THE EFFECTS OF CULTURAL BASED TEXTS ON UPPER PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION

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READING COMPREHENSION

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ABSTRACT

Acquiring reading comprehension is a very challenging task especially among English as a second language readers as it does not only depend on the information in the printed text but also on the activation of information or schemata in the reader's mind. Schema theory proposes that a reader's background knowledge impacts memory, reading comprehension, interpretation and reading rate. The purpose of this research was to investigate the impact of cultural based texts on reading comprehension in a multi-racial setting. An exploratory case study research design was used in this research. The retelling technique in written form and an interview was used as instruments in this research to find out respondents' comprehension of the culturally familiar and unfamiliar texts. In addition, a comprehension test was administered to gather data. The research instruments employed in this research were culturally familiar and unfamiliar texts, retelling assessment, comprehension tests and an interview. In addition three different forms of text were used to ensure that the form of text did not impact the results of the study. Thus a thorough and an in-depth research was carried out. The findings of the study shows that the existence of cultural schemata and the activation of the appropriate schema are more important in determining the comprehensibility of a cultural based text. The type of text only plays a secondary role. This research implicates that reading various cultural texts in classrooms enriches students' cultural schemata and thus teachers, examiners, education policy makers and resource creators should play their role in assisting students to comprehend cultural based texts.

KESAN TEKS BERTEMAKAN BUDAYA
TERHADAP PEMAHAMAN MEMBACA
DI KALANGAN MURID-MURID
TAHAP 2 SEKOLAH RENDAH

ABSTRAK

Memperoleh pemahaman membaca adalah tugas yang sangat mencabar terutama di kalangan pembaca yang menggunakan bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua kerana ia tidak hanya bergantung pada maklumat dalam teks bercetak tetapi juga pada pengaktifan maklumat atau skema dalam minda pembaca. Teori skema mencadangkan bahawa pengetahuan latar belakang pembaca mempengaruhi memori, pemahaman membaca, tafsiran dan kadar bacaan. Tujuan penyelidikan ini adalah untuk mengkaji kesan teks yang bertemakan budaya terhadap pemahaman membaca dalam suasana berbilang kaum. Reka bentuk kajian kes eksploratori digunakan dalam penyelidikan ini. Teknik penceritaan dalam bentuk bertulis dan temu bual digunakan sebagai instrumen dalam penyelidikan ini untuk mengetahui pemahaman responden mengenai teks budaya yang tidak dikenali dan tidak dikenali. Sebagai tambahan, ujian pemahaman diberikan untuk mengumpulkan data. Instrumen kajian yang digunakan dalam penyelidikan ini adalah teks budaya dan teks yang tidak dikenali, ujian penceritaan semula, ujian pemahaman dan temu bual. Selain itu tiga bentuk teks yang berbeza digunakan untuk memastikan bahawa bentuk teks tidak memberi kesan kepada hasil kajian. Oleh itu kajian menyeluruh dan mendalam dilakukan. Hasil dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa kewujudan skema budaya dan pengaktifan skema yang sesuai lebih penting dalam menentukan kefahaman teks budaya. Format teks hanya memainkan peranan sekunder. Penyelidikan ini juga mengimplikasikan bahawa membaca pelbagai teks budaya di bilik darjah memperkayakan skema budaya pelajar dan oleh sebab itu, guru, pentaksir, pembuat dasar pendidikan dan pereka sumber pendidikan harus memainkan peranan mereka supaya pelajar dapat memahami teks budaya.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

NILAM   Nadi Ilmu Amalan Membaca

UPM   Universiti Putra Malaysia

L1   1st Language / Native Language

QAR   Question-Answer Relationship

SAPS   Sistem Analisis Peperiksaan Sekolah

UPSR   Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah

L2   2nd Language

S3Q11   Student 3 Interview Question 11

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the background of the study which entails the discussion of the relationship between reading comprehension and cultural schemata. This study aimed to determine whether the existence of cultural schemata has any influence on the comprehension of a reading text. This chapter also presents the statement of the problem and the rationale in explaining the basis of this study.

This study is significant as it provides insights into the problems faced by students when they are reading English texts especially with regards to understanding the meaning of the cultural based texts. The limitations of the study are also discussed in this chapter.

1.2   Background of the Study

Reading is one of the most important skills that a person can acquire during his or her academic career, and it is a skill that remains critical throughout one's lifespan (Hosp & Suchey, 2014). It represents the window that readers can view through to explore the world and know its secrets. It is considered a life skill besides its importance in the school setting. In addition, Hosp and Suchey (2014) agreed that reading is an important element to function successfully in society. Hence, it is important to equip children with this important survival skill.

This survival skill is more important after the schooling days especially when the learners have to keep themselves up-to-date with the current issues that are constantly changing. The ability to understand and retrieve the necessary information from a text is important in academic literacy which can lead to appropriate functioning in the society. Beyond formal schooling, the ability to read is important to function effectively in a literate society (Zainol Abidin, Low, & Raman, 2016).

For their education, students move from the initial stage of pre-school and progress to primary, secondary, and ultimately to university level. During the progression, they need to read more books in various fields. Reading is ultimately interdisciplinary as it applies to all areas of education, and the Malaysian government has consistently increased efforts to encourage students to read more (Tan, Pandian, & Jaganathan, 2016).

The issue of reading comprehension has been a concern among educationalists for many generations. When reading, students need to look past the scripted words and be able to relate with the text. However, acquiring reading comprehension is a very challenging task especially in a multi-racial country like Malaysia where people with different cultural backgrounds intermingle and associate with one another with the notion that they can comprehend one another despite their differences.

The teaching of English language in Malaysia is organised in a manner that reflects the way it can be used in society. The Curriculum Development Division (2011) has documented the standard document for primary school curriculum which include the basic core module of English Language for National Schools. It outlines the three areas of language use: Interpersonal, Informational, and Aesthetic. These three language usage enable students to read a variety of texts and develop the ability to express their thoughts and ideas creatively.

According to the Report of the Education Committee: Razak Report (Ministry of Education, 1956) the Malaysian education caters to all races. Therefore, the schools in Malaysia are categorised into two types, namely national schools and national type schools (vernacular schools). Although all the schools implement a standard curriculum and syllabus, the medium of instruction is different according to the types of school. The national schools use Bahasa Melayu as the medium of instruction, whereas the vernacular schools use either Mandarin or Tamil as the medium.

In most national schools, the non-Malay students are the minority and they can comprehend the Malay culture-based text due to the opportunity to mix with the Malay students. However, the Malay students may not have sufficient interaction with the minority group in building their schema on the culture of the minority group. Likewise in vernacular schools, the majority are Chinese and Indian in which the friends opportunities of the Chinese to interact with their Malay and Indian s are limited or none. The same situation also happens in Tamil vernacular schools. In these situations, texts that are cultural-rich can pose a problem such as misinterpretation in reading. Lee et al. (2020) have posited that this can be particularly challenging for children from minority ethnic groups whose first language is different from the target culture. Eskey (2005) pointed out that second language learners, compared to first language learners, are weaker in terms of linguistic competence as they tend to have problems in area of identifying key points, cue words as well as making predictions. This indicates that second language learners are having difficulty in keeping up with the complexity of reading comprehension (Halim, Arif, & Supramaniam, 2020).

In addition to the current KSSR syllabus, the Ministry of Education has established several national policies to achieve better English levels for Malaysian students. One of the policies is the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) which provides clear guidelines for the teaching, learning, and assessment of the English language. It describes comprehensively the elements that language learners have to learn when using the language for communication as well as the knowledge and skills that they have to develop to act effectively. The description covers the cultural context of the language. The framework also defines the levels of proficiency which allow the measuring of learners' progress at each stage

of learning and life-long basis. Students are expected to read, comprehend, find information, discuss a variety of texts on various environmental issues, as well as respond and provide their opinions. The Ministry of Eduction (2012) aligned the CEFR programme into the Malaysia Education Blueprint with the objective of boosting the level of education in Malaysia to international standards (Hazita Azman, 2016). The ministry has subscribed the Cambridge English textbooks which has British content to be used in the CEFR classrooms to enable students to experience authentic and meaningful learning experiences across a variety of real contexts. In order to accomplish this there is a need for teachers to create authentic experiences for English language in a target-language-deprived context against a multilingual rich environment (Uri & Abd Aziz, 2018). Thus, the role of schema in reading comprehension under the CEFR programme cannot be denied. The CEFR programme all the more accelerates the need for teachers to take into consideration the role of cultural schema in enhancing reading comprehension of the cultural texts.

According to schema theory, during reading the reader's schema or background knowledge plays an important role in the comprehension of the text. According to Carrell (2013), there are two types of schemata, namely formal schemata and content schemata which are equally important in reading comprehension. Formal schemata refer to the reader's language proficiency and the text's language, whereas content schemata refer to the background knowledge. Readers combine their background knowledge with the information in a text to comprehend the text. Li and Lai (2012) have supported this statement by stating that background knowledge can decode new information.

Therefore, the task of understanding a written discourse does not only depend on the distribution of information in the printed text, but also the voluntary and automatic activation of information or schemata in the readers' mind (Elbro & Buch-Iversen, 2013). Content schemata are necessary for understanding of texts, and a specific sub-schema in this content schemata that is crucial in any reading comprehension but are often neglected in text selection is cultural schema. Thus, the role of cultural schemata is important in reading comprehension. This statement is supported by Carrell (2013) who claimed that the reader's background knowledge plays a crucial role in the process of reading comprehension. This cultural schema is an area that was not much studied especially on its effects in second language learning (L2) in Malaysia which is a multicultural society comprising three major ethnic groups, Malay, Chinese, and Indian as well as many diverse indigenous cultural groups. Students from different cultural communities are greatly influenced by their social customs, behaviour, and ideology. The understanding of the role of cultural schemata and it effects on reading comprehension is important for teachers and policy makers when selecting cultural texts for reading comprehension purpose.

Culturally unfamiliar texts can pose reading comprehension problems such as misinterpretation. However, this excuse should not be the ultimate reason for teachers to choose texts that only deal with familiar aspects of culture. Students should be exposed to a variety of culture-oriented genres that would enable them to see other people's views and cultural practices and compare them with their own. One of the benefits of reading is opening new worlds and new cultures to the readers. The knowledge of each group's world view can facilitate understanding, which in turn can

result in more harmonious relationships and communication between peoples of different cultures and religions (Samovar, Porter, McDaniel, & Roy, 2015).

Kidd and Castano (2013), two psychologists, from the New School for Social Research in New York have conducted five experiments and have proven that reading literary fiction can improve the ability to detect and understand other people's emotions. They further emphasised that reading is an important skill in navigating complex social relationships. Thus, it can be concluded that the area of literary aesthetics language use is important in moulding future citizens into individuals who understand and have sensitivity towards other races. Reading, appreciating, and comprehending cultural-based texts can influence students to become better individuals who care for others as well as be aware and appreciative of the multi-cultural diversity surrounding them. In a multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-religious country like Malaysia, it is important to understand each other's culture. This statement is true for the majority and the minority cultural groups and it is misleading to assume that people can gain sufficient knowledge about one another's culture by living together in the same country for many years. According to Boadhar, Nam, and Fallah (2014), cultural education can improve the readers' understanding of cultural information by enriching their background knowledge and enabling them to make correct inferences about an unfamiliar culture.

1.3   Statement of the Problem

According to a new United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) report Malaysians' literacy rate stood at 94.94 % (Bernama, 2017) . Despite the high literacy rate , the question arises whether Malaysians are reading enough to stimulate their intellectual capacity. The National Library of Malaysia has conducted an interim study in 2014 and found that Malaysians, on average, read about 15 books a year which is far less compared to those from developed countries who read an average of 40 books a year (Yuen, 2019). He also reported that reading leisurely such as Face book feeds, Twitter posts, Watsapp status, and Instagram stories is more popular among Malaysians. These type of readings are just to gain information or to provide information, provoke and entertain. It does not mould readers to engage in healthy discourses.

Another survey report from the National Library of Malaysia in 2010 on the Malaysian children's reading habits and interests has revealed that 63% of children prefer to play and watch television or video compared to reading (Baba & Affendi, 2020). According to Muhamad (2007), 165 of the students in his study feel bored when asked to read as they could not relate to the text written in English. In other words, reading is not a preferred activity for the children and thus it is difficult to cultivate a love for reading among these children (Muhamad, Latiff Azmi, & Hassan, 2020). As Malaysian students come from a diverse multi-cultural background, the reading comprehension process of a text written in a second language context

consumes more time to interpret (Thirunavukarasu, 2013). Hence, the reluctance among Malaysian students in the reading activity.

The main issue in reading is the level of comprehension which constitutes the understanding and interpretation of what is read.   According to Halim et al., (2020), when readers cannot understand the text major problem such as misinterpretion will occur. This then will lead to the inability to answer reading comprehension questions, and providing irrelevant answers. Maasum and Maarof (2012) mentioned that in order for students to excel in reading comprehension, they must be able to understand the accurate meaning of the text which can only be accomplished if students are able to comprehend implicit meaning of a text and make inference. Fitrisia, Tan and Yusuf (2015) have supported this by indicating that students lack the ability to interpret information gained from the text, critical thinking and employing contextual clues to

obtain meaning from the text.

The comprehensibility of a text can be affected by factors such as lack of appropriate cultural knowledge and lack of linguistic knowledge (Erdogan, 2020). Readers must be able to decode what they read (linguistic knowledge), make connections between what they read and what they already know (background knowledge), and finally think deeply about what they have read (interpretation) in order to read and understand the written material.

Readers who lack the appropriate cultural schemata would face difficulties in interpreting the text (Yang, 2013). It is known that reading is an interactive process between two elements, namely the schema and complex characteristics of the text. In

this interaction, two sub-processes that may be negatively correlated might be generated, namely reader-based processing and text-based processing. During the reader-based processing, readers construct meaning based on what they know. The readers' schemata are activated when they start reading. When the new information do not match the existing schemata, non-assimilation occurs whereby readers cannot build on their existing schemata with the new information.

Consequently, misinterpretations tend to occur, and readers begin to rely on text-based processing to construct the meaning. They spend more time looking for cues and information from the text itself. They organise new information and build new schemata based on the text (Yang, 2013). In this process, more time and effort are taken for comprehension which makes reading more difficult and slower. This statement is supported by Li and Lai (2012) who asserted that readers read a familiar text more rapidly than an unfamiliar text. According to Li and Lai (2012), one of the consequences for not activating the pre-existing knowledge is that the inability to predict and anticipate the text. Hence, the short term memory is overloaded, the process of the text takes longer, and the reading rate also drops.

For foreign or second language learning, the learner has to deal with unfamiliar spelling patterns, sentence structures, syntax, lexicons, and other complex semantic relations in order to fully understand a text (Marwan, 2016; Pan & Pan, 2010; Paul & Christopher, 2017; Peng, 2012;). In second language learning, reading is a challenging task and the development of reading comprehension in the target language can be affected. The incomprehensibility of the text can lead to poor reading

habits which curtail the development of students' schematic knowledge (Rajab, Zakaria, Rahman, Hosni, & Hassani, 2012).

Due to poor reading habits, the readers will not be able to acquire adequate linguistic knowledge (vocabulary) that can help them in understanding the content of the text. The lack of adequate linguistic knowledge can create a mismatch between the information received from the printed page and the information stored in the students' schema. This statement is supported by Cain and Oakhill (2012) that young readers with poor linguistic skills are unable to integrate information in the texts and they will not be able to infer meanings for the new vocabulary. The difficulty will further discourage the students from reading, which can create a vicious cycle whereby the fear of reading is due to the inability to understand the text that further stagnates the development of the students' schema.

This study was mooted based on the researcher's 20 years of teaching experience in which she observed that some students could read some texts faster and comprehend better than others when they have similar cultural background knowledge with the text and are able to engage better in class discussions. The discrepancy of the in-class engagement made the researcher question whether she had made a mistake in selecting the texts. Further discussions with her colleagues had made things worse as they argued that she should only use texts that are within the cultural knowledge in the reading lessons. They further emphasised that culture-biased texts should be avoided at all cost.

A research conducted by the researcher for the master's degree (Thirunavukarasu, 2013) revealed that students from the same ethnicity with the culture in the text often finished reading earlier than those from different ethnicities. Although students were able to answer the comprehension questions equally well, the researcher could detect that their understanding of the content in the text was at different levels.

Hence, this study intended to investigate the impact of cultural-based texts on reading comprehension. Besides that, this study aimed to study the students' opinions on the role of schemata during and after the reading comprehension process.

1.4   Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to determine to what extent the upper primary school students' reading comprehension ability is affected by cultural-based texts and the factors that may contribute to their incomprehensibility of the texts. Hence, the study attempted to establish the connection between students' reading comprehension ability and the various factors involved in reading cultural-based texts.

1.5   Research Objectives

This study examined the impact of cultural-based texts in reading comprehension as reading comprehension does not only depend on the distribution of information in the

text but also on the automatic activation of information or schemata in the readers' mind. It aims to determine whether different cultural backgrounds can influence reading comprehension. Hence, the following objectives were created for this study:-

1) To investigate how cultural-based text affects students' reading comprehension.

    a) To what extent does the students' ability to comprehend a cultural-based text can affect their performance in retelling assessment.

    b) To what extent does the students' ability to comprehend a cultural-based text can affect their performance in a comprehension test.

    c) To determine how the performance in comprehension tests can inform the students' ability in the retelling assessment

2) To assess which type of cultural-based text format can affect students' reading

comprehension.

3) To probe how reading cultural-based texts have an impact on students' reading comprehension and their cultural schemata

1.6   Research Questions

The following research questions are formulated to meet the research objectives:-

1) How do cultural-based texts have an impact on students' reading comprehension?

    a) How do the weaknesses and strengths demonstrated in retelling assessment indicate the students' understanding of a cultural-based text?

b) How does the performance in comprehension test reflect the students' understanding of a cultural-based text?

c) How does the students' performance in comprehension test inform the students' ability in the retelling assessment?

2) Which type of cultural-based text format has an impact on the students' reading comprehension?

3) How does the use of cultural based texts enhance students' cultural schemata?

1.7 Theoretical Framework

Many theories of reading have been proposed by researchers to explain the nature of reading: mental models, proposition theory, schema theory, the behaviourism view, the cognitive view, the meta-cognitive view, reader response theory and transactional theory. As the current study aims to investigate the effects of cultural based texts on reading comprehension, the schema theory and the reading models theory are explored further and a framework based on these theories is outlined.

The schema theory is based on the psycholinguistic model by Goodman (1967) that reading is a guessing game. The basic idea of the theory is that human memory consists of schemata which encapsulate our knowledge about everything that

is connected with a particular object or event. The theory emphasises the role of prior knowledge by the readers when reading a text (Gass, 2013).

According to schema theory, individuals possess their individual units of knowledge through life experience. Thus, their comprehension and interpretation may vary depending on their unique individual experiences. Schema is an active organisation of past experiences (Bartlett, 1932). Rumelhart (1977) cited in An (2013) defined the schema theory as a theory of how knowledge is mentally represented in the mind and how the knowledge is used. The theory proposed that the reader constructs the meaning of texts by analysing them and matching the analysis with existing schemata (An, 2013). During matching, the comprehension of the text is faster and easier. On the other hand, non-comprehension occurs when the existing schemata are not parallel with the new information. In this situation, the existing schemata go through modification which results in new schemata.

There are three types of schemata for reading, namely linguistic schemata, formal schemata, and content schemata. Linguistic schemata refer to the readers' existing language proficiency which enables them to decode and understand a text. Formal schemata are the organisational forms and rhetorical structures of the written texts. They include the knowledge of different text types and genres. Content schemata or cultural schemata refer to the background knowledge for the content of a text, which includes topic familiarity, cultural knowledge, and previous experience with a field. Many studies revealed that readers' cultural schemata could influence

their reading comprehension more significantly than formal schemata (Radzi, & Aziz, 2013, 2014; Xie, 2017; Yang, 2013; Yousef, Karimi, & Janfeshan, 2014). Generally, the familiarity of the topic has a direct influence on readers' comprehension, and this study focused on cultural schemata.

Schema theory proposed that reading comprehension is an interactive process between the reader's background knowledge and the text (Carrell, 2013). There are three models of reading process for reading comprehension, namely bottom-up model, top-down model, and interactive model. Bottom-up theory depends on phonemic awareness and word-by-word decoding strategies in which readers need to identify the phonemes, link the phonemes to recognise letters, combine letters to recognise the words, and proceed to sentence, paragraph, and text level processing. On the other hand, the top-down process suggests that the processing of a text begins in the mind of the readers by assuming the meaning of the text. From this perspective, readers identify letters and words to confirm their assumptions about the meaning of the text (Birch, 2014).

Rumelhart (1977) developed the interactive reading model which combines the contrasting views of bottom-up and top-down for a more comprehensive understanding of the text. The model recognises the importance of the text and the reader in reading comprehension. In a study conducted by Grabe and Stoller (2013), the interactive model refers to two concepts, namely reader-text interaction and simultaneous processing of many component skills. In this concept, readers construct meaning based on the printed text and their prior knowledge which are the existing schema.

The current study used the data from Malaysian schools in which the students have different cultures in the classroom. These students are bound to bring into their reading classroom their background knowledge which has a strong cultural knowledge. These cultural knowledge impacts the reading comprehension. Therefore to study how this cultural schema impacts the reading classroom and how students take control of their reading process, the schema theory and the reading models theory need to be taken into consideration as the theories underpinning this study. Figure 1.1 shows that schema theory and interactive reading process forms a strong platform to investigate whether cultural familiarity can influence the reading comprehension of texts.

Figure 1.1

The Theoretical Framework of the Study
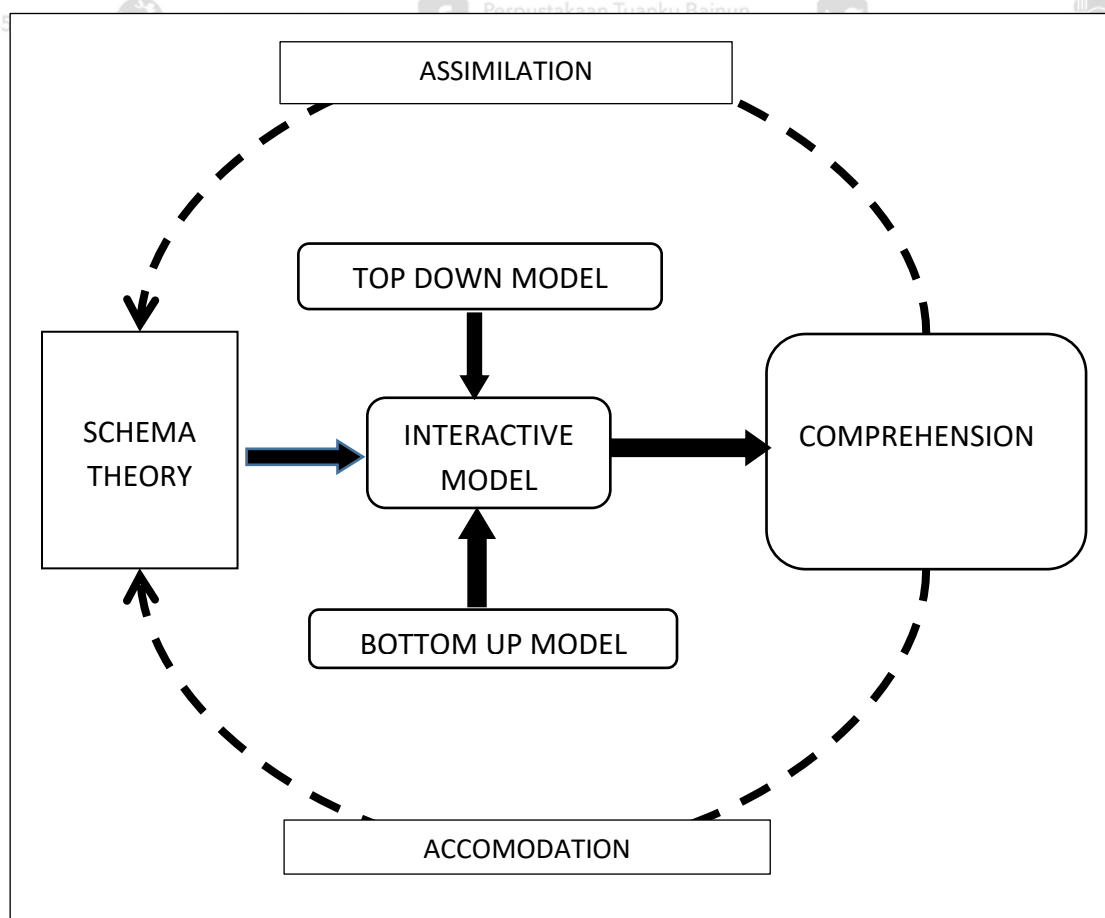
Prior knowledge provides readers with some expectations that can help them in making predictions regarding the meaning of the text. Both knowledge and content interact simultaneously when processing the printed text during the interpretation which can lead to better comprehension of the text. When comprehension is achieved, the existing schema experience changes such as accommodation and assimilation. The process of taking in new information into the existing schemas is known as assimilation. Accommodation involves modifying the existing schemas or ideas as the result of new information. During this process, new schema may be developed. If the new information are related to prior knowledge, the existing schema will assimilate the new information (Yang, 2010). If the new information do not match the existing schema, accommodation occurs and new schema are built.

1.8 Significance of the Study

This study is important as the researcher believes that the outcome of the study would be of help to teachers in understanding some of the difficulties and problems faced by students in understanding the cultural content of a reading text. It would also enable researchers as well as teachers to become aware of the importance of selecting a variety of Malaysian culture rich reading texts to ensure pupils gain knowledge of the various Malaysian cultures which will lay the foundation slabs for national harmony. In line with this, the study is also significant to education policy makers to consider integrating cultural studies or cultural knowledge of all races in the Malaysian education system to promote national harmony starting from the primary school. The outcome of this study will also benefit the Text Books Division Ministry

of Education to not only include more variety of Malaysian cultural texts into the school text-books but to also consider the cultural content as well as vocabulary used in the text. A glossary for the cultural content in all the main languages used in the country will ensure pupils' comprehension of the texts is not affected. The researcher is of the opinion that opportunity should be given to the students to read unfamiliar topics if we want them to see reading in a second or foreign language as a purposeful and an intrinsically interesting activity which can enable them to gain more knowledge.

1.9   Operational Definitions of the Terms

The definition of some important terms used in the context of this study is given below.

1.9.1   Reading

The main purpose of reading is the construction of meaning such as comprehending and actively responding to the reading material. Gurkhan (2012) defined reading as interplay of text-based and knowledge-based process of reading. Reading is activated by the print and the reader must be able to translate the written words into meaningful language. It is not only a complex cognitive process of decoding symbols to construct meaning. According to Phantharakphong and Pothitha (2014) the process of reading and understanding the text refers to the readers' ability in identifying the information in written form. In this study, reading is a complex interaction between the text and

the reader which is shaped by the reader's prior knowledge, experiences, attitude, and the context where reading takes place.

1.9.2 Reading Comprehension

Over the years, reading comprehension has many definitions. Alvermann, Unrau, and Ruddell (2013) defined comprehension as a mental process that depends on prior knowledge, experience, and information in the text. According to Rahmani and Sadeghi (2011), reading comprehension is an interactive mental process between a reader's linguistic knowledge, knowledge of the world, and knowledge about a given topic. For the context of teaching English as a second language, reading comprehension is the fundamental way of learning new information and it is the most significant skill for the students' success (Abidin, Pourmohammadi, & Lean, 2014). In this current study, comprehension is the interpretation of meaning derived from the cultural-based text.

1.9.3 Schema

According to Ensar (2015), schema is a well-integrated chunk of knowledge about the world, events, people, and actions which enable people to form expectations. Schemata are not fixed structures as they are consistently shaped and reshaped by experiences (Ajideh & Nourdad, 2012). There are three main types of schemas,

namely formal schemata, linguistic schemata, and content schemata. According to An (2013), formal schema is concerned with the rhetorical structure of a text while linguistic schema refers to the language proficiency of the reader. On the other hand, content schema is about the subject matter or content of a text which includes familiarity of topic, cultural knowledge, and past experience (Gurkhan, 2012). For this study, schema is defined as prior knowledge of an individual's learning experiences which include formal, linguistic, and content schemata.

1.9.4   Cultural Schema

Cultural knowledge which is an extension of content schema is called cultural schema. It is a part of an individual's cultural orientation. Gurkhan (2012) defined cultural schema as the pre-existing knowledge regarding cultural elements in a text. In this study, cultural schema represents the awareness and understanding of the values, traditions, customs, and artefacts of the Malay, Chinese, and Indian culture.

1.9.5   Cultural based texts

According to the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition in University of Minnesota, USA, the characteristics and knowledge of a particular group of people is known as culture. This culture encompasses language, religion, food, social behaviour, customs, traditions, marriage, music and arts. Based on this

definition, cultural based texts can be referred to as story-telling tools that attempts to explain, contribute and shape a particular group or society's culture. These texts can be considered as a representative of a culture and its values. The cultural-based texts that are used in this study focuses on Malaysian ethnicity customs, traditions and festivals.

1.9.6 Retelling

Retelling is a strategy that is used to determine how well a student has comprehended a specific story. According to Jennings, Caldwell, and Lerner (2013), retelling can be used as an effective tool in improving comprehension as well as assessing it. It is through retelling that teachers can gain insight as to how students are putting together the information that they acquired from the text through reading. When students' understanding of a text is observed and analysed during retelling, teachers discover what information students remember and deem as important. Retelling can be in the form of oral or written. According to Schisler (2008) oral retelling involves a student reading a passage and then orally restating what was read. On the other hand written retelling involves students to write everything they can recall after reading a text passage. In this study, the researcher has employed the written retelling as a form of comprehension assessment.

1.9.7   Text Type

According to Abdualameer (2016), texts used in reading comprehension are categorized as informative and narrative based on the texts' structures, contents and language features. Narrative texts consists of elements such as setting, characters and events within a context whereas informative texts has explanation, enumeration, cause-effect, comparison, contrast and problem solving for the purpose of informing the reader of a particular subject. Informative texts can further sub-categorized into descriptive and expository. In this study, narrative texts are defined as written stories that contain setting, plot and characters and are usually read for pleasure. The narrative texts used in this study are excerpts from short stories written on Malaysian culture. Informative texts used in this study are in the form of descriptive and info graphic. These text types; narrative, descriptive and info graphic are chosen as these are the formats used in the UPSR English Paper.

1.10   Summary

The chapter presents the main introduction of the study, background of the study, statements of problem, and research questions. It also presents a detailed explanation of the rationale, objectives, significance, and operational definitions of the study.

It is hoped that this study can shed more light on the impact of cultural-based texts on reading comprehension in a multiracial country. Subsequently, the results will pave way for teachers to understand the difficulties faced by their students in

reading comprehension when they are given a culturally unfamiliar text. This study developed the research objectives and questions based on this aim. The significance of the research is highlighted for better understanding of the study. Next, the subsequent chapter discusses the literature review of this study.