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READABILITY ANALYSIS OF PROSE TEXTS IN THE MALAYSIAN LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE
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READABILITY ANALYSIS OF PROSE TEXTS IN THE MALAYSIAN LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOLS

ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze the readability of prose texts used for Malaysian lower secondary school students. The research involves both the quantitative and qualitative research methods in collecting data. The quantitative research methods are used to gauge readability level of the texts used and also students' views on reading the literary texts prescribed focusing on text-reader factors which are i) cultural familiarity of the texts, ii) physical features of the texts, iii) students' interest and motivation and iv) the preferred prose texts. The qualitative research method investigates the text-reader factors which affect students' reading comprehension and students' strengths and weaknesses in understanding the prose prescribed. Samples comprised randomly selected lower secondary school students from secondary schools in Perak. A total of 450 respondents and 18 participants were involved in the research. Data collection techniques include four readability formulas, a cross-sectional survey, interviews, and retelling procedures. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis, thematic analysis, in-depth procedures and judging richness of retellings. Also included are four online readability formulas to analyze the readability level of the prose texts used in schools. The findings show that the prose forms were below students' age level and the physical features of the prose texts could be improved to enhance reading interest. The results of the retellings analysis suggest that the prose forms are readable and are within students' comprehension ability level. The implication of the research however indicates that future selection of prose texts prescribed for use in schools should meet the needs and age level of the students and those which best fits students' reading interest.

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ANALISIS KEBOLEHBACAAN TEKS PROSA BAHASA INGGERIS DI SEKOLAH MENENGAH RENDAH MALAYSIA

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis kebolehbacaan teks prosa Bahasa Inggeris di sekolah-sekolah menengah rendah di Malaysia. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah penyelidikan kuantitatif dan kualitatif. Kaedah penyelidikan kuantitatif dijalankan untuk mengetahui tahap kebolehbacaan teks prosa yang digunakan dan pandangan pelajar terhadap pembacaan teks sastera dalam aspek: i) kebolehbacaan teks, ii) pengetahuan budaya yang dipaparkan dalam teks, iii) ciri-ciri fizikal teks, iv) minat dan motivasi pelajar dan, v) pilihan teks prosa yang diminati pelajar. Kaedah penyelidikan kualitatif mengkaji faktor teks dan pembaca yang mempengaruhi pelajar dalam memahami teks prosa serta mengenal pasti kekuatan dan kelemahan pelajar dalam memahami teks tersebut. Sampel kajian terdiri daripada pelajar yang dipilih secara rawak dari sekolah menengah di Perak. Seramai 450 responden dan 18 pelajar sekolah menengah rendah mengambil bahagian dalam kajian ini. Teknik pengumpulan data melibatkan empat formula kebolehbacaan, kaji selidik, temu bual dan menceritakan semula isi kandungan teks prosa. Data yang dikumpulkan dianalisis dengan menggunakan analisis statistik deskriptif, analisis tematik, prosedur mendalam dan menilai kekayaan penceritaan semula teks prosa. Empat formula kebolehbacaan dalam talian juga digunakan untuk menganalisis tahap kebolehbacaan teks prosa yang digunakan di sekolah. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan teks prosa berada di bawah tahap usia pelajar dan ciri fizikal teks sastera dapat diperbaiki untuk meningkatkan minat membaca pelajar. Hasil analisis proses menceritakan semula teks prosa oleh pelajar menunjukkan bahawa teks prosa dapat dibaca dan berada di tahap keupayaan pemahaman pelajar. Implikasi penyelidikan menunjukkan pemilihan teks prosa untuk kegunaan di sekolah pada masa hadapan seharusnya memenuhi keperluan dan sesuai dengan tahap umur pelajar serta sesuai dengan minat membaca mereka.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CF	Cultural Familiarity
fa	Frequency of Units of Agreement
fc	Frequency of Units of Chance
FOG	Gunning Fog Index Measure the Readability
IM	Interest and Motivation
JPN	Jabatan Pendidikan Negeri
KPM	Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia
N	Total Number of Units
PF	Physical Features
PLT	Preferred Literary Texts
PSW	Percentage of Polysyllabic Words
RF	Readability Factors
sl	Sentence Length
SMOG	Readability formula created by Harry McLaughlin
SPSS	Statistical package for the social sciences
SQ	Students' Questionnaire
U.S.	United States
UFMWDS	Unfamiliar Words

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UK	United Kingdom
WDS/SEN	Number of Words Per sentence
wl	Word Length

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

Reading is an interactive process where one reads and understands the text, in order to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential (Perfetti, 1985). A match between the text and the reader is essential for the reader to make sense of the written language. Text features in all aspects should be captivating and interesting so that reading process is engaged and focused. This enhances text comprehension to take place successfully. Successful reading depends on many factors such as reader characteristics, text features and instructional strategies (Dahlia Janan, 2011).

Among these factors, in the education field, text features should be researched on because one of reading problems among students are related to text. A study by Pandian (2000) discovered that majority of Malaysian students were considered as reluctant readers when it involved reading second language materials. Examples of English Language reading materials catered for students at secondary level are English Language textbooks and texts for Literature Component. Literature Component was incorporated in

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the English Language syllabus in the year 2000. It is a reading programme aimed to enhance students' language proficiency. After about eleven years of implementation of the Literature Component, a new cycle of literary texts was introduced to the secondary level students in the year 2011. It is important that the current literary texts are analysed for their readability because any weaknesses in the literary texts will have implications in the teaching and learning environment (Kalajahi, 2013) especially for the lower secondary students who are novice to literature learning and teaching.

When reading the literary texts students are faced with reading problems such as the ability to read and understand the texts (Siti Norliana Ghazali, 2008). Two major factors that influence students' ability to read and understand are text and reader factors (Samuels, 1983). Both the factors play a significant role in literacy skills. If students are exposed to inappropriate texts, it might lead to a collapse of the whole literacy process (Dahlia Janan, 2011). Also, DuBay (2004) has rightly said that when text exceeds the reading ability of the readers, they usually stop reading. Therefore, there must be a match between the reader and the text. The matching of the reader and the text is called readability (Gilliland, 1972).

Readability studies began in early 1920's and researchers focused on measuring readability level of texts using readability formulas. However, in the 1950's, new developments transformed the study of readability. Researchers explored how reader factors affect readability (DuBay, 2004). Recently a Malaysian scholar, Dahlia Janan

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(2011) explored the concept of readability and found that the concept is influenced by both reader and text factors and bounded by certain context.

According to Dahlia Janan (2011), the reader factors involve nine elements which are the reader's interest, prior knowledge, attitude, reading ability, motivation, the purpose for reading, engagement, age and gender. The text factors include eight elements, the physical features of the text, genre, content, author, linguistic difficulties, legibility, illustrations and organization of the text. Dahlia Janan (2011) contends that the concept of readability is a complex matching process involving the dynamic interaction between both reader and text factors and bound by certain contexts.

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As the focus of this study is on readability, an interactive process between the text and the reader factors, Dahlia Janan's (2011) concept of readability is given prominence because it conceptualizes the term 'readability' and forms the backbone of this research. Thus, the text and reader factors that constitutes Dahlia Janan's (2011) concept of readability is explored in the prose forms of the literature component read by the Malaysian lower secondary school students. The exploration of both the text and reader factors will reveal the suitability of the prose forms catered for students.

1.2 Significance of the Study

It is important to investigate the readability level of the prose forms prescribed for the lower secondary school students by analyzing the sentence structures and vocabulary difficulty in the prose forms to find out the level of difficulty of each prose. This task is

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carried out using four readability formulas which are SMOG (1969) Chall and Dale (1996), Flesh and Kincaid (1972) and Fog (1952). These formulas are used to predict the level of difficulty of the prose forms. The reading index calculated from these readability formulas reveal the grade level of the prose forms. The grade level exhibits the appropriate age one must have to read and understand the prose forms.

This study also explores the elements of text factors in the prose forms and reader factors which have been highlighted in the new readability model developed by Dahlia Janan (2011). The findings will reveal the text and reader factors which hinder or promote reading comprehension. Besides, this study aims to find out the preferred prose forms which are of students' interest. Finally, students' strengths and weaknesses in understanding the prose forms in the literature component were also investigated.

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By analyzing and exploring the elements on readability in the prose forms for lower secondary students, it is hoped that this study may help the parties concerned in selecting suitable prose forms for Malaysian lower secondary school students. Suitable texts selection could help students to be engaged in reading, simply because students are interested and motivated to read literary texts. This would promote active participation among the students in classroom activities. Hence, effective teaching and learning activities could be implemented and teachers' objective for the day will be achieved. In the long term, teachers could complete their syllabus early and have much time for revision.

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It is an important aspect in the teaching and learning environment because teachers can gauge how much students know of what is being taught and vice versa. As such, it helps students to be prepared and perform well in their formative or summative tests or public examinations. Table 1.1 shows the literary texts catered for the lower secondary school students by the Ministry of Education.

Table 1.1

Literature texts prescribed for lower secondary schools in Malaysia

Form	Poems	Short story	Drama	Novel
One	Sad I ams by Alain Troiter News Break by Max Fatchen	Fair's Fair by Narinder Dhami	-	20,000 Leagues Under The Sea by Jules Verne (Perak, Kelantan, Pulau Pinang, Perlis and Kedah) King Arthur by Janet Hardy-Gould (Johor, Pahang, Terengganu, Sabah and Sarawak) The Swiss Family Robinson by Johan D Wyss (Selangor, Negeri Sembilan and Melaka)
Two	My Hero by Willis What is Red by Mary O' Neill	Cheat by Allan Bailli	A Night Out- O. Henry	-
Three	A Fighter's Lines by Marzuki Ali Leisure by William Henry Davies	-	-	The Railway Children by John Escott (Perak, Perlis, Pulau Pinang, Kedah and Kelantan) Around the World in 80 days by Jules Verne (Johor, Pahang, Terengganu, Sabah and Sarawak) How I met Myself by David A. Hill (Selangor, Negeri Sembilan and Melaka).

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In Table 1.1, the lower secondary school students in all states in Malaysia read a total of 6 poems, 2 short stories, a drama and 2 novels, one of which is a graphic novel for Form One students. In this research, only the prose forms for the lower secondary students are measured to find out the readability level because the prose forms compared to other genres are easier to be measured for their complexity. In this study, the elements in the model of readability developed by Dahlia Janan (2011) will be explored to find out the suitability of the prose forms for Malaysian lower secondary school students.

As students are different individuals, they will have their own preference in the selection of literary texts. According to Nor Hasimah Isa and Che Ton Mahmud (2005), students' preference should take precedence in text selection. Therefore, the text factors as well as reader factors should be investigated in order to provide texts which suit students' reading ability. Consequently, students will be interested in reading the prose forms in the literary texts. When students have strong interest in what they read, they tend to read more. Students who read more are better readers (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998).

With regard to positive attitude in reading, reading problems among secondary school students in English Language could be minimized. This could lead the students to the achievement of several objectives laid in the English Language Literature Component by the Ministry of Education (2000). It is stated that by the end of secondary school education, students should be able to:

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