The Role of Prior Knowledge on Students' Performance in Comprehending Recount Text: A Case Study of Students at SMP Negeri 18 Kota Kupang.

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This study investigates the role of prior knowledge in enhancing students' comprehension of recount texts, focusing on eighth-grade learners at SMP Negeri 18 Kota Kupang. The research aims to identify the sources of students' prior knowledge and to explain how such knowledge influences their reading performance. Using a qualitative descriptive method, data were collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews involving 25 students. The findings reveal that students' prior knowledge originates from domain knowledge, including vocabulary familiarity, personal experiences, and topic preference, as well as ancillary knowledge from social interactions and media exposure. Students with stronger prior knowledge demonstrated better comprehension, particularly in recognizing vocabulary, identifying characters and chronological events, and making inferences. Conversely, students with limited prior knowledge struggled with unfamiliar vocabulary, grammatical structures (especially past tense), and understanding implied meanings. The study concludes that activating and enriching students' prior knowledge is crucial for improving reading comprehension. Teachers are encouraged to integrate pre-reading activities, contextual supports, and familiar themes to help students build connections between their background knowledge and the content of recount texts.
Keywords:	

1. Introduction

Reading comprehension is a fundamental skill in second language acquisition, enabling learners to access information, build knowledge, and develop critical thinking (Mustika, 2020). In the context of English language learning, comprehending texts, particularly recount texts, which retell past experiences in chronological order, requires students to connect new information with their existing knowledge (Ratmeilia, 2022). Prior knowledge, defined as the combination of a learner's pre-existing attitudes, experiences, and knowledge (Kujawa & Huske, 1995), serves as a cognitive foundation that facilitates deeper text understanding. According to Dochy and Alexander (1995), prior knowledge is dynamic and encompasses declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge, all of which interact during the reading process. Reading comprehension is strongly influenced by students' ability to connect new

information with what they already know. In the case of recount texts, prior knowledge plays a vital role in helping students understand past events more effectively. Prior knowledge, also known as background knowledge, is more than just an important component in helping students develop their comprehension of a subject, it also serves as a foundation for them to start learning the skills. Students' experiences with language and the outside world will dictate their ability to absorb the material, particularly when it comes in text form (Wijaya, 2014). According to Ratmeilia (2022), prior knowledge in recount text refers to the background information and experiences that students bring to the reading process, which can enhance their understanding and engagement with the text.

However, students often face challenges in comprehending recount texts due to limited vocabulary, unfamiliar topics, and difficulties with grammatical structures such as past tense and chronological markers (Kikas et al., 2021). This is especially evident in diverse classroom settings, such as at SMP Negeri 18 Kota Kupang, where students exhibit varying levels of English proficiency and background knowledge. Observations during teaching practice revealed that whil666e some students easily grasped the sequence of events and main ideas in recount texts, many struggled with unfamiliar vocabulary and implied meanings. This disparity underscores the need to investigate how prior knowledge influences reading comprehension and to identify the sources from which such knowledge is derived. Research highlights the significant role of prior knowledge in reading comprehension. Delahay and Lovett (2019) categorize prior knowledge into domain knowledge directly related to the topic, including vocabulary and experiences and ancillary knowledge, background knowledge from social and media exposure that supports comprehension indirectly. In recount texts, domain knowledge helps students identify characters, settings, and events, while ancillary knowledge enriches interpretation through cultural and personal connections.

Previous studies have explored related aspects of reading comprehension.Safitri (2023) identified vocabulary as the primary difficulty in reading comprehension among eighth-grade students, while Sandria (2020) emphasized the role of interest and prior knowledge in engaging with academic texts. Putri (2021) highlighted environmental factors, such as teaching methods and peer support, in motivating English learners. However, these studies often focus broadly on reading difficulties or motivational factors without specifically examining how prior knowledge functions in the comprehension of recount texts, a gap that this study aims to address. While existing research acknowledges the importance of prior knowledge, few studies have qualitatively explored its sources and direct influence on recount

text comprehension among junior high school students in Indonesia. Additionally, there is limited focus on how students with varying levels of prior knowledge navigate comprehension challenges. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining the specific sources of students' prior knowledge and its impact on their understanding of recount texts. This study aims to, first identify the sources of prior knowledge (both domain and ancillary) that students utilize to comprehend recount texts. Second analyze how prior knowledge influences students' comprehension, particularly in terms of vocabulary recognition, understanding of chronological events, and inferential reasoning. By addressing these aims, the study provides insights into how teachers can activate and integrate students' prior knowledge to enhance reading instruction and support learners with diverse linguistic backgrounds.

2. Research Method

The research employed a qualitative descriptive design, which was chosen to explore students' experiences, perceptions, and the natural learning processes that occur when they attempt to comprehend recount texts. This design aligns with the purpose of the study, namely to identify the sources of students' prior knowledge and to describe how such knowledge influences their reading comprehension. The qualitative descriptive approach allows the researcher to portray participants' responses in rich, contextualized detail without manipulating the learning environment. Through this design, the researcher was able to focus on the meanings students construct, the connections they form with the text, and the challenges they encounter, making it suitable for examining the real conditions experienced by learners in the classroom setting.

Data collection in this research involved two main instruments: questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire was distributed to 25 students of class 8A to gather information about their background knowledge related to vocabulary, personal experiences, topic familiarity, social interactions, and media exposure. The questionnaire items were arranged on a Likert scale, enabling the researcher to identify students' levels of agreement regarding different sources of prior knowledge. Meanwhile, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 8 purposively selected students representing high, medium, and low reading comprehension levels. These interviews explored in depth how students described their prior knowledge, how they used such knowledge during reading, and the difficulties they faced when the text contained unfamiliar vocabulary, grammatical structures, or topics. The data collection procedure included distributing the questionnaire, organizing responses into

themes, selecting a recount text aligned with students' interests, conducting a shared reading session, and finally carrying out the individual interviews.

The analysis of data followed qualitative analytical procedures suited to each instrument. Questionnaire responses were examined using descriptive qualitative analysis by grouping items into thematic categories, identifying dominant patterns, and interpreting students' tendencies regarding sources of prior knowledge. Meanwhile, interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which included transcribing the interviews verbatim, reading and familiarizing with the data, coding significant statements, grouping similar codes into broader themes, and interpreting findings in relation to the research questions. This analytical process enabled the researcher to identify how students activated their prior knowledge while reading, how it influenced their comprehension of characters, time sequence, events, grammar, and inferences, as well as the obstacles faced by students with limited prior knowledge.

3. Research Findings and Discussion

Research Findings

1. Sources of Prior knowledge

According to Delahay and Lovett (2019), students' understanding is influenced by two types of prior knowledge: domain knowledge and ancillary knowledge. Domain knowledge is directly related to the topic, including key facts and concepts that help readers build deeper comprehension and make logical connections. Ancillary knowledge, on the other hand, is general background knowledge, such as everyday experiences or cultural awareness, that is not directly tied to the topic but still supports understanding by helping readers interpret context and relate to the text.

1) Domain Knowledge

Domain knowledge is the background knowledge students bring to learning, and it strongly supports reading comprehension. In this study, three themes emerged: vocabulary understanding, experiences, and topic preference. Vocabulary helps students connect new words to what they already know, experiences provide meaningful context for understanding the text, and topic preference increases motivation and makes comprehension easier. Together, these themes show that stronger domain knowledge leads to more effective understanding of recount texts.

a.   Sources of Prior Knowledge in Vocabulary Understanding

Various vocabulary sources, such as media exposure, teacher explanations, familiar topics, and comparisons with Indonesian or regional languages, strengthen students' domain knowledge by helping them connect new words with what they already know. The richer these sources are, the easier it becomes for students to understand vocabulary and comprehend recount texts effectively.

Tabel 1. Students' sources of prior knowledge

No.	Statements	Options	Number of Responses	Percentage
1.	Technical terms (e.g., sports, music, or technology) are easier to understand if I have heard them before.	Strongly Agree	13	52%
		Agree	10	40%
		Disagree	2	8%
		Strongly Disagree	-	-
		Total	**25**	**100%**
2.	When I find new words in recount texts, I can guess their meaning because I have heard them in another context (film/music/social media).	Strongly Agree	13	52%
		Agree	10	40%
		Disagree	2	8%
		Strongly Disagree	-	-
		Total	**25**	**100%**
3.	When the teacher connects new words with daily life examples, I understand them faster.	Strongly Agree	18	72%
		Agree	7	28%
		Disagree	-	-
		Strongly Disagree	-	-
		Total	**25**	**100%**
5.	If the recount text topic is already familiar, the new vocabulary is easier to understand.	Strongly Agree	17	68%
		Agree	7	28%
		Disagree	-	-
		Strongly Disagree	17	68%
		Total	**25**	**100%**
9.	When reading recount texts, I connect new words with the knowledge I already have.	Strongly Agree	12	48%
		Agree	9	36%
		Disagree	4	16%
		Strongly Disagree	-	-
		Total	**25**	**100%**
10.	I compare new vocabulary with Indonesian/regional language to help understanding.	Strongly Agree	15	60%
		Agree	7	28%
		Disagree	2	8%
		Strongly Disagree	1	4%
		Total	**25**	**100%**

The data show that students' domain knowledge plays a significant role in understanding vocabulary in recount texts. Most students agreed that technical terms are easier to understand when they have seen them before, and they can guess new words through contexts such as films, music, or social media. A large majority also stated that they learn new vocabulary

faster when teachers use real-life examples, highlighting the importance of teacher support. Topic familiarity further helped students learn new words, and many reported connecting new vocabulary with what they already know. Finally, most students found that comparing English words with Indonesian or regional languages made understanding easier.

b.   Sources of Prior Knowledge in Experience

Experiences strengthen students' domain knowledge by providing meaningful context from daily life, school activities, and outside-school exposure. Experiences such as reading beyond school, hearing everyday stories, or encountering similar events help students connect new information with what they already know, making vocabulary and text comprehension easier. The supporting data can be seen in the following table.

Tabel 2. Students' sources of experience

No.	Statements	Options	Number of Responses	Percentage
8.	My knowledge from outside school helps me understand recount texts.	Strongly Agree	10	40%
		Agree	10	40%
		Disagree	4	16%
		Strongly Disagree	1	4%
		Total	**25**	**100%**
12.	I gain knowledge from things I read outside school.	Strongly Agree	18	72%
		Agree	3	12%
		Disagree	3	12%
		Strongly Disagree	-	-
		Total	**25**	**100%**
14.	The more I read or listen to everyday life stories, the easier it is to understand recount texts.	Strongly Agree	16	64%
		Agree	6	24%
		Disagree	1	4%
		Strongly Disagree	2	8%
		Total	**25**	**100%**
15.	I understand recount texts more easily if I have experienced something similar.	Strongly Agree	18	72%
		Agree	4	16%
		Disagree	3	12%
		Strongly Disagree	-	-
		Total	**25**	**100%**
16.	I enjoy reading recount texts more if the topic is something I have experienced.	Strongly Agree	15	60%
		Agree	8	32%
		Disagree	1	4%
		Strongly Disagree	1	4%
		Total	**25**	**100%**
17.	Thinking about what I already know before reading helps me understand better.	Strongly Agree	12	48%
		Agree	10	40%
		Disagree	1	4%
		Strongly Disagree	2	8%
		Total	**25**	**100%**

The data show that experiences outside the classroom strongly support students' understanding of recount texts. Most students agreed that outside-school knowledge helps them comprehend what they read, and that reading beyond school provides useful input for learning. Daily exposure such as hearing everyday stories also makes recount texts easier to

understand. Personal experiences play a major role, as students find it easier and more enjoyable to read recount texts when the topics relate to their own lives. Students also reported that recalling what they already know before reading helps them understand the text better.

c.   Sources of Prior Knowledge in Topic Preference

Topic preference strengthens students' domain knowledge by increasing motivation and focus when reading text, they find interesting or familiar. When students enjoy or have experienced the topic, they connect new information more easily, making vocabulary and overall comprehension clearer. The supporting data can be seen in the following table.

Tabel 3. Topic preference

No.	Statements	Options	Number of Responses	Percentage
6.	Reading recount texts with topics I like helps me learn new vocabulary more easily.	Strongly Agree	16	64%
		Agree	8	32%
		Disagree	-	-
		Strongly Disagree	1	4%
		Total	**25**	**100%**

Based on the table, students' prior knowledge largely comes from their topic preferences, which strongly support their vocabulary learning in recount texts. Most students agreed that reading topics they like helps them learn new vocabulary more easily, while negative responses were very minimal.

2)   Ancillary Knowledge

Ancillary knowledge refers to general background information that supports reading comprehension. This includes social and media sources, such as conversations, TV, films, music, and online content, that provide extra language input. These sources help enrich students' understanding and make it easier for them to connect with recount texts.

Tabel 4. Social and media sources

No.	Statements	Options	Number of Responses	Percentage
4.	I often get stories or experiences from others through books, social media, or films.	Strongly Agree	18	72%
		Agree	6	24%
		Disagree	1	4%
		Strongly Disagree	-	-
		Total	**25**	**100%**
11.	I often hear stories from family or friends.	Strongly Agree	17	68%
		Agree	8	32%
		Disagree	-	-
		Strongly Disagree	-	-
		Total	**25**	**100%**
13.	I usually connect texts I read at school with things I see on social media.	Strongly Agree	14	56%
		Agree	7	28%
		Disagree	3	12%
		Strongly Disagree	1	4%
		Total	**25**	**100%**

Based on the table, students' prior knowledge mostly comes from social and media exposure, which acts as ancillary knowledge that strongly supports their reading comprehension. Most students agreed that they often get stories from books, films, or social media, and also hear stories from family or friends. This shows that both media and social interactions provide frequent narrative input that helps students build vocabulary, understand text structures, and relate recount texts to real-life experiences. Students also tend to connect school readings with content they see online, making it easier for them to understand recount texts through familiar and relatable contexts.

2. The Influence of Prior Knowledge

Based on the research, there are two main points that the researcher focused on in explaining the influence of students' prior knowledge, namely reading comprehension and the challenges faced by students with limited prior knowledge. This is based on the results of interviews conducted by the researcher with 8 students in grade 8A at SMP Negeri 18 Kota Kupang to obtain the validity of their reading comprehension of recount texts as well as to identify the challenges they experienced when having limited prior knowledge and the strategies they used to overcome those challenges.

1. Prior Knowledge in Reading Comprehension

Prior knowledge plays a crucial role in students' reading comprehension because it serves as the foundation for understanding new information. When students activate what they already know, such as vocabulary, concepts, or past experiences, they can more easily

interpret the meaning of a text. The richer and more organized their prior knowledge is, the deeper and more effective their comprehension becomes.

1. Character, Times and Events

Based on the interviews conducted during the research, the findings show that prior knowledge plays a significant role in supporting students' comprehension of recount texts. Students reported that when they already understand certain vocabulary or are familiar with the topic of the story, they can more easily identify the characters, setting, and sequence of events. Prior knowledge also helps them interpret the emotions of the characters, follow the storyline more clearly, and understand the cause-and-effect relationships within the text. In addition, familiarity with the topic, such as stories related to their interests or everyday experiences allows students to connect new information with what they already know, making it easier for them to predict events and grasp the message conveyed in the text.

2. Syntactic Structure

Based on the interviews conducted during the research, the findings indicate that students' reading comprehension in terms of syntactic structure is strongly influenced by their prior knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. Students explained that understanding recount texts becomes challenging when they are not familiar with English sentence patterns, such as correct word order or the use of past tense verbs, which are essential features of recount texts. Limited knowledge of these structures often makes it difficult for them to follow the sequence of events or understand the meaning of more complex sentences. The interviews also reveal that vocabulary knowledge gained both inside and outside the classroom contributes significantly to comprehension. When students already know many words, they can understand sentences more easily without constantly relying on a dictionary. Even when their vocabulary is limited, it still helps them identify the main idea of the text and grasp the overall message.

3. Inferences

Based on the interviews conducted during the research, the findings show that students' ability to make inferences in reading comprehension is strongly supported by their prior knowledge. When information in a text is not stated explicitly, students rely on what they already know from their experiences, exposure to media, and interactions in daily life to interpret implied meanings. Many students shared that their knowledge of vocabulary related to school, sports, and everyday expressions comes from watching television, browsing social media, playing online games, and viewing sports content on platforms like YouTube and

TikTok. These familiar words and contexts help them connect ideas, predict events, and understand characters' actions or motives even when the text does not directly explain them. The interviews also revealed that repeated exposure to English terms in entertainment media strengthens students' understanding of meaning and usage, making it easier for them to infer the message of a sentence or situation.

2. Challenges Faced by Students with Limited Prior Knowledge

Based on the interviews conducted during the research, the findings reveal that students with limited prior knowledge face significant challenges in comprehending recount texts. Many students explained that encountering unfamiliar vocabulary makes it difficult for them to understand the meaning of sentences or follow the sequence of events in a story. When they lack background knowledge related to the topic, they are unable to make connections between ideas or interpret new information, which results in a breakdown of comprehension. The interviews also showed that limited understanding of grammatical structures, such as word order and the use of past tense, which is essential in recount texts, further complicates their ability to make sense of the text. These gaps in vocabulary, topic familiarity, and grammatical knowledge prevent students from inferring meaning, recognizing the timeline of events, and following the storyline effectively. To cope with these difficulties, students frequently seek explanations from the teacher, and some rely on dictionaries to look up unfamiliar words. Exposure to English through media such as television, YouTube, social media, and games also provides partial support, as it helps them recognize certain words or phrases, enabling at least a basic level of understanding.

Overall, findings show that domain knowledge, especially topic familiarity and vocabulary, is the most influential factor in helping students understand recount texts. Ancillary knowledge from media and social interactions provides additional support. Strengthening students' domain knowledge through varied reading materials and real-life learning experiences can significantly improve their comprehension of recount texts.

Discussion

The findings reveal that students' prior knowledge comes from multiple sources, including vocabulary, personal experiences, topic preference, and exposure to social and media environments. These findings support the theoretical distinction between domain knowledge and ancillary knowledge as proposed by Delahay and Lovett (2019). Domain knowledge, which includes vocabulary, experiences, and familiarity with the topic, emerged

as the most dominant and influential source in helping students comprehend recount texts. This aligns with Kujawa and Huske (1995), who state that prior knowledge is an essential entry point for instruction because it supports comprehension and facilitates the understanding of new information. Consistent with Ngabut (2015), who explains that reading comprehension involves constructing meaning from the text, the results show that students with richer prior knowledge are better able to recognize vocabulary, follow the chronological flow, and connect textual ideas with personal experiences, leading to deeper comprehension.

Conversely, students with limited prior knowledge face significant challenges, particularly in understanding unfamiliar vocabulary, following the sequence of events, and interpreting implied meanings. Interview responses indicate that students often cannot comprehend recount texts when the topic is unfamiliar or when they encounter too many new words. These findings correspond with Kikas et al. (2021), who emphasize that limited prior knowledge can lead to misinterpretation of information, cognitive overload, and difficulty making connections, all of which hinder comprehension. To cope with these difficulties, students rely heavily on teacher explanations, dictionaries, and prior exposure to English through media, which helps them recognize certain words and partially understand the text. Overall, the discussion highlights that activating and strengthening students' prior knowledge is crucial for improving their ability to comprehend recount texts effectively.

4. Conclusion

The results of this research show that students' prior knowledge comes from diverse sources and significantly affects their ability to comprehend recount texts. The first finding concerns the sources of prior knowledge. Students build their understanding through domain knowledge and ancillary knowledge. Domain knowledge includes vocabulary understanding, personal experiences, and topic preference, which are gained through school learning, reading, and real-life experiences. Ancillary knowledge, on the other hand, comes from social interaction and exposure to media such as television, films, social media, and games. These two types of knowledge complement each other, with domain knowledge forming the main foundation for comprehension and ancillary knowledge providing additional context and emotional connection to the text.

The second finding relates to how prior knowledge influences students' comprehension of recount texts. Students with rich prior knowledge can recognize vocabulary more easily,

understand the sequence of events, identify characters and settings, and make logical inferences about implied meanings. Their familiarity with topics and experiences helps them connect ideas and interpret the text more effectively. Meanwhile, students with limited prior knowledge struggle with unfamiliar words, grammatical structures, and understanding chronological events, which often causes confusion and cognitive overload. However, prior exposure to English through media and teacher assistance helps them overcome some of these challenges.

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