

The effect of empathy on comprehension and attitude in text reading

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Abstract: This study investigated the effect of empathy in text comprehension. After 89 university students read a document which described how to write an educational practical report, they took a comprehension test and responded on the following scales: parallel empathy, reactive empathy, subjective comprehension, and attitude. In the framework of dual-process theory, parallel empathy depends on system 1 while reactive empathy is controlled by system 2. As a result, the mean comprehension test score in the condition in which students read the document describing only procedure and some cautions was higher, but the mean reactive empathy score was lower than that in the condition in which students read the document including empathic episodes of the author with illustrations, in addition to the procedure and cautions. An analysis by structural equation modeling with previous data suggested that adding empathic episode disturbed text comprehension, but enhancing empathy promoted subjective comprehension and attitude change.