

**CASE STUDY: RESPONSES OF YOUNG CHILDREN DURING READ ALOUD
ACTIVITY**

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ABSTRACT

CASE STUDY: RESPONSES OF YOUNG CHILDREN DURING READ ALOUD ACTIVITY IN *TADIKA* UNIMAS

Angella Louis Cox

This study investigated the response of young children in Tadika UNIMAS during read aloud activity. This study aimed to identify responses of the young children in terms of the language used during the read aloud activity. Furthermore, this study was set up to find the types of response the young children made. In addition, this study aimed to find out whether the young children used the words or sentences that were read to them. The study employed an observation method where read aloud sessions were video recorded. An analysis of the data transcribed data showed that the young children used their Sarawak Malay dialect and Bahasa Malaysia in their response and the use simple English words. The young children's responses were then categorized based on Haden, Reese and Fivush model (1996) and the result revealed that the responses fell into seven main categories. The young children illustrated the ability to use and recall some of the words and sentences used during the read aloud activity. The current study seemed to suggest that the read aloud activity should be incorporated into the kindergarten co-curriculum as the findings showed the activity has given an advantage to the young children

ABSTRAK

KAJIAN KES: RESPON KANAK-KANAK TADIKA UNIMAS SEMASA READ-ALOUD AKTIVITI

Angella Louis Cox

Kajian kes ini bertujau untuk menyelidik respon kanak-kanak tadika Unimas semasa activity 'read aloud'. Kajian ini bermatlamat untuk menganalisa respon kanak-kanak tadika Unimas, dari segi bahasa yang digunakan semasa berinteraksi dalam aktiviti 'read aloud'. Di samping itu, kajian ini juga bertujuan untuk mengklasifikasikan respon yang digunakan kepada beberapa kategori serta melihat kerelevanan respon yang diberikan. Kajian ini juga melihat sejauh mana kanak-kanak dapat memahami dan mengingat perkataan atau ayat yang digunakan dalam cerita yang dibacakan serta ini dapat menggambarkan pemahaman kanak-kanak terhadap cerita yang di dengar. Oleh yang demikian, kajian ini telah menggunakan kajian kes bagi mengkaji perlakuan kanak-kanak pra-sekolah di tadika Unimas dengan lebih terperinci. Keputusan menunjukkan bahawa kebanyakan kanak-kanak menggunakan dialek Melayu Sarawak serta Bahasa Malaysia dalam memberi respon. Walaubagaimanapun, keputusan kajian mendapati wujud penggunaan Bahasa Inggeris yang minimum di kalangan kanak-kanak tadika Unimas. Selain itu, keputusan juga mendapati terdapat tujuh jenis respon yang digunakan. Hasil kajian ini sedikit sebanyak dapat memberi gambaran manfaat yang diperolehi daripada aktiviti 'read-aloud' tersebut serta pertimbangan bagi memasukkan aktiviti 'read aloud' dalam kurikulum pendidikan pra-sekolah.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

R = Reader

C = Children

Cm = Child

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Chapter Overview

This chapter discussed the background of the study. The chapter also included statement of the problem, the research objectives, the research questions, significance of the study, and the definition of key terms and scope of the study.

1.1 Background of the study

As early as the infant stage, a child starts using various sounds to communicate. The “sounds” made at this stage is considered as the early spoken language. A child experimenting his early spoken language through cries and cooing, is learning to express pain, anger, fear or joy (Petty, Petty, & Salzer, 1994). A child’s language ability will expand as they grown up.

Aldridge (2005) states that other than listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, children's oral language is important to a child's literacy development. Young children can be encouraged to use language through normal play activities, such as using picture books and puppets. Oral language skill provides a medium to enable the young children to share and exchange ideas, feelings, opinions, as well as to communicate in their target language effectively.

Reading books to children been widely known. Reading to very young children is important as its contribution to other language-learning experiences (Petty, Petty, & Salzer, 1994). A further opportunity to develop oral language in children is the time between an adult and a child through storybook reading (Booth, 2005). The opportunity to listen and discussing stories benefits children's oral language as well as written language development in many ways (Novick, 1998).

1.2 Statement of problem

Trelease (2000) cited in Coiro (2006) pointed out that reading aloud to children "stimulates their interest, their emotional development, their imagination and their language". In addition, reading aloud is also recommended as an activity and as a teaching routine in every class especially in classes which include children with reading difficulties (Razinski & Padak, 2000). Leuenberger (2003) pointed out that reading aloud is the foundation of a well-balanced kindergarten literacy curriculum (as cited in Oueini, Bahous & Nabhani, 2008). Furthermore, reading aloud demonstrates the relationship between the printed word and meaning—children understand that print tells a story or conveys information and invites the listener into a conversation with the author (Gold & Gibson, 2001).

As illustrated above, reading aloud activity is such a worth whole activity for the children. Therefore, this study attempted to answer the following research question. Firstly, which language was used by the young children in responding while

engaged in the reading aloud activity? Secondly, what were the children's response(s) during the activity? Thirdly, what did the young children say in responding to the story read and how were the responses related to the story retell? Finally would the young children use the words/sentences found in the stories?

1.3 Aim and objectives of the study

Learning a language requires using the language and also reinforcement. Learning the mother tongue for means learning it naturally. That is, speakers of the first language, such as the parents. However, for young children to learn a second language requires purposeful implementation. Through activities, then, learning takes place. So in this study, the young children as their second language through this activity, reading aloud

The aim of this study was to look through this activity, reading aloud for the answers to meet the following objectives.

- i. To identify the young children's response(s) during the read aloud activity.
- ii. To identify what they say and how they are related to the story.
- iii. To find out whether they could have used the word/ sentences that have been read to them.

1.4 Significance of Study

The result of this study provided information on the oral language used by the young children in responding while engaging in the read aloud activity. This study provides insights for teachers working in the kindergartens on the impact of reading aloud activity for young children. Therefore, it is important that kindergarten teachers incorporate this activity in their daily teaching

Hence, it is important that kindergarten teacher be properly trained to conduct the activity with young children as the kindergarten is an early platform of learning. Research has shown the importance of the early years in children's emergent literacy, language growth and reading achievement (Bus, Van Ijzendoorn, & Pellergrini, 1995; Dickson & Tabors, 2000; Scarborough & Dobrich, 1994)

1.5 Operational Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined as follows:

i. Oral language

As pointed by Lindfors (1987 as cited in Genishi, 1988), oral language is the complex system whereby human relates sounds to meanings and it is made up of three components which are the phonological, semantic, and syntactic. Based on Zhang and Alex (1995), basically oral language means communicating with other people. However, oral language development in a curriculum, do not mean teaching children to speak only as it is more to improve the children ability to talk or communicate more effectively. Speech is not usually simply basic communication--it involves thinking, knowledge, and skills. It also requires practice and training. Thus, in this study the oral language used will specifically referred to the young children's response (s) while engaging in the read aloud activity.

According Sipe (2002), children's response is viewed as the children "seek to understand the story through analyzing its plot, setting, characters, or themes and compare or contrast the story to the other stories they know, other cultural products like movies or visual 'texts' like painting "

ii. Reading aloud

As quoted in Oueini, Bahous and Nabhani (2008), Franzese (2002) refers read aloud as when children listen to an adult read different type and genres of texts and then engage in talking about the book. Furthermore, reading aloud the material to be read aloud may be fiction or non-fiction books, poems, articles or book chapter (Razinski & Padak, 2000 as cited in Oueini, Bahous, & Nabhani, 2008). Furthermore, reading aloud is a social event, a shared activity in which children are encouraged to ask questions and talk about a story (Lopes, 1993).

1.6 Scope of Study

This study attempted to look at the language used by the young children when responding during the reading aloud activity. This study identified whether the responses given by the children were relevant and related to the part of the story. Moreover, this study was set up to find whether the young children could use the words/sentences that had been read to them.

However, this study did not look at the oral language used by the children in the other activities in the kindergarten except for read aloud activity. The children's responses in a group setting and not specifically responses of individual children were analysed in this study.

1.7 Chapter review

This chapter had covered the background of the study, the problem statement, the research objectives, the significance of the study, the definition of terms and the scope of the study. The next chapter covers the literature review related to the study.

CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Preview

This chapter begins by focusing on language acquisition of the young children. Then, this chapter discusses on how children acquire a language, oral language and reading aloud activity. In addition, this chapter looks at interactive reading, and the results of research on repeated reading and books used. Finally, the chapters covers benefits of reading aloud and the chapter summary.

2.1 Children's language learning

All children learn to talk without much difficulty and children start their learning at birth. According to Petty, Petty and Salzer (1994), there are three theories related to language acquisition of the children. Firstly, behaviorist theory; says that newborn infant is the first stage in learning a language and do not have the ability yet to perform or to produce the language. In addition, the theory claims that language

learning as essentially imitation and repetition guided by external events. The second theory of language children acquisition is a nativist. The Nativist point of view of language learning is seen as “innate” skills of learners since they were born. The natural skills named as language acquisition device (LAD) and which needs a triggered by a “language environment” in which the infant lives in. Thirdly, the cognitivist theory in which the argument is about learning a language is related to the thinking process of the learner.

J. Doug McGlothlin (1997) stated that there are two parts in children’s language learning. The first part is concerned with the language environment that surrounds the child, and the second part deals with how the learner comes to the new language. The second part refers to the different strategies used by children in their attempt to increase his/her language skills.

For the purpose of this study, the theories presented show the importance of exposing to children language in order for them to become competent language speakers. Bruner (1983) pointed out that there is no specific effort from the caregivers in supporting children language development (as cited in Novick, 1998). Furthermore, Genishi (1988) stated that language occurs through an interaction “among genes (which hold innate tendencies to communicate and be social able),” surrounding and the children’s thinking ability.

2.2 Oral language

The development of oral language is one of the child's most natural--and impressive--accomplishments. As argued by Aldridge (2005), oral language is crucial to a child’s literacy development, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Meanwhile, Justice (2004) said that oral language development begins in infancy when adults respond to infants babbling. In language rich environments

children are subject to high quality oral input from their peers and others (cited in Sooth, 2005).

Oral language defined by Linfors (1987), is the complex system in which human relates sounds to meanings and it is made up of three components which are the phonological, semantic, and syntactic (in Genishi, 1988). On the other hand, Holbrook (1983) specifies three criteria for oral language competence: fluency, clarity and sensitivity (as cited in Bertram, 2002). Bertram (2002) believed that oral language development in school is not just focusing on teaching children to speak but also providing children with the skills and opportunities to communicate more effectively. Speech involves thinking, knowledge and skills. Effective communication is developed through practice and training.

In addition, the oral language proficiency is of advantage to young children. Novick (1998) pointed out that, “oral language provides the ‘connerstone’ of written language; speaking, listening, reading, and writing are all aspects of literacy and develop in an interdependent manner” (p 33).

2.3 Reading Aloud

Children learn to read at different ages, although most of them discover the connection between letters and sounds in kindergarten. Trelease (2006) said that, reading to young children is the same as talking to the children such as “to reassure, to entertain, to bond; to inform or explain, to arouse curiosity, to inspire and so forth” (p.1). The Florida Center for Reading Research (FCRR) recommends that parents should read with their child for at least fifteen minutes everyday as the first steps toward learning (cited in Sitton, 2008). According to Franzese (2002) cited in Oueini, Bahous & Nabhani (2008) read aloud is when children listen to an adult read different types and genres of text.

Reading aloud to children is very important, either at home or school and most of the time the reading is a planned activity (Petty, Petty & Salzer, 1994). Daisey (1993) cited in Fisher, Flood, Lapp and Frey (2004) reported that reading aloud activity is one of the three ways to promote student literacy in any ages. Studies (Adams, (1990); Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson (1985); Goldfield & Snow (1984) stated that reading aloud activity was highly recommended activity in promoting language and literacy among the young children (cited in Beck & McKeown (2001).

Similar to this, Dale (2008) stated that the most beneficial “language-building task” for the children is through reading aloud activity. In addition, reading aloud activity as claimed as a critical activity in helping a child gain the knowledge and language skills. *Gibson (2007) claimed that reading aloud to young children is the most effective tools to be used in school and more important than homework, assessments, worksheet or the interactive work-board in school.*

Robert Needlman (2004) expressed the view that reading aloud activity is not mainly for children who is able to read but means to meet the children who is having a difficulty learning to read. Children who is having a difficulty in reading who be pleasure as there are someone assisting them in their reading which read aloud activity is one of the methods that provides the approach.

The used of reading aloud activity in young children’s learning is vary. Therefore it is important to have in advance the clear purpose of using read aloud activity in learning. This statement was further support by Teale (2003) in his article “ what make the difference in whether reading aloud to children promoted language and literacy development was why readings were done, what teachers read, and how are read.”

2.3.1 Interactive reading

Blok (1999) believed that in attempts to understand the children's language development it is essential to look at different ways of reading to the children. The two ways of reading mentioned are; "talking with the child" and "talking to child". The first ways of reading describe as a great deal of interaction between the reader and child about the text and known as interactive reading style. On the other hand, "talking to the children" is more to passive reading style where limited opportunities for the interaction for the children because most of the time reader will done the talk.

Blok (1999) in his study pointed out that interactive reading has a stronger effect in children's language development since it gives an opportunity to the children to reconstruct the meaning with the supports from the reader. Research by Rosenhouse, Fietelson, Kita and Goldstein (1997) pointed out that the interactive classroom story- reading showed a positive effect to the first-grade student as the participant "increases in decoding, reading comprehension, and picture storytelling."

2.3.2 Repeated reading

Cheryl K. Iannucci (2007) claimed that repeated interactive read-aloud is a "systematic method of reading aloud." Moreover, it provides opportunities for the teacher to assist the student to comprehend the book being read, "model strategies for making inferences and explanations, and teach vocabulary and concepts"(p.1) A study by Dowhower (1987) found the positive result of repeated reading for a second-grade transitional readers. The results showed there are encouraging improvements in "transitional readers' rate, accuracy, comprehension, and prosodic reading (reading in meaningful phrases)."

2.3.3 Books

Research by Moscohovaki and Meadows (2005) on young children's spontaneous participation during classroom book reading where the differences were on the various types of books used. The books illustration is important to facilitate children's comprehension. Further, the study pointed out that no illustration means the degree of task difficulty is increased because of a long concentration on a language only. The use of picture books is believed one "principal format" for the young children to experience literature (Sipe, 1999).

Similar to this, Donaldson (1978) added that the attention span of the young children is limited when they have to attend to language alone. Therefore, the nonverbal context which is illustrated by the book illustration helps young children in interpreting the situation in hand (cited in Moscohovaki and Meadows, 2005). This statement further is further supported by Sipe (1998a) who argued that children are able to make meaning by using both visual and verbal clues from the picture books (cited in Sipe, 1999).

According to Gary and Manning (1996), using a picture book makes young children enjoy reading more as they are attracted by the illustrations of the delightful character, as well as the written language in the storybook. In order to understand books, children connect their real life experience with the books. Therefore, book choices is a crucial part in reading aloud activity in order to invite children to respond with enthusiasm and understanding. Look for books with rich language, meaningful plots, compelling characters, and engaging illustrations (Gambrell & Almasi, 1996 cited in Gold and Gibson, 2005).

2.4 Benefits of read aloud activity

Researchers who advocate the use of reading aloud activity for young children has listed several benefits of using the read aloud activity. Based on a 10-week case study done by Oueini, Bahous and Nabhani (2008) on the impact of read-aloud in the classroom, which involved fifty three 5 to 6 year-old kindergarteners, it is evident that the read aloud activity has an positive impact on the kindergarten. The findings from the study showed that young children's listening and speaking abilities are more develop that their reading and writing and children easily developed their vocabulary through listening to the story.

Reading aloud to children significantly improves their reading skills, written skill, oral, and auditory skills. In addition, the reading aloud activity has increased children's motivation towards reading compares to those who are not involved in the activity (Qunell, 1999). Gambrell, Palmer, and Codling (1993) found that reading aloud activity as one of the motivating factor for reading among the children (as cited in *Fisher, Flood, Lapp & Frey, 2004*). Similarly, Gold and Gibson (2001) stated that reading aloud to children encourages children to read on their own and develops their listening comprehension as well as reading comprehension. In view of this, Speaker et al. (2004) observed that the use of reading aloud activity with young children can enhance children's oral language (cited in Sooth, 2005).

Reading stories aloud have the capability to develop children "concepts about print, story structure, and another elements of text" and provides knowledge about the process and function of written language to the children (Rog, 2001 as cited in Oueini, Bahous and Nabhani, 2008). Studies (Altwerger, Diehl-Faxon, & Dockstader-Anderson, 1985; Teale & Sulzby, 1987) found that as the children participate in read-aloud this would benefit the children in learning new words and ideas through the

exposure of the variety of genres in written forms (cited in Fisher, Flood, Lapp & Frey, 2004).

According to Hall and Moats (2000) benefits from reading aloud to children including developing background knowledge about a variety of topics, building vocabulary, becoming familiar with rich language patterns, developing familiarity with story grammar, acquiring familiarity with the reading process and identifying reading as a pleasurable activity. Learning new words and ideas is leading to the ability to use the language either orally or written. Similar to this, Needlman (2004) observed that reading aloud activity is of advantage to the children in building their vocabulary and listening skills and helps to increase their interest in reading keep them engaged in reading. Pinnell and Jaggar (2003, cited in Fisher, Flood, Lapp & Frey, 2004) demonstrated the importance of read-aloud activity in the growth of oral language for both first- and second-language speaker.

Furthermore, reading books aloud children will be able to stimulate their imagination and 'expands' children's understanding of the world, lead to the development of the young's language and listening skills and early preparation in understanding the written words (Cullninan & Bagert, 1996).

2.5 Summary

Research has recommended reading aloud activity as one of the most important activity especially for young children. The benefits of reading aloud to children are varied from the basic which is providing the young children with the basic knowledge about books and prints. Then, the basic literacy knowledge from the reading aloud has developed in supporting the development of the oral language of the young children, motivation in reading and the increase of vocabulary. However, it is important to know the purpose of the read aloud activity, the selection of book that suite the learner. The next chapter will be discussing the research design and methodology of this study in depth.

CHAPTER THREE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Chapter Preview

The aim of this study was to look at the responses of young children during read aloud activity. The methodology used in this study was qualitative in nature. Qualitative data from read aloud sessions videoed and transcribed gave the researcher a in-depth view of the respond of the young children. In this chapter, the procedures and methods in conducting this study that is the research design, participants and setting of the study, the data collection procedure, the instruments for data collection, data analysis, and limitations of the study were also highlighted.

3.1 Research Design

This research adopted a qualitative case-study design in studying children's responses while engaging in the reading aloud activity. According to Nisbet and Watt

(1984), “a case study is a specific instance that is frequently designed to illustrate a more general principle”(cited in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). Besides, Merriam (1990) highlighted the case study as an examination of a specific phenomenon such as a program, an event, a person, a process, an institution, or a social group and it is chosen as occurrence of some concern, issues, or hypothesis.

According to Cronbach (1975), a case study design is different in the sense that the study was “an interpretation in context” (p.98) as it direct one's to a single phenomenon and its significant features (cited in Merriam, 1990). Similarly, Yin (1984) indicates that case study was a one to one situation which means specifically design for a situation in which it was impossible to separate the phenomenon's variables from their context (cited in Merriam, 1990).

3.2 Participant

The participants for this study consisted of kindergarten children from Tadika UNIMAS in Kota Samarahan. The kindergarten chosen has its uniqueness compared to other kindergartens around Kuching and Kota Samarahan area. Tadika UNIMAS is located within Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Kota Samarahan. Children attending this kindergarten are children of staff of the university, both academic and non-academic. The medium of instruction in this kindergarten is Bahasa Malaysia.

The kindergarten is under the charged of three teachers and one helper, and there are thirty-nine children with ages ranging from three to six years old on the enrol. The uniqueness of the kindergarten was the service that it provides. Besides providing kindergarten education to children, the kindergarten also provides childcare service to its community. Therefore, some of the children would be staying at the centre for the whole day. In this kindergarten the children are put into two classes according to the children's age: three and four-year old children in one class and the

rest in another class. Even though the children are separated into two different classes, the children come together for some activities; the children combine into one big group for their meal and outdoor activities.

For the purpose of this study, only children five to six years old were in this study and which come to a total of 31 young children, 18 boys and 13 girls. The group of children was determined by the kindergarten teacher.

3.2.1 Setting

Unimas's kindergarten is an institution kindergarten which is operated by Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). The kindergarten was situated at the west campus. In addition, the kindergarten is operated in one of the flat building in one of the staff flat. The kindergarten was housed in one of the university staff flats and it is located in two units of flats on the ground floor. The building is not purpose built for the kindergarten and the kindergarten shares the building with other tenants. Each unit of the flats had three rooms and these are used as the teacher's office, the classroom and the activity rooms for the children.

As mentioned earlier, the children are separated into two different classes in this kindergarten. The three and four-year old children are in one unit of the flats and five and six-year old children in another flat. The five-and six-year old group children are taught following curriculum for kindergarteners set by the Ministry of Education. The children were exposed to the '3M' (*membaca, menulis, mengira*) as stated in the curriculum. As for the three to four-years the children, they learn basic literacy such as reciting the alphabet and recognizing number, drawing, colouring and singing.