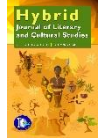




Influence of schema theory on reader-responses to Soyinka's *The Interpreters* (1965): A case of Kenyan university undergraduate students



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Abstract

This study investigated the effect of the story schema teaching model on Kenyan university undergraduate reader-response to Soyinka's *The Interpreters* (1965). Schema theory describes the interaction readers' background knowledge in reading tasks. Most researchers using schema theory have established that instruction of story grammar improves the reading comprehension of narratives, however, there is a dearth of studies that have investigated the effect of teaching strategy on the comprehension of psychological novels such as *The Interpreters*. A true experimental design which is the post-test only control group treatment with random assignment. The experimental group received experimental treatment: instruction on the story schema while the control did not. Three tests measured the dependent variable: a multiple-choice test story recall and story frame test of the selected passages from *The Interpreters*. One-way ANOVA tests show that the experimental groups were significantly better than the control group in all the three tests: story recall, the story-grammar, and multiple-choice questions. The story mapping theory can be adapted as a model for teaching narratives in order to enhance text comprehension by University undergraduate students.

Keywords: inference, inferential link, rhetorical structure, story mapping, schema activation model

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Public Interest Statement

Wole Soyinka's *Interpreters* (1965) is one of the texts that has been pushed to the periphery of literary criticism due to the claim that it is difficult. This study, however shows that schema theory could be effective in improving the level of text comprehension.

Introduction

The present paper is the result of an experiment conducted by Ayieko (2003) that investigated the effectiveness of the story grammar instruction approach as conceptualised within the Schema Activation Model in the comprehension of narrative. The contribution of formal schema which account for the rhetorical structure and text organizational principle of the novel *The Interpreters* by Wole Soyinka and its effect on comprehension has received very little or no attention. The present paper investigates empirically story mapping as schema building technique that can aid in narrative comprehension. According to schema theory, the correspondence between a reader's underlying knowledge structures which is the schemata and the textual material determines the extent of comprehension. Anderson, Reynolds, Schallert, and Goetz (1977) contend that the appropriate schemata guide the reader to make correct inferences, the readers ability to constitute the text grammar and comprehend the story is facilitated by the schema.

Critics who have analysed *The Interpreters* have paid very little or no attention at all to the stream-of-consciousness technique and interior monologue that give the novel its rhetorical structure and constitutes one its key text organisation principles. This has led some critics to dismiss the novel as lacking in structure. The plot of *The Interpreters* is chronologically non-linear but is composed of a series of intertwining mental vignettes that revolve around a group of young Nigerian professional. The scenes do not develop in an exactly chronological or linear order. The plot is marked by long and recurrent passages of dialogues and various scenes of action similar to the play form; it is also strongly marked by the 'inward perspective' through the use of the stream-of-consciousness device, interior monologue and flashbacks. The main source of difficulty in reading this novel is the inability of the reader to differentiate between the underlying events as narrated in the novel and the linguistic presentation of the events in the novel. Comprehending a lengthy text involves not just activating and instantiating specific schemata but also organising those schemata into metal models.

The novel does not follow the conventional of the story schema and presents a challenge to readers who do not have the requisite background knowledge of the, experiences and cultural situations presented by Wole Soyinka. There have been no empirical studies, to the best knowledge of the present writer, that investigate the story

mapping of Kenyan undergraduate readers' story schema on their reading responses to selected excerpts from *The Interpreters*. The readers' comprehension of a narrative can be configured as a varying series of schema or a fixed set of schemas. The plot of a story, for example, can be defined as an instance of a long-range schema that encompasses the entire narrative. The plot is not simply what is encoded 'there' in the text, but is realized as a result of the interphase of the bottom-up and top-down processes that are dependent on the schema for its realization.

Schema theory is premised on the fact the readers' past experience helps them to create mental framework that guides their interpretation and how they make sense of new experiences in both the world and the text. The meaning of a text is not within the text but rather it is the product of the interaction between the readers' knowledge about the world and text. Rumelhart defines schemata as the representation of knowledge at various levels starting from the ideological and cultural dimension of the meaning of a particular word to and the connotations attached to them as well as the general knowledge (p 41). Rumelhart and Ortony add the following:

Schemata are data structures for representing the generic concepts stored in memory. They exist for generalised underlying objects, situations, sequence of events, actions, and sequences of actions. A schema contains as part of its specifications, the network of interrelation that is believed to hold among the constituents of the concept in question (p. 101).

According Sharp rhetorical pattern is part of the macrostructure of a text and it contains the logical organization of the text which the writer has used to represent the intended meaning (111). There are five main rhetorical patterns that can be employed by a writer: sequence, cause-cluster, elaboration, circumstance and concession. There are formal schemata that represent these rhetorical structures such as the sequence schema, cause-cluster schema, elaboration schema, circumstances schema, and concession schema.

Literature review

The schema theoretic model of story comprehension is premised on the assumption that effective comprehension requires that the readers integrated their knowledge of the world with the linguistic material that they encounter. Carrell and Eisterhold reiterate Schema theory outlines the process of comprehension founded on the principle that there is an input-output mapping where all aspects of that schema output must have corresponding input information. There are two basic modes of information processing: bottom-up and top-down which result from schema. (557). Carrell and Eisterhold make

a further a distinction between a formal schema that represent the background knowledge of the formal, rhetorical organizational structures of different types of texts and content schema that represent the background knowledge of the content area of a text (560). Rumelhart and Ortony add that have following attributes:

- i) schemata have variables
- ii) schemata can embed one within another
- iii) schemata represent generic concepts which are characterised by variation in the different levels of abstraction
- iv) schemata represent knowledge rather than definition. (101)

Brewer and Lichtenstein argue that an adequate theory of narrative comprehension must distinguish between three different aspects: (a) theory of plan comprehension, (b) theory of narrative comprehension, and (c) theory of the story schema. (2) Plan comprehension is the interpretation of sequence of actions in terms of the intention of the agent in the narrative. The observations made by the readers of the agents are organised in terms of plan schemas comprising of hierarchically structured goal sub -goal relations. Plan understanding is critical for a theory of narrative and theory of stories, since the essential component of most narratives and most stories is a description of a sequence of human actions. Narrative theory of comprehension accounts for the ability of humans to understand narrative discourse. A theory of the story schema accounts for the individual's knowledge and enjoyment of the subclass of narrative discourses that are stories

Graesser and Wiemer-Hasting point out discourse psychologists define a situation model as the mental micro-world that is constructed by the reader of a story and that the explicit text does not sufficiently constrain and determine what information goes into the situation model (77). Generally, plots have multiple characters that are performing different actions in pursuit of varied goals; there are events which present obstacles to goals, conflicts between characters, clever methods of resolving conflicts, and consequences of these resolutions. In addition to the principal plot, the situation model includes explicit and inferred information that brings to life the plot and make it more entertaining. In most narrative discourse, the order of mentioning the propositions in the text-base is in synchrony with the chronological order of episodes in the situation model. When authors use asynchronic devices such flashbacks and flash-forwards, there are temporal discourse markers that signal deviations from the implicit chronological synchrony between the text-base and situation model. If the author does not signal this shift in time explicitly then the readers' situation model is disrupted.

Lehr (550) distinguishes a story grammar from a story schema by noting that a story schema is the mental representation that readers have of story part and their

relationships where the story grammar deals with the text. The story grammar is a system of rules that describes the constituent features of a narrative. The rules describe the story parts, arrangement of the parts and how they relate to each other. Cooper (270-271) conceptualises the story as comprising of different episodes, each consisting of a setting, characters, a problem, action and resolution of the problem. *The setting* is the place and time at which the story occurs. *The characters* are the people or animal or other entities that carry out the action. *The problem* is the situation around which the episode is organised. *The action* is what happens, or what the characters do as a result of the problem, which is called the *resolution*. A story has a *theme* which is the basic idea that the entire story revolves around. When the readers identify these elements, they are identifying the elements of the story grammar and comprehension is enhanced. The story schema, on the hand, deals with text as reconstructed in the mind of the readers.

Application of Schema Theory in literary narrative comprehension

There are three main phases in the process of teaching/learning process of reading in the following sequence: pre-reading, during-reading and post-reading activities. There is a dearth of studies have been on the application of the schema theory through the whole procedure using excerpts from novels. In light of this, the present writer planned a schema theory-based teaching Mode of English reading, which is a framework of pre-reading, during-reading and post-reading activities for classroom reading literary narrative comprehension teaching. This approach aims to increase the level of narrative comprehension reasonably and effectively at the university in Kenya.

The first phase is the pre-reading stage is a necessary phase, transforms the readers' mind from its initial passive state to the active state of mind that reads with purpose, motivation and anticipates new information in the text. Auerbach and Paxton (259) suggest the following nine pre-reading strategies of which are also a good indication of schema-theory-based pre-reading tasks/strategies. First activity is accessing the prior knowledge of the readers. Second, the readers write their way into reading by writing about their experiences, which are related to the topic. Third activity which is questioning requires both the teacher and the students who are the readers can ask questions based on the title. This type of questioning is a top-down processing activity. Questions can either be generated by the teacher or by the students and should be completed in advance of the reading and not post-reading. The fourth activity which is semantic mapping entails pre-teaching vocabulary probably requires that the words to be taught in semantically and topically related sets so that word meaning and background knowledge improve concurrently. The fifth activity is the making predictions based on previewing the text. The sixth activity is the identification the text structure which includes

identifying the setting, characters, a problem, action and resolution of the problem of the narrative. The seventh activity is skimming the text for general idea that it contains. The eighth activity is the reading the introduction and conclusion of the texts to get a general global picture of the text before the readers start the reading process. Finally, the readers write a summary of the article based on previewing. The pre-reading activity help to activate existing schema, build new schemas and provide the teacher with information about what the students know. Formal schemata are activated by advance organisers and overview that draw attention to the structure of the narrative. During the pre-reading phase, brainstorming is used to determine the students' prediction ability using previous knowledge and the previewed reading this is known as content schemata activation.

The second phase of the teaching / learning cycle is the actual reading process where the teacher should inculcate in the students the skill of making predictions of how different schemas work based on the students' experience and the text presented information. The prediction guides the students to detect the important information in the narrative and generate the inferences that they can be make as well as increasing the reading speed. The text generally does not contain all the information and authors leave out information and detail that they assume the readers can understand and retrieve from the context and co-text of the narrative. Most of the authorial intention is a matter of implicature which the readers are expected to calculate based on the context. This requires that the readers to generate inferences based on the information provided in the text. In conclusion, an effective reader should constantly check their understanding of message by making predictions, confirming predictions, making inferences, evaluating and reflecting. The readers make a number of inferential processes while reading such as synthesis of new information, expanding present knowledge, widening beliefs and updating misunderstandings of the text. The three main connections that readers make are: text to self, text to text and text to world.

The third phase is the post-reading activity. The post- reading can be dichotomized into two. The first aspect of post reading activity is what the teacher can do to help the student activate the appropriate schemas. The following questions from Cooper (382-384) were used to help the students to activate the appropriate schema:

- i) **Setting:** Where did the story happen? When did the story happen?
- ii) **Characters:** Who was the story about? Who are the people in the story? Who is the most important person in the story?
- iii) **Problem:** Did the people have a problem? What is the big problem that the story is about?

- iv) **Action:** What did the people do to solve the problem? What were the most important things that happened in the story?
- v) **Resolution:** How did the people solve the problem? How did the story end?
- vi) **Theme:** What lesson could we learn from the story?

Second, the teacher may ask the students to recollect and repeat in their own words the significant parts of the narrative. Finally, the teacher can offer the students an opportunity to respond to the reading in various ways through writing, debate, and dramatic play. The second aspect of post reading activities is the role of the students where the teacher offers some help to them as they evaluate and discuss the ideas encountered in the text. The students apply and extend the ideas in the narrative to other texts and real-life situations. They summarize what was read by retelling the main ideas. Finally, they discuss ideas for further reading

Problem Statement

A common challenge that confronts many readers is that despite that fact they may understand every word in the text; yet they still experience difficulties in making sense of the whole narrative and coming up with a clear global picture of the text world. One factor that can account for the failure in comprehension by the reader could be the fact that they did not activate the appropriate schemas related to the narrative text. To tackle this problem, schema theorists suggest that before reading any text the reader should out find if there extra textual materials, such as picture or topic of the passage that they need to access in order to activate the appropriate schemas that will facilitate comprehension. The present paper seeks to establish the effectiveness of using story mapping technique in teaching literary narrative comprehension and its effect on the reader-responses of university undergraduate students in Kenya. There have been suggestions that instruction on text structure may improve narrative comprehension but there is a dearth of empirical studies that have been conducted that this level of the education cycle to investigate literary narrative comprehension. The present paper hopes that by merging schema theory and reader-response theory a more pedagogically sound model of reading the Schema Activation Model (SAM) will be developed.

Research Objective

The study sought to investigate how Schema Activation Method (SAM) affected undergraduate students' score on the post-reading of Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters*, to ascertain whether the score of achievement of students taught through SAM was

statistically different from that of students taught through conventional teaching (CT) methods.

Research hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at a 0.05

- i) There is no statistically significant difference in scores of the undergraduate students between the group taught by SAM and those taught through the CT on the story recall test.
- ii) There is no statistically significant difference in scores of the undergraduate students between the group taught by SAM and those taught through the CT on the story grammar test
- iii) There is no statistically significant difference in scores of the undergraduate students between the group taught by SAM and those taught through the CT on the multiple-choice question test

Research Design and Methodology

The present study is an experimental post-test only control group treatment design with random assignment. Ayieko (34) points out that in this design there are two groups, one group receives the treatment: the SAM approach as well reading *The Interpreters*. The second group did not receive experimental treatment and were taught using the conventional method and read *The Interpreters*. There is no pre-measurement which is a measure of how the state of achievement would have been if there was no manipulation. Both measures are taken after the manipulation occurred. This design controls against the interaction of testing and treatment. The limitation of the design is that it suffers from limited external validity of the experimental finding.

Experimental group	R	X	O ₁
Control group	R		O ₂

Population

The population of the study is third and fourth year Bachelor of Arts (literature) students in two Kenyan public universities: Moi and Egerton and one private university UEA-Baraton. The total number of BA literature students in these three universities as at the time of the study in 2002 was 178 distributed as follows:

Table 1 Population of study

University	Year III	Year IV	Total
Moi	50	60	110
Egerton	15	11	26
UEA-Baraton	24	21	45
Total			178

Sample and sampling techniques

The unit of sampling was the university rather than individual undergraduate students because universities operate as intact groups. At the time of the study there were six state universities in Kenya and four chartered private universities. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select third and fourth year BA (literature students). Stratified random sampling technique was used in order to obtain a representative sample of the whole population with respect to gender. The assignment of students to either of the two treatment condition per university was done by simple random sampling technique. The year of study was not considered as a variable that would affect the result of the study significantly.

Sample Size

Sixty undergraduates from three universities: Egerton, Moi, UEA-Baraton participated in the study. Table 2 show the distribution of the subjects in the control and experimental groups per university.

Table 2 distribution of subjects in control and experimental group

University	Moi	Egerton	UEA-Baraton	
Control	10	10	10	
Experiment	10	10	10	
	20	20	20	60

Materials

The Interpreters by Wole Soyinka (1965) was the main narrative used in the present study. The undergraduate students had to read it as part of the present experiment since it was not part of regular syllabi in the respective universities that took part in the present research. The text under study is a novel consisting of eighteen chapters. The chapters can be further subdivided into episodes. The chronological dimension of the novel is quite short; the first seven chapters are memories and event which take place within twenty-

four hours. There are seven episodes in the entire novel (see appendix A for the story grammar of *The Interpreters*)

Procedures

The control group class was taught by the present researcher using the Conventional Teaching method that entailed the following steps:

- i) Pre-reading activity, pre-teaching of new words and expressions
- ii) Intensive reading; detailed questions for the students to answer; detailed explanation of the text step by step, analysing the sentence structures.
- iii) Extensive reading; questions about general context to check whether the students have understood the text or not;
- iv) Examination of vocabularies or exponents of grammar to check the students' performance.

The researcher taught the experimental group using the SAM approach and the control group using the CA approach for forty-five minutes during four weekend sessions since this was the time the students volunteered to be available for the study. The following three phases were used in the experimental group. First phase is the use of story maps to model the narrative comprehension process. During this phase the researcher explained to the readers the use and the function of Story Maps and displayed some templates to them. The meaning of each element of story map and how to complete the story map was elaborated. A set of question based on the story maps were generated to help the readers see the interrelated and interconnected nature of the narrative. The second phase of the story map technique is when the readers are led to identify independently the elements of the story. All the eight episodes in the novel *The Interpreters* were transformed into story maps through the generation of questions and appropriate blanks were given for the students in the experimental and control groups to write their answers in these blanks. The third phase which is the post-reading phase is the story grammar questioning used to help the students to activate the appropriate schema:

Setting	i)	Where did the story happen?
	ii)	When did the story happen
Characters	i)	Who was the story about?
	ii)	Who are the people in the story?
	iii)	Who is the most important person in the story?
Problem	i)	Did the people have a problem?
	ii)	What is the big problem that the story is about?
Action	i)	What did the people do to solve the problem?
	ii)	What were the most important things that happened in the story?
Resolution	i)	How did the people solve the problem?
	ii)	How did the story end?
Theme	i)	What lesson can we learn from the story

Data collection instruments and analysis procedure

The data of the study were gathered through two tests: first "*Textuality and Readability of Texts: Reader-Response Test*" a twenty-five multiple-choice question which had been constructed by the present writer, second was the story map which had the story frame. For the duration of ten weeks when the experimental treatment was on different tasks were completed where it was hoped that the objectives and skills which had been targeted to be taught were identified and the comprehension tests were developed in order to test the level of achievement. The Kuder Richardson 20 reliability coefficient of the "*Textuality and Readability of Texts: Reader-Response Test*" was calculated as 0.93. In this test composed of 50 multiple choice questions. The data of the study were analysed through software package SPSS 10.00 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). In order to understand the efficiency of Schema Activation Model post-test results were compared and ANOVA tests were conducted to see whether the differences were significant or not.

Results and Discussion

One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was used to analyse the effect of experimental treatment (SAM) on the scores of the two treatment groups on the three different tests that were administered to test the hypotheses of the present study.

Table 3 One Way ANOVA of Story Recall test score

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1737.53	1	108.59	19.78	0.5
Within Groups	230.64	58	5.49		
Total	1968.16	59			

The ANOVA results in table 3 indicate that there was a significant difference in the means of the two groups ($f(59) = 17.78, p > 0.05$) after the experimental treatment: schema activation for the story grammar. The null hypothesis (i) there is no statistically significant difference in scores of the undergraduate students between the group taught by SAM and those taught through the CT on the story recall test was therefore rejected. A comparison of the two groups of students taught using the two different approaches shows that the schema activation method cohort outperformed the group that was taught using the conventional method in the recall of stories. This confirms the prediction made in the literature review section of this work that schema activation improves narrative comprehension. The results show that schema have a strong causal relationship on the readers' recall of a story. Schema-driven processing is a top-down interpretation procedure that controls a selective search for incoming information that conforms to the expectations set up by the readers' schema.

Table 4 One way ANOVA of the Story Grammar test scores

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2890.70	1	180.67	13.48	0.5
Within Groups	562.69	58	13.48		
Total	3453.39	59			

The ANOVA results in table 4 indicate that there was a significant difference in the means of the two groups ($f(59) = 13.48, p > 0.05$) after the experimental treatment: schema activation for the story grammar. The null hypothesis (ii) there is no statistically significant difference in scores of the undergraduate students between the group taught by SAM and those taught through the CT on the story grammar test was therefore rejected. The use of story maps to generate the story grammar and activate the relevant schema accounted for the marked difference between the control group and experimental group. The readers in the experimental group were able to identify with greater accuracy the narrative story schemata in *The Interpreters* that included flashback, flash-forwards and

interior monologues that are made of two major categories: the setting (characters and story context) and the episode system of the story (initiating events, internal responses, plans, actions, consequences, and reactions). The story maps enabled the readers in the experimental group identify for the opening episode of *The Interpreters*. The present experiment used generic questions which required the readers to identify the character(s), goal, obstacles, outcome, and theme, as a framework to teach undergraduate readers to formulate questions that were specific to each literary narrative. Results in table 4 indicate that the procedure was effective in improving literary narrative comprehension of the readers, and that their scores could be attributable to increased ability to select and organize story events.

Table 5 One way ANOVA of the Multiple Choice Question score

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3360.02	1	3360.12	215.44	0.5
Within Groups	904.57	58	15.60		
Total	3453.39	59			

The ANOVA results in table 4 indicate that there was a significant difference in the means of the two groups ($f(59) = 215.44, p > 0.05$) after the experimental treatment: schema activation for the story grammar. The null hypothesis (iii) there is no statistically significant difference in scores of the undergraduate students between the group taught by SAM and those taught through the CT on the multiple choice question was therefore rejected. Multiple choice questions were established to be efficient means of activating the schema of the readers as the process literary texts. Multiple choice questions aided the experimental readers in locating and activating a schema that fits the narrative, while the control group readers find the text incomprehensible because they were unable to activate the appropriate schema. Multiple-choice exercises can be used to assess the readers' comprehension of the text. It is prudent to design multiple choice activities and tasks that will evaluate and monitor the integration of background knowledge into the reading process since these contribute to better reading comprehension. Two passages of about 200 words in length were extracted from episodes in the novel that involved a flashback, flash-forward, or interior monologue. Each could be given at least two distinct interpretations as relating to the setting, problem, action, theme, resolution and them. The preliminary pilot test indicated that each question was ambiguous between two

interpretations with two correct answers, one for each interpretation. One of the distractors was consistent with one of the expected interpretations, the other with the second interpretation. The experimental group responses included different responses from the control which reveal a treatment effect.

Conclusion

The SAM method which uses story maps enhances readers' comprehension of literary narratives and increases the readers' scores across three different reading tests. The method can be considered as one of those that can be applied in the teaching of literary narrative comprehension.

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