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THE EFFECTS OF WRITTEN RETELLING STRATEGY ON READING COMPREHENSION FOR PRIMARY ESL LEARNERS

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NUR DZALIFFA RIZA BINTI RIDZWAN

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the effects of written retelling strategy on reading comprehension skills. This study also analyses the effects of written retelling strategy on pupils' understanding of the story structure. This study was conducted in a primary school in Ipoh. This study was conducted for eight weeks. A quasi-experimental research design with pre-test and post-test was adopted to carry out the study. Pre-test and post-test questions consisting of structural comprehension questions and written retelling were used to measure the effects of written retelling strategy on the pupils' achievement in reading comprehension and their understanding of the story structure. The participants consist of forty eight Year Three pupils (N=48) who were equally distributed into experimental group and control group. An independent t-test was used to obtain the mean values and standard deviations. Mean scores of the post-test for both groups had resulted in significant gains made by the experimental group in answering structural questions for reading comprehension (M=7.96, SD=2.798). The mean difference was 2.28 compared to the control group (M=5.88, SD=3.51). The results also showed that post-test achievement was significantly higher in the overall understanding of the story structure of the experimental group (M=4.29.SD=2.16) than the control group (M=1.75, SD= 2.77) with a mean difference of 3.55. In conclusion, the written retelling strategy had notably increased the pupils' ability to relate the stories read with their previous knowledge and experiences. They were also able to retain information from the story and make better predictions, hence increased their abilities in answering the comprehension questions. An implication can be made that the written retelling strategy has improved pupils' reading comprehension and enable them to understand elements of the story structure better. The results also indicate that written retelling could be a prospective reading strategy for ESL learners.

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KESAN STRATEGI *WRITTEN RETELLING*- PENGULANGAN CERITA SECARA BERTULIS KE ATAS KEFAHAMAN MEMBACA KEPADA MURID-MURID SEKOLAH RENDAH YANG MEMPELAJARI BAHASA INGGERIS SEBAGAI BAHASA KEDUA

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengesan strategi penceritaan semula (*Retelling strategy*) dengan memberi tumpuan kepada strategi pengulangan secara bertulis (*written retelling strategy*) dalam meningkatkan kemahiran pemahaman membaca. Kajian ini juga menganalisis kesan strategi terhadap pemahaman murid mengenai struktur cerita. Kajian ini dilakukan di sebuah sekolah rendah di Ipoh. Reka bentuk kajian menggunakan kuasi-eksperimental dengan ujian pra dan ujian pasca . Soalan ujian pra dan ujian pasca yang terdiri daripada soalan pemahaman berbentuk struktur dan *retelling* secara bertulis digunakan sebagai instrumen untuk mengukur kesan strategi *retelling* bertulis terhadap pencapaian murid dalam pemahaman membaca dan pemahaman mereka ke atas elemen struktur cerita. Sampel kajian ini terdiri daripada dua kumpulan murid Tahun Tiga(N=48). Sampel diagihkan kepada dua kumpulan iaitu 24 orang responden kumpulan eksperimen dan 24 orang responden kumpulan kawalan. Ujian pra dilaksanakan sebelum pembelajaran dan pemudahcaraan kedua-dua kumpulan berlangsung. Kajian ini dilakukan selama lapan minggu yang kemudian diikuti dengan ujian pos. Ujian-t digunakan untuk memperoleh nilai min, sisihan piawai dan kepentingan kajian. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan pencapaian ujian pasca adalah lebih tinggi secara signifikan ke atas kumpulan eksperimen dalam menjawab soalan struktur untuk pemahaman membaca (M =7.96, SD = 2.798) dengan perbezaan min 2.28 berbanding kumpulan kawalan (M = 5.88, SD = 3.51). Dapatan kajian juga menunjukkan bahawa pencapaian ujian pasca lebih tinggi secara keseluruhan dalam pemahaman elemen struktur cerita kumpulan eksperimen (M=4.29, SD=2.16) daripada kumpulan kawalan (M=1.75, SD = 2.77) dengan perbezaan min 3.55. Secara kesimpulannya strategi *written retelling* telah meningkatkan kemampuan murid untuk mengaitkan cerita yang dibaca dengan pengetahuan dan pengalaman mereka sebelumnya. Kajian ini memberi implikasi bahawa strategi *written retelling* telah meningkatkan kefahaman membaca murid dan membolehkan mereka memahami elemen struktur cerita dengan lebih baik.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference
CVI	Content Validity Index
EFL	English as Foreign Language
ESL	English as Second Language
IES	(United States) Institute of Education Sciences
KSSR	New Curriculum Standard for Primary Schools
L1	English as First Language
L2	Learning English As Second Language
LINUS	Literacy and Numeracy Screening
NSE	Native Speaker English
OECD	Overview of the Economic Assessment of Malaysia
ORS	Oral Retelling Srategy
UPSR	Ujian Pentaksiran Sekolah Rendah
WRS	Written Retelling Strategy

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

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1.1 Introduction

Reading is an essential life skill. It not only increases our knowledge, but also builds maturity and character, sharpens our thinking, and widens our awareness of social, economic, political, and environmental issues. Reading is a fundamental skill for learners, not just for learning but for life (Traves, 1994) with reading being defined as "…the ability to draw meaning from the printed page and interpret this information appropriately" (Grabe & Stoller, 2002, p. 9).

According to Clark and Rumbold (2006), studies show that reading gives a big impact on learners' educational performance. Learners who read for enjoyment daily not only perform better in reading tests than those who do not but also develop a broader vocabulary, increased general knowledge and a better understanding of other

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cultures. Furthermore, reading is more likely to determine whether a learner does well at school compared to their social or economic background status (OECD Report, 2016).

Reading skills are foundational building blocks at the elementary level and the earlier pupils with low reading skills receive interventions, the greater the interventions will impact their reading careers (Hausheer, Hansen, & Doumas, 2011). According to The National Reading Panel Report of USA (2000), phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension strategies are five essential reading components in teaching children to read effectively.

The ultimate goal of reading is comprehension. According to Grabe (2009), reading comprehension is the ability to process text, understand its meaning, and to integrate it with what the reader already knows. There are a few fundamental skills required in efficient reading comprehension highlighted by Davis (1994) in his article on fundamental factors of reading comprehension. According to him, learners need to know the meaning of words and have the ability to understand meaning of a word from discourse context. They should also be able to follow organization of a passage. The ability to draw inferences from a passage about its contents and identify the main thought of a passage is also required for efficient reading. Learners should be able to answer questions related to the passage, and recognize the literary devices or propositional structures used. They should be able to determine its tone, understand the situational mood (agents, objects, temporal and spatial reference points, casual and intentional inflections, etc.). Finally, they should also have the skill to determine the

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writer's purpose, intent and point of view, and draw inferences about the writer (discourse-semantics).

To master the skill, one needs to be able to comprehend the materials read, which the majority of Malaysian students are facing this problem. Ahmad Mazli (2007), Isarji and Ainol Madziah (2008), Jamaliah and Faridah Noor (2001) reported that Malaysian students have problems in approaching their academic reading texts. They face difficulties coping with such texts because they do not really understand what they are reading and, as a result, they are unable to link appropriate ideas from their readings to the assigned tasks given. Therefore, this study seeks to determine if the written retelling strategy helps to improve reading comprehension achievement of primary three pupils.

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According to Brown and Cambourne (1987), the written retelling is a strategy that reflects a holistic concept in which learners are actively involved as they reconstruct a written retelling of the story read. Retelling has been found to significantly improve the story comprehension, sense of story structure, and oral language complexity of Native English Speakers (NSE) (Morrow, 1984, 1985, 1986; Stoicovy, 1997).

Retelling is a flexible strategy which can be applied according to teachers' and learners' needs. It involves having students orally reconstruct a story that they have read. It also requires students to activate their knowledge of how stories work and apply it to the new reading. According to the model adopted in Manyrawi (2013), there are six types of retelling:

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1. Oral-Oral: Students listen and retell orally.
2. Oral-Drawing: Students listen and retell by drawing.
3. Oral-Writing: Students listen and retell in writing.
4. Written-Oral: Students read and retell orally.
5. Written-Drawing: Students read and retell by drawing.
6. Written-Written: Students read and retell in writing.

From the above variations of retelling, it can be concluded that retelling can be categorized into two main types which are oral and written. Written retellings are similar to oral retellings except that instead of reading a story and describing it aloud, students are asked to write everything that they can recall after reading a text (Schisler, 2008). The theory behind the use of written retellings stems from the knowledge that reading and writing share many of the same developmental components and are mutually reinforcing (Fitzgerald & Shanahan, 2000).

This study will focus on written retelling because, through this strategy, pupils will be encouraged to be more critical and explore the relation between ideas, read between the lines to find clues, explore cause and effect, add previous knowledge from their own schemata, and then reconstruct the ideas and events in a new form stamped with their personality (Gibson, Gold, & Sgouros, 2003).

Moss, Leone, & Dipillo (1997) in their article on linking reading and writing through information trade books wrote that written retellings allow pupils to play an active role in reconstructing expository texts. The strategy enables pupils to reconstruct the materials they have read in their own form, which requires a clear

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understanding of what has been read. It serves as an assessment tool as teachers can see how much information was retained after reading or listening to a text. Additionally, the strategy gives teachers insights about pupils' knowledge of the genre and their ability to organize information. Moreover, they allow pupils to record their thoughts about the connections between their own lives and the books they are reading.

Based on the positive findings from the previous studies on the significant effects of written retelling, this will also give opportunities to Malaysian teachers to vary their teaching strategies and hence benefit the pupils.

1.2 Background of the Study

One major issue in most schools in Malaysia especially in the rural areas is the inability of the pupils to understand the English language (Semtin & Maniam, 2015). Pupils who are able to read and understand well in English will find learning the subject enjoyable. However, for those who are not, they find it meaningless and will lose interest in their lessons, especially in the early stages as they will face difficulties when using the language (Greathouse, 1991).

Based on the Overview of the Economic Assessment of Malaysia (OECD, 2019) school-age students have achieved below-average scores on PISA, with scores for Mathematics, Science and Reading among the lowest of the 65 countries surveyed in 2012 , 2015 and 2018 which affects one of Malaysia's competitive advantages within

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the region. In 2018, Malaysia scored 415 in Reading, a slight declined from 2015 result of 431 and 398 in 2012. However, the global average score in 2018 was 489 for Reading, indicating Malaysian scores are still far below the international standard. Thus, retelling strategy may be considered to aid students' understanding starting from the lower primary learners.

In October 2011, the Ministry of Education launched a review of the education system in order to develop a new National Education Blueprint – the *Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025* (referred to as the Education Blueprint). This document recognizes the increasing importance of English as a global language and the fact that the English proficiency of a population is linked to the country's economic development. Therefore, in 2013 the Ministry commissioned Cambridge English Language Assessment to undertake a comprehensive evaluation of the learning, teaching, and assessment of the English language in Malaysian schools from pre-school to pre-university (Cambridge Baseline Report, 2013).

To ensure Malaysian youngsters are able to develop the necessary proficiency skills in English, The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (henceforth "CEFR") is being adopted by Malaysia and other countries across the globe, to the extent that it has become the *de facto* of the international standard. The CEFR distinguishes five communicative skills, namely listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production, and writing. Language proficiency is measured in relation to the five skills on a scale beginning with A1, and progressing through A2, B1, B2, and C1 to C2. This scale enables us to set targets for each stage of our English language program. The targets set to be achieved by 2025 for our pupils to

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reach as they progress through the English language program are as shown in Figure 1. (English Language Education in Malaysia: An Agenda for Reform, 2015-2025).

CEFR Targets for each stage of Education	
Preschool	A1
Primary School	A2
Secondary School	B1/B2
Post-Secondary	B2
University	B2/C1
Teacher Education	C1

Figure 1.1 CEFR Targets

According to the Cambridge Baseline 2013 report on English Language in Malaysian Schools, their key findings were that on average the Year 6 pupils were at CEFR level A1 on overall skills (Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking) with 57% of the pupils were below A1, 29% at level A1, 14% at A2 and none at level B1 and B2 of reading skills.

In the UPSR examination, reading comprehension is the most important component tested. There are at least five questions on linear and non- linear text which carry 30 out of 50 marks in the English -Comprehension paper. The ability of the pupils to answer the comprehension questions will determine whether they will pass or fail the exam.

Under the Standard Based Curriculum - KSSR, the lower primary students are required to pass the Literacy and Numeracy Screening 2.0 (LINUS 2.0) programme

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by Year Three. Reading is a vital part of the skills tested and the students' ability to read and understand the text will help them pass the test.

Due to the highlighted issues, an effective reading strategy is required to help improve pupils' reading comprehension. Thus, this study aims at exploring one of the strategies commonly used to aid reading comprehension of lower proficiency level pupils. This study seeks to specifically investigate the effects of written retelling strategy on reading comprehension of Year 3 pupils in a school located in Ipoh. Written retelling will be examined as a comprehension strategy that could help the primary three pupils to improve in their learning and develop their comprehension.

This study focuses on the written retelling strategy as past studies have recognized this strategy as an active procedure and flexible strategy. It helps to improve comprehension, strengthen listening and speaking skills, build and deepen pupil's vocabulary. The strategy also helps pupils to understand literary elements and nonfiction structures, and facilitates teachers in reading assessment (Shaw, 2005).

1.3 Problem Statement

The ability to read and understand in English is deemed an important skill to be acquired for academic, business and other purposes. Poor reading comprehension among the pupils may affect their abilities to succeed in school. All subjects, including Science and Mathematics require reading comprehension skills. Hence, pupils with low reading skills may result in obtaining low grades and poor test scores.

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Compared to the common practice where pupils read and lift for specific information from the story read to answer the reading comprehension questions, the retelling is a more holistic and developmentally appropriate way to evaluate pupils' understanding of story text (Morrow, 1989). Gordon and Braun (1982) found that retelling (written or oral) enhances a story structure leading to both improved retelling accuracy and greater comprehension. This is supported by Greathouse (1991) who stated that providing pupils with plenty of opportunities to experience stories and allowing them to retell simple stories may encourage their sense of story and lead to better comprehension.

Numerous past studies on written retellings as conducted by Rana Wijaya and Dacholfany (2018), Louis and Kulwinder (2018), Sylvia and Widiati (2017), Manyrawi (2013) , Schisler, Konrad & Morgan (2010) and Han (2005), have reported the effectiveness of a written retelling strategy in aiding learners' comprehension; those studies, however, only focused on adult learners and native speakers of English. In the case of countries such as Malaysia, there is only one study reported on the use of retelling strategy for comprehending and interpreting short stories for secondary students by Louis and Kulwinder (2018) and none on written retelling as a strategy for improving the reading comprehension of primary level students. This study, therefore, seeks to examine the effects of written retelling strategy on reading comprehension of primary three pupils of a school in Malaysia.

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1.4 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of the written retelling strategy on the reading comprehension of Year Three pupils of a school located in Ipoh, Malaysia.

Written retelling is chosen as the reading strategy based on the research conducted by Sylvia and Widiati (2017) who found that in the EFL context, the written retelling technique minimized the students' anxiety to demonstrate their comprehension compared to the oral retelling technique. This is also supported by Manyrawi (2013), which mentioned that the EFL students taught using this technique felt more comfortable and showed increased self-confidence, which had positive effect on their reading comprehension. Findings from both studies showed written retelling strategy is more effective on EFL students compared to oral retelling technique. Therefore, this study will examine whether written retelling strategy does help primary three pupils improve their reading comprehension by focusing on two aspects; the pupils' ability in answering the structural reading comprehension questions and their understanding of story structure.

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1.5 Research Objectives

The research aims at achieving the following objectives:

1) To determine the effect of written retelling strategy on pupils' reading comprehension.
2) To determine the effect of written retelling strategy on pupils' understanding of story structure.

1.6 Research Questions

To investigate the effects of written retelling strategy in improving primary three pupils' reading comprehension ability, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. What is the effect of a written retelling strategy on the pupils' ability in answering the structural comprehension questions?

2. Is there any significant difference between the control and experimental groups of students' story structure scores?
   (a) for overall story structure scores in the post-test?
   (b) for story structure scores in the post-test in terms of setting, beginning, middle, resolution, and sequence?

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1.7 Significance of the Study

This study hopes to examine the effects of written retelling strategy on reading comprehension of primary three pupils. The retelling method is not a new strategy but it remains under- utilised as ESL teachers are unaware of the technique (Han, 2005).

Retelling requires pupils to activate their knowledge of how stories work and apply it to the new reading. As part of retelling, students engage in ordering and summarizing information and in making inferences. The teacher can use written retelling as a way to assess how well pupils comprehend a story, and then use this information to help them develop a deeper understanding of what they have read.

Fitzgerald and Shanahan (2000) as cited in Manyrawi (2013) mentioned that the integration of teaching reading and writing will be beneficial in facilitating learning. This is because both of the skills shared many of the same developmental components. The written retelling task can motivate pupils to take a closer look at the text features, and offer new insights into the original material.

Both the teacher and students benefit from the activity as they explore innovative ideas, connect reading and writing in the context of the story, and create versions of their own (Larcy, 2008). Through this study, the teachers will also have a better picture of the pupils' weaknesses and their problems in reading.

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1.8 Limitations of the Study

Several limitations emerged in conducting this research. First, this research is a quasi-experimental study and will be conducted in one urban school only; therefore, the results will not be representative of pupils in other urban schools.

Second, this study only focuses on lower proficiency of pupils in an urban school. The pupils with moderate and higher proficiency in English are not tested in this study. The lower proficiency pupils are the critical group requiring attention and intervention in reading. Therefore, the results will not reflect the pupils at other proficiency levels.

Thirdly, this study was conducted in only eight weeks. The pupils were given only seven short stories during the intervention period. Hence, the result may not give big impact to pupils' overall reading proficiencies.

Finally, this research will be conducted only in one classroom that comprises a small group of pupils. Therefore to generalize the results to a larger group, the study should involve more participants at different levels.

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1.9 Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are conceptualized as follows:

1.9.1 Reading Comprehension

In this study, reading comprehension is defined as the ability of the pupils to understand the content of the stories they read. To show understanding, pupils should be able to answer questions pertaining to the story read, make connections to their own basic knowledge and experience and ultimately able to share their reading experience with others. Manyrawi (2013) defines reading comprehension as the process of extracting and constructing meaning through interaction with written language, or a process of combining prior knowledge with new information in the text to generate new material through which readers can relate the author's experience to their own. As a result, the readers may be able to judge and express their own opinion on specific issues.

1.9.2 Retelling Strategies

According to Morrow (1989), retellings are post-reading and post-listening recalls whereby listeners or readers tell what they remember either orally or in writing. In this study, retelling strategies is used as a strategy to help pupils' to comprehend the story read. Retelling strategies is a system for evaluating the depth and breadth of student text understandings based on their attempts to retell or recall what they have

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read. It also helps pupils to develop a sense of story structure, and become more accurate in monitoring their understanding.

Retelling stories (free recall) has been previously researched as an assessment of comprehension (Brown & Cambourne, 1987; Gambrell, Pfeiffer, & Wilson, 1985; Irwin & Mitchell, 1983). The basic assumption among researchers is that retelling indicates something about the reader's assimilation and reconstruction of text information, and therefore reflects comprehension.

1.9.3 Written retelling strategy

Written Retelling is one of the strategies in retelling. In this study, written retelling is a process where pupils read the story and later recall the story by writing the important ideas in complete sentences. Pupils recall the story by writing the story based on the elements of story structure in terms of characters, setting, problems, and solution or the main ideas of the story. Kutz and Roskelly (1991) stated when reading is taught, written letters, words and sentences represent the content of the material to be developed. Writing without understanding the text that has been written is almost impossible.

1.9.4 Story Structure

Story structures have been described in several different grammars. In this study, they are referred to a set of stories' component parts such as a setting, characters, theme, plot episodes, and resolution. Although the terminology may differ, generally

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similar categories are designated. Story structures are also called story elements (Greathouse, 1991).

1.10 Summary

This chapter introduced the importance of reading skills using written retelling strategy as an intervention to enhance reading comprehension. The study seeks to determine the effect of written retelling strategy on improving reading comprehension and understanding of a story structure for primary three pupils. This chapter also discussed on the significance and limitations of this study. The next chapter addresses the significance of reading comprehension and writing retelling approach. It also includes a review of previous studies on retelling strategies as an effective strategy in improving reading comprehension.

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