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The relative roles of vocabulary and sociocultural knowledge in EFL reading comprehension

Radiah Hamid; Silva Liani; Ratna Dewi

Abstract

In comprehending reading texts, EFL students mostly utilize their prior knowledge of linguistic and sociocultural schemata. This study aims to determine the significant correlation and influence of vocabulary and sociocultural knowledge on reading comprehension. Samples of 40 EFL students from the English Education Department of Makassar Muhammadiyah University were selected using simple random and purposive sampling techniques. Data were obtained through proficiency and reading comprehension tests. Regression and correlation analyses were performed using SPSS Version 27 to analyze the collected data. The results of this study indicated that the students' vocabulary knowledge significantly influenced their reading comprehension; however, their sociocultural knowledge proved to be insignificant in influencing their reading comprehension. The results revealed that linguistic schemata still play a major role in the EFL students' comprehension processing. Furthermore, the correlation analysis showed that despite having better sociocultural knowledge, students must possess better vocabulary mastery, because their comprehension still heavily depends on their competence in the meaning, use, and forms of English words. The contribution of this study is to support the development of a method that helps students use their linguistic knowledge to appropriately activate their background knowledge when understanding various English reading texts.