

**TEACHING READING STRATEGIES USED BY ESL TEACHERS THAT  
FACILITATE TEACHING AND LEARNING READING**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **A SURVEY ON TEACHING READING STRATEGIES USED BY ESL TEACHERS THAT FACILITATE TEACHING AND LEARNING READING IN ENGLISH LESSONS**

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This study was to investigate the teaching reading strategies used by the English as Second Language (ESL) teachers in the selected schools that facilitate teaching and learning reading. It was to find out the teaching reading strategies frequently used by the ESL teachers in the selected schools with advanced, intermediate and beginner students. In addition, it also attempted to discover which strategies the teachers think are effective for advanced, intermediate and beginner students. The sample consisted of 191 teachers in secondary schools around Kuching and Samarahan division. Teachers responded to a questionnaire and interview which explored the reading strategies they used that facilitate teaching and learning reading. The findings showed that the main strategies used by the ESL teachers in facilitating teaching and learning reading are activating students' background knowledge and scanning for specific details or information. Teachers frequently used activating students' background knowledge and pose questions about the text as their strategies in teaching reading regardless of students' level. The teachers perceived activating students' background knowledge and answer comprehension questions are the effective strategies despite of the students' level.



## ABSTRAK

### *TINJAUAN TERHADAP STRATEGI PENGAJARAN MEMBACA YANG DIGUNAKAN OLEH GURU-GURU BAHASA INGGERIS YANG MEMBANTU PENGAJARAN DAN PEMBELAJARAN MEMBACA DALAM BAHASA INGGERIS*

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*Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenalpasti strategi pengajaran membaca yang digunakan oleh guru-guru Bahasa Inggeris di sekolah yang terpilih untuk memudahkan pengajaran dan pembelajaran membaca. Kajian ini juga bertujuan untuk mengenalpasti strategi pengajaran membaca yang kerap digunakan oleh guru-guru di sekolah yang terpilih dengan pelajar di tahap kemahiran tinggi, pelajar di tahap kemahiran sederhana dan pelajar di tahap permulaan. Selain itu, kajian ini juga bertujuan untuk mengenalpasti strategi yang guru-guru fikir berkesan untuk pelajar ditahap kemahiran tinggi, pelajar ditahap kemahiran sederhana dan pelajar ditahap permulaan. Sampel terdiri daripada 191 guru di sekolah menengah sekitar bahagian Kuching dan Samarahan. Guru-guru menjawab borang soal selidik dan diwawancara bagi mengetahui strategi membaca yang mereka gunakan yang memudahkan pengajaran dan pembelajaran membaca. Hasil kajian menunjukkan strategi utama yang digunakan oleh guru-guru Bahasa Inggeris dalam memudahkan pengajaran dan pembelajaran membaca ialah mengaktifkan pengetahuan yang terdahulu pelajar dan memandang dengan teliti untuk butir-butir khusus atau informasi. Guru-guru kerap menggunakan aktifkan pengetahuan yang terdahulu pelajar dan memberi soalan tentang teks sebagai strategi mereka dalam pengajaran tanpa mengira peringkat kemahiran pelajar. Guru-guru merasa bahawa aktifkan pengetahuan terdahulu pelajar dan menjawab soalan pemahaman adalah strategi yang berkesan tanpa mengira peringkat pelajar.*



# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.0 Chapter Overview**

This study was to investigate the teaching reading strategies used by English as Second Language (ESL) teachers in the selected schools that facilitate teaching and learning reading. It attempted to find out the teaching reading strategies frequently used by ESL teachers in the selected schools with advanced, intermediate and beginner students. In addition, it also attempted to discover which strategies the teachers think are effective for advanced, intermediate and beginner students. In this chapter, the background of the study, the aim and objectives of the study, the significance of the study, the operational definition of key terms and scope of the study will be discussed. The last part of the chapter is the chapter review.



## **1.1 Background of the Study**

This study was done to investigate the teaching reading strategies used by the ESL teachers that facilitate teaching and learning reading. Reading is an important skill in English as a second language. Students who possess a good reading skill will be able to make a great progress in most academic areas. Therefore, the ESL teachers must facilitate students to learn the reading skill in order to help the students engaged with the text they read in a meaningful way. Understanding main ideas, predicting outcomes and guessing vocabulary from the context are some of the reading skills that students need to acquire. In order to teach students these skills, teachers need to consider the strategies they can use in helping the students during the teaching and learning reading. According to Farris, Fuhler & Walther (2004), teachers must know a wide range of instructional method and how to apply them depending on the needs of the students. Teachers should have various teaching reading strategies and apply the strategies in the classroom in order to facilitate students in their learning.

English language teaching in Malaysian schools emphasizes on training the students to communicate effectively in English for social and professional purposes. Students are expected to have communicative language ability which will enable them to communicate in the language effectively. According to Bachman (1990), communicative language ability can be described as having both the knowledge or competence and the ability to apply the competence in appropriate contextualized communicative language use. Students need to have the knowledge and capacity to use the language for different purposes. For that reason, students need to develop communicative competence in language skills and language components. Reading is one of the essential language skill needed, we encounter reading everyday for instance names on the street signs, and words on menu and according to Grabe & Stoller (2002), the most common way for students to learn new information is



through reading. Therefore, students must be able to understand what they read and do something with it. Students have to know the reading skills and strategies in order to achieve the reading comprehension. According to Grabe & Stoller (2002), reading comprehension is the ability to understand the information in a text and interpret it appropriately. In relation to that, this study intended to identify the teaching reading strategies used by the ESL teachers in the selected schools to facilitate teaching and learning reading.

Teachers play essential roles in developing the basic skills in every student. Teachers' roles are to transmit knowledge to students (Arends, 2004). According to Rasinski & Padak (1996), teachers' roles are to make learning meaningful and enjoyable for students. With regards to this study, teachers have to make the reading lesson meaningful and enjoyable while transferring the knowledge to students so that they can understand the lesson better and acquire the skills and strategies to achieve reading comprehension. However, in order to accomplish the intended purposes teachers need to have a repertoire of effective teaching strategies. Silver, Hanson, Strong, & Schwartz (1996) defined teaching strategies as a particular set of steps to evoke a specific set of desired behaviors from students. For this study, it focused on teaching reading strategies for example reading aloud, guided reading, repeated reading, and silent reading and so forth. By having a variety of teaching reading strategies and knowing when to use them, teachers can assist their students to gain the skills to achieve the reading comprehension.

Nesamalar, Saratha & Teh (1995) stated that, teachers are important agents in making English language learning successful. Teachers act as inter-mediator in the classroom. They select materials and activities that are relevant and interesting to the students. Teachers also need to be familiar with various reading strategies and demonstrate those strategies to students in order to help the students in their reading.



Therefore, it is essential to find out how teachers teach reading in the classroom and the strategies they use to achieve the aim of English language education in Malaysia.

This study attempted to discover the teaching reading strategies used by the ESL teachers of the selected schools to facilitate teaching and learning reading during the teaching and learning process of English. It also focused on the frequent strategies used by ESL teachers to teach English with advanced, intermediate and beginner students. In addition it also attempted to find out which strategies the teachers think are effective for advanced, intermediate and beginner students. The findings from this research may be useful to teachers in dealing with a diversity of students. According to Sheppard (2001), teachers often feel lack of training in effective teaching strategies that could help them meet the diverse needs of students in their classroom. Thus, this study may give examples on teaching reading strategies that teachers can consider to use in their reading classroom.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Teaching strategies used by the teachers can create a classroom environment that helps to produce the best conditions for effective teaching and learning. When teachers used strategies to teach reading skills to students it will help the students in learning reading in English. Some students may lack of vocabulary to understand the reading text that teachers give in the classroom so when teachers used the strategies for example using word cards to teach vocabulary or cultivate the students' vocabulary before students read the text, it will help the students to understand the text. As Silver, Hanson, Strong, & Schwartz (1996) stated, the use of teaching strategies by teachers allows them to create a classroom environment for the attainment of specific learning objectives. This situation will contribute to their success because when students can actively engaged and understand the reading text



it will facilitate them to accomplish specific goals in the lesson. Students will learn the language successfully and it will as well contribute to their success in English.

Most of Malaysian classroom comprise mixed ability students, mixed ability students are students with different levels and varying learning ability. For that reason, teachers need to vary their teaching reading strategies so that it will benefit different levels of students. According to Burden & Byrd (2003), students often complain that teachers do not take their characteristics into account before teaching and teachers teach in the same way for every student. If the teachers do not use appropriate teaching reading strategies to teach reading with different levels of students, they may not receive the instructions that meet their needs such as to maintain self-esteem and to do well on the tasks. Therefore, teachers have to differentiate their teaching in order to meet the needs of their students in the classroom. Students learn in various ways according to their abilities and needs. Some students will prefer to work alone and others prefer to work in group. For example, in reading lesson teacher can ask the students to work in group through jigsaw reading. Teachers group the students in homogenous group and each group will has different information from a different part of the text and they must tell other students about the part of the text they have read.

Teachers should vary the use of teaching reading strategies in order to meet the different levels of students' abilities and needs because it will help the students to read with adequate understanding of the text. Teaching reading strategies used by the teachers that meet their needs and abilities will help the students to attain the knowledge and skills they learn in class. Moreover, teaching reading strategies selected by the teachers will facilitate the students in learning reading in English. In view of that, the purpose of this study was to find out the teaching reading strategies used by the ESL teachers in the selected schools to facilitate teaching and learning



reading. This study also focused on the frequent teaching reading strategies used by the ESL teachers with advanced, intermediate and beginner students and which strategies the teachers think are effective for advanced, intermediate and beginner students.

### **1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study**

This study aimed to examine the instructional practices that ESL teachers in secondary schools around Kuching and Samarahan division used to facilitate teaching and learning reading. 200 hundred ESL teachers in secondary schools around Kuching and Samarahan division were selected as participants. All participants were interviewed and completed a questionnaire. There were three objectives of this research which were to find out teaching reading strategies used by ESL teachers in the selected schools to facilitate teaching and learning reading, to find out teaching reading strategies frequently used by the ESL teachers with advanced, intermediate and beginner students and which strategies the ESL teachers think are effective for advanced, intermediate and beginner students.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

The research aimed to answers the following questions:-

1. What are the reading strategies used by the ESL teachers of the selected schools to facilitate teaching and learning reading?
2. What strategies are frequently used by the ESL teachers in the selected schools with advanced, intermediate and beginner students?
3. Which strategies that the teachers think are effective for advanced, intermediate and beginner students?



## **1.5 Significance of the Study**

This study can provide ideas and information on the reading strategies that can be used during the teaching and learning process to facilitate teaching and learning reading that could benefit ESL teachers and ESL trainee teachers. The findings of this research can provide examples to ESL teachers and ESL trainee teachers on reading strategies they could use in dealing with the diverse students' needs during the teaching and learning reading. In addition, this study can give better understanding to the ESL teachers and ESL trainee teachers on the strategies they can use to facilitate teaching and learning of reading. Thus, they can integrate appropriate activities for students into regular instructions by understanding the strategies.

## **1.6 Operational Definition of Terms**

### **1.6.1 Reading Strategies**

Reading strategies are methods used by the ESL teachers to teach the reading skill during the reading lesson. For example, using word card to teach vocabulary, silent reading and group work. Strategies used by teachers can help the students to have better understanding on the text that they read. Leask (2001) defined teaching strategies as a choice and range of teaching method used for a lesson. With regard to this study, the methods used by the teachers in teaching reading are the strategies used by the teachers to facilitate their students in learning reading. Cairo (n.d) defined reading strategy as an interactive process of getting meaning from text.



## **1.6.2 Reading**

Reading is the process when readers make meaning of the written text they read. In this study, reading was referred to the second language reading. Reading is one of the language skills in English as a second language. Reading lesson is the lesson which students learn to read and learn the skills and strategies needed in order to become a good reader. In the reading lesson teacher is preparing the students to meet the reading objectives and teach the students reading skills. Anderson (1999) defined reading as an active and smooth process that involves the reader and the reading material or text in order to construct the meaning. Goodman (1967) as cited in Abisamra (2001) defined reading as a receptive language process and it is a psycholinguistic guessing game.

## **1.6.3 ESL Teachers**

ESL teachers are teachers who teach English as a second language in primary or secondary schools. For this study, ESL teachers were teachers who teach English in secondary schools around Kuching and Samarahan division. Moore (2001) mentioned that teacher is an instructional expert which is the one who plans, guides and evaluates learning. Teacher have to make decision on what to be teach, what teaching material to use, the best strategies to teach the selected content and how to evaluate the intended learning. ESL is English as a second language, students learn English as a second language in schools. ESL is taught as one of the compulsory subject in schools. According to Nesamalar, Saratha & Teh (1995), a second language is not a native language of the country but is a language used for a certain purposes and by a certain people within the country. ESL classroom is the English as a second language classroom. In ESL classroom, students learn English as a second language. Students learn the skills and components of the language.



#### **1.6.4 Advanced, Intermediate and Beginner Students**

In this study, advanced students were the high achieving students, intermediate students were the students with average scores and beginner students were the lower achievers students. According to Nesamalar, Saratha & Teh (1995), advanced students are intelligent and capable. Advanced students obtain high scores in aptitude and intelligence, and they are motivated and creative. Intermediate students are those with average scores. Intermediate students form the majority in schools. They have no extraordinary talents or skills and there are great individual differences in their needs, interests and experiences. Beginner students are those with lower intelligence scores. These students need more time to grasp a concept or to complete a task. Beginner students need individual attention and assistance in order to perform satisfactorily.

#### **1.6.5 Facilitate Teaching and Learning**

In this study facilitate teaching and learning can be referred as to help the teaching and learning process of reading. Arends (2004) mentioned that, teacher provides leadership to their students through planning, motivation and facilitation of learning. Teachers facilitate their students in learning by using strategies that can help the students to learn. The help given by the teachers in reading lesson will be able to improve the students understanding in the text that they read they read.

#### **1.6.6 Frequent**

With regards to this study, frequent strategies used by teachers referred to the most common or popular strategies used by the teachers in the selected schools to facilitate teaching and learning reading.



## **1.7 Scope of the Study**

This study focused on teaching reading strategies used by ESL teachers to facilitate teaching and learning reading. It only tended to focus on one skill which was reading and the strategies to teach the skill. Therefore, it will not cover other language skills and strategies to teach it. This study only focused on one skill since no study has done it. Furthermore, this study will not cover ESL teachers in primary schools it only focuses on the ESL teachers in secondary schools. Therefore, the findings are only applicable for ESL teachers in secondary schools.

## **1.8 Chapter Review**

The first chapter had presented in detail the main focus on this study through the background of the study, the statement of the problem and the aim and objectives of the study. This was followed by the significance of the study, the operational definitions of key terms and scope of the study. Chapter two will be dealing with the review of literature.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Chapter Overview**

In this chapter, the review of the related literature on teaching reading strategies will be discussed. In this study, the teaching reading strategies used by ESL teachers that facilitate teaching and learning reading was investigated. It was to find out teaching reading strategies which are frequently used by ESL teachers with advanced, intermediate and beginner students and which strategies the teachers think are effective for advanced, intermediate and beginner students. The following literature review attempts to demonstrate and support these research questions. It is divided into a section which is teaching reading strategies commonly used by teachers. The last part of the chapter is the summary.



## **2.1 Teaching Reading Strategies**

Teaching reading strategies are strategies used by the ESL teachers to teach the reading skill during the reading lesson. For example, using word card to teach vocabulary and activating students' prior knowledge. According to Coiro (n.d), reading strategy can be described as any interactive process of getting meaning from the text. Teaching reading strategies used by English teachers can help students to have better understanding on the text that they read as well as in learning reading in English. Students in Malaysian Primary and National Secondary Schools are normally with different levels and varying learning ability. Therefore, teachers should find appropriate teaching reading strategies in order to teach reading with different levels of students. Some of the strategies discussed in this section are found appropriate to teach the advanced, intermediate and beginner students. This section discusses the teaching reading strategies commonly used by English teachers and how these strategies can facilitate teaching and learning reading in English. In addition, it also discusses which strategies are appropriate for the different levels of students.

### **2.1.1 Activating Background Knowledge**

Activating students' background knowledge is one of the strategies in teaching reading. According to Anderson (1999), background knowledge or schemata refers to all the experience that students bring to text while they read. For instance, their life experience or previously learned materials. While students read the text, they will relate the text with the previous knowledge they have about the topic to help them in understanding the text. Students are making sense of what they read or the new information they get with the past experience they have. Students usually use their schemata to predict meaning in the text. Through this they will be able to comprehend the information within the text they read. Carrell (1988) stated that, several approaches and methods for facilitating reading through activation of background knowledge



have been proposed in the literature. Activating students' background knowledge will help the students comprehend the text better. According to Hayes and Tierney (as cited in Carrell, 1988), presenting background knowledge related to the topic to be learned helped students to learn from text in spite of how the background information was presented and how specific or general it was. This strategy is suitable for all levels of students because it help students in understanding the meaning in the text.

In a recent study of the effect of strategy instruction on the comprehension performance of at-risk students Dole et al. (1996) claimed that different instructional goals require different instructional activities. For instance, when the goal is to comprehend independently the reading texts, the more useful technique might be to teach students a strategy for activating their own prior knowledge. At- risk students in this study are the lower achiever students. This research investigated group and individual differences arising from strategy instruction. It compared strategy instruction with teacher-directed instruction. The research was divided into two phases, in the first phases, sixty seven fifth and sixth graders students from designated at-risk school were randomly assigned to one of the three treatments which is the story content instructional treatment, the strategy instructional treatment or the basal instructional treatment. In the second phases, two sixth-grade students had been randomly assigned to the strategy instructional treatment group to identify possible reasons why a lower achieving student used the strategy she learned successfully and a higher achieving student did not.

Results showed that the lower achieving students who received strategy instruction made better gains in comprehension performance when students were asked to read the text on their own compared to students who received story content or traditional basal instruction. The strategy treatment focused on students' procedural and conditional knowledge and from the findings of this study it highlighted the importance of procedural and conditional knowledge in the reading process. The results showed that teaching students how, when, and



why to activate their own prior knowledge when they read the text benefits at-risk students in their learning.

All of the results showed that, teachers' instruction can bring effects on students' performance. Strategies chose by teachers can facilitate comprehension as well as affect the students' achievement. This shows that teaching reading strategies used by teachers are important in the teaching and learning reading. Therefore, it is essential to examine teaching reading strategies used by ESL teachers in Malaysian context in order to identify their strategies in facilitating the students to comprehend the text read in the learning process.

### **2.1.2 Cultivate Vocabulary**

Another strategy in teaching reading is through cultivating vocabulary. Anderson (1999) stated that, vocabulary has an important role in the development of reading skill and academic achievement. There are numerous strategies in cultivating students' vocabulary, some of the strategies are semantic word maps and look and say. Having lack of vocabulary will affect students' understanding of the text. Thus, teachers need to cultivate the student's vocabulary because the development of student's vocabulary has an effect on their reading. This is because developing the students' vocabulary can enhance not only on the word knowledge but also enhance the students' understanding in what they read. Reading involves the reader and the reading material in building meaning (Anderson, 1999). Vocabulary development can facilitate students in their reading because when they understand the meaning of the word and word in context, it will help them in comprehending the text because they have some basic knowledge of the text. Vocabulary development can be done as one of the pre-reading activities. These pre-reading activities can help in teaching reading for comprehension. However, it will be discussed in detail in the upcoming section.



Semantic word maps involve selecting key-word from an expository passage and represent the key-word in some sort of visual display in which the connection among the key ideas are made explicitly. According to Carrell (1988), particular relevance teaching reading strategies for second language reader at lower levels of proficiency and with limited vocabularies in the second language is pre-reading activities involving key-word or key-concept. Semantic word maps is a strategy where students create a visual picture of a new word (Farris, Fuhler & Walther, 2004). In this strategy, students tie new words to formerly known words, concepts, or word with similar meaning. This activity enables them to remember the newly acquired word efficiently. It encourages students to relate new information to their prior knowledge. Teachers can give a complete semantic map to students before the lesson to enhance their understanding. This strategy can help students in their reading lessons because it helps to develop students' vocabulary on the topic they learned. Therefore, it will improve their understanding of the text they read.

'Look and say' is a technique in helping students to recognize word using word cards. According to Dlugosz (2000), the 'look and say' method can be strongly recommended for foreign language learners, since it helps them to relate the graphical form of a word with a given sound, and to learn the meaning of that word. This strategy is appropriate to beginner students. Beginner students can also be taught by teachers reading sentence by sentence from a carefully selected text, explaining its meanings wherever necessary.

### **2.1.3 Reading Aloud**

Reading aloud is another strategy which teachers can use to help their students in learning reading in English. Reading aloud is done when the teachers read the whole story or book aloud meaningfully. Meaningfully here means the teachers read the book aloud with the proper oral production of prosodic features for instance, rhythm, stress and intonation. These elements will help the students to realize the feelings, mood, and emotions of the



characters in the text. This, in turn may facilitate their overall comprehension of the text (Amer, 1997). In one study with Spanish-speaking learners (Santos, 1987 cited in Amer, 1997), it is revealed that reading aloud has a significantly positive effect on ESL learners' reading comprehension, particularly their ability to inter-relate, interpret, and draw conclusions from the content or text. Reading aloud facilitates reading because while the teachers read the text aloud students will follow and read silently. When teachers read aloud to students, students will encounter new ideas, words and concept. According to Farris, Fuhler & Walther (2004), reading aloud helps improve students' comprehension and increase their vocabulary and knowledge base.

Reading aloud is usually done with the younger children because it makes the children to want to read. Farris, Fuhler & Walther (2004) mentioned that reading aloud generates interest in books. This is because once children heard a good book being read aloud, they can hardly wait to enjoy it again. Reading aloud is one of the effective strategies in helping students with lower level of proficiency in English. This is revealed in another study with Arabic-speaking university students, Dhaif (1990 as cited in Amer, 1997) found that learners with only a basic level of proficiency in English have a better understanding of what they are reading in a teacher reading aloud situation than in a silent reading situation. The result showed the positive effect of reading aloud to lower level students. According to Rasinski & Padak (2000), reading aloud should be an instructional practice in all classrooms. For lower level students, this strategy familiarizes students with the style and form of written language. Apart from that Rasinski & Padak (2000) stated that, reading aloud is a great way to encourage additional learning and to give students' access to information that they could not read independently. According to Amer (1997), beginner readers tend to read word by word and reading aloud helps them read larger semantic units rather than focusing on graphic cues.



#### 2.1.4 Teaching Reading for Comprehension

Teaching reading for comprehension is one of the strategies in teaching reading. Observing comprehension is important for successful reading and teachers need to teach students to comprehend the text or information they read (Anderson, 1999). This strategy will help the students in their reading because when they can understand what they read, students will be able to engage with the text meaningfully. This strategy can be used in different stages, which are in pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading stage. Pre-reading activities introduce students to a particular text, elicit or provide appropriate background knowledge, and activate necessary schemata. In pre-reading stage, teachers can build the students' background knowledge on topic they will learn. For instance, teachers can cultivate students' vocabulary by introducing unknown words in the text that they are going to read. By doing that, teachers help the students in understanding the text they read. One of the pre-reading activities as discussed in the previous section is semantic word maps. This activity will help the students to remember the word meaning and this in turn help them to concentrate on what they mean while reading and facilitate their overall comprehension on the text they read. According to Carrell (1988), different pre-reading activities may be more or less effective with different proficiency levels.

While-reading exercises help students develop reading strategies, improve their control of the second language, and making sense of problematic text passages. In while-reading stage, teachers must acquire the students to monitor their comprehension while reading by asking them to find the answer for the questions given by the teachers before they read. By doing this, they do not read the text blindly devoid of really engaged with the text. Some example of while-reading activities are guessing word meaning by using context clues, learning to use dictionary effectively and reading for specific pieces of information. These activities help the students to comprehend the text they read while reading. In addition, for while-reading activities the teacher can form