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*Pembelajaran Matematika Melalui Proses
Recognizing Building With Constructing.*

Dr. Suhirman, M.Pd
*Pembelajaran Kooperatif Learning Jigsaw
Pada Pembelajaran IPS - MI - SD.*

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*Pendekatan Pembelajaran
Student Center Learning.*



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SCHEMA THEORY IN TEACHING READING COMPREHENSION

Syamsul Rizal

Abstract

Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan penting pemahaman teori skema bagi bagi setiap tenaga edukasi bidang studi apapun. Namun dalam penulisan ini dibatasi hanya bagi tenaga edukasi dalam bidang studi pengajaran bahasa Inggris, khususnya *reading comprehension*. Dalam tulisan ini akan dipaparkan hubungan yang sangat erat antara teori skema dengan pemahaman membaca. Teori kema menjelaskan bahwa ketika peserta didik masuk ke dalam kelas untuk memulai mengikuti pelajaran sesungguhnya mereka tidak masuk dengan otak yang kosong, melainkan dalam otak mereka telah ada sedikit atau banyak pengetahuan sebelumnya sehubungan dengan pembelajaran atau tek bacaan yang akan dibahas dalam kelas tersebut. Oleh karena, itu semakin banyak *background knowledge* (pengetahuan sebelumnya) yang dimiliki pembaca, maka akan semakin cepat ia memahami tek bacaan tersebut.

Keywords; schema theory, reading comprehension

Introduction

In the modern world, reading is one of the most important skills to acquire knowledge. Most of scientific information has been spread through electronic or printed media, such as: TV, internet, books, and journals. According to Sharon (2002) quoted by Abdillah (2003:1-2), 70%-95% of teaching and learning activities in the classroom depends on written texts like textbooks. This means that learners should be good readers in order to comprehend what they read in the texts. Related to teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL), English teachers should motivate their students to read English texts by using appropriate

strategies in reading in order that the students can comprehend what they read in the target language. The appropriate strategies in teaching reading comprehension, therefore, should be implemented by the English teachers in teaching and learning processes especially for the EFL learners, because applying good strategies in teaching and learning process may improve students' reading comprehension achievement.

According to Feuerstein (1995:5-9), there are two approaches in teaching reading comprehension, that is, traditional and current approach. Traditional approach sees the product in which the students are expected to understand a text and have the ability to answer the questions provided by a text.

In other words, this approach focuses on the students' performance after reading. In contrast to the traditional approach, the current approach of teaching reading emphasizes the process of reading rather than the product. This means that the process is viewed as an interactive between the reader and text. In other words, current strategies focus on what the reader actually does while reading. The application of schema theory (the way in which a teacher activates his or her students' prior knowledge before the students read the reading text) in teaching reading comprehension is one of the current strategies.

Concept of Schema Theory

The term of schema (plural schemata) was first used by Jean Piaget in 1926. He proposed his theory *cognitive accommodation*, that is, one's knowledge is gained from the accommodation of his or her cognitive structures to the environment like animals must accommodate to their environment to maintain their life (Kumanireng, 2003). In 1932 Bartlett (in Cook, 1997:86) proposed the concept of schema or schemata (plural). He suggested that memory takes the form of schema, which provides a mental representation or framework for understanding, remembering and applying information. Then, in 1977 schema theory was developed by R. C. Anderson, a respected educational psychologist, as cited in Carrell and Eisterhold ((1983:73). This learning theory views organized knowledge as an elaborate of abstract mental structures which represent one's understanding of the world.

Rumelhart (1980:35-58) further developed the schema concept and described schema theory as basically a theory of how knowledge is mentally represented in memory. Furthermore, he pointed out that schemata are created through experience getting in the world, and culture. Schema theory can help us to focus on the prior knowledge and experience, or mental schema, that students bring to the learning situation, and the gaps or discrepancies between what the learner already knows and what he/she needs to know to successfully carry out and complete the particular learning task. Students who are limited by their experiences and do not have relevant schemata have difficulty carrying out the task successfully, hence teachers need to help students to develop and fine-tune the appropriate conceptual systems that are needed to successfully complete the learning task(s).

Rumelhart (1980:35) defines schema as follows.

A schema theory is basically a theory about... how knowledge is presented and about how that representation facilitates the use of the knowledge in particular ways. According to schema theories, all knowledge is packaged into units... [called] schemata. Embedded in these packets of knowledge is... information about how this knowledge is to be used.

According to Slavin (1988:55), for decades, cognitive scientists and psychologists have discussed the schema theory of human memory. The underlying idea of this theory is that humans, as they receive incoming

information, organize it with their previous schemata. Humans develop many schemata over the course of their lifetimes.

Based on the definition proposed by several experts, it can be concluded that a schema (plural schemata) is a hypothetical mental structure for representing generic concepts stored in memory. Schemata are created through experience with people, objects, and events in the world. Schemata grow and change as new information is acquired. There are schemata representing our knowledge about all concepts: those underlying objects, situation, events, sequences of events, actions and sequences of actions. A schema contains, as part of its specification, the network of interrelations that is believed to normally hold among the constituents of the concept in question.

As a major theory of learning, schema theory has tremendous implications for school classrooms. It is crucial for teachers to realize that students can remember substantial amounts of new information only if they are able to cluster it with their related existing ideas. People forget information if they do not work to integrate it into their existing mental frameworks. Ausubel (1967:20) states that as a result of this type of anchorage to cognitive structure, the newly-learned material is no longer dependent for its incorporation and retention on the frail human capacity for assimilating and retaining arbitrary associations.

Schema theory has been utilized in research fields such as EFL/ESL education, especially in reading and writing instruction. According to schema theory, EFL/ESL students from

different countries have different schemata and most have difficulties in processing knowledge. As this theory states, proficient readers are able to activate prior knowledge stored in memory to integrate new linguistic data in the comprehension process. Therefore, under schema theory, EFL/ESL reading class should utilize pre-reading activities to activate prior knowledge and teachers should provide minimal background knowledge when students do not have sufficient prior knowledge, especially due to cultural differences.

Despite all the recent developments in EFL/ESL research, the traditional grammar-translation approach is still practiced in most English classes in Indonesia. The method of teaching reading comprehension in Indonesia still deals with memorization and sentence level analysis using bottom-up skill which is dominant in reading classes and students suffer from the inevitable lack of ability to use top-down skill. Therefore, reading practice based on schema theory is highly recommended for such students not only because it focuses on training for culture-specific texts but also since it trains students to use a top-down process in reading. This directly contrasts with the bottom-up process that these students are familiar with from traditional grammar translation exercises.

Referring to the AST in conducting the treatment to the experimental group students, the writer used the procedure of K-W-L technique. According to Ogle (1986:564-570), the originator of K-W-L, prior knowledge is an integral aspect of how we interpret

what is read, and what students will learn from reading. Unfortunately, most science teachers fail to make use of what their students bring to a topic. The K-W-L procedure supports the main assertion of cognitive psychology that the student preconceptions of science need to be determined prior to learning new concepts.

The procedure is comprised in three steps: assessing what I Know, determining what I Want to learn, and recalling what I did Learn. Ogle has developed a K-W-L strategy sheet which students can use as they "read" a section of the science textbook. Table 2 shows the sheet of K-W-L.

Table 2
K-W-L strategy sheet

K- What we know	W- What we want to find out	L-What we learned and still need to learn
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.
4.	4.	4.

Briefly, here are the essential characteristics of each step in the K-W-L procedure:

1. Step K - What I know

This is a brainstorming session in which students express what they know about the topic. What the students know can be written on the chalkboard, on chart paper, or written by students working in small groups. The focus at this stage should be specific. If the

students are going to read a section in their text on earthquakes, ask "what do you know about earthquakes," not what do you know about natural disasters, or have you ever been to Enggano island?. Focusing on the content will help bring out the cognitive structures of the student's prior knowledge.

A second part of the K-step is to have the students categorize the information they have generated during the brainstorming session. For example, in the lesson plan below on earthquakes, the teacher might suggest that students group their information in the following categories: causes of earthquakes, how earthquakes are measured, and damages caused by earthquakes.

2. Step W - What do I want to learn?

This step helps the students anticipate the reading that is to come, and helps the students focus on what they want to learn from the reading. This step should be done as a group activity. The teacher should ask the students to write down on the K-W-L worksheet questions that they are most interested in having answered as a result of the prior discussion and brainstorming session. Once the questions are written, the teacher might have the students share their questions in small groups prior to actually reading.

3. Step L - What I learned

Students can write down what they learned on the K-W-L strategy sheet. They can also check to see if their questions were answered, and if some of their prior knowledge was confirmed. Students should work in small groups and discuss their questions to determine if their questions were answered.

The Types of Schema

Researchers have identified several types of schemata. In literacy it is often said that there are three types of schemata: language schemata, formal schemata and content schemata. In this study, the writer applied content schemata which are closely related to reading comprehension. Content schemata refer to the knowledge relative to the content domain of the reading passage. It is defined as background knowledge of the content area of the text that a reader brings to a text such as knowledge about people, the world, culture, and the universe. Carrell and Eisterhold propose that appropriate content schema is accessed through textual cues (Xiaoqin, 2002:48).

Concept of Reading Comprehension

During 20th century the views (theory of learning) of reading comprehension have shifted dramatically, that is, from a behavioral perspective, which dominated the field from the turn of the century to the sixties and seventies, to a holistic or interactive approach, which began in the late seventies, and nowadays continue to shape our thinking about reading comprehension. Practitioners of the interactive model view reading as a cognitive, developmental, and socially constructed task that goes beyond understanding the words on a page.

The different views on reading comprehension from the past to the present can be observed. In the past, reading was considered a relatively static activity. Meaning was embedded in the text, and the reader's job was to

understand what was being transmitted via the words on the page. In current approach, the researchers view reading as a more dynamic process in which the reader "constructs" meaning based on information he/she gathers from the text. In other words, reading is an active process as stated by Anderson (1999:1).

Reading is an active, fluent process which involves the reader and the reading material in building meaning. Meaning does not reside on the printed page ... (a) synergy occurs in reading, which combines the words on the printed page with the reader's background knowledge and experiences.

From Anderson's statement, it can be seen that there is an important thing in a reading process, that is, there is an interaction between readers and the text they read. The readers' schemata will help them in comprehending the text. This means that the more they have schemata in relation to the text, the easier the readers will understand it. Meanwhile, Maria (1990:14) defines reading as

"...holistic process of constructing meaning from written text through the interaction of (1) the knowledge the reader brings to the text, i.e., word recognition ability, world knowledge, and knowledge of linguistic conventions, (2) the reader's interpretation of the language that the writer used in constructing the text, and (3) the situation in which the text is read."

Based on the reading definition illustrated by the researchers as mentioned above, it can be concluded that reading is a process of constructing

meaning through the dynamic interaction among the reader's existing knowledge, the information suggested by the written language, and the context of the situation. Therefore, reading comprehension is an attempt to understand the words found in any printed text.

Types of Reading Comprehension

According to Lapp and Flood as cited in Cheek et al (1989:157), there are three types of comprehension: (1) literal, (2) inferential, and (3) critical. Literal comprehension is the ability to read or understand what is stated in the text. Some literal comprehension skills are: (a) understanding concrete words, (b) identifying stated main idea, (c) recalling details, (d) remembering stated sequences of events, (e) selecting stated cause-effect relationship, (f) contrasting and comparing information, (g) identifying character traits and action, (h) interpreting abbreviations, symbols, and acronyms, (i) following written directions, and (j) classifying information.

Inferential comprehension refers to the ability to understand what is implied from the text. Several inferential comprehension skills (Cheek, 1989:157) are: (a) predicting outcomes, (b) interpreting characters traits, (c) drawing conclusion, (d) making generalization, (e) perceiving relationships, (f) understanding implied cause and effect, (g) interpreting figurative language, (h) understanding mood and emotion reactions, (i) understanding the author's purpose, (j) using signal words to understand meaning, (k) examining language

pattern including capitalization and punctuation, (l) summarizing information, (m) recognizing implied sequence, and (n) using context clues to determine meaning.

Critical comprehension refers to the ability to evaluate and judge what is read in the text. Some critical comprehension skills are: (a) identifying relevant and irrelevant information, (b) interpreting propaganda technique, (c) perceiving bias, (d) understanding the reliability of an author, (e) differentiating facts and options, (f) separating real and unreal information, and (g) understanding fallacies in reasoning (see Cheek, 1987:158).

In Cooper et al (1988:32-48) version, types of reading comprehension are divided into 7 elements. All of the elements are organized hierarchically and symbolized by numbers: (1) meaning vocabulary, (2) literal comprehension, (3) inference, (4) main idea, (5) critical reading/thinking, (6) metacognition, and (7) literary application.

Relationship between schema theory and Reading Comprehension

Schema theory, now widely accepted as playing a key role in reading comprehension, is based on the assumption that the reader's prior knowledge directly impacts new learning situations. While schema theory has existed in various forms since the 1930's, recently, the theory has been re-emerged and redefined as an important concept in reading instruction. Reading theorists view schema theory as a "framework" that organizes knowledge in memory by

putting information into the correct "slots," each of which contains related parts. When new information enters memory, it not only must be compatible with one of the slots, but it must actually be entered into the proper slot before comprehension can occur (Nist & Mealey, 1991). This means that reading shifts from a text-based activity to an interactive process in which the reader constructs meaning by interacting with the text. According to reading specialist McNeil (1992:20), schemata are the reader's concepts, beliefs, expectations, processes virtually everything from past experiences that are used in making sense of reading. In reading, schemata are used to make sense of text; the printed word evokes the reader's experiences, as well as past and potential relationships. In addition, McNeil (1992:20) pointed out that reading teachers emphasize three types of schemata:

- (1) knowledge of the concepts and processes that pertain to certain subject matter, i.e., science, math, humanities;
- (2) general world knowledge i.e., social relationships, causes and effects;
- (3) knowledge of rhetorical structures i.e., patterns, rules, structures for organizing text and cues to the reader.

The reading process, therefore, involves identification of genre, formal structure and topic, all of which activate schemata and allow readers to comprehend the text (Swales 1990:89). In this, it is assumed that readers not only possess all the relevant schemata, but also that these schemata actually are activated. In other words, there is a relationship between readers' schemata

and the reading text they read. If the readers have relevant schemata to the text, they will comprehend the text easily. Therefore, the interaction between the readers and the writer of the text will occur in reading process.

The other research on enriching background knowledge has demonstrated that activating such knowledge increases comprehension. Graves et al (1980:38-54) developed previews for short stories that had, as one component, the building of prior knowledge important to understanding the selection. Data indicated that reading the previews before reading the stories increased students' learning from stories by a significant and impressive amount. Stevens (1982:326) increased learning from text compared with a control group for 10th-grade students reading a history passage by teaching them relevant background information for that passage. Hayes and Tierney (1982: 256) found that presenting background information related to the topic to be learned helped readers learn from texts regardless of how that background information was presented or how specific or general it was.

Based on the illustration above, it can be concluded that providing students with an appropriate strategy to activate their prior knowledge has a positive influence on comprehension in their classrooms.

The research literature addresses several instructional approaches for building schemata in the form of direct instruction. Direct instruction on background knowledge can significantly improve students' comprehension of relevant reading material. For example, in one study, using different teaching

materials from the study Andrew (2002) conducted an experimental research entitled "*A Comparative Analysis of the Effect of Schemata upon Taiwanese EFL University Students' Reading Comprehension*" at Southern Taiwan University of Technology Taiwan, found that Taiwanese EFL technological university students have better comprehension when they read the passages which are related to their majors. This concludes that proper schemata helps the students to infer the meanings of unfamiliar words in the reading tests and enhances their comprehension proficiency.

Stevens (1982:326) found that students who received direct instruction on relevant background knowledge before reading an expository text demonstrated significantly greater reading comprehension than peers who received direct instruction on an irrelevant topic area. Dole et al. (1991) extended these findings, showing that teaching students important background ideas for an expository or narrative text led to significantly greater performance on comprehension questions than did no pre-reading background knowledge instruction.

Hayes and Tierney (1982: 256) found that presenting background information related to the topic to be learned helped readers learn from texts regardless of how that background information was presented or how specific or general it was. In addition, Lipson (1984) quoted by Steffenson (1987:46-47) compared the reading comprehension of children in relation to their religious affiliation and found an effect of religious affiliation on reading comprehension when children read texts

about a topic dealing with aspects of their familiar or unfamiliar religion.

In Indonesia, the research finding of Fuad Asnawi (2004) who conducted an action research to the second year students of Junior High School of SUP Mataram Kasihan Bantul pointed out that the students' mean score in teaching reading comprehension before they were taught using the Application of Schema Theory was 50%, and their mean score after the treatment was 73%. This indicated that the students' reading comprehension achievement increased 23%.

Conclusion

Based on the illustration above, it can be concluded that supporting students as they read to learn is an important instructional goal. Research studies have clearly established the importance of background knowledge to reading and understanding a variety of texts. Research studies also provide direct evidence that instructional strategies designed to support the accumulation and activation of prior knowledge can significantly improve student reading comprehension of informational texts. Thus, by implementing instructional strategies to support students' background knowledge, teachers can better support their content area learning. In other words, providing students with an appropriate strategy to activate their prior knowledge has a positive influence on comprehension in their classrooms. Therefore, research on the effect of schemata in relation to second or foreign language reading comprehension is very significant to be conducted. Therefore, it can be

concluded that providing students with an appropriate strategy to activate their prior knowledge has a positive influence on comprehension in their classrooms.

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