

**CASE STUDY OF LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT OF SELECTED
KINDERGARTENERS DURING READ ALOUD SESSIONS**

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Statement of Originality

The work described in this Final Year Project, entitled
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is to the best of the author’s knowledge that of the author except
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ABSTRACT

A CASE STUDY OF LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT OF SELECTED KINDERGARTENERS DURING READ ALOUD SESSIONS

Ting Ying Ying

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the language development of the four selected kindergarteners. The study was conducted in a private kindergarten which was under an institution of higher learning. The four kindergarteners were selected through a video recording during the second visit to the kindergarten. Selection of the children was made in consultation with and at the recommendation of the teacher. The teacher was the best person to make recommendation as the children were under her charge. Data for this study were video recordings of reading aloud sessions which were then transcribed for analysis. The video recordings were conducted from the end of July to the middle of November. A total of eighteen reading aloud sessions were recorded. Seven picture storybooks were repetitively used to read aloud to the kindergarteners. Results of the study showed that the four selected kindergarteners showed some language development through the interactive story discussion with reader during read aloud sessions. They demonstrated their understanding and knowledge based on their personal experience, background knowledge and imitation from peers and reader. Open-ended question technique and picture discussion were used on the reading aloud sessions to stimulate kindergarteners to think critically and creatively to the story. However, there was only minor language development achieved by the four kindergarteners probably because of the short period of reading sessions. The findings of this study highlighted the importance of reading aloud to children which contributed to their language development.

ABSTRAK

KAJIAN KES TENTANG PERKEMBANGAN BAHASA BAGI KANAK-KANAK TADIKA TERPILIH KETIKA SESI “READ ALOUD”

Ting Ying Ying

Tujuan utama kajian ini dijalankan adalah untuk menerokai perkembangan bahasa bagi empat kanak-kanak tadika yang dipilih. Kajian ini dijalankan di sebuah tadika swasta yang di bawah jagaan sebuah institusi pendidikan tinggi. Empat kanak-kanak dipilih melalui satu video rakaman semasa lawatan kedua ke tadika tersebut. Pemilihan kanak-kanak adalah melalui cadangan dan perundingan bersama dengan guru tadika. Guru tadika itu merupakan orang yang paling sesuai untuk memberi cadangan sebab semua kanak-kanak adalah di bawah jagaan beliau. Data bagi kajian ini adalah video rakaman sesi “read aloud” dan kemudian ditranskripkan untuk tujuan analysis. Sejumlah lapan belas sesi “read aloud” dijalankan dari lewat bulan Julai hingga tengah bulan November. Tujuh buah gambar buku cerita dibacakan kepada kanak-kanak berulang kali. Kajian ini menunjukkan empat kanak-kanak tadika tersebut menunjukkan beberapa perkembangan bahasa melalui interaksi perbincangan cerita bersama pembaca ketika sesi “read aloud”. Mereka menunjukkan kefahaman dan pengetahuan mereka dengan menggunakan pengalaman sendiri, persekitaran pengetahuan dan peniruan daripada kawan-kawan dan pembace. Soalan yang “open-ended” dan gambar huraian telah digunakan dalam sesi “read aloud” untuk merangsangkan kreativiti dan kritikal permikiran kanak-kanak terhadap cerita. Walaupun demikian, hanya sedikit perkembangan bahasa yang didapati daripada keempat-empat kanak-kanak tersebut mungkin disebabkan jangka masa yang pendek. Hasil kajian ini menegaskan kepentingan “reading aloud” kepada kanak-kanak dimana ia boleh menyumbang kepada perkembangan bahasa mereka.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Chapter Overview

This chapter focuses on the background of the study, statement of the problem, research aims and objectives, research questions, the significance of the study, operational definition of terms and the scope of the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

Language plays a major part and helps children to organize thought, and use language to learn as well as communicate and share experiences with others (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986 cited in Wilson, 2005). Human beings are born to speak. Children learn the rules of language at an early stage through use without formal instruction. They work through linguistic rules on their own because they use forms that adults do not use such as “I goed there before” and eventually the children learn the conventional forms once they sort out for themselves the exceptions to the rules of English syntax (Genishi, 1998).

Apart from that, children are also born to interact socially. Before they are able to use words, they use cries and gestures to convey meaning. The purpose is mainly to make connections with other people and to make sense of experiences (Wells, 1986 cited in Genishi, 1998). It is unproductive to correct constantly children's speech but encourage them to practise speaking everyday as learning to talk requires time for development.

Teacher and reading specialist, Julie Coiro (2000) discovers that young children's language and literacy skills can be built through read aloud. According to her, read aloud helps very small children to build closer relationship with the one who loves them as they begin to explore the wonders of their new world. Through hearing the words, babies have the opportunity to become familiar with other people and environment whereas toddlers begin to mimic the language patterns. For young preschoolers, they are freely to venture into new worlds filled with fantasy and adventure. Children who are read to at an early age perceive firsthand that reading can be exciting and fun. Thus, they will remember the feeling of warmth, sanctuary, love, and family unity into their adulthood. Although they might forget the actual stories, reading has become their enjoyable and lifelong habit (Coiro, 2000).

Read aloud has been recognized as a significant instructional approach that could affect children's literacy achievement. In *Becoming A Nation of Readers* (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985) published by the Commission on Reading stated that "the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children" (cited in Kaplan and Tracey, 2007, p. 2). Since then, the number of teacher read aloud in the classrooms has steadily increased. Before the issue of *Becoming A Nation of Readers*, less than half of elementary teachers regularly read aloud to their students (Brabham & Lynch-Brown, 2002 cited in Kaplan & Tracey, 2007). In contrast, they reported that approximately 75 percent of all elementary teachers read aloud daily to their students after ten to twenty years of the issue of the book. Recently, Jacobs, Morrison, and Swinyard (2000 cited in Kaplan & Tracey, 2007)

found that 100 percent of elementary teachers read aloud to their students on a regular basis.

Read aloud is, however, not a skill that is isolated, but characteristically interactive: children interact with the teacher and the other children (Colwell, 1983 cited in Wilson, 2005). Interactive read aloud incorporate as of Cambourne's conditions of learning (1988 cited in Barrentine, 1996). Cambourne (1988) developed a model that describes how children become proficient users of language. His theory of language learning declares that certain conditions lie at the core of the effective teaching and learning in natural settings. These conditions are engagement, immersion, demonstration, expectation, responsibility, use, approximation, and response. He argues that classroom teaching must stimulate conditions available to learners in natural settings in order to achieve success in literacy teaching and learning (Mathie, 1995 cited in Barrentine, 1996). Knowledge is constructed as a result of dynamic interactions between the individual and the physical and social environments (Terblanche, 2002). Involving children interactively in reading the story aloud helps to improve children's comprehension and engagement in the story while post reading discussions encourage children to relate the story events to their personal experiences and background knowledge. In a sense the child discovers knowledge through active experimentation. In a conclusion, read aloud helps to engage children to their existing prior knowledge and associated with others' knowledge.

Read aloud should be treated as a daily basis on children. It is because the words and sentences in books are often different and more complicated than what children hear in the course of everyday living. It gives more benefits to those children whose English is not their first language. Read aloud exposes them to new vocabulary. According to Neuman, (2005), children who have been read to since their earliest years can do better in reading than their peers who have not had the same advantage. Therefore, it is important to provide even very young children with many opportunities to discover and explore books, environmental

print, the alphabet and rhymes to convey meaning at whatever level they are capable of participating (Morrow, 2001).

Few researchers reveal that children's language and literacy skills in kindergarten are strongly related to later academic success (Morrow, n.d.). Reading aloud contributes to a well-balanced kindergarten literacy curriculum (Leuenberger, 2003 as cited in Oueini, Bahous, & Nabhani, 2008). Kindergartners are exposed to some specific strategies like talking about the book before or after reading it, listening to teacher read aloud using an enthusiastic voice and asking questions about the book. Children then learn to master written language obliquely. Writing, speaking, listening and reading skills are developed among children via reading aloud. Children who are exposed to language experiences during the preschool years are able to read with comprehension when they reach middle school (Morrow, n.d.).

Despite the great advantages that the storybook read-aloud provides, it can have no effect if it is not well implemented. Children could only benefit from it when teachers establish clear and daily routines and plan for the read-aloud sessions seriously. Thus, Rog (2001) notifies teachers that read aloud storybooks would not turn students into readers by simply listening to stories. Success would be determined by the good selection of books and the method used in reading.

Book reading with young children has been the focus of much research. The majority of such research has focused on the development of early literacy concepts, mainly related to the decoding aspect of print and the development of oral language skills. Since children tend to use gesture and cries before they are able to use words to convey meaning, the researcher wants to know how the children respond to the story read to them and how they respond to the different characteristics of storybooks during read aloud sessions. Hence, the language development and responses of children towards storybooks read to them were investigated in this study.

1.2 Research Problem

In the study carried out by Datuk Dr. Zainal Abidin Ahmad of The National University of Malaysia on reading habit in 1997, he found that Malaysians only read a couple of pages a year. Most of a child's school day is devoted to reading-skill instructions where children follow what their teachers ask them to read for the purpose of passing the examinations. Besides, the reading habit is not cultivated in children from a young age. Fitzgerald, Spiegel, and Cunningham (1991) report that parents, regardless of their literacy level, rank "child listens to someone read to him or her" as the most important feature in early literacy development (cited in Kissinger, 2004, p.58). However, it has been found that only 39% of parents read to their children on a daily basis (Young, Davis, & Schoen, 1996 cited in Franklin, 2008). Parents who rarely read books or newspapers themselves may be less likely to read to their children (Fletcher & Lyon, 1998 cited in Harris, Loyo, Holahan, Suzuki, & Gottlieb, 2007).

According to Gadsden and Ray (2003), parents who have limited schooling as well as low reading and writing abilities have difficulty participating in school-related activities requiring high levels of literacy. They feel challenged by their own limited formal literacy capacities and hence they are unable to support their children's early literacy development. Parents are their child's first literacy teachers (Edwards, 2004 cited in Zeece, 2005). They may not always know how to extend a story-telling session, judge a teachable moment or even read the words themselves. Furthermore, parents with limited English proficiency may be reluctant to read aloud in their native language, out of concern that this would impede their children's English acquisition (Golova, Alario, Vivier, Rodriguez, & High, 1999 cited in Harris, Loyo, Holahan, Suzuki, & Gottlieb, 2007).

In addition, more and more families are becoming two-income nowadays in order to support their families. According to Schuman and Relihan (1990), they predict that in 1995, two out of three preschool children will have both parents in the work force, and by the year 2000, 70 to 80 percent of all mothers with children

under five will be in full-time employment. It seems inevitable that the mission of ‘emergent literacy’ of children will become the responsibility of day care providers.

Without a proper guidance of parents at home, television has presented a powerful barrier to children’s reading in the United States. It is routinely used in American families to occupy children (Rideout & Hamel, 2006). According to a 1998 report by the University of Michigan’s Institute for Social Research (Hofferth & Sandberg, 2000 cited in Harris, Loyo, Holahan, Suzuki, & Gottlieb, 2007), children of all ages spent as much time watching television in one day as they spent reading for fun in an entire week.

As a result, children who are not read to might have poor reading skill. According to Good (1998 cited in Persampieri, 2006), poor reading skills not only have a detrimental effect on children’s academic trajectory, they also have been associated with behavioral and emotional problems, such as aggressive behavior and poor self-concept. It has been shown that if children fail to read by the fourth grade, they have a ‘future of diminished success’ (US Department of Education, 2001 cited in Persampieri, 2006). Those who do not read, or who do not read well, would find their chances for academic and occupational opportunities limited next time (Wolfe & Nevills, 2004 cited in Wilson, 2005).

1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study

This study focused more on the interaction of the four selected kindergarteners with reader, story and other kindergarteners instead of the whole group of kindergarteners. The purpose of this study was to find out the language development of the four selected kindergarteners, their responses towards the story read and the materials used during read aloud sessions. Specifically, the objectives of this study were as below.

- a) To find out how the kindergarteners respond to the story read to them.

- b) To find out how the kindergarteners respond to the materials used during read aloud sessions.
- c) To examine the language used by the kindergarteners in responding during read aloud sessions.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The findings and outcomes of this study provided beneficial information to parents, teachers, administrators and researchers in assisting to increase children's reading abilities. This study gave awareness to adults about the significance of reading aloud to their children as early reading experiences prepare children for the benefit of formal literacy instruction. They should take their responsibilities to read aloud to their children instead of giving the responsibility to day care providers. The findings of this study would enable adults to understand that read aloud could be used to engage children to become good listeners besides developing children's background knowledge related to the story read, increasing comprehension skills, and fostering critical thinking. Moreover, adults learnt that children's vocabulary could be developed from words to phrases and to sentences and their relationship with their children would be strengthened through read aloud activity. They would be motivated to read aloud to their children in order to develop the love of reading.

1.5 Operational Definition of Terms

1.5.1 Reading aloud

Reading aloud is when children listen to an adult read different types and genres of texts (Franzese, 2002 cited in Oueini, Bahous, & Nabhani, 2008) and engage in talking about the book (Oueini, Bahous, & Nabhani, 2008). Few researchers defined reading aloud as the skills or knowledge that children develop before learning the more conventional skills of reading and writing (Duursma, Augustyn, & Zuckerman, 2008) which affect children's later success in reading. It

is describing pictures in the book, explaining the meaning of the story, and encouraging the child to talk about what has been read to them and to ask questions in order to improve their understanding of the world and their social skills. The material to be read aloud may be fiction and nonfiction books, poems, articles or book chapters (Razinski & Padak, 2000 cited in Oueini, Bahous, & Nabhani, 2008).

In this study, reading aloud was a group activity that involved a group of children and a reader. The genre of text used was picture storybook. The reader guided the children and helped them to become active participants by asking questions and responding to pictures, meaning, and language. The reader assisted the children in making connections between text and personal experiences.

1.5.2 Language

Language can be called as the symbolization of thought. It is a learned code or system of rules that enables us to communicate ideas and express wants and needs. Reading, writing, gesturing and speaking are all forms of language. Language falls into two main divisions which are receptive language and expressive language. The examples of receptive language understand what is said, written or signed while the examples for expressive language are speaking, writing or signing (Brown, 1998).

1.5.3 Language development

Language development is the keystone for the development of reading, writing, and thinking skills especially in the early years when young minds are ripe for language learning. Children speak in increasingly complex phrases and sentences, at first to express their needs and feelings and gradually to interact with adults and their peers. In Capute, Shapiro, and Palmer (1986)'s Clinical Linguistic and Auditory Milestone Scale, include these benchmarks for a 3-year-old: uses pronouns discriminately, uses plurals, forms 3-word sentences, and has a 250-

word vocabulary. They will understand a great many more words spoken to them, since young children are more advanced in receptive (hearing) language than in expressive (speaking) language.

In this study, the researcher focused on the development of children's utterance. Children who were used to speak in mother tongue had the tendency to speak in English when interacting with reader during reading aloud sessions. Their utterances had been developed from words to phrases and to sentences.

1.5.4 Kindergartener

Kindergartener is the child who is undergoing the earliest stage of formal systematic education and receiving 3M (*menulis, membaca, mengira*) in his or her learning process. The age is normally around four to six years old. They are preparing themselves with alphabet knowledge, print awareness, phonemic awareness and other knowledge before entering primary school. They learn through teacher and peers as well.

In this study, the kindergarteners referred to the children who were studying in a kindergarten which was a part of a university. The university served as a learning environment for the children of the employees of the university. Hence, the kindergarteners were the children of the staff.

1.5.5 Response

Response means readers' or listeners' spoken or written words and physical actions, for instance, art projects, gestures, and facial expressions evoked by a reading or listening experience (Sipe, 1999).

In this study, the response referred to the kindergarteners' verbal and non verbal reaction towards the storybooks read aloud to them. The verbal reactions could be the utterance in one word, phrases or in a sentence or in their own

mother tongue while non verbal reactions are gestures and facial expression shown by the kindergarteners.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study was conducted in a kindergarten which is a part of an institution of higher learning. It is a service for staff who are employees of the university. The participants were four selected kindergarteners. They are part of a group of kindergarteners. This study was not about other children in a group. Therefore, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to all kindergarteners. The activity involved was reading aloud. Other activities like English language lesson, singing or play were not included.

1.7 Chapter Review

This chapter described briefly on the development of children's language and the characteristics of reading aloud to children. This chapter also focused on the background of the study, statement of the problem, aims and objectives of the study, the significance of the study, operational definition of terms and scope of the study. The next chapter will discuss on related issues, literacy theory and reviews on previous researchers done related to reading aloud.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Chapter Overview

In order to address the research purpose, this section presents a critical review of literature related to this study. It begins by discussing on the definition of language development and the factors influence the language development. This is then followed by a discussion on the theory of literacy learning - Cambourne's Conditions of Learning (1988) and literacy learning in kindergarten. Subsequently, the chapter discusses in depth on reading aloud activity and how it leads to language development.

2.1 Language Development

2.1.1 Definition

Language development is used in a broad sense which is related to oral as well as written language. Phonological skills, vocabulary, morpho-syntactical skills, metalinguistic awareness, and reading and writing skills are the language skills which are generally distinguished (Blok, 1999).

The order of these language skills represents a development order as long as the starting point of each of the components is concerned. For instance, the development of phonological skills starts earlier than the development of vocabulary. Likewise, the development of vocabulary starts earlier than the development of morpho-syntactical skills. However, there is a possibility that overlap occurs in the periods of these developments where the development of vocabulary coincides with the development of skills for which the starting point occurs at a later stage.

2.1.2 Factors influence the language development

Children are born to have an inherent aptitude for language learning. Almost all children learn the rules of their language at an early age without formal instruction. They generate internal rules or schemas to better understand and connect what they are experiencing, or being taught, to what they have learned previously. They do not simply imitate what they hear instead they use what they hear to construct their own version of the language (Black, 1995). They have an innate gift for figuring out the rules of the language used in their environment (Genishi, 1998). Children often use self-directed language to guide their own thought processes (Vygotsky, 1962).

On the other hand, other researchers believe that learners build knowledge in active response to sensory experiences where they construct personal understanding of the environment through a process of interaction, reflection, and action (Eitelgeorge, Rushton, & Zickafoose, 2003). During this interactive stage, learners contemplate both their actions and the environment while cognitive structures are stimulated to construct the knowledge (Eitelgeorge, Rushton, & Zickafoose, 2003). According to Anbar (1986 cited in Blachman, 1997) who has done a study on six children, he found that children learn enthusiastically through the interaction with their parents. Firstly, their parents read to them daily, the children turned the pages of the books when they were read to and they played magnetic letters with alphabet blocks. Then, they started to recognize letters and

some sight words. In the third stage, the children showed interest in the sounds of letters, using ABC books, invented sound games and alphabet letters. Subsequently, the children started to use what they had learnt to “make words” using plastic letters, blocks or cards. Then, they were interested in sounding out new words, as long as the words contained only a few letters. Eventually, they started reading for themselves.

According to Piaget and Inhelder (1969 cited in Eitelgeorge, Rushton, & Zickafoose, 2003), knowledge comes neither from the subject itself nor the object, but from the unity or interaction of the two. The “individual constructs knowledge and makes meaning through interpretation of his own experiences and analyses of the environment” (Lincoln, 2001 cited in Eitelgeorge, Rushton, & Zickafoose, 2003, p.12). Further, Vygotsky (1978) alleged a sociocultural version of constructivism, believing that understanding is generated by the learner’s interaction with the social environment. In both cases, constructivists propose that understanding is created when the learners are engaged in using their cognitive processes in relation to their bodies and within the context of the physical world of materials, symbolic tools, and nuances of their culture.

Learners of all ages attempt to make sense of the world around them and their experiences by synthesizing the present moment, skill, or concept being taught with their own prior knowledge, conditions of learning, and mental understandings (Eitelgeorge, Rushton, & Zickafoose, 2003). Biological growth and experiences with language through the environment enhance the language learning potential. As with these aspects of development, language acquisition is not predictable. One child may say her first word at 10 months, another at 20 months. One child may use complex sentences at 5 1/2 years, another at 3 years (Genishi, 1998). Thus, the differences in language learning potential among children can be traced back to three sources: they are partly determined by talent and biological development, but they are also partly the result of experiences with language that stimulate the language learning potential. This view implies that

language learning potential and language experiences do not operate independently but determine language development interaction.

A study related to English language learner has been done by Cummins (1979 cited in Durodola, Hickman, & Vaughn, 2004). He claims that children who are English second learners are more likely to learn to read and write English when they already have a firm foundation in the vocabulary and concepts of their primary languages as they are able to construct knowledge using their primary language. They then need to be exposed to rich English language materials and models from teachers to gain more exposure of using English language (Fillmore, 1991 cited in Morrow, 2001).

In the process of acquiring English, the children may appear to have limited proficiency in both languages. This is most likely a developmental phase where lack of using the primary language results decline in proficiency, while at the same time knowledge of the second language is not yet at an age-appropriate level. However, when they have attained age-appropriate levels in the second language, they may still retain an accent and make grammatical mistakes which will mark them as nonnative speakers.

Indeed, this is merely a temporary phase in language development (Cummins, 1979 cited in Durodola, Hickman, & Vaughn, 2004). What looks like deprivation in both languages should be more appropriately described as language imbalance where at certain points in the development of their languages bilingual children do not perform as well as native speakers in either language. Nevertheless, when they are given enough exposure and opportunities to use both languages, most bilingual children are able to come up to age-level proficiency in their dominant language. Few researchers exclaim that the nature and quantity of language input strongly determine the rate of language development (Blok, 1999).