

Background Knowledge and Reading Comprehension

What was the goal of the study?

The researchers wanted to know if there was a relationship between background knowledge (i.e., academic and general knowledge) and reading comprehension in adult learners.

Why was the study conducted?

Research has shown that skills such as decoding, listening comprehension, and oral vocabulary are related to reading comprehension. However, this study explored the importance of background knowledge for understanding text.

What did the study find?

Researchers assessed background knowledge by having adult learner participants complete two assessments: (1) the WJ Academic Knowledge assessment, which gauges knowledge on academic topics such as science, social studies, and humanities; and (2) the WJ General Information assessment, which asks participants about common objects. After controlling for educational attainment, the researchers found that background knowledge made a significant unique contribution to reading comprehension beyond decoding and listening comprehension.

Who participated in the study?

The participants in this study were 222 adult learners in the United States who were native speakers of English.

How was the study conducted?

The researchers used structural equation modeling, which is a set of statistical techniques used to examine relationships between variables.

How can people use the results?

The results of this study demonstrate the importance of background knowledge in reading comprehension for adults who struggle with reading. This may have special implications for instructors who are helping their learners pass high school equivalency tests.

Reference

Talwar, A., Tighe, E. L., & Greenberg, D. (2018). Augmenting the Simple View of Reading for struggling adult readers: A unique role for background knowledge. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 22(5), 351-366.