

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN READING MASTERY
AND FACTUAL TEXT COMPREHENSION
AMONG FORM ONE STUDENTS
IN THE RURAL AREA**



**MASTER OF EDUCATION (TESL)
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA SABAH
2007**



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FACTUAL TEXT COMPREHENSION AMONG FORM ONE STUDENTS IN THE
RURAL AREA**

VIVA DATE : 24 MAY 2007

**This dissertation has been accepted by The Centre for Postgraduate Studies
and School of Education and Social Development for the partial fulfillment /
requirement of Master of Education (TESL) Programme in year 2007.**

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I declare that the materials in this dissertation are original except for quotations, excerpts, summaries and references, which have been duly acknowledged.



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16 April 2007

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank the Teachers Education Division, Ministry of Education for giving me a chance to pursue the Master of Education (TESL) Program in University Malaysia Sabah.

I would also like to thank my supervisor, Ms. Kamsilawati Kamlun for her counsel and support throughout the study. Her encouragement and guidance brought the research to a successful end.

In a similar way, I would also like to acknowledge the concern and warm support given by the Dean and all the lecturers in the School of Education and Social Development throughout the study.

I am also grateful for the total support given by my all the respondents in providing me with the useful information to complete the writing of my dissertation. Their support and sacrifice of the precious time helped steer the direction taken towards this study.

Finally, all the members in the Master of Education Program especially the 'TESL group' who had sincerely and honestly given their best deserves a hearty 'well done'. The personal interest and wisdom shared will always be cherished.

Let us hope that the experience gained from the research will help us all to cope better with others, especially our students in future.

ABSTRAK

HUBUNGAN ANTARA PENGUASAAN BACAAN DENGAN PEMAHAMAN TEKS DI KALANGAN PELAJAR TINGKATAN SATU DI LUAR BANDAR

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti penguasaan bacaan dan pemahaman teks fakta berdasarkan tahap bacaan dan pemahaman teks fakta berdasarkan tahap bacaan bebas, bimbingan dan kecewa. Selain itu, untuk mengenal pasti adakah wujud hubungan antara penguasaan bacaan dan penguasaan penguasaan pemahaman teks dengan pencapaian pelajar dalam bacaan dan pemahaman teks. Subjek kajian 60 orang pelajar tingkatan satu, yang terdiri daripada 30 orang lelaki dan 30 orang perempuan. Kajian ini dijalankan secara tinjauan deskriptif. Data dan maklumat dikumpul melalui empat instrumen kajian, iaitu borang profil, teks petikan fakta (transkripsi rakaman bacaan individu), ujian pemahaman teks dan satu set soal selidik untuk mendapat maklumat tentang pandangan guru mengenai kemahiran membaca dan pemahaman text bacaan. Data-data kajian dianalisis menggunakan peratus dan program Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS), iaitu analisis statistic 'Simple Regression'. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa terdapat hubungan yang signifikan dengan pencapaian pelajar dalam kedua-dua kemahiran membaca dan pemahaman dengan nilai 0.016, $p < 0.05$, iaitu $p = 0.016$. Penemuan kajian ini, mencadangkan guru-guru bahasa Inggeris perlu memberikan perhatian yang wajar kepada minat membaca di kalangan pelajar sekiranya penguasaan bacaan dan pemahaman teks mahu ditingkatkan. Pendekatan, kaedah dan teknik pengajaran bacaan dan pemahaman teks perlu digabungkan dengan pengajaran dan pembelajaran penulisan. Perpustakaan sekolah perlu dilengkapi dengan buku-buku bahasa Inggeris terkini. Walau bagaimanapun, keberkesanannya memerlukan usaha gigih dan kerjasama antara pihak pentadbir sekolah, guru, ibu bapa dan pelajar.

ABSTRACT

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN READING MASTERY AND FACTUAL TEXT COMPREHENSION AMONG FORM ONE STUDENTS IN THE RURAL AREA

The main purpose of this survey is to identify reading and text comprehension ability based on the level of free reading, guided and frustration. It is also done in order to identify if there is a connection between the mastery of reading and comprehension with students' performance in reading and comprehension. The survey subject consists of 60 Form one students, 30 boys and 30 girls. The experiments were held by using descriptive observation. Information and data gathered by using 4 observation instruments, which comprises profile form, the reading passage of factual text (Individual reading transcription recorded), text comprehension and a set of questionnaire to obtain responses from teachers regarding reading and comprehension skills. All experimental data would be analysed by using proportion per hundred and programmed of Statistical package for Social Science (SPSS) that is Simple Regression statistical analysis. The result of the survey shows a significant relationship between students' mastery in reading and comprehension with their overall performance in reading and comprehension at the value 0.016, $p < 0.05$, that is $p = 0.016$. The discovery of this survey suggests that English teachers need to give appropriate attention to ensure the mastery of both reading and text comprehension skills by keeping students interested in reading through appropriate approaches, methods and technique. However, in order to ensure the effectiveness of reading text comprehension learning, cooperation among the administrator, teachers and students is crucial.

TABLE OF CONTENT

	PAGE
TITLE	i
DECLARATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
ABSTRAK	iv
ABSTRACT	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
LIST OF TABLES	vii
LIST OF APPENDICES	viii

CHAPTERS ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1	Introduction	1
1.2	Background of the study	7
1.3	Statement of the problem	10
1.4	Research Questions	13
1.5	Aims of the Study	14
1.6	Objective of the study	14
1.7	Research Hypotheses	14
1.8	Operational Definition	15

1.9	Significance of the Study	18
1.10	Limitation of the Study	21

CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1	Introduction	23
2.2	Conceptual Definition	23
2.2.1	The Characteristics of Reading	23
2.2.2	The Purposes of Reading	24
2.2.3	The Reading Process	25
2.2.4	The Relationship between the Reader and the Writer	26
2.2.5	The Relationship between the Reader and the Writer with the Text.	27
2.2.6	The Relationship between Visual and Non-Visual Information	28
2.2.7	The Reading Skills	29
2.2.8	The Reading Skills Taxonomy	32
2.2.9	The Inferential Skills	38
2.2.10	The Reading Strategies	41
2.2.11	Types of Reading Strategies	44
2.3	Schema Theory and Reading Comprehension	48
2.4	The Reading Models	49
2.4.1	The Bottom-up Models	50

2.4.2	The Top-down Models	51
2.4.3	The Interactive Models	54
2.5	Previous Studies	56
2.6	Conceptual Framework	65
2.7	Conclusion	66

CHAPTER THREE: Methodology

3.1	Introduction	69
3.2	Research design	70
3.3	Population and Sampling	70
3.3.1	Selection of School for the Study	70
3.3.2	Sampling Method	71
3.4	Research Instrument	72
3.5	Pilot test (Reliability)	78
3.6	Research Procedure (Data Collection)	80
3.7	Data analysis	82

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF DATA AND DISCUSSION

4.1	Introduction	85
4.2	Findings	85
4.2.1	Respondent's Personal profile (Students)	85
4.2.2	Respondent's Personal profile (Teachers)	88
4.2.3	Factual Text Reading Based on Free, Guided and frustration Level	88
4.2.4	Factual Text Comprehension Mastery Level	89

4.3	Reliability Measurement	90
4.4	Regression Analysis	91
4.4.3	The Relationship Between Reading and Comprehension Mastery with Reading Achievement	92
4.5	Conclusion	95
CHAPTER FIVE:	DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	96
5.1	Introduction	96
5.2	Discussion	96
5.2.1	Factual Text Reading Achievement Based on Free, Guided and Frustration	96
5.2.2	Factual Text Comprehension Achievement Based on Free, Guided and Frustration	97
5.2.3	The Relationship Between Students' Reading and Comprehension	100
5.3	Theoretical and Practical Implications of The Study	101
5.3.1	Students	101
5.3.2	Teachers	102
5.3.3	School Administrators	103
5.4	Recommendation	103
5.4.1	Recommendation for Student	104
5.4.2	Recommendation for Teacher	107
5.4.3	Measuring Reading Achievement	110
5.5	Recommendation For Future Research	112
5.6	Conclusion	113



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LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1: Characteristics of Proficient and Less Proficient Readers	42
Table 2.2: List of Cognitive Reading Strategies.	45
Table 2.3: List of Meta-cognitive Reading Strategies	46
Table 2.4: List of Compensating Reading Strategies	46
Table 3.1: Factual Text Oral Reading Achievement Level	74
Table 3.2: Factual Text Reading Comprehension Achievement Level	76
Table 3.3: Development of Questionnaire by Parts, Elements of Reading and Comprehension.	77
Table 3.4: A simplified explanation of the Statistical Method Employed to test Hypothesis.	79
Table 3.5: Statistic Analysis Summary	84
Table 4.1: Respondent's Personal profile (Students)	87
Table 4.2: Respondent's Personal profile (Teachers)	88
Table 4.3: Statistical Analysis of English Language Reading and Comprehension Test	90
Table 4.4: Cronbach's Alpha Values for Variables	90
Table 4.5(a): Multi Regression of Reading Mastery and Achievement	93
Table 4.5(b): Multi Regression of Comprehension Mastery and Achievement	93
Table 4.5(c): Multiple Regression of Reading and Comprehension Mastery on Achievement.	93

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Two sources of information in reading	28
Figure 2: Three basic model of reading	48
Figure 3: What readers do according to bottom-up model	51
Figure 4: Levels of visual information a reader identifies in bottom-up model	52
Figure 5: What readers do to achieve comprehension according to top down model	53

LIST OF SHORTFORMS / INITIALS

ANOVA	Analysis of variance
DV	Dependent variable
ESL	English as Second Language
F	Frequency
IV	Independent variable
R	Regression
R ²	Regression Square
Sig. F(P)	Significant Frequency
t-value	

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A1: Student Profile

Appendix A2: Reading text

Appendix A3: Comprehension text

Appendix A4: Student's Reading Index Record Form

Appendix B : Questionnaires (Teacher's Response)

Appendix C: Detailed Statistical Analysis

Appendix D: Detailed Statistic Analysis of Pilot test (Reliability of Questionnaire)

References

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Introduction

The English Language was the lingua franca of the world's community and it was widely used in various aspects in our daily life. Most of the important and valuable discoveries in science, technology and other fields were documented in English. Therefore, reading materials in English were produced in vast numbers for information as well as for leisure. The printed mode such as books, reports, bulletins, journals and magazines remained as the main source of knowledge, even though the medium of education has rapidly diversified in the forms of radio, television, and computer. If the citizens did not have the ability to read and understand materials written in English, they would always be left behind and thus become handicapped with lack of access to new knowledge.

One must master the four linguistics skills in the process of learning a language including English. The skills are listening, speaking, reading and writing. Listening and reading were seen as receptive skills whereas speaking and writing were considered as productive skills. In the past, reading had been considered a passive activity but researchers had shown that it is not so.

Reading had been found to be interactive. The reason for this claim was that while reading, the readers brought his prior knowledge of the topic he was reading to the text and processed what he had gathered from the text itself to get at the meaning intended by the writer. There were five main processes that a reader went through when he read. They were micro processing, integrative processing, macro processing,

elaborative processing and meta-cognitive processing. The details of these processes would be discussed further in Chapter Two.

The ability to read is an important skill as "learning, both in school and beyond, largely depends on information derived from texts." (Ulijyn, 1980:17). Nunan (1989:43), saw reading "is a complex process of obtaining information and reconstructing meaning." Further Nunan (1989:43) suggested two views of reading; reading is a process of decoding written symbols and reading is a process of reconstructing meaning.

Reading therefore plays an important role in a person's life in this modern scientific and technological era. It plays the role as a source of communication as well as a source of knowledge. People who are highly skilled in reading will tend to be more knowledgeable and thus successful in life. Due to the various important roles that reading plays, it has become a great concern to the educationists in the world to stress out the importance of reading.

In relation to the importance of reading, psycholinguists had come up with various definitions of reading that have become more complex, due to the evolving knowledge of the reading process.

Harris (1976:22) cites "the first important description of the reading process" by the psychologist Edward L. Thorndike as early as 1917:

"Understanding a paragraph is like solving a problem in mathematics. It consists in selecting the right elements of the situation and putting them together in the right relations, and also with the right amount of weight or influence or force for each. The mind is assailed as it were by every word in the paragraph. It must select, repress,

soften, emphasize, correlate and organize, all under the influence of the right mental state or purpose or demand..... It thus appears that reading an explanatory or argumentative paragraph involves the same sort of organization and analytic action of ideas as occurs in thinking of supposedly higher sorts."

Chapman (1978:132) viewed reading as "an interaction by which meaning encoded in visual stimuli by an author becomes meaning in the mind of the reader. It involves the recognition of printed or written symbols which serve as stimuli for the recall of meanings that are built up through manipulation of concepts that are already possessed by the reader." Flesch (1981:13), related reading to a set of mechanical skills when he said "learning to read is like learning to drive a car The child learns the mechanics or reading, and when he is through, he can read."

However, Dechent (1982:166) believed that reading is a more complex process. Reading cannot occur unless the students can identify and recognize the printed symbol, and generally the students must also give the visual configuration a name. Dechent also believed that "too much emphasis in reading instruction has been placed on word identification and not enough on comprehension."

Thus, reading means getting meaning from the written form of language. So, a reader's task is to derive meaning from what he reads. In the early stage, a person only needs to find the printed word that stands for the spoken sound. As the skill is being developed, he must not only pronounce the word correctly but at the same time, he must also be able to convey the meaning of the word. According to Devine (1987:52), these may be distinct or discrete skills in decoding a text, such as moving the eyes from left to right across the page or matching letters with appropriate sounds. Some

examples of typical reading skills are, finding main ideas, following sequence or drawing conclusions.

According to Nuttall (1996:12), a person reads in order to get the writer's message from the reading materials. In other words, the reading activity involves the transfer of message from the writer to the reader. This explained that understanding what one reads is very important in the process of reading. Therefore, reading is not only to produce the correct sound with word symbols but also to get meaning from these words.

Reading is also a dynamic cognitive process. It is a continuously developing ability and as learners' reading abilities develop, they are able to read materials that are more complex. Hence, reading ability has generally been characterized according to age. Young readers' might still be using their knowledge of letter-sound relationship and context to decode words whereas the advanced readers' should have developed some comprehension skills. This has been described as the "reading to learn" stage. (Gunning, 2000:54).

As can be seen from the various definitions above, reading is a complex process which involves the processes of recognizing printed or written symbols, techniques of arranging materials, reconstructing meaning, and thinking critically. The definitions also suggested that comprehension is very significant in successful reading. In fact, comprehension can be described as the essence of reading.

It should also be noted that the role of reading is even greater in the field of education. This is due to the fact that learning in school is most dependent on acquiring

information from the text. The students' ability to read effectively will determine a student's success or failure in his or her academic achievement. This means that effective reading is the basic element in order to progress in the learning of other subjects as well.

On the other hand, the failure in acquiring the reading skills may limit student's access to a broader range of information and knowledge. Relating to reading problems, Edwards (1978:54) stated that most students face difficulties in comprehending reading text. This could be seen when they were not able to answer comprehension questions that were based on the reading materials. Edwards further conclude that when a reader cannot answer factual questions; questions that are based on the text, he shows a sign of reading comprehension problem. Therefore, Edwards believed that the possible reason might be because of the reader's inability to get meaning from the text.

Dulcie Abraham (1983:15) stated that, the main reason for the never ending problems in reading was the fact that a number of students were not thinking very much about what they have to know and do to be a reader. As a result, they failed to interact with the text they read and consequently failed to understand what they have read.

The concern in reading problems was also highlighted in the survey of reading habits and interests of Malaysians done by Atan Long in 1984. Two major findings of the survey revealed that the respondents spend RM 10.00 or less on books and magazines a month and only half of the forty-two percent of the respondents who had read books in the past six months could provide the titles of the books which had been read (Atan Long *et al*, 1984:129).

Tan (1986:78) conducted a study at the University of Malaya to assess the reading competency of the university's undergraduate students. Tan found that students were mere decoders of reading. Tan's finding was similar to a survey conducted by Criper (cited in Cooper, 1984:122). When a series of cloze tests were administered to students from form one to form five, the result of the study revealed that the students were hardly able to read at the 2000 word level without teacher's guidance.

Another study on reading problems of young people was conducted in 1992 by Fatimah and Lynne. The study pointed out that while reading is perceived as an important activity, it is not necessarily fun. The study further suggested that "the aura attached to reading or the prestige with which it is regarded in the curriculum, the community, the family and the school is important to the development of a child's interest in reading" (Fatimah and Lynne, 1992:39).

Ambigapathy (1997:10) claimed that the average Malaysia reads only half a page in a year and that the amount is far below the UNESCO leisure reading recommendation of eighty pages per person per year. It was also reported that Malaysians do not even read a single newspaper every day. Furthermore, when it came to reading in English, the percentage was even worse.

Looking at the problems face by Malaysians especially among the students in English language in general and reading in particular, continuous efforts have been taken by the Ministry of Education in the education system. The introduction of the Integrated Primary School Curriculum (Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Rendah) and the Integrated Secondary School Curriculum (Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah) were among the two of the most important action taken. Among the aims of the English

Language Programme in the Integrated Primary School Curriculum (Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Rendah) is to equip students with “basic reading skills of word recognition and phonics and then to lead them on to comprehension skills” (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1981:1). Similarly, the Integrated Secondary School Curriculum (Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah) aimed at the end of the secondary school English Language Programme, the students should be able to “read and understand prose and poetry for information and enjoyment” (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 1987:1)

1.2 Background of the study

The problem in reading in English had arisen since the students were in primary schools. The students might face the same problem when they are in secondary school or even in university. In schools, due to time constrain and various skills and language contents to be taught, teachers allocate very little thought to the reaching of reading comprehension per se. A study by Durkin (1978:481) discovered that teachers dedicate less than 25 per cent of instructional activities to reading comprehension.

Gallagher and Pearson (1982:76) studied the teacher and students' interactions in science and social studies class and found that the predominant routine arrangement involved an oral reading of the text with low-level detailed questions at the end. The second predominant routine activity includes a teacher and student dialogue focusing on what the teacher thought was important, once the students had read the text on their own. Another favourite activity was the teacher interpreting the text after the students had read the text.

Although these studies by Durkin (1978:481) and Gallagher and Pearson (1982:76) referred to first language reading instructions, there are possible corresponding observations of similar practices in ESL reading classes.

The findings and practices mentioned above indicated that students must possess the skills of efficient reading to enable them to get the vast amount of knowledge.

Majority of educators and researchers concurred that reading is a crucial skill for ESL students' academic achievement (Eskey, 1986:45). Similarly, Bernhardt (1991:34) reported that reading was the most cost-effective of the second language skills. For English as Second language (ESL) students, reading was a crucial skill which enables them to pursue their professional fields of study. Furthermore, most reference materials at the tertiary levels of education were in English and to get the vast amount of knowledge, students must possess the skill of efficient reading.

By implementing the English language reading programmes, it is a hope that by the end of secondary school education, students should be able to master the process, strategies and skills for efficient reading because the ability would determine their performance in English language as well as in their future undertakings.

In order to improve the students' reading skill, it is important to look at the relationship between their mastery of reading skills or strategies and their comprehension ability. This is due to the fact that reading is a complex mental process that involves the brain and the sensory perceptual nerves. "When the eyes run across a text, the word identification skills of sight words, context clues, structural analysis, and

phonic analysis facilitate the understanding by helping readers associate printed words with the word in their oral and listening vocabulary” (James, 1986:54). Therefore, it can be seen that there is interplay between the readers’ pre-existing knowledge and the written content. This lead to the fact that a proficient reader needs a variety of skills to facilitate him in the reading process.

According to Goodman (1970:134), proficient readers were both efficient and effective. They were effective in being able to construct a meaning to accommodate as well as bear some level of agreement with the original meaning of the author. To be this efficient, readers maintain constant focus on constructing the meaning throughout the process, always seeking the most direct path to meaning, using strategies to reduce uncertainty, always selecting cues available and drawing on prior conceptual and linguistic competence.

In order to become proficient readers as mentioned by Goodman (1970:134), the learners need to apply certain strategies which would determine the effectiveness of reading. And due to the importance of reading strategies in ensuring effective reading, a study needs to be carried out to investigate whether there is a relationship between reading mastery and comprehension mastery among lower secondary students especially Form one student in the rural area in factual text. The question is how far is the mastery gap of form one students in the rural area in reading skills and text comprehension? Does the relationship between the level of reading mastery and text comprehension among the form one students exist? Does the relationship of the two skills guarantee a more successful learning and provide new experience in their life? Researcher believes that the level of inability to master reading skills and comprehension

skill among the students at lower secondary is most likely to affect their academic achievement at upper secondary. This is due to the fact that they would be exposed to a more complex comprehension levels especially in subjects that demand critical thinking.

1.3 Statement of the problem

Majority of Malaysian students in primary schools as well as in secondary schools are facing problems in reading. Many ESL students do not like to read in English. Reading is often perceived as laborious and tedious. The whole process of putting words together and creating meaning is something terribly overwhelming and students shy away from it (Vethamani, 2002:25). Although some students may be able to read in English, they are unable to understand what they read. As a result, the number of students who failed in the English language examinations is rather high. For example, in the 2004 SPM English language, result showed a 71.7 % pass rate out of 355, 490 candidates (The Star, 2005:4).

The problem in reading in factual text was also rather critical. This was due to the fact that in order to understand and appreciate a factual text better, the reader must be aware of a number of aspects that need to be considered in reading a factual text; they would be the language in which the text is expressed, the language used by the reader, the particular culture within which the text was created, the particular culture within the reader exist, and the culture context within which the text is set (Rasinki, 1999:3). Failing to understand the aspects above will become a hindrance in understanding the factual text in particular.

The country's development in various aspects have increased the availability of reading materials like books, newspapers and magazines and this had an impact on Malaysians reading habit especially the students. The development in information technology has also introduced new reading materials on the internet. Its large amount of information had attracted numerous numbers of readers to use it. It was also undeniable that the increment of the literacy rate and the need for information in the economic, social and political sectors increased the Malaysians reading habits. Realizing the importance of reading for Malaysians, the government has given more emphasis for reading. It had declared the month of July as the reading month since 1995 (Star, 1999:13).

The Ministry of Education had also stress the importance on reading in the English language. According to the Integrated Curriculum for Secondary School (KBSM) Syllabus Specification for Form One, by the end of the English Language Programme for Form One, the students should be able to posses the following skills:

- i. Read and understand words, phrases and sentences from instructions, directions, messages, information, description, poems, stories and letters.
- ii. Read and locate main and supporting ideas and details in stories on courage, honesty, charity and unity.
- iii. Read and locate information in labeled pictures of local scenes and activities and comic strips.
- iv. Read and follow sequence of events in stories on courage, honesty, charity and unity.