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Teacher's Effect in L2 Reading Topic Familiarization: Students' Test Performance and Perceptions

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ABSTRACT

*With 73 students at an Iranian university, the present study investigated teacher's effect in topic familiarization in L2 reading context. The participants—Group B with and Group A without the presence of a teacher—experienced four pre-reading treatments and read four passages of unfamiliar topics, after which they were tested on comprehension recalls and multiple choice questions. They also completed a perception questionnaire, and 23 students were interviewed. The results of independent samples *t*-tests did not indicate any significant difference between teacher-directed and written topic familiarization. Furthermore, the quantitative data of the perception questionnaire triangulated with the qualitative data of interview responses showed that the students thought teacher directed topic familiarization and written background knowledge activities were equally effective in second language reading, which rejected the research hypothesis.*

INTRODUCTION

Topic familiarity is one of the most important issues in second language reading (Cabaroglu & Yurdaisik, 2008). It is generally believed that the role the teacher plays at the pre-reading stage with regard to this variable is crucial to students' performance in the reading class. However, almost no data is available in the literature reflecting on the degree of the teacher's effect in topic familiarization. With the growing number of advocates of learner centered instruction, CALL, internet based English lessons, and self study English language textbooks, it seems that the importance of the teacher's role in an L2 class is underemphasized. This failure to appreciate the teacher's intervention in the second language class, in general, and in the reading class, in particular, was the most inspiring motive behind the present research.

The purpose of the study was twofold. First, it attempted to compare the applicability and effectiveness of presenting introductory data in the form of printed input at the pre-reading stage intended to familiarize students with text topic prior to reading a passage with the efficiency of the teacher doing the same job at the pre-reading stage. In other words, the study attempted to compare the effects of written topic familiarization with teacher directed topic familiarization in students' performance of comprehension tests. Second, students' perceptions of the teacher's effect in topic familiarization were probed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Topic Familiarity

There is a substantial body of research in cognitive psychology supporting the idea that topic familiarity has a facilitative role in reading comprehension (e.g., Bransford & Johnson, 1972; Moravacsik & Kintsch, 1993; Anderson, 2005; McVee, Dunsmore & Gavelek, 2005). This role has been motivated through schema-based models of comprehension (e.g., Rumelhart, 1980; Hudson, 2007; Nassaji, 2007) which posit readers' background knowledge contributes to their understanding of texts. The nature of the knowledge that readers have will influence not only what they remember of text but also their understanding of the text, and the way they process it (Rumelhart, 1980; Carrell, 1984; Alderson, 2000; Hudson, 2007; Leeser, 2007; Nassaji, 2007).

In this context, Anderson, Reynolds, Schallert, and Goetz (1977) indicated that people's prior knowledge influences the interpretations they give to reading passages. Steffensen, Joagdev, and Anderson's (1979) later found that background knowledge about the content of a discourse had a profound influence on how well the discourse will be comprehended, learned, and remembered. Further, Johnson (1981) reported that cultural background knowledge was crucial to understanding a text. Carrell and Eisterhold (1983) then argued that "much of the meaning understood from a text is not actually in the text, per se, but in the reader, in the background or schematic knowledge of the reader" (p. 559). Afflerbach (1990) subsequently added that only readers with prior knowledge of topic were able to infer/construct main idea sentences. Florencio (2004) later showed that topic familiarity had a significant impact on the performance of EFL students. Furthermore, one of the findings in Leeser (2007) was that "topic familiarity can also promote learner's ability to make form-meaning connections" (p. 253).

Pre-reading Tasks

Floyd and Carrell (1987) contend that before attempting a reading passage, second language teachers must provide students with appropriate schemata they are lacking and must teach students how to construct bridges between existing knowledge and new knowledge. Chen and Graves (1995) refer to this as "bridging the gap between the text's content and the reader's schemata" (p. 664). In fact, the purposes of pre-reading activities are to provide key or difficult vocabulary, activate appropriate schemata, arouse interest and motivation for reading, and establish expectations about a text to read (Carrell, 1984; Taglieber, Johnson & Yarbrough, 1988). Hudson (1982) examined the role played by induced schemata in L2 reading comprehension. The results showed that the vocabulary and read-test/read-test treatments were less effective than the pre-reading treatment at the beginning and intermediate levels, but were as effective or more effective at the advanced level. He also found that there seemed to be differences between levels of proficiency in the abilities to form schemata from printed input.

Dole, Valencia, Greer, and Wardrop (1991) indicate that the teacher-directed condition was more effective than the interactive condition at enhancing comprehension, and both of the treatments were superior to the third condition, no pre-reading instruction. Chen and Graves (1995) found strong positive effects of the previewing and combined treatments on students' reading comprehension. In a replication of Hudson's (1982) study, Ming (1997) notes that average proficiency readers performed better, although not significantly, than low proficiency readers in the pre-reading treatment. Park (2004) reported that providing background knowledge significantly contributed to L2 reading comprehension. Karakas (2005) found that the

combination of previewing and brainstorming pre-reading activities contributed more to the comprehension of short stories than the brainstorming activities alone.

Teacher's Role: The Problem

Almost all pre-reading activities are teacher-directed, to use Dole et al.'s (1991) term. In other words, it is the teacher who initiates, and is at the center of, the pre-reading practices, but this begs the following questions:

1. Should topic familiarization be necessarily done by the teacher?
2. Would it be possible to find a substitute for the teacher in the process of background knowledge activation/construction?

Unfortunately, to date, there is no data on the effectiveness of the reading teacher, his/her presence at, or absence from, the classroom, and his/her influence in the pre-reading phase. To investigate the problem, an attempt was made to find an alternative for the teacher's introduction of text topic in the pre-reading phase. After careful examination, and carrying out a pilot study, I decided to explore and examine the efficacy of printed input in the form of written explanations or introductions to texts, used as a pre-reading activity. I compared the effectiveness of the teacher's initiation and centrality in pre-reading tasks with the practicality and usefulness of printed input. In addition to investigating the variable discussed thus far, the study also probed students' perceptions as to the teacher's role in the reading class. The purpose was to examine, in depth, students' feelings and ideas about the teacher's effect.

Students' Perceptions

The field of L2 reading in second/foreign language teaching does not seem to have benefitted much from the research on students' perceptions. Bruton and Marks (2004) assert that "in foreign-language reading, there is a dearth of research on students' perceptions of what they read" (p.770). Despite the huge body of research in the field of second/foreign language reading, "the affective domain of reading has received much less attention than the cognitive domain" (Yamashita, 2004, p. 1). The lack of understanding of L2 learners' attitude toward reading is particularly unfortunate in extensive reading programs (ibid.). Among the few studies conducted on students' perceptions in the reading class, Bensoussan, Sim, and Weiss (1984) showed that the teachers were more critical of their students' abilities to use dictionaries. They did not think that students could use dictionaries effectively, but students themselves generally thought they could. Padron and Waxman (1988) noticed that students' perceptions of cognitive strategies they used had predictive validity for their reading comprehension. Chen and Graves (1995) noticed that their subjects generally responded positively to all the experimental treatments, and a large percentage of the students in all the treatment groups strongly emphasized their need for vocabulary instruction and cultural background information.

Bruton and Marks (2004) suggested that teachers and educators needed to take seriously into consideration students' reading needs and wants across the curriculum in first, second, and foreign language reading. Yamashita (2004) concluded that understanding learners' attitudes, particularly feelings, is so important to reading both in L1 and L2 for encouraging L2 learners' involvement in extensive reading. Alessi and Dwyer (2008) observed that the students who only received hypertext glossing liked it much more than the students who received both hypertext

glossing and a pre-reading activity. Likewise, Howard (2012) attempted to learn more about English language learners' preferences on reading and "to consider the findings in making suggestions for teachers that want to encourage and improve reading in their students" (p. 125).

A review of the literature reveals that an investigation of students' perceptions of topic familiarization is another gap in the field of second language reading, which the present study attempted to fill. For this purpose, an explanatory mixed methods approach was taken to triangulate the quantitative results of a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire with the qualitative data of interview responses.

METHOD

Research Hypothesis and Questions

The quantitative phase of the research aimed to test the following research hypothesis, which had been formulated based on the results of a previous pilot study: Teacher directed topic familiarization enhances students' performance on L2 reading comprehension tasks more than written introductions do. To test this hypothesis, this study sought to answer two questions (RQs 1 and 2), and for the mixed-data (qualitative and quantitative) part of the research, RQ 3 was supposed to serve the purpose. The research questions are as follows:

- RQ1. To what extent does teacher-directed topic familiarization help students' recall of reading passages?
- RQ2. To what extent does teacher-directed topic familiarization enhance students' performance on multiple choice reading comprehension tests?
- RQ3. What are students' perceptions of the teacher's effect in topic familiarization as compared with the efficacy of written explanations?

Participants

The study was conducted with 73 undergraduate L2 students at a university in southern Iran. Based on their proficiency scores on the Oxford Quick Placement Test (2004), the participants were assigned to two homogeneous groups: Group A of 38 students and Group B of 35 students. They ranged from intermediate to upper intermediate in terms of English language proficiency. All students were aware of the nature and purpose of the study, and all had volunteered to participate in it.

Instruments

Reading Passages

A large number of passages with diverse topics were carefully examined. I read and tested many texts and, after consulting reading experts, selected the following four passages:

1. "Wedding Traditions in Sudan" adapted from:
Wedding traditions in Sudan. (n.d.). Retrieved April 9, 2008, from
http://www.worldweddingtraditions.com/locations/african_traditions/sudanese_traditions.html

2. “Melting Pot or Salad Bowl” adapted from:
Melting Pot or Salad Bowl. (n.d.). Retrieved June 25, 2008, from <http://www.geocities.com/yamataro670/pot-bowl.htm>
3. “Shin Pyu, the Novice hood” adapted from:
Shin Pyu, the Novice hood. (n.d.). Retrieved July 2, 2008, from <http://www.myanmars.net/myanmar-culture/myanmar-novicehood-shinpyu.htm>
4. “History of the Seychelles” adapted from:
History of the Seychelles. (n.d.). Retrieved July 11, 2008, from <http://www.seychelles-s.info/seychelles-history.php>

The passages were pilot tested before they were administered in the study. Firstly, their topic unfamiliarity was examined by giving them to 30 undergraduate Iranian L2 students. Without an exception, all readers stated that the topics and contents of the first, third, and fourth texts were unfamiliar to them. However, the result for “Melting Pot or Salad Bowl” was slightly different. This text described America’s cultural diversity and immigration history. The only superficial knowledge students had about America was confined to the view that “America is an ideal country to live and work” and that “Immigrants to America are from different parts of the world.” After reading the text, they confirmed that their limited knowledge did not help them very much in comprehending the text.

The second consideration was topic interest and gender bias. The four selected topics were neutral and gender did not affect comprehending them. Sex does not influence interest in reading about different countries’ history, traditions, and cultures (Arkian, 2008). The texts were also appropriate in terms of length, and readability index (Table 1).

Table 1. Texts’ Lengths and Readability

Text	Length	Readability Index	
		Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	Flesch Readability Ease Level
<i>Wedding Traditions in Sudan</i>	589 words	10.15	56.79
<i>Melting Pot Or Salad Bowl</i>	592 words	9.80	59.66
<i>Shin Pyu, the Novice hood</i>	596 words	9.62	61.14
<i>History of the Seychelles</i>	596 words	9.41	62.32

Table 1 illustrates that the texts were understandable by an average American student in 9th and 10th grades. However, this was only raw data, and the researcher could not be sure whether these readability scores were also reliable and applicable to this study’s participants, who were adult L2 learners. Therefore, the reading selections were further evaluated in pilot tests, and will be discussed later.

Tests

Free Recall. Compared to multiple-choice questions, a free recall provides a purer measure of comprehension. Of course, there might be an objection to free recall in that it looks more like a test of memory than of understanding, “but if the task follows immediately on reading, this need not be the case” (Alderson, 2000, p. 232). This was one of the instruments at the researchers’ disposal.

Multiple Choice Tests. 10 multiple choice questions were written for each of the four reading passages, totaling 40 MCQs. Using colleagues' comments and suggestions, I carefully revised the questions, and pilot-tested them by giving the tests to 30 undergraduate Iranian EFL students. After analyzing the results, revising the malfunctioning and non-functioning choices and editing the questions, I pilot-tested the questions a second time with another group of 30 undergraduate Iranian EFL students. The following table shows the reliability of the MC tests.

Table 2. Tests' Reliability

Reading Passage	Cronbach's Alpha Reliability of the Comprehension Test
<i>Wedding Traditions in Sudan</i>	.72
<i>Melting Pot or Salad Bowl</i>	.70
<i>Shin Pyu, the Novice hood</i>	.73
<i>History of the Seychelles</i>	.74

Items analyses confirmed that the multiple-choice questions ranged from .4 to .8 in terms of facility, and from .4 to .9 for discrimination.

Questionnaire. In order to probe participants' perceptions of their reading class, a five point Likert scale questionnaire was cautiously developed with the assistance of two testing experts. In the first pilot-testing, the questionnaire was administered to 30 undergraduate Iranian L2 students. However, because the reliability of the questionnaire was not acceptable for the study, the items were further revised and pilot-tested three more times, each time with a larger number of students, until the Cronbach's alpha reliability reached an acceptable level ($r = .75$).

Data Collection Procedure

The study's participants were provided with the four reading passages of unfamiliar topics/contents, which they read and were tested on, with a one-week interval between treatments. The participants in Group A did not receive teaching intervention. Through pre-reading activities, they were provided with some brainstorming questions, to which they did not receive answers, and an introductory paragraph meant to help students construct/activate background knowledge on the text they were going to read. The text that this group read had a title, which is believed to have a role in helping students to construct/activate prior knowledge (Hammadou, 1991).

The participants in Group B, however, experienced teacher's instruction. It was the teacher who, in some pre-reading activities, familiarized the students with the topics/contents, and taught them the key vocabulary. In order to insure the consistency of the methods applied, the instructor asked students the same brainstorming questions, provided them with the same introductory background knowledge information, and taught them the same key words as those used in Group A. Moreover, their texts did not include titles. To avoid bias, the researcher asked a lecturer to teach the participants in Group B, and another one to administer the reading passages and tests in Group A.

After finishing each text, students were assessed on comprehension by first writing a free recall and then answering a set of 10 comprehension MCQs. To prevent students' writing ability from affecting their recalls, they were allowed to write their recalls either in Persian (their first language) or English, or a combination of both, in whichever language they were more

comfortable with. Moreover, students wrote the recalls before taking the MCQs so that the questions would not aid them in remembering the idea units. The experiment was conducted in four consecutive weeks, with each session lasting 100 minutes.

The research questionnaire was administered at the end of the study, in the fourth session. For the ensuing interviews, 20 participants, 10 from Group A, and 10 from Group B, were selected based on their total scores of the comprehension tests. There was a fair distribution of students from the lowest scores to the highest scores. The interviewees were asked two questions in Persian so that their English speaking ability would not influence the expression of their perceptions.

The scores of three students were eliminated from the study. These students were selected based on their reading tests results in the first two experiments. Two of them were from Group B, and one from Group A, equally from among the low-, mid-, and high-scorers. They were intentionally asked to shift to the other group for the second two tests, and attend both treatment classes. The purpose of this task was to elicit the perceptions of those students who had experienced both methods and could comment on and make a comparison of the efficiency of both approaches. Thus, these three students were interviewed as well, totaling 23 interviewees.

RESULTS

In order to test the research hypothesis and find the answers to research questions 1 and 2, independent-samples t-tests were applied. To do so, firstly, the participants' written recalls in the four tests were checked for the number of idea units remembered, and their papers were marked by the researchers and an assistant. Each correctly recalled idea unit received one point, and each partly remembered idea unit received half a point. The inter-rater reliability of the four recall tests were .89, .91, .86, and .87, respectively. Secondly, the 40 multiple-choice questions, 10 for each reading test, were marked by the researcher. Finally, to answer research question 3, the results of the study perception questionnaire were mixed with interview responses, hence triangulating quantitative data with qualitative data.

Research Question 1. *To what extent does teacher-directed topic familiarization help students' recall of reading passages?*

Results of independent-samples t-tests indicated that there was no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the students in Group A (No Teacher) and Group B (Teacher) in any of the four recall tests. In fact, pre-reading activities directed by the teacher produced the same results as topic familiarization through printed input in helping students recall reading passages, and there was no superiority of one approach over the other. As illustrated in Table 3, the t-values of recall tests 1-4, shown in the column Sig. (2-tailed), are all above .05 ($p > .05$).

Table 3. T-tests (Recall Tests)

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2 tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
R1 Var. assumed	.131	.719	-.983	71	.329	-1.644	1.672
Var. not assumed			-.989	70.879	.326	-1.644	1.663
R2 Var. assumed	.209	.649	-1.663	71	.101	-2.613	1.571
Var. not assumed			-1.656	68.703	.102	-2.613	1.577
R3 Var. assumed	1.970	.165	-1.754	71	.084	-4.119	2.348
Var. not assumed			-1.740	65.864	.087	-4.119	2.368
R4 Var. assumed	.000	.989	-1.854	71	.068	-5.420	2.924
Var. not assumed			-1.855	70.627	.068	-5.420	2.922

Research Question 2. *To what extent does teacher-directed topic familiarization enhance students' performance on multiple choice reading comprehension tests?*

Similar to the results of the recall tests, comparisons of students' mean scores on the multiple-choice comprehension tests confirmed that there was no statistically significant difference between Group A and Group B in any of the four tests (Table 4). In other words, topic familiarization performed by the teacher and the role he played in background knowledge activation/construction in Group B (Teacher) did not yield better results in enhancing students' performance on multiple-choice reading comprehension tests as compared with pre-reading activities in the form of scripts, or written data, in Group A (No Teacher). Students in Group A did not necessarily need a teacher for reading comprehension in their class as the teacher's absence was tolerated and did not influence students' scores negatively.

Table 4. T-tests (Comprehension MCQs)

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2 tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
C1 Var. assumed	2.196	.143	-1.454	71	.150	-.626	.430
Var. not assumed			-1.471	68.061	.146	-.626	.425
C2 Var. assumed	.007	.933	-.341	71	.734	-.137	.401
Var. not assumed			-.342	70.917	.733	-.137	.400
C3 Var. assumed	.390	.535	-.658	71	.512	-.364	.553
Var. not assumed			-.658	70.040	.513	-.364	.553
C4 Var. assumed	4.543	.037	-1.081	71	.283	-.602	.557
Var. not assumed			-1.073	66.160	.287	-.602	.561

Research Hypothesis. *Teacher-directed topic familiarization enhances students' performance on L2 reading comprehension tasks more than written introductions do.*

The answers to research questions 1 and 2 confirmed that there was no significant difference between teacher-directed topic familiarization and written introductory background knowledge activation/construction pre-reading activities in enhancing students' performance on second language reading comprehension tests. Therefore, the research hypothesis was rejected.

Research Question 3. *What are students' perceptions of the teacher's effect in topic familiarization as compared with the efficacy of written explanations?*

Questionnaire Responses

Results of an independent-samples t-test (Table 6) indicated that there was no significant difference between the No Teacher and Teacher groups in terms of their perceptions of teacher-directed topic familiarization versus written background knowledge activation/construction information ($p > .05$). In other words, the students in both groups thought that the two approaches yielded the same results in their performance of reading comprehension tests (i.e., recalls and multiple-choice questions). Indeed, their perceptions agreed with their results of reading comprehension tests.

Table 6. Perception Questionnaire t-test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2 tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
TF Var. assumed	.621	.444	-.364	14	.722	-.08375	.23031
Var. not assumed			-.364	13.739	.722	-.08375	.23031

Interview Responses

1. **Interview Question 1:** *In order to understand an unfamiliar reading passage, do you think you need a teacher to provide you with oral background information about the text, or would you prefer to read about the background information? Give reasons for your choice.*
2. **Interview Question 2:** *Do you generally think you are an independent reader, or do you think you need a teacher? Give reasons.*

The results of the responses to interview questions 1 and 2 indicated that an average 35% of the students in Group A (No Teacher) believed that they were not independent readers and preferred to listen to the teacher's oral background knowledge activation/construction information, hence teacher-directed topic familiarization, rather than read explanations about it. Another 35% of the participants in the same group thought themselves as independent readers and stated that written explanations on back ground knowledge were more effective than teacher-directed topic familiarization. However, an average 30% of the interviewees called themselves neither independent nor dependent readers. They also stated that both approaches were equally effective and could not consider any superiority of one over the other.

In Group B (Teacher), 40% of the participants maintained that they were not independent readers, and preferred teacher's oral topic familiarization to written explanations. 30% of the interviewees in this group considered themselves as independent readers, and found written explanations on text topic/content more effective than teacher's oral explanations. For the last 30%, who were neither dependent nor quite independent readers, it made no difference whether they listened to the teacher's oral explanations or they read written introductions about the text topic/content.

As for the neutral group, 33.3% (1 student for each question) was an independent reader and preferred teacher-directed topic familiarization. Another 33.3% (1 for each question) was

dependent and wanted to read written explanations. And the last 33.3% was neither dependent nor independent in reading and did not indicate any difference between the two approaches.

From the total 23 students interviewed, 36% preferred to listen to the teacher providing oral background knowledge on the text topic/content. 33% of them would rather read written introductions/explanations on the text. The remaining 31% did not see any difference between oral and written background knowledge information. Therefore, it could be concluded from the above qualitative data that, although the number of the students who favored teacher's oral explanation was slightly more (by only 3% compared to those favoring written explanations), there was generally no significant difference between the students' perceptions in Group A and Group B in terms of the teacher's effect in topic familiarization. Both teacher-directed topic familiarization and written explanations were almost equally helpful for both groups.

A triangulation of the above qualitative data with the questionnaire results confirmed that interview responses explained the quantitative questionnaire data, which, as well, did not show any significant difference between Group A and Group B students' perceptions of the teacher's role in topic familiarization as compared with the efficacy of written explanations.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Research Questions 1 and 2

One reason teacher directed and written topic familiarization did not produce different results might be because the oral pre-reading activities performed by the teacher in Group B were consistent with the written pre-reading materials provided for the study participants in Group A. The variables such as background information content, brainstorming questions, time allotments, and even classroom conditions were all kept consistent, as far as possible, for students in both groups. It might seem, at first glance, that the present study has restricted the facilitative role of the second language reading teacher, and has narrowed it down to a limited rigid teacher's role. In normal real-life situations, the teacher and teaching process are so flexible that they might not lend themselves to unchanging, pre-planned pre-reading activities, following a definite, inflexible lesson plan step-by-step. However the present study focused mainly on the effect of the teacher's instruction at the pre-reading stage. Therefore, I have attempted to evaluate a somewhat more limited role of the teacher in a second language reading classroom. To the best of my knowledge, the present study seems to be the first attempt to compare teacher's oral topic familiarization with written topic familiarization in second language reading. Thus, there is no evidence in the literature for the purpose of comparison and contrast. More research seems inevitable in the field to be able to generalize the study findings. The only study that is to some extent in line with the present research belongs to Dole et al. (1991).

Dole et al. (1991) compared the effects of two pre-reading instructional treatments on students' comprehension of narrative and expository texts. Results showed that the teacher-directed condition was more effective than the interactive condition at enhancing comprehension, and both of the treatments were superior to the third condition (i.e., no pre-reading instruction). Dole et al. suggested that the reasons why the teacher-directed condition was more effective might be because it focused only on the most important information necessary for understanding the text, and it included direct and explicit instruction. However, in the present study, teacher-directed topic familiarization was not confirmed to be superior to written scripts intended to activate/construct students' background knowledge.

Research Question 3

As already discussed, research on students' perceptions of their reading is unexpectedly inadequate. This dearth makes it really difficult for the present researcher to find similar studies in the literature for comparison and contrast. The answer to research question 3 suggested that there was no significant difference between Group A and Group B students in terms of their perceptions of teacher-directed topic familiarization and those of written explanations, and both approaches were perceived as being equally effective. Interestingly, the students' perceptions agreed with their results of reading comprehension tests. This supports the studies that encourage probing into students' perceptions in order to realize what they actually need in second language reading.

Chen and Graves (1995) found that students generally responded positively to all their experimental treatments. They also reported that a large percentage of the students in all the treatment groups strongly emphasized their need for cultural background knowledge. The findings of the present study are somewhat supported by Chen and Graves' (1995) findings; although, the participants insisted on receiving general background knowledge either by the teacher or through written information. The findings might also support, in a way, Bruton and Marks (2004) who concluded that teachers and educators need to take seriously into consideration reading needs and wants across the curriculum in first, second, and foreign language reading. In indirect support of the present research, Yamashita (2004) suggested that understanding learners' perceptions is important to reading both L1 and L2 for encouraging L2 learners' involvement in extensive reading, although the investigation of L1 reading was not the scope of the present study.

In sum, this study presented written topic familiarization activities to act as a substitute for teacher-initiated pre-reading tasks in order to investigate the teacher's effect in an L2 reading class. The findings confirmed that learners could be independent readers when it comes to topic familiarity.

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