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Passages in a University English Reading Classroom

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Foreword

It is quite a commendable feat that within a short span of time since its last issue, the University Publication Centre (UPENA) of UiTM Pulau Pinang has produced its sixth volume of the Esteem Academic Journal UiTM Pulau Pinang. Of course, this issue would not come into fruition if not for the firm commitment and close cooperation of all the relevant parties involved.

First and foremost, I would like to extend my thanks to Associate Professor Mohd Zaki Abdullah, Director of UiTM Pulau Pinang, Associate Professor Dr Mohamad Abdullah Hemdi, Deputy Director of Academic Affairs and Associate Professor Ir. Damanhuri Jamalludin, Deputy Director of Research, Industry Linkages, Development & Maintenance for offering their continuous and untiring support. They were the driving force behind the successful publication of this journal. Time and again they rendered invaluable advice on how to address the problems that UPENA encountered in the publication of this academic journal.

UPENA highly appreciates the comments and expertise proffered by the panel of external reviewers when articles in this journal were sent to them for blind reviews. Likewise, UPENA also salutes the dedicated panel of language editors for their time in editing the authors' manuscripts.

However, all the assistance tendered would have been a futile effort if there were no authors willing to submit their articles for publication. This journal comprises articles on the social sciences and technology disciplines. I am proud to state that there is no shortage of writers from Penang and the response from them in these two disciplines has been overwhelming.

Lastly, I would like to urge more lecturers to submit their articles to UPENA. Authors' contributions of articles in this refereed journal help to disseminate and share knowledge with readers. It also helps to elevate the status of UiTM Pulau Pinang in research writing. In return, the authors gain recognition from the wider audience and also consideration for promotion in their career. It is a win-win situation for both parties. So lecturers, what are you waiting for? Put on your thinking caps and start contributing your research articles to UPENA.

Liaw Shun Chone

Chief Editor

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(Social Sciences and Technology)

Using Drawings as a Means of Summarizing Reading Passages in a University English Reading Classroom

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ABSTRACT

It has been noted that many university students do not know about strategies to summarize or organize information gained from their article reading. The aims of this research are to examine the accuracy of university students' drawings as summaries and their perceptions of drawing as a strategy to summarize reading articles in an English reading class. The study involves 19 students, aged between 19 to 20 years old, from the Food Service and Culinary courses in a Malaysian public university. Using newspaper reports, students first read the articles and after which they draw pictures to summarize the newspaper reports. The drawings cum the summaries are assessed by five experienced English lecturers using a scoring guide for drawings. The analysis showed that over 80% of the drawings were marked as accurate summaries of the newspaper articles. Through interviews, the study also revealed that students showed positive perception about drawing as it allowed them to make meanings through images and tap on their creative mind. It was also observed that the students were delighted and attentive in finishing the

assignments. Drawing appeared to have the potential to be used as a summarizing strategy in a university English reading classroom.

Keywords: *reading, summary, drawing, creativity*

Introduction

Students need to be taught reading and summarizing strategies as Kajder (2006) reported that seventy per cent older readers can read words on a page but they are not able to understand what they read, and only less than six per cent of secondary school students can understand, identify main ideas, support answers with evidence from a text, and imply relationships.

Acquiring effective summarizing skill is a must for university students as they need to read extensively and then summarize and make connections among the details. University students need to demonstrate high level of understanding and reasoning and not just regurgitate facts. Thus, having a strategy for summarizing reading texts is essential. A good summary depicts a good comprehension of a reading material. Research by Sutherland, Badger and White (2002) have proven that university students who made notes and reviewed them performed significantly better than those who did not do so and knowing the relationship between ideas can help them in their studies.

Students are always urged to read widely to be able to write papers, discuss in classes, do group work and sit for tests and exams. As pointed out by Guastello, Beasley and Sinatra (2000), the higher the levels of their studies, the more time these students have to allocate to read and learn from reading materials. However, not many of them have undergone a formal education that allows them to know about strategies to organize information effectively (Cornford, 2002). This has resulted in many of them feeling helpless and stressed out as a result of having difficulty studying massive amount of materials (Heiman & Precel, 2003). They only depend on their own abilities to organize or structure the vast information read (Smith & Dwyer, 1995) without resorting to any note-making systems. In fact, seven out of ten students interviewed did not make any notes at all and only read from their textbooks.

Steyn and DeBoer (1998) state that university students need some appropriate learning strategies to allow them to ease the difficulties in learning at university. Azri Aziz (1994) suggests that notes should be simple but condensed because the ability to produce such notes shows

that one who does it has a systematic learning strategy. Donald and Kneale (2001) similarly argue the fact that and add that notes should grab students' attention, be clear and lively, and should make sense to them even when revised later. With these suggestions, students can be helped to summarize and organize important information about their reading materials by asking them to draw.

Indeed, many educators now, as reported by Shameem and Kaur (2005), resort to systems that can encourage students to draw, use colour, images, pictures, symbols, words and phrases to present their ideas. Review of current studies found that drawing as a language learning tool has been only tried among primary and secondary school students worldwide (Ajayi, 2009; Altman, 2008; Hadaway & Mundy, 1999; McGinnis, 2007). However, drawing has not been experimented with university students either as a language learning tool nor a summarizing strategy for article reading.

This research has dual aims. First, it aims to test the accuracy of the students' understanding of the text by examining the drawing that they use as a summarizing tool. Secondly, it intends to investigate the students' perceptions about using drawing as a summarizing method in their English reading class. It is hoped that these investigations would shed some light on whether drawing has the potential of being a means to summarize important points in a reading article. The findings would also provide guidance for classroom practice.

Drawing

To draw, according to Thomas and Taylor (2006) in their book entitled *Drawing*, is to “extract, attract, make, manifest, represent, formulate, perceive, or form a line between two points, which all add to the idea of a physical activity which enables us to make our ideas visible” (p. 12). They further explain that drawings can be signs, symbols, or combinations of images to communicate ideas, messages, facts or stories, and these drawings can explain complex concepts in a simple manner. Raynes (2005) describes drawing as the making of visuals or images either of direct observation, or a representation of the imagination. Gurian, Stevens and King (2008) define drawing as creating symbols and pictures to represent knowledge. In short, drawing is a means that allows ones to draw and communicate their ideas or messages through visual stimulus. For the purpose of this paper, drawing means symbols, images and simple

sketches of pictures such as stick people, faces, animals, scenes or objects. The pictures are dominant and may come in a story board. They carry the storyline and may be paired with minimal use of words.

As pointed out by Shameem (1999), drawings can be used with students for them to show their understanding of events or processes that are sequential or non-sequential. She further elaborates by stating that drawings should be used with students because while producing them, students have to construct meanings and comprehension and thus show a higher order thinking. Moreover, drawings can represent students' ideas or show the relationships between ideas. Drawings, thus, can be an effective means of helping students to make sense of their reading texts besides enhancing their critical reading and thinking skills. Altman (2008) also highlights that drawings can better explain texts and words, and clarify understanding as meanings may sometimes be obscured by words in texts.

As students move from primary to secondary and into tertiary levels, drawing has been left behind, and as Clark and Lyons (2004) write, its potential to improve learning is under-realized because most educational emphasis is given on words and the production and analysis of language. That could be the reason why many of us express our ideas almost instantly with words. However, to underestimate the value of drawing in helping our students producing meaning and understanding is not a wise move. Gurian, Stevens and King (2008) claim that the process of trying to capture the main concepts from a reading text and interpret them into a drawing is a high-level synthesis task in itself because it challenges one to convey meaning to others without the use of or very minimal use of words. They also stress that not only does drawing allow the visual-spatial learners to shine through, but it also challenges verbal learners to think and express differently than they are used to. Margulies and Valenza (2005) have expressed a similar view.

In short, as university students need to read extensive reading materials in their course of studying, they should have a strategy to organize and summarize reading information. It is believed that drawing, a means of knowledge representation through visual stimulus, can be used by students as a skill to organize and summarize the information read. This is evident in studies done by Altman (2008); Gurian, Stevens and King (2008); and Margulies and Valenza (2005).

The Methodology

Drawing in Classroom

The study involved 19 students from the Food Service and Culinary courses in a Malaysian public university. They were Semester 3 students aged from 19 to 20 years old. This group of students was a cluster sampling as explained by Borg and Gall (1989).

In one of the reading classes, all the students were instructed to browse through and choose an article of their liking from the Malaysian English newspapers. Newspaper reports were used because they are suitable for students of any levels and they provide an excellent pattern for clear organizing of information and summarizing by having 5W's (What, Where, Who, Why, When) (Lukens, 1968). 'What' is used to help students identify the major event that takes place in the newspaper report. 'Where' is used to detect the place an incident happens and 'who' is used to distinguish the people involved in an incident. Next, 'why' is used to ascertain the reason behind the event reported in the news and 'when' is employed to decide the time an event takes place in the report.

After choosing a newspaper article each, the students were asked to read their articles silently and try to understand the report. The time given for this activity was 30 minutes. Upon completing the reading task, the students were asked to draw pictures, images or symbols to summarize and organize the information presented in the newspaper reports of their choices. For this task, they used A4 white paper, and may use pens or pencils for their sketches. Colours could be used but was not made compulsory. They too could use words alongside their pictures, but these words were only subordinate. The time allotted for this exercise was also 30 minutes. Since the articles were all chosen by the students themselves, thus, they involved various topics ranging from politics to accidents reports and many others.

When students had completed their tasks, they were free to examine and appreciate their friends' works and see whether they could comprehend the drawings created by each other. They too could compare their friends' drawings against the newspaper articles that had been used to check the accuracy of the summaries and organizations made in the form of pictures.

A few students were also asked to voluntarily share and exhibit their drawings with the whole class. In this session, they pasted their works

on the board and explained to the classmates about the reports of the newspaper articles.

All the reading, summarizing the information in a form of drawing, and sharing tasks were completed in about one hour and forty minutes. The students' drawings were collected and stapled together with the specific news that they had read. Figures 1, 2 and 3 show the drawings of three students that depict the summaries of the newspaper articles.

In Figure 1, the student represented her summary of the newspaper report by drawing three vehicles: a lorry, a bus and a car which were involved in an accident by incorporating the word 'Boom'. These images clearly answered the question 'what', as in "What was the newspaper report about?" The answer could be given as "The newspaper report was about an accident involving three vehicles". Next, the question 'where' was answered through the writing on top of the drawing, that is Johor – Mersing Road. The writing told the reader that the accident happened at a spot on the Johor – Mersing Road. From the student's drawing, it was also clearly shown that there were no deaths for passengers of the lorry and bus except for the Singaporean passengers in the car. The person looking at her drawing would know that one passenger died on the spot, and the other two were critical and sent to

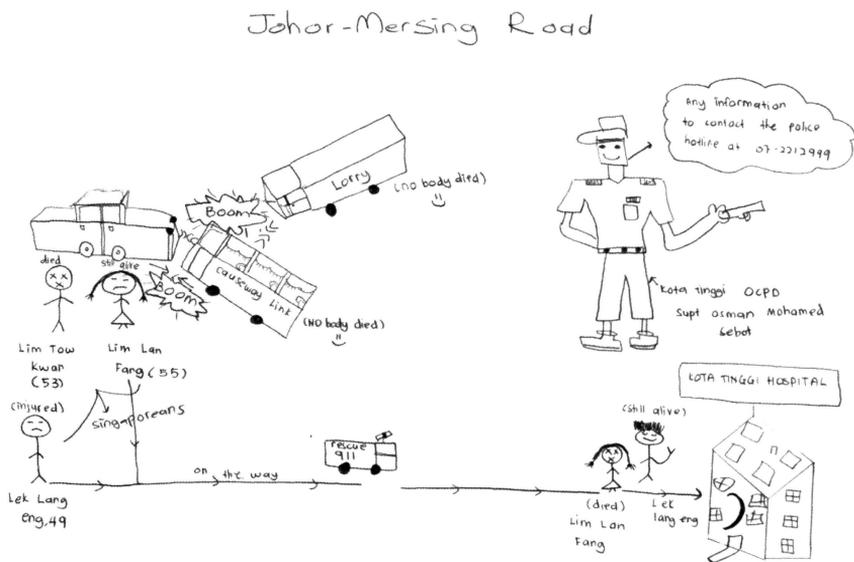


Figure 1: A Drawing about an Accident

the hospital by the picture of 911 rescue van in the middle. Note that on the far left and bottom part of her drawing, the male victim was drawn without hair to symbolize the critical condition of his health but hair was then drawn on his head to signify that he cheated death at last. One of the critical passengers died on her way to the Kota Tinggi Hospital. All these images answered the questions “Who were involved in the accident?” and “Who was critical in the accident?” On the right top position, the student drew a picture of a policeman who invited witnesses to contact the police regarding the matter and this indirectly gave an indication that the reason for the accident (that is to answer the question ‘Why’) could be known with witnesses’ testimony. However, the student did not specifically write or draw when this incident happened.

The author of Figure 2 represented her summary of the newspaper report by drawing the figure of a bus that promotes the peace and donation campaign by writing ‘Hentikan Keganasan’ in Bahasa Malaysia or is equivalent to ‘Stop the Aggression’ in English. On the left, the location for killings and sufferings of children and women (note the stick people of babies and a woman) were depicted to be in the Middle East, particularly Gaza (note the hills, hot sun and a date tree to symbolize the



Figure 2: A Drawing about a Donation Campaign

idea). Gaza is known through the author's image on the top right of her drawing. In fact, the Malaysian community is invited to donate their money to this campaign from the image of the fifty-ringgit note, and they can do so by banking in their money in a Maybank's Account which was clearly depicted at the bottom right of the drawing. In fact, the account number was clearly written as 514105-320501. These images on the whole answered these questions:

1. What was the newspaper report about? It was about a donation campaign.
2. Where did the aggression happen? It happened in Gaza.
3. Where can people donate their money? People can bank in their money in a Maybank's account.
4. What is the account number of the bank? It is 514105-320501.
5. Who were mainly killed in the aggression? Women and babies were mainly killed in the aggression.
6. When was this report written? It was written on the 11th January, 2009.

The drawing did not depict any image to answer the question 'why' probably because the newspaper report did not touch on the issue.

Figure 3 represented the author's summary of how a person can be successful by taking education seriously. This answered the question "What was the main point of the newspaper article?" He started his drawing at the bottom right by drawing a figure of a student and a short description "Poor Student". He had an arrow to the left showing the student studying. Next, he showed the student scoring 10As in his exam. Now, on top left of the drawing, the student was shown studying in a college and he ended his drawing by illustrating that the student had become a successful person. Note that he drew a BMW car to show the image of success. Since the newspaper report was about steps that a student can take in order to be successful, thus, questions such as 'where, who, when and why' were answered in a subtle way.

The Assessment of Drawings

All the drawings or the supposed summaries of the newspaper articles that the students made were collected and given to five English lecturers to assess using a scoring guide for drawings that had been developed. The scoring guide was developed based on a widely accepted Cognitive



Figure 3: A Drawing about Securing Success through Education

Reading Theory which explains that a good reader is a participant who is actively making meaning out of the reading text (Colorado, State University, 1993-2010). The scoring rubric was also created based on an article by Facione and Facione (2006) entitled 'Using the Holistic Critical Thinking Scoring Rubric' The scoring guide is shown in Table 1.

One of the English Lecturers is an Associate Professor with more than twenty five years of experience in teaching English, while the other four lecturers have the experience of teaching English for sixteen, thirteen, seven and five years respectively. Each of them has a Masters' Degree in English.

Analysis

Based on the scores given by all the five English lecturers, a total of 31% of the students' drawings were marked as 'most accurate', whereas 53% of the drawings were ranked as 'accurate', and only 16% were rated as 'less accurate'. Figure 4 below shows the overall results.

Table 1: Scoring Guide for Drawings

Drawing Characteristics		
Most Accurate	Accurate	Less Accurate
The student consistently does all or almost all of the following in his / her drawing:	The student does most or many of the following in his / her drawing:	The student consistently does all or almost all of the following in his / her drawing:
a. thoughtfully analyzes and evaluates major points in the newspaper article	a. ignores or superficially evaluates major points in the newspaper article	a. fails to identify major points in the newspaper article
b. accurately and truthfully interprets the newspaper article	b. partially interprets the newspaper article	b. offers biased and misleading interpretations of the newspaper article
c. presents a storyboard that is easy to follow	c. presents a storyboard that is easy to follow	c. does not present a storyboard that is easy to follow
d. uses only minimal text/ words to accompany the sketch	d. uses a lot of words to accompany the sketch	d. uses too many words to accompany the sketch

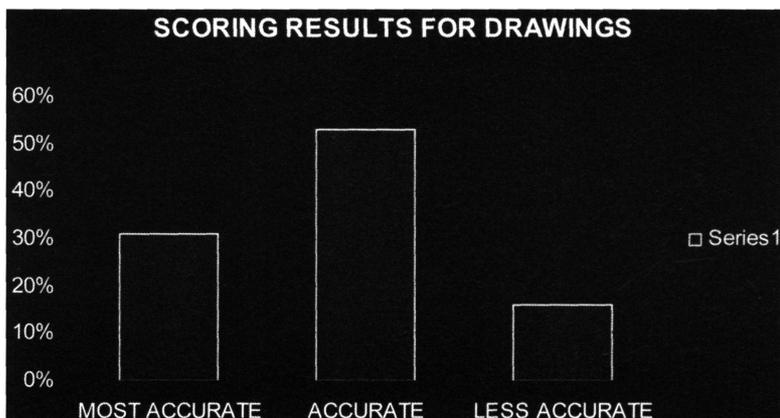


Figure 4: The Scoring Results for Drawings

Through interviews, the study also revealed that students showed positive perceptions about drawing as a form of summarizing a reading article, for drawing allowed them to make meanings through images and tap on their creative mind. Their responses are summarized in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Students' Perceptions about Drawing

Perceptions about drawing as a tool to summarize a reading article	%	Perceptions about drawing as a tool to summarize a reading article	%
It is unique, never has any language class done this before	100%	It is a form of communication and expression	26%
It is interesting	47%	It improves students' attentiveness in classroom	15%
It improves vocabulary	15%	It taps on our imagination	15%
It is a creative way to learn	11%	It is a relaxing activity	11%

These were what two of the students said about this activity:

S1: "I've not drawn for a long time and I'm not good at drawing, but I try to let others know what I'm doing. It allows me to express my understanding of the article I'm reading".

S2: "I think this activity is interesting and unique. I never know about it but after I've done the drawing I felt great. I'm not bad at it! I think my language class is interesting".

In fact, there were students who declared that this activity had allowed them to make meanings through images and tap on their creative mind.

S3: "Drawing makes me be more creative and imaginative, and I used my imagination to describe about the news".

S4: "It helps me to think creatively on how to explain one thing without using any words or write it on a piece of paper. I think this is a creative way to learn".

A total of 100% students also recommended that this activity be extended to other English classes and third language classes like French and Mandarin that are offered in the university. One student said, "We have been exposed to reading the text books, listening to the radio, having group discussions, but now I know that there is another way of learning a language – through drawing". Another student added, "In our Mandarin class, we are only taught pronunciation and how to score in the final exam. I would recommend this activity in our Mandarin class".

The positive perceptions students gave about drawing in this study may notify English language classroom practitioners that drawing can

be potentially used as a means to help students organize and summarize their reading texts. It confirms the findings made by Altman (2008); Gurian, Stevens and King (2008); and Margulies and Valenza (2005). Thus, an emphasis that drawing is a summarizing strategy can be made.

Researchers' Observation

When the students were first asked to draw pictures, symbols and images from their understanding of the newspaper articles read, they were aghast. They replied that they had left drawing since primary school days, and their hands were 'rusty' and they did not know how to draw well. However, when they were ensured that the emphasis was not on the artistic value but more on the summarizing skill, they felt at ease.

It is true when people say that the first was always the hardest. The students were encountered experiencing a little difficulty when they wanted to draw initially. Perhaps they were still thinking that they could not draw. Some drew and erased at the first few attempts, but the rest was history. The class atmosphere was calm and the students looked attentive. They took delight in taking the opportunity to exercise their drawing skills and showed positive attitude towards drawing.

Some of them tend to read deliberately and went to read the articles a few times to ensure that their pictures accurately represented the words written by the reporters and that no details were misinterpreted. One student commented:

S5: "Normally, in language classes, we only learn to read and write. We are not asked to imagine about what we learn. Most of the time, we just keep learning and writing. It's tiring sometimes. But with this particular activity, my mind is relaxed and I can be creative. I learn how to translate a report to a simple drawing. It is quite tough because not all reports can be done that way. We need to read the report and understand it clearly before we can start to draw".

Discussion and Conclusion

The aims of this research were to examine the accuracy of university students' drawings as summaries and their perceptions of drawing as a strategy to summarize reading articles in an English reading class.

Assurance was given that these students were not required to be artists but to represent ideas and knowledge that emerged as they read and visualized. Judging from their drawings and personal responses, it can be safely suggested that drawings have the potential to help learners summarize important points in a graphic form – a new and different form from the usual verbal form. As asserted by Tversky (2002), “Like spoken and written language, sketches are a form of communication”. A total of 26% of the students admitted that drawings were their new-found form of expression and communication. This finding tells us that the comprehension of a reading article can come in another method besides words alone. Carroll (1998) summarizes this well by saying “... there is not just one medium; productive thought uses many ways to find meaning”, (as cited in Altman, 2008).

This study also revealed that 60% of the students had storyboards to sequence their information carefully. Half of the drawings were ranked as ‘most accurate’, and the other half produced drawings that were ranked as ‘accurate’. Some began with pictures in the centre and branching out with more pictures in the left and right, or above and bottom directions. Some others began either clockwise or anti-clockwise, and have arrows to direct and connect the sequence of their information. They included pictures or visuals, and wrote keywords or captions that they imagined while reading the newspaper article. All in all, they organized their thoughts well as they went along doing the task. This could be a positive sign that drawings have the potential to help learners enhance their summarizing and comprehension skill, and also boost their visual ability, besides the verbal ability, to construct meaning.

However, a number of limitations must be considered when interpreting the finding of this investigation. First, this study was only administered with a small number of students; thus, limits the generalization of the findings with other groups of students. Replicating this study with a larger sample may yield further understanding on the matter. Furthermore, the reading articles used were from newspapers and the students themselves had had the liberty to choose any reports that they were comfortable with. Some might have chosen much simpler articles, whereas some others might have chosen more difficult ones. This might also influence their comprehension levels and drawing abilities. It could be proposed that a standard reading article of about 750 to 800 words be used in another study to create uniformity and similar level of difficulty among all students. Furthermore, future research should also examine the impact of using power point presentation in organizing,

summarizing and reflecting upon their reading of some texts. This presentation may combine students' oral presentation and the use of ready-made pictures or images from the internet and the ones they snap through their digital cameras or hand phones.

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