

**USING THE STRATEGY OF GUESSING  
MEANINGS OF WORDS FROM CONTEXTUAL  
CLUES IN DEVELOPING READING  
COMPREHENSION AMONG YEAR 5 LEARNERS**

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## DECLARATION

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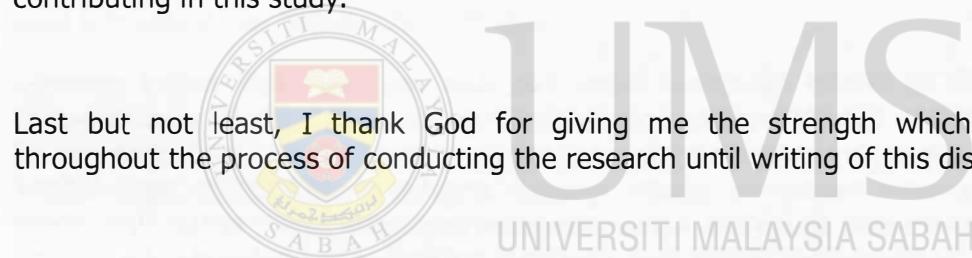
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## ABSTRAK

Kajian ini dijalankan untuk mengkaji penggunaan strategi tekaan perkataan melalui konteks dalam pencapaian pemahaman bacaan genre naratif di kalangan murid-murid Tahun 5.

Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah kuantitatif dan kualitatif yang mana menggunakan rekabentuk quasi-eksperimen. Walau bagaimanapun, data kualitatif mengenai persepsi murid-murid diperolehi untuk triangulasi dapatkan kajian yang diperolehi melalui kaedah kuantitatif. Murid-murid seramai enam puluh empat orang telah dipilih secara persampelan bertujuan. Tiga puluh dua orang murid-murid telah diagihkan kepada kumpulan intervensi dan kumpulan kawalan. Murid-murid dalam kumpulan intervensi didedahkan dengan kaedah strategi tekaan perkataan melalui konteks untuk pencapaian pemahaman bacaan genre naratif, manakala, kumpulan kawalan didedahkan dengan kaedah pengajaran tradisional.

Murid-murid dalam kumpulan intervensi diberikan beberapa instrumen kajian yang merangkumi satu set soal selidik yang mempunyai 15 pernyataan, ujian pra dan pos dan jurnal refleksi kendiri. Prosedur untuk kumpulan intervensi merangkumi latihan strategi untuk satu jam setiap sesi selama satu minggu dan didedahkan dengan pengajaran strategi tekaan perkataan melalui konteks untuk satu jam setiap sesi selama lima minggu. Murid-murid dalam kumpulan kawalan diberi instrumen kajian ujian pra dan pos. Kumpulan kawalan pula didedahkan dengan kaedah pengajaran tradisional untuk satu jam setiap sesi selama lima minggu.

Dapatkan kajian dari ujian pra dan pos untuk kumpulan intervensi didapati bahawa terdapat peningkatan pencapaian pemahaman bacaan selepas didedahkan strategi tekaan perkataan melalui konteks. Data kualitatif yang diperolehi melalui jurnal refleksi kendiri juga menunjukkan bahawa strategi tekaan perkataan melalui konteks telah membantu murid-murid kumpulan intervensi untuk mencapai pemahaman bacaan teks naratif. Maklumbalas yang diterima daripada soal selidik menunjukkan bahawa murid-murid mempunyai persepsi yang positif terhadap penggunaan strategi tekaan perkataan melalui konteks dalam membantu pencapaian pemahaman bacaan teks naratif.

## ABSTRACT

The research is carried out to find out the use of the strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues in developing reading comprehension of texts in the passages on narrative genre among the Year 5 learners.

This study adopts a quantitative approach – that is veered toward a quasi-experimental design. However, qualitative data in the form of learners perceptions of the efficacy of the technique used is also elicited, with the intention to triangulate the findings obtained from the quantitative approach. The learners were selected from a population comprising of sixty-four Year 5 learners via purposive sampling. Thirty-two learners each were put into experimental and control groups. The learners in experimental group were exposed to the use of the strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues to comprehend reading narrative genre while learners' in the control group was taught by using conventional method.

The learners in the experimental group were subjected to several instruments comprising of a set of 15-item questionnaire, pretest and posttest and reflective journals. This whole procedure took up one week strategy training for an hour of each lesson and five weeks intervention for an hour of each lesson. The learners in control group were subjected to instruments of pretest and posttest and five weeks of exposure for an hour in each lesson to conventional method.

From the pretest and posttest data obtained, it was found that the experimental group learners overall performance in reading comprehension increased after exposed to the strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues. Qualitative data obtained from reflective journals also demonstrated – how the strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues helped the learners to comprehend reading narrative texts. Responses obtained from learners also showed that the learners' had positive perceptions on the use of the strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues in helping them to comprehend narrative texts.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

NILAM	Program Nadi Ilmu Amalan Membaca (Reading Programme)
UPSR	Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah
MCQ	Multiple Choice Questions
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
B.Ed (TESL)	Bachelor of Education (Teaching of English as a Second Language)
M.Ed (TESL)	Master of Education (Teaching of English as a Second Language)
ESL	English as a Second Language



### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

English is taught as a second language in all Malaysian primary and secondary schools in the country. One of the aims of the English Language syllabus in primary schools is to enable the learners to read and understand different kinds of texts for enjoyment and information. They should be taught to use cues for word identification and to use their understanding of grammatical structure and the meaning of the text as a whole to make sense of the content (Primary School Syllabus, 2002). Curriculum Specifications for English Year 5 (p4:2003) emphasized that the learners should be taught 'Learning How to Learn Skills'. Learning 'How to Learn Skills' are also integrated with the learning outcomes and aim to enable the learners to take responsibility for their own learning. These skills incorporate information skills, library skills and study skills to enable learners to access sources of information more efficiently and help them become independent life-long learners. Therefore, this research on introduction of strategy training to train the learners on a learning strategy that is guessing meanings of words from contextual clues is relevant for the learners to use them in comprehension of narrative texts. They will be equipped with a strategy which will enable them to use it during examinations as well as when completing tasks related to comprehension of narrative texts.

Reading is very important for the learners to develop critical and creative thinking skills. They need to read extensively to be competent in English Language and they also need to develop several strategies to become competent readers. They need to read widely and should not be trapped with unknown words and stop reading texts. Instead they should be able to make use of the strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues to comprehend narrative texts.

Reading is a complex process that cannot be defined easily and one of the definitions for reading is the construction of meaning from a written message which involves the reader connecting information from the written message with previous knowledge to arrive at meaning or understanding (Day & Bamford, 2000: 12). This research is carried out by the researcher to enable the learners to use the strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues to comprehend narrative texts.

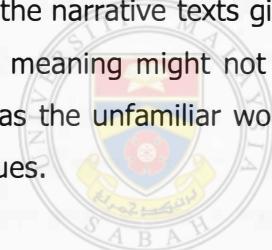
## **1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

Many of the learners in the classroom where the researcher chose for the purpose of this study did not show an interest in reading. They found reading to be tedious and time-consuming activity, whereby in order to get information a lot of time need to be spent by them. A survey on the achievement of NILAM Reading Programme done by Technology Division of the Ministry of Education in 2004 showed that after six years of its implementation for the Year 6 primary school learners and four years for the Form 4 secondary school learners, the number of books read by them had been considerably low in volume, with 28% of the respondents were from primary schools and 47% of them from secondary schools (Technology Education Division, 2004). Generally it was very difficult to find learners to read books for pleasure than reading for examinations.

Albert Harris and Edward Sipay state that wide reading not only increases word-meaning knowledge but can also produce gains in topical and world knowledge that can further facilitate reading comprehension (in Day & Bamford, 2000).

The researcher feels solutions need to be taken to encourage learners to show interest in reading. Reading will be fun and exciting if the meaning found in the text is comprehensible among the readers. As second language learners, the learners need to learn the use of strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues to comprehend the narrative texts. They will continue reading without having frustration when encountered with difficult words in the texts. Reading to comprehend meanings of words will also enhance the readers understanding and develop their vocabulary.

There are several reasons for the researcher to choose the strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues as one of the strategies to be taught to the learners. First, the use of the strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues can be carried out during different stages of reading namely, pre-reading, while reading and post-reading (Fauziah Hassan, 2002). The researcher introduced the use of the strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues during while reading stage. Another reason for opting to the strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues was to enable the learners to learn various types of clues. Clark and Nation (in Fauziah Hassan, 2002) mentioned several types of clues such as noun, verb, adjective, adverb, punctuation and markers. Warriner and Griffith (1977) stated that there are words in similar meaning, words used in contrast and supplied definitions or synonyms could be the clues. The researcher hopes that the learners would make use of the strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues after exposed to strategy training sessions prior to intervention. It is hoped that through strategy training sessions the learners should be able get a grasp on the types of clues in order to comprehend the narrative texts given to them. However, if an unknown word appears in the text, the meaning might not be easily comprehended. This should not discourage the learners as the unfamiliar words meaning should be predicted with the help of the contextual clues.



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The researcher feels that there is a necessity for the learners to learn parts of speech, punctuation and vocabulary in order for them not only able to answer Questions 36 to 40 of Paper 1 English Language subject but also Questions 1 until 35 of Paper 1 English Language subject. The researcher planned well for the learners to be taught the use of the strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues so that they will have a tool to rely on during the examinations.

The learners will gain the benefits as they are exposed to steps to be taken in the strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues. The activity related to the strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues will enhance learners' thinking skills, in line with the first educational emphasis in Curriculum Specifications for English Year 5 (2003). The researcher will provide the learners to

understand information, make decisions, solve problems and express themselves accurately and creatively in the target language when involving themselves in the strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues. The researcher finds that the strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues is relevant and appropriate to be taught to Year 5 learners.

The researcher is using narrative texts for the purpose of the study rather than other types of texts from different genre. The first reason for opting to teach the learners the strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues by using narrative texts is to prepare the learners for their examinations. Narrative text is one of the types of texts frequently tested in the UPSR (*Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah*) examination and school examinations. It is necessary for the learners to be taught on how to solve their problems by using the strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues when reading narrative texts than using other types of texts.

The learners are exposed to stories as stipulated in Curriculum Specifications for English Year 5 (2003) whereby, the learners should be reading fiction and non-fiction for understanding and enjoyment. Therefore, it is easier to expose a new strategy by using narrative texts as the learners have the capability to comprehend the strategy taught than using any other types of texts which might be a burden for the learners to even comprehend the texts.

This research is carried out in order to find out on the use of the strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues in developing reading comprehension based on narrative genre among the Year 5 learners. The findings of this research should conclude that there is an improvement in learners' overall performance in reading comprehension after exposed to the strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues. Responses obtained from learners also should show that the learners' have positive perceptions on the use of the strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues in helping them to comprehend narrative texts.

### **1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

People read for many reasons either reading for survival, reading for learning, reading for occupation and reading for pleasure (Wallace, 1992). However, many people may find that reading materials are difficult to comprehend. This is further supported by Nuttal (1996), slow readers do not enjoy reading because they read less as compared to fast readers. So, when these slow readers read less, they do not get enough practice and they find it difficult to understand the reading materials. Reading skills can be developed only by reading, so these slow readers can be introduced to other strategies involving cognitive strategies as well as visual strategies (Fauziah Hassan, 2002: 126)

Nuttal (1996) further explains that one of the main differences between poor and good readers is that good readers are not stuck when faced with a difficult word. They keep reading ahead and take risks in constructing comprehension of the text. Poor readers usually opt to decode and identify the meaning of every word. When faced with difficult word, they stop reading and regress instead of reading ahead. Therefore, the presence of unfamiliar words is considered as an obstacle for the readers to continue reading.

From personal and collegial observations it was noted by the researcher that there is a point to take note on Nuttal's (1996) explanation regarding slow and fast readers. The learners who are going to participate in this study are considered as slow readers because they do not read much. Since they do not read much, they slowly do not understand what they have read and will not be able to comprehend the reading materials.

The target group learners were not only able to comprehend reading materials but also performed poorly in the Second Term English Language subject examination Paper 1. For example, it was observed that the researcher's target learners did not do well in the Second Term English Language subject examination Paper 1 (Year 2008). There were 30 learners scored A, 42 learners scored B, 58 learners scored C, 36 learners scored D and 10 learners scored E in the examination. A total of 46 learners or 26 % failed in the English Language examination. In total 130 learners or 74% passed

in the English Language examination. On further checking of the learners' responses in Paper 1, the researcher found that most of them were not able to answer questions on reading comprehension correctly.

The researcher felt that, this might be attributed to the failure in utilizing the strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues. It might be useful and helpful for the learners to comprehend the texts better. Their failure to comprehend the text might have resulted in them not able to answer comprehension questions during the examination. The researcher felt that if the learners had better knowledge of the strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues, they could benefit and perform better in the English Language examination.

It was noted through personal and collegial observations that the learners were exposed to reading lessons via conventional method. Therefore, the researcher opted to introduce the strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues after strategy training. The teachers had to change their roles from instructor or controller during English Language lessons to as guide, consultant, coordinator or idea person (Oxford, 1990: 10). The researcher had identified the problems faced by the learners, so she planned to conduct strategy training and help learners become more independent as suggested by Rebecca Oxford (1990:10)

In short, it is seen clearly that the learners faced problems related to comprehension of narrative texts, the teachers were teaching using conventional method and the learners were not given a chance to be independent in their own learning. In order to increase the learners interest in reading, to enable them to read and comprehend texts better a focus on using the strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues via the introduction of relevant techniques were introduced. For this reason, the researcher attempted to investigate the use of the strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues in developing reading comprehension based on narrative genre among the Year 5 learners.

## **1.4 AIM OF THE STUDY**

This study thus aims to investigate whether the use of the strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues will develop reading comprehension based on narrative genre among the Year 5 learners.

## **1.5 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The objectives of this research are:

- 1.5.1 to find out how the strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues will improve the overall performance of the learners reading comprehension performance in narrative texts.
- 1.5.2 to find out how the strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues will help the learners to comprehend narrative texts.
- 1.5.3 to find out the learners' perceptions of the use of the strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues in helping them to comprehend narrative texts.

## **1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The purpose of this research is to answer the following questions investigating the use of the strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues in developing reading comprehension based on narrative texts among the Year 5 learners. The aforementioned objectives are operationalised via the following research questions:-

- 1.6.1 Does the use of the strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues improve the overall performance of the learners reading comprehension performance in narrative texts?
- 1.6.2 How does the use of the strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues help the learners to comprehend narrative texts?
- 1.6.3 What are the learners' perceptions of the use of the strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues in helping them to comprehend narrative texts?

The first research question was answered by gathering quantitative data in the form of pretest and posttest which consisted of 40-item Multiple Choice test. The second research question was answered by gathering qualitative data in the form of reflective

journals and the third research question was answered by gathering quantitative data in the form of a set of 15-item questionnaire.

## **1.7 RESEARCH HYPOTHESES**

The first research question in the study will be answered by testing the following null hypotheses:

H<sub>0</sub>1 There is no significant difference in the mean of the pretest and posttest scores on reading comprehension in the experimental group.

H<sub>0</sub>2 There is no significant difference in the mean of posttest scores on reading comprehension between the experimental group and the control group.

## **1.8 OPERATIONAL DEFINITION**

The following are some of the terms used in this study:

(a) Guessing meanings of words from contextual clues

Guessing meanings of words from contextual clues is defined as the prediction of unfamiliar words' meanings with the help of the text. According to Clark & Nation (in Fauziah Hassan, 2002) the clues can be from parts of speech, vocabulary and punctuation. In the context of this study, guessing meanings of words from contextual clues is the ability of the learners to understand the steps of identifying clues related to unfamiliar words and making guesses of the words. Then, the learners need to complete tasks related to comprehension of narrative texts and to answer multiple choice questions.

(b) The strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues

Strategy is defined as 'planning, competition, conscious manipulation, and movement toward a goal' (Oxford, 1990: 7). Strategy in the context of this study is to enable the researcher to plan and later to allow the learners to compete with conscious manipulation toward a goal. The goal is to comprehend narrative texts and to answer multiple choice questions.

### (c) Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is 'to develop learners' skills in comprehending texts. Learners need to employ different reading strategies for different tasks, texts and purpose of reading' (Fauziah Hassan, 2002). For the purpose of this study, the learners need to learn the strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues in order to understand the information written in the narrative texts.

### (d) Narrative text

There are many types of narrative which can be imaginary, factual or a combination of both. They may include fairy stories, mysteries, science fiction, romances, horror stories, adventure stories, fables, myths and legends, historical narratives, ballads, slice of life and personal experience. For the purpose of this study texts in the form of stories of any combination will be used to enable the learners to comprehend the texts and to answer multiple choice questions based on the texts.

### (e) Learning Strategies

Learning strategies are 'specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations' (Oxford, 1990: 8). For this study the learners will be learning several steps on the strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues in more enjoyable, more self-directed and transfer the information into new situation which is to comprehend the narrative texts and to answer multiple choice questions.

### (f) Strategy Training

Strategy training 'teaches language learning strategies but also deals with feelings and beliefs about taking on more responsibility and about the role change implied by the use of learning strategies' (Oxford, 1990: 201). For the purpose of this study the learners will be exposed to one week strategy training whereby they will be exposed to narrative texts, steps to strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues. Then, they will be asked to answer MCQ, to keep reflective journals and to response to a set of 15-item questionnaire. The learners will be given intervention by using the strategy repeatedly using the narrative texts over a period of five weeks or five lessons.

(g) Multiple Choice Questions (MCQ)

Multiple choice questions are taken from past year *Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah* examination and English Year 6 textbook. These questions will be followed by three or four options in the form of A, B and C or A, B, C and D.

(h) Conventional method

Conventional method is related to teacher-centered teaching whereby the teacher will instructs the learners through three stages of teaching namely pre-reading, while reading and post-reading. During these stages the learners will be exposed to language based activities.

(i) Performance

Performance of the learners is related to their achievement in answering MCQ through comprehension of texts. The learners' performance is seen through the pretest and posttest scores of experimental and control groups.

## **1.9 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

Wallace (1992) states that reading is 'a process when one looks at and understands what has been written'. Thus, understanding what has been read is important to interpret the meaning. It is very important for the learners to be able to read and understand the meaning of what is read by them. Fauziah Hassan (2006) stated that meaning or comprehension is the basis of reading, so readers need to work on constructing the meaning of a text. The real meaning of any written text lies in the relationship the words have with one another.

It is hoped that predicting on difficult words will be able to help learners to identify meaning of the text. The strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues will help the learners to be competent in reading, to develop their reading comprehension, enable them to be interested in reading and to perform well in English Language subject during examinations.

It is hoped that the introduction of the strategy training in order to introduce the strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues will be essential for learning English Language by the learners inside or outside the classroom, significance for group work in language learning, get rid of fear of mistakes, and promotes a different ways of learning language from learning other subjects (Oxford: 1990, 201). Therefore it is hoped that the strategy training for the use of strategy of guessing meanings of words from contextual clues will be able to help learners to have interest in reading texts in English Language and to answer MCQ in examinations.

This study will be able to help teachers and educators to instill reading habits among the learners in English Language. The learners will be able to guess meanings of words from contextual clues in order to read further without having lack of interest to continue to read in English Language texts. The learners will be able to gain more vocabulary knowledge as they continue to read for pleasure. The learners also will be able to contribute in speaking as well as writing if their reading skill is fully developed. The learners also will be able to read extensively in order to gain extra knowledge.

## **1.10 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

This study will be taking samples of Year 5 learners from one of the schools in an urban area in Tawau District. The results and finding which will be done in Chapter 4 later will only represent learners in that particular school only. The results will not provide an overall performance of Year 5 learners as a whole in Malaysia.

The findings also will not be applicable for other group of learners other than the Year 5 learners in the particular school in Tawau District. The extraneous variables interference in the research will be beyond the researcher's control. This research will be taking into consideration on the use of the strategy of guessing of words from contextual clues in developing reading comprehension based on narrative genre among the Year 5 learners. Other methods will not be raised in the research. The above factors will be contributing to the limitations of the research.

## 1.11 CONCLUSION

In this chapter the researcher has revealed background of the study, statement of the problem, aim of the study, objectives of the study, research questions, research hypotheses, operational definition, significance of the study and limitations of the study. The researcher will be presenting literature review in Chapter 2, research methodology in Chapter 3, research findings in Chapter 4 and discussion and conclusions of the research in Chapter 5.

