

**THE EFFECT OF STRATEGY TRAINING IN THE COMPREHENSION OF
ACADEMIC READING MATERIALS**

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**DISERTASI INI DIKEMUKAKAN
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work in this dissertation is my own except for quotations and summaries which have been duly acknowledge.

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The name of Allah Most Gracious and Most Merciful

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ABSTRACT

Reading skills play an important role in mastering a language and knowledge. Therefore it is important to expose students to practice strategic reading habits since it will assist them to perform in academic journey. The current investigation aims to observe the effect of reading strategies training towards subjects' reading comprehension performance as well as the subjects' level of awareness utilizing reading strategies when they perform their reading tasks. The subjects in this investigation were 30 first semester students from the Commerce Department of Sultan Azlan Shah Polytechnic. 15 subjects were Diploma of Marketing (DPR) students and another 15 subjects were Diploma of Accountancy (DAT) students. DPR students were assigned to the experimental group meanwhile DAT students were assigned to the control group. The experimental group undergone 60 minute reading strategy training for 12 weeks meanwhile the control group did not receive any training. In order to observe the effect of the training, pre-test and post-test for reading comprehension test and survey on reading strategies (SORS) were administered to the experimental group. The pre-test and post-test were also conducted to the control group so that the performance for both group could be compared. The data obtained from the tests were analyzed via SPSS. The t-test conducted had revealed that the experimental group showed a significant improvement in reading comprehension test score and survey on reading strategy score. This evidence has proven that the reading strategy training exposed to the experimental group managed to facilitate the subjects to read and further perform better in comprehending the reading text.

ABSTRAK

Kemahiran membaca memainkan peranan yang penting dalam menguasai sesuatu bahasa dan ilmu pengetahuan. Oleh itu adalah penting mendedahkan para pelajar untuk mempraktikkan kaedah membaca yang strategik kerana ia boleh membantu mereka dalam menimba ilmu. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk melihat kesan latihan strategi membaca keatas pencapaian kefahaman dan tahap kesedaran di dalam penggunaan strategi ketika membaca bahan bacaan akademik dikalangan subjek. Subjek bagi kajian ini adalah 30 orang pelajar semester 1 Jabatan Perdagangan, Politeknik Sultan Azlan Shah. 15 subjek adalah pelajar program Pemasaran (DPR) manakala 15 subjek lagi adalah pelajar program Akauntasi (DAT). Pelajar program Pemasaran diletakkan sebagai kumpulan eksperimen manakala pelajar program Akauntasi diletakkan sebagai kumpulan kawalan. Kumpulan eksperimen menjalani latihan penggunaan strategi membaca selama 60 minit untuk 12 minggu manakala kumpulan kawalan tidak menjalani latihan berkenaan. Bagi melihat keberkesanan latihan, subjek diberi ujian kefahaman dan Survey on Reading Strategies (SORS) sebelum dan selepas mereka didedahkan dengan strategi membaca. Kedua-dua ujian ini turut dijalankan keatas kumpulan kawalan untuk dijadikan perbandingan. Data yang dikumpul dianalisa dengan menggunakan perisian SPSS. Hasil analisa t-test membuktikan kumpulan eksperimen menunjukkan peningkatan dalam prestasi kefahaman dan kadar penggunaan strategi membaca. Hasil analisa ini membuktikan latihan strategi membaca mampu membantu mereka dalam meningkatkan kemahiran membaca dan tahap kefahaman mereka dalam memahami bahan bacaan akademik.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ESL	-	English as Second language
GLOB	-	Global Reading Strategies
KBSR	-	<i>Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Rendah</i> (New Primary School Curriculum)
KBSM	-	<i>Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah</i> (New Secondary School Integrated Curriculum)
L1	-	First Language
L2	-	Second Language
PROB	-	Problem Solving Strategies
SPM	-	<i>Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia</i> (Malaysian Certificate of Education)
SUP	-	Support Strategies
SBI	-	Strategies-Based Instruction
SORS	-	Survey of Reading Strategies

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter discussed the background of the research. It illustrated the framework of the current research by providing the background of the study, the statement of problem, objectives of the study, research questions, significant of the study, scope of the study and definitions of terms.

1.1 Background of the Study

Reading is a fluent process of reader combining information from a text and their own knowledge to build meaning (Anderson, 1990). The process that is going on in a reader's mind is essentially unobservable. Despite the unobservable nature of reading, researchers are still able to get hold of valuable insight into reading. Investigation and inquiry conducted in relations to reading provide language teachers and language learners with

rich information which can assist them to progress in language learning as well as in academic field.

Reading can simply be interpreted as the process of negotiating meaning between the reader and the written text (Grabe, 2002). A more complex definition is being suggested by Meena Singhal (1998). She defined reading as a meaning making process involving an interaction between the reader and the text. Vega (2004) stated reading as a cognitive process because it requires the utilization of certain mental and intellectual procedures and strategies. The definitions proposed by researchers are the representation of a complex process that going on in readers' mind. In reality, the process of reading itself is not as easy as it been defined. Many elements contribute towards the successfulness and the effectiveness of a reading process. Factors such as first and second language proficiency, prior knowledge, phonology, psychological process, motivation and strategies in reading are examples of variables studied by the researchers in order to understand more on the hidden process of reading. As for research in relation to reading strategies, there were a number of researchers that study on the characteristic of strategies employed by research participants such as Block (1986), Honsenfield (1984) and Anderson (1991). The participants of the studies were selected from various profile namely poor and good reader (successful and unsuccessful reader), ESL students, low and high proficiency students, adult reader and EFL students. Based on the findings obtained the researchers highlighted the pattern of strategies employed by the participants. They further suggest the strategies that can be employed in order to read effectively. Another issue observed by researches was reading strategies instruction or training. Carrell (1989), Tan and Bromely (2006) and Muniz-Swicegood (1994) were among the researchers that involved in studying the reading strategies training. The studies conducted were focused on developing strategies training framework and examining the effectiveness of reading strategies training. As a result, teachers and language instructors can get the benefit from the research's findings. They will be able to compare and contrast the effectiveness of reading strategies training proposed by researchers.

As for this inquiry the major focus was to look at the effect of exposing students to reading strategies which it is believe that through the exposure the students are able to improve their comprehension towards the text. The exposure given is particularly to facilitate students to used and further assimilate the reading strategies when they are reading academic text and content. It is also hope that the exposure given will increase students' awareness in utilizing reading strategies in their reading activities.

1.2 Reading Difficulties

In second language classroom, students might encounter with a number of problem in their reading activities. The understanding towards difficulties and obstacles experienced by the student in their reading process is very important therefore the solutions can be proposed in order to overcome the issues.

Reading processes may be interrupted by disability to comprehend unfamiliar words such as technical terms or jargon in specific field. Complex sentences structure also may lead to difficulty in interpreting the content. Other than that, lack of background knowledge related to the content presented in the text also hinders the comprehension process. In addition, ESL students also unable to plan their reading process whereby in certain situation they tend to read word for word in order to interpret the text. In other words they are relying too much on understanding of individual words rather deductively interpreting the content. These habits are ineffective to be practice since the comprehension process will be distracted if the reader encounter with unfamiliar word. As for Block (2002) and Johnson (2002), they suggested that readers who struggle to attain a semblance of meaning from the text they are reading, do not contemplate a detailed relevance of unfamiliar words, thus creating a vague meaning of what is being read. As a result, comprehension becomes such a challenge that these readers disengage and refrain from meaning making.

Researchers have also discovered some weaknesses in ESL reader. Singhal (2001) mentioned that the unsuccessful reader on the other hand, lost the meaning of the

sentences when decoded, read in short phrases, pondered over inconsequential words, seldom skipped words as unimportant, and had a negative self-concept. Meanwhile, Block (1986) highlighted that the “non-integrators” on the other hand, failed to integrate, did not recognize text structure, and were more reflexive in that they relied much more on personal experiences.

. Based on the researches’ finding and classroom observation language practitioner are able to learn what are the problems and what are the causes of the reading problems experienced by the students. Therefore, it enables the teachers and researchers to formulate the solutions that can be used in order to help the reader to read successfully.

1.3 The Importance of Reading Strategies in Academic Setting

Ulijn and Salager-Mayer (1998) highlighted the fact that there is a close relationship between reading on the one hand, and school achievement and language development on the other. Further, they point out that learning, both in school and beyond, largely depends on information derived from texts. Therefore it can be signified that reading is essential in order to be success in academic field.

One of the ways to achieve successful reading is by utilizing appropriate reading strategies (Block, 1986). Reading strategies play an important role in the reading process. Block (1992) mentioned that when teaching reading, teachers cannot expect that second language readers will continue to meet easy-read texts as they go through school (Block, 1992). Therefore she suggested that one of the ways to help students to develop their reading skills is through teaching them awareness of the metacognitive process and of their strategic resource as this will give the students ways to keep on nourishing themselves through school.

In polytechnics teaching and learning setting, reading is a vital element which involve in students’ academic journey. Through out the programme, students are required to involve in many activities and tasks such as completing assignments, taking quizzes and exam, preparing for oral presentation and etc. Therefore the skills to read efficiently

are essential in order to cope with such a demand. Efficient reading skills can be a powerful tool for the students to acquire knowledge as well as to promote self-development. The ability to utilize and manipulate reading strategies will facilitate the students in solving any problems that they encounter when comprehending any reading task.

In real academic setting students usually encounter wide range of texts, as they are required to read the simplest text, for instance, advertisements to the most complicated technical texts from specialized journals. Hence, students need to be skilful and flexible in dealing with reading particularly why they read, how to read and what they need to take into account while reading. Zuraidah Zakaria (1999) mentioned that, it is of the utmost importance to possess appropriate reading strategies to enable students to effectively process text in their attempt to upgrade themselves in terms of knowledge. Therefore, exposing students to reading strategies training or instruction can be a promising approach in order to develop students' reading proficiency. According to Sengupta (2002) in order to help our students, we need to know how the new strategies and pedagogies impinge on the ways in which students approach reading in other academic subjects and whether making students' implicit models of reading explicit is going to change students' reading experiences in the real-life academic context .

To conclude, it is important to expose students to reading strategies therefore it can be a tool for them to manage their learning process. The awareness towards reading strategies can enable them to read and comprehend variety of texts which further facilitate the students in dealing with any task or courses requirement.

1.4 Reading Strategies Training

Language teaching and learning at primary (KBSR) and secondary level (KBSM) do expose students to four major language skills namely reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. However, there are limitations to heavily focus in each aspect of the four skills in the classroom. Time, syllabus, number of students and teachers' competency are

some of the limitations which hinder the optimum exposure towards the four skills in the classroom.

As for reading skill, the syllabus outlined mostly focus on reading comprehension with a lack input on how to guide students to be a strategic reader. There is less exposure in invoking students' awareness towards utilizing reading strategies in order to optimize the comprehension as well as to overcome problems that related to comprehension process. Therefore students usually struggle in comprehending the text and they might find reading as a tedious process especially when they encounter a complicated content. In certain case, there are students who possess the skills, unfortunately, they don't know how to coordinate the strategies and to suite the text that they read. This is where reading instruction or training can come into play whereby students can be exposed to the effective usage of the reading strategies. The fundamental hypothesis is that the processes or skills induced by the strategies become more habitual with practice. Therefore strategy training is introduced in order to provide the means to tackle complex problems in more efficient ways and, with practice, the strategies lead to skills that become automatic and quick over time. Carrell (1998) mentioned, students may have many misconceptions about the nature of reading and incomplete awareness of reading strategies, or of executive processes for monitoring and regulating comprehension, some researchers have called for fostering better metacognition and reading comprehension through direct instruction.

In the language classroom it is essential that teachers strive to increase students' awareness towards reading strategies, as that will help them decide on the most appropriate strategies for a given task. It is hoped that by introducing the strategies and how to utilize them, the students will be able to coordinate the use of strategy according to the needs of the text. In order to introduce reading strategies to second language students, the selection of training strategy framework is important to be put into consideration. The framework explains how the training will be conducted. There are a number of training frameworks that can be replicated in order to guide a training course. Winograd and Hare (1988), Cohen (1998) and Chamot (2005) were among the researchers who proposed the framework for strategies training. The frameworks outlined

elaborate the steps needed in order to implement the training procedure. As an instructor it is important to understand and to be able to conduct the training as outlined by the framework chosen so that the students will be benefited by the training.

1.5 Statement of Problem

Learning and acquiring English language is an ongoing process in tertiary level of education. In Politeknik Sultan Azlan Shah Perak the importance of learning English is reflected through the implementation of English as medium of instruction in teaching technical and commercial subject. The change of medium of instruction in 2008 has brought a new challenge for students in their learning process. The current change requires students to be able to read in English as well as to comprehend the content of subject matter. To read in second language is not an easy task since students will encounter with a number of obstacles such as unfamiliar vocabulary, unfamiliar content, and technical terminology and so on. The comprehension process that takes place is also differ from one individual to another since personal factor such as motivation and proficiency level also influence the reading proficiency. In order to help the students in developing their reading proficiency as well as to handle a content specific text reading strategies training/ instruction can be an effective solution.

Therefore it is worth to investigate students' awareness in utilizing reading strategies in their reading process. Further, it is hopes that the exposure given will be able to improve their reading comprehension as well as to help the students to read efficiently.

The research questions addressed in this paper were as follows:

1. To what extend the reading comprehension score improved after the students are introduced to reading strategies training?
2. To what extend the level of awareness towards reading strategies improved after the students are introduced to reading strategies training?

Two hypotheses were proposed in this study, i.e.

1. Students who receive reading strategies training will improve their reading comprehension as measured by reading comprehension's test.
2. Students who receive reading strategies will improve in term of reading strategies awareness evidenced by scores achieved in Survey of Reading Strategies Inventory (SORS).

1.6 Purpose and Objectives of the Study

There were a number of researches conducted in order to investigate the aspects that involve reading and specifically reading strategies. As for this study, it was focusing on the effect of reading strategies training towards students' comprehension in comprehending text which related to academic activities namely textbook, journal, article and etc. In addition, this investigation was also intended to examine the awareness in utilizing reading strategies posses by the students after receiving the treatment. Therefore this study was driven by the following aim which were:

1. to examine the different in terms of reading strategies used before and after the treatment.
2. to examine the different in terms of reading comprehension score obtained by students before and after the treatment.

1.7 Significance of the Study

Throughout the years studies on reading strategies has grown remarkably. Investigations in many aspects in relations to reading strategies are conducted in order to examine the issues. related to the used of reading strategies in various context and across variety groups of subjects. As for this study, it is significant since it can contribute towards the

growth of knowledge on reading strategies especially at polytechnics level whereby the ability to read effectively is an essentially skill for the students. Findings generated from this study will also help language teacher or language trainer to gain some insights regarding students' reading strategies and guidelines on the teaching and learning of reading therefore the students can practise and develop an effective reading habit. Besides, the knowledge obtained may also facilitate English teacher to review their teaching approach especially in order to plan reading strategies instruction in the language classroom. It is hope that through an effective reading strategies instruction, students so called "strategic reader" can be developed and nurtured.

1.8 Functional Definitions

There are a number of terms which require specific interpretations according to the research context. They are as follow:

1. Reading

Reading is a cognitive process which requires the utilization of certain mental and intellectual procedures and strategies (Vega, 2004).

2. Reading for academic purposes

Reading for academic purposes (RfAP) is referring to reading activities which take place in an academic setting. For instance, reading textbook, journal, article etc. For the purpose of this study, RfAP is defined as purposeful and critical reading of a range of lengthy academic texts for completing the study of specific major subject areas (Sengupta, 2002).

3. Reading strategies

In this study, reading strategies are those mental processes that reader consciously chooses to use in accomplishing reading task (Cohen, 1990). The reading strategies addressed in this study are divided into three groups according to the categories proposed by Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002). The groups are:

i. Global reading strategies

Global reading strategies are intentional, carefully planned techniques by which learners monitor or manage their reading process.

ii. Problem solving strategies

Problem solving strategies are the activities and procedures that readers use while working directly with the text.

iii. Support reading strategies

Supporting reading strategies are basic support mechanism intended to facilitate the reader in understanding the text.

1.9 Limitation of the Study

Basically, the focus of the study was to investigate the use of reading strategies between two groups of students, namely are high proficiency group and low proficiency group. Therefore, the research has been designed to gather the intended data to meet this proposes. However, there were numbers of factor which can influence the findings since the reading process also involves other variable. The variable can be drawn out form two perspectives which are students' perspective and language learning perspective. In terms of the students' perspective, variables such as personality, gender, former education, motivation and attention span might affect the result of the research. From the language perspective, variables which might affect the results could include exposure towards the

second language, first language interference and texts selected for the purposes of the study. It is important to note that the variables mentioned might have some influence towards the findings. However, the research design was not able to cater to all of the variables influence. Therefore, the findings of the current research cannot contribute towards a concrete generalization. Another issue which needs to be mentioned is the time constrain. The time constraint did not allow the researcher to intensively focus on a single subject therefore the researcher could not ensure that each subject able to grasp all the strategies taught. The findings might be different if researcher could be able to attend to each subject in facilitating them to learn the strategies.

1.10 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the background of the study. In this chapter the objectives and the research questions were outlined. In addition it also explained the significant of the studies as well as the limitation of the current investigation.