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## Pakistani Advanced EFL Learners' Perceptions of Role of Pakistani English Short Stories in Increasing Motivation and Interest in Reading Classroom

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### Abstract

*This research was conducted to study the effectiveness of Pakistani English short stories to increase the level of interest and motivation of the students in reading class. The first part of this study was experimental research that found the positive effect of indigenous English literature on students' interest and motivation in reading classrooms. This second part is based on the students' perceptions about using Pakistani short stories in the reading classroom. The advanced EFL students constituted the population of this study. The study revealed that the students found the reading lessons based on Pakistani English short stories much more effective as compared to the ones based on foreign literature as the former was easy to understand and relate to, and increased the students' motivation level. The study recommends including indigenously produced English literature in the Pakistani curriculum.*

**Key Words:** Indigenous Literature, Interest, Motivation, Reading Comprehension, Foreign Literature

### Introduction

To enhance the effectiveness of lessons in a language classroom, teachers need to reflect on their teaching practices and adjust their teaching techniques so that their classes are interesting, effective, and engaging, and their students stay motivated to learn their lessons and the element of boredom is cut off to a reasonable extent. The lack of students' interest in language classrooms may be due to routine teaching practices or boring lesson content which may not be of interest to the learners. Therefore, teachers must base their lessons on content that is interesting for the learners so that they participate in the lesson fully and their participation makes their learning of language fun and interesting.

Language is a combination of various skills, and reading is an important skill as it is one of the two sources of language input, the second being listening. In the Pakistani context where English is learnt by the learners as a foreign language, reading is an important skill as the students get exposure to the target language through reading. For the advanced learners of English, who are self-motivated and take up English language studies to either equip themselves with essential English language skills to pursue their higher educations or to excel in their respective professions, reading is an essential skill. Reading skills are increasingly becoming the centre of attention in today's age of online interaction where emails, chatting on social media sites and so on are so much in vogue that most of the time we find

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ourselves more engaged in reading and writing than in speaking or listening. Hence our social lives also depend to a great extent on reading skills.

Reading skills of Pakistani EFL learners are weak mainly due to the reason that most of the subjects they have studied before taking up a specialized language course are in Urdu or in hybrid form, and when faced with English reading, they face difficulty and as a result, their progress in education or job is hampered considerably. These difficulties can be effectively overcome by applying innovative strategies such as the use of local literature, and the demotivation resulting from the difficulties they otherwise face can be overcome. Reading skills have an important role to play in the learners' educational achievement, be at beginner level or advanced level. Without good reading skills, learners of English would always be lagging behind in their studies as a lot of focus in the curriculums in traditional setups such as Pakistanis is on reading comprehension, even the entry tests of most of the programmes seem to be focusing on the entrants' reading comprehension. Keeping this scenario in mind, it is of utmost value to pay attention to reading skills and think of applying techniques and strategies that are different from the routine reading tasks and are based on more interesting texts than the ones which are normally part of school syllabi. Pakistani curriculum generally includes reading lessons based on foreign text, and the reason for the selection of these texts is the widespread belief that to learn a language, the learners must be given exposure to the target culture as well. Whereas this approach might have certain wisdom in it, it also has the drawback as the students start developing a feeling of alienation and start feeling bored due to the fact that the themes discussed in the foreign text are culturally alien to them, and they have little interest in those themes and culturally located contexts. Noticing this feeling of boredom which is a result of exposure to texts which have little relevance to the local context, we have realized that introduction of local literature could be an effective strategy to engage the learners in reading lessons and increase the level of their motivation, as it is through these texts that the feeling of alienation could be countered and learners' motivation in reading lessons could be increased. Good comprehension is not only important in

success in education, but also in broader learning and employment. [Oakhill, Cain and Elbro \(2015\)](#) opine that reading consists of two components: "Word reading (or decoding) refers to the ability to read single words out of context. Language comprehension refers to our ability to understand words, sentences, and text." (p. 02). They further explain that reading ability is not the sum of these two components but the product. That is, "Reading=Word Reading×Language Comprehension (R=WR×LC)" (p.03). By this, they mean that if one of these two components is zero, for example, if either word-reading or language comprehension is zero, the learners' ability to read will be considered zero. Language comprehension normally precedes word reading, but without it, word decoding is not going to work effectively. Till the time a child is able to read, he/she has already developed reading comprehension, so, in order for good reading to develop, language comprehension ability is almost a pre-requisite.

As far as language comprehension is concerned, the first step, it might deal with spoken language as the first step for a child is to engage in oral communication when he/she tries to make sense of what is said to him/her. When the child grows up and is faced with the challenge of reading, the issue of "de-contextualisation" often surfaces which makes reading difficult for the reader. In the case of spoken language, the speaker and the listener share the context in which the communication is happening, but in the case of written language, the writer and the reader do not share a context, and that makes understanding of the encoded message a bit of a challenge for the reader. It is this challenge that this study helps to minimize by introducing the text in the classroom in which the writer, or the encoder of the message, and the reader, or the decoder of the message, share cultural context which makes it easy for the reader to comprehend the text as well as take interest in the ideas discussed in that text since they are not remote or culturally alien as the ideas presented in a foreign text would be. In other words, not only the physical but also cultural background plays an important role in reading comprehension. The unfamiliarity of the learner with the culture in which a text is written hampers communication. If we consider that text contains meanings that are

there for all readers to interpret equally, then reading in a foreign culture may not be a problem, but if we consider reading an interactive process in which the reader has an active role in the process of meaning-making, then we come to realize that lack of background information about the text negatively affects comprehension. Reading efficiency can be explained more by what he/she brings to the process of meaning-making than by the meaning present in the text. The schema present in the readers' minds enables them to form expectations and make predictions about the things they come across in their life. With the help of this schema, which is a set of ideas, beliefs and so on, we make sense of the new information that our mind receives in different forms, i.e. oral or written input. The teachers in the ESL/ EFL context are often required to activate that schema to make better sense of the language they come across when encountering a second or foreign language. In view of the fact that different countries have their own Englishes, it is inevitable that the texts produced in different cultures carry their own colour as far as ideas, thoughts, themes, and contexts discussed in these texts are concerned. Keeping this point in mind, one comes to think which text would be better for the learner; the one that has references and allusions to an unknown/alien culture or the one that has allusions to one's native culture? The answer obviously is going to be in favour of the second option as it gives the teacher an edge to easily engage the learners in the discussion about culturally familiar themes and achieve the target of developing their reading comprehension.

The traditional Pakistani context does not seem to care much about this aspect as most of the reading texts on which lessons are based are taken from foreign cultures and very little effort is made to introduce the texts indigenously produced by the writers of Pakistani Origin, who are in a considerable number. Enough literature has been produced to emphasize the need of using literature in the language classroom. It has linguistic benefits and is also expected to raise the motivation level of the students in an EFL / ESL classroom. Indigenous literature has a twofold advantage; It can be used to teach an indigenous variety of languages as well as connects the learners to people who are not alien, are familiar with them, are like themselves, face similar

issues as the learners themselves and talk in a closer manner to their own way of talking. All these benefits make a compelling case for the use of indigenous literature in a foreign language classroom.

To highlight the possibility of using local literature in the language classroom and to see its effectiveness in removing boredom from the classroom, this study introduced lessons based on stories written by Pakistani English writers. This study is conducted in two phases; the first part is an experimental one that aimed to highlight the effectiveness of local literature in English language classes to develop reading skills, and the second part consists of students' perceptions about such an approach in the language classroom. The results of the first part have been published in [Malik, Khan & Shams \(2019\)](#), whereas the results of the second part will be presented in the present study.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The traditional Pakistani classroom makes use of texts produced by British or American writers in which the cultural issues discussed as well as settings are usually alien to the students. As schema theory puts it, the learners' reading comprehension is higher when they are studying about their native culture as compared to reading about a foreign culture. The reader who has background knowledge about the text that he/she engages with will be in a better position to understand it as compared to the one who has none. Keeping in mind the Pakistani Educational system, advanced EFL learners have developed their basic linguistic skills in the initial stage but at the advanced stage, when they are faced with foreign texts, they often lack the cultural background knowledge required to easily comprehend British or American texts. It is very much likely that the introduction of Pakistani literature to such students will positively affect their development of all language skills, particularly reading.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of the study is to investigate the effectiveness of using Pakistani short stories for improving the reading skills of students at an advanced level. It will be further broken down into the following subsidiary objectives:

- (i) To understand the significance of Pakistani short stories for increasing the motivation and interest of the students in the reading classroom.
- (ii) To explore the effectiveness of indigenous literature and cultural background knowledge in facilitating the comprehension of second language texts.

### Research Question

This research has been conducted with the aim to explore the following research questions:

1. What role do Pakistani short stories play in increasing the motivation and interest of the students in reading English in class?
2. How do indigenous literature and background knowledge facilitate comprehension of the second language texts?

### Significance of Research

This study is significant as it explores whether the use of indigenous literature, to be specific, short stories are considered a useful strategy by advanced English language learners to improve their reading skills. It draws upon the learners' responses based on their experience to go through the experiment in which short stories were used to teach reading skills in the class. After having gone through the experiment, they are able to reflect on that experiment and are able to comment on the effectiveness of short stories in their reading class or otherwise. This research informs us about how indigenous literature and cultural background knowledge facilitate the development of reading skills as compared to foreign texts about which the learners do not have any cultural information. The learners' responses to the questions asked in the survey are likely to enlighten Pakistani EFL teachers about effective strategies to improve their students' reading skills. They are also likely to inform other stakeholders such as syllabus designers/writers about areas in which improvements can be brought to the Pakistani curriculum, and about techniques that can be adopted to improve the teaching-learning situation in the country with regard to the English language. In highlighting the effectiveness of local literature, this research also introduced local literature to readers

who may not be familiar with versatile Pakistani fiction writers and the pedagogical scope that the literature produced by them entails.

### Delimitation of the Study

The study is delimited to a group of students enrolled in the Advanced Diploma in English at the National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad. These students have studied English as a subject throughout their schools and colleges, and here at the university, they are studying English as a language.

### Literature Review

#### Reading and Literacy

Reading is essentially situated in sociocultural and educational contexts where the teachers' aim is to improve literacy. [Urquhart and Weir \(1998\)](#) note that "the teacher of reading is in the business of attempting to improve literacy" (p. 1). Literacy, to which reading is central, according to [Urquhart & Weir \(2009: 03\)](#), does not only entail cognitive abilities "but also knowledge of sociocultural structures and ideologies". They further cite Brandt (1990) who opines that "Literacy is "a part of the highest human impulse to think and rethink experience in place" (p. 03). Literacy is considered to go beyond writing and reading and maybe a social event in which literacy practices are 'done' or performed. Furthermore, [Barton \(2007\)](#) suggests that literacy practices refer to "common patterns in using reading and writing in a particular situation. People bring their cultural knowledge to an activity" (p. 36). What people do with their knowledge of *literacy practices* can be referred to as *literacy events*. Literacy practices are essentially socially organized events. Being literate means acquiring knowledge of how textual conventions and contexts of use shape one another. Being purpose-sensitive, literacy draws on cognitive abilities, knowledge of various genres and even knowledge of various cultures. The texts involved in reading cannot be seen as detached from culture. Hence reading must also take account of culture as well as social practices in order to promote effective literacy.

### **Literary Text and Reading in L2**

Urquhart and Weir (1998), while summing up the studies by Aebersold & Field, 1997; Carter & Long, 1987, 1991; [Collie & Slater, 1987](#); Gajdusek, 1988; Gajdusek & van Dommelen, 1993; Heath, 1996; [Lazar, 1993](#); Spack, 1985 remark that 'Working with literature in L2 instruction results in a number of favourable outcomes' (p. 243). Literature, according to them, might include "short and full-length works of fiction, poetry, and drama, regardless of a particular work's popularity with readers or stature in the eyes of literary critics and scholars" (p. 244). They cite Lazar (1993) who argued that a definition of literature that is useful for teachers must "go beyond the traditional literary canon to include contemporary works [that] recognize that the English language is no longer the preserve of a few nations, but is now used globally" (p. 5). For Lazar, under such a broad definition, Sherlock Holmes or Star Wars novel will be considered as literary as any other works, and the literary works in English 'set and written in non-Western, non-Inner Circle societies would also be appropriate choices' (Kachru, 1992, as cited in Urquhart and Weir, 1998. p. 244). Critical acclaim of a literary text or canonical status is not our chief concern when we are talking about using literary texts in L2 literacy education.

L2 literature needs to be incorporated into the curriculum in the courses which target L2 teaching, not the ones aiming to cover the literary content. The use of literature may be different in different settings. In some cases, the literary content may be a part of the course, whereas, in others, some L2 learners may be a part of mainstream English courses with teachers knowing their specific needs, whereas, in yet others, there may be EFL learners who read literature as well as language. Literary texts offer a legitimate option in classes where analysis, as well as composition of literary texts, is carried out as a class activity.

Different literary genres have different characteristics. As explained by [Urquhart and Weir \(1998: 245\)](#) in their example of a poem and an essay, a poem might have rhyme, meter, repetition, antiquated language and metaphor, whereas an essay might contain idiomatic expressions, requiring cultural knowledge, no rhyme, and has a relatively simple syntax. Literary language, however, cannot be

easily identified and defined as the language of specific fields such as law or medicine, as the former 'feeds creatively one very possible style and register—it has become the one form of discourse in which any use of language is permissible' ([Lazar, 1993. p. 6](#)). Literary language might have certain aspects which may be present in other text types also, but in literature, "they combine to form a highly unified and consistent effect, which strongly reinforces the message of the text" ([Lazar, 1993. p. 6](#)). Literary texts might share characteristics of other genres but may be entirely unique in their purpose, approach and distinct use of language.

### **Benefits of Literature for L2 Reader**

The use of literature in language teaching was once thought to be controversial because of its language being static and far removed from daily communication, being elitist, and literary analysis requiring too much time and specific terminology and knowledge. But with the passage of time, unease about keeping the literature away from language studies has been growing. The students love literature and teachers like incorporating literature into the class as it provides the material with some emotional colour ([Collie and Slater, 1987. p. 2](#)). [Urquhart and Weir \(1998\)](#) provide a list of benefits that literature has for L2 learners. These are as follows:

### **Cultural Knowledge**

Literary texts embody a great wealth of cultural information which is not to be found in any other text. As Urquhart and Weir (1998: 247) remark, 'Plots and themes may be universal and timeless, but settings, characters, and dialogue tend to be rooted in the time and culture shared or created by the author'. [Lazar \(1993\)](#) points out that the cross-cultural differences in literary texts could be an obstacle for teachers to overcome, although some experts regard literature as 'a window into culture'. Literary texts might include what [Collie and Slater \(1987: 4\)](#) call "a full and vivid context" in which there could be many characters from various social backgrounds. They bring with them a wide array of thoughts, ideas, feelings, traditions, customs, beliefs, fears, ways of living, speaking and so on". Urquhart and Weir

(1998: 248) provide a list of examples of how literary texts could be depicting social, cultural and racial conflicts related to the times in which these works are produced.

### **Rich Exposure to Language**

The complex and varied use of language in literary texts can make them distinct from other texts. The readers need to carefully interpret the literary devices such as “inference, metaphor, simile, oxymoron, double entendre, unusual or unorthodox syntactic constructions, and so forth..... to ensure comprehension” (Urquhart and Weir (1998: 249). This may be a challenging task for L2 readers. Although the complex use of language may prove a challenge for the L2 reader, reading literature on the target language can produce “a sharper awareness of the communicative resources of the language being learned” (Widdowson, 1975, p. 83) among the students. Learners are exposed to varied uses of language in tightly patterned ways exhibiting creativity, and this may be more enjoyable for the language students as compared to the texts that are accessible but less imaginative. (Hirvela, 2001, 2004; Peregoy& Boyle, 2004 cited by [Urquhart and Weir \(1998: 249\)](#)).

### **Input for Language Acquisition**

Certain aspects of language such as anomalous syntactic forms and varied morphological use can only be acquired through repeated exposure. And according to [Collie and Slater \(1987: 05\)](#) “[l]iterature provides a rich context in which individual lexical or syntactical items are made more memorable. Reading a substantial and contextualized body of text, students gain familiarity with sentences, the variety of possible structures, the different ways of connecting ideas”. Exposure to texts with new vocabulary might also lead to the learners unconsciously developing new vocabulary as has been proved by certain studies such as [Saragi et al. \(1978\)](#). Students enjoy reading literature and as they read, so many things happen even in passing. They learn new phrases, new structures, new expressions, new slang or even various uses of the same word. Improved confidence and Personal Growth are other benefits of using literature in a language class as the

students learn a lot from the literary texts and are able to speak on various themes that they acquire after reading these texts.

### **Use of Indigenous Texts**

The use of indigenously produced literature has various benefits. The benefit of not using alien literature in the language classroom is that the students do not have to encounter unfamiliar cultural contexts which come with unfamiliar cultural motifs, unfamiliar contexts, cultural artefacts, foods, dresses, or even concepts that may be hard for them to decipher due to remote ideology upon which they are based. The introduction of familiar cultural components, according to [Barfield and Uzarski \(2009\)](#), includes ‘opportunities for participants to share their experiences, in terms of culture and content, and to participate in cooperative learning tasks. Further, they say that it leads to an understanding of one’s own culture and bilingual or even multilingual activities ultimately help students to improve the students’ language proficiency. (p. 03). [Hanson \(2020\)](#) argues that “Indigenous works of literature matter because they are challenging the workings of colonialism that restrict the self-determination and well-being of Indigenous communities. Indigenous literary expression, he says, engages with the local contexts, and opposes barriers to indigenous expression.

### **Research Methodology**

The present research has been carried out using a two-fold strategy of data collection. Since the main objective is to investigate the effectiveness of Pakistani short stories for teaching reading skills, the researchers used a quasi-experimental research design to establish the cause and effect relationship between the use of Pakistani short stories and the performance of the students on reading comprehension tests. The study was conducted on an already intact group of students enrolled in Advanced Diploma at the National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad. After the experiment has been conducted (reported in [Malik, Khan & Shams, 2019](#)), the researchers asked the participants of the study to fill out a questionnaire in order to offer their views about the experience of reading Pakistani

short stories as well as to gauge their level of interest in these stories and the extent to which Pakistani stories increased their motivation to read. The combined perspectives of the two modes of study are expected to present a detailed picture of how Pakistani short stories can improve the reading comprehension of advanced level students.

### **The population of the Study**

The students of Advanced Diploma at the National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad constituted the population of the study and simple random sampling techniques was used to select one section of the Advanced Diploma class as a sample for the study.

### **Sample**

A group of twenty students was selected through random sampling. All of the students enrolled in that course had done their Bachelor of Arts and were supposed to possess a good command of the English language. Since they had studied English for eight to ten years before attending the present course and had passed the entry test of the University to get admitted to the Advanced Diploma, they were ranked at the advanced level of English proficiency.

### **Data Collection**

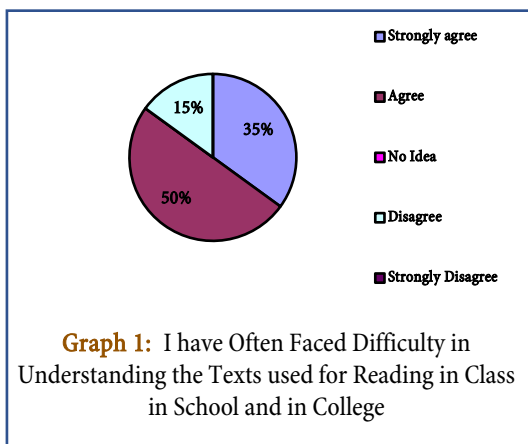
This article reports the results collected by the questionnaire that was distributed among the participants of the study to know about their experience of using Pakistani short stories in their reading class. The researchers wanted to determine whether the use of Pakistani short stories can be effective in improving the reading comprehension of the students due to the familiar cultural content of these stories. For this purpose, the experimental part of the study was conducted. In order to know how these stories motivated the students and enhanced their level of interest in reading lessons, the students were asked to respond to a questionnaire at the end of the study.

### **Data Analysis**

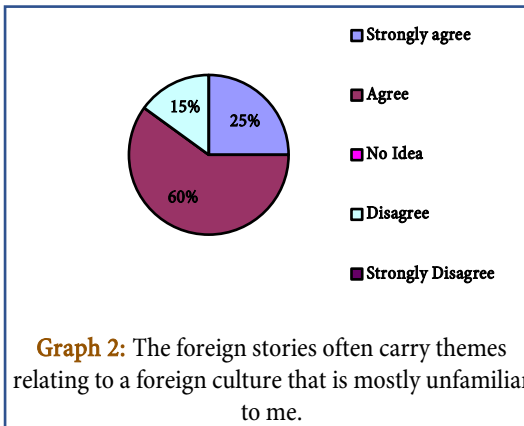
The first statement in the questionnaire aims to get the students' opinions regarding their experience of

dealing with foreign texts that are normally used in their classes at the school and college levels. The prescribed books in schools and colleges pose the students a great challenge due to the linguistic and schematic difficulties and resultantly the students can neither comprehend nor fully enjoy these texts. Alien themes and content make these texts culturally unfamiliar to Pakistani students and coupled with understanding a foreign language, reading becomes a cumbersome task for the students.

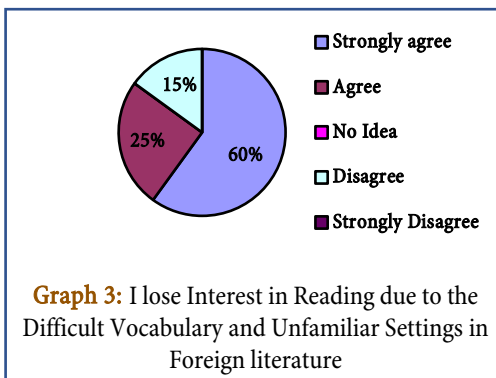
Thirty-five percent of students strongly agreed with the statement that they found foreign texts in their classroom difficult to comprehend, whereas fifty percent agreed. Only fifteen percent thought that they did not face difficulty in understanding foreign texts.



Due to the fact that literary texts inevitably reflect the values, beliefs and culture of their author, the texts produced by foreign authors have little relevance to Pakistani culture. The unfamiliar cultural representations portraying reality that is altogether different from the one around them make the reader confused who is faced with not only learning the target language but also making sense of the foreign culture. Thus sixty percent of the students agreed that the reading texts found in their course books carry themes from foreign culture that is mostly unfamiliar to them. Twenty-five percent strongly agreed while only fifteen percent thought that different cultural themes do not bother them a great deal.

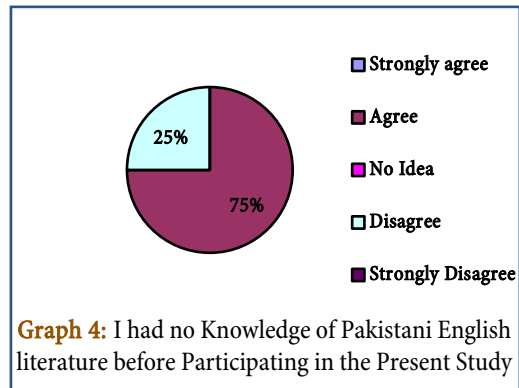


Different vocabulary and unfamiliar settings are other challenges that foreign literature poses to L2 readers. The interest of a reader in a text is often determined by the extent to which he/she can relate to that text, and a setting that the reader is not familiar with makes his / her task difficult. This makes the reader lose interest in tasks and it increases boredom. Most of the foreign texts taught in Pakistani classrooms are full of cultural assumptions and references to places, events, issues and people, about which Pakistani learners have little or no background knowledge. Thus, in response to the above question, sixty percent of the students strongly agreed that the difficult vocabulary and unfamiliar settings in foreign literature make it less interesting for them. Twenty-five percent agreed while fifteen percent disagreed with the statement.

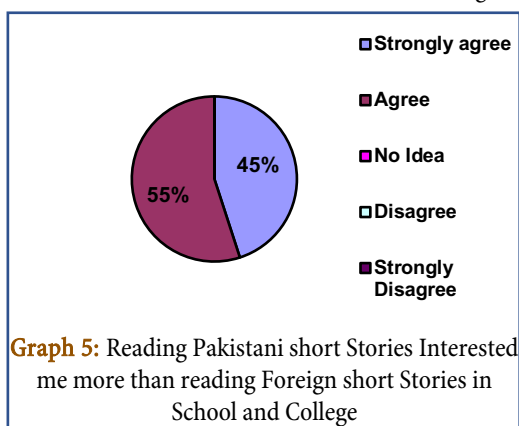


The next question is based on the assumption that most of the students in Pakistani schools, colleges and universities have little knowledge of the existence of Pakistani English literature. And as expected, a resounding 75 % of the students revealed that they

did not know about the existence of such literature before this study while only twenty-five percent had some knowledge about that. The fact that most of the students do not know about such literature highlights how the works of local writers remain unacknowledged and unrecognized by educational institutions that rely more on foreign texts.

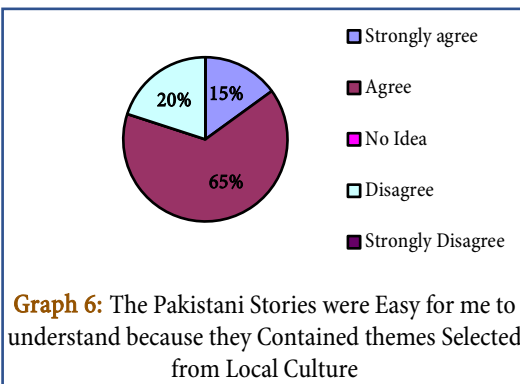


The number of the students reporting a high level of interest and motivation while reading Pakistani short stories was forty-five percent strongly agreed and fifty-five percent agreed. This response reflects upon the task of reading foreign texts during which they cannot make sense of the alien setting and characters, whereas the situation is entirely different in the case of Pakistani texts as the setting as well as characters are familiar to the students. The fact that the students could easily relate to the characters and settings of the stories motivates them to take interest in reading.

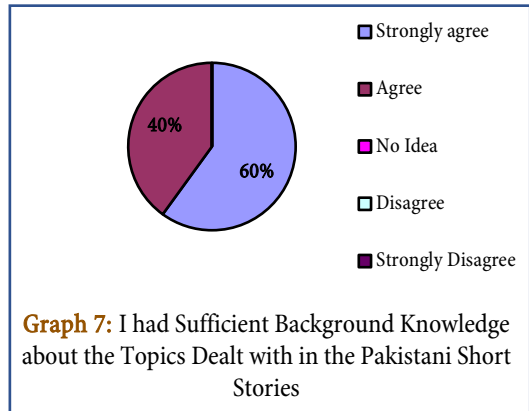


The short stories written by Pakistani authors generally, and the ones selected for the present study particularly, contain issues, problems and characters

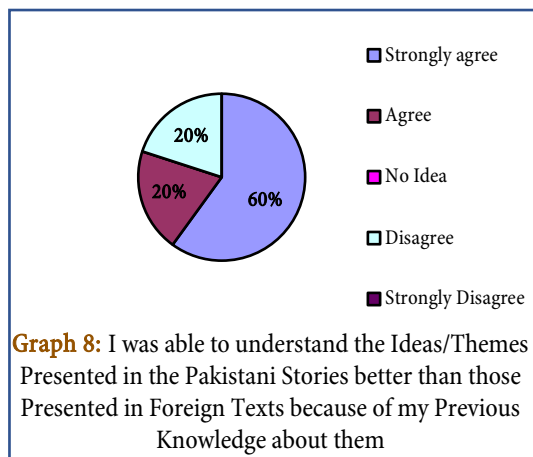
borrowed from their own local culture. The characters are those that we come across daily in our lives and the problems they face in the story are encountered by us every day. For example in the story, 'Munnoo', it was easy for the Pakistani readers to understand the character of the little girl belonging to a poor family and the reason why she was forbidden to play with her rich playmate because they understood the class system of Pakistani urban society. Similarly, the emotions of a maid and the attitude of her employer towards her in the story 'Scar' were not new/strange to the students as they observe these attitudes all around them in their daily lives. The village life depicted in 'Billa Nayee' was also a familiar theme for Pakistani students. This familiarity made these stories quite easy to understand for them and the students gave the same response to the above question. Sixty-five percent agreed, while fifteen percent strongly agreed that the Pakistani stories used in this study were easier for them to understand due to their culturally familiar content. Only twenty- percent disagreed with this statement.



The present study is based on the assumption that a Pakistani reader has sufficient cultural background knowledge about the contents of the English stories written by Pakistani authors. The question below was aimed at getting students' responses to that assumption. All the students agree that the topics dealt with in the Pakistani stories in this study were familiar to them.

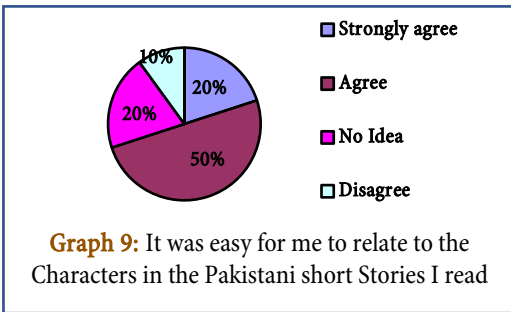


As evident from their test scores as well, the students could easily understand most of the ideas presented in Pakistani stories, whether explicitly or implicitly. However, in this question, mention is made of the reason for that better performance in local stories, that is, the previous knowledge of the readers about the themes and ideas presented by the author. The students agreed that their previous knowledge was the reason for better comprehension of Pakistani stories. Sixty percent of the students strongly agreed while twenty percent agreed. However, twenty percent disagreed with the statement. Thus, eighty percent of the students were of the opinion that Pakistani stories were easier to comprehend for them than foreign stories due to the background knowledge they had.

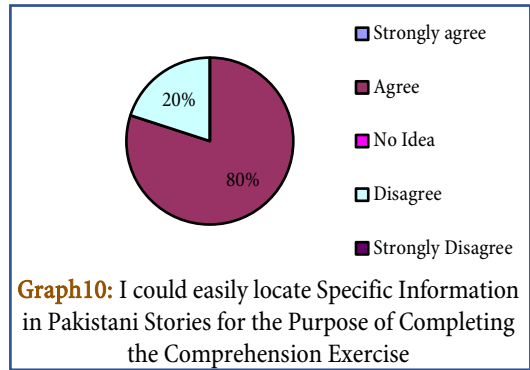


It is often a big challenge for EFL learners to relate to the characters they come across in the English

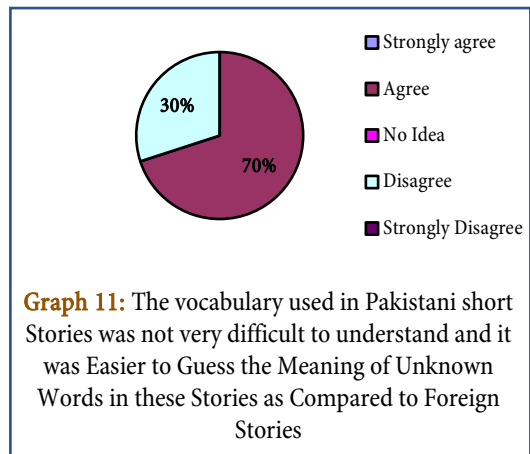
literature they read in their classrooms. A Pakistani reader always has difficulty relating to a British girl and her ideas about life, but he/she can quite easily relate to a Pakistani girl and her problems as part of Pakistani society. A Pakistani reader can empathize with characters in local stories because he/she has somewhat similar attitudes, values and religious beliefs and has a similar way of looking at and perceiving things. The cultural values are similar to some extent, the expected behaviour from a girl or a boy of a certain age in Pakistan is known to almost all Pakistanis. Thus, in response to the above question, seventy percent of students agreed among which twenty percent strongly agreed that it was easy for them to relate to the characters of the Pakistani stories they read during this study. Only ten percent of the students disagreed.



When the EFL readers are presented with a reading text produced by a British or any other foreign author, they have to overcome linguistic as well as conceptual barriers in order to fully comprehend that text. Their understanding is often hindered, not only because the language is not very easy for them, but also because they do not understand the reference to some ideas, places or people in that text. They get confused due to these foreign elements and perform poorly in comprehension exercises. The above question was aimed at knowing whether students had a bit of help from the familiar contents of Pakistani stories in their reading comprehension. Eighty percent of students agreed that they could easily find the required information in Pakistani texts and this is supplemented by their test scores in the same activity in the tests on Pakistani stories that are consistently higher than their scores in foreign stories. Twenty percent disagreed with this statement.

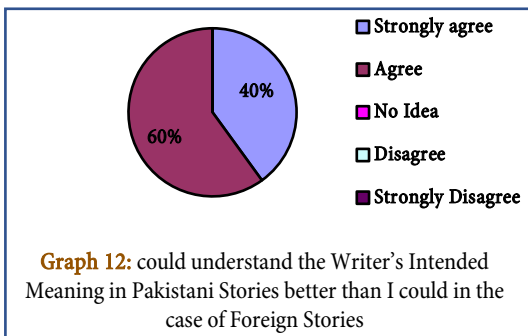


Pakistani literary writings carry a Pakistani colour to the language. The words the writers chose, and the description of events and people reflect the Pakistani style of using the English language. For that reason, Pakistani English literature often does not contain typical British or American expressions and most of the writers make use of simple and everyday terms in English that are easier to understand. Even if the terms are new and unknown to the local reader, the familiarity with the context of use assists them to guess their meaning. That is the reason that seventy percent of the students agreed that the vocabulary used in the Pakistani stories was easy for them to understand and they could easily guess the meaning of unknown words from the context. This fact was further verified by their higher scores in vocabulary exercises based on these stories than in the ones based on foreign stories.

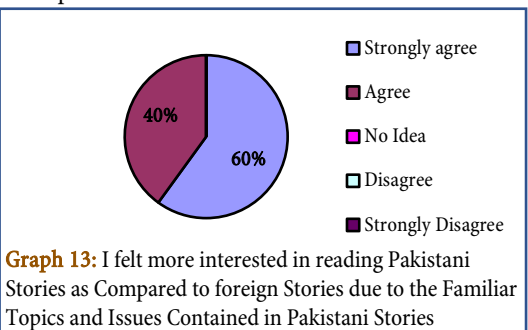


Reading required the reader to infer meaning not explicitly stated in the text by the writer. Inference involves connecting pieces of the text with each other

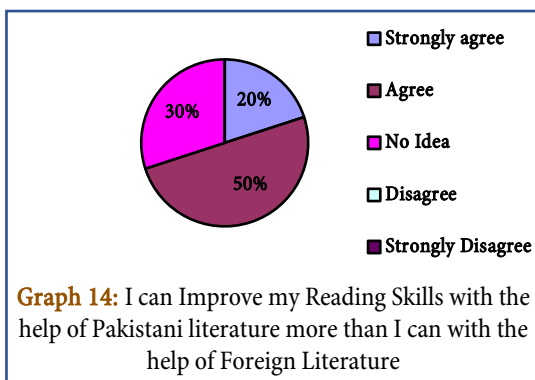
and making use of one's previous knowledge. When the text corresponds to our background knowledge, it becomes easier to synthesize and generalize the information in it. To understand a writer's intended meaning, the reader must have some similarity of experience or of thinking and attitude with the writer. None of the students disagreed with the above statement and all of the students agreed while forty percent strongly agreed that it was easier for them to understand the writer's intended meaning in Pakistani stories.



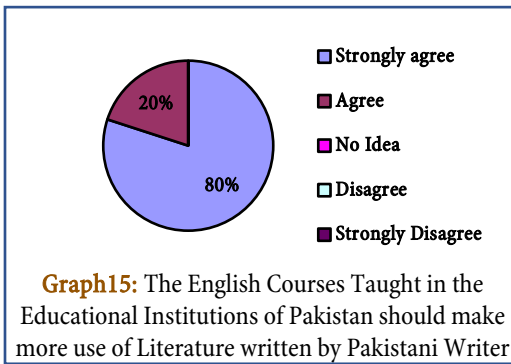
One of the research questions for the present study asked whether Pakistani stories, due to their familiar cultural content, can increase the Pakistani EFL learners' interest and motivation or not. This was an aspect that could only be judged through observation or by asking the students directly about their level of interest and motivation. Thus, all of the participants of the present study agreed that they felt more interested while reading Pakistani stories for the present study as compared to reading foreign stories. This factor can be used by the material developers and teachers of EFL in enhancing the teaching and learning experience in Pakistani classrooms. The students can be better motivated to read English texts in class if the texts appear interesting and relevant to their personal lives.



The students who participated in the present study had never been taught with the help of Pakistani literature in English before, and as evident from their responses to Q.No.4 above, most of them did not know at all about the English literature written by Pakistani authors. The results of the reading comprehension tests and the student's responses to the above questions clearly show that the experience of reading Pakistani short stories in class was an enriching and enjoyable one for them. This question was framed to get their views about the pedagogical value of Pakistani literature in Pakistani EFL classrooms. Seventy percent of the students agreed, among which twenty percent strongly agreed, that they could improve their reading skills if they are taught with the help of Pakistani literature.



The last statement aimed to get the students' point of view about incorporating Pakistani literature into the curricula of Pakistani educational institutions. Given the positive effects on students' comprehension that these stories had and the level of interest of the students while reading them, it is pertinent that such local literature is given some space in the textbooks and curricula in Pakistan. The results of the present study along with the students' responses to this questionnaire show a strong trend towards the need to use Pakistani literature for pedagogical purposes. Thus, all the students agreed, while twenty percent strongly agreed, that Pakistani English literature should be used in language classrooms in Pakistan. This strong response from the students presumably stemmed from their positive experience with Pakistani short stories in the present study and their ability to do well in the reading comprehension test based on these stories



### Discussion / Recommendations

As the students' responses to the questionnaire reveal, the sample of the study enjoyed using Pakistani literature in their English reading classroom. It is a general feeling among the students, parents, and teachers that foreign literature might be a good model of language for the students but teaching them by using it has as many challenges as the benefits. The students are most of the time little interested to know about the feelings of Mr. Chips or the struggle of the 'old man' in Hemingway's famous literary piece "The old Man and the Sea" as these stories and characters are too remote from their own lives. They are at the best, imaginative, unreal characters, who are hard to be found around them. Indigenous literature, on the contrary, fully captures their attention as the narrative of the story is considered by the students familiar and, hence engaging. The characters appear to be real, and the setting seems to be familiar. A Pakistani student will be much more interested to read about a poor child who is discouraged by the rich elite to go to study and suffer in poverty to serve the rich people's interests than talking about the lives of people whom he has

never seen and may never see in his / her whole life. The content that is familiar to the reader makes them interested to read on. They can relate to the characters, make guesses about the events that are likely to unfold in the story, and this rise of interest makes the teacher's task of teaching easy as he/she is able to motivate the students. Keeping in mind the students' interest in Pakistani literature, the curriculum designs need to consider including some representative Pakistani works of fiction in the syllabus and structure lessons around local stories to provide the students best learning experience. The inclusion of these works will not only facilitate the process of learning for the students but will recognize the writers' efforts and encourage them.

### Conclusion

The task of a language teacher is two-fold; maximizing students' learning and keeping them motivated and interested in class. Thus, it becomes essential for the teacher that selects teaching material that is accessible to students at linguistic as well as experiential levels. It is important for example, that students as readers understand and identify with the situations and experiences presented in a reading text. They should be able to interpret it in the light of their own knowledge and experience of the world they live in. Therefore, it is pertinent that when teaching language through literature, the local writers writing in the target language are not ignored. While this may be true for all levels, this study can confidently suggest that Pakistani short stories should be used in advanced classes. This will positively affect the student's reading comprehension and motivation level, and aid to uplift the level of their literacy.

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