SCHEMA ACTIVATION IN EFL READING: IMPLEMENTATION AND PERSPECTIVES FROM STUDENTS AND TEACHER

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ABSTRACT

Students at the Madrasah Aliyah level often face difficulties in comprehending texts and making intertextual connections due to the limited use of instructional strategies that activate their prior knowledge. This study aims to 1) examine the implementation of schema activation as a reading strategy, 2) investigate students' responses toward its use in the classroom, and 3) investigate the perceived impact of schema activation from the teacher's perspective. A descriptive qualitative method was employed, involving English teachers and eleventh-grade students at MAS An-Nur Tangkit as the study subjects. Data were gathered through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation, and analyzed using qualitative content analysis. The findings indicate that schema activation was implemented through three reading stages such as pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading. Each stage helped activate different types of schemata such as content, linguistic, and formal schemata which supported students in making meaningful connections with the text. Moreover, students responded positively to the strategy, showing increased engagement, improved comprehension, greater self-confidence, enhanced motivation, and stronger critical thinking. Finally, from the teacher's perspective, schema activation had a significant impact on students' reading development, including improved reading comprehension, greater information retention, reduced difficulty with complex texts, and enhanced critical and analytical thinking.

A. INTRODUCTION

In the context of language education, whether in general instruction or in the specific domain of second language acquisition, reading serves as a fundamental skill. It encompasses more than the mechanical decoding of words; it involves the active construction of meaning, making comprehension an essential component of literacy development. The ultimate goal of reading, therefore, is not merely word recognition, but the ability to interpret and internalize the intended meaning of a text. Reading comprehension, as defined by Lestari et al. (2023: 30), is "a form of reading whose purpose is to understand what is being read". This definition underscores that comprehension goes beyond decoding linguistic elements; it entails an in-depth engagement with the text's context, communicative purpose, and

evaluative dimensions. Proficient readers are expected to activate prior knowledge, identify relationships between ideas, and construct meaningful interpretations of the text.

However, numerous challenges such as limited vocabulary, weak decoding skills, and insufficient background knowledge have been identified as key factors contributing to learners' difficulties in achieving deep textual understanding (Al-Jarrah & Ismail, 2018). As Hansen (2016: 5) emphasized, "reading is a complicated skill which requires time and practice to develop, especially for ESL and EFL learners", highlighting the cognitive demands placed on language learners. These findings reflect a broader issue in reading comprehension: the failure to make intertextual and inferential connections due to underutilized background knowledge. This underscores the urgent need for the implementation of effective pre-reading strategies that activate learners' prior knowledge to foster deeper comprehension and engagement with texts.

The concept of intertextuality is intrinsically linked to schema activation. When learners are able to connect a newly encountered text with prior texts, personal experiences, or cultural frameworks, they engage in deeper levels of comprehension and critical analysis (Nurgiyantoro, 2020). Facilitating such connections requires the strategic use of instructional materials that can effectively elicit and activate learners' prior knowledge. In this regard, picture books represent a valuable pedagogical resource. Their combination of visual imagery and narrative familiarity provides accessible cues that support schema activation and foster intertextual engagement (Kimani, 2023). Recent studies demonstrate the utility of schema activation for improving reading comprehension. Cho and Ma (2020) found that schema-building tasks significantly enhanced reading comprehension, strategy use, and motivation among Korean L2 learners. Yan & Kim. (2023) revealed that schema strategy training using digital mind maps yielded notable comprehension improvements in Chinese university students. This aligns with findings by Biboussi (2022), who emphasized the role of pre-reading schema activation in enhancing comprehension, and by Monica et al. (2023), who found that schema strategies significantly foster students' analytical engagement with texts. Fikri et al. (2024) further highlight that integrating visual schema tools can support learners in making text-to-text and text-to-self connections, crucial for developing intertextual responses in EFL contexts.

However, despite their potential, empirical studies investigating the deliberate use of schema activation to promote intertextual responses, particularly within EFL learning environments, remain relatively scarce. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the use of schema activation as a reading strategy in an EFL classroom through three main objectives: first, to examine how the strategy is implemented during the pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading stages; second, to explore students' responses to the strategy; and third, to analyze the teacher's perspective on the impact of schema activation on students' reading development.

B. METHOD

This study applied a descriptive qualitative approach to examine the implementation, student responses, and the significance of schema activation as a reading strategy in developing intertextual responses among EFL learners. The research was carried out at MAS An-Nur Tangkit, Jambi, with 26 eleventh-grade students and one English teacher as participants. Eleventh-grade students were chosen due to their cognitive maturity and the curriculum's alignment with reading comprehension and critical response activities. Data were gathered

through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation analysis, all of which were aligned with the study's objectives and guided by updated theoretical frameworks from the last decade.

For the first research objective, which was to explain the implementation of schema activation as a reading strategy to develop students' intertextual responses, the study adopted the reading activity framework initially proposed by Zhao and Zhu (2012) and further refined in recent research by Ferdiyanto (2025). This framework categorizes reading into three structured phases: (1) pre-reading, which includes activating background knowledge, predicting content, and introducing text structure and genre; (2) while-reading, involving the inference of meaning through context and the identification of textual features; and (3) post-reading, which emphasizes summarizing, evaluating, and reflecting. The implementation was explored through non-participant classroom observations that captured instructional strategies used across these phases. To supplement observational data, student-generated documents, such as reading tasks, intertextual response worksheets, and visual schema maps, were analyzed to trace patterns of schema activation and connections between texts and learners' experiences.

The second objective aimed to explore students' responses to the implementation of schema activation. Guided by indicators from recent and verifiable studies such as Kashani, et al, (2013) and a more recent meta-analysis by Monica et.al., (2023) the analysis focused on aspects including student engagement, reading comprehension, self-confidence, and critical thinking. Data were collected via semi-structured interviews with the teacher and six purposively selected students (two high-, two average-, and two low-performing readers). Additionally, classroom observation field notes captured real-time behaviors such as participation, motivation, curiosity, and metacognitive responses during interaction with the text.

The third objective investigated the significance of schema activation in promoting students' reading development. This investigation was grounded in recent theoretical insights from McVee et.al., (2005) who revisited schema theory and highlighted its central role in facilitating reading comprehension and memory retention. Complementing this, Wang (2023) demonstrated that schema-based instruction through tools such as mind mapping and information technology effectively enhances students' content schemas and improves comprehension. To support these theoretical perspectives, the study employed data triangulation involving classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and analysis of student-generated documents, including reflective journals and comprehension logs. These data were systematically analyzed to determine the extent to which schema activation contributed to students' ability to retain information, comprehend complex texts, and establish deeper, more analytical intertextual connections.

Data analysis followed the thematic analysis model suggested by Creswell and Poth (2016). The researcher began by organizing and reading all data sources to gain an overall understanding. Coding was conducted by identifying recurring patterns and themes, both emerging and based on theoretical indicators. Codes were grouped under categories such as schema types (content, linguistic, formal), instructional strategies, and student responses

(engagement, inference, critical reflection). These categories were interpreted in relation to the study's objectives.

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings, triangulation was applied in three forms:

1 Time triangulation through multiple observations across sessions,
2 Investigator triangulation by discussing findings with the English teacher, and
3 Theoretical triangulation by applying updated schema and reading comprehension theories.

The theoretical framework for this study integrated multiple perspectives. Firstly, Schema Theory, as revisited by Zhao & Zhu (2012), provided a robust basis for understanding how readers' prior knowledge structures support the comprehension process. Secondly, Reading Engagement Theory, grounded in Guthrie et al. (2004), emphasized the motivational and strategic dimensions of reading. Thirdly, the Transactional Reading Theory (Rosenblatt, 1994) and operationalized in EFL contexts by Liu & Wang (2020), elucidated how intertextual and affective reader responses develop. This integrative theoretical approach enabled a comprehensive examination of how schema activation develop students' responses in reading experiences, enhances comprehension, fosters engagement, and promotes deeper intertextual connections.

C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section is divided into three parts based on the research objectives. The first part explores the implementation of schema activation as a reading strategy through the stages of pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading. The second part examines students' responses to the use of this strategy. The third part presents the teacher's perspective on the impact of schema activation

1 The Implementation of Schema Activation as a Reading Strategy

This subsection discusses the implementation of schema activation as an instructional strategy to support students' reading comprehension and intertextual responses. The findings are based on classroom observations conducted across three meetings, each of which followed the three-phase reading framework: pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading. The following sections describe how the strategy was carried out in each phase of the reading process across all three observed meetings. The summary of teaching activities observed in all meetings is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Teaching Reading Stage by Using Schema Activation

Meeting	Reading Stage	Type of Schema Activated	Teaching Activity
1	Pre-Reading	Content Schema	The teacher shows the picture related to the topic *"Does anyone know what narrative text is?"*
		Linguistic Schema	Brainstorming vocabulary from a picture of Malin *"Disobedient, Boat, Rich man, Beautiful wife."*
		Formal Schema	Asking students to identify the text type based on a picture *"Is this text descriptive, recount, or narrative?"*
	While-Reading	Content Schema	Asking students to recall and retell the Lake Toba story in groups. *"Can you describe briefly the story of Lake Toba?"*
		Linguistic Schema	Interpreting vocabulary in context *"approached"*
		Formal Schema	Identifying main idea and structure (orientation, past tense) in Timun Emas text.
	Post-Reading	Formal Schema	Summarizing the story of Malin Kundang using structure.
		Content Schema	Discussing moral value. *"disobedience"*
		Linguistic Schema	Expressing the summary and moral in English
2	Pre-Reading	Content Schema	Asking about familiarity with folktales and showing Tangkuban. *"Have you ever read Indonesian fairy tales?"*
		Linguistic Schema	Describing the picture using relevant vocabulary *"Cursed person, forbidden love, challenge."*
		Formal Schema	Explaining narrative structure *Orientation, Complication, and Resolution."*
	While-Reading	Linguistic Schema	Vocabulary exercises using context *"transformation"*
		Content Schema	Making inferences about character emotion (Toba's wife).
		Formal Schema	Identifying orientation in the Lake Toba story.
	Post-Reading	Formal Schema	Summarizing and retelling the story using structure.
		Content Schema	Identifying moral values *"devotion to parents"*
		Linguistic Schema	Retelling the story and expressing moral values in English. *"We should be devoted to our parents."*

3	Pre-Reading	Content Schema	Activating prior knowledge with image of Bawang Merah Bawang Putih
		Linguistic Schema	Translating and describing vocabulary from the image *"Onion and garlic."*
		Formal Schema	Making predictions based on the title *"A cruel stepmother, two siblings, one good, one bad. The ~~kind sister turned~~"*
	While-Reading	Linguistic Schema	Constructing vocabulary meaning through sentence use. "turned into stone"
		Content Schema	Making inferences about character emotion
		Formal Schema	Identifying main ideas and orientation. *"Where is the main idea of the first paragraph?"*
	Post-Reading	Formal Schema	Structuring story summary of Si Pahit Lidah.
		Content Schema	Reflecting on moral values *"jealousy, kindness"*
		Linguistic Schema	Expressing summary and moral in English, *"Don't be jealous, be kind, help others, and be careful with words."*

Pre-Reading Stage: Schema Activation Across Three Meetings

Across the three pre-reading sessions, a consistent instructional pattern emerged in which the teacher systematically activated students' content, linguistic, and formal schemata through culturally familiar Indonesian folktales such as Malin Kundang, Danau Toba, Sangkuriang, and Bawang Merah Bawang Putih. Rather than treating each meeting as an isolated event, classroom observations revealed a recurring schema-based instructional design that functioned as a cognitive bridge between students' prior cultural knowledge and English narrative texts.

Picture 1. Malin Kundang Stone, Tangkuban Perahu, and Bawang Merah Bawang Putih

This pattern was evident across all meetings, as students drew on shared cultural experiences to make predictions and construct meaning before reading. These findings reinforce schema theory's claim that comprehension is facilitated when learners can anchor new textual input to existing knowledge structures (Zhao & Zhu, 2012; Biboussi, 2022).

Second, the teacher repeatedly strengthened linguistic schema through visual scaffolding and vocabulary elicitation. Images related to the folktales (e.g., Malin Kundang's stone, Mount Tangkuban Perahu, and Bawang Merah Bawang Putih) served as prompts for

brainstorming key English vocabulary. Representative classroom interactions, such as students producing words like "disobedient," "cursed person," and translating "bawang merah" into "onion", illustrate how culturally grounded visuals facilitated lexical recall and prediction-making. Rather than functioning as isolated vocabulary practice, these activities consistently connected language forms with meaning, confirming previous findings that visual and cultural cues enhance vocabulary retention and reading readiness in EFL contexts (Wahid et al., 2023; Fikri et al., 2024).

Third, formal schema activation constituted a recurring instructional focus through genre identification and explicit instruction on narrative structure. Students were regularly guided to recognize texts as narrative rather than descriptive or recount, and to recall the generic structure of Orientation, Complication, and Resolution. Across meetings, students demonstrated increasing awareness of narrative organization by identifying conflicts, predicting resolutions, and summarizing plots coherently. This sustained emphasis on genre awareness reflects a pattern of formal schema scaffolding that supports strategic and purposeful reading, as corroborated by genre-based reading research in EFL settings (Muniroh et al., 2021; Chen & Chen, 2021). Overall, the synthesis of observations across the three meetings indicates that schema activation functioned not as a one-time pre-reading technique but as a sustained instructional framework.

While-Reading Stage: Schema Activation Across Three Meetings
Across the three while-reading sessions, a consistent instructional pattern emerged in which the teacher systematically activated students' content, linguistic, and formal schemata through interactive reading tasks and guided classroom dialogue. Rather than positioning students as passive readers, the teacher repeatedly engaged them in meaning construction by prompting connections between the narrative texts and their prior cultural knowledge. Classroom observations revealed that this schema-based instructional design recurred across meetings through the use of culturally familiar Indonesian folktales such as Timun Emas, Lake Toba, and Si Pahit Lidah, allowing students to negotiate meaning, interpret events, and understand narrative structure while reading.

First, content schema activation was consistently achieved through teacher-initiated questions that encouraged students to relate the unfolding text to familiar folktales and cultural narratives. During the reading of Lake Toba, for example, the teacher asked, "Can you describe briefly the story of Lake Toba?" prompting students to recount key events such as the marriage, broken promise, and transformation of the mother into a fish. Similarly, while reading Si Pahit Lidah, the teacher guided students to interpret character actions by asking, "The text doesn't say he was angry. How do we know?" Students responded by linking the act of cursing villagers to anger and betrayal. These classroom interactions indicate that students relied on shared cultural knowledge to interpret implicit meaning and moral values during reading. This recurring pattern across meetings supports schema theory's claim that comprehension is facilitated when learners anchor textual information to existing content schemata (Zhao & Zhu, 2012; Biboussi, 2022).

Second, the teacher repeatedly strengthened linguistic schema through contextualized vocabulary questioning embedded within the reading process. Rather than explaining vocabulary directly, the teacher guided students to infer meaning through prompts such as, "In the sentence 'Suddenly, a giant approached him,' what does 'approached' mean?" and "What is another word for 'turned into'?" Students responded with expressions like "getting closer," "change," and "transformation," and were further encouraged to use the words in

sentences related to the narrative context. These teacher-led interactions illustrate how vocabulary learning was integrated with comprehension, allowing students to associate new lexical items with meaningful story events. Such findings confirm previous research that context-driven vocabulary instruction supported by schema activation enhances lexical acquisition and retention in EFL reading (Wahid et al., 2023; Monica et al., 2023; Fikri et al., 2024).

Third, formal schema activation constituted a recurring instructional focus through teacher guidance on narrative structure during reading. Across meetings, the teacher explicitly prompted students to identify structural elements by asking questions such as, "Where is the orientation in the story?" and "What information is given in the first paragraph?" In the first meeting, students expressed confusion about narrative texts, leading the teacher to clarify that narratives typically use past tense and consist of orientation, complication, and resolution. In subsequent meetings, similar teacher prompts resulted in students accurately identifying orientation, main ideas, and narrative elements such as characters, setting, and time. This pattern indicates that repeated teacher-led questioning and explanation during the while-reading stage gradually strengthened students' formal schema. These observations align with genre-based reading research emphasizing the importance of explicit structural guidance in supporting EFL learners' comprehension and strategic reading (Muniroh et al., 2021; Chen & Chen, 2021). Overall, the synthesis of observations across the three while-reading meetings indicates that schema activation operated as a sustained instructional framework supported by continuous teacher–student interaction.

Post-Reading Stage: Schema Activation Across Three Meetings
Across the three post-reading sessions, a consistent instructional pattern emerged in which the teacher systematically activated students' content, linguistic, and formal schemata through discussing, summarizing, and reflecting activities. Rather than treating post-reading as a simple recall stage, classroom observations revealed a recurring schema-based instructional design that encouraged students to reconstruct meaning, evaluate moral values, and consolidate genre understanding after reading. Through culturally familiar Indonesian folktales such as Malin Kundang, Lake Toba, and Si Pahit Lidah, the post-reading stage functioned as a reflective bridge between textual comprehension and students' cultural knowledge and language production.

First, content schema activation was consistently achieved by guiding students to reflect on moral values embedded in the narratives. Across meetings, the teacher prompted reflection by asking questions such as "What lesson can you take from this story?" and "What wisdom can we learn from this story?" Students responded by identifying culturally grounded values, including obedience to parents, devotion, kindness, avoiding jealousy, and being careful with words. These responses indicate that learners connected narrative events to shared cultural norms and ethical principles. This recurring pattern demonstrates that post-reading reflection enabled students to interpret texts beyond literal meaning by anchoring moral understanding in familiar cultural frameworks. Such findings reinforce schema theory, which emphasizes that comprehension and reflection are strengthened when learners link textual meaning to existing value systems (Biboussi, 2022; Monica et al., 2023).

Second, the teacher repeatedly strengthened linguistic schema through guided oral summarization and reformulation in English. During post-reading discussions, students were asked to retell stories such as Malin Kundang, Lake Toba, and Si Pahit Lidah using their

own words. Classroom interactions show that students were able to recount story events in English, describe characters and conflicts, and express moral lessons after receiving minimal prompts from the teacher, such as "Say it in English" or "Summarize the story briefly." These activities required students to retrieve vocabulary, construct sentences, and organize ideas orally, demonstrating that linguistic schema activation occurred through meaningful language use rather than isolated practice. Consistent with previous research, this finding confirms that post-reading discussion and summarization enhance learners' ability to articulate understanding and reinforce vocabulary through contextualized output (Biboussi, 2022; Monica et al., 2023; Fikri et al., 2024).

Third, formal schema activation constituted a recurring instructional focus through reflective questioning about genre and narrative structure. Across the three meetings, the teacher repeatedly revisited the definition of narrative text by asking questions such as "What is a narrative text?" Students consistently responded that narrative texts tell past events or stories, particularly fairy tales. In addition, students' summaries reflected an understanding of narrative organization, as they presented events in logical sequence and implicitly referenced orientation, complication, and resolution. This repetition across meetings indicates that post-reading activities functioned as schema consolidation, reinforcing students' awareness of genre features and text structure. Such sustained emphasis on formal schema aligns with genre-based reading research, which highlights the importance of revisiting text structure during reflection to strengthen comprehension and retention (Muniroh et al., 2021; Chen & Chen, 2021). Overall, the synthesis of observations across the three post-reading meetings indicates that schema activation functioned as a sustained reflective framework rather than a closing routine. By consistently integrating moral discussion, oral summarization, and genre reflection through teacher–student interaction, the teacher facilitated deeper comprehension, cultural interpretation, and language production.

2 Students' Responses Toward the Implementation of Schema Activation

This study explored students' responses to the implementation of schema activation as a reading strategy, analyzed through four pedagogical indicators: (1) Increased Engagement, (2) Improved Comprehension, (3) Increased Self-Confidence, and (4) critical thinking and reflection. Data were collected through interviews with six students of varying performance levels.

Increased Engagement

Most students reported enhanced interest and emotional involvement in reading activities when they were encouraged to activate prior knowledge. It can be seen in the following excerpts:

> S1 : *"After I was given time to remember my knowledge, I felt more interested in the text I read."*
> S5 : *"I felt more involved because I could connect what I read with my own experiences."*

(Students interview, October 5th, 2024)

These responses suggest that activating background knowledge not only enhances reading comprehension but also increases learners' emotional and motivational involvement. Kashani et al. (2013) assert that schema activation significantly improves comprehension by fostering active engagement. Similarly, Hidayatullah et al. (2020) found that schema-based reading instruction increased student interest and attention. Monica et al. (2023) further

emphasize that connecting prior knowledge with new content fosters emotional involvement and motivation in EFL reading classrooms. In addition, Wijayati et al. (2019) demonstrate that schema activation benefits learners with diverse personality traits, contributing to improved participation and reading achievement.

Improved Comprehension

All students expressed that their understanding of the narrative text improved when they linked it to prior knowledge or personal experiences. It can be seen in the following excerpts:

> S3 : *"Schema activation helps me understand more about the text because I can see things that are important and related to my knowledge."*
> S4 : *"My understanding increases after connecting it to my knowledge. The difficult parts feel easier to understand."*
>
> (Students interview, October 5th, 2024)

These responses highlight how activating background knowledge allows learners to make meaningful inferences and reduce cognitive load, resulting in better overall comprehension. Monica et al. (2023) similarly found that schema activation strategies foster deeper comprehension by linking students' prior experiences to new texts. Moreover, Khartite (2021) emphasizes that pre-reading schema activation, including content, formal, and linguistic schemata serves as a vital bridge in facilitating EFL reading comprehension. Additionally, empirical evidence from Zhang (2008) demonstrates that formal schema instruction significantly improves Chinese EFL learners' ability to anticipate text structure, make inferences, and retain information long term.

Increased Self-Confidence

Schema activation led to enhanced readiness and confidence in tackling new or complex texts. It can be seen in the following excerpts:

> S1 : *"Previously, I felt hesitant to read difficult texts, but now I feel ready."*
> S6 : *"I am very ready to study other types of texts after understanding to add to my knowledge."*
>
> (Students interview, October 5th, 2024)

Students' responses indicate that schema activation fostered greater self-confidence in approaching complex texts. Ismail et al. (2023) report that authentic assessment methods which implicitly involve activating prior knowledge significantly improve self-efficacy and autonomous learning in EFL classrooms.

Critical Thinking and Reflection

Students demonstrated deeper analytical skills and the ability to assess texts beyond surface-level understanding. It can be seen in the following excerpts:

> S2 : *"I can be more critical in viewing the text... understand why a character acts the way they do."*
> S4 : *"I think more about how the author structures the story and why they choose certain themes."*
>
> (Students interview, October 5th, 2024)

Students' reflections indicate that schema activation notably supported the development of critical thinking and reflective reading skills. S2's insight into character motivation and S4's focus on narrative construction represents higher-order thinking, including inference, evaluation, and interpretation. These cognitive shifts suggest successful schema activation, enabling learners to go beyond literal comprehension toward deeper meaning-making. According to Salameh et al. (2011), training students to use schema-based cognitive and metacognitive questioning strategies such as self-to-text and text-to-world connections, not only enhances understanding but also stimulates critical thinking and broader perspective awareness.

3 Teacher's Perspective on The Impact of Schema Activation

This study investigated the implementation of schema activation as a reading strategy in teaching narrative texts. The data were obtained through in-depth interviews with an English teacher. The analysis identified five major indicators of effectiveness: improved reading comprehension, increased information retention, reduced reading difficulty, enhanced engagement and motivation, and improved critical and analytical thinking. Each indicator is described below.

Improved Reading Comprehension

Students demonstrated a better understanding of narrative texts when schema activation was employed during the pre-reading phase. The teacher observed that students were able to comprehend the main ideas more easily, especially in complex texts. It can be seen in the following excerpt:

> *"They find it easier to understand the gist of the text after discussing their previous knowledge, especially for more complex texts."*
>
> (Teacher, interview, October 5, 2024)

The findings support the claim that schema activation enhances students' ability to comprehend narrative texts. Activating relevant background knowledge provides learners with a cognitive framework that facilitates understanding of new content and reduces processing difficulty. As Wang (2023) asserts, schema theory-based instruction helps students construct meaning more efficiently by allowing them to integrate prior experience with textual cues. Similarly, McVee et al. (2005) highlight that schema activation enables learners to engage in dynamic, socially constructed meaning-making processes, particularly during narrative reading. Welianti et al. (2022) found that schema activation significantly improves students' ability to identify key narrative structures and main ideas. Hidayatullah et al. (2020) further reported that pre-reading tasks such as prediction and discussion enhance student interest and cognitive engagement. Salameh et al. (2011) emphasized that schema-driven questioning strategies improve both critical comprehension and reader autonomy. In support, Monica et al. (2023) concluded that schema activation strategies foster deep, strategic reading habits in EFL learners, leading to improved outcomes in both understanding and motivation.

Increased Information Retention

Students recalled text details more effectively when they were given time to connect new material to prior knowledge. This pre-reading connection allowed them to better retain key information. It can be seen in the following excerpt:

> *"They can remember details better after we discuss previous knowledge related to the text."*
>
> (Teacher, interview, October 5, 2024)

The study also found that schema activation improved students' ability to recall text information. This aligns with Brod (2013), who assert that the integration of prior knowledge strengthens long-term memory. Fitriyani et al. (2020) confirm that schema-based reading promotes deeper encoding of textual details. Al-Faki and Siddiek (2013) found that students who access background knowledge before reading tend to reconstruct and recall information with greater clarity.

Reduced Difficulty in Reading Complex Texts
Schema activation helped reduce students' struggles with difficult or unfamiliar texts. With background knowledge activated, students felt more equipped to navigate challenges in reading comprehension. It can be seen in the following excerpt:

> *"They are better able to understand and overcome difficulties in the text after knowing the connection with the knowledge they already have."*
>
> (Teacher, interview, October 5, 2024)

The findings support the claim that schema activation enhances students' ability to comprehend narrative texts. Activating relevant background knowledge provides learners with a cognitive framework that facilitates understanding of new content and reduces processing difficulty. As Wang (2023) asserts, schema theory-based instruction helps students construct meaning more efficiently by allowing them to integrate prior experience with textual cues. Similarly, McVee et al. (2005) highlight that schema activation enables learners to engage in dynamic, socially constructed meaning-making processes, particularly during narrative reading. Welianti et al. (2022) found that schema activation significantly improves students' ability to identify key narrative structures and main ideas. Hidayatullah et al. (2020) further reported that pre-reading tasks such as prediction and discussion enhance student interest and cognitive engagement. Salameh et al. (2011) emphasized that schema-driven questioning strategies improve both critical comprehension and reader autonomy. In support, Monica et al. (2023) concluded that schema activation strategies foster deep, strategic reading habits in EFL learners, leading to improved outcomes in both understanding and motivation.

Increased Reader Engagement and Motivation
The teacher noted that students were more motivated to read when they recognized that the text content was related to their existing knowledge. It can be seen in the following excerpts:

> *"They are more motivated to read, especially when they feel they know what they are going to read because it is already connected to their knowledge."*
>
> (Teacher, interview, October 5, 2024)

Schema activation enhanced students' motivation and interest in reading by fostering meaningful engagement with the text. When learners perceive the material as personally relevant, they are more inclined to explore it with greater attention and enthusiasm. Yang (2021) explains that activating prior knowledge not only facilitates comprehension but also cultivates emotional and intellectual involvement, thereby encouraging sustained reading.

Similarly, Fitriyani et al. (2020) reported that when students relate reading content to their personal experiences, they show increased motivation, participation, and persistence. Tindall and Nisbet (2021) add that schema-based instruction promotes learner autonomy, which in turn boosts students' confidence and intrinsic motivation to read more independently and critically.

Improved Critical and Analytical Thinking

Students developed deeper analytical skills after schema activation. They were able to evaluate textual elements, make connections to personal experiences, and interpret the author's intent more critically. It can be seen in the following excerpt:

> *"They were better able to analyses the text critically and connect it to their knowledge to understand the text more deeply."*
>
> (Teacher, interview, October 5, 2024)

The response above revealed that schema activation fosters critical literacy, as students demonstrated ability to evaluate textual features, make inferences, and engage in reflective analysis. It is in line with the statement of Salameh et al. (2011) that schema-driven questioning strategies promote interpretive reading and higher-order thinking in EFL contexts. Cho and Ma (2020) reported that schema building combined with reading strategy instruction enabled learners to synthesize text and prior knowledge, enhancing analytical comprehension. Moreover, Andreani et al. (2021) confirmed that genre awareness an aspect of formal schema significantly contributes to reading comprehension by guiding recognition of structure and evaluative reading. Meta-analytic evidence from Monica et al. (2023) further supports that schema activation strategies cultivate critical, reflective reading habits in EFL learners. Collectively, these findings support the notion that schema-based instruction including attention to genre, narrative structure, and questioning frameworks effectively develops interpretive autonomy and critical literacy.

D. CONCLUSION

This study examined the implementation of schema activation as a reading strategy in teaching narrative texts within an EFL classroom. Drawing on classroom observations, student interviews, and document analysis, the findings demonstrate that schema activation was systematically integrated across the pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading stages. Through culturally relevant narratives, visual scaffolding, and guided discussion, the teacher effectively activated students' content, formal, and linguistic schemata, thereby facilitating deeper comprehension of narrative structure and meaning. The results further indicate that students responded positively to this instructional approach. Activating prior knowledge enhanced engagement, strengthened comprehension, increased self-confidence, and encouraged critical and reflective thinking. By reducing cognitive barriers, the strategy enabled learners to construct meaningful connections between their background knowledge and textual input. These findings suggest that schema-based instruction contributes not only to improved reading outcomes but also to the development of independent and strategic readers in EFL contexts.

Despite these contributions, this study is not without limitations. This study was conducted in a single classroom with a limited number of participants and focused solely on narrative texts, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the use of

predominantly qualitative data limits the ability to measure the strategy's impact quantitatively. Future research is recommended to involve broader educational contexts, diverse text genres, and larger participant groups. Employing mixed-method or experimental designs may also provide more comprehensive evidence of the effectiveness of schema activation in improving reading achievement.

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