



A Comparative Study of Effectiveness of Pakistani and Foreign Short Stories in Teaching Reading Skills to Pakistani Advanced EFL Students

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Tahira Malik *

Ubaidullah Khan †

Shamim Ara Shams ‡

Abstract

Reading is a critical language skill that is likely to develop better in nonnative learners if they are provided text related to their own culture rather than the native or foreign culture. This study aimed to explore the influence of Pakistani short stories on the reading comprehension of Pakistani EFL learners of advanced level. A group of students of Advanced Diploma was taught reading skills with the help of three foreign and three Pakistani English short stories. They were administered tests on the basis of respective stories to study the difference in the development of reading comprehension. The result revealed a massive difference as the learners' performed markedly better in the exercises based on the Pakistani short stories.

Key Words: Pakistani, Foreign Short Stories, Education, EFL,

Introduction

Reading is an important language skill. Not only do we need to have good reading skills to understand the text, but also the whole learning and academic attainment depend heavily on reading. This makes reading important for everyone, be it a native speaker or a learner of the language. No doubt, good reading skills depend upon the reader's ability to recognize words, which are basic units of meaning, and sentences which are larger meaningful units. In the words of [Oakhill, Cain and Elbro \(2015\)](#), "comprehension typically require the comprehender to integrate the sense of these words and sentences into a meaningful whole" (p. 01).

Reading involves a variety of sub-skills; the four major ones are skimming, scanning, intensive reading and extensive reading. These basic skills can be further described in terms of subsidiary skills, e.g. understanding information stated explicitly as well as that which is not so stated, deducing the meaning of unfamiliar items, understanding the main idea of a text, scanning to locate specific information, extracting salient points of the text, understanding conceptual meaning and so on. Not everyone can read effectively, even in their own language, and in the case of learners of English as a foreign language, lack of good reading skills commonly means failure in comprehension of the text. However, this failure or lack of comprehension might also occur as a result of a lack of background knowledge and cultural unfamiliarity of the reader with the contents of the text.

There are two main views about the nature of reading. According to the first view, meaning is present in the text itself, and it is there to be discovered by all readers in the same way. However, the second view about reading sees it as an interactive process that involves the active participation of the reader in deducing the meaning of the text. The reading process is seen as an interaction between the text, the writer and the reader, a process in which the reader's background knowledge plays a determining role in comprehension. Reading efficiency cannot be measured against the information already there in the text; rather, it depends on how much the reader brings to the text in terms of his familiarity with the language and the content of the text. The background knowledge present in the reader's mind is sometimes explained in terms of the concept of 'schema'. A schema is a kind of framework of concepts stored in our minds and is created by our encounters with the world. It is an organized store of knowledge that helps us form expectations or make predictions about the things we come

* Bahria University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

† Lecturer, Department of English Language & Applied Linguistics, Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad, Pakistan. Email: ubaidkhan81@gmail.com

‡ Karakoram International University, Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan.

across in our daily lives. With the help of schema, we assimilate the incoming information with the information already present in our minds and thus make sense of the stimuli in a better way.

It is often maintained by second language researchers that an important job of the EFL / ESL teacher is to activate the students' schema or to provide them with appropriate schema which they might be lacking when encountering a second or foreign language. This is more important in view of the fact that language is a carrier of culture, and since English has become a global language and enjoys a second language status in many countries, these countries have their own 'Englishes' and the texts produced in these countries mirror their native cultural norms and the particular issues and problems prevalent in their respective societies. Thus the English texts produced in these countries tend to have different themes and different cultural connotations than the ones produced in Britain or any other English speaking country. The students of English as a foreign language belonging to different countries are bound to have different schemata and can face difficulty in processing the information as native English speakers. The logical conclusion that could be drawn from this is that in case of learners of English as a second or foreign language, it would be wiser to teach them with the help of English texts written by native writers and containing references to their native culture so that their comprehension can be facilitated.

The reading texts usually presented to the language learner in the language classrooms are those found in reading course books and are usually not considered interesting or motivating enough by the students. The benefits of using literature in a language classroom have been discussed extensively by scholars, researchers and teachers of English as a foreign language. It has been observed that literature can help in the development of all four skills of language---reading, writing, speaking and listening, and can be a useful complement to other teaching materials. Apart from the more obvious linguistic benefits, literature can also help increase the motivation and interest of students and can develop their critical thinking abilities. However, the effectiveness of literary texts, e.g. short stories, is further enhanced if their content is familiar to the reader and is more related to his or her native culture. A reader is not a mere passive receiver of visual stimuli from the pages of a book etc. He is an active decoder of meaning and selects from the alternative interpretation of the text, the one that suits his 'model of the world', i.e. the interpretation that fits in with his background knowledge about the language as well as about the world. Thus, if the literary texts contain familiar themes and topics that match with the reader's thought patterns and his views of the world and about which he has some prior information, the readers' comprehension of the reading texts would be greatly facilitated.

In Pakistan, reading in class is often carried out on the texts borrowed from foreign books. The literary texts included in course books of English are mostly those written by British and American writers. The fact remains that meaning is not present in a text as it is, ready to be discovered by every reader. He has to understand the cultural context.

The present research aims to bring to light the importance of using Pakistani short stories for teaching English to students at an advanced level of proficiency in English as a foreign language. It will strive to show that, given the importance of background knowledge for reading comprehension, if readers are presented with texts that are produced in their native country and are familiar to them in terms of their socio-cultural content, their reading comprehension would be greatly facilitated.

Statement of the Problem

English language classrooms in Pakistan normally make use of British or American texts that are usually alien to the students in terms of themes discussed therein and the setting. According to the schema theory of reading comprehension, when students are reading about their native culture, their reading comprehension is higher as compared to them reading about a foreign culture. The advanced learners of English possess enough linguistic knowledge of English but often lack the cultural background knowledge necessary to fully comprehend the English or British texts. Thus, if Pakistani literature is used in a language classroom in Pakistan, it is likely to positively affect the acquisition of all four language skills, especially reading, of the learners.

Objectives of the study

The main objective of the study is to investigate the effectiveness of using Pakistani short stories for improving

the reading skills of the students at an advanced level. However, this objective is further broken down into the following subsidiary issues:

- (i) To investigate the role of the reader's cultural background knowledge in reading comprehension.
- (ii) To explain the contribution of indigenous literature for bringing improvement in the reading comprehension of the students
- (iii) To investigate the effects of teaching reading skills by using short stories, particularly those written by Pakistani writers.

Research Question

The study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. Can Pakistani short stories, due to their familiar cultural content, prove effective in improving the reading comprehension of Pakistani students at an advanced level?
2. What role can these stories play in increasing the motivation and interest of the students in reading English in the class?

Delimitation, Population and Sampling

The study is delimited to a group of students enrolled in Advanced Diploma in English at the National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad (hereinafter referred to as NUML). A simple random sampling technique was used to select one section, i.e. 20 students of the group as a sample for the study. The students who had done their BA possessed a good command of the English language; hence they were placed at Advanced level.

The research period was three weeks, in which the researcher met the participants of the study twice a week for a period of 45 minutes each day. Each story was presented in one session, followed by a reading comprehension test.

The researcher selected three short stories written by foreign authors and three short stories written by Pakistani authors. The titles of the stories, along with the names of their authors, are as follows;

Foreign Stories

1. *The Chaser* by John Collier.
2. *Desiree's Baby* by Kate Chopin.
3. *The Model Millionaire* by Oscar Wilde.

Pakistani stories

1. *Billa Nayee* by Imran Kureshi
2. *Munnoo* by Ziab-un-Nisa Hamidullah
3. *Scar* by Aamina Ahmad

Significance of the Research

As earlier commented, in reading, which is an interactive process consisting of interaction between the reader, writer, and the text, the reader's background knowledge and his / her familiarity with the contents of the reading text is essential for effective comprehension. In the context of this research, this need can be best fulfilled by Pakistani short stories, the content of which is familiar to Pakistani students due to the fact that the issues discussed in these stories are not alien to them as they are in foreign texts. The EFL learners at an advanced level can immensely benefit from Pakistani literature and progress much faster in learning the English language as compared to when they are taught with the help of text containing foreign content. This study thus aims to stress that Pakistani literature should be made an essential part of the English syllabus for the learners of the English language across the country, especially the adult learners, due to its familiar content, cultural connotations and social themes and concepts. The curriculum designers will be encouraged to use Pakistani literature, which will not only promote it but also facilitate the students' learning.

Literature Review

Reading: Difference between L1 and L2 Reading

Reading is one of the basic language skills through which we get a window to the recorded information of the world. It allows us to get information about matters of importance and to access, analyze and evaluate information and arguments. Through this indispensable tool, we are able to involve in critical thinking and do creative work. As far as L1 is concerned, we take reading for granted as there is little effort involved in learning to read, but learning this skill as an FL learner can prove to be quite a challenging task. Reading normally is said to involve decoding and comprehension. Decoding might mean recognizing symbols (letters) combined as words, and understanding might mean understanding the meaning of sentences, larger texts and then assimilating this learned knowledge with already existing knowledge in one's mind.

As cited by [Grigg et al. \(2003\)](#), [Braunger and Lewis \(2006\)](#) define reading as “an interactive and constructive process involving the reader, the text, and the context of the reading experience. Reading involves the development of an understanding of the text, thinking about the text in different ways, and using a variety of text types for different purposes” (p. 03). This makes reading an active mental process in which meaning-making takes place as a result of decoding the message by the reader and understanding it. Being a user of a language, the reader employs rules of the language to understand the meaning of words, sentences and so on. Reading is a cognitive process because it uses the reader's prior knowledge and learned rules in the process of interpretation. For example, the sentence will have a different interpretation for a person familiar with Pakistani politics and for one who is not.

‘The lawyer’s movement began in order to get the Chief Justice restored.’

The Pakistani readers will instantly be able to understand the background of the movement, whereas the foreign reader may have to seek help in order to make sense of the sentence.

After having discussed the processes reading entails, the question arises as to whether reading is the same for native language and second or foreign language, or different? There are two theories: one theory proposes that the processes are the same for both types of reading, while the other maintains that skilled readers of the first language are often prevented from using the same processes while reading in a second language due to inadequacy in the second language. According to [Alderson \(1984\)](#), before the reading abilities of the readers in their first language can transfer to reading in the second language, they have to progress beyond a ‘language threshold’. Many researchers claim that once a person has acquired proficiency in reading in the first language, it is available for use in the second language, and all that is required is linguistic proficiency in the second language. This view has been challenged by a lot of scholars. When readers are learning to read in their first language, they already have a sufficient vocabulary base of that language and know thousands of words to help them in reading comprehension. They also have some grammatical knowledge of their first language. However, this is not the case with second language readers. The difficulties of second language readers are further enhanced if the first language and the second language are significantly different in syntax, vocabulary and so on. [Singhal \(1998\)](#) mentions a study by Stone (1985) in which he examined whether the difference found in the language patterns of English and Spanish would have an effect on the reading comprehension of ESL students reading English texts. Nine stories were developed by the researcher, three for each of three different language patterns categories: similar, moderately similar, and dissimilar. It was observed that when students were asked to retell the stories, the lowest scores were obtained on the stories that were most dissimilar from the students' initial language, and oral reading errors increased as language pattern similarity decreased. Moreover, second language readers often do not have enough knowledge to perceive the second language texts in their cultural and social context. They lack sufficient information about the society and culture in which these texts are produced unless these texts are produced and written in their native country by their own writers who choose to write in the second language.

Importance of Cultural Background Knowledge for better Reading Comprehension

Culture is defined by [Brown \(1980\)](#) as “the ideas, customs, skills, arts and tools which characterize a given group of people in a given period time” (p.122). Every society has a distinct culture of its own and thus, every member of that society tends to perceive reality in terms of that culture. This guided perception helps us to make sense of the world around us without getting confused by a host of stimuli, novel ideas and new events that we encounter

every day. It is here that the importance of culture in language learning comes to light. Language does not exist without a culture, nor does the latter without the former. Thus, English language texts written in a particular country are bound to have at least some references to the local culture and will facilitate the comprehension of the learners of English belonging to that particular country. When a writer is writing, he has in mind to some extent the knowledge, views and beliefs that his reader will bring to the text, and this will make reading easy for him as compared to when he is reading a foreign text.

Successful reading has come to be known as a combination of both linguistic as well as background knowledge of the reader, and an important type of background knowledge is the cultural knowledge about the contents of the text. 'Every stage of comprehension involves reader's background knowledge of culture.' (Anderson, 1997: 369).

The background knowledge can be divided into 'overall background knowledge' and 'specific background knowledge'. The overall background knowledge is that which is acquired by the readers from there in and out of school experiences, while the specific knowledge represents the particular information needed by the readers in order to understand a text about a certain topic. Students cannot be motivated unless they find the text engaging. As [Guthrie \(1996\)](#) puts it, 'engaged reading is based on motivational and cognitive characteristics of the reader...who is intrinsically motivated, builds knowledge, uses cognitive strategies socially to learn from the text' (p.45). If the students are not motivated to read "because of contextual factors, have no meaningful reason to do so, or are not interested in the content, then reading skill or strategy instruction alone will not engage them" ([Sweet, 2003: 21](#)).

Research Methodology

The present research was carried out using a two-fold strategy of data collection. The researcher used a quasi-experimental research design to establish the cause-and-effect relationship between the use of Pakistani short stories and the performance of the students on reading comprehension tests.

The study was conducted on an already intact group of students; there was no random assignment of students to groups by the researcher. The duration of the experiment was three weeks, in which the researcher met the students twice a week for a period of 45 minutes each day. Every week, they were presented with one Pakistani and one foreign short story. Each story and the reading comprehension test based on it was presented in a single session. Their performance on these stories was recorded on activity sheets given to the students by the researcher.

The second data collection method was a questionnaire, which is the subject of another research paper.

Data Collection

In order to collect data for the present study, Reading comprehension tests were used as a tool was by the researcher. The researcher wants to determine whether the use of Pakistani short stories can be effective in improving the reading comprehension of the students due to the familiar cultural content of these stories. Their performance on Pakistani stories was compared to their performance on stories written by foreign authors. In order to test the reading comprehension of the students, six tests were developed by the researcher based on the six short stories that were presented to the participants. Each test contained four activities with different numbers of items in each activity. The questions and the number of items in each activity in all of the six tests were almost similar and aimed to test the same reading skills. Only multiple choice questions and true/false questions were used because they could easily be assessed objectively and quantitatively. The total marks for each test were forty. Each item in each activity was rated with a 0 or 1 score. Finally, the results of the comprehension tests were tabulated, and the overall picture of the data was shown through figures and tables.

Data Analysis

The reading tests based on 3 Pakistani and many foreign short stories were developed to study the influence of each type of reading on the comprehension and reading motivation of the students. Each of these tests carried 40 marks. The marks obtained by each student have been presented in the form of a table along with their percentage score. After that, the arithmetic mean was calculated for each story and compared in the form of a graph with

other stories. The data collected by these tests were then analyzed with the help of descriptive statistics and inferential statistics, i.e. after calculating the mean scores for all the stories, a T-test was applied in order to assess whether the difference in mean scores of Pakistani and foreign stories was statistically significant or not.

Total Marks Obtained by the Students in each Pakistani Story with Percentage

The table below presents overall marks as well as percentages obtained by the students in the tests based on the three selected Pakistani stories. These scores may later be contrasted with the scores presented in Table X, which shows scores and percentages of the students in the tests based on foreign stories.

Table 1. Total Marks Obtained Along with the Percentages

Billa Nayee			Munnoo			The Scar		
S. No	n	%	S. No	n	%	S. No	n	%
1	22	55	1	32	80	1	28	70
2	22	55	2	26	65	2	24	60
3	36	90	3	30	75	3	24	60
4	22	55	4	22	55	4	30	75
5	26	65	5	20	50	5	24	60
6	26	65	6	34	85	6	24	60
7	28	70	7	28	70	7	30	75
8	32	80	8	20	50	8	20	50
9	28	70	9	36	90	9	32	80
10	36	90	10	34	85	10	32	80
11	24	60	11	32	80	11	26	65
12	28	70	12	28	70	12	22	55
13	26	65	13	30	75	13	22	55
14	32	80	14	22	55	14	36	90
15	34	85	15	24	60	15	26	65
16	22	55	16	26	65	16	28	70
17	26	65	17	34	85	17	32	80
18	26	65	18	22	55	18	32	80
19	32	80	19	22	55	19	30	75
20	22	55	20	24	60	20	20	50

Billa Nayee

The Mean score of this story is 27.45. This short story by a Pakistani author proved to be easier to comprehend than the foreign stories, and the marks obtained by the students clearly prove this fact. The highest score was ninety percent obtained by two students, while three got eighty-five percent. The lowest score was much higher than the foreign stories, at fifty percent, obtained by five students. The majority of the students (15 out of 20) obtained sixty or above sixty percent marks which is a very good score on any reading comprehension test.

Munnoo

The second Pakistani story on which the test was based was MUNNOO. The Mean score of this story is 27.3. This story by a Pakistani author also proved easier to understand for the students as compared to a foreign story presented to them in the same week. This is evident in the test scores obtained by the students in the reading comprehension test based on this story. The highest score was ninety percent, while five students obtained eighty percent or higher marks. Four students got above seventy percent, while four got above sixty percent marks. The lowest score was fifty percent.

Scar

The scar is the third Pakistani story that was selected for the tests. The mean score of the students in the test based on this story is 27.0. As evident from the table above, the students obtained above-average marks in this short story written by a Pakistani author. The highest score was ninety percent which was obtained by one student, and four students obtained eighty percent marks; three students obtained seventy-five percent marks while seventy percent marks were obtained by two students. The lowest score was fifty percent, obtained by two students. Thus, it can be safely asserted that overall the students showed very good performance in the reading comprehension test based on this story

Total Marks Obtained by the Students in each Foreign STORY WITH Percentage

The following table presents the total score as well as percentage score obtained by the student in all three foreign stories, i.e. The Chaser, Desiree’s Baby, and The Millionaire.

Table 2. Total Marks Obtained along with the Percentages

The Chaser			Desiree’s Baby			The Model Millionaire		
S. No	n	%	S. No	n	%	S. No	n	%
1	12	30	1	24	60	1	28	70
2	24	60	2	14	35	2	22	55
3	24	60	3	16	40	3	20	50
4	20	50	4	12	30	4	16	40
5	20	50	5	04	10	5	20	50
6	16	40	6	22	55	6	24	60
7	22	55	7	14	35	7	28	70
8	22	55	8	22	55	8	20	50
9	24	60	9	16	40	9	22	55
10	14	35	10	14	35	10	18	45
11	16	40	11	10	25	11	22	55
12	22	55	12	14	35	12	16	40
13	12	30	13	20	50	13	24	60
14	14	35	14	22	55	14	22	55
15	12	30	15	16	40	15	22	55
16	22	55	16	14	35	16	20	50
17	20	50	17	22	55	17	16	40
18	16	40	18	10	25	18	16	40
19	18	45	19	14	35	19	18	45
20	14	35	20	24	60	20	20	50

The Chaser

The first foreign story selected for this research was The Chaser. The mean student score in this story is 18.15. As can be seen from the percentages as well as the average score, the students obtained less than the average scores in the reading comprehension test based on this foreign story. The highest score was sixty percent, obtained by three students, while the lowest score was thirty percent, also obtained by three students. Four students obtained fifty-five percent marks, three obtained fifty percent marks, and three obtained thirty-five percent, while three obtained thirty percent marks. Thus, all the students obtained less than sixty percent marks, with the majority at less than fifty percent. This could be attributed to the fact that the content and the setting of the story were culturally alien to the Pakistani learners, and that negatively affected their reading comprehension of the story.

Desiree’s Baby

The second foreign story is Desiree’s Baby. The Mean score in this story is 16.2. The marks obtained by the students in the reading test based on this foreign story show the same trend as the other two stories written by foreign authors. Only six students obtained more than fifty percent marks, the highest score being sixty percent, obtained only by two students. The lowest score was ten percent obtained by one student, while ten students obtained forty or less than forty percent marks.

The Model Millionaire

In this last foreign story, the Mean score is 20.7. In the test based on this story, out of forty students, nine students scored less than fifty percent marks, while the highest score was seventy percent, obtained by only two students. The lowest score was forty percent, obtained by four students.

A Comparison of the Mean Scores of the Total Marks Obtained by the Students in all Six Tests

The total marks for each test were forty. The marks for each story were first arranged in a tabular form, and then their mean (average) was calculated. Thus, we have six mean scores for six tests based on those stories. Those mean scores are presented in the form of the chart below in order to have a clear picture of the difference in their values.

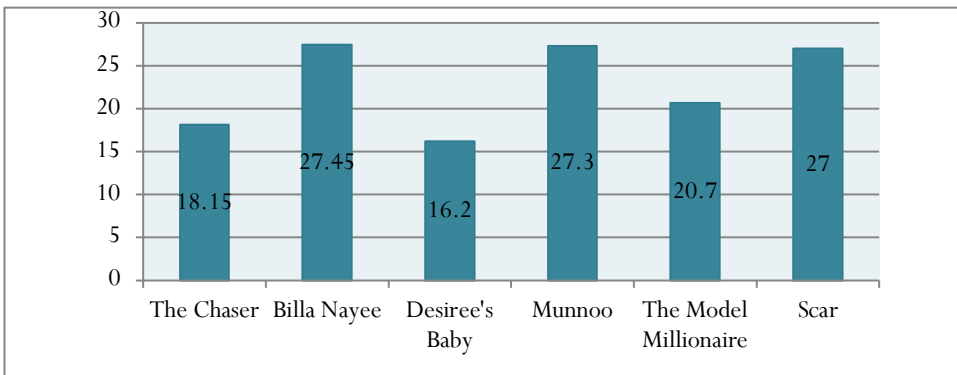


Figure 1: Comparison of Mean scores of Pakistani & Foreign Stories

As shown in the chart above, the students scored higher on all of the three Pakistani short stories as compared to the three foreign stories. The mean score of the first reading comprehension test based on the foreign story was 18.15, which were considerably lower than the next story presented to the students in the same week. This story was ‘Billa Nayee’ written by a Pakistani author, and the students’ mean score on this story’s test was 27.45. Similarly, in the next week, the mean score for the American short story ‘Desiree’s Baby’ was 16.2, while for the Pakistani story ‘Munnoo’, it was 27.3 that showing a similar trend. In the third and last week of the study, the same results were found; that is, the mean score obtained in the reading comprehension test based on the foreign story ‘The Model Millionaire’ was 20.7, which is much lower than the mean score of the Pakistani story ‘Scar, i.e.’27.0.

Activity-Wise Comparison of Scores Obtained in all Stories

Activity wise summary and comparison of all six stories are presented in the following pages. There were four activities in each test: (i) prediction, (ii) understanding explicitly stated facts, (iii) inference and (iv) guessing the meaning of unknown words from the context.

Activity No. 1: Prediction

The first activity in all six tests was a prediction, in which the students had to predict what the story would be about, based on the title and the opening line of the story. The activity carried 2 marks. Based on the score of all students in each story, the arithmetic mean was calculated for the stories. The six mean scores calculated from the six reading tests are presented in the graph below.

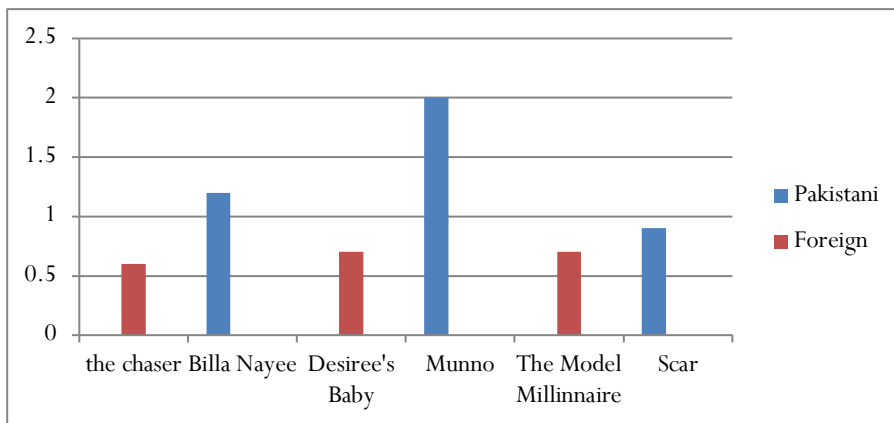


Figure 2: A Comparison of the Mean Scores Obtained in Activity no.1

It is quite obvious that the students scored much higher in Pakistani stories. For example, in the first foreign story, ‘The chaser’, the mean score is 0.6, while the mean score for the Pakistani story ‘Billa Nayee’ presented in the same week is 1.2, which indicates that the students had relative ease in predicting about the contents of Pakistani story on the basis of its title and opening line. Similarly, in the foreign story ‘Desiree’s Baby’, the mean score of ‘prediction’ activity is 0.7, while in the Pakistani story ‘Munno’, the score is considerably higher, at 2.0. In the third foreign story titled, ‘The Model Millionaire’, the mean score of the students was 0.7, whereas they scored 0.9 in the same activity for the Pakistani story, ‘Scar’. The results throw light on the fact that the students, due to their cultural familiarity with the Pakistani short stories, predicted better about these stories. This could be attributed to the fact that even the titles and the opening lines of these local stories were enough to activate the cultural schema of these learners, and they understood them better than the unfamiliar titles of foreign stories.

Activity No. 2: Understanding Explicitly stated information

The second activity in the reading test was “comprehending clearly stated information in the text”, and the total marks for this activity was 16.

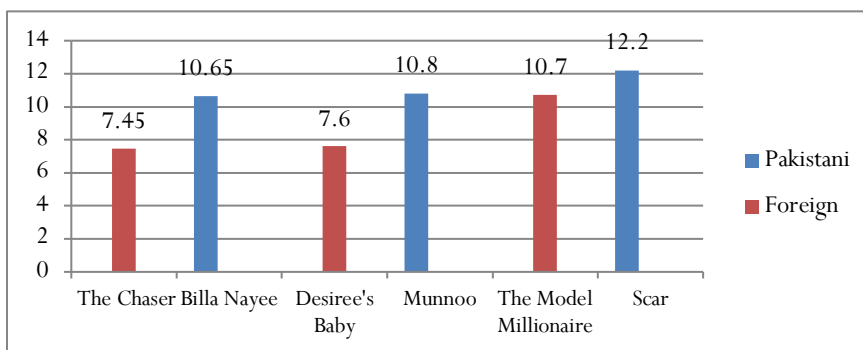


Figure 3: A Comparison of the Mean Scores Obtained in Activity no. 2

A comparison of the mean scores obtained by the students in this activity shows that the students performed better on all Pakistani short stories than on foreign stories, with the exception of one foreign story, 'The Model Millionaire'. The mean score for this story is 10.7, which is almost equal to the mean score of the Pakistani story 'Munnoo' and greater than the mean score of another Pakistani story, 'Billa Nayee'. The other two foreign stories, 'The Chaser' and 'Desiree's Baby', present a score less than all three Pakistani stories. However, the results of activity no.2 are not as conclusive as activity no.1 because, in this activity, the students performed better in one of the foreign stories as compared to a Pakistani story.

Activity no. 3 Inference

The third activity was inferring the implicitly stated information from the text, i.e. understanding facts not clearly mentioned by the writer. The marks for this activity were 12

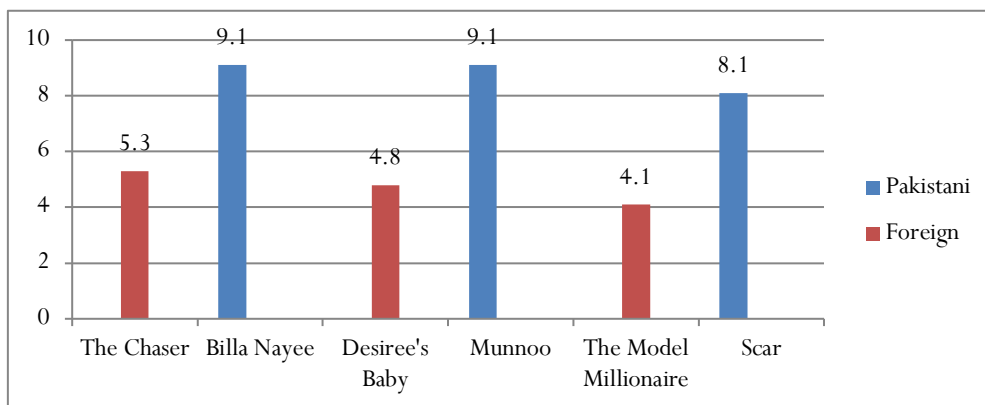


Figure 4: A Comparison of the mean Scores Obtained in Activity no.3

The mean scores in this activity strongly support the proposition that students' comprehension can be greatly facilitated if they are presented with culturally familiar texts. There is a marked difference between the mean scores of foreign stories and Pakistani stories. For example, in the first story, 'The Chaser', the mean score is 5.3, while in the Pakistani story presented in the same week, the mean score is 9.1. Similarly, in the next foreign story, 'Desiree's Baby', the students scored 4.8, which was much lower than the Pakistani story 'Munnoo', i.e. 9.1. The same pattern can be observed in the next two stories. This discrepancy can be attributed to students' cultural familiarity with Pakistani stories' content and their somewhat similar thought patterns, beliefs and values with the writers of those stories, in contrast with foreign stories, which made it easier for them to understand the writers' intended meaning in Pakistani stories.

Activity no. 4: Guessing the Meaning of Words from the Context

The last activity was guessing the meaning of unknown words from the context in which they are used in the story. This is an important skill for readers as well as learners of EFL, as no one is expected to know the meaning of each and every word they come across in a text. Moreover, learners of English do not carry a dictionary with them all the time, and even if they do, it is time-consuming to look up all the difficult words of a reading text in the dictionary. Thus, efficient readers can guess a word's meaning by reading the lines or paragraph in which it is used, and again this process is facilitated to a great extent if the reader has enough background knowledge about the contents of the text. Cultural background knowledge becomes quite important here because, in a culturally familiar text, there ought to be many terms that the reader has come across previously, and even if there are new words, the familiar context in which they are used will help the reader to comprehend their meaning with greater ease than in the case of culturally unfamiliar texts. The same phenomenon was observed in the present study, as in the activity of guessing the meaning of unknown words from the context, the students scored consistently higher in all of the three Pakistani stories as compared to foreign stories.

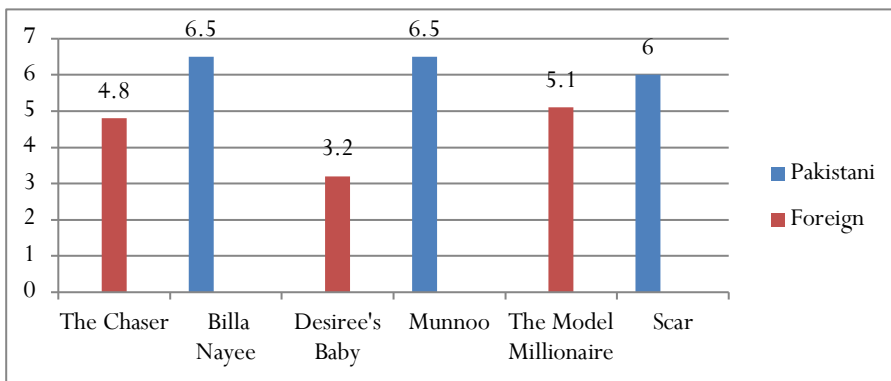


Figure 3: Marks obtained in activity no.4

The mean score for the story ‘The Chaser’ was 4.8, while in the Pakistani story titled ‘Billa Nayee’, presented in the same week, the student scored much higher with a mean score of 6.5. Similarly, in the other two foreign stories, the students’ mean scores were 3.2 and 5.1, while in the two Pakistani stories, they were 6.5 and 6.0. These results indicate that the students generally felt more comfortable in dealing with new vocabulary items in local stories due to the familiarity they had with the content therein.

The T-test

The *t*-test is the most commonly used method to evaluate the differences in means between two groups. It gives an indication of the separateness of two sets of measurements and is thus used to check whether two sets of measures are essentially different. Theoretically, the *t*-test can be used even if the sample sizes are very small. It can be computed using software like SPSS. The resultant *t*-value is then looked up in a *t*-table to determine the probability that a significant difference between the two sets of measures exists and hence what can be claimed about the efficacy of the experimental treatment.

The present study was based on the assumption that the student's comprehension and the resulting test scores would be better for Pakistani stories due to their familiar cultural content, as compared to the foreign stories. To test this hypothesis, the results of all the stories were calculated, and the mean score of each student on Pakistani stories and on foreign stories was calculated. The data was then fed into SPSS for applying a *t*-test. The results of the *t*-test are found to be statistically significant.

Table 3. Paired Samples Statistics

Paired Samples Statistics		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Mean scores in foreign stories	18.3465	20	2.33317	.52171
	Mean scores in Pakistani stories	27.2480	20	2.98866	.66829

If we look at the above table, we can note that the average score of the students in foreign stories is 18.34, while for Pakistani stories, it was much higher at 27.25. Thus, we have obtained a significant difference in the mean scores of these two types of stories, as anticipated, because the students had sufficient cultural background knowledge about the contents of Pakistani stories, whereas the situation was totally opposite in the case of foreign stories.

The standard deviation of mean scores of Pakistan stories is 2.98, which is higher than the standard deviation of foreign stories, which is 2.33, thus indicating the greater variability in mean scores in Pakistani stories.

Table 4. Paired Samples Correlations

Paired Samples Correlations		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	Mean scores in foreign stories & Mean scores in Pakistani stories	20	.088	.711

The paired sample correlations between the mean scores of foreign and Pakistani stories is 0.88, as shown in the above table, which means that no relationship exists between these two.

Table 5. Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences				
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Pair 1	Mean scores in foreign stories - Mean scores in Pakistani stories	-8.90150	3.62549	.81068	-10.59828	-7.20472

Looking at the results of paired samples test, we can see that the paired difference between Pakistani and foreign stories is -8.90 with a standard deviation of 3.62. The lower and upper confidence limits are -10.59 and -7.20, respectively. It indicated that out of 100 successive samples, 95 times we observed this difference of mean scores between -10.59 and -7.2. This helps generalize the results of the present study to the entire population, and we can safely say that if Pakistani stories are used for reading in class at an advanced level, the student's comprehension would be better.

Table 6. T-Test

T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
-10.980	19	.000

The t-statistics value for the present study is -10.980 with 19 degrees of freedom (df). The significance value is .000, which is less than .05, and which shows that the mean scores of the foreign stories and the mean score of Pakistani stories is significantly different and provides evidence for the rejection of the null hypothesis of equality of average scores or means. In statistical terms, the hypothesis for the present research can be formulated as

$$H_0: \mu_1 - \mu_2 = 0$$

$$H_0: \mu_1 - \mu_2 \neq 0$$

This means that the difference of average scores is 0 versus the difference in average scores is not zero. In other words, there will either be no difference between the average scores of Pakistani and foreign stories or there, the average scores of Pakistani and foreign stories will be significantly different. However, the significance value in the present t-test is less than the p-value of .05, which provides evidence for the rejection of the null hypothesis of equality of means. In other words, we accept our alternative hypothesis that is, the mean difference between the average scores in foreign and Pakistani stories is not the same and is significantly different from each other. Thus,

$$H_0: \mu_1 - \mu_2 \neq 0$$

Moreover, as evident from the results of the t-test, the mean scores for Pakistani stories (27.24) is significantly higher than the mean scores for foreign stories (18.34), and the difference between them is -8.9, which indicated that mean scores in Pakistani stories are much higher. These results support our hypothesis that

the students' reading comprehension could be greatly facilitated in an English language classroom in Pakistan if students are taught with the help of Pakistani English literature that contains familiar cultural information.

Conclusion

The task of a language teacher is two-fold; maximizing students' learning and keeping them motivated and interested in class. Thus, it becomes essential for the teacher to he or select teaching material that is accessible to students at linguistic as well as experiential levels. It is important, for example, that students as readers understand and identify with the situations and experiences presented in a reading text. They should be able to interpret it in the light of their own knowledge and experience of the world they live in. Therefore, it is pertinent that when teaching language through literature, someplace should be given to English literature written by local authors also. More particularly, if Pakistani short stories are taught to advanced students in their English language class, it will positively affect their comprehension and motivation level because of the readers' familiarity with the writers' topics, themes and issues as presented in these stories. This research aimed to study the influence of Pakistani short stories on the development of reading comprehension, and the results discussed above have proved that these stories helped the students develop their reading skills better as compared to foreign short stories.

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