



The Use of Think-Aloud in Assisting Reading Comprehension among Primary School Students

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ABSTRACT

Reading strategies are seldom taught to students despite their importance in aiding reading comprehension. This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of the think-aloud strategy and investigate primary school students' perceptions of using the think-aloud strategy in assisting their reading comprehension. Twenty-seven primary school students were introduced and trained to use the think-aloud strategy through teacher-modelling and reciprocal think-aloud with comprehension passages related to the relevant English curriculum. Questionnaires and interview sessions were conducted to gather information on how the students perceive the use of think-aloud in reading comprehension. Findings revealed that students have positive perceptions towards using think-aloud as a reading strategy in their reading comprehension and were keen on using the strategy in their future reading.

Keywords: think-aloud, reading comprehension, reading strategies

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1 INTRODUCTION

English is the compulsory second language for all Malaysian students in the primary and secondary levels in the Malaysian education system. Given the importance of English, in 2018, the Ministry of Education (MOE) implemented the Dual Language Programme (DLP). Under this program, the schools under MOE are given the options of conducting Science and Mathematics in English.

Malaysian primary school students sit for a formal assessment, *Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah* (UPSR), at the end of their six years of schooling. The assessment serves as a checkpoint to measure students' mastery in several skills, such as reading, writing, calculating and clarity. Despite early exposure to English, not all students are proficient users of the language. In fact, in some schools, English is among one of the least performing subjects. In the UPSR examination, English is assessed in two papers, Comprehension and Writing. Based on the analysis for UPSR 2019, 14.87% of students at the national schools and 12.94% of students of the national-type schools failed to achieve the minimum passing grade in the Comprehension paper (KPM, 2019). The curriculum for primary education in Malaysia aims to prepare students with basic language skills that will enable them to communicate effectively in different contexts suitable for the students' development. As reported by AD-Heisat, Mohammed, Sharmella and Issa (2009), in the primary school English curriculum, the teaching of reading strategies was not mentioned, and the reading skills to be taught are word attack skills and reading for main ideas. It was also found that although primary school teachers know reading strategies, these are seldom applied in the teaching of reading. Reading strategies should be exposed to students to facilitate them in improving their reading comprehension and be critical in their reading.

1.1 Reading Comprehension

Reading is a process of constructing meaning from prints. It is a complex process involving word recognition, comprehension, fluency, and motivation (Leipzig, 2001). Comprehension is one of the seven key components in reading. Khalifa, Ahmed and Ismael (2020) cited Brantmeier (2004) and Yigiter and Gurses (2005) that comprehension is the most effective component in the reading process; without it, reading is meaningless. The ability to read does not ensure competency in comprehending reading materials. Prior knowledge of the reading topics, broad oral and print vocabularies, understandings of how print works, knowledge of diverse types of texts, purposes for reading and strategies for constructing meaning from texts are essential for readers to develop comprehension (Leipzig, 2001). When readers read, they visualise and build mental models with their interpretation of the texts. Students' comprehension of the reading materials is influenced by their prior knowledge, cultures, purposes for reading, and motivation (Pardo, 2004).

Students gather information from the texts during the reading process, make connections, draw inferences, and make their conclusions on the text read. Students combine their prior knowledge with the information from the text and the stances they take with regards to the text. Statistics collected by BERNAMA in 2017 showed that, on average, Malaysians read about 15-20 books in a year. The number of books read is insufficient compared to other developed countries.