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USE OF WORD RECOGNITION SKILLS IN IMPROVING YEAR FIVE PUPILS
IDENTIFICATION OF ENGLISH WORDS AT A RURAL TAMIL SCHOOL.

KANNAN A / L CONABAYAN



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DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF EDUCATION (TEACHING ENGLISH AS A
SECOND LANGUAGE)
(MASTER BY MIXED MODE)

FACULTY OF LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION
UNIVERSITI PENDIDIKAN SULTAN IDRIS

2015



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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to help weak pupils to identify more words in English by using word recognition skills. The subjects were four Year 5 pupils who were very weak in English. This study employed a qualitative research method. It was a descriptive case study using four weak pupils and it was conducted for 16 days. The samples were screened by using their Year 1 to Year 4 final examination results and those who obtained grade D and E were chosen. The pupils were asked to recognize the key words from Dolch Lists using word recognition skills. When they had succeeded in these activities, they were asked to recognize words in three texts from Year 4 and Year 5 English textbooks. The findings showed that the pupils improved in all three word recognition skills namely configuration clues, phonemic clues and picture clues. The subjects did not only improve in their word recognition skills, they also developed in their leadership ability and motivation. The teachers from national and vernacular schools can make use of word recognition skills to teach their pupils in order to facilitate Linus 2.0 program from Year 1 to Year 3. This study would not only help national remedial programs but also promote weak pupils' reading ability.





PENGUNAAN KEMAHIRAN PENGECEMAN PERKATAAN UNTUK MENGENALPASTI PERKATAAN BAHASA INGGERIS BAGI MURID TAHUN LIMA DI SEKOLAH TAMIL LUAR BANDAR











ABSTRAK
















Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk membantu murid-murid yang lemah dalam bahasa Inggeris dengan menggunakan kemahiran mengenal perkataan. Kajian ini menggunakan rekabentuk kajian kualitatif dalam proses mengumpul data. Kajian kes deskriptif menggunakan empat orang murid yang lemah dalam bahasa Inggeris dan dijalankan selama enam belas hari. Sampel kajian dipilih berdasarkan gred peperiksaan akhir tahun iaitu gred D dan E dari Tahun 1 hingga Tahun 4. Murid yang memperoleh gred D dan E sahaja yang dipilih untuk kajian ini. Murid-murid ditanya mengenal perkataan kunci dari 'Dolch Lists' dengan menggunakan kemahiran mengenal perkataan. Apabila murid-murid berjaya dalam aktiviti yang dilaksanakan, mereka diminta mengenalpasti perkataan dari tiga teks di dalam buku teks bahasa Inggeris Darjah 4 dan 5. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan kemampuan murid-murid mengenali tiga kemahiran pengenalan kata melalui tatarajah, fonemik dan petanda gambar. Subjek bukan sahaja berupaya menguasai kemahiran pengenalan kata, mereka turut menunjukkan perkembangan dari aspek kepimpinan dan motivasi. Guru-guru dari sekolah kebangsaan dan jenis kebangsaan boleh menggunakan kemahiran mengenal perkataan untuk mengajar murid murid Program Linus 2.0 dari Tahun 1 hingga 3. Kaedah ini bukan sahaja dapat membantu dalam program pemulihan. Kajian ini bukan sahaja membantu program pemulihan negara tetapi juga menggalakkan keupayaan membaca murid-murid lemah.



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CDP+ CONNECTIONIST DUAL PROCESS PLUS

DRC DUAL ROUTE CASCADE

U.P.S.R UJIAN PENILAIAN SEKOLAH RENDAH



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APPENDICES

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION



1.1 Introduction

There are many weak pupils who cannot read even after six years in the primary school throughout this country (Spykerman, 1998; Lim & Sebastian, 2006; Loh, 2006). This happens because of many reasons and one of them is they could not recognize the words. Thus, the researcher has decided to come up with alternative techniques that could help the weak pupils to read. In this study they are word recognition skills.



These skills are easy to use techniques particularly for remedial pupils (Bermen, 1998; Mergel, 1998; Kernel & Jordan, 2004; McClelland & Bybee, 2007; Perry, Ziegler & Zorzi, 2007; Voght & Echevarria, 2008). These skills are not difficult to teach or learn but require some adjustments. These adjustments must be made in the form of time, materials and instructions to cater to the needs of the pupils.

So in this study the researcher would find ways to make sure the weak pupil identify the given words with minimal mistakes. The minimal mistakes here are defined as the probability of the pupils to recognize and memorize the words successfully as compared to doing so by using traditional methodologies.

1.2 Background of the Study

In the case of this study, the pupils face difficulties in reading due to the geographical positioning of the estate which is in a remote area. This made the lives of the people difficult and to make it worst this school is categorized as a rural area school because of 65 % of the surrounding area is full of agriculture (Education Ministry, 2010).

This condition not only makes it hard to get information from outside of the estate but also reduces the interaction between the people in the estate and the outside world. This is the main reason why not much information gets to the people in order to develop their knowledge. Furthermore, parents' lack of education poses as a contributing factor in the pupils' difficulty in learning. The parents could not help in their children's educational progress.

The parents' knowledge of the Malay language can be questioned even though it is the national language because only few people can speak and understand the language (Jain, 2000). As for the English language it is regarded as a foreign language to them (Tan & Saw, 2009). In this rural school, many of the weak pupils cannot read even after six years in the primary school because they could not recognize the words. With this in mind, the researcher has decided to use the word recognition skills as a tool to help the weak pupils to read.

1.3 Statement of the problem

English language is a subject that many pupils find difficult to master. They have difficulty in reading because the usage of English is just limited to the classroom

exposure by the teachers. Pupils do not have around the clock coaching in the language (Safi, 2003; Lim, 2006)

Table 1.1 presents the U.P.S.R results for S.J.K (T) Ladang Anak Kulim from 2004 to 2012. The results show that the pupils in the school require enhancements in learning English Language.

Table 1.1.

English U.P.S.R results from 2004-2012.

Year	Total	A	B	C	D	E	Candidates
							who passed
							%
2004	9	0	4	2	1	2	67
2005	10	0	0	3	3	4	30
2006	6	0	0	1	4	1	12.5
2007	11	0	2	8	1	0	90.9
2008	10	0	3	1	1	5	40
2009	6	0	2	2	1	1	67
2010	7	2	4	1	0	0	100
2011	13	0	3	8	2	0	85
2012	5	0	0	4	1	0	80

Source: S.J.K (T) Ladang Anak Kulim

Currently, the teachers in the school are using traditional methods in English language teaching. The methods being used by the teachers are ‘The Grammar – Translation method’ and ‘The Audio-lingual method’. The methods have been used frequently in the school. The good pupils in the school are able to learn via these methods but the weak pupils cannot do so because they are not helping them to remember the words being introduced (Caroll, 1965; Felder & Henriques, 1995; Weschler, 1997; Na Kong, 2011).

In this school, weak pupils can only remember certain words if seen frequently. The words are ‘is’, ‘are’, and ‘the’. Other words are forgotten by the weak pupils because of the length and pronunciation of the words. So, this is the main obstacle faced by the weak pupils. This hinders their reading capability. They cannot identify the words, even if they knew the English alphabet. Their inability to recognize the words caused a lot of problems in improving their skills. Some of the weak pupils do not want to learn English because they find English as a difficult subject. The main reason for this is because the weak pupils do not know how to read their reading materials.

Tamil primary schools are institutions where pupils use Tamil language as a medium of instruction in most of the subjects in the classroom (Education Ministry, 2010). The teaching and learning in Tamil are given priority by the school as this is the first language or mother tongue. Pupils in the school use Tamil daily in formal

functions of the school. Most of the teachers are educated in Tamil medium in order to teach the subjects in the school.

In the teaching of English, teachers use Grammar-Translation method to teach the grammar part of the language. It is still considered as an effective method of teaching grammar for this school. This is because of the limited usage of the English language among pupils. It can save the teachers' time because they are Tamil educated teachers teaching English. So, they just use Tamil which is the mother tongue in order to teach English (Bax, 2003; Na Kong, 2011).

Another popular method among the English language teacher is the Audio-lingual method. The teachers in this school prefer to use this method because they can simply take out a new material daily and ask the pupils to memorize (Caroll, 1965; Felder & Henriques, 1995). It is a logical one for everyone as this method can be suitable for good and average pupils. The only problem with this method is the pupils in this school do not want to memorize the words at home.

There are many problems that can be associated with acquisition of English words. For instance, the pupils could not even identify all individual letters and associate the sounds of the letters in the words. Then, the length of the words

increases according to the age of the pupils (Carrier & Garnier, 2004). All of these pose further difficulties to weak pupils in learning English words.

Pupils find it difficult to recognize the words if it is not represented by pictures. This can be seen when most of the pupils could recognize a large number of words when they were in Year 1 and then recognition decreases when they progress to higher classes where most of the words are recognized by using phonetics (Swingley, Pinto & Fernald, 1999; Ploetz, 2007).

As the key problems faced by the weak pupils in reading English texts increase according to the time and place, the researcher sees word recognition skills may pose as an alternative technique in facilitating the pupils' reading ability.

1.4 Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- a) to look at the improvement of Year Five weak pupils' abilities to identify words after being introduced to word recognition skills.
- b) to find out the year five weak pupils' responses towards word recognition skills.

1.5 Research Questions

The following research questions are based on the objectives of the study:

- a) To what extent the word recognition skills improve the Year Five weak pupils' ability to identify words?
- b) What are the year five weak pupils' responses towards word recognition skills?

1.6 Significance of the Study

This present study is an attempt to investigate the use of word recognition skills in a rural Tamil primary school. It is hoped that this research might initiate further research in this area as it is important for Malaysian language learners to be exposed to various teaching and learning strategies. This research would also be able to help pupils identify strategies in language learning which would help them in their life - long learning process.

The findings in this study can provide useful information for teachers who teach English in the school where the research is being carried out. Both teachers and

pupils would benefit from the word recognition skills as they would encourage independence and self-directed teaching techniques in language acquisition. This study would also get the pupils to realize the effectiveness of word recognition skills.

This study would also be able to encourage higher education lecturers in various institutions of higher learning in and out of Malaysia to explore in this kind of research. This also could enhance them to use various language learning strategies in their environment. Besides that, the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) in Malaysia could also benefit from the findings of this study as it would facilitate the creation of various materials in order to promote language learning at all level in rural Tamil primary schools.

It is evident that Tamil schools today have to recognize the importance of empowering people at all levels. Most importantly, the classroom teachers need to be facilitators in the learning process and help pupils equip themselves with knowledge, skills and competencies that will enable them to take responsibility for their learning.

In promoting the concept of using word recognition skills to the weak pupils, the teachers need to help learners identify their own word recognition skills which will eventually help them take up responsibility for their own learning. However, before doing that, one should take into consideration such as individual differences,

needs, interests, goals and motivation for learning. Therefore, in teaching pupils how to learn, the teachers can help facilitate the learning process by introducing and equipping them with suitable learning techniques.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

Firstly, this study is based on a rural Tamil primary school. The selected small sample size might not be able to provide the data to support any conclusive findings that may be a representative of the whole Tamil schools. However, the results obtained from selected samples in this study can provide some useful insights in the usage of word recognition skills among rural Tamil primary schools. Due to time and financial constraints, the researcher is only able to conduct this study among these small selected samples.

1.8 Definition of terms

1.8.1 Weak Pupils

Kirk, Gallagher & Anastasiaw (2000) describe weak pupils as those who develop learning disabilities day by day. This situation arises because of many things. They state that biological problem, perceptual-motor, visual difficulties, auditory – processing deficits, memory disorders and attention deficits may lead to weak pupils.

Summers (2005) explains that that term weak means not good at a particular skill or subject or in a particular area of accuracy or knowledge. In the context of this study, the weak pupils is defined as those who have difficulty in reading as they are poor at recognizing words.

1.8.2 Word Recognition Skills

The term ‘word recognition skills’ as used in the literature during the past twenty years has labeled a very broad and relatively confusing concept (Tan et al. 2003). Scott (1991) defines word recognition skills as the combination of reading and spelling skills and they are highly interdependent. According to him only children