the case of 76% students (see table).

The third question was regarding the use of extra reading materials by the students. It has been noticed that 34% students prefer newspaper, 4% story books 4% magazine, 0% journal, 2% comics, 50% more than one materials, 2% prefer other materials as their extra reading materials and 4% do not respond at all to this question (see table 3).

The fourth question was about the prescribed or the followed language books at their (students) universities. It has been discovered that 18% students follow British books, 42%

American books, 32% Indian books and 4% students do not respond to this question (see table 4).

The fifth question was about the students who preferred TV channels. It was found that 28% students like only Bengali TV channels, 24% prefer only Hindi, 12% like only English, more than one channels are favored by 30% and other channels are watched by 6% students (see table 5).

Question 6 was set to know whether they feel comfortable with the language books in foreign context. It was revealed that 6% students like texts in foreign context, 30% students do not like texts in foreign setting, 60% students respond that they sometimes like the foreign setting and 4% students are confused (see table 6).

Question 7 was regarding the suggestions of the students in the respect of having English language books in local setting. The findings were that 94% students are inclined to have English language books in local setting whereas 6% students do not like the idea (see table 7).

Question 8 was about their liking regarding the theme of reading materials. The findings were that 4% students like love as a theme, 50% real life situation, 2% adventure, 0% sports (some students like sports but they prefer all the themes mentioned in the questionnaire), 40% prefer all and 4% students like other themes which were not mentioned in the questionnaire (see table 8).

Question 9 was set to know whether their background knowledge help them to cope with the American/British reading materials. It was found than 16% students previous knowledge help them to understand foreign reading materials whereas 14% students cannot connect their background knowledge with their reading materials of foreign origin and 60% students sometimes are able to make bridge between the reading materials and their background knowledge (see table 9). This table also shows that 10% students hardly can cope with the foreign reading materials.

Question 10 was set to find out the reasons of difficulty in understanding English texts for the students. It has been found that 40% students feel uncomfortable with English text because of complex language, 16% students find those texts difficult because of exotic culture, 2% students are always anxious about English texts and 32% students identify all the reasons mentioned in the questionnaire for feeling uncomfortable with English texts (see table 10).

5. FINDINGS:

After analyzing the data gathered from the questionnaire, the researchers have got some interesting results that indicate the relationship between schemata and the reading skill of undergraduate students. Students are mostly from Bengali medium background hence their background knowledge is very much localized from the very beginning. Students' current medium of instruction is not exclusively English or solely Bengali, rather they receive instruction in a mixture of Bengali and English language. It has been found that half of the surveyed students read mainly the newspaper (English/Bengali) which gives information of

their surroundings and they develop their schemata from that information in general. It is also found that private universities prescribe mainly American/British books with which students hardly find any similarity with their schemata.

The author also comes to know that students usually watch Bengali and Hindi TV channels and thus, develop their schemata accordingly. It has also been found that most of the students sometimes like the language books in foreign setting and sometimes they do not and it indicates that students are not always happy with the text in foreign setting and they sometimes find it difficult to understand as they always cannot activate their schemata consistently. It is very surprising that huge number of students (94%) suggest that it will be better if the language books are in local setting and this is a simple compliance with the fact that they are having problem with language books in foreign setting. Another fact has also been revealed that students like real life situation as the theme of reading materials which suit them the best.

Therefore, it can be easily said that with real life situation they actually can match their schemata. Researcher finds that most of the students sometimes can cope with the reading materials with their background knowledge and sometimes they fail. This finding actually tells us when the students find the reading materials matching with their schemata they can cope easily with the text and when they find it against their background knowledge they just struggle. At last the author finds out that, most of the students identify the complex language as the main reason for the inefficiency of reading skill. As the language is complex it becomes difficult for them to understand context of the reading materials that result in poor schemata connection. Here learners cannot activate their schemata as they struggle to comprehend the reading text.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS:

Learners should get exposure to visual demonstration so that they can activate their schemata for better reading.

Pre-reading discussion can be introduced for reading comprehension.

The use of authentic illustrated reading materials can be a better idea for the development of the schemata of the undergraduate learners.

Social and educational background is very important for the development of schemata. So, when the language teachers go to prescribe any reading materials for the students of undergraduate level they should think about students' educational, cultural and social background and above all their prior knowledge of the world.

Teachers can contextualize the reading materials in foreign context when they feel it necessary.

By doing proper needs analysis of the learners, reading materials should be selected and designed.

In our country, English reading materials are insufficient in our context. So, reading materials should be designed in such a way that the learners get access to different reading materials of their interest and need.

For tertiary level students, teachers may sometimes need to use reading materials in foreign context; in that case the teachers should provide the students with necessary background knowledge.

Overnight nobody can be excellent or efficient reader and hundred percent perfection is not possible. For gaining effective reading skill our learners can be suggested to read newspaper, magazine, journal; story books in local setting as reading materials. Besides this students should be encouraged to watch English movies, read English newspapers and hear English news of home and abroad etc and by this, students can equip their schemata with diverse knowledge and information which will help them to go through texts in a foreign a setting.

Conclusion can be drawn by saying that students' schemata play a vital role in understanding the reading materials. If the students are provided with the materials with which they activate their schemata, they can ultimately be competent readers.

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APPENDIX:

The following is the questionnaire that the author produced before the students to collect data for the study.

**Reading expertise of Undergraduates in BIU:
A Case Study in the Perspective of Schema Theory
(Put a tick (✓) mark in the appropriate answer)**

1. What was the medium of instruction in your school and college?
 - a. Bengali b. English

2. What is the current medium of instruction at your university?
 - a. Bengali b. English
 - c. Mixture of English and Bengali

3. Do you read/go through any extra reading materials (out of syllabus books/not for exam purpose)? Yes or No; types of materials-
 - a. newspaper b. books (story)
 - c. magazine d. journals
 - e. comics f. others (specify).....

4. For your English language development what type of books do you follow/what are the prescribed language books of the university?
 - a. British Books
.....
.....
 - b. American Books
.....
.....
 - c. Indian Books
.....
.....

5. What are the TV channels you usually enjoy watching?
 - a. Bengali b. Hindi
 - c. English d. Others

6. Do you feel comfortable with the language books written in the foreign context or in foreign setting?
 - a. Yes b. No
 - c. Sometimes d. Others

7. Do you think that it will be helpful for you if the English language books are written by the Bangladeshi writers in Bangladeshi context or in Bangladeshi setting?

- a. Yes b. No

Please specify the reason (s):

.....

.....

8. What kind of theme in reading materials suits you the best?

- a. Love b. Real life situation c. Adventure
- d. Sports e. All of these f. Others (specify the reason)

.....

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9. Do you think that by using your knowledge and experience, you can easily cope with the American/British/Indian reading materials?

- a. Yes b. No
- c. Sometimes d. Rarely

10. Why do you feel uncomfortable reading English texts?

- a. Because of complex language
- b. Because the text based on different culture
- c. Anxiety about unfamiliar texts d. All e. Others:

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