Knowledge of Linguistic Cues among Malay EFL Students and Teachers' Practices in the Teaching of Reading Skills

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ABSTRACT

The objectives of this study were to investigate the reading ability of Malay students at primary and secondary schools, and teachers' practices in the teaching of reading skills. Miller's (1995) Reading Assessment Techniques, which comprised six tests, were used to test word and parsing identification miscues and reading comprehension. The subjects were 1989 students and 360 teachers from both rural and urban schools in Perak and Terengganu. Findings show that the majority of students were able to recognize linguistic cues at the word level. However, they had poor recognition of phrases and clauses, thus

facing difficulties in processing sentences, especially complex sentences and main ideas in discourse (Ibrahim, Mohamed Nor, Abu, & Atan, 2007). Hence, the majority of students (Year 5, Form 1, 2 and 4) were unable to read textbooks provided by the Malaysian Ministry of Education because of higher readability levels (Carrell, 2001; Nation & Deweerdt, 2001). These findings could be attributed to the fact that teachers did not address the knowledge of linguistic cues in their reading lessons because they felt that such knowledge should be taught implicitly or during grammar lessons.

KEYWORDS: Reading achievement, reading skills, linguistic cues, parsing, and text readability level

Introduction

Reading is a very important literacy skill which also acts as the window to learning as it is a source of information. Upon entering school, most children look forward to learning how to read; unfortunately, not all become proficient readers (Harris & Sipay, 1990). In fact, for Malaysian ESL students, informational books can be difficult to read because of the complexity of the language, text organizational style and the density of ideas presented (Lerkkanen, Rasku-Puttonen, Aunola, & Nurmi, 2004; Salager-Meyer, 1991). Many students lack the ability to process linguistic cues (Carrell, 1998), and are not equipped with effective reading skills to help them comprehend texts and prepare for their school tasks and examinations (Gough, Hoover & Peterson, 1996; Lyall, 2005; Bhatia, 2001). Undoubtedly, reading involves a lot of complex processes (Snow, Burns

& Griffith, 1998), and hence, helping ESL students to read and extend their literacy development is a very challenging job for teachers at all levels.

English has a special status in Malaysia and politically, it is considered a second language even though many students use it, if at all, as a foreign language (EFL) and mostly only during their English class. However, English is also a first or a second language to some Malaysian students who use it outside the classroom and at home to communicate with family members and friends. These can be considered to be ESL students, and they are normally found in areas where English is used extensively especially in urban areas (Ibrahim, Mohamed Nor, Abu, & Atan, 2007). For such ESL students, reading in English is often not a problem but for EFL students, reading in English is definitely an uphill task.

Reading in L1 is not the same as in L2 (Alderson, 1984; Carrell, 2001; Samuels, 1985). In L1 reading, students usually have the prerequisite language knowledge to process linguistic cues (which are considered to be the foundation for comprehending texts effectively) to help them construct the meaning of the text (Smith, 1971) thereby helping them to understand the texts. However, this is not the case in L2 reading; many students lack the knowledge and skills to recognize even basic linguistic cues, such as morphemes, words, phrases, clauses, sentences and discourses, to process the messages in the text (Smith, 1971; Eskey, 2005).

The knowledge of linguistic cues, that is, morphological and syntactical forms, is an important aspect of basic reading ability which contributes to effective reading comprehension (Adams, 1990). This includes knowledge of orthography especially the connection between orthography and spelling which is full of irregularities (Nunes & Bryant, 2009), and the ability to parse and segment parts of vocabulary into morphemes and words, and parts of sentences into subject, predicate, objects and adverbials which is essential for successful decoding of texts because it plays a central role in comprehension (Adams, 1990, Gough, et.al, 1996).

When knowledge of processing linguistic cues is acquired, readers will have the benefit of choosing the correct reading strategies to suit their purpose for reading. For example, questioning techniques help readers to locate specific information in the text by analysing the language cues. Readers have the benefit of selecting suitable strategies that fulfil their reading objectives. In understanding the sentences in the text, questioning helps readers to break down the sentence structures into subject and predicate, verb, object and indirect object in particular and to parse the sentences in terms of noun phrases, verb phrases and adverbial phrases, as well as to determine the roles assigned to each of the constituents. The ability to recognize linguistic cues enables good readers to apply appropriate strategies which help them to focus on the text by analysing sentences at the discourse level (Clarke, 1979; Cummins, 1986; Jimenez, Garcia & Pearson, 1996).

A bottom-up reading model is text-driven, and it emphasizes a process that results in meaning-based reading that proceeds from recognizing and decoding basic linguistic cues

in order to derive meaning. The ability to understand texts depends very much on phonological, word and sentence knowledge and skills (Adams, 1990; Gough, 1972). This means the process in a bottom-up reading model involves first, recognizing orthographic symbols or letters to phonology or sounds which are converted to words, phrases, clauses, sentences, paragraphs and discourse. Accordingly, the strings of linguistic cues are converted to meaning from low level information to a high level encoding system. Reading is not a guessing game which allows readers to rely on any kind of texts for comprehension, but readers must be able to process linguistic cues which lead to comprehension.

Many researchers believe successful readers apply a top-down model (Goodman, 1967; Smith, 1971), which is a more flexible strategy that integrates readers' knowledge and new information from texts. A top-down model is conceptually driven, higher level processing which integrates reader's knowledge of the world and reading skills which involve making predictions and testing these hypotheses while reading. Readers are seen as constructing meaning based on information from the texts such as topics, text organization, letters and so on, as well as previous knowledge (Goodman, 1967; Smith, 1971). This model suggests that readers bring their previous knowledge to the text and integrate it with information from the text. Because of this, good readers are able to read faster because they do not waste time attending to the basic linguistic cues but use higher level cognitive processes (Smith, 1971).

However, this view has also been also challenged. For example, Stanovich (1986) discredits this assumption and downplays the belief that good readers do not use graphic clues to construct meaning. On the contrary, it has been found that good readers use graphic information to derive meaning of words. This strategy is more effective than guessing for meaning based on contextual clues and language cues. In contrast to a top-down model, good readers do employ bottom-up strategies to construct meaning. Rumelhart (1977) believes that there are shortcomings in both the bottom-up and top-down models, and suggests an interactive model which combines the best of the two models in exploiting the low level linguistic cues and high level cognitive processing. This model suggests that good readers are able to select suitable reading strategies in attending to various texts, for example, difficult texts require more attention than simple texts, and also to suit their purposes. When readers are familiar with reading strategies, they are ready to read interactively by integrating their prior or other knowledge to read with speed. In this view, the mastery of linguistic cues will enhance the comprehension levels of L2 readers.

Readability

The selection of suitable reading materials based on students' readability level is a very important consideration in determining the success of a reading programme (Torgesen et al., 2001). This can be achieved by evaluating students' prior knowledge based on linguistic cues, reading skills as well as the subject matter (Torgesen et al., 2001). In

order to achieve a reasonable reading speed, students should be able to have automatic recognition of linguistic cues. Different levels of texts are also required to introduce important linguistic cue prototypes and can be categorized into three groups; Independence, Instructional and Frustration levels (Miller, 1995). At the Independent level are texts that consist of all recognizable linguistic cues, while the Instructional level consists of one or two unrecognizable linguistic cues and frustration level are texts that have more than three unrecognizable linguistic cues. Therefore, it is very important for any reading programme to choose suitable levels of reading materials to suit the different levels of students.

One way of matching students' reading ability with the text readability level requires teachers to know the language competency of their students and match it to the text linguistic complexity that is appropriate for them. The appropriate level depends on the purpose of reading; for example, in intensive reading, teachers may require texts equivalent to the students' current readability level or a level higher. This is done to ensure that students are reading material that is linguistically simpler. Children of differing abilities show a widening of individual differences in reading performance over time (Stanovich, 1986; Williamson, Appelbaum, & Enpanchin, 1991). Additionally, Stanovich (1986) proposes that negative reading experiences among children with lesser reading ability create a downward spiral of failure that affects the subsequent development of reading skills and habits. Children who encounter problems while

learning to read, read less, and without practice they fall behind in reading skill development. Stanovich (1986) refers to this phenomenon as the Matthew effect, which suggests that early developmental differences in literacy ability become more evident as development proceeds.

Many studies have shown the importance of orthography/phonology in enhancing word recognition among students. Training on articulation such as reading aloud spelling and dictation has shown increased awareness of word segmentation (Ehri & Sweet, 1991; Castiglioni-Spalten & Ehri, 2003). Phonological skills enable students to be aware of syllable, rime, phonemes and morphemes and thus promote the awareness of morphological structures which also enhances analogical reasoning in cognitive development (Goswami, 1998). In addition, lack of phonological awareness inhibits students from learning orthographical patterns that act as the basis of fluent word recognition. The role of primary school language teachers in teaching L2 phonology is clearly very important as this ensures early recognition of linguistic cues (Thomas & Senechal, 1998).

The ability to read effectively requires students not only to have being able to recognize linguistic cues such as syllables, rime, morphemes (e.g. free and bound), words (e.g. content and structure), phrases, clauses and sentences (Gough et.al., 1996) but also effective reading strategies in order to be able to have good comprehension of the texts.

Thus effective reading should encompass not only recognition of linguistic cues but also the reading strategies that are discussed in the three models.

The effectiveness of teachers' practices in the teaching of reading skills is questionable (Lyall, 2005). Suitable techniques should be used to teach young leaners. For example in 2006, the Malaysian Education Ministry found approximately 163,835 Year One pupils with reading and writing problems. After providing them with an intervention programme focused on reading and writing, the number was reduced by fifty per cent. The programme also managed to detect 6,000 pupils with special educational needs (Koh, 2007). Educationists have noted that pupils with reading and writing problems often ended up with disciplinary problems and finally dropped out without pursuing higher education. In order to help these at-risk students, it is very important to gauge students' reading ability at the early stages in order to determine students' reading performance and the effectiveness of teachers' practices in teaching reading skills. Above all, research in rural Malaysian schools shows that there are poor reading habits among students as well as poor teaching practices among teachers which have resulted in a high levels of illiteracy (Lyall, 2005).

This study attempts to identify the factors which cause some students to have low reading achievement while other students have high reading achievement in reading English texts. It is mainly concerned with EFL students' reading achievement associated with

classroom reading. Further, it is only directed towards the teacher factor in teaching reading; to observe and evaluate the ability of teachers in teaching reading skills. Hence, the purposes of this study were to investigate the ability of EFL Malay students in recognizing linguistic cues in reading and to find out whether teachers teach recognition of linguistic cues in reading.

Methodology

Sampling

The sample consisted of students aged 11, 13, 14 and 16 years in Year 5, Form 1, 2 and 4 respectively from two rural and two urban schools. The researchers were interested in finding out the mastery levels of ESL students (those who use English interactively outside the classrooms) and EFL students (those whose use of English is confined only to the classroom setting). The dichotomy was important since the texts used were the same and did not take into account students from non-English speaking backgrounds especially in rural areas (Rajaretnam & Nalliah, 1999). The schools were selected based on teachers' interviews and observations made to determine whether students used the language interactively or only in the classroom. Forty students were selected for each group.

Instruments

The instruments used for assessing the students learning ability were adapted from Miller (1995). The instruments consisted of three types of tests which included vocabulary tests, reading tests (identification miscues in word and phrase segmentation or parsing, and reading comprehension tests:

(i) In Vocabulary Skills, the tests were on word recognition (pronunciation) and meaning (homonyms and synonyms).

(ii) The Reading tests focused on parsing skills, such as on rhythm, intonation, and marking the parts of phrases and miscues

(iii) The Reading Comprehension tests were at sentence and discourse level.

(iv) A questionnaire, interview questions and observation check-lists were utilized to investigate both students' and teachers' practices in the classrooms (see Appendix 1-3).

Descriptions of tests and method of scoring

(a)   Vocabulary test (Word reading - Sight word knowledge)

Sight word knowledge consists of two different elements: sight word recognition and sight word identification. The latter is the more difficult of the two since a student must be able to identify a word while reading, not merely just be able to recognize it. In this study, Fry's Instant Sight Words List (Sakiey & Fry, 1984) was utilized. Sight word

identification was assessed by placing a random sampling of words from a sight word list on individual word card, printing on them in very short lists. For primary grade students, each selected sight word was placed on a separate word card, to prevent the students from becoming overwhelmed when seeing all of the words on such a list, and subsequently not making the effort to pronounce them. The cards were presented, one card-per-second, since the sight words should be identified immediately to be considered truly mastered. The first 100 words make up half of all written material and should be mastered by the end of the first reader level, while the 300 words together comprise 65% of all written materials. The assessment was stopped when a student could not respond to four or five consecutive words. The student's responses were recorded on an answer sheet.

The vocabulary items used to assess the vocabulary knowledge of students were graded using Fry's readability formula (Miller, 1995). The tests were scored on the ability of students to supply appropriate responses to the tests given. In the vocabulary test, the focus was on the ability of students to pronounce the words and also to provide the meaning of the words. The students were encouraged to give their answers in English, but they could also provide them in Malay. Translation and code switching were permissible since the main aim was to investigate whether they could recognize the linguistic cues given to them in the test. Vocabulary tests were conducted orally. Scores were given in percentages converted to the three reading level categories; independent, instructional and frustration.

Table 1 shows the categorical range of students' miscues and their appropriate reading levels. These categories determined the level of miscues by students in reading different vocabulary lists of readability levels used in the test.

Table 1. Reading levels and categorical range of students' miscues (Adapted from Miller, 1995)

Reading Level	*Reading Level*
Independent Reading	0-1
Low Independent reading	2
High Instructional reading	3-4
Instructional reading	5-6
Low instructional reading	7
Frustration reading	8+

Reading Level	*Reading Level*
No response	NR

(b)   Parsing and comprehension tests

The same reading texts were also used to measure the ability of students to parse the sentences. In the oral test, students' skills were measured based on miscues, rhythm and intonation of their reading. However, during the reading test, students were instructed to parse sentences by marking lines to separate different sentence parts, for example, subject, predicate, adverbials and others. The objective was to find out whether students could identify and understand the constituents of linguistic cues which are basic reading recognition skills (Waltzman & Cairns, 2000).

The reading test was conducted orally as well as in written form. In the oral test, students were encouraged to respond orally in English but they were allowed to code switch if they found it difficult to provide the answer in English. All marks were converted to the three levels of reading ability (see Table 1).

Table 2 shows the categorical range of students' miscues and their appropriate reading levels. These categories determined the level of miscues by students in reading different passages of various readability levels used in the test.

Table 2. The categorical range of students' miscues and their appropriate reading levels (Adapted from Miller, 1995)

Identification Miscues	Word	Parsing
1.Independent Reading Level	0-1	0-1
2. Low Independent reading level	2	2
3. High Instructional reading level	3-4	3-4
4. Instructional reading level	5-6	5-6
5. Low instructional reading level	7	7
6. Frustration reading level	8+	8+
7.No response	NR	NR

Table 3 shows the categorical range of students' score and their appropriate reading levels. These categories determined the level of score made during reading comprehension by students when reading passages at different readability levels used in the test.

Table 3. Table categorical range of students' score and their appropriate reading levels (Adapted from Miller, 1995)

Independent reading level	6
Instructional reading level	4-5
Frustration reading level	3 or fewer
No response	NR

(c)   Text reading tasks

The Individual Reading Inventory (IRI) (Miller, 1995) was used to assess the reading levels and specific reading strengths and weaknesses of the subjects in the study. The IRI was utilized to determine a subject's approximate reading level (independent, instructional and frustration).

The reading task was administered by first giving the subjects a text and asking them to read it. Second, the researcher evaluated the tasks by recording (i) correct word pronunciation (ii) mispronunciations (iii) repeating (iv) ability to do self-correction (v) students' asking for help and (vi) researcher's help (Miller, 1995). Third, the scores on the reading tasks were analyzed to determine the real performances of the students in the reading tests. The tests were used to gauge the level of difficulty and also to determine an appropriate text level for a student's reading instruction.

In the Text Reading task, the student was presented with texts of increasing difficulty until a level was found at which he or she could not read with at least 90% accuracy. The aim was to identify a student's instructional reading level. The researchers began the assessment by estimating the instructional level for each student. The level was determined if the students could read at 90%-96% accuracy, and then they were presented with increasingly difficult texts. The researchers would skip levels if the students read with relative ease and accuracy so that they were not required to read every text in the Text Reading task

Findings

Vocabulary knowledge

The study investigated EFL Malay students' English reading comprehension proficiency and their ability to understand meaning at word level using different vocabularys list provided by Miller (1995) as shown in Figure 1. The vertical axis on the right denotes the students' vocabulary knowledge and the meaning reading levels are in percentages using the stacked-bar graph. The horizontal axis shows the students' percentage level for Form 1, 2, 4 and Year 5 based on the four word lists respectively.

The ability of students to read the Vocabulary List 1 was developmental (i.e. the higher the students' grade level, the better vocabulary knowledge and achievement), and the third stacked-bar graph indicates Form 4 students' vocabulary knowledge and reading levels: 80% at the independent level, 15% at the instructional level and 5% at the frustration level. The fourth stacked-bar graph indicates the Year Five students' vocabulary knowledge and reading levels which was 38% independent, 52% instructional and10% at the frustration level.

Figure 1. Malay EFL students' vocabulary knowledge and reading levels: Independent, Instructional and Frustration.

Reading Levels

Frustration

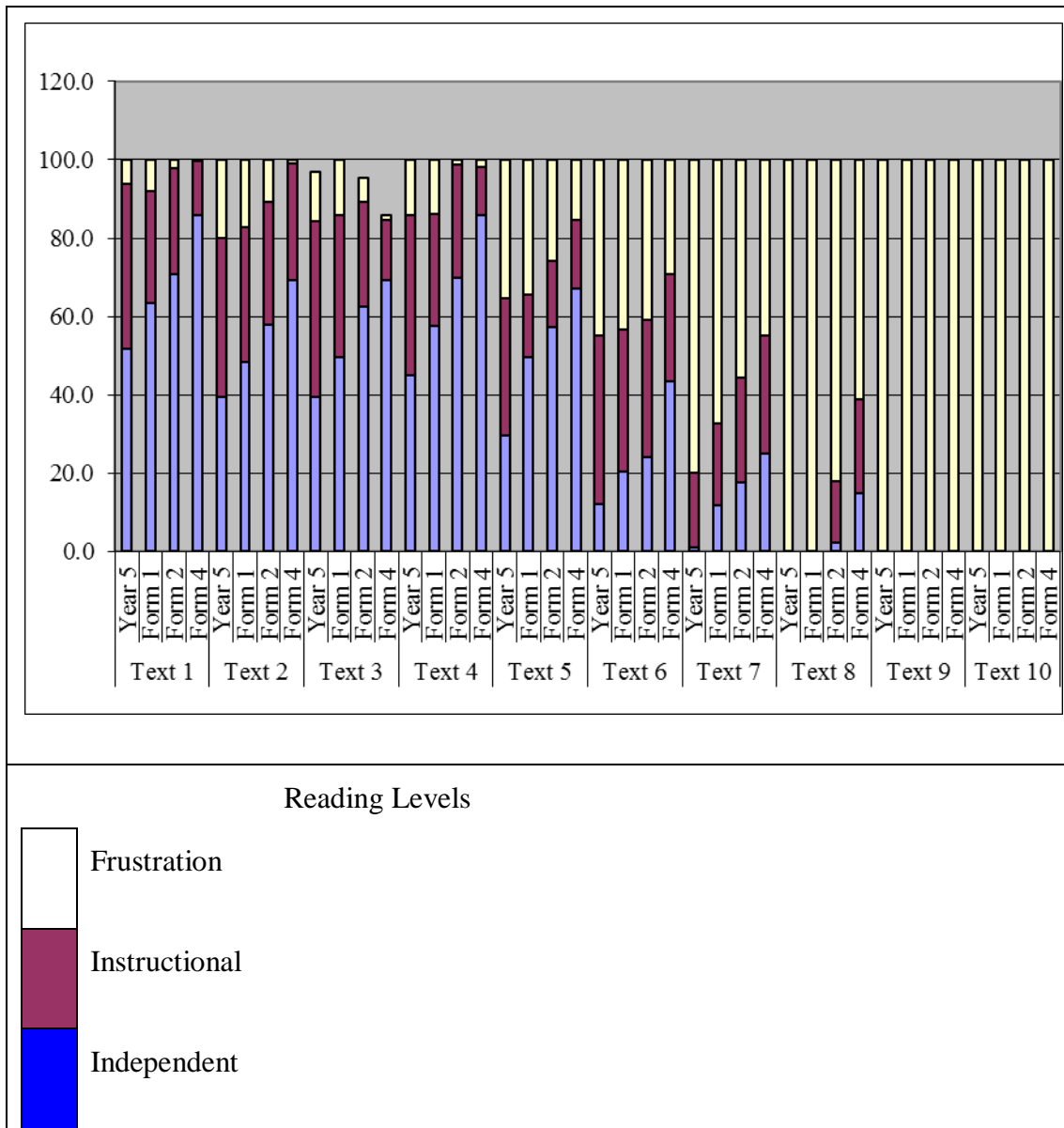*Instruction*

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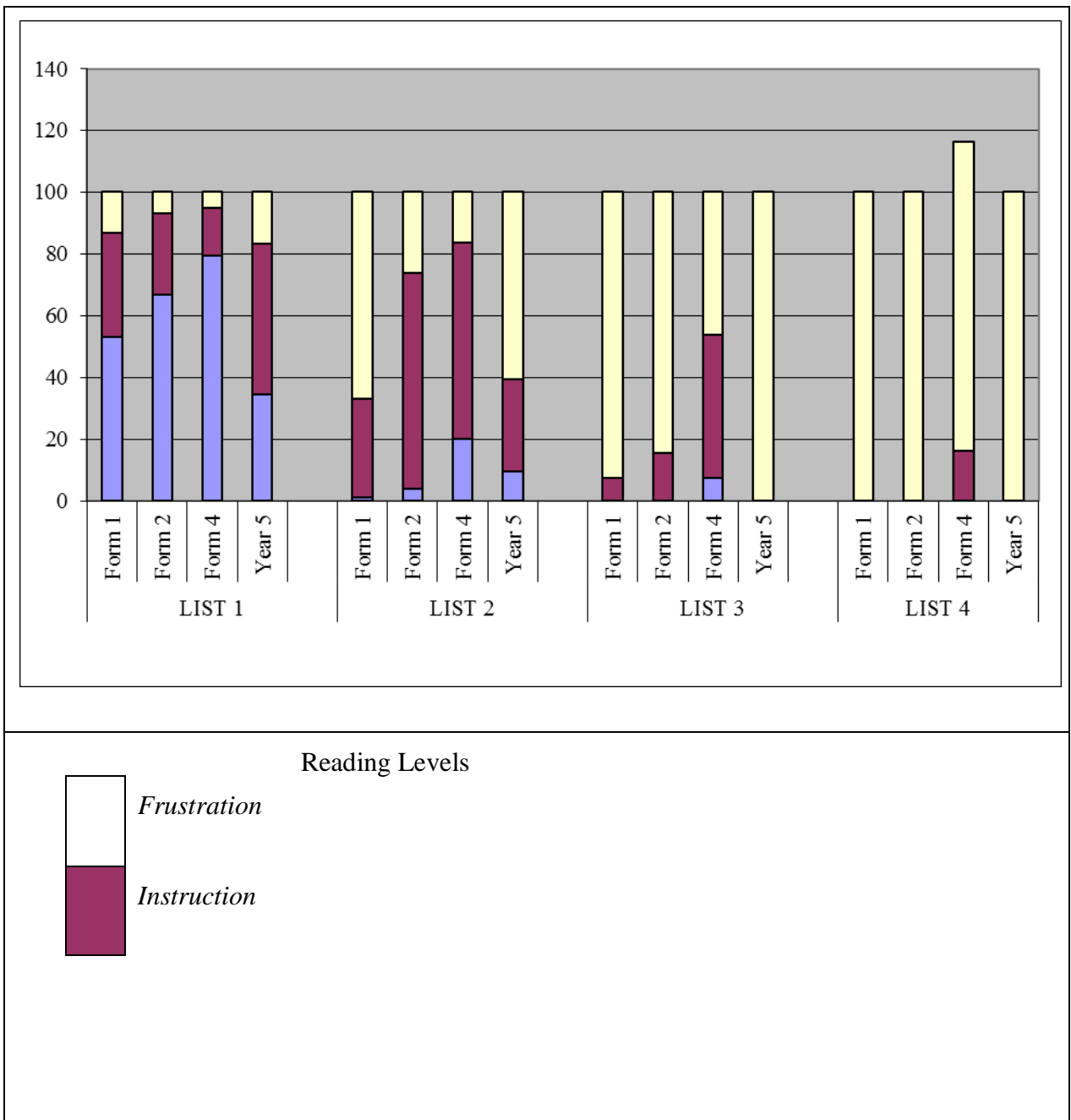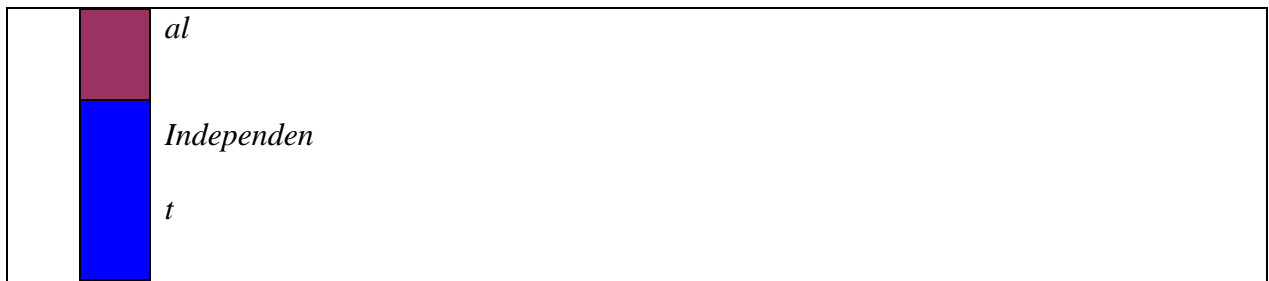
Vocabulary List 2 was already difficult for Form 4 students. Only 20% managed to read at the independent level, while 64% required some instruction and 16% were not able to comprehend the text and required translation. Most Year Five students did not have vocabulary knowledge and for reading performance, 12% read independently, 28% required some instruction and 60% were at the frustration level.. List 2 presented many problems to the students in Form 1 and 2 where only 48% and 58% were at the independent level respectively.

Vocabulary List 3 and 4 show the overall low achievement by the students where Form 4 students' vocabulary knowledge and reading leve was only at 8% independent level. This finding shows that students' vocabulary knowledge is very limited and is likely to be one of the most important reasons why the EFL Malay students did not read fluently.

Parsing skill

The ability to process linguistic cues by parsing is shown in Figure 2, where students were asked to parse sentences in terms of subject and predicate and to read with correct intonation and rhythm. Figure 2 shows the Malay ESL student' reading levels as noted by the three levels: independent, instructional and frustration. The vertical axis on the right denotes the students' reading levels in percentages using the stacked-bar graph. The horizontal axis shows the ten graded text types as well as the students' reading levels: Year 5, Form 1, 2 and 4 respectively.

Figure 2. Parse-reading ability of English texts by Malay EFL students

Reading Levels

□ Frustration

■ Instructional

■ Independent

The third stacked-bar graph indicates the Form 2 students' reading levels with 70% reading independently, 28% requiring instruction and 2% being unable to read or at the frustration level. The fourth stacked-bar graph indicates the Form 4 students' reading levels with 80% at the independent level, 16% requiring instruction, and 4% not

understanding the text or being at the frustration level. However, the reading tests revealed that there is an overall developmental pattern in the students' reading levels for Text 1.

Text 1 has Fry's readability index at level 1. The first stacked-bar graph indicates the Year 5 students' parse-reading ability levels, where about 46% were able to read the text independently, and 49% required instruction to comprehend it, while 5% were frustrated and not able to comprehend it or required translation. The second stacked-bar graph indicates the Form 1 students' reading levels with 62% at the independent level or able to read it on their own, 30% at the instructional level or requiring guidance from teachers and 8% at the frustration level or unable to understand it even with teachers' guidance. The third stacked-bar graph indicates the Form 2 students' reading levels with 70% at the independent level, 28% at the instructional level and 2% at the frustration level. The fourth stacked-bar graph indicates the Form 4 students' reading levels with 80% at the independent level, 16% requiring instruction and 4% at the frustration level. However, the reading tests revealed that there is an overall developmental pattern in the students' reading levels for Text 1.

Texts 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 used only simple vocabulary and simple sentences (average words of 5.56) and yet the majority of the students in Year 5, Form 1 and 2 could not read them independently. The majority of students still had problems in parsing the sentences and

comprehending these texts. They were unable to understand the meaning of the texts especially when a why-question was used. The majority of them could not provide suitable answers to the why-questions. For example, in Assessment Passage 1, 80% of the students were not able to answer the question "Why do you think a dog is a good pet?"

Texts 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 comprised mixed vocabulary and a variety of sentence structures with an average of 14 words per sentence. The complexity of this text was still considered average since the complex sentences only used relative clauses modifying noun phrases. These texts should be suitable for Form Four students, but they posed problems to the majority of Form 4 students who were not able to read with appropriate comprehension. These students had problems in processing relative clauses, adverbial phrases and answering why-questions.

Poor recognition of linguistic cues seemed to be the main obstacle for the students to comprehend the texts. Development of basic vocabulary is essential (Grabe, 2001) for them to read effectively. Torgesen et al (2001) proposes that the proportion of words a reader can access directly from memory and recognize by sight is likely to account for individual differences in reading rates. Ehri (1997, 1998) proposes word identification strategies as factors influencing individual differences in reading fluency, and this is supported by Coady (1997) who suggests students require about 2,000 to 3,000 sight words. Many researchers (e.g. Gough & Tumner, 1986) found that word recognition and

language comprehension skills are the two main factors in determining the success of reading comprehension. Many researchers (e.g. Gough & Tumner, 1986) found that word recognition and language comprehension skills were crucial. Thus, poor recognition of linguistic cues among EFL students posed real problem for them.

The ability of students in comprehension and parsing was low when the readability levels of texts increased. In reading comprehension, the students had difficulty relating prior knowledge to the text and consequently faced difficulty in answering why-questions. The ability to recognize basic phrase structure posed problems for the students to recognize linguistic cues such as subject, predicate, objects, adverbials and so on. The majority of them were unable to recognize phrases and clauses and in addition they faced difficulty in interpreting sentences, especially complex sentences. Many of the students did not have the required reading skills, specifically, recognition of linguistic cues at their grade levels. For example, simple phrases and clauses should be comprehensible by Form 4 students, but the majority of them and also others in Year 5, Form 1 and 2 were not able to recognize them. Hence, they were reading far below their grades with only word level recognition of linguistic cues.

The general ability of the students was reading at Level 2 (Latham, 2002). They could pronounce most of the consonants, diphthongs and monophthongs and were able to explain meaning at the word level accurately. They could also read the texts, such as

passages 1 to 5 with simple sentence structures with ease but faced problems when reading complex structures such as passage 6 and above.

The knowledge of linguistic cues, such as knowledge of word and sentence formation has been seen as crucial in determining the ability to comprehend a text. Adams (1990), Gaux and Gombert (1999) and Waltzman and Cairns (2000) found that there is a strong relationship between sentence knowledge and comprehension among monolingual children. Researchers such as Bentin, Deutch and Liberman (1990) argue that the inability to process sentences contributes to poor reading achievement. The knowledge of language, especially knowledge of grammatical structures, is very important in the understanding of academic texts, because both enable the readers to extract accurate interpretation of the text (Adams, 1990). The knowledge of linguistic cues and the ability to process them are very important in determining students' reading comprehension. In providing reading lessons teachers need to select suitable texts based on suitable readability levels and also help students to recognize the language cues using suitable language cue processing techniques. These will not only help students with their reading comprehension but also increase their reading speed.

Teaching practice

Based on the interviews conducted, the majority of the teachers 70% (N= 360), mentioned that they did not utilize any reading technique when teaching students to read. Only, 65% reported that they provided some reading tips such as how to use the

dictionary, surveying techniques such as skimming for main ideas, and scanning for supporting details. Overall, only a minority of the teachers, 43% used some explicit reading techniques.

In observing and interviewing teachers' focus in teaching, the results presented in Table 4a show that teachers did not teach students appropriate reading skills to handle texts. Most conduct reading a loud and asking comprehension questions at the end of the text. Teachers usually did not address suitable skills but taught students high reading skills such as skimming and scanning. Based on their ability, which was at Level 2 (Latham, 2002), there was no way these students could apply the technique taught to them because their recognition skill was still very poor and they were not given any technique or strategy to process the linguistic cues.

Table 4a. Teaching technique

	Frequency	Percent
No reading technique	252	70.0
Reading tips	65	18.1
Explicit reading technique	43	11.9

Total	360	100.0

Table 4b. Focus of teaching

	Frequency	Percent
Topic	192	53.3
Skills	61	16.7
Linguistic cues	61	16.7
Linguistic cues & skills	46	13.3
Total	360	100.0

The majority of the teachers were unable to differentiate between language knowledge, language skills and topics in reading lessons. A total of 65% did not specify language knowledge and 75% did not specify language skills in teaching reading. Reading in L2 was focused on the topic rather than the acquiring of skills or language. Linguistic cues were not addressed appropriately, except vocabulary which was thoroughly discussed at meaning level only, neglecting word formation strategies and other related knowledge. Many felt that teaching of linguistic cues should not be done in reading lessons but only during grammar lessons. It appears that the consequence of neglecting reading skills and

knowledge of linguistic cues affects the ability of students to use appropriate reading strategies and resulted in poor recognition of linguistic cues among them.

Similarly, based on the questionnaires, the majority of the teachers (67.2%, N= 1205) mentioned that they taught according to the topics as listed in the text books when teaching students to read. Only 7.7% reported that they provided some word-attack reading skills such as how to identify root words, prefixes and suffixes. Overall, only a minority of the teachers, (12.4%) taught their students to use linguistic cues. Some of the linguistic cues emphasized were simple, compound and complex sentences, and discourse organization. Additionally, only a mere 12.7% focused on linguistic cues and skills when teaching reading.

To give an example, the Head of the English Department of a secondary school asserted that, "We teach for the examination only, not the skills". To cite another example, a college trained teacher with five years' experience, explained that: "We do not address linguistic cues; we do not focus on phonemes or morphemes; we do not teach 'parsing' during reading aloud. We teach 'parsing' only when the need arises; we seldom do reading aloud; we teach the English language like teaching the first language. In fact, we do not use any special techniques to teach reading skills. Just follow (sic) what is in the text books."

Above all, based on our observations, we noted that a majority of the English teachers did not use any specific technique but focused on the topic as if they are teaching in the students' first language. Accordingly, the teachers teach, not the language skills or language knowledge, but the topic, for instance, health, science or geography without emphasizing the learning of language knowledge and skills (see Table 4b).

Conclusion

In essence, text comprehension is a hierarchically layered process. At the bottom level, readers must encounter the spelling of the word or orthographic processing. Then, the reader must recognize individual words and at the next level of text interpretation, this must give way to the meanings (Koda, 2005) of the individual words, to phrases, clauses, sentences and discourse to enable correct interpretation of the text. They must, in other words, periodically interrupt their word-by-word progress through the text to interpret the collective meaning of the chain of words they have been reading (Koda, 2005). According to Adams (1990) skilful performance at this level depends on two factors: (1) the ability to recognize the opportunities at which recoding is most appropriate and (2) the ease and speed of recognizing linguistic cues.

In general, skilful readers make interpretive parses regularly at major syntactic boundaries (Klieman, 1975) as this effectively ensures the coherence of the constituents

of words to be recoded and it is extremely important for readers to master the skill in order to have automatic recognition of the linguistic cues. More specifically, the skilful reader's selection of automatic recoding reflects a balance between the importance of the syntactic boundary and the length and difficulty of the phrase or clause that it bounds. The ability to parse major boundaries of syntactical structures allows the reader to put together a more significant meaning of the sentence at once. Otherwise, their capacity to comprehend strings of words might be limited and consequently some of the information relayed would be lost, and comprehension would fall short. Likewise, if readers miscomprehend segments of a language unit, such as clauses or phrases, then the true meaning of a sentence will be distorted. In addition, if readers are unable to detect different functions of sentences in a paragraph, for example, topic or supporting detail, comprehension will obviously fail.

In view of the requirements of comprehension, the immediate point is that the automatic facilitation to word recognition is critical. However, proficient reading comprehension depends not just on the ability to recognize words, but the ability to recognize them relatively quickly and effortlessly. Reading achievement in the early years of school depends critically on the student's facility with the printed code. Thus, teachers are required to teach linguistic cues and language cue processing techniques as well as suitable reading strategies to tackle text comprehension. In addition, teachers need to choose suitable graded materials, for example, suitable readability levels to address the

different reading needs among students. If reading skills are addressed properly from Year 1, then reading problems among students can be eliminated.

Reading involves a gamut of complex knowledge and skills. It is very important for teachers to address reading with proper planning in order to help readers from different levels, that is, from a low level stage of recognizing linguistic cues to a higher level which requires higher cognitive activation. Being aware of these complexities, teachers must realize that reading in L2 is more challenging, especially for EFL students who have a language knowledge deficit. Students need effective reading strategies in order for them to take advantage of reading materials as we are witnessing an explosion in both information and technology. In addition, more specialized reading strategies are needed to cope with the information that we need to process through reading given the expanse of information available in print and electronic form. It is no longer possible to guess, much less dictate, what knowledge and skills will be critical to students in their futures. Since classroom time is limited, systematic instruction on linguistic cue recognition is worthwhile. This will provide the best support possible toward the purpose for learning to read and comprehension and for students to become efficient and effective reader.

The findings of this study have several educational implications. Firstly, teachers must teach not only higher reading skills, but ensure students master the skills of recognizing linguistic cues and techniques of recognizing them. In recognizing linguistic cues,

students must be taught the basics of language knowledge such as correct pronunciation of English words and be aware of phonemes, and word and sentence formation. Secondly, text book writers and instructors need to know that there are differences between ESL and EFL students in reading abilities. Thirdly, readers need to be coached to monitor their comprehension strategies and activate their comprehension-enhancing techniques. Our results show that such skills are particularly important if students' comprehension in reading texts is to be successful.

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Appendix 1

SOAL SELIDEK PENGAJARAN DAN PEMBELAJARAN MEMBACA DISEKOLAH-SEKOLAH DI PERAK DAN TRENGGANU 2006

Jenis Sekolah:	
Tingkatan:	
Negeri:	

Scale: Quality Rating

SD	D	U	A	SA
Strongly Disagree	**Disagree**	**Undecided**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**

Instructions:

For each item of the questionnaire, indicate whether you Strongly Agree (SA), Disagree, Undecided (U), Agree (A) and Strongly Agree by circling the appropriate key.

A. Planning reading lessons

1. according to topics in the textbook   SD   D   U   A   SA

2. according to the reading skills listed in the syllabus   SD   D   U   A   SA

3. according to grammar items listed in the syllabus   SD   D   U   A   SA

B. **Reading materials used in my reading lessons**

4.Authentic materials such as magazines, newspaper etc.   SD   D   U   A   SA

5. Graded reading passages   SD   D   U   A   SA

6. Based on my students' readability level   SD   D   U   A   SA

7. My students choose the reading materials   SD   D   U   A   SA

8. Passages in the textbook   SD   D   U   A   SA

C. Students' performance in Reading

9. Able to do the reading skills using authentic materials   SD   D   U   A   SA

10. Normally my students will know all the vocabulary in the passages   SD   D   U   A   SA

11.Normally my students do not know most of the words in the passages   SD   D   U   A   SA

12. I have to translate most of the words in the passages into the first language.   SD   D   U   A   SA

13.My students are able to answer comprehension questions of the passages in the textbook   SD   D   U   A   SA

D. Identify Linguistic Cues

14.Able to read with correct rhythm and intonation   SD   D   U   A   SA

15.Differentiate subject – predicate in a sentence	SD	D	U	A	SA
16.My students are able to locate the main idea	SD	D	U	A	SA
17.Read in meaningful chunks	SD	D	U	A	SA

E: **Teaching technique for reading lessons**

18. I have a repertoire of teaching techniques	SD	D	U	A	SA
19. I use SQ3R	SD	D	U	A	SA
20. I use questioning to simplify the texts	SD	D	U	A	SA
21. I use a specific reading technique for my own reading.	SD	D	U	A	SA
22. Students find my technique useful as a study skill	SD	D	U	A	SA
23. Students use this technique to read other subjects	SD	D	U	A	SA

F. Teaching Reading Skills

24. Teaching reading in the first language is the same as teaching reading in the second language.	SD	D	U	A	SA
25. I focus more on the reading topics	SD	D	U	A	SA
26. I focus more on the reading skills	SD	D	U	A	SA
27. I focus more on the grammatical items	SD	D	U	A	SA

28. I teach thinking skills as well as other study skills

G. Teaching Comprehension

29. My students do not have any difficulties in answering

comprehension questions when applying the reading skills learnt

30. I have to translate the text to help them answer the comprehension questions

31. I provide the answer to the comprehension questions

32. My students can answer comprehension questions when working in groups

33. My students normally can answer comprehension question when working alone.

Demography

Teaching experience	
Education Qualification	
Subject Specialization	

THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY

Appendix 2

Interview Questions

1. What type of readers do you have in your English class? Are they ESL or EFL learners? Do you find any differences in their reading performance?

2. What do you take into consideration when planning your reading lessons?

3. How do you choose your reading materials?

4. Do you think that reading teachers should use some authentic reading materials? Please justify

5. Can you briefly describe your students' reading performance? Are they at the same reading level of achievement?

6. Do you think your students comprehend what they are reading? How do you check that?

7. Can you elaborate on some of the reading strategies or techniques that you had utilize on your students? Were they effective? Elaborate with examples.

8. Do you think teaching reading is the same for both ESL and EFL learners? Can you elaborate?

9. How do you teach reading comprehension? Do you encounter difficulties to teach reading comprehension to your students? Can you describe some of the techniques you had used?

10. Do you teach reading as group work or individual work? Which is more effective?

Appendix 3

Observation checklist

	Teacher activity	Students activities
Lesson Plans		
Reading Materials utilized		
Reading activities-strategies/techniques		
Reading skills		
Reading problems		
Comments		
Suggestions		
Implications		