Developing Reading Comprehension in L2 with respect to Text Genre and Form

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Abstract

Self-development in terms of reading comprehension in a second foreign language is often practiced to a small extent in foreign language education. In the L2 (German language) educational process, the teacher focuses mainly on teaching basic grammatical phenomena and vocabulary. The development of reading comprehension in L2, as to text genres and forms, provides a new dimension in terms of self-development, as it mainly supports metacognitive processes and thus self-efficacy and success in a foreign language text understanding.

The goal of the presented research was to find out connections between students success in reading comprehension with regard to different categories of text genres (adventure books, historical novels, fairy tales, poems, legends, and science fiction, and others) and text forms (either printed - magazines, newspapers, books, textbooks or electronic - e-books, websites, e-textbooks, and others). We were interested in whether a particular (concrete) genre or form of text does (or does not) contribute to the success in L2 reading comprehension or whether reading of any genre or form of text does (or does not) contribute to the success in L2 reading comprehension. The research was carried out in secondary vocational and grammar schools in Slovakia on a sample of 126 respondents. Statistically significant correlations were found between specific (concrete) genres and forms of texts and success in reading comprehension. It turns out that short stories, legends and books about nature predict better understanding of texts in the German language, and reading of printed books and magazines promotes success in L2 reading comprehension.

Keywords: reading comprehension, L2, developing reading comprehension, genre and text form, foreign language teaching

Развитие понимания смысла прочитанного на втором иностранном языке с учетом жанра и формы текста

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Аннотация

Часто в процессе обучения иностранному языку самостоятельное обучение пониманию прочитанного на втором иностранном языке отрабатывается в незначительной степени. При обучении второму иностранному (немецкому) языку преподаватель в основном акцентирует внимание на обучении базовым правилам грамматики и словарному запасу. Развитие навыка понимания смысла прочитанного на втором иностранном языке с учетом жанра и формы текста обеспечивает новое направление саморазвития, поскольку способствует главным образом метакогнитивным процессам, и, следовательно, развитию самоэффективности и достижению успеха в понимании текста на иностранном языке.

В представленном исследовании была поставлена цель – выявить связь между успехами студентов в понимании прочитанного с учетом различных категорий жанров текста (приключенческая литература, исторические романы, сказки, стихотворения, легенды, научная фантастика и др.) и форм текста (печатных – журналы, газеты, книги, учебники или электронных – электронные книги, сайты, электронные учебники и др.). В ходе исследования особое внимание уделялось тому, способствует ли конкретный жанр или форма текста успешному пониманию смысла текста на втором иностранном языке, способствует ли чтение текста любого жанра или формы успешному пониманию смысла текста на втором иностранном языке. Исследование проводилось в школах среднего профессионального образования и гимназиях Словакии, в исследовании приняли участие 126 респондентов. Обнаружены статистически значимые корреляции между конкретными жанрами и формами текстов и успешностью в понимании смысла прочитанного. Обнаружено, что короткие истории, легенды и рассказы о природе обеспечивают более глубокое понимание смысла текстов на немецком языке, а чтение печатных книг и журналов способствует успешному пониманию смысла прочитанного на втором иностранном языке.

Ключевые слова: понимание смысла прочитанного, второй иностранный язык, формирование навыка понимания прочитанного, жанр и форма текста, обучение иностранному языку.

Introduction

A change of perspective on the development of reading comprehension in foreign language teaching began to take effect in the second half of the 20th century (Gadušová et al., 2020a; Gadušová et al., 2020b). In the methodology of teaching foreign language reading, or the work of a teacher with foreign language texts, the main attention of teachers has been shifted to the reader's experience with the text, their need for motivation, emotions and social dimension (Garbe, Holle & Jesch, 2009; Rautenberg & Schneider, 2015; Artelt & Dörfler, 2010; Lenhard, 2019; Welnitzová, 2013; and others). In this sense, reading comprehension of a text is referred to as a complex phenomenon, while complexity is perceived through connecting the text comprehension with subsequent application of the identified knowledge and information from the text, their evaluation and interpretation. Recent studies (Lenčová, 2005; Liptáková & Cibáková, 2013; Lenhard, 2019; Stranovská & Ficzere, 2020; Hockicková et al., 2020; Khonamri et al., 2020; Khonamri, Azizi & Kralik, 2020; Welnitzová & Munková, 2020) point to the interplay of several cognitive and metacognitive processes, which is necessary for self-development and a sense of selfefficacy in the process of foreign language text comprehension. Reading comprehension in a foreign language is characterized by a specific position in language learning and acquisition, as it is directly dependent on the learner level of language competence in a foreign language. In order to contribute to students' self-development and a sense of self-efficacy, sufficient scope of work with texts is required. The problem, however, is the development of reading comprehension in L2, because teachers usually do not have enough time allocated for the development of this skill, while teaching a foreign language they focus mainly on the development of learners' grammatical and lexical competence. As to reading comprehension, they focus more on testing comprehension not developing it. They have no time left in lessons to deal with the development of comprehension and motivation to read. Here a specific research problem and question arises as to how to develop understanding at the level of the interconnection of cognitive processes, emotions, motivation and socio-cultural context in a second foreign language, in order to develop understanding of factual and narrative texts. Current research and hypotheses of experts in the field of a second foreign language reading comprehension (Lenhard, 2019; Lalinská, 2020; Genç & Ünal, 2017; Khonamri & Roostaee, 2014; Stranovská, Ficzere & Gadušová, 2020) focus on the text, its genre and form, because literary genres are a powerful tool to ensure the unity and continuity of the process of text understanding. In this regard, we believe that text genre and form can play a significant role in the process of developing comprehension, as it can, by its nature, stimulate the development and selfefficacy of individuals in reading comprehension.

The goal of our research was to find out connections between students success in reading comprehension and categories of text genres (adventure books, historical novels, funny stories, books about nature, fairy tales, poems, legends, and science fiction, books on technology, short stories, encyclopedias, and detective stories) and categories of text forms (either printed – magazines, newspapers, books, textbooks or electronic - e-books, websites, e-textbooks, and others).

Developing foreign language reading comprehension in L2 and text genre

The development of foreign language reading comprehension is different for each reader, even if individuals are at the same language proficiency level. For this reason, several levels should be taken into account when developing foreign language comprehension. According to Schmied (2013), comprehension of a foreign language text develops at the following levels:

• basic level, or basic reading competence at the level of word and sentence perception (read accurately and fluently);

• cognitive level as the ability to understand texts of different length, complexity and content (to learn knowledge from texts and be able to find connections between them);

• motivation as the ability and readiness to select appropriate texts (ability to interconnect cognitive and emotional components while working with a text);

• reflective competence as the ability to work critically or creatively with texts (comment, evaluate and compare texts);

• communicative competence as the ability and readiness to exchange information about read texts.

Reading supports the ability to criticize, judge, reason, make decisions and develop personal and cultural identities. Artelt and Dörfler (2010) recommend training different

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reading strategies so that students can later use them independently. Genç and Ünal (2017) say that there are three basic criteria for effective reading comprehension training. First of them is systematical training of multiple reading strategies contributing to the improvement of text comprehension. The second criterion involves the integration of reading strategies into reading, i. e. their integration into teaching context. The third criterion points to strategies that suit the reader, i.e. they help the reader to choose an appropriate reading strategy according to the type of text they are reading.

When developing reading comprehension in L2, specifically in the German language, the teacher's attention should be focused on syntactic indicators needed to understand the sentences. There is no doubt that a flexible German word order is generally the biggest challenge for any student who knows only a stable, fixed word order. In addition, students have difficulties also with declination inflections in German, which play an important role in decoding the text meaning. The need for syntactic indicators in the reading comprehension process is determined by several factors, for example, prior knowledge of text content (topic), grammar, factors related to text and sentences, as well as knowledge of the source language and other language skills. If errors occur in lower-level processing, attention must be paid to word recognition and parsing. As a result, the semantic processing of information from the text is not taken into account. This is why readers of not only German but also other foreign languages rely on deriving meaning from the text or skip entire parts of the text, which often hinders the correct comprehension and leads to incorrect or misleading interpretation of the text. Students also have difficulty with various slang words and word collocations, idioms, long sentences, and culture-specific content. Henseler and Surkamp (2013) have identified these drawbacks in promoting foreign language reading comprehension: lack of learners' motivation to read due to incorrect and overly demanding choice of text genre or text form. Meißner (2011) emphasizes that textbooks focus heavily on learning goals or language development, and therefore, students often read only mechanically which makes reading comprehension difficult for students. Henseler and Surkamp (2013) point to some sources of methodological misconceptions about teaching foreign language reading, they have indicated the following ones: facilitating the reading of texts, this promotes word-to-word reading and weakens the ability to decode, then, loud reading, which prevents silent reading and thus processing information from the text. In addition, drawbacks in reading support include the often absent development of reading strategies, as well as teachers' habitude of asking common questions about the text instead of involving students in meaningful activities before, during and after reading that develop comprehension. Positive self-concept, self-evaluation influences the willingness of students to read various texts in their free time. Ehlers (1998) emphasizes that reading skills can be promoted primarily through an integrative approach. In this approach, reading tasks are combined with productive tasks, for example, reading with writing or reading with speaking, which not only encourages readers, but also allows them to experience positive language perception and create their sense of self-efficacy. Especially communication in various social groups (students in pairs, triplets, teams and others) and successes in reading can turn into positive experiences.

The aim of developing reading comprehension through the text genre is to prepare students for the needs of the labor market that students will need in the future. This is made possible by using authentic factual texts, such as brochures, specialist papers, specialist journal articles and, on the other hand, literary printed texts, such as collections of poems. Literary texts versus factual texts can not only offer the fun and enjoyment of reading, but they can also stimulate reading skills, communication, and motivation, cognitive, emotional and social development of students. They allow students to develop perception, thinking and learn more from the culture of the target language. Understanding a literary text also requires basic knowledge of the realities of the target language country. This aspect affects not only the socio-political context, but also the value orientation of learners, i.e. their values, faith, attitudes to social knowledge. In methodology of foreign language reading, a distinction between linear and nonlinear texts is made (Wenzel, 2014). Linear texts are continuous connected texts. Nonlinear texts are texts that do not contain complete sentences, and the information in the text is arranged according to a certain scheme that allows the reader to quickly identify the most important indicators (Rosebrock et al., 2017). According to Göppert (2009), nonlinear texts contain various diagrams and graphs, tables and matrices, diagrams, advertisements, and others. In the category of linear texts, Stranovská & Ficzere (2020) distinguish between texts that support development of intensive reading, for example, articles from magazines, journals, newspapers, as well as such texts as menus, timetables, game rules, professional or factual texts, and others. Next category of linear texts are those texts that develop extensive reading, for example, reading excerpts from youth literature, personal letters, and others. The scope of electronic reading is also very diverse. There are electronic editions of novels and non-fiction texts, magazines and newspapers that can be read on a smartphone, reader or laptop. Electronic libraries such as Project Gutenberg and others also offer many reading options.

Methodology

Research design and methodological background

In the research, mixed research methods, qualitative and quantitative, were used. Quantitative methods were used to measure reading comprehension performance and qualitative methods to identify text genre categories and categories of text forms in reading comprehension. The research was divided into two parts, qualitative and quantitative. The qualitative part descriptively describes the research sample and identifies the performance in understanding German texts in two groups of upper-secondary (grammar and vocational) school students (more information see in the part *Research Results*) and the preferences of text genres and forms in L2 (German language) reading comprehension. The quantitative part of the research identifies the relationship between learners performance in reading comprehension and text genre categories (adventure, historical, technical, fiction, crime, educational, aesthetic) and categories of text forms (printed and electronic). Success or performance in reading comprehension (extensive and intensive reading, factual and literary types of texts).

The text genre has been operationalized in the following categories:

A – adventure books, B – historical novels, C – funny (humorous) stories, D – books about nature, E – fairy tales, F – poems, G – legends, H – science fiction, I – books on technology, J – short stories, K – encyclopedias, L – detective stories

The form of reading texts has been operationalized in the following categories:

A – magazines, B – printed books, C – newspapers, D – e-books, E – websites, F – textbooks, G – recommended literature

For the research the following hypotheses have been set:

H1: A connection exists between students' success in reading comprehension in German and the text form for reading in printed categories.

H2: A connection exists between students' success in reading comprehension in German and text genre: adventurous, historical and fiction categories and others.

We were interested in whether a particular (concrete) genre or form of text does or does not support students' success in reading comprehension in German language, or whether reading of any text genre or form does or does not support students' success in reading comprehension of German texts.

Research Sample

The research was carried out in upper-secondary (vocational and grammar) schools in the Slovak Republic (Western and Central Slovakia) on a sample of 126 respondents. They were full-time students in their 3rd year of studies at upper-secondary grammar and vocational schools (hotel academies, business academies, school of commerce, polytechnic school, veterinary school, and electro-technical school) that were required to study German as a foreign language. The students involved studied German as a compulsory elective and a second foreign language. Their level of language proficiency according to CEFR was A2. The students studied German on average 5.2 years.

Instruments

The reading comprehension test for the German language was developed by a team of experts (Hockicková, Stranovská, Stančeková, Ficzere) from the Department of German Language at Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra (Slovakia) within the project APVV-17-0071 Support of Reading Literacy in Mother tongue and Foreign Language. The test was based on Slovak language policy documents, the State Educational Program and the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). The didactic test, as the quantitative research method, was designed to test and measure German language reading comprehension performance of students at A2 level of language proficiency. The test contained 5 short texts and 20 testing items - 17 closed items with a choice from three options (one correct answer and two distractors), and 3 open items with a specific answer to two questions (What does he do? How often?). The extent of texts was reasonable (100-250 words, including items per text). When writing texts, the test writers considered topics familiar to students, topics students encounter in everyday life and communication at the level of different social strata (parent, teacher, classmate, sibling, and friend). The addressed topics were as follows: interpersonal relations; written communication of friends with a description of the journey to visit a friend; environment, or protection of the environment; entertainment or entertaining magazine Bravo for young people; leisure time people of different ages and different jobs; description and instructions for games.

The sociological questionnaire was prepared by a team of experts from the Department of Sociology of the University within the same project. The questionnaire examined students' subjective self-assessment of reading comprehension, preferred genres and forms of reading, reading motives and characteristics of family background, which can influence students' reading habits: educational and professional status of the family, emotional and communicative environment of the family, cultural background of the family. For the purposes of this research, the factor of preferred text genres in reading comprehension, preferred text forms in reading comprehension was used. The questionnaire consisted of 28 items, which were closed on a 4-point Lickert scale, with options to choose from (text genres, reading motifs) and open ones (items related to the education and status of parents).

Data Collection Procedure

The research was carried out in 8 upper-secondary schools (grammar and vocational schools) in the Slovak Republic in 2019 and 2020 years. The data were collected using the two research methods – Reading Comprehension Test and Sociological Questionnaire. Research instruments, the test and the questionnaire, were designed by the research project

team members and subsequently their reliability was piloted and tested. Pilot testing led to proofreading and editing of the test and questionnaire. Subsequently, research was carried out. The data collected from students' testing were evaluated using the method of descriptive statistics and classical test theory (Butašová & Lalinská, 2014; Lalinská, 2020). To verify the degree of reliability and accuracy of the measurement tool for the concrete population of students Kuder-Richardson coefficient and Cronbach's alpha testing were used. To determine the statistical indicators of the collected data a descriptive analysis of students' success in L2 reading comprehension was applied. The analysis focused on basic statistical indicators: arithmetic mean, percentage mean, minimum and maximum value, standard deviation. Percentage averages were used for the descriptive analysis of text genre and form preferences of students in L2 reading comprehension.

To test hypotheses, to determine the relationship between success in reading comprehension and preferred text genres in L2 reading comprehension, between success in reading comprehension and text form in L2 reading comprehension, Pearson's correlation was applied, which is used to determine the degree of dependence between two or more variables. The data were recorded and processed using the SPSS statistical program.

Results

At first, we analyze the research results descriptively and then the hypotheses are verified. We describe the students' performance in reading comprehension in the German language in two groups (grammar school and vocational school students, Table 1), preferences of the text form and genre in reading in the German language (Graph 1 and 2). We verify the hypotheses by correlation research using the Pearson Correlation statistical method (Table 2 and 3).

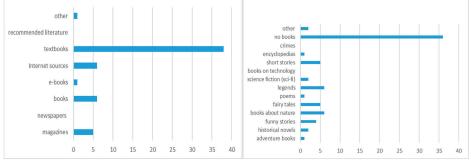
Table 1: I	Descriptive a	inalysis of re	eading comprel	hension perj	formance in Germa	п
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	AM	PAM	Min	Max	SD
Secondary grammar school students	11.97	55.78%	5	23	4.883
Secondary vocational school students	8.19	33.96%	2	22	3.925

Legend: AM – average achievement in rough points, PAM – average achievement in percentages, Min – minimum value, Max – maximum value, SD – standard deviation

Performance in reading comprehension in the German language for the group of upper-secondary grammar school students was identified in the average range (PAM = 55.78%). Performance in reading comprehension in German for the group of upper-secondary vocational school students was below the average band (PAM = 33.96%). The standard deviation is higher in the group of grammar school students, which means that the differences in performance within the groups were higher in the group of grammar school students (see Table 1), but these differences can be considered as normal ones. The minimum value of the achieved performance of grammar school students in the test is 5 points and of vocational school students 2 points. The maximum value of the achieved performance in the group of students in the test is 23 points and in the group of vocational school students 22 points. It seems that the difference between students in these groups is due to low or below-average performance of secondary vocational school students. Performance in the average and above-average

range of secondary vocational school students is close to the performance of grammar school students. There are no differences between the two groups in this respect.



Graph 1 Text form in L2 reading comprehension (PAM)

Graph 2 Text genre in L2 reading comprehension (PAM)

PAM - percentage expression of arithmetic mean

Graph 1 shows the preferences and self-assessment of students' in reading in terms of the categories of text forms in the German language. It was found that students read mostly textbooks in German (PAM = 38%) as the textbook is for them the basic learning aid and source of knowledge in the German language. Other text forms are rarely used by students, as the graph 1 shows students read minimally whether printed or Internet texts in German. They make little use of printed forms such as books (6%) and magazines (5%) and, last but not least, they also make little use of Internet resources (6%) in German.

Graph 2 illustrates students' reading preferences and self-assessment in terms of categories of text genres in the German language. It was found that the majority of students (53.52%) do not read any books in German. Pupils read legends in German to a small extent (7.04%), short stories (6.54%), and books about nature (5.96%), fairy tales (5.63%), and funny (humorous) stories (4.63%). In the range of 1% - 2% they also read sci-fi literature, adventure books, history books, poetry, encyclopedias and other books. Books on technology and crimes are not chosen at all by students for their leisure time reading, neither for reading in German language lessons.

In the next part of the research, we tested the correlations between the students' performance, success in reading comprehension in the German language and the text form and genre in German language reading. We wanted to find out whether the students' success in reading comprehension is related to different text genres and forms, or whether the development of L2 reading comprehension (in German) is linked to certain (concrete) text genres and forms that need to be supported in foreign language teaching. Since the descriptive research showed us that students read very little in German regardless of whether they attend a grammar school or a vocational school and their performance showed the average (grammar school students) and below-average band (vocational school students), we further investigated whether the text genre and form can predict any students success in reading comprehension (Table 2 and 3).

		RC	Α	В	С	D	Е	F	G
RC	Pearson Correlation	1	.377**	0.241*	0.207	0.175	-0.004	0.083	-0.010
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.004	0.049	0.123	0.193	0.978	0.537	0.943

Table 2. Pearson Correlation between L2 reading comprehension and text form

Variable: RC-reading comprehension in German

Categories of text forms:

A – magazines, B – printed books, C – newspapers, D – e-books, E – websites, F – textbooks, G – recommended literature

A statistically significant relationship was found between reading comprehension performance in German and printed texts. It seems printed forms of texts such as books and magazines can predict success of students in reading comprehension. There was a strong connection with journals and magazines (p = .004 **), in reading of which students can verify their understanding not only in terms of the acquired lexical and grammatical competence, but also their sociolinguistic and pragmatic knowledge, i.e. whether they know how to use the language commonly. The correlation also manifested itself with books (p = .049 **), but this relationship is much weaker.

We also investigated the relationship between reading comprehension and the text genre for reading in German.

Table 3. Pea	erson Correlation b	between L2 reading	g comprehension	and text genre

		RC	Α	В	С	D	Е	F	G	Н	J	K
RC	Pearson Correlation	1	0.121	0.075	0.221	0.248*	0.207	0.041	0.248*	0.173	.398**	0.009
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.371	0.577	0.099	0.042	0.122	0.761	0.042	0.199	0.002	0.944

Statistical significance at the level p = .05 (*), p = .01 (**), p = .001 (***)

Variable: RC- reading comprehension in German

Categories of text genres:

A – adventure books, B – historical novels, C – funny (humorous) stories, D – books about nature, E – fairy tales, F – poems, G – legends, H – sci-fi, J- short stories, K – encyclopaedias

A statistically significant relationship was found between reading comprehension performance in German and categories of such text genres as historical – legend, aesthetic – short story and science – books on nature. The strong relationship between reading and text genres was reflected in the short story genre (p = .002 **). We found a weaker relationship between the reading comprehension of German texts and legends (p = .042 **) and books about nature (p = .042 **). Within this testing, or the statistical processing of results collected for different categories, two genres (books on technology and crime) were lost as no one reads these genres in our research sample.

Discussion and conclusion

In the research study, the aim was to contribute the research in the field of reading comprehension in a second foreign language (German language) in connection with the students' success in the performance, role of text form and genre in foreign (German) language reading comprehension. We were interested in the connection between performance in reading comprehension and the text form for reading and the connection between performance in reading comprehension and text genre for reading, whether the development of reading comprehension in L2 is influenced by specific (concrete) text genres and forms for reading, or whether it does not matter what text form and genre the teacher uses for the development of reading comprehension in the German language. We consider the text genre and form for reading to be an essential indicator because it stimulates self-development and self-regulation in the process of reading comprehension skills acquisition.

We also consider the choice of the right text genre and form for reading to be, to a certain extent, a positive indicator in the sense of motivation to acquire reading comprehension skills.

The study examined the success of reading comprehension with respect to the categories of text genres (adventure, historical, technical, fiction, crime, educational, aesthetic) and related to then specific (concrete) text genres (adventure books, historical novels, funny/humorous stories, books about nature, fairy tales, poems, legends, science fiction, books on technology, short stories, encyclopedias, detective stories). It also examined the relationship between success in reading comprehension and the categories of text form (printed and Internet) and the associated specific (concrete) text forms for reading (magazines, newspapers, printed books, e-books, websites, textbooks, recommended literature).

It was found that the success of students in reading comprehension in the German language was in the average (grammar school students) and below-average (secondary vocational school students) band, the preferred text form for reading is the printed text (especially magazines and journals) and the "preferred" (better to say, most widely used) text genre for reading is the textbook and to a small extent legend and short story. Most students do not read in their free time. Descriptive findings are not uncommon, as students at A2 level of language proficiency in a second foreign language focus mainly on the language aspects and much depends on whether a teacher or a parent offers the pupil certain text genres for reading.

The hypothesis that there is a link between students' success in reading comprehension in German and reading of printed texts (categories of text form) has been confirmed. Reading the texts in the form of printed books and especially journals and magazines has shown a close connection with the support to success in L2 reading comprehension. Despite the fact that reading comprehension is currently moving in the digital direction, the connection has manifested itself in the printed text form for reading, which may mean a more personal relationship between the reader and the text in printed form. Tactility also plays an important role, as touch creates a relationship between the reader and the text. We agree with Singer & Alexander (2017), who found that while students currently prefer to read digital texts, they also read these texts faster, but the comprehension of the read text manifested itself at a higher level in printed form. Their further finding relates to global and detailed understanding of the of the text form. They have found that within the global understanding of the text and the text form for reading, the performance in reading does not differ, i.e. the understanding of printed and digital text is at the same level. Understanding varied within detailed understanding. Individuals understood the printed form of the text to a greater extent.

The hypothesis stating that there is a link between students' success in reading comprehension in German and adventurous, historical and fantastic text genre categories has been partially confirmed. Historical genres in the form of legend, aesthetic genres in the form of short stories and genres in the form of a book about nature have been identified to predict better understanding and contribute to development of reading comprehension in the German language. It turned out that not all genres predict good understanding in the German language. These are mainly simple, straightforward, short and understandable genres. The strong relationship manifested itself in the text genre of short story, which focuses on one event, its plot has a rapid development and is surprising, and the end is closed. A weak relationship was found with historical (legends) and scientific genres (books on nature). This may be related to what the teacher offers students, as students do not know many text genres for reading in German.

Research has shown that a particular (concrete) text genre and form in foreign (L2) language can contribute to the development of reading comprehension and provides a new dimension in developing comprehension of foreign texts in terms of self-development, as it mainly supports metacognitive processes and thus self-efficacy and success in comprehension of a foreign language text.

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