

Students' Perceptions of Reading Habits and Schemata in Reading Comprehension at a Bilingual School.

Abstract:

Reading habits and background knowledge play important roles in English reading comprehension, yet little is known about how bilingual secondary school students perceive these factors. This study investigated Grade 7 students' perceptions of their reading habits, schema use, and the relationship between these constructs at a bilingual school in Vietnam. Guided by Schema Theory, the Interactive Model of Reading, and the Extensive Reading Hypothesis, the study adopted an embedded mixed-methods design. Data were collected from 153 students through a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire and from 15 students through semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation, while qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis. The findings revealed that students generally held positive perceptions of both their reading habits ($M = 3.83$) and schema use ($M = 3.90$). Among the four schema types, cultural schemata received the lowest rating, indicating difficulties in understanding culturally embedded texts. A strong positive association was also found between reading habits and schema use ($r = .725, p < .001$). The findings highlight the importance of promoting regular reading and explicitly developing students' background knowledge, particularly cultural schemata, to enhance reading comprehension in bilingual classrooms.

Keywords: reading habits, schemata, reading comprehension, bilingual school, students' perception

1. Introduction

Reading comprehension is a fundamental skill in English language learning because it enables learners to acquire knowledge, participate in academic activities, and develop lifelong learning skills. In bilingual education, this skill is particularly important because students use English not only to learn the language but also to study other subjects. They are expected to understand different types of English texts, identify key ideas, and apply information across learning contexts. Grabe (2009) described reading as a complex process that involves the interaction between the text, the reader's language ability, and prior knowledge. Anderson (2008) argued that effective reading requires learners to use appropriate strategies to construct meaning from increasingly complex texts. Successful reading comprehension depends not only on language proficiency but also on the ability to connect new information with existing knowledge.

Two important factors that support reading comprehension are reading habits and schemata. Reading habits refer to how often, how extensively, and for what purposes students read. Regular reading helps learners develop vocabulary, become familiar with different text types, and expand their knowledge of the world. These experiences contribute to the development of schemata, which are the background knowledge readers use to understand new information. According to Anderson and Pearson (1984), readers rely on different types of schemata, including content, formal, cultural, and linguistic schemata, to interpret a text. When relevant schemata are activated, comprehension becomes easier. In contrast, limited background knowledge may prevent readers from fully understanding a text, especially in a second language.

Reading comprehension remains a challenge for many English learners in Vietnam. English instruction often emphasizes vocabulary learning and grammar rather than reading for meaning, which may limit students' opportunities to develop independent reading habits and deeper comprehension skills (Vu & Peters, 2021). In addition, many learners have limited access to diverse English reading materials, reducing their opportunities to build the background knowledge needed for higher-level comprehension (Day & Bamford, 1998; Krashen, 2004). As a result, limited vocabulary and insufficient prior knowledge remain common barriers to reading comprehension (Le & Nguyen, 2020; Pham, 2021).

These challenges are particularly relevant in bilingual schools. At WSSG, Grade 7 students follow both the Vietnamese national curriculum and an international curriculum based on the U.S. Common Core State Standards. In addition to developing language skills, students are expected to analyze ideas, make inferences, and understand texts from different cultural perspectives. These demands require both positive reading habits and effective use of schemata. However, previous studies have mainly examined reading habits and schema use separately, with little attention to how bilingual secondary students perceive the relationship between these two factors. Therefore, this study investigates Grade 7 students' perceptions of their reading habits and their use of schemata in English reading comprehension at WSSG, as well as the relationship between these two variables.

2. Literature review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Schema theory explains how readers use their existing knowledge to construct meaning from texts. Schemata are mental structures that store what a person knows about the world based on their past experiences (Rumelhart, 1980). People do not passively decode words when reading; they actively connect new information with what they already know to build meaning. Anderson and Pearson (1984) argued that comprehension occurs when readers can activate the right schemata and relate them to what they read. If appropriate schemata are missing, readers may struggle to interpret a text even when they understand the individual words. Carrell and Eisterhold (1983) extended this idea to second-language reading, identifying four main types of schemata: content schemata (topic knowledge), formal schemata (text structure knowledge), cultural schemata

(cultural values and social practices), and linguistic schemata (vocabulary, grammar, and sentence patterns).

The Interactive Model of Reading (Rumelhart, 1977) builds on schema theory by explaining how readers combine two types of processes during reading. Bottom-up processing involves working from the text itself. Readers decode letters, words, and sentences to build meaning step by step. Top-down processing works in the other direction. Readers use their background knowledge and expectations to predict and interpret meaning. Rumelhart (1977) argued that skilled readers do not rely on just one of these approaches. Instead, they move back and forth between the text and their prior knowledge at the same time, using each source of information to support the other. This model is especially relevant in bilingual school contexts, where students may have strong language knowledge in some areas but limited background knowledge in others, requiring them to balance both processes when reading English texts.

The Extensive Reading Hypothesis, developed by Day and Bamford (1998) and supported by Krashen (2004), argues that learners who read regularly and widely develop stronger language ability, vocabulary knowledge, and reading comprehension over time. Unlike intensive reading, which focuses on analyzing language in detail, extensive reading encourages students to read large amounts of text at a comfortable level, mainly for meaning and enjoyment. Day and Bamford (1998) emphasized that when students choose reading materials based on personal interest, they are more likely to read consistently. Research by Mol and Bus (2011) confirmed this, showing in a large-scale meta-analysis that greater print exposure was strongly linked to better vocabulary and reading outcomes across different age groups. This hypothesis connects directly to schema theory: the more students read across a variety of topics and genres, the more they build and strengthen all four types of schemata over time.

2.2 Reading Habits and Types of Schemata

Reading habits refer to the regular patterns of reading behavior that a person develops over time. This study focuses on four key components. Reading frequency describes how often and how long students read English texts, and Anderson et al. (1988) found that students who read independently every day developed significantly stronger vocabulary and comprehension than those who did not. Genre variety refers to the range of text types students read, including fiction, news articles, academic texts, and online content. Reading purpose describes the reasons behind reading, whether for pleasure, for information, or for school tasks, and Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) found that students with personally meaningful reading goals tend to read more widely and engage more deeply with texts. Finally, multicultural reading refers to engagement with texts from different cultural backgrounds, which helps learners build the cultural schemata that are essential for understanding English texts in bilingual contexts.

The four types of schemata each support a different aspect of reading comprehension. Content schemata help readers understand a text's topic by connecting new information with what they already know about a subject (Carrell, 1983). Formal

schemata allow readers to follow the structure and organization of a text, knowing how a news article or an argumentative essay is typically organized (Carrell, 1983). Cultural schemata help readers interpret cultural references, social practices, and values that are embedded in a text (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983). In bilingual school settings, cultural schemata are particularly difficult to develop because Vietnamese learners often read texts shaped by Western cultural traditions that are not part of their everyday experience. Linguistic schemata involve knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, and sentence patterns that allow readers to process language at the word and sentence level (Carrell, 1988). Together, all four types of schemata interact with reading habits to support effective reading comprehension.

2.3 Previous Studies

Several studies have found a positive relationship between reading habits and reading comprehension across different EFL contexts. Cho and Ma (2020) reported that elementary school students in South Korea with stronger reading habits also achieved higher comprehension scores. In Vietnam, Ho (2016) found that reading engagement was closely linked to academic performance and English proficiency among undergraduate students, and Pham (2021) confirmed a significant positive relationship between reading habits and comprehension performance at the university level. These findings suggest that the connection between reading habits and comprehension is consistent across different age groups and educational settings. However, most of these studies measured comprehension through test performance and did not explore how students themselves understand or describe their own reading habits.

Research on schemata has also shown consistent links between background knowledge activation and reading comprehension in L2 settings. Andreani et al. (2021) found that content, formal, and linguistic schemata all had significant positive effects on comprehension among Indonesian EFL university students. Bensalah and Gueroudj (2020) demonstrated that students who received cultural background information before reading performed better on comprehension tasks than those who did not. In Vietnam, Le and Nguyen (2020) showed that the K-W-L strategy, which activates prior knowledge before reading, improved comprehension among Grade 5 students. Vu and Peters (2022) also found that Vietnamese EFL learners who read more extensively developed stronger vocabulary knowledge over time, supporting the link between reading habits and linguistic schema development. Like the reading habits studies, most of this research focused on measuring outcomes rather than understanding how students perceive and use their background knowledge during reading.

Despite this growing body of research, several important gaps remain. First, reading habits and schemata have mostly been studied as separate factors, with few studies examining how the two may influence each other. Second, while research in Vietnamese EFL contexts is expanding, studies on bilingual lower-secondary school students remain very limited. Students in bilingual schools like WSSG work across two curricula: the Vietnamese MOET program and the U.S. Common Core State Standards

(CCSS), which create reading demands that differ from those in standard EFL classrooms. Third, and most importantly, very little research has asked students directly about how they perceive the role of reading habits and schemata in their own comprehension. Students' perceptions are worth studying because they shape reading motivation, strategy use, and willingness to read. By focusing on Grade 7 students' perceptions at a Vietnamese bilingual school, this study aims to address all three of these gaps.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed an embedded mixed-methods design to investigate Grade 7 students' perceptions of their reading habits and schema use in English reading comprehension within a bilingual school context. A mixed-methods approach was considered appropriate because it enabled the researchers to obtain both broad quantitative evidence and in-depth qualitative insights into students' reading experiences. Quantitative data served as the primary source of evidence by identifying overall patterns of students' perceptions, while qualitative interview data were embedded to explain and enrich the statistical findings. This complementary design allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of how students perceived the role of reading habits and different types of schemata in supporting reading comprehension.

3.2 Research Context and Participants

The study was conducted at Wellspring Saigon International Bilingual School (WSSG) in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. WSSG adopts a bilingual educational model in which students study both the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) curriculum and the U.S. Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Consequently, students are regularly exposed to a wide range of English academic texts that require not only linguistic competence but also sufficient background knowledge for effective comprehension.

A total of 153 Grade 7 students voluntarily participated in the questionnaire survey. Participants represented different classes within the same grade level and had studied English for several years before entering the bilingual program. To obtain richer insights into the quantitative findings, 15 students were subsequently selected for semi-structured interviews. The interview participants were chosen to represent diverse reading experiences and levels of engagement in English reading activities, thereby providing multiple perspectives on reading habits and schema use.

3.3 Research Instruments

Two research instruments were employed to collect the data: a structured questionnaire and semi-structured interviews.

The questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first section gathered participants' demographic information. The second section examined students' perceptions of their English reading habits, including reading frequency, genre variety, reading purposes, and multicultural reading experiences. The third section investigated students' perceived use of four types of schemata: content schemata, formal schemata, cultural schemata, and linguistic schemata. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The questionnaire was developed based on Schema Theory (Anderson & Pearson, 1984; Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983), the Interactive Model of Reading (Rumelhart, 1977), and previous studies on reading habits and extensive reading. Internal consistency was examined using Cronbach's Alpha, and all scales demonstrated satisfactory reliability, indicating that the instrument was appropriate for the present study.

To complement the survey findings, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 students. The interview protocol focused on students' reading practices, experiences using background knowledge while reading English texts, perceived challenges, and opinions regarding different types of schemata. This qualitative instrument enabled participants to elaborate on their questionnaire responses and provided richer explanations of the quantitative results.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was carried out during the second semester of the 2024–2025 academic year. After receiving approval from the school administration, the researchers explained the purpose of the study to both students and teachers. Participation was entirely voluntary, and students were informed that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential.

The questionnaire was administered during regular English classes and required approximately 15–20 minutes to complete. After the survey data had been collected and reviewed, 15 students were invited to participate in individual semi-structured interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 10–15 minutes and was conducted in a quiet environment within the school to ensure participants felt comfortable sharing their opinions. With participants' consent, the interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed for analysis.

3.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were calculated to examine students' perceptions of reading habits and schema use. Cronbach's Alpha coefficients were computed to assess the internal reliability of the questionnaire. Pearson correlation analysis was subsequently employed to examine the strength and direction of the association between students' reading habits and their perceived schema use. Statistical significance was determined at the .05 level.

Qualitative interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Interview transcripts were read repeatedly to identify meaningful units related to students' reading experiences and schema use. Similar responses were grouped into broader themes corresponding to the four schema types and reading habits. Representative quotations were selected to illustrate and support the quantitative findings, thereby enhancing the credibility and interpretability of the results.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to fundamental ethical principles throughout the research process. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from both the participating students and their parents or legal guardians prior to data collection. Participants were informed of the objectives of the study and their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. All collected data were treated confidentially, and no identifying information was reported. The data were used solely for academic research purposes, ensuring the privacy and anonymity of all participants.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. Students' Perceptions of Reading Habits

The reliability check for Q6 to Q10 showed a Cronbach's Alpha of .854, indicating good internal consistency. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for students' perceptions of their English reading habits. The overall mean was 3.83, suggesting that students generally held positive views toward reading English. However, the results also revealed a notable gap between students' awareness of the value of reading and their actual reading routine outside of class.

Q6 received the highest mean score ($M = 4.03$), with 46.4% agreeing and 32.0% strongly agreeing that reading English regularly improved their understanding of classroom texts. This result is understandable in the context of WSSG, where students are regularly required to read English texts across multiple subjects. By contrast, Q7 received the lowest mean score ($M = 3.58$). Only 34.6% agreed and 22.9% strongly agreed that they read English texts regularly at both school and at home. This shows that while most students recognized the academic benefits of reading, consistent independent reading had not yet become a stable habit for a significant number of them. This contrast was clearly

illustrated in the interviews. Some students described regular personal reading habits: "I read English texts every day, normally I read novels and story books." (S1). Others described reading only when a teacher required it: "I don't read English texts outside of school. I only read them because my teacher said so." (S7).

Q9, which focused on reading purpose, received the second-highest score ($M = 3.90$), with 75.2% of students agreeing or strongly agreeing that they read English for different purposes. This suggests that for many students, reading is not just for school assignments but also for pleasure, interest and information. Q10, which focused on cultural reading, also received a positive result ($M=3.88$), with 71.9% agreeing or strongly agreeing that reading English texts helped them understand different cultures. Q8 (genre variety) received a moderately high score ($M=3.7$), with 65.4% of students agreeing or strongly agreeing. However, interview responses showed that fiction and entertainment texts dominated. One student said, "I usually choose fantasy stories because they are interesting" (S3), while others mentioned novels, manga, and adventure stories. The data revealed a mismatch in reading choices: students mostly read for entertainment, which limits their experience with the diverse, academically challenging texts demanded by the bilingual curriculum.

These results are consistent with Ho (2016), who found that reading attitudes and habits were closely connected to academic engagement among Vietnamese undergraduate students. The findings also support Pham (2021), who reported that stronger reading habits were associated with better reading comprehension among Vietnamese EFL learners. The present study extends these findings into a bilingual lower-secondary school context, showing that even with greater English exposure through a dual curriculum, school-based exposure alone does not guarantee stable independent reading habits. Motivation and reading purpose play a central role in whether structured reading develops into a personal and consistent habit, which aligns with Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) and Day and Bamford (1998).

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Students' Perceptions of Reading Habits

Item	Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.	SD	D	U	A	SA
Q6	Reading English regularly improves my understanding of texts in class.	4.03	0.92	3.3%	1.3%	17.0%	46.4%	32.0%
Q7	I read English texts regularly both at school and at home.	3.58	1.13	5.9%	11.1%	25.5%	34.6%	22.9%

Q8	I read different types of English texts.	3.76	1.09	3.9%	9.8%	20.9%	36.6%	28.8%
Q9	I read English texts for different purposes.	3.90	0.99	3.9%	5.2%	15.7%	47.7%	27.5%
Q10	Reading English texts expands my understanding of different cultures.	3.88	0.95	3.3%	3.3%	21.6%	45.8%	26.1%
Overall	Students' perceptions of reading habits	3.83	0.81					

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296 **4.2. Students' Perceptions of Schemata Use**

297 The reliability check for Q11 to Q17 showed a Cronbach's Alpha of .899,
 298 indicating good internal consistency. The overall mean for schemata use was 3.90,
 299 suggesting that students generally agreed that background knowledge supported their
 300 reading comprehension. This finding is consistent with Schema Theory, which explains
 301 that readers understand texts by connecting new information with existing knowledge
 302 structures (Anderson & Pearson, 1984; Carrell, 1983). Table 2 presents the descriptive
 303 statistics for each type of schemata.

304 Content schemata received the highest mean score ($M = 3.96$). In Q11, 78.4% of
 305 students agreed or strongly agreed that they used topic knowledge to connect new
 306 information with what they already knew. In Q12, 79.0% agreed or strongly agreed that
 307 familiar topics helped them predict what a text would say about a familiar topic. This was
 308 clearly demonstrated in the interview responses. One student explained: "My background
 309 knowledge helps me understand the general idea of the text. Learning at school about
 310 water pollution allows me to understand more about a newspaper talking about plastic
 311 bags polluting the ocean" (S10). Another noted: "When reading English, schemata help
 312 me understand faster by connecting new information with what I already know" (S11).
 313 These responses suggest that when the topic of a text is familiar, students can process
 314 new information much more efficiently. This supports Carrell (1983), who argued that
 315 content schemata are especially effective in L2 reading because they help readers
 316 interpret new textual information through established knowledge frameworks.

317 Linguistic schemata ranked second ($M = 3.93$). Q17 received a notably high score
 318 ($M = 3.97$), with 79.0% of students agreeing or strongly agreeing that sentence patterns
 319 helped them guess word meanings. Q16 also received a strong result ($M = 3.89$), with

73.9% agreeing or strongly agreeing that grammar knowledge supported their reading comprehension. One student described using context clues actively: "I often guess words when I do not understand a new word while reading news at home. I guess the meaning while reading and then look it up after reading to expand my understanding" (S4). This finding supports Krashen (2004), who argued that reading builds language ability through meaningful exposure, and Vu and Peters (2022), who found that Vietnamese EFL learners developed vocabulary knowledge through extensive reading input.

Formal schemata ranked third ($M = 3.90$). In Q14, 75.8% of students agreed or strongly agreed that knowledge of text structure helped them follow a text and read more smoothly. In Q15, 74.5% agreed or strongly agreed that formal schemata helped them locate main ideas in paragraphs. One student described using structural knowledge during reading: "Scanning and skimming the content helps me understand the basic ideas of a text, and I can understand the text using prior knowledge" (S5). This connects with the Interactive Model of Reading (Rumelhart, 1977), which explains that readers combine textual information with prior knowledge, including knowledge of text structure to construct meaning. The slightly lower score of formal schemata compared to content and linguistic schemata may suggest that students found it easier to notice and describe topic and language knowledge than structural awareness, even when they were using formal schemata in practice.

Cultural schemata received the lowest mean score ($M = 3.74$). In Q13, only 67.3% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they used cultural schemata to connect English texts from different cultural contexts, and notably, 24.8% were unsure. This is the highest proportion of uncertain responses across all seven items in this section. Some students showed cultural awareness in familiar contexts: "Vietnamese students understand the meaning of lucky money during Tet" (S13). However, other students were less confident. One admitted: "I usually use only the formal or linguistic/content schemata for the reading, not a lot of cultural since I don't have that much background knowledge of culture" (S2). This finding aligns with Carrell and Eisterhold (1983), who argued that cultural schema failures arise from a lack of lived cultural experience rather than from weak language skills. It also aligns with Bensalah and Gueroudj (2020), who found that EFL learners needed explicit cultural background support before reading culturally specific texts. At WSSG, students regularly encounter English texts shaped by Western values, practices, and social references through the CCSS curriculum. Without teacher guidance, students may follow the surface meaning of these texts but miss the deeper cultural implications.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Students' Perceptions of Schemata Use

Item	Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.	SD	D	U	A	SA
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Q11	I use my content schemata to connect new information in a text with my prior knowledge.	3.95	0.90	2.6%	3.9%	15.0%	52.3%	26.1%
Q12	My content schemata help me predict what a text will say about a familiar topic.	3.97	0.83	2.0%	2.6%	16.3%	54.2%	24.8%
Q13	I use my cultural schemata to connect English texts from different cultural contexts.	3.74	0.92	3.3%	4.6%	24.8%	49.7%	17.6%
Q14	I use my formal schemata to understand how a text is structured, which fosters my reading flow.	3.92	0.85	2.0%	3.3%	19.0%	52.3%	23.5%
Q15	My formal schemata help me find main ideas in paragraphs or sections.	3.88	0.92	3.3%	3.3%	19.0%	51.0%	23.5%
Q16	I use my linguistic schemata about grammar knowledge to support my reading comprehension.	3.89	0.91	2.6%	3.9%	19.6%	49.7%	24.2%
Q17	My linguistic schemata help me guess word meanings from sentence patterns.	3.97	0.85	2.6%	2.0%	16.3%	54.2%	24.8%

Overall	Students' perceptions of schemata use	3.90	0.70
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4.3. Relationship Between Reading Habits and Schema Use

Pearson correlation analysis revealed strong positive relationships across all three variable pairs (see Table 3). The correlation between reading habits and schemata use was $r = .725$ ($p < .001$), between reading habits and the relationship scale was $r = .749$ ($p < .001$), and between schemata use and the relationship scale was $r = .785$ ($p < .001$). The overall mean for the relationship scale was 3.94 ($\alpha = .920$), indicating that students generally believed their reading habits supported the development of their schemata. It should be noted that these correlations indicate a strong relationship between the two constructs but do not confirm that one directly causes the other.

The strongest relationship was between genre variety and content schemata ($M = 4.04$). In Q18, 80.4% of students agreed or strongly agreed that reading frequently helped them build topic knowledge for exploring new subjects. In Q19, 59.5% agreed and 25.5% strongly agreed that reading different genres helped them link ideas across different subjects, the highest agreement rate in this section. Interview responses clearly supported this finding: "When I read a lot, it helps me improve my vocabulary skills and my schemata by enhancing my knowledge about a multitude of topics" (S1). Another student said: "It improves my background knowledge by feeding more information, therefore allowing me to better understand other English texts" (S8). This is consistent with Day and Bamford (1998), who argued that reading widely across different materials enriches background knowledge over time.

The second strongest relationship was between reading frequency and linguistic schemata ($M = 3.98$). In Q24, 79.7% of students agreed or strongly agreed that reading frequently helped them build vocabulary and infer word meanings from context. In Q25, 79.1% agreed or strongly agreed that regular reading helped them develop grammar knowledge for understanding sentence structures. One student described noticing these benefits directly: "Regular reading habits help me gain more vocabulary, knowledge, and understand English content faster" (S10). Another said: "When I read, I can infer the meanings of new vocabulary, and later, I use them in my writing" (S9). These results are consistent with Krashen (2004) and Vu and Peters (2022), who confirmed that reading exposure supports vocabulary and grammar development among Vietnamese EFL learners.

The third relationship was between reading purpose and formal schemata ($M = 3.95$). In Q23, 81.1% of students agreed or strongly agreed that regular reading helped them find key points in texts, the highest item percentage in this section. In Q22, 75.1% agreed or strongly agreed that reading different types of texts helped them understand how texts are organized. One student explained: "I can quickly identify the use and

purpose of a text, while also understanding its context and significance to real-life events" (S5). These responses suggest that when students read with a clear purpose, they become more familiar with how different text types work, which makes it easier to locate and organize information during reading.

The weakest relationship was between multicultural texts and cultural schemata ($M = 3.79$). In Q20, 22.9% of students were unsure whether reading multicultural texts helped them understand diverse English contexts, and in Q21, 24.2% were unsure whether this helped them understand cultural traditions in stories. These were the highest unsure proportions across all items in this section. This result partially diverges from Bensalah and Gueroudj (2020), who found that structured cultural pre-teaching significantly improved EFL learners' comprehension of culturally loaded texts. A key difference is that their study used explicit cultural instruction before reading, while the present study measured natural student perceptions without guided support. This suggests that simply exposing students to multicultural texts is not enough so that teachers need to actively help students recognize and interpret cultural references during and after reading.

Overall, the strong correlations across all three variable pairs confirm that reading habits and schema awareness tend to develop in parallel, reflecting the Interactive Model of Reading (Rumelhart, 1977), which predicts a reciprocal process in which reading activates schemata and stronger schemata make reading more efficient and rewarding. These findings extend prior research by Pham (2021) and Andreani et al. (2021), which connected reading habits and schemata to comprehension outcomes, by showing that this relationship is also present at the level of students' own perceptions. Students who saw themselves as regular and wide-ranging readers also tended to perceive themselves as more confident users of background knowledge. However, the pattern of associations across schema types confirms that bilingual reading instruction cannot treat all schemata equally. Content and linguistic schemata, which can be built through classroom learning and reading practice, were more accessible to students. Cultural schemata, which depend on lived cultural experience, remained the weakest area and require deliberate and structured pedagogical support beyond regular reading alone.

Table 3: Pearson Correlation Results

Relationship	Pearson r	p-value	Interpretation
Reading habits and perceived schemata use	.725	$p < .001$	Strong positive relationship
Reading habits and relationship scale	.749	$p < .001$	Strong positive relationship

Perceived schemata use and .785
relationship scale

$p < .001$

Strong positive relationship

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5. Conclusion

This study explored Grade 7 students' perceptions of their reading habits and schema use in English reading comprehension within a Vietnamese bilingual school context. The findings demonstrate that students generally held positive perceptions of both constructs and that stronger reading habits were closely associated with greater awareness and use of background knowledge during reading. Among the four types of schemata, cultural schemata emerged as the least developed, suggesting that students experienced greater difficulty interpreting culturally embedded information despite their regular exposure to English in a bilingual curriculum.

Beyond confirming the complementary roles of reading habits and schema awareness, this study contributes to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence from a bilingual lower-secondary setting, an educational context that has received limited scholarly attention. The findings extend Schema Theory and the Extensive Reading Hypothesis by highlighting that regular reading alone is insufficient to foster deep comprehension unless students are also supported in developing diverse forms of background knowledge, particularly cultural knowledge that cannot be acquired solely through language exposure.

From a pedagogical perspective, the study suggests that bilingual schools should move beyond encouraging reading quantity to implementing structured reading programs that integrate diverse genres, authentic multicultural texts, and explicit schema-building activities. Teachers should provide opportunities for students to activate prior knowledge, discuss cultural perspectives, and connect new information with their existing experiences to promote deeper comprehension and critical engagement with texts.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study was conducted at a single bilingual school and relied primarily on students' self-reported perceptions, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research could include learners from different bilingual or international school settings, employ longitudinal or experimental designs, and examine how schema-based instructional interventions influence actual reading comprehension performance. Such investigations would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how reading habits and schema development interact to support English literacy in bilingual education.

Overall, this study underscores that effective reading comprehension is not merely the result of linguistic competence but also the product of sustained reading engagement and well-developed background knowledge. Cultivating both dimensions should therefore become a central goal of bilingual English language education to equip students

with the skills needed to comprehend, interpret, and critically engage with increasingly complex texts.

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