

# Giving Topic or Genre Familiarity in Teaching Reading Comprehension for Male and Female Students

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**Abstract:** Some studies which are concerned with finding the reason why females and males have different reading comprehension discover two possible factors. The factors are topic and genre familiarity. This study is focused in finding the relationship of topic familiarity, genre familiarity, and reading comprehension across gender. Besides to find the existence of relationship between variables, the researcher also worked to find the strongest factor in affecting reading comprehension across gender. 157 participants were involved in this study. They were 123 females and 34 males from English Department in State University of Malang. This study found that the more the students familiar with the topic, the better they are reading comprehension. However, there is no significant relationship between genre familiarity and reading comprehension. Topic familiarity also became the strongest factor affecting reading comprehension.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

There is a lot of research conducted on reading comprehension across gender. Some studies have proved that reading comprehension between male and female is different. Some studies showed different result in revealing either females or males has better reading comprehension than the opposite gender.

There are some explanations why the results of reading comprehension across gender varied. The first cause is students' familiarity towards the topic of the text. Some research on reading comprehension across gender use gender-oriented text to reveal the effects of the text and gender on reading comprehension. Gender-oriented text means a text containing topic for specific gender.

The previous researchers classify the text into three text orientations, or also known as gender-oriented text. Three common gender-oriented texts are known as male-oriented texts (Male text), female-oriented texts (Female text), and gender-neutral texts or neutral texts. Male text is a text that talks about male's matters, as such as automotive and sports. In female text, female's matters are the focus of the topic, for example a text about beauty product, hair treatment, et cetera. While gender-

neutral text does not contain any of them. The example of gender-neutral text is the history of human beings or disasters. Sotoudehnama and Asadian who conducted the research in Tehran (Jalilehvand and Samuel, 2014), used those three gender-oriented texts on their research. In the research they found that Males had better performance on male-oriented texts, and females had better performance in female-oriented texts.

This assumption is supported by Shahmohammadi's study on reading text materials which have gender-oriented texts in it (Oda and Abdul-Kadhim, 2017). In his study he said that males would have greater comprehension achievement if they read the text which sound masculine, and females would have greater comprehension achievement if they read text about feminine topics. It is because the existence of schemata has interfered in reading comprehension. They have schemata for certain type of gender-oriented text because they had exposed for such text in their daily life, so the certain gender-oriented text has been familiar for them.

The second factor affecting reading comprehension between males and females is type or genre of the text. In research conducted by Al-Shumaimeri, informative text was used (Martínez, 2014). The result showed that male students easier to

comprehend the informative text than female students. Moreover, Keshavarz and Ashtarian (Heyvaert et al., 2012) from Iran propose an idea that familiarity of the text genre makes the different reading comprehension for males and females. In this research three genres of reading texts were used (argumentative essay, history, and short story) to reveal whether there was relationship between gender and genres of text. Basically, females were supposed to have superiority in reading skills according to their basic reading ability. The result showed that females comprehend better in all three genres of text. Each gender's mean score in reading comprehension test showed that both males and females could comprehend essay better than history and short story because they had exposed to essay more than the others. As the result, they became more familiar to the organization and distinctive features of academic argumentative essay than to history and short story. The finding of the research conducted by Keshavarz and Ashtarian showed the effect of genre familiarity on reading comprehension across gender exists. Another research using different type of genre was also conducted by Salehi et al. (2014). In their research, Salehi et al. (2014) used labels and signs, informal letter and newspaper. The result showed that males and females had better reading comprehension on a text genre that familiar to them. Finally, from this we also can conclude that whatever the types of the text (narratives, recounts, information reports, instruction, explanation, or expository text), females and males can have good comprehension if they have much knowledge to the genre of the text. In other words, they will comprehend better if they are familiar with the genre of the text.

From the above research we can conclude that there are two factors proposed based on previous research affecting reading comprehension across gender. The previous research on reading comprehension across gender have shown that males and females may have different reading comprehension, and certain factors also affect reading comprehension across gender. Yet, there is still no research in investigating how each factor on reading comprehension across gender can correlate to reading comprehension. Even if topic and genre can affect reading comprehension for males and females, we are still not sure which one between topic and genre is more influential in affecting reading comprehension across gender. Finally, by investigating the stronger relationship among genre familiarity, topic familiarity and reading comprehension across gender this present study

attempts to reveal the factor that needs more consideration if they are really correlated with reading comprehension.

It is important to find the correlation between topic familiarity and genre familiarity towards reading comprehension across gender. Most previous research has already been concerned with the differences between males and females in reading comprehension, but still not researching their assumptions whether those factors really correlated with reading comprehension. By knowing the relation between genre familiarity and topic familiarity toward reading comprehension of female and male students, we can discover the existence of the relationship and what factors between genre familiarity or topic familiarity which has stronger relationship on reading comprehension and need to get more attentions for each gender.

## 2 METHOD

This research used ex post facto because it wanted to reveal the effect without using treatment. This study employed ex post facto research to examine the existence of relationship and strongest relationship between topic familiarity and genre familiarity towards reading comprehension across gender. Quantitative approach was used for this research because it dealt with numeric data and statistical analysis. There were three variables used in the present research: two predictor variables and one criterion variable. Topic familiarity and genre familiarity were predictor variables, and reading comprehension was criterion variable which was divided into reading comprehension of males, reading comprehension of females, and reading comprehension in general. The research used multiple linear regression analysis to reveal causal relationship of two factors: topic familiarity and genre familiarity towards reading comprehension of females and males to discover the strongest relationship on reading comprehension across gender.

The target population of the study was English Department students at university level. Then the accessible population called as samples were State University of Malang students in English Department who had passed or taken last intensive reading course, that is advanced reading course. The consideration of taking State University of Malang students in English Department strata I was that the department has got A based on accreditation by *Badan Akreditasi Nasional Perguruan Tinggi*

(2009). The samples of the research should not have problem with reading English text, because it was not expected to get interference from vocabulary difficulty or the samples' incapability in reading English text. In order to accomplish that need, it was necessary to have population and samples from English department who have taken advanced reading course. Advanced reading course is the highest level of reading course in strata 1 English Department of State University of Malang. The samples from English Department who had already taken advanced reading course were assumed they did not have problem in vocabulary, so they could read a wide range of genres and longer texts. The samples of the research were divided into female students and male students. The minimum number of students who participated in this research was intended to be at least 30 females and 30 males as suggested by Borg and Gall (Naomi and Githua, 2013). This research had 157 participants, which were divided into 123 female students and 34 male students. The samples were chosen randomly using random sampling technique according to their availability.

## 2.1 Instruments

To measure the correlation of predictor variables (topic familiarity and genre familiarity) and criterion variable (reading comprehension across gender), this study uses three instruments. They are topic familiarity test, genre familiarity test, and reading comprehension test.

Topic familiarity test was administered to find how far the participants knew and had knowledge about the topic of the text. It was intended to reveal whatever they already know and understand about the topic. The students needed to explore their previous knowledge about certain topic for this familiarity test. The topic was limited to social, natural, and humanity topics. The students needed to show their understanding and knowledge of the topic by identifying the most appropriate topic based on the clues given. There were totally 30 items for participants to identify. Those 30 items were then divided into five levels (1) word level has 6 items, (2) phrase level has 6 items, (3) sentence level has 6 items, (4) paragraph level has 9 items, and (5) passage or text level has 3 items. The scoring of the test was in the form of ratio scale and dichotomous. The score of each item was 0 for wrong answer and 3 for right answer.

The purpose of genre familiarity test is to reveal how familiar a student with certain genre of text.

The indicators of genre familiarity are shown in their ability to identify the text purpose, text organization, and the name of text types. The test was in the form of close-ended question. Close-ended was chosen to avoid the students to guess the answer if it was presented with multiple choice. It was suitable to use close-ended for this type of test which purposely to see students previous understanding or their previous knowledge about certain genre which revealed how familiar they were with the genre in the text. There were 9 questions related to genre familiarity. The data of genre familiarity test were in ratio scale which were carried non-dichotomously. There were holistic scoring rubrics for guiding in making score.

The main purpose of using reading comprehension test is to reveal how much the students can comprehend a text. It measures the macroskills of reading comprehension. Based on Brown's (2004).

In regard to its criterion variables known as topic familiarity and genre familiarity, so the text used for reading comprehension was the same text for genre test. There were three texts with various genres and various topics. One genre was represented in one text. It has a total of 30 reading comprehension question items constructed for all texts. The reading comprehension test used in the recent study contains 10 items of multiple-choice questions on everyone text.

## 3 RESULTS

The multiple linear regressions were applied in revealing the relationship between variables: two predictor variables called topic familiarity and genre familiarity, and one criterion variable named reading comprehension. Besides each correlation on each variable, this chapter reveals which one from topic familiarity and genre familiarity has stronger correlation on reading comprehension of each gender.

### 3.1 Relationship of Topic Familiarity and Reading Comprehension

The correlation of topic familiarity and reading comprehension for all groups was 0.396. The degree of freedom was 5%, the value of t-calculate was 5.290, and the value of t-Table was 1.975. Because of t-calculate was higher than t-table (t-calculate > t-table) or significant value was lower than degree of freedom, it could be concluded that there is

significant relationship of topic familiarity and reading comprehension. The research hypothesis was accepted. The positive value on the standardized coefficient showed that the more familiar all students with the topic of reading passage, the higher the score of reading comprehension obtained.

Then, the correlation of topic familiarity and reading comprehension on females' group was 0.354. The correlation was positively significant because 4.109 as t-calculate was higher than its t-table (1.983) or significant value was lower than degree of freedom. It could be concluded that the research hypothesis was accepted which showed that there is significant relationship between topic familiarity and reading comprehension on female group. The standardized coefficient meant the more familiar female students with the topic of reading passage, the higher the score of reading comprehension obtained.

The result of the correlation of topic familiarity and reading comprehension in males' group was 0.529. It is significant since t-calculate (3.537) was higher than t-table (2.040), and also the significance was lower than 0.005 as degree of freedom. The research hypothesis was accepted which showed that there is significant relationship between topic familiarity and reading comprehension in males group. The standardized coefficient showed that the more familiar male students with the topic of reading passage, the higher the score of reading comprehension obtained

### 3.2 The Relationship of Genre Familiarity and Reading Comprehension

The standardized coefficient of genre familiarity and reading comprehension in all groups of participants was 0.005. It showed 0.943 as significant value and 0.071 as t-calculate. With 5% as the degree of freedom, then the value of t-table was 1.975. Because of t-calculate was lower than t-table (t-calculate < t-table) or significant value was higher than degree of freedom, it could be concluded that the null hypothesis was accepted which showed that There is no significant relationship on genre familiarity and reading comprehension for all subjects. Because of the insignificance correlation of genre familiarity and reading comprehension, the more familiar all students with the genre of reading passage the score of reading comprehension obtained is not always higher.

The standardized coefficient of genre familiarity and reading comprehension in females' group was -

0.112. It showed 0.197 as significant value and -1.298 as t-calculate. With 5% as the degree of freedom, then the value of t-table was 1.983. Because of t-calculate was lower than t-table (t-calculate < t-table) or significant value was higher than degree of freedom, it could be concluded that the null hypothesis was accepted which meant there is no significant relationship on genre familiarity and reading comprehension for female group. The negative result on the standardized coefficient showed that the more familiar female students with the genre of reading passage the lower the reading comprehension is achieved.

The standardized coefficient of genre familiarity and reading comprehension in males group was 0.142. It showed 0.349 as significant value and 0.951 as t-calculate. With 5% as the degree of freedom, then the value of t-table was 2.040. Because of t-calculate was lower than t-table (t-calculate < t-table) or significant value was higher than degree of freedom, it could be concluded that the null hypothesis was accepted which meant there is no significant relationship on genre familiarity and reading comprehension. The standardized coefficient showed that the more familiar male students with the genre of reading passage, the higher the score of reading comprehension can be.

### 3.3 Stronger Factor Affecting Reading Comprehension

In order to determined which stronger factor between topic and genre familiarity for reading comprehension, the value of beta or also called as standardized coefficient was needed. The standardized coefficient of topic familiarity was 0.396, whereas genre familiarity was only 0.005. Topic familiarity had higher standardized coefficient than genre familiarity. As the conclusion, topic familiarity had stronger correlation on reading comprehension than genre familiarity for all students. For Females, the standardized coefficient of topic familiarity was 0.354, whereas genre familiarity was only 0.112. Topic familiarity had higher standardized coefficient than genre familiarity in females' group. As the conclusion, topic familiarity had stronger correlation on reading comprehension than genre familiarity for female students. For males, the standardized coefficient of topic familiarity was 0.529, whereas genre familiarity was only 0.142. Topic familiarity had higher standardized coefficient than genre familiarity. As the conclusion, topic familiarity had

stronger correlation on reading comprehension than genre familiarity for male students.

## 4 DISCUSSION

This section presents the discussion of the results. The explanation is focused in solving the research problems. It compares the research results with previous research and gives reasonable explanation from the relevant theories. The discussion of research results is divided into three sections. The first section is about topic familiarity's relationship on reading comprehension. The second section is about genre familiarity's relationship on reading comprehension. Last section is the stronger factor in affecting reading comprehension. Each relationship is explained through reading comprehension in general, females, and males.

### 4.1 Relationship of Topic Familiarity and Reading Comprehension

Without looking at the gender, topic familiarity has correlation in reading comprehension. It has significant relationship on reading comprehension, which means its existence really affects reading comprehension. This research supports previous research conducted by Al-Shumaimeri (2005), Sotoudehnama & Asadian (2011), and Shahmohammadi (2011). Those previous research showed topic familiarity's effect on reading comprehension, which is supported by recent research with 0.356 as the coefficient of correlation. The relationship of topic familiarity on reading comprehension exists and significant.

Female group and male group showed significant relationship between topic familiarity and reading comprehension with coefficient of correlation for females is +0.306 and for males is +0.522. The more the female or male familiar with a certain topic in reading the better the comprehension they get. It is because when the readers are familiar with topic of reading, they will be easier in reading comprehension as the result of the efficiency and effortlessly in reading. It is in line with (Alexander et al.'s1988:9) theory about the role of topic familiarity in reading comprehension.

The recent research confirms the previous research (Al-Shumaimeri, 2005; Shahmohammadi, 2011; Sotoudehnama & Asadian, 2011) that used different text with different gender orientation as one technique in finding the role of topic in reading comprehension. This research also can answer the

dissimilarity of Al-Shumaimeri's (2005) and Sotoudehnama & Asadian's (2011) on the use of neutral text whether females and males have the same performance in reading comprehension or not. The use of neutral text can be not beneficial for one of two genders, because they have the different topic familiarity. The gender that gets higher reading comprehension can be assumed has more topic familiarity for the text. It is in line with Al-Shumaimeri's (2005) belief that said male students in his research have more reading comprehension because they had exposed in more various range of topics than female students, so they have more topic familiarity when faced with reading.

### 4.2 The Relationship of Genre Familiarity and Reading Comprehension

The results for all group of gender showed that genre familiarity did not have significant relationship to reading comprehension. The correlation of genre familiarity to reading comprehension was solely +0.004. Genre familiarity exists, but it does not significantly affect reading comprehension. It againsts Harmer's (2001: 27) theory about the role of genre familiarity that helps students to have better reading comprehend than without genre familiarity.

The research conducted by Keshavarz & Ashtarian and Salehi, Lari, & Rejanezad (2014), who concluded that the familiarity of certain genre can affect the females and males' reading comprehension is contradicted to the recent research. Their research concluded that the reason behind reading comprehension between males and females is genre familiarity. However, recent research showed that there was no significant relationship between genre familiarity and reading comprehension.

On top of that, genre familiarity showed negative correlation on females. This negative correlation showed the way of females in thinking is someway affect their reading comprehension. It is in line with Ahmadi & Mansoordehghan's (2012) and Al-Shumaimeri's (2005) assumptions that females tend to look seriously for detailed in specific organization of the text. When they are familiar with genre of the text, they will seriously look up into their knowledge about genre when try to understand a text and cannot use their previous knowledge on genre flexibly. It can be when females are drilled much on genre, they will be harder to comprehend a text.

### 4.3 Stronger Factor Affecting Reading Comprehension

According to this research, the stronger factor affecting reading comprehension is topic familiarity. Even if the participants are females or males, topic familiarity is always the stronger factor affecting reading comprehension. It is in line with the theory and research by Gilakjani & Ahmadi (2011: 144) who said that topic familiarity is the most important schema for reading comprehension. Topic familiarity as part of content familiarity is said to be more factors in affecting reading comprehension than genre familiarity as formal schemata.

From the research, researcher found that topic familiarity had stronger correlation than genre familiarity in affecting reading comprehension for female group. It can give the contradiction to two previous research conducted by Al-Shumaimeri (2005) and Keshavarz and Ashtarian (2008). Keshavarz and Ashtarian's (2008) research concluded that the females are superior in argumentative essay, history and short story than males. And among those three genres, essay was the highest score gotten by females because according to Keshavarz & Ashtarian (2008) females are more familiar with that genre. However, since recent research showed no significant relationship between genre familiarity and reading comprehension, it can be assumed that the superiority of females in essay is not because of their familiarity in genre. It can be one of factors affecting reading comprehension is topic familiarity since it is more strongly affecting reading comprehension than genre familiarity.

As same as with female group, topic familiarity also has more influence on reading comprehension than genre familiarity in male group. Al-Shumaimeri (2005) assumed that the male students' superiority in reading comprehension for their research is because of the genre of the text used was informative text. However, based on the result from recent result, the superiority of male students can be because the male students more familiar with the topic of the informative text than female students.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

According to the analysis and discussion, three conclusions can be drawn for answering the research problems.

First, topic familiarity has significant relationship to reading comprehension, whether it is for females or males group. It can help the students to

comprehend the text better if they are exposed to the topic they are familiar with. The more the students are familiar with the topic of the text, the better the students comprehend the text.

However, genre familiarity does not have significant relationship to reading comprehension. Its effect to reading comprehension is too small. Both genders obtain small coefficient correlation which only 0.101 for females, and 0.103 for males. Females group got negative correlation in genre familiarity. It means that the more the females familiar with text genre, the less they can comprehend the text.

Finally, topic familiarity has higher coefficient correlation than genre familiarity. It means the familiarity with topic is stronger in affecting reading comprehension than genre familiarity. It is no matter which gender the readers are, topic familiarity is still stronger in affecting reading comprehension. In this case, topic familiarity won over genre familiarity in affecting reading comprehension in general or for specifically female group and male group.

The best effort has been made for this research; however, the researcher still can meet weaknesses in the process. The first weakness is because of the imbalance number of females and males participants. Even if the participants are 157 participants, the male participants is still too much less than female participants. The male participants are only 34 males, but female participants are 123 females. The number of male participants needs to be increased for the future research to improve the validity of recent research.

The second limitation employs in this research is its instruments. There is still no standardized instrument for measuring topic familiarity and genre familiarity, so the researcher developed the instruments which are validated by the expert validator and trying out process. However, it cannot be avoided that the instruments are still questioned because of its standardization. The instruments are also questioned for their interference in each other. The instruments are still not strong enough to avoid the interference. The instrument to find topic familiarity still contains texts that have genre in it, and the instrument to find genre familiarity still contains texts that have topic in. As the solution for this problem, the developmental study is needed for creating the standardized instrument to measure topic familiarity and genre familiarity.

As the topic familiarity is stronger than genre familiarity in affecting reading comprehension on both genders, the teacher should use the strategy for pre-reading activity by brainstorming the topic of the

text to help the students comprehend the texts. The teacher should be careful in choosing the topic for reading assessment, make sure the topic should be familiar to all students and the topic should not be dominated by merely one gender. So, it is better to use neutral text for teaching or assessing reading comprehension. Moreover, it will be better if the neutral text also has a topic which is familiar to the students.

The teachers are also suggested to reduce their too-much-drilling in genre because it can give negative effect on female students and the knowledge of genre barely has effect on reading comprehension. The teachers are advised to avoid the overuse of teaching genre in teaching reading.

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