

**FOSTERING READING COMPREHENSION THROUGH  
SHARED READING IN THE YEAR FOUR  
ENGLISH CLASSROOM**

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## ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to identify students' responses towards reading comprehension, the strategies used by the researcher to facilitate students' reading comprehension and students' experiences during shared reading sessions. A qualitative case study design was selected to answer three research questions. Ten year four students from a school in Cameron Highlands, Pahang participated in the study. The researcher facilitated the shared reading sessions while observed by another teacher. Six sessions of shared reading were conducted using two different big books which were recorded and transcribed. Six students were then selected for semi-structured interview sessions. The recording transcriptions, interview transcriptions and observation notes were analysed using the framework technique of thematic coding. The findings showed six categories of students' responses towards reading comprehension. Overall, the students enjoyed and preferred shared reading and it enhanced their reading comprehension. The implication of this study suggested that shared reading needs to be carried out in the English classroom on a regular basis to foster reading comprehension.





## **MEMUPUK KEFAHAMAN MEMBACA MELALUI PERKONGSIAN MEMBACA DALAM KELAS BAHASA INGGERIS**

### **ABSTRAK**

Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk mengenalpasti maklum balas peserta kajian ke arah perkongsian membaca, strategi yang digunakan oleh penyelidik dan pengalaman peserta kajian. Reka bentuk kajian kualitatif telah dipilih untuk menjawab tiga persoalan kajian. Sepuluh murid tahun empat di sebuah sekolah di Cameron Highlands, Pahang telah mengambil bahagian dalam kajian ini. Enam sesi telah dijalankan menggunakan dua buku besar yang berlainan. Enam murid telah dipilih untuk sesi temu bual separa berstruktur. Rakaman transkripsi, transkripsi temu bual dan nota pemerhatian dianalisis dengan menggunakan teknik rangka kerja pengkodan bertema. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan enam kategori maklum balas pelajar terhadap kefahaman pembacaan dan strategi yang digunakan memudahkan kefahaman bacaan pelajar semasa perkongsian membaca. Keseluruhan peserta kajian menikmati dan lebih suka strategi perkongsian membaca kerana ia membantu dalam kefahaman bacaan. Implikasi kajian ini menyarankan bahawa perkongsian membaca perlu dijalankan di dalam kelas Bahasa Inggeris secara berkala.



## CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
<b>DECLARATION OF ORIGINAL WORK</b>	ii
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</b>	iii
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	iv
<b>ABSTRAK</b>	v
<b>CONTENTS</b>	vi
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b>	ix
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	x
<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</b>	xi
<b>APPENDIX LIST</b>	xii

### CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

<b>1.0 Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Background of the Study	3
1.2 Statement of the Problem	5
1.3 Aims of the Study	9
1.4 Objectives of the Study	9
1.5 Research Questions	9
1.6 Significance of the Study	10
1.7 Research Overview	10
1.8 Definitions of terms	11
1.9 Summary	13

### CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction	14
2.1 Using Stories in the English Language Classroom	15
2.2 Shared Reading in the English Language Classroom	17
2.3 Teacher's Roles in Shared Reading	29
2.4 Reading Skill and Reading Strategy	32

2.5 Reading Comprehension Strategy	33
2.6 Shared Reading and Think Aloud	35
2.7 Student's Proficiency	37
2.8 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework	38
2.9 Summary	44

### **CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY**

3.0 Introduction	45
3.1 Research Design	46
3.2 Qualitative Research Methodology	47
3.3 Instruments	48
3.4 Setting of the Study	54
3.5 Participants of the Study and Sampling	54
3.6 Data Collection Procedures	59
3.7 Data Analysis Procedures	63
3.8 Validity and Reliability Strategies	64
3.9 Ethical Considerations of the Study	66
3.10 Summary	67

### **CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

4.0 Introduction	68
4.1 Findings for Research Question 1	69
4.2 Discussion for Research Question 1	79
4.3 Findings for Research Question 2	91
4.4 Discussion for Research Question 2	96
4.5 Findings for Research Question 3	106
4.6 Discussion for Research Question 3	114
4.7 Summary	118

### **CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

5.0 Overview of the Study	119
5.1 Limitations of the Study	122
5.2 Implications of the Study	122

5.3 Recommendations for Future Research	125
5.4 Conclusion	127
<b>REFERENCES</b>	129

## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Table No.</b>		<b>Page</b>
3.1	Research instruments of the study	48
4.1	Coding used for the identified effects	70
4.2	Coding used for comprehension strategies	72
4.3	Analysis of responses for ‘The Rainbow Fish’	74
4.4	Analysis of responses for ‘ The Smartest Giant in the Town’	77
4.5	Teaching strategies used during shared reading	92
4.6	Common themes identified for semi-structured interviews	107

## LIST OF FIGURES

No. Figures	Page
2.1 Procedures in Shared Reading	24
2.2 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework of the Study	38
3.1 Flow of shared reading sessions for ‘The Rainbow Fish’	61
3.2 Flow of shared reading sessions for ‘The Smartest Giant in the Town’	62

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ESL	English as a Second Language
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
HOTS	Higher order thinking skills
CDC	Curriculum Development Center
UPSR	Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah
S1	Session 1
S2	Session 2
S3	Session 3
L	Line number
T	Teacher
SS	All students
SA	Student A
SB	Student B
SC	Student C
SD	Student D
SE	Student E
SF	Student F
SG	Student G
SH	Student H
SI	Student I
SJ	Student J

## APPENDIX LIST

- A Synopsis of big books
- B Observation Checklist
- C Interview Questions
- D Students' mid-year test results
- E Lesson Plans
- F Audio-Visual Recordings Transcriptions
- G Interview Transcriptions



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION



#### 1.0 Introduction

The research-based shared reading technique rooted from the theory of constructivism, emphasizes socially constructed learning through meaningful discourse between teachers and students in the English language classroom (Holdaway, 1982). As such, there has been a considerable emphasis in recent years on the value of shared reading in facilitating the development of language and literacy among learners especially those in pre-primary and primary grades (Cunningham & Zibulsky, 2011; Honchell & Schulz, 2012; Ong, 2014; Sullivan, 2014; Waters, 2014).





During shared reading instructions which emphasise natural and developmental process in literacy, a teacher reads aloud a story to a group of learners using enlarged picture books or big books while the learners read the print and see the accompanying pictures in the storybooks. At the same time, learners get to use the language in an authentic environment as they share their knowledge and experiences with each other in a group setting facilitated by the teacher.

In this approach, the teacher uses various strategies to engage students in the comprehension and cognitive process. For instance, students are encouraged to join in on repetitive text, learn decoding of words, practice reading aloud, read and understand high frequency words and new vocabulary, make prediction of story development, understand the text and engage in a critical discourse (Ong, 2014; Waters, 2014;). After reading the story, some related activities which enhanced students' learning usually follow. For instance, learners are encouraged to pose and answer questions, discuss main themes or issues, write responses related to the stories shared and creating something new.

According to Cunningham and Zibulsky (2011), the shared reading technique is similar to the provision of reading aloud to children or also known as read aloud technique in its aims and objectives and only slightly differs in its procedures. Thus, shared reading can be seen as the extension of the read aloud practice and describes the practice of sharing a book to a group of learners while carrying out meaningful and purposeful activities related to the stories shared.



In this chapter, the overall scope of the study is detailed from background of the study, problem statement, research aims and objectives, research questions, significance of the study, research overview and definitions of terms.

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

In Malaysia, English is taught as a second language in schools, colleges and universities. Though students learn English as a Second Language (ESL), its importance is never neglected and prioritized as a global language in the Malaysian Education System. As such, the ministry constantly encourages English language teachers to up skill their teaching techniques and cater to the rapid development of the world. It is the Ministry's aspiration to see its future generation to be well versed in the English language and able to place themselves in the working force all around the globe (Ministry of Education, 2015).

Starting from 2011, the new Standard Curriculum for Primary Schools (KSSR) with the support of Curriculum Development Center (CDC) was implemented to the primary grades starting from Year 1. This curriculum emphasizes on Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) with activity based teaching and learning activities such as problem solving, creative, analytical, decision making and innovative. It emphasizes high level of questioning which helps students in their thinking process and set Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as the basis in the teaching and learning of the English language. This approach emphasizes interactions and communication as well as using the language in real-life situations.



As such, one of the techniques that English language teachers can use to teach English with the aim of developing students' communicative, comprehension and HOTS competence is the shared reading technique. Similar to the read-aloud technique which was stipulated in the Malaysian English language syllabus, shared reading is an extension of the read aloud technique which focuses on sharing stories using big books or any other relevant materials such as posters and picture books (Curriculum Development Centre, 2003).

The shared reading technique lets teachers to communicate with their learners while reading and sharing stories to them. Inevitably, it provides ample opportunities for the learners to interact as well as to understand the stories using the English language. They also will be able to learn vocabulary, varied sentence structures and story structures in which enhanced their second language performance and at the same time enhanced their reading comprehension and thinking skills through teacher facilitated questioning and interaction.





## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

### Background of the problem

In the recent 2016 Primary School Achievement Test also known as Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR) which tested Year 6 students' academic performance, the analysis of results for English subject both in comprehension and writing papers revealed that English was one of the lowest performed subject along with Science and Mathematics with 17.4% failures in Comprehension and 22.9% in Writing (Malaysia Examination Board, 2016). Furthermore, the percentage of students scoring excellent marks for English were also lower than the previous year with only 12.1% in Comprehension and 6.8% in Writing.



According to the Malaysia Examination Board (2016), the shift in the examination format with more structured questions which required the students to reason and write might explain the fall in the percentage. This new format is in line with nation aspiration to develop students who have strong thinking skills as well as able to elaborate and articulate well. Apart from that, based on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results for 2015 which was announced on December 6, 2016, Malaysia showed slight improvement as compared to PISA 2012 with the score of 431 in Reading (Ministry of Education, 2016). However, Malaysia is still under the average global score which was 493. In PISA 2012, Malaysia was stuck in the bottom third of the countries surveyed in this international assessment. Among the 62 participating countries, Malaysia was ranked 59 with the score of 398 in Reading. Meanwhile, the global average score was 496 in Reading (Chen, 2013)





Although Malaysia shows improvement in which the nation can be proud of, however, Malaysian students are still lacking the necessary skills and strategies needed for reading and higher order thinking skill which is one of the main elements in the PISA assessment which assesses numerous cognitive skills such as application and reasoning. Thus, English language learners need to be taught using a technique that could scaffold and enhance their comprehension and enthusiasm to learn and utilize reading comprehension strategies. As such, shared reading could be one of the techniques.

### **Problem Statement**

In Malaysian public schools, language is treated as one of the core subjects with great emphasis on the attainment of phonics, vocabulary, grammar and little opportunity is provided to use the language (Ma'rof, Redzuan, Anderson & Ma'rof, 2012). During reading lessons, round-robin reading and choral reading are two ways in which English language teachers frequently practiced instead of shared reading which allow students to connect their background experiences with the information-rich texts they read. Shared reading expands students' opportunity to think and talk about a text and extend their ideas and views of the world. Darus and Mohamed (2001) argued that reading lessons should not be fast-paced and cognitively low-level. To address the inadequacy of reading lessons in the English classroom, shared reading which is a technique that promotes relaxed and supportive atmosphere was employed in the current study.





Shared reading will help learners who face difficulty in answering reading comprehension questions that require them to comprehend the text, read the underlying meaning and response to the questions critically. This technique helps learners to comprehend a text as well as how to derive meaning and reason from the text they read through teacher guided interaction and critical discussion. The questioning techniques utilised during the sessions support students' HOTS as they will be asked to reason and share their knowledge and experiences based on the story shared. Eventually, students will be able to use the skills they acquired through shared reading when they do independent reading.

The benefits and importance of shared reading as a technique for English language teaching and learning especially for the young learners is widely known by most educators and it is strongest for early literacy skills such as print concepts, phonetics and vocabulary (Sullivan, 2011). The National Early Literacy Panel also found out that shared reading had a significant implication towards language development and general cognitive ability (Lonigan, Shanahan & Cunningham, 2008). In that case, some scholars also argued that shared reading could support children's reading comprehension and their ability for meaning making and using reading comprehension strategies (Waters, 2014). However, only a few studies have explicitly studied on reading comprehension as an outcome measure in shared reading practice in the classroom setting and most of the studies targeted pre-school and lower primary grades learners (Schickedanz & McGee, 2010).





Precisely, research has not been done in identifying the students' responses towards reading comprehension during the shared reading sessions in a qualitative study for the older learners. Though there were some studies done to identify the teaching strategies deployed by the teachers during read aloud sessions (Omar & Saufi, 2015; Wiseman 2011), not much studies were carried out on the teaching strategies used to facilitate students' reading comprehension during the shared reading sessions. In terms of students' experiences or feedbacks regarding the shared reading sessions, a few studies (Beck & McKeown, 2001; Chen, Huang & Chen, 2009) were carried out in a quantitative manner where students were asked to fill in questionnaires and the findings were analysed quantitatively. As such, this study intended to explore the students' experiences during shared reading sessions using a qualitative approach to gain a more in-depth understanding of the students'



perspectives.

All in all, there is a need to address these problems and this study intended to explore the use of shared reading to up skill and enhance students' ability in reading comprehension and in the hope to see better UPSR and PISA results in the near future.





### 1.3 Aims of the Study

This study aimed to discover the effects of shared reading technique on students' reading comprehension. Besides that, this study also explored the strategies used by the teacher to facilitate students' reading comprehension during the shared reading sessions. Last but not least, this study also looked into the students' experiences during the shared reading sessions.

### 1.4 Objectives of the Study

The following were the objectives of the study:

1. To identify the Year 4 students' responses towards reading comprehension during shared reading sessions.
2. To explore the strategies used by the researcher in facilitating Year 4 students' reading comprehension during shared reading sessions.
3. To investigate Year 4 students' experiences on shared reading in general.

### 1.5 Research Questions

1. What are the students' responses towards reading comprehension during shared reading sessions?
2. What are the strategies used by the teacher during shared reading in facilitating students' reading comprehension?
3. What are the students' experiences during shared reading sessions?





## 1.6 Significance of the Study

This research contributes to the teaching and learning of primary ESL learners in some ways. Students engaged in a quality discussion with the teacher during the shared reading sessions. The findings of the study also set as a platform for the teachers to use shared reading technique as it positively influenced and developed students reading comprehension skill.

Learners engaged themselves in discussion during the shared reading sessions while they were stimulated with questions by the researcher. Besides students, there were other stake holders who gain advantage from this study such as the primary ESL teachers, schools, parents and the Ministry of Education in general. Schools will be able to produce more students who are able to read for understanding and think out of

the box beyond any given text. Through this study, parents will be motivated to buy more storybooks for their children and read with them. Finally, this study can contribute to enrich the body of research on using shared reading and reading comprehension skill.

## 1.7 Research Overview

This study took place in a school in Cameron Highlands district in the state of Pahang. 10 Year 4 ESL students participated in the study. The researcher who was the teacher in the study facilitated the six shared reading sessions while observed by another English language teacher. All the sessions were video-recorded and observed. An observation checklist was used for each session and notes were made along the checklist.





After the sessions, six students; 2 proficient, 2 average and 2 below average were selected for semi-structured interview sessions. The findings based on the observation checklist, video-recording transcriptions and interview transcriptions were analysed using the framework technique of Ritchie and Spencer (2002), discussed and put forward.

## 1.8 Definitions of terms

### *Shared Reading*

Shared reading is a form of ‘reading aloud’ with a group of children while the teachers use various strategies to engage learners in the reading process through and critical discourse (Cunningham & Zibulsky, 2011).



### *Reading Comprehension*

Reading comprehension is a deliberate process of figuring, building and constructing meaning from a written text being read (Block & Pressley, 2002).

### *Reading Comprehension Strategies*

Reading comprehension strategies refer to the strategies that are deliberately used by readers in order to make sense and comprehend what they read. These strategies help readers to think and have a deep understanding of the text being read. The reading comprehension strategies are as follow (Block & Pressley, 2002);

- a) *Making connection*- The reader uses what is known and connect to the text to enrich the meaning the author is trying to convey through the text.



Usually, the reader can make three types of connections which are; text-to-self, text-to-text and text-to world.

- b) *Predicting*- Readers will use their own opinion and personal experiences to predict what is the text about or what is going to happen next before reading the text. After reading, they usually reconfirmed whether their prediction was right or wrong.
- c) *Asking questions*- In order to have a good understanding of the text, readers are encouraged to ask questions before, during and after reading.
- d) *Inferring*- Readers will use the content in the text together with their prior knowledge to reason and coming into a personal conclusion about something still related to the text.
- e) *Visualizing*- This is a strategy where readers create mental images or pictures about the text they are reading in their mind
- f) *Analysing and Synthesising*- Readers tend to combine new ideas that they get from the text with their existing knowledge and coming into a form of new ideas or interpretations, making it their own.
- g) *Evaluating*- Readers will make personal judgment to the text they are reading in light with what they already know.
- h) *Identifying author's purpose and point of view*- Readers must know that every author has reasons and important messages to convey to the readers.

### ***Think Aloud***

Think-aloud is a metacognitive strategy of being able to think about one's own thinking and it is an important component of learning as it enables learners to evaluate their level of comprehension and adjust their strategies for greater achievement (Oster, 2001).



## 1.9 Summary

The present study was designed to answer three research questions which were the students' responses towards reading comprehension, the teaching strategies used by the teacher to facilitate students' reading comprehension and students' experiences during the shared reading sessions. There is a need to conduct the present study as it will contribute to the enhancement of English language teaching and learning techniques especially for those ESL learners. Shared reading has been proven in numerous researches to be beneficial to the learners. In the next chapter, the literature related to the study was reviewed.





## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW



#### 2.0 Introduction

A good reader or language learner usually monitors his or her own reading using various reading comprehension strategies. In order to mould language learners to be good readers when it comes to reading, teaching strategies deployed for comprehension instructions by the teachers during reading comprehension lessons are vital. This has been proven by a considerable number of researches in the area of reading comprehension and literacy (Harvey & Goudvis, 2013; Yang, 2006). Lennox (2013) found that increased storybook reading aloud sessions at home and school have a significant effect on comprehension, general cognitive ability and language development.

