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THE PERCEPTION OF YOUNG LEARNERS TOWARDS “WALKING PHRASE” ACTIVITY: IS IT EFFECTIVE IN ENGAGING THEM IN ENGLISH PHRASE READING AND SENTENCE WRITING?

Norhasni Mohd Amin¹ and Noraziah Mohd Amin²

¹Collage of Arts and Sciences, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia;

²Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Pulau Pinang, Malaysia.

¹norhasniamin@yahoo.com

²noraziahm.amin@gmail.com/noraziahm@ppinang.uitm.edu.my

ABSTRACT

Learning sentence structure is usually not seen as an enjoyable learning experience, while writing is a complex system of communication, which means learning how to write can pose some difficulties. Thus, “Walking Phrase” activity was introduced to 26 young learners of Sekolah Kebangsaan Seri Wangsa as a technique for engaging them in reading phrases and writing sentences. The objective of this study was to investigate the perception of these young learners towards the use of “Walking Phrase” as an effective strategy in engaging them in English phrase reading and sentence writing. “Walking Phrase” is a learning strategy that involves simple phrases and then learners try to use them in structuring sentences. As for the present study, the students each wore a phrase card. Then they read and memorized the short phrases written on the cards. The students then wrote the phrases in their writing booklets and also wrote complete sentences using the phrases. A questionnaire which comprised sixteen “Yes”/“No” questions was administered each of the 26 participants who were Year 6 students of the primary school in order to investigate their perception towards “Walking Phrase” activity. Based on the findings obtained, the majority of the students viewed “Walking Phrase” activity as an effective strategy in engaging them in reading phrases and writing sentences of English.

Keywords: “Walking Phrase”, phrase, sentence, reading, writing

1.0 INTRODUCTION

According to Schmitt (2000), vocabulary is not composed of merely unattached, individual words working individually in a discourse environment. Leech (2013) claims that despite evolving usage, there are numerous aspects of the English grammar and semantics of the verb



which present little or no change since 1971. According to Palmer (2014), for most languages, the part that concerns the verb is the most problematic. “Learning a language is to a very large degree learning how to operate the verbal forms of that language, and, except in the case of those that are related historically, the pattern and structure of the verb in each language seem to differ very considerably from those in every other language” (Palmer, 2014, p. 1).

1.1 Problem Statement

According to Palmer (2014), despite the increasing attention given on English grammar, there have been more books and articles written on the verb than on other parts of speech like the noun, the adjective or any other class of word. This author also argues that this is due to the fact that the verb, or rather the verb phrase is so significant to the construction of the sentence that no syntactic analysis can be done without a careful consideration of this category of word, and another reason is the high complexity of the internal semantic and syntactic form of the verb phrase itself. Based on these arguments regarding the central use of the verbs in structuring sentences, it is important for studies to be conducted with the objectives to discover the effective methods of teaching and learning verbs and verb phrases. Therefore, the present study was conducted in order to investigate if the practice of walking phrase activity involving verb phrases could be proposed as another attractive learning technique for young English language learners.

Even though many teachers might not place heavy emphasis on the teaching of phrases, it must not be ignored, particularly among the low proficiency students who have very limited exposure towards English usage. Students who do not have adequate knowledge of phrase usage will not be able to function or use the language properly. They might also find learning English burdening as they are not able to comprehend what is being taught nor express themselves using the targeted language. As a result, they tend to lose interest in learning the language. To overcome this, teachers’ role in encouraging students to learn and be interested in the language is very crucial. Nevertheless, teaching low proficiency students can be challenging because the majority of these students are not really interested in learning English language. Thus, teachers need to find suitable or new methods to encourage the learners’ language learning and for this reason, this study was conducted in order to identify if the utilization of “Walking Phrases” can attract the young learners with low English proficiency to learn this language.

1.2 Objective of the Study

The present study was performed for the purpose of mainly determining if walking phrases managed to engage the young learners of Sekolah Kebangsaan Seri Wangsa in reading English phrases and writing English sentences. In short, the present study intended to achieve the following objective:

- 1) To investigate the perception of young learners towards the use of “Walking Phrase” as an effective strategy in engaging them in English phrase reading and sentence writing.

1.3 Research Question of the Study



The research intended to seek answer to the following question posed:

- 1) What is the perception of young learners towards the use of “Walking Phrase” as an effective strategy in engaging them in English phrase reading and sentence writing?

1.4 Significance of the Study

The present study anticipates itself being a source of insights about teaching and learning English phrases especially through the activity of “Walking Phrase.” Besides, by conducting this research, the data obtained can be another evidence and justification for deciding if “Walking Phrase” is an effective strategy or not in engaging students in English phrase reading and sentence writing.

The present study hopes to be of an important source of extended knowledge about vocabulary learning, particularly with regard to read and to write through phrase card. Specifically, the findings about a phrase card named, ‘Walking Phrase’ can perhaps contribute to more insights about the effectiveness of using phrase card as compared to other techniques in learning English vocabulary.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Definition of “Phrase” and its Categories

According to Schmitt (2000), the three interchangeable terms, “lexeme”, “lexical unit” and “lexical item” refer to “an item that functions as a single meaning unit, regardless of the number of words it contains” (p. 2). According to Li, Lu, Xiong and Long (2018), phrases can be classified into compositional and non-compositional where for compositional phrases (e.g: “traffic light” and “swimming”), their meanings are derived from the meanings of their component words, while for non-compositional words (e.g: multi-word expressions such as “coach potato” and “kick the bucket”), their meanings are not generated directly from the meanings of their component words. Li, Lu, Xiong and Long (2018) refer to component words as “the internal context of a phrase.” (p. 107). According to Palmer (2014), phrases are made up of words, while sentences are made up of phrases.

2.2 English Phrase Learning

Schmitt (2008) argues that studies have revealed that any form of activity which intensifies a student’s engagement with a lexical item is able to facilitate its learning. The study conducted by Li and Schmitt (2009) indicated that language learners have the tendency to rely too excessively on an insufficient repertoire of phrases, and this implies that pedagogical approaches need to be established in order to help learners to develop more diverse phrasal lexicons. With respect to semantic aspect of learning and recalling phrases, according to Jacobs, Dell, Benjamin and Bannard (2016), phrases can be different in terms of the extent to which their meaning can be predictable from their parts like the phrase, “red house” being much more predictable than the meaning of the phrase, “red herring.” In terms of frequency of exposure to phrases in learning this type of strings of words, a study conducted by Bannard



and Matthews (2008) discovered that the young learners' experience particular phrases due to their familiarity managed to make fewer mistakes when asked to repeat them and also were quicker in doing this task. These researchers give the examples of these noun phrases, "a drink of milk" and "a drink of tea" where the former is more common than the latter as examined in a corpus of child-directed speech.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a descriptive, quantitative research design through the implementation of a questionnaire survey on the perception of young learners towards "Walking Phrase" activity, specifically in terms of how this activity could help them being engaged in English phrase reading and sentence writing.

3.2 Participants/Respondents

The respondents of this study were 26 young English learners of Sekolah Kebangsaan Seri Wangsa, Sungai Petani, Kedah. The respondents were from Year 6 class and there were 13 boys and 13 girls. Besides, they were of different levels of proficiency in English as proven by their achievements in English tests that has been conducted until the time of the execution of the present study.

3.3 Instrument

3.3.1 "Walking Phrase"

"Walking Phrase" is an English vocabulary game that involves short phrases. 'Walking Phrase' is intended to help students to read English words easier by learning it through a card which consists of short English phrases for students to read and use the phrase in writing complete sentence. Therefore, 'Walking Phrase' is expected to be a learning tool that is able to make learners understand English vocabulary more effectively.

Table 1: Phrases Involved in "Walking Phrase" Activity

NO	PHRASE	NO	PHRASE
1	take part in	14	stir the mixture
2	fry some fish	15	invite their friends
3	pitch the tent	16	wrap the parcel
4	tidy up the room	17	write a letter
5	collect the rubbish	18	pull the curtain
6	clear up the place	19	cycle to school
7	pack the luggage	20	send a message



8	hang the clothes	21	carry the books
9	gather in the hall	22	break the eggs
10	prepare some food	23	examine the patient
11	listen to the radio	24	feed the cat
12	watch television	25	organise a family day
13	pour a little water	26	clean the drain

3.3.2 Questionnaire

A questionnaire of 15 items was given to each respondent regarding their perception towards their experience in doing “Walking Phrase” activity in terms of how effective they thought the activity was in engaging them in reading English phrases and writing English sentences. The items were self-reporting statements written using the simplest language possible for young respondents to answer. The choices for response options included in the questionnaire were dichotomous, “yes” and “no” to suit the understanding and capability of the young respondents in answering a questionnaire.

3.4 Data Collection

3.4.1 “Walking Phrase” Activity Execution

Each of the students wore a phrase card. Then they read and memorised the short phrase written on the card. The students wrote the phrase in the writing booklet and also wrote complete sentence with the phrase. The students wore the phrase card all the time they were in school and when they were walking around the school area, other students would be able to see the phrase cards. The pictures of the cards used in the “Walking Phrase” activity and the students involved in this type of learning are shown below:



“Walking Phrase” cards



“Walking Phrase” cards



Student holding a
“Walking Phrase” card



Students holding cards of “Walking Phrase”



Students writing sentences
in their workbooks



Students reading each other's card



The “Walking Phrase” workbook



3.4.2 Questionnaire Survey

The data was collected from the questionnaires administered to the 26 respondents after a certain period of conducting “Walking Phrase” activity. The questionnaires were administered only once and there was no re-administration of the questionnaires for answering consistency testing.

3.5 Data Analysis

The data obtained from the questionnaires submitted by the respondents was analyzed without using any software and the numerical data such as frequencies and percentages were calculated manually. The data was analysed in terms of frequencies and percentages only for the items asked in the questionnaire.

4.0 FINDINGS AND ANALYSES

The data obtained from the questionnaires submitted by the respondents was analysed statistically using a manual, conventional method.

4.1 Research Question 1: What is the perception of young learners towards the use of “Walking Phrase” as an effective strategy in engaging them in English phrase reading and sentence writing?

Table 2: Frequencies and Percentages of the Items in the Questionnaire

No.	Item	Yes		No	
		<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
1	I enjoyed wearing a “Walking Phrase” with my friends.	26	100	-	-
2	My friends helped me read phrases when I used “Walking Phrases” with them.	24	92	2	8
3	My friends helped me write sentences when I used “Walking Phrases” with them.	24	92	2	8
4	I would like to do “Walking Phrase” activity again.	23	88	3	12
5	“Walking Phrase” made it easy for me to write sentences.	25	96	1	4
6	Instructions on “Walking Phrase” cards are easy to understand.	21	80	5	24
7	I was happy to be able to write correct sentences during the “Walking Phrase” activity.	25	96	1	4
8	The phrases on “Walking Phrases” were easy to understand.	19	72	7	28
9	Every “Walking Phrase” contains a phrase that is often used in daily life.	25	96	1	4



10	The phrase on a “Walking Phrase” can add to my English vocabulary to help my English phrase reading.	23	88	3	12
11	I like to read the phrases displayed on the “Walking Phrases.”	24	92	2	8
12	I can remember the phrases better after I did the “Walking Phrase” activity with my friends.	25	96	1	4
13	I would like to have a set of “Walking Phrases” at my own house.	18	68	8	32
14	The phrases on “Walking Phrases” help me write complete sentences.	22	84	4	16
15	The phrases on “Walking Phrases” are simple phrases.	24	92	2	8
16	The phrases on “Walking Phrases” are important for me to learn for English phrase reading.	25	96	1	4

A questionnaire which comprised sixteen questions with dichotomous “Yes”/“No” response options was administered to each of the 26 participants who were Year 6 students of the primary school in order to investigate their perception towards experiencing the “Walking Phrase” activity.

To answer Research Question 1, the data obtained was analysed statistically. The analysis of the data can be divided into three sub-topics, i) the perceptions of the respondents towards the walking phrases as a learning tool (item 1, 4, 6, 8, 9, 12, 13 and 15), ii) the responses of the respondents towards using the walking phrases in reading phrases (item 2, 10, 11 and 16), and iii) the reaction of the respondents towards using the walking phrases in writing sentences in English (item 3, 5, 7, and 14).

As for the first division of data analysis, it was discovered that all of the respondents, 26 individuals (100%) admitted that they enjoyed wearing a “Walking Phrase” with their classmates (item 1). Two items received the same number of responses, 25 (96%) which were item 9 and 12 as the respondents agreed with the statements of the two questionnaire item 9 (“Every “Walking Phrase” contains a phrase that is often used in daily life” and item 12 (“I can remember the phrases better after I did the “Walking Phrase” activity with my friends”). As for item 8 and 13, these two items were among the items that received the least number of respondents who assigned “yes” to the statement as their answer but still they made up the majority responses. Clearly, of all the 16 items, these two item received the biggest numbers of respondents who did not think the phrases on “Walking Phrases” were easy to understand (item 8) and that they would like to have a set of “Walking Phrases” at their own houses.



As for the second division of data analysis, item 2, 10, 11 and 16 were of 24%, 23%, 24% and 25% respectively for the response selection, “yes”. This indicates that the respondents in majority revealed having their friends helping them read the phrases when they used the “Walking Phrases” together (item 2), admitting that the phrases on the “Walking Phrases” could improve their English vocabulary to facilitate them in English phrase reading (item 10), favouring reading the phrases displayed on the “Walking Phrases” (item 11) and perceiving the phrases on “Walking Phrases” were significant for them to learn for their English phrase reading.

With respect to the third division of the data analysis, it was discovered that again the majority of the respondent agreed with statements 3, 5, 7, and 14 as they answered “yes” to these items with the percentages of 24%, 25%, 25% and 22% respectively. Apparently, the learners believed that their friends at school helped them writing sentences when they used the “Walking Phrases” together (item 3) and the “Walking Phrase” activity made it easy for them to write sentences (item 5). Besides, the respondents mostly were also happy to be able to write correct sentences during the “Walking Phrase” activity (item 7) and the phrases on the “Walking Phrase” cards had helped them write complete sentences (item 14).

To summarize, the majority of the students viewed the “Walking Phrase” activity as an effective strategy in engaging them in reading phrases and writing sentences of English. Thus, it is obvious that the “Walking Phrase” activity is an activity that should be conducted in English language classes. Perhaps, the activity can generate collaboration among the students that make them enjoy doing it as they can be more communicative with each other.

5.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The students enjoyed the activities because learning probably because it was conducted in an enjoyable and incidental manner. The ability to retain the phrase is essential especially for the learners to be able to utilise them for later use in reading, speaking and writing sentences.

The students wore the phrase cards all the time they were in school and thus, when they were walking around the school area, the other students would be able to see the phrase cards too and indirectly, these students would be interested to look and read what was written on the cards. Thus, it can be presumed that the execution of this study would have also impacted the students other than the ones involved in the study as they too could also learn the phrases. In conclusion, “Walking Phrase” can be considered an effective activity to engage students in reading English phrases and writing English sentences as proven by the responses given by the students regarding this activity.

The present study hopes to be of an important source of extended knowledge about vocabulary learning, particularly with regard to reading and to writing through phrase cards. Specifically, the findings about a phrase card activity named, “Walking Phrase” can perhaps contribute to more insights about the effectiveness of using phrase cards as compared to other techniques in learning English vocabulary.



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