

**THE USE OF METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES
FOR LEARNING THE PEARL IN GRAPHICS
AMONG LOW ENGLISH PROFICIENCY
VOCATIONAL STUDENTS**

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**THEESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTERS OF EDUCATION**

**SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH
2009**

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JUDUL: **THE USE OF METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES FOR LEARNING THE PEARL IN GRAPHICS AMONG LOW ENGLISH PROFICIENCY VOCATIONAL STUDENTS**

IJAZAH: **MASTER OF EDUCATION (TESL)**

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SESI PENGAJIAN: **2008/2009**

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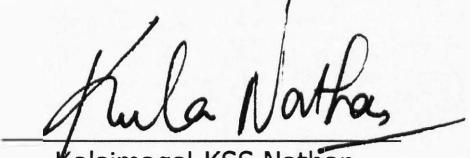
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THE PEARL IN GRAPHICS AMONG LOW ENGLISH
PROFICIENCY VOCATIONAL STUDENTS**

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Through out the two years in completing this dissertation, I was in contact with many people in the Educational field, who contributed towards my understanding and thoughts. In particular, I wish to express my sincere appreciation to my supervisor, Dr Lee Kean Wah for his guidance, patience and invaluable criticism which guided me through out the preparation of this dissertation.

I would also like to thank my classmates for their friendship and motivation through out the two years. My sincere appreciation is also extended to my Principal, colleagues and students who have shared ideas and experiences which were of great help in completing my work.

To my dearest Mum, my nephew Seth, brother, sisters and brothers-in-law thank you for your love, support and encouragement which helped me to complete my dissertation.

Last but not least, I thank God for giving me the strength and wisdom to begin and complete this research until the writing of this dissertation.

Abstrak

Kajian ini dijalankan untuk mengkaji penggunaan grafik dalam membantu pelajar yang berprofisiensi lemah dalam Bahasa Inggeris untuk mempelajari dan memahami novel 'The Pearl'. Pelajar-pelajar ini telah mempelajari novel 'The Pearl' dengan bantuan gambar yang mengilustrasikan cerita sebagaimana ia dibaca. Selain itu, kajian ini juga telah menyiasat sekiranya pelajar-pelajar yang berprofisiensi lemah ini menggunakan sebarang strategi 'metacognitive' untuk melihat perkembangan proses pembelajaran mereka.

Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah kuantitatif dan kualitatif, iaitu dapatan daripada kedua-dua kaedah ini telah ditriangulasikan untuk mevarifikasi ketepatan kedua-dua set data. Pendekatan kuantitatif merangkumi instrumen ujian pra dan pasca untuk menentukan keberkesanannya grafik dalam pembacaan dan pembelajaran novel. Pendekatan kualitatif pula, merangkumi instrumen soal selidik dan penulisan jurnal. Instrument ini digunakan untuk mengenalpasti sekiranya wujud penggunaan strategi 'metacognitive' dalam proses pembelajaran pelajar-pelajar yang berprofisiensi lemah ini.

Dapatan kajian daripada data kuantitatif menunjukkan pelajar-pelajar yang berprofisiensi lemah ini telah menunjukkan peningkatan dalam prestasi pemahaman novel apabila dibantu dengan grafik, berdasarkan keputusan ujian pasca. Data kualitatif yang diperoleh dari soal selidik dan penulisan jurnal pelajar, menunjukkan pelajar ini lebih minat membaca dan belajar Bahasa Inggeris apabila grafik digunakan. Hasil penulisan jurnal juga menunjukkan bahawa pelajar-pelajar yang berprofisiensi lemah ini, telah menggunakan strategi 'metacognitive' seperti merancang, menilai dan menyoal diri apabila membaca novel dengan bantuan grafik.

Perkara yang dicadangkan, adalah kajian yang lebih mendalam harus dilakukan untuk melihat penggunaan strategi 'metacognitive' di dalam kalangan pelajar-pelajar yang berprofisiensi lemah, boleh dieksplotasi untuk membantu mereka memahami Sastera dalam Bahasa Inggeris dengan lebih baik dan berkesan.

Abstract

This study examines the use of graphics in helping Low English Proficiency (LEP) students to learn the novel 'The Pearl'. Students learned the novel with the aid of graphics which essentially illustrated the story they were reading. In addition, this study also investigated if the LEP students used any form of metacognitive strategy in monitoring their learning process.

The study adopted a mixed-method design using a QUAN-QUAL approach, whereby the findings of both the quantitative and qualitative data were triangulated to verify the accuracy of both set of data. The quantitative approach involved conducting a pre test and post test to determine the effectiveness of graphics in learning the novel, whilst the qualitative approach involved investigating the metacognitive strategies used by these students in their learning process. This was done by using a questionnaire and reflective journal. Findings from the questionnaire and journal entries were able to validate this study.

Findings based on quantitative data showed that LEP students performed better in learning the novel when aided with graphics. Qualitative data derived from questionnaire and reflective journal showed that LEP students were more interested to read and learn in English when graphics was used. Analysis on retrospective accounts based on reflective journals revealed that LEP learners also used metacognitive strategies such as planning, monitoring, evaluating and quizzing oneself when reading the novel with graphics.

It was suggested that further research need to look at how LEP students use of metacognitive skills could be exploited to help them to better understand literature in English.

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List of Abbreviation

ESL: English Second Language

PMR: Penilaian Menengah Rendah (Lower Secondary School Examination)

LEP: Low English Proficiency

RQ: Research Question



1.1 Introduction

The main purpose of introducing literature in the teaching and learning of English in Malaysian schools is to enable students to appreciate literary values and instill moral values as stated in the curriculum specification for secondary schools. The teaching and learning of literature in English in the Malaysian English Second language (ESL) context used to be a core part of the English language curriculum before it came to a point of near extinction in the mid-80's to mid 90's. Literature in English only reemerges in the late 90's with the restructuring of the Intergrated Secondary School Curriculum (known as KBSM – Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah) in 1997. According to Ganakumaran Subramaniam of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia in a paper entitled Linguistic Pathways to the Study of Literature in the Malaysian ESL Context, since the 1970's English has been taught as the second language in all Malaysian schools and this has indirectly caused limitations to the teaching and learning of Literature, be it the big 'L' (English Literature) or the small 'l' (Literature in English).

In 1990 literature in English was incorporated as part of the English language programme beginning at the lower secondary level to promote English proficiency and the study of literature in general. The Class Reader program which was aimed at 'developing reading skills and to introduce elements of literature into language teaching' (Devinder Raj and Hunt quoted in Edwin, 1993: 47) failed to show results as it was not a compulsory part of the English Language curriculum.

Today the scenario has changed where by, Literature in English has been incorporated into the English Language lessons and is formally tested in examinations. Therefore it is crucial that consideration be given to teaching and learning approaches that take into account the limited English language proficiency of a majority of Malaysian students while keeping in mind the aims and aspirations of the syllabus.

The objectives of introducing literature into the English Language subject in secondary school according to the Education Ministry of Malaysia (English Language Curriculum, 1999) are:

- to give a personal response text
- to show an awareness of how language is used to achieve a particular purpose.
- to understand and appreciate cultures
- to reflect upon and draw valuable moral lessons from issues in the literary works.

In general it is hoped that the introduction of the literature component increases students reading habits in English.

Unfortunately it is very difficult to attain the aim and aspiration of the syllabus when students are weak and refuse to read the reading material. This results in very weak examination performance. This is very apparent amongst vocational students who enter form 4 with an average grade of D in the English language subject for the Penilaian Menengah Rendah examination (Lower Secondary School Examination). Despite being exposed to the small 'I' in lower secondary they are uninterested and reluctant to read the texts of short stories in form 4. This scenario becomes worse when these students enter form 5, where

they have to read a novel, remember the plot and understand the theme and characters.

1.2 Background of the Study

Literature in English for the upper secondary level consists of 3 components which are 6 poems, 5 short stories and a novel. The poems and short stories are to be completed in form four while the novel is to be completed in form five. In the duration of two years students are suppose to remember plots of five short stories and a novel as well as understand and appreciate six poems.

Students in technical secondary schools come from various secondary schools after completing their Penilaian Menengah Rendah examination. In Sekolah Menengah Teknik Likas, Kota Kinabalu students come from all corners of Sabah. Out of the hundreds that enroll only a handful is proficient in English. The following table (Table 1) which shows the grades obtained by the form 4 vocational students for English in the PMR examination in 2008 quite evidently tells the tale that the majority of students who had enrolled themselves in the school is of average and below average proficiency level in their English Language.

Table 1.1: Grades obtained by form 4 vocational students for English Language in the PMR examination 2008

No of students	A	B	C	D	E
193	04	06	24	73	86

As can be seen the table shows that more than 70 % of students in the vocational stream is at below average level for proficiency in English.

The question on short stories comes in Section D of Paper 2 in the English Language exam paper for form 4 and form 5. It consists of 3 questions which carries a total of 5 marks. In an analysis carried out on students' responses to this question in an examination, out of 100 low achieving vocational students, only seven were able to obtain full marks. Sixty-five students obtained 0 marks due to wrong answers or refusal to write anything in the examination paper. When students were asked on why they could not answer or refused to write anything, their responses were as follows:

"Do not remember story"

"Don't understand the story"

"Don't understand the question."

"Not interested in short stories."

When these students enter form 5 and are faced with a novel entitled The Pearl, their response is the same. They are unwilling to read and a wordy text de-motivates them.

If this scenario continues, the purpose of teaching the small 'I' in schools will not be met and students will not gain any literary knowledge in school. The researcher has been teaching Literature in English in a Teknik and Vocational school for the last 8 years from the very first time it was introduced and the method of teaching varies in accordance to the proficiency level of the students. Students who enroll for form 4 in the vocational stream have not shown any improvement in the quality of their English language proficiency in the last 5 years. In a class of 40 students only an average of 8 to 10 would have passed

English at the PMR level. On top of this was to get these students to read and listen attentively.

Another big challenge faced was getting students to read the story by themselves. Whenever students were asked to read certain pages and questions were asked on what was read, students were unable to respond to the questions. This could be due to a number of reasons as students did not read, they were unable to understand what they read or they lacked the confidence to answer the questions. The researcher opted to reading the story line by line and translating in Malay where necessary but this was consuming too much time.

Another noticeable fact in the class was the lack of interaction in English amongst the students during a 40 minute lesson unless asked to by the teacher. This certainly is not going to give them the confidence to use the English Language in the future.

One significant contribution to this study would be to develop a technique to enhance low achieving vocational students to understand and remember the plot of the novel so as to enable them to perform better in the examination and to improve their proficiency level in the English Language. The development and use of graphics would be able to scaffold students' learning of 'The Pearl'. This study will also examine the use of metacognitive strategy in their learning process. Their ability to coordinate their learning process by using functions such as centering, arranging and planning, as well as evaluating should be able to enhance their learning ability.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The teaching of the small 'Y' is a requirement in the secondary school syllabus. Students are assessed in school and government examinations on this subject which is part of the English Language examination paper. It may be a

small portion of the total marks but if students are able to read, remember and gain knowledge from the small 'l' much will be achieved.

Since the small 'l' was first introduced in 2000 teaching weak students the short story component has merely been a comprehension passage. Even as a comprehension lesson the teacher has to do the reading, explanation and translation. The lesson becomes a dull chalk and talk method. It has become very teacher centered and mechanistic. Students are to listen and comprehend what is taught, which unfortunately hardly happens. There is no active involvement, voicing out of opinions and ideas or usage of the English Language on the students part. Hence the lesson becomes dull and predictable which diminishes whatever interests students have. This most certainly contradicts the purpose of introducing the literature component. What we as teachers fail to see is literature encourages representational language which provides space for multiplicity in meanings and interpretations and not referential language which provides communication on only one level. (McRae 1991)

In a test which consists of short story questions carried out on 3 vocational classes, out of 87 students only 6 could get all correct answers. 16 got partially correct answers while 65 students got all wrong answers or refused to answer the questions. During a short story lesson students hardly interact among themselves or give views on the story. Students do not show any cognitive ability such as questioning, planning or evaluating their lesson.

This component is testable in the English Language subject in national exams such as the Penilaian Menengah rendah (PMR) and the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM).

In addition students hardly relate what they learn with what they have learnt.

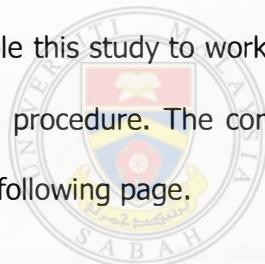
Attention span is very short, they do not plan for their learning process and self evaluation is never done.

Based on these challenges and obstacles faced in teaching the Literature component in upper secondary this study was initiated to find means to facilitate a more effective teaching and learning method for low achieving vocational students.

1.4 Conceptual Framework

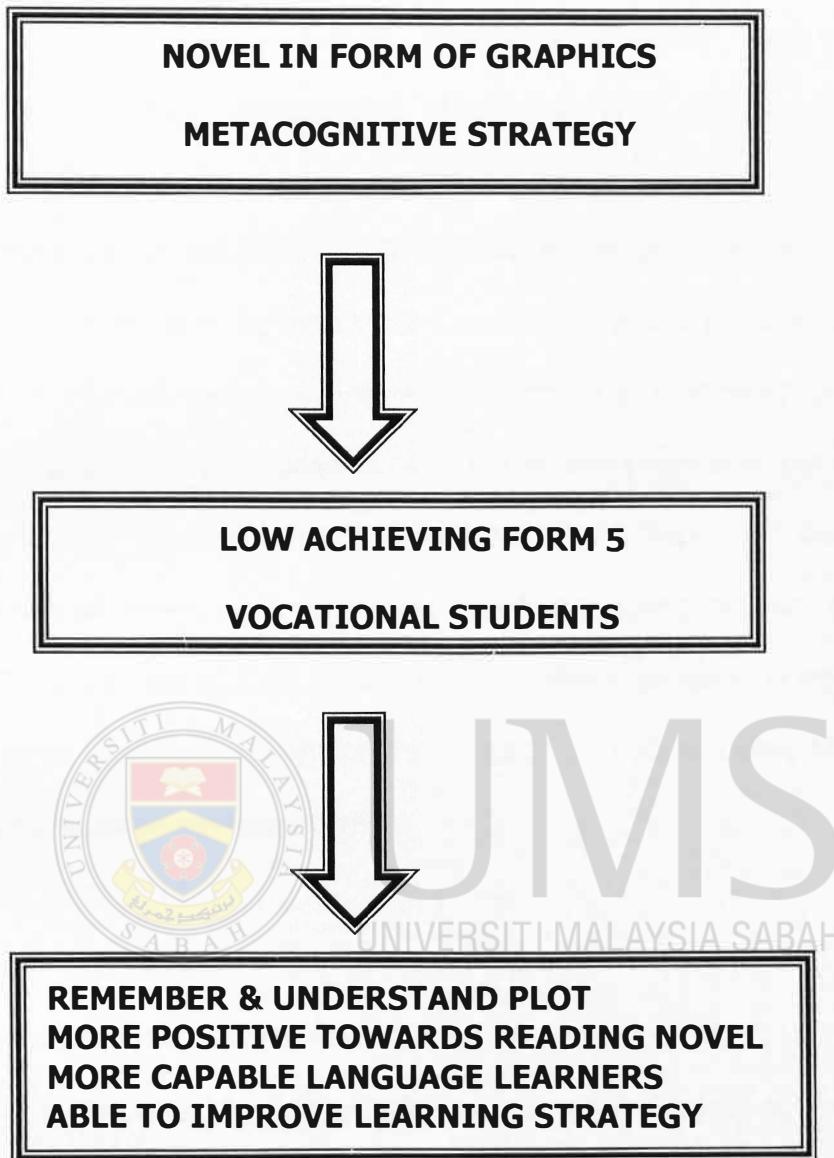
The importance of English Language has been stressed upon year by year. The introduction of Literature in English in 2000 was seen as a step to encourage students to read, use and appreciate language. Although a number of researches have been carried out on the teaching of Literature in English, further research is necessary to see its effectiveness when it is taught to different target groups.

To enable this study to work out as planned a framework is set up to ensure its process and procedure. The conceptual framework of this study is as shown in Figure 1 in the following page.



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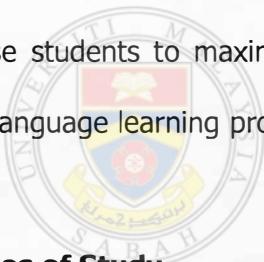
Figure 1: Conceptual framework



1.5 Aim of the Study

The aim of this research is to enable students to understand and remember the plot of the novel The Pearl in the Form 5 Literature in English subject. Teaching it the traditional way as in reading the whole text and explaining vocabulary is time consuming and positive impact is not seen when students are tested on this component. The time allocated for literature is 1 period out of the

5 weekly periods of English Language. Therefore reading of the whole text is sometimes rushed through in class and when this happens no appreciation of literature can be seen among students. They do not give their views or share their thoughts on their understanding of the plot and character thus the objectives of teaching Literature in English in secondary schools have failed. These students do not put any effort to coordinate their own learning process. On top of that, students in technical schools come from various parts of the state after form 3, thus the teacher is unable to ascertain the proficiency level of a student as background knowledge of a students performance in the English Language is not accessible. In addition this study hopes to identify if metacognitive strategies are used among the LEP students in their learning process. The use of this strategy among the LEP learners can help the researcher to guide these students to maximize this strategy to produce better results in their English language learning process.



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1.6 Objectives of Study

Among the objectives of this research is as follows:

- 1) To examine whether the use of graphics enables low achieving vocational students to remember and understand the novel.
- 2) To find out if learners' perception towards learning the novel using graphics is significantly positive.
- 3) To identify if metacognitive strategies were used in the learning process of the low achieving vocational students.

1.7 Research Questions

Among the research questions (RQ) for this study are:

1. To what extent does the use of graphics improve students' comprehension of the novel The Pearl among the LEP students?
2. What are the LEP vocational students' perceptions towards learning the novel The Pearl using graphics?
3. Do LEP students use any metacognitive strategy in their learning process?

1.8 Research Hypothesis

The hypotheses of this research are as follows:

There is no significant improvement in the mean score of the Form 4 LEP vocational students using the graphics in understanding the literary elements of the novel on The Pearl.

There is no positive indication of LEP vocational students' perceptions towards learning the novel component using the graphics.

The aforementioned hypothesis are statistically tested based on the following null hypothesis

Ho1 There is no significant difference in the mean scores of the pre-test of the Form 4 short stories between the treatment and control group.

Ho2 There is no significant difference in the mean scores of the pre-test and post-test of the Form 4 short stories and The Pearl in the treatment group.

Ho3 There is no significant difference in the mean scores of the pre-test and the post-test of the Form 4 short stories and The Pearl in the control group.

Ho4 There is no significant difference in the mean scores of the post-test of The Pearl between the treatment and control group.