

**Using Analogy As A Scaffolding Tool For Facilitating The
Comprehension Of Literary Texts**

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Abstract

The study and teaching of literature has been a challenge for many teachers and students. This is due to the fact that many teachers are not equipped to teach the subject and many students have not seen the significance of reading literary texts as an important aspect for language development. Often, reading literary texts means memorizing useless information and not really understanding and appreciating literary works. It is imperative to find ways to overcome these challenges especially when dealing with the comprehension of literary texts. Based on the sociocultural perspective, this paper presents findings from a larger study on the use of analogy. It explores the ways analogy is used as a scaffolding tool by teacher trainees in their attempts to comprehend literary texts. Based on a qualitative study, this paper identifies and explores how teacher trainees scaffold their partners in pair work, with the use of analogy. The findings of this study suggest that analogy generates positive impact in the comprehension of literary texts. It enables teacher trainees to make rational statements through justification that leads to possible new knowledge.

Introduction

There has been resurgence in interest in studying literature at all levels of the Malaysian education system. With the implementation of various reading programmes in the English language syllabus, literature has slowly assumed its role in secondary and primary schools in Malaysia (Ganakumaran Subramaniam, 2007; Vethamani, 2007). Now that literature is taught and tested in public examinations, reading literary texts is taken more seriously in the language classroom. This has also resulted in a more concerted effort to train English language teachers to be literature teachers in teacher training institutes and the faculties of education in universities.

Since the implementation of literature in the English component in Malaysian schools, various researchers have pointed out the important role literary study plays in the learners' learning development. This has led to research conducted to identify the importance of literary texts in the language classroom (see Ganakumaran Subramaniam et al., 2003; Too, 2006; Vethamani, 2006) and various strategies that can be adopted to facilitate learning (see Kim, 2003; Perumal, 2003). However, there is a lack in the research conducted in the ways learners attempt to comprehend literary texts.

Quite often, learners attempt to approach literary works by digging out the meaning intended from the text (Probst, 2004). The act of paraphrasing, defining or applying the proper rubrics to demonstrate their understanding hampers learners' potential to learn (Rosenblatt, 1985). This leads learners to passively receive information and facts, hence, restricting the construction of the individual's knowledge and understanding. The study of literature requires learners to have emotional, intellectual and personal responses to the text for comprehension to take place (Vethamani, 2004). These responses are crucial since they serve as platforms for learners to appreciate literary works. Therefore, there is a need to explore the ways learners attempt to comprehend literary texts that looks into the examination of knowledge and strategies that contribute to learners' understanding. With this in mind, this paper aims to provide a closer look into how teacher trainees from a teacher training institute respond verbally in dyads in their attempt to make sense of two local short stories. In particular, it seeks to view the ways teacher trainees use analogy as a form of scaffolding tool that enables comprehension to take place.

The Use Of Analogy In Education

Originally, analogy was used by Plato and Aristotle as a mathematical term for 'equality of ratios' (Esper, 1973, p. 1). In recent years, there has been an increasing interest on how analogy assists learners in the fields of science and mathematics in facilitating problem-solving tasks. Various researchers define analogy as a relation of similarity between concepts (Esper, 1973; Glynn, 2007; Indurkha, 1992). Analogy is used with the assumption that a concept can be expressed in various ways since different expressions represent the same thing from different aspects. Furthermore, learners'

choice of expression is dependent upon their point of view. Therefore, association forms the basis of analogy.

Other researchers such as Goswami (1992), view analogy as a form of thinking that can facilitate problem-solving by means of discovery. The author's view was based on studies conducted on analogical reasoning among children. On the other hand, Indurkha (1992) in his study distinguished two types of analogy: simple and predictive. Simple analogy refers to similarities between two objects or situations. Predictive analogy on the other hand, refers to predicting further similarities between two objects or events that require the ability to make justifications through reasoning, inferencing and argument. The author went one step further by analyzing the characteristics of analogy. According to him, three basic components are present in the use of analogy: the source, target and imparted features (ibid, p. 315). The source refers to the existing concept of the learners for comparison. This concept may derive from learners' prior knowledge, experience or expression. The target is the concept which learners have difficulty in understanding. On the other hand, imparted features refer to the meaning transmitted from comparison between the source and the target.

Analogy is seen as effective in promoting students' meaningful learning in the field of science and mathematics. Studies conducted by various researchers in these disciplines have shown students' capability of overcoming complex concepts by the use of analogy. It also leads to expansion of concepts. There are also studies carried out that sought the importance of teaching analogy to learners for language learning. Jeffries (2003) also pointed out the need for students to make their own analogies based on their experiences. In the study of literature, the use of analogy was first described by Thomson (1987). He characterized analogy as the readers' association of the characters found in the text with their personal experience. This enables readers' responses to go beyond the text as a means of exposing the readers' to 'a serious view of the world' (Carter, 2007, p. 3). Corcoran (1987) further expanded the concept of analogy by describing it as the 'mental images' where students are able to visualize what is in their minds. A study conducted by Many and Wiseman (1992) on third grade students also identified analogy as a form of response used in their attempt to comprehend literary texts.

Analogy As A Form Of Scaffolding

Although studies conducted by researchers view analogy as a form of teaching tool, this paper views analogy as a form of scaffolding that enables learners to assist each other towards gaining new knowledge and understanding. The term 'scaffolding' refers to the assistance rendered by a knowledgeable peer towards a novice. Studies conducted in the field of scaffolding have viewed various forms of scaffolding that enable learners' comprehension of texts (see Hogan & Pressley, 1997). Some of the forms of scaffolding are modelling (Wollman-Bonila & Werchadlo, 1999; Roehler & Cantlon, 1997; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988), feedback (Wollman-Bonila & Werchadlo, 1999; Tharp & Gallimore,

1988), questioning (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988) and cognitive structuring (Duffy et al., 1986; Silliman et al., 2000; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). For the success of scaffolding, Vygotsky (1978) stresses the need for learners to facilitate learning in the zone of proximal development (ZPD). ZPD refers to a continuum between the actual developmental level and the potential developmental level of the learner. Scaffolding is said to be able to facilitate the learning process of a learner through the assistance provided by a knowledgeable learner. Analogy serves as an early 'mental model' that connects prior knowledge with new knowledge when learning a new concept (Glynn, 2007).

Literary Text Comprehension

Few studies in relation to literary text comprehension focus on how students create the meaning of literary texts. For example, a study by Rogers (1991, p. 7) revealed that students are able to adequately examine meanings through support analysis and interpretations of literary passages. On the other hand, Brooke (1989, p. 10) experimented using eighteenth century literary texts on second year university students. His study identified cultural differences as a major problem in the literature classroom. This problem may be even greater for the multicultural Malaysian students in studying literature in English. In the local context, the few studies that look into ways learners attempt to comprehend literary texts have identified various problems faced by learners. For example, a study by Cheong (1996) on university TESL students revealed low level proficiency students facing problems in comprehending literary texts. The use of poetic forms in the text further hampered their comprehension. The findings also revealed the students' lack of background knowledge, inability to make critical judgments and assumptions. The study indicated that these students were more concerned with getting the main idea and literal surface meaning of the text.

In general, students who are able to identify the relationships among main ideas in a text generally comprehend the text better than those who fail to identify them (Carrell, 1985, Taylor, 1980). A fluent reader who at first fails to comprehend would find other ways to deal with the text such as self check and self-correct. Therefore, fluent readers have good over-all comprehension (Stewart and Tei, 1983). However, weak readers who come across this kind of problem will tend to attribute their failure to their lack of ability. Literary text comprehension is a cognitively demanding process, which requires learners to engage in the process of meaning making rather than finding meaning in the text (Noden & Vacca, 1994). The diagram in Figure 1 describes the process of literary text comprehension. It is based on the work of Benton (1983), Rosenblatt (1985) and Ruddell (2001).

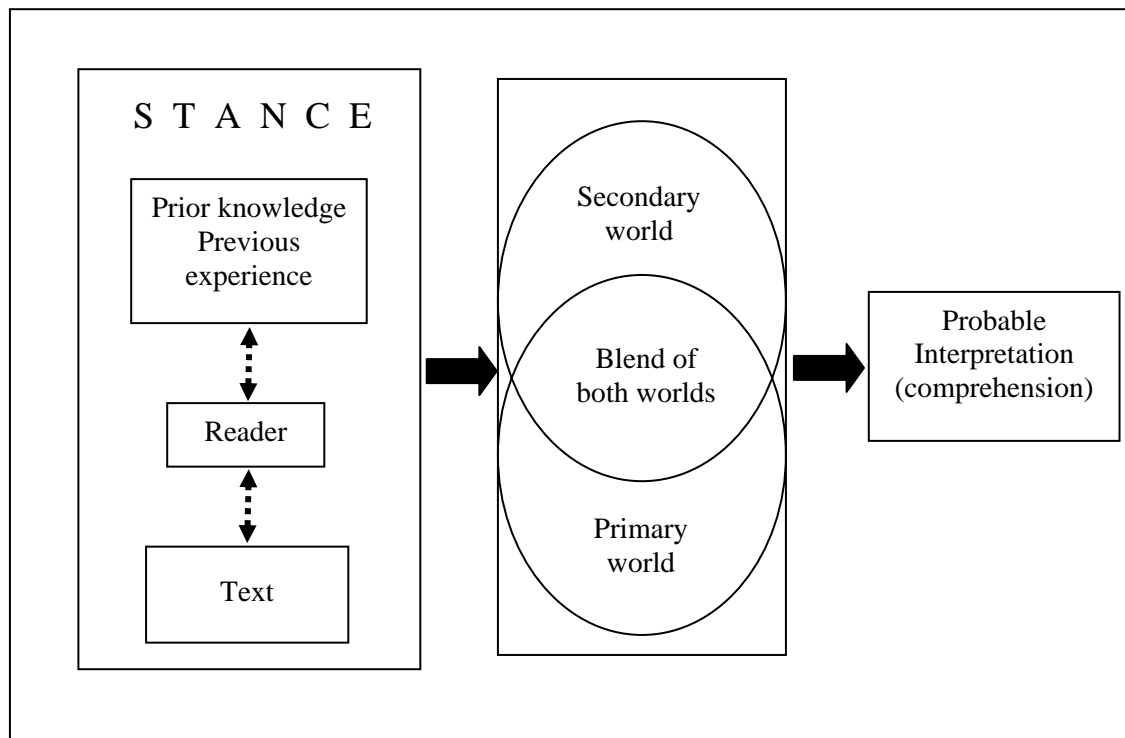


Figure 1: Literary Text Comprehension

Literary text comprehension involves the link between the reader's prior knowledge and personal experiences to the information from the text. The stance the reader takes sets the purpose for reading. The aesthetic stance involves a transition from the reader to the text as the reader crosses over and enters into the journey of the world to experience the story, the events and the ambiance created by the text (Rosenblatt, 1985). It goes beyond simple interaction with the text and involves a shared or reciprocal process between the reader and text. The reader is able to see herself 'living through' a literary character (Ruddell, 2001). During the transition phase, the reader recognizes the world of the text (primary world) by synthesizing the characters, events and plots of the text.

The 'secondary' world (Benton, 1983) depicts the world of 'self' (the reader). In the world of self, literary experiences expand the learners' familiarity with 'other selves that will enhance the understanding and development of ones own self' (ibid, p. 259). The result of this process is the new information gained from the blend of the two worlds. This new information is described as the evocation that leads to comprehension. The reader synthesizes ideas, sensations, feelings and images from her past linguistic, literary and life experiences' to form a new experience. This will lead to a probable interpretation of the literary text.

Relationships Among Analogy, Scaffolding And Literary Text Comprehension

In order to achieve comprehension, learners may resort to using strategies that enable meaning to take place. Analogy is seen as a form of scaffolding since it enables learners to assist their partners to gain understanding of difficult concepts found in the literary texts. Figure 2 below describes the analogy process that takes place during discussion. Learners make use of familiar concepts that come from their prior knowledge or expressions to link to the problematic concept. The imparted feature is the learning process that leads to new knowledge. Vygotsky (1978) claims that the learning process takes place when learners are transported from the actual development (existing knowledge) to the potential development (new knowledge). This can only be achieved if the learning process occurs in the zone of proximal development.

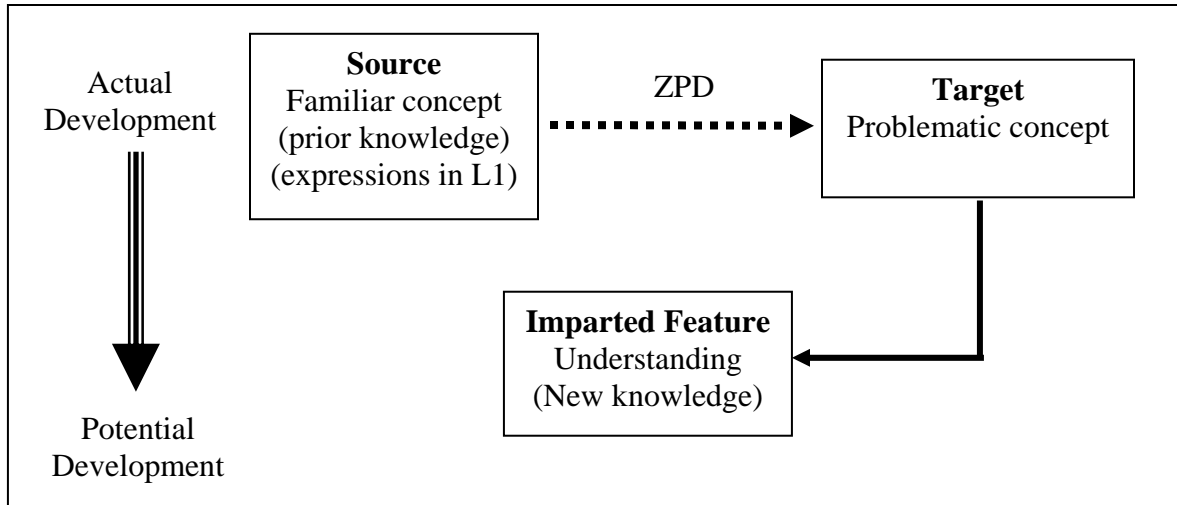


Figure 2: The Analogy Process

The Present Study

The present study is part of a larger study that was carried out to identify the types and characteristics of scaffolding utilized by teacher trainees during peer discussion in their attempts to comprehend short stories. The focus of the present study is the teacher trainees' use of analogy. From the sociocultural perspective, leaning is said to occur when a capable peer is able to assist a novice. Therefore, this paper reports on the teacher trainees' use of analogy in the process of trying to understand literary texts through verbal discourse. It needs to be noted that analogy was not introduced or taught to the subjects in this study. A study of tape scripts made it evident that subjects used analogy as a form of scaffolding to assist their partners' understanding.

Research Method

The qualitative method of collecting data using the constant comparison process was employed for this study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The data collection procedure involved two stages. The first stage involved each subject reading the first short story a week before the recording session. This procedure was necessary to allow the subjects to be familiar with the content of the story. This was followed by the recording of the dyads' discussion of the short story. Each dyad was given a comprehension evaluation sheet as a guideline for discussion (refer to Appendix B). No time limit was set for the duration of the discussion since each learner's capability of comprehending the text might differ. The same process was repeated in stage two involving the second short story.

The recorded discussions were later transcribed for analysis. The labelling of raw data into themes involved three stages. First, based on the raw data, themes were identified to select the different characteristics of analogy. Second, coding categories were carried out to select and cluster similar codes together. Finally, similar emerging themes were identified and labelled for analysis.

The Subjects

The subjects for this study consisted of sixteen Bachelor of Education (TESL) Foundation teacher trainees from a teacher training institute in Malaysia. These teacher trainees were involved in the study of short stories as one of the components in the English Studies programme for one semester. Hence, they were accustomed to reading and discussing literary texts. Since the purpose of this study was to look into ways low and high proficiency teacher trainees respond to a short story in dyads, subjects were selected based on the proficiency test administered by the researchers. From a total of 96 teacher trainees, 16 subjects consisting of 8 high and 8 low proficiency subjects were selected. They were paired at random and each dyad consisted of one high and one low proficiency subject. This was necessary to allow scaffolding to take place where a capable peer can assist a novice in comprehending literary texts.

Teaching Material

The material for discussion consisted of two Malaysian short story entitled 'Journey' by Shirley Lim (1994) and 'Just a Girl' by Lee Kok Liang (1994). The subjects had not read these stories before. The short stories are based on a local setting that depicts the problems faced by a young protagonist. These stories were selected since the themes highlighted are universal and which subjects could relate to. Both texts focus on the life of a young teenage girl who comes from a poor family background.

Findings

Based on the data analysis, subjects with high English language proficiency used analogy as a form of scaffolding in the comprehension of the short story. Analogy was used as a means of scaffolding by high proficiency dyads to assist their low proficiency partners. The capable partners in the dyads assisted their low proficiency partners to comprehend difficult concepts found in the short story by resorting to analogy. The findings revealed the use of analogy by means of personal experiences and the use of expressions in their L1. These are discussed and illustrated with examples below. For easy reference, in each dyad A and B in each excerpt represent subjects with high and low English language proficiency respectively.

Excerpt 1 below shows how the high proficiency subject used analogy to justify her answer. The problematic concept identified in the discussion was the inability of B to grasp the meaning of the phrase ‘skulls smiled without friendship’ (line 2). A’s attempt to provide the answer was unfruitful when her partner could not understand the intended meaning (line 8). This led A to use analogy as a form of scaffolding to assist her partner’s understanding. The movie ‘Pirates of the Caribbean’ was used as a source to connect the significance of the ‘skull’ to the problematic concept found in the short story. The similarity of ideas presented between the skull found in the movie and the story allowed A to associate ‘skulls’ to ‘pirates’ and that it foreshadowed a bad event about to occur. B’s understanding was evident when she was able to relate the bad event to the protagonist’s mother’s death (line 16).

Excerpt 1

- 1 **B:** Can you find any literary terms used in the story?
- 2 **A:** Here got, I found ‘skulls smiled without friendship.’
- 3 **B:** What’s that? Personification?
- 4 **A:** Right.
- 5 **B:** Why the author use that? I don’t know ah like what it means.
- 6 **A:** I’m not sure myself but I think like its kind of telling us that ah
- 7 something bad is going to happen...
- 8 **B:** What bad happen?
- 9 **A:** You know, like have you seen the movie Pirates of the Caribbean? You
- 10 know, pirates have the the symbol right? The flag thing, like has the
- 11 skull on it?
- 12 **B:** Yeah the pirates.
- 13 **A:** Everyone is afraid of pirates right? It means because they are bad people
- 14 and all that. They are not friendly also. So here it means something
- 15 badlah.
- 16 **B:** Because the mother died at the end right?
- 17 **A:** Ya.

Similarly, in Excerpt 2 given below, **B** had difficulty in understanding the meaning of the lexical item ‘labyrinths’ (line 3) as found in the short story. **A**’s attempt to give the denotative meaning in line 4 was not successful. This led her to use analogy to assist her partner’s understanding. By using ‘traffic jam’ as the source, she was able to associate the state of ‘inability to move’ to the problematic concept ‘labyrinths’ which is the target.

Excerpt 2

- 1 **A:** It started with the she dream about that she’s in some kind of *labyrinths* and
2 she...
3 **B:** *Labyrinths* is what?
4 **A:** It’s like what I found in the dictionary is like complicated network of
5 passages and path. I mean, in it yes complicated network of winding
6 passages and path.
7 **B:** Meaning?
8 **A:** Meaning, its kind of like a its like **macam** like a very complicated **macam**
9 **kat junction.**
10 **B:** What?
11 **A:** When **ada** traffic jam **kan, nak jalan pun sangkut. Macam tulah.**
12 **B:** Oh okay.

From the two examples given above, analogy is attempted by high proficiency subjects to assist their partners’ understanding of difficult concepts in figurative language and problematic lexical items. The use of analogy in the examples above is based on the subjects’ personal experiences or previous knowledge. This allows learners to encounter the text that will later shape new experiences. The new experiences gained leads to the comprehension of the text (Ballenger, 1997). The learners’ capability to create meaning by validating their thinking and supporting their contentions with details through analogy leads to the possibility of interpretation.

High proficiency partners were also seen to use idiomatic expression and proverbs as a form of analogy to illustrate their understanding. For example, in Excerpt 3, **B** accused the protagonist’s father of being irresponsible in line 2. **A** associated her understanding by providing a similar expression in the form of a Malay proverb (line 3) as a form of analogy. Similarly in Excerpt 4, **A** associated the reason for the protagonist crying with the expression ‘di luah mati anak, ditelan mati bapak’ (line 6) as an analogy to express her understanding of the story.

Excerpt 3

- 1 **A:** Why the father did not do anything? He should provide.
 2 **B:** Ya, I don't like the father character. He only plays mahjong.
 3 **A:** Yalah, the father is like **lepas tangan je**.
 4 **B:** That's why the family is suffering.

Excerpt 4

- 1 **B:** Her mother is very sick right?
 2 **A:** Ah yes, that's why I think she cried in the end.
 3 **B:** She does not know what to do. Cannot rely on her father also.
 4 **A:** Yeah, that's why. It's like she cannot rely on her mother.
 5 **B:** Ok.
 6 **A:** It's like **di luah mati anak, ditelan mati bapak**.
 7 **B:** What?
 8 **A:** Macam you cannot rely on both lah. Mother is sick and father also cannot
 9 help because he is a gambler. So, the girl like don't know what to do lah.

The use of proverbs and idiomatic expressions by high proficiency partners denotes their maturity in associating the events from the story with real life. Their use of proverbs to describe the events in the story indicates their ability to use mental images to visualize or perceive what is happening in the story. This is one form of 'aesthetic' response where subjects are able to express their understanding of the read text (Many & Wiseman, 1992). This form of personal reaction allows the learners to see 'the relationship between the texts of their own lives and the lives of others who are like them as well as different from them' (Rogers, 1997, p. 109).

Analogy is also used by subjects as a means of explaining their opinion. For example, in Excerpt 5, the dyad had difficulty in understanding the role of 'keramat' in the story. A managed to use 'bridge' (line 6) as an analogy to explain that keramat could act as a medium who has the power to connect the existing world to the unknown world. Again, the mother tongue is also used to further aid in the explanation.

Excerpt 5

- 1 **B:** Haa that wise keramat. Actually what is the keramat?
 2 **A:** Keramat. What, what does keramat mean?
 3 **B:** I think what I understand.....
 4 **A:** Bomoh?
 5 **B:** Keramat is something like magic but...
 6 **A:** That means is it something like a bomoh? Like a bridge?
 7 **B:** Yeah, something like that bridge, what?
 8 **A:** **Pengantara lah**, like medium. **Penghubung**. The keramat can tell what
 9 will happen, like that. **Macam hubung dengan alam ghaib**.

On the other hand, both subjects in Excerpt 6, had conflicting views on what had happened to the protagonist's mother. A argued that the protagonist's mother had died. She justified her answer by providing an analogy in line 11. Her reference to the phrase 'sleep in the exhausted peace' is associated with the idiomatic expression 'rest in peace'. A used this as her reason for her claim and explanation to B.

Excerpt 6

- 1 **A:** I think her mother died.
 2 **B:** No, no.
 3 **A:** Yeah, yeah. When you can see there.
 4 **B:** If I'm not mistaken her mother just sleep right?
 5 **A:** No, no.
 6 **B:** No?
 7 **A:** I think her mother died. You can see in the last paragraph. I think
 8 **B:** No, no.
 9 **A:** When *finally the woman lay and sleep covered with the blanket. Sleep in*
 10 *The exhausted peace of past pain*. So ah.. I think here *sleep in the*
 11 *Exhausted peace* ah peace here I think you know rest in peace
 12 something like that. Her her nightmare, *tonight she was gone* so here the
 13 phrase the phrase the clause, I don't knowlah whether it's a phrase or
 14 clause. Same thing here is that it indicated that her mother mother had
 15 gone away had passed away. So ah she cried after she cleaned the blood on
 the floor.

Examples from Excerpts 5 and 6 indicate subjects' capability of using analogy to link their opinions based on their personal experience or previous knowledge

The findings from this study indicate the subjects' capability of using analogy in assisting their understanding of literary texts. Probst (2004, p. 33) is of the opinion that the text

'becomes literature by virtue of what the reader is able to do with it'. The subjects' interpretive ability is evident when they associate their understanding through the use of analogy. This enables the learners to be critical by providing justification for their interpretation.

Discussion

This study has shown the use of analogy as a form of scaffolding in the comprehension of the short stories. The teacher trainees were using analogy despite the fact that they had no instruction on analogy. High proficiency partners are capable of assisting their low proficiency partners in gaining understanding of difficult concepts identified in the short story through discussions. Analogy was preferred by high proficiency partners since they were pressed for answers by their low proficiency partners. This led high proficiency partners to find ways and means to overcome their constraints. The findings of this study show that analogy is used by teacher trainees for three main purposes. First, analogy is used as a tool to search for meaning of certain difficult concepts such as literary terms and lexical items found in the literary texts. Second, analogy also functions as a means to justify or explain subjects' opinions. Third, analogy is drawn from idiomatic expression and proverbs to express the subjects' understanding of the texts. The findings from this study suggest that analogy provides new ways of understanding and comprehending literary works. It also shows that subjects' use of analogy is an unconscious process that relates to their everyday experiences.

Conclusion

This study has revealed an insight into yet another way to approach the teaching of literary texts. There is a need to rethink how learners use strategies to comprehend literary works. Based on the study, to some extent, analogy enabled the comprehension of literary texts to take place among low proficiency subjects. This form of strategy was evident when high proficiency learners scaffolded their low proficiency partners to make sense of difficult concepts. It is interesting to note that analogy was used only by subjects of high proficiency. This finding indicates the learners' ability to associate their everyday life with the literary texts and their ability to assist their partners' understanding of the literary texts. This is one form of a desirable strategy that promotes learning among learners.

Analogy is one form of strategy that enables scaffolding to take place for facilitating problem solving learning. It allows learners to decode unfamiliar concepts and allows successful inferring of meaning to take place. The findings from this study confirm Glynn's (2007) study that emphasizes the effectiveness of analogy in the meaning making process.

With the current emphasis on producing life-long readers who are capable of being critical, analogy should be taught to learners. Besides challenging learners' thinking ability, it also requires learners to make comparisons by making connection between what is in the text and the real world. This new way of thinking should be encouraged among all our learners. Ample opportunities should be given to the learners to be responsible for their own learning. Analogy allows learners the freedom to express themselves and the opportunity to associate their experiences with the read text. Teachers being more experienced and competent in the language than their students should be able to draw from various sources to provide analogies to their students and this could facilitate in their students' understanding of literary texts.

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Appendix A

Comprehension Evaluation Sheet (Adapted And Modified From Cattell, 1999)

<p>Characters Name The Protagonist. Comment On Other Characters And The Way The Author Presents Them To The Reader.</p>	<p>Identify The Protagonist's Physical Traits/ Characteristics Through;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Protagonist's Words Or Actions • Narrator's Words Describing Protagonist's Actions/Thoughts • Other Characters' Reactions Towards The Protagonist.
<p>Setting Tells When/Where The Story Happened</p>	<p>Identify Setting Through;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time • Place • Cultural Value
<p>Key Images Look For Key Images. Say What The Image Is, What It Means And How It Works In The Story.</p>	
<p>Events (What Happens) Include All Major Events. Comment On Any Details And Incidents Which You Find Interesting In The Story.</p>	<p>Identify;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which Event Happened Before/After Another Event. • Problems/Conflicts That Occurred
<p>Theme What Are The Main Ideas In The Story?</p>	
<p>Treatment Of Conflict Tells How Problem Was Solved</p>	<p>Identify;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How The Problems/Conflicts Were Solved.

Appendix B

Questions For Discussion

1. Describe And Discuss The Characters Found In The Story You Have Read. Which Character Do You Like/Dislike? Give Your Reasons. Relate The Character To Your Personal Experiences If Possible.
2. What Are The Problems Faced By The Protagonist? Support Them With Evidence From The Text.
3. What Are The Issues Highlighted In The Story? Discuss The Issues By Giving Your Personal Opinion.
4. Can You Identify Any Literary Techniques Used By The Author In Relation To The Story? Identify Them And Discuss The Effectiveness Of The Techniques Mentioned. Why Do You Think The Author Used These Techniques?
5. Is The Theme Of This Story Similar To Other Stories You Have Read? Is It Universal? Can You Relate It To Other Cultures?
6. Do You Like This Story? Will You Read It Again? Give Your Personal Opinion.