

**EXPLORING READING COMPREHENSION USING THINK-ALOUD
PROTOCOLS IN A SECONDARY SCHOOL**

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**LAPORAN PROJEK SARJANA DIKEMUKAKAN BAGI MEMENUHI
SEBAHAGIAN SYARAT UNTUK MEMPEROLEHI
IJAZAH SARJANA PENDIDIKAN**

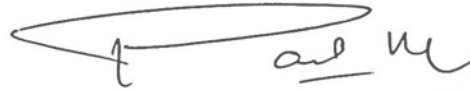
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PENGAKUAN

Saya mengaku laporan projek sarjana ini adalah hasil kerja saya sendiri kecuali nukilan dan ringkasan yang setiap satunya saya jelaskan sumbernya

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DECLARATION

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

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ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji penggunaan *Think-aloud* di sebuah kelas Tingkatan Empat. Ia digunakan untuk mengkaji bagaimana pelajar menggunakan strategi *Think-aloud* untuk meningkatkan tahap pemahaman mereka terhadap sesuatu petikan. Tiga orang peserta dipilih dari kelas Tingkatan Empat. Mereka kemudian didedahkan kepada strategi *Think-aloud*. Selepas itu, setiap daripada mereka diberikan sebuah petikan yang sesuai dengan tahap pembacaan mereka. Mereka kemudiannya disuruh membaca dan pada masa yang sama berfikir dan menyuarakan pemikiran mereka tentang pembacaan mereka. Sesi ini dirakamkan dan data diperoleh dan disalin semula. Peserta-peserta ini kemudian telah diminta untuk menceritakan semula isi penting petikan melalui *Retelling*. Selepas itu peserta-peserta di temuduga oleh penyelidik.

Berdasarkan data yang dikumpul melalui *Think-aloud*, ia memberi informasi tentang strategi pembacaan yang digunakan oleh peserta-peserta. Mereka menggunakan pelbagai strategi untuk memahami petikan dengan lebih baik. Oleh itu, dengan menyedarkan pelajar tentang strategi *Think-aloud*, mereka dapat mengetahui pelbagai strategi yang digunakan oleh pembaca yang baik untuk memahami sesuatu petikan.

ABSTRACT

EXPLORING READING COMPREHENSION USING THINK-ALOUD PROTOCOLS IN A SECONDARY SCHOOL

The aim of this investigation is to study how think-aloud protocols are used in a Form Four reading comprehension class. It is to see how students use appropriate strategies to enhance their reading comprehension. Three participants, from a Form 4 class are selected. They are then exposed to think-loud protocols. Each of them is given an appropriate passage of the same level to read. They are then asked to read and think at the same time. This is to see how they verbalize their thoughts and feelings. This session is audio-taped and the data transcribed. These participants are then asked to retell through delayed retelling what they have understood from the passage. Later they are interviewed by the researcher.

Based on the data collected, this think-aloud protocols provides information on reading strategies. Also, based on the information obtained, participants use reading strategies to have a better understanding of the passage. Therefore by making them aware of this type of strategies that good readers engage in when they read a passage, we are providing the students an opportunity to become aware of the many strategies that good readers use in comprehending a passage.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

As we embark into the new century, understanding comprehension plays an important role to the teaching and learning of English education and forming student-centered environment in classroom. Current development in the field of teaching and learning of English in Malaysia compels teachers to choose the instructionally better alternative strategies in the teaching of English, generally in reading comprehension.

Reading comprehension may be the most important skill for any student to acquire and is therefore an area of particular interest to educators. Without adequate comprehension skills, students are limited in their reading, analytical and occupational abilities. Too many, including the student's themselves, comprehension or "good reading" skills begin and end with simple decoding. It is thought that if students can 'read' and define the vocabulary they are reading, then they also comprehend what is read. However, true comprehension goes far beyond decoding.

True comprehension requires visualization of a text, predicting events in the text, making inferences about the text and clarifying what is not understood about the text in order to lead to higher level thought processes such as personally connecting with the text. According to Adamson (1993: 107), reading is the most important language skills for academic achievement followed by listening comprehension and then writing. This is consistent with Colliers's (1989: 521) suggestion that successful

reading performance is a strong predictor of students' academic performance in the second language at the secondary and post secondary level. This is supported by (Sugirin, 1995) that "while reading comprehension presents particular challenges for English as a second or foreign language student, little is known about these students reading comprehension processes". This will hinder their pursuit of higher academic goals. Also, students need to enhance their academic performance. This can be done through reading.

Research has shown that good readers monitor their comprehension during reading. Keene & Zimmerman (1997) have stated that good readers know when the text they are reading to make sense, when it does not, what does not make sense and whether the unclear portion is critical to the overall text. Reluctant, beginning or low-skilled readers often do not have the ability to visualize, predict, inference or clarify what they are reading and so they do not truly comprehend what the text is or what it means. Too often, these readers do not understand that "good readers" go through a series of mental processes in order to comprehend the text in ways which the low-level readers never even imagined. Therefore, reading skills need to be enhanced so that these students become better readers. To become better readers, students need to know the strategies used in reading. As educators, it is our responsibility to use an appropriate strategy like think-aloud to attract students towards the process of reading comprehension. The main aspects are to enhance students understanding in the reading skills related to comprehension and also encourage them to communicate and explain what they understand. In addition, students can interact and apply the appropriate strategy in their process of reading comprehension. Therefore, as educators in this ever-changing world, we play an important role to fulfill the objectives of the English curriculum.

Students, who are aware of the strategies in reading, will enhance their academic performance. This is why using Think-Aloud Protocol as a reading strategy is very important to improve reading comprehension. As educators, it is our job to show reluctant, beginning or low-skilled readers what these processes are and how they work in an attempt to boost the self-confidence and independence of these readers. Preparing texts for reading comprehension instruction and preparing students to read that text are important components of reading comprehension; however, the essence of reading comprehension begins only after students respond to the text in discussion, retelling, writing or acting out. Reading comprehension is to encourage students not only to state the right information, but even more importantly, to describe the thinking that resulted from the reading. One way to help students to say what it is they are thinking and why they are thinking such is for teachers to demonstrate or model these thinking aloud activities as they read a text, and then help their students learn to deploy these same strategies for thinking about a text on their own. In 1960-1980s, think aloud was viewed mainly as a research tool to investigate processes involved in thinking, problem solving, and reading comprehension. In 1980s, think aloud was viewed as a technique to model to students the strategies teachers use to comprehend text in order to help students improve thinking and reading comprehension. In 1990s, think aloud became accepted as an integral component of the process of constructing meaning within a social interaction.

This is why I have chosen think-aloud protocol as a reading strategy to improve reading comprehension in my study. In the past, researchers have proven that think-aloud as a reading strategy is very important in improving reading comprehension among students.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In my twenty years of teaching English to lower and upper secondary students in National Schools, I found many students struggling to cope with the requirements of the English syllabus especially mastering reading comprehension skills. I faced an arduous task in teaching my students comprehension especially reading and understanding a text. Most of the English teachers in secondary schools only rely on the traditional method to teach comprehension in classroom. For example, they only instruct the students to read a text and answer wh-questions based on the text given without emphasizing on students understanding about the text. They believe reading comprehension could not be taught with varies strategies. In a teacher-centered classroom, lessons are usually carried out without any involvement of students in instructionally based activities. This way hardly allows an opportunity for students to be creative and imaginative in their thinking and reasoning. This could be one of the reasons why students are passive in class. When students are not exposed to interesting strategies in reading comprehension, they will not be able to build conceptual understanding. They find it very boring and monotonous when the teacher enters the class and starts doing reading comprehension. The facial expression shown by the students says it all. Therefore, the students find reading comprehension difficult to comprehend because they lack reading skills and they show no interest in reading. As we know reading forms the basic knowledge of mastering a language.

In a typical reading comprehension class, the teachers do not know what exactly the students are doing. They might be looking at the text but we are not sure if they comprehend the text. They might be nodding their head as if they are reading but

in actual fact they might be day dreaming. That is why it is important to know what they are thinking when they are reading a comprehension text.

Also, during reading comprehension lessons, I find that it is difficult to gauge whether students understand what they are reading. Although they are able to answer the comprehension questions, it does not mean that they are able to comprehend the text. They are able to answer the comprehension questions because of certain cue words. However, they are reluctant to think critically while reading the text and they do not use their background knowledge or other reading skills to comprehend the text. According to Paul Harvey,(2005,p.33), he says that a good reader needs to look at the interaction between the reader and the text and the skills the reader brings to the reading process. Alderson for example, (2000), says that: 'at least part of the reading process probably involves the simultaneous and variable use of different and overlapping 'skills'.

During English reading comprehension lessons in classrooms, I found that the majority of my students do not monitor their reading. They tend to read for the sole purpose of answering the comprehension questions and not more than that. When a higher order questions are put forward to the students, they are not able answer correctly. Research has shown that good readers monitor their comprehension during reading.(Keene & Zimmerman 1997,p.43),have stated that good readers know when they are reading to make sense, when it does not, what does not make sense and whether the unclear the portion is critical to the overall text.

Another concern of this study is to find out whether students are able to use appropriate reading skills while reading a text. I found that most of the students are not exposed to the various reading skills and do not know how to make use of the

reading skills effectively. Students often do not have the ability to visualize, predict, inference or clarify what they are reading and so they do not truly comprehend what the text is or what it means. Therefore, a reading strategy should be used in reading comprehension to monitor students' reading, Helping them to choose appropriate reading strategies which will enable them to comprehend the text while reading.

I have chosen the Think-Aloud strategy in my study to determine whether the strategy is appropriate and effective in enhancing students' comprehension skills. The main concern of this study is to explore whether the use of think-aloud protocols as a reading strategy will improve students' performance where reading comprehension is concerned.

1.3 Rationale Of The Study

Reading is very much a two-way process between the reader and the text, and parts of this process may contribute to the inherent “difficulty” of a text. The interest in reading comprehension text among students in schools is very important because it helps the students to understand the text better and at the same time it makes teaching and learning process in the classroom to be interesting. Although there are many reading strategies that can be used when reading comprehension is concerned, a proper guide is needed to assist the students to choose the appropriate reading strategies in order to understand the text better. Research done on the implications of reading strategies and exposure of the reading strategies to educators are still lacking in Malaysia.

A recent article in the Indianapolis Star by Doreen Nagle stated the fact that all children of all ages and even the adults benefit from reading and thinking aloud. Reading is an important activity for building knowledge and success. Ms. Nagle and The Commission on Reading suggested that there are many reasons why reading is very important to children. One of the reason is it strengthens the child's reading skills, vocabulary skills and writing skills too. A child who does not have the attention span to read for a long time can learn to pay attention longer by reading and thinking aloud This is because through reading and thinking at the same time promotes imagination by visualization of what a child reads.

The think-aloud strategy asks students to say out loud what they are thinking about when reading, solving math problems, or simply responding to questions posed by teachers or other students. Effective teachers think out loud on a regular basis to model this process for students. In this way, the teachers demonstrate practical ways of approaching difficult problems while bringing to the surface the complex thinking processes that underlie reading comprehension and other cognitively demanding tasks. Thinking out loud is an excellent way to teach how to comprehend a text and monitor comprehension while reading a difficult text book. Getting students into habit of thinking out loud enriches classroom discourse and gives teachers an important assessment and diagnostic tool.

The three things that are mainly focused in this study are the usage of think-aloud protocol as a reading strategy to improve reading comprehension among the Form Four students, the strategies used by the students when reading comprehension is concerned and whether they are aware and able to use the appropriate reading strategies when reading a comprehension text. The main aspect in this study is to

identify whether the use of think-aloud protocols as a reading strategy improves reading comprehension among the Form Four students. It is hoped that the usage of think-aloud protocols as a reading strategy in a reading comprehension lesson would benefit the students of all ages as well as the educators. Furthermore, it is hoped that this reading strategy would kindle students' interest towards the comprehension lessons and change their negative perception or thoughts when reading comprehension is concerned. Therefore, students' performance in English subject can be enhanced especially in answering comprehension section.

1.4 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for this study looks from a social constructivist standpoint.

From a social constructivist Vygotsky's (1978, 1986) perspective, the children learn through interactions with their surrounding culture. This theory is also known as the socio-cultural perspective, which emphasizes on a child's cognitive development and adolescents. This theory states that children's cognitive development and adolescents is enhanced when they work in their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). To reach the ZPD, children need the help of the adults or more competent individuals to support or scaffold them as they are learning new things. According to Vygotsky's theory, children can do more with the help and guidance of an adult or other person who are more experienced than they can do by themselves. The ZPD defines skills and abilities that are in the process of developing.

The concept of ZPD and what the children can do with the help of adults or in collaboration with their peers was very relevant to the instructional design of the

present study, which was one reason why a framework based on Vygotskian perspective, was considered appropriate. A crucial feature in the discussion of ZPD is the support or scaffold provided in the ZPD whereby the child or learner is guided towards his or her potential level of development. Researchers note that scaffolds are only useful within the student's ZPD where the student cannot proceed alone, but can proceed when scaffolding is provided (Rosenshine and Meister, 1998).

According to Vygotsky's theory, a child is seen as a social being that tends to learn from other people within a social context. The potential result of participating in a social situation involving reading and thinking about text they are reading are that individual students can draw upon the teacher and other students to help them construct not only an understanding of text ideas but also an understanding of what it means to read and think about texts (Kucan & Beck, 1997). In other words, the researcher's aim for the students to explore think-aloud protocols through a process of designing reading text.

The researcher's goal is to generate a series of investigations, each of which should stimulate the students' thinking skills and require resolving a cognitive conflict. I hope this approach will allow the students to develop higher understanding of the text acquired in mastering their thinking skills and make the learning process like reading comprehension more dynamic and meaningful.

1.5 Purpose of the Study

Generally, this study has three main aims. The main aims of this study are to (a)

identify whether the use of think-aloud protocol as a reading strategy improves reading comprehension among Form Four student (b) identify the strategies used by the Form Four students when reading comprehension is concerned and (c) investigate whether Form Four students are aware and able to use the reading strategies in reading comprehension task.

1.6 Research Questions

Specifically, this study is carried out to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent does the think-aloud protocols provide information about reading strategies?
2. What type of strategies used by the students in a reading comprehension task?
3. Does the use of think-aloud protocols in a reading comprehension class improves reading?

1.7 Definition of Terms

Aware: practical knowledge and understanding of reading strategies that good readers use

Protocol: guided instruction and training of using reading strategies from the teacher

Think-aloud: it is a strategy in which students verbalize their thoughts as they read a text. The students are to describe what they were thinking after a task has been completed or after a defined task has been completed. It is also defined as the verbalization of one's thoughts while engaged in a task. (Kucan and Beck, 1997).

1.8 Limitations of the Study

1.8.1 Research Design

Limitations of the study are associated with the research design that has been chosen for this study. The research design chosen for this study is a case study and it has weaknesses that cannot be controlled. In this research, the techniques of data collection are retelling, observations and interviews. The way the data is collected, for example, the questions prepared for the interview shows weaknesses. A pretest and a post test would be more suitable for this study but for a case study research design, it is not applicable. Experimental design was not chosen because it might possess weaknesses through the pre test and post test.

1.8.2 Selection of Participants

The participants chosen for this study are the Form Four students of a secondary school in Kinta District II, Perak. The participants are selected based on their level of competency in English. Only three students were selected for this study and it represents a small number of Form Four students in Malaysia. Therefore, the findings of the study cannot be generalized to represent all the schools in Malaysia. The samples were chosen non-randomly and the results of the study only can be generalized for schools that have the same characteristics as the school chosen for the study. Weaknesses in the participants like reluctant to co-operate with the researcher and withdrew from participating in the study are things out of control faced by the researcher.

1.8.3 Logistic

The researcher also faced logistic weaknesses like the environment of the school where the samples are less active in the afternoon and not committed during the interview sessions. The participants tend to feel bored and do not involve actively during the retelling and the interview session. The ability of the participants to think and attend to a task at the same time possesses limitations to this study. Some participants tend to have a short-term memory capacity for talking and attending the task at the same time.

During the tape recording session, the participants found it difficult to stop the cassette player each time they were thinking aloud. They tend to concentrate more on their role as a participant who is being tested by their teacher.

1.8.4 Curriculum

Weaknesses of the English curriculum in the teaching and learning of comprehension lessons is also limited in this study. For example, when the researcher wanted to conduct the study, the school English teachers have not covered the content area of comprehension and students are not exposed to the reading strategies like think-aloud at all.

1.8.5 Research Scope

The researcher chose the reading comprehension to be studied in his study and the way used in the selection of this section is the delimitation of the study. The researcher has narrowed the research scope to the reading comprehension using silent strategy and think-aloud strategy only and the other reading strategies are not covered in this study. The researcher has controlled the reading strategies to think aloud protocols in this study.

1.8.6 Budget

The researcher has to control the budget for this study. A bigger budget would enable the researcher to do a more thorough research whereby more samples would be able to participate and more data would be available for analysis.

1.8.7 Relevant Literature

The related or relevant literatures chosen to be reviewed also possess delimitation for this study. Other relevant literatures which are more suitable for this study might be left out by the researcher.

1.8.8 The Reading Task

The task selected by the researcher might be chosen according to the samples level of

achievement in the mid-year examination. The theme selected for this study in Environment and the topic is on Health. The researcher has delimited the theme and the topic for this study.

1.8.9 Time

The time limit for this study also possess a constraint as the duration allocated does not allow the researcher to conduct a more thorough study on the reading comprehension section.

1.8.10 Theory

The theory chosen for this study was constructivism and it may show its weaknesses and might not be relevant to this study. It is hoped that similar studies will be carried out in other parts of the world for developing further understanding in this area.

1.9 Significance of the Study

The aim of this study is to identify whether the use of think-aloud protocols as a reading strategy improves comprehension among form Four students. This research is important especially for secondary school teachers. This is because the teachers will have the knowledge of think-aloud protocols as they carry out a reading comprehension lesson. They are able to apply the knowledge to enhance students understanding of a reading comprehension text. With the knowledge that they possess, they will be able to make the reading comprehension lesson more lively and interesting. The teacher becomes very creative in conducting lessons related to thinking skills. The reading comprehension lesson does not only focus on reading and

decoding a text but involves students personally connecting themselves to the text. The teachers can design creative and challenging tasks which involves thinking skills.

By undertaking this research, I hope the teaching and learning process in classroom is more to student-centered. Through the use of think-aloud protocols as a reading strategy in reading comprehension, it is hoped that students become good readers where they are able to visualize a text, predict events in the text, make inferences about the text that will lead to a higher level of understanding a text. The reading comprehension lesson is not boring because students are actively engaged in the thinking processes as they attempt to understand the text.

Studies on the exploration of think-aloud protocols in reading comprehension is lacking in Malaysia. It is therefore necessary to conduct studies to gauge the exploration of think-aloud protocols in reading comprehension in enhancing students' performance in language classrooms among secondary school students. Other areas using think-aloud skills has been explored, generally in subjects like Mathematics and Science. In Mathematics and Science think-aloud provide opportunities for teachers to model how to explore mathematics text. This might include previewing a chapter by looking at titles, subtitles, graphic organizers, and pictures to get an overall view of what the chapter is going to be about. Therefore, it is utmost important that we help students to understand the thinking processes that will enable them to be a skilled reader.