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Using the PAH in Teaching Reading
to Sustain the Quality of EFL Students' Life

Ruofei Du[1*], Gurnam Kaur Sidhu[2], Arieff Shamida[2]

[1] Faculty of Primary Education, School of Education, Linyi University, China
[2] Faculty of Education, Languages, Psychology & Music, SEGi University, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia

duruofei@lyu.edu.cn, gurnamgurdial@segi.edu.my, arieffsamsulkamil@segi.edu.my

Tel: +8615092386096, +603 6145 2777 (Ext 3218), +603 6145 2777 (Ext 2602)

Abstract
Sustaining the quality of student life in any learning environment should be the priority of all educators. This situation becomes even more challenging when international EFL postgraduate students are expected to function in a learning environment where English is the medium of instruction. This study aimed to enhance their reading skills by implementing a learner-centred instructional framework referred to as the PAH (Pedagogy-Andragogy-Heutagogy) Continuum. This reading programme witnessed a significant increase in students' reading comprehension skills. Students claimed to be more confident and experienced joy and learner satisfaction through a nurturing learning environment that encouraged peeragogy and cybergogy.

Keywords: reading skills; postgraduate students; EFL; PAH Continuum

1.0 Introduction
Literacy is often the cornerstone of learning, from primary to tertiary to postgraduate. At the postgraduate (PG) level, both primary and critical reading becomes even more critical when EFL students are required to think and write in English. Therefore, it is vital for PG supervisors to provide a nurturing and quality learning environment that will help them develop their reading skills which can enhance their language proficiency.

In today's learning environment, a PG student has to sieve through volumes of information to become a competent scholar. They must be equipped with strategies to search and gather relevant information, comprehend texts from multiple resources, and integrate various information to build up representations of connected sources.

However, studies have shown that EFL (English as a foreign language) learners often face obstacles when applying various reading strategies (Shehata, 2019), and a majority of ESL postgraduate students in Malaysia fail to graduate on time because of the limited critical reading skills (Sidhu et al., 2016). Besides that, little attention is given to postgraduate students' limited reading skills to help them meet the needs of postgraduate study, especially when they are EFL Chinese students studying overseas in a country where English is the

medium of instruction. Thus, there is a gap in the current literature. There is scant evidence of research studies that have addressed reading skills concerning EFL learners studying overseas for a postgraduate degree.

This scenario calls for attention to address the quality of life of EFL PG students with limited English language reading skills. In higher education, the QSL (quality of student life) has received much attention over the decades and has matured and grown. In recent years, increasing attention has been given to the process of research training for doctoral-level EFL students.

Therefore, this study will examine an alternative instructional treatment program to enhance the learning environment' quality alongside developing their reading skills. The program implemented was based on the PAH (Pedagogy-Andragogy-Heutagogy) Continuum teaching philosophy. The framework embodied both formal and informal learning that encouraged peeragogy and cybergogy.

2.0 Literature Review
The following section will provide a brief overview of the literature review addressing the main aspects of this study.

2.1 Academic Reading Skills
Researchers have conceptualised reading comprehension as the "overall goal in reading". More specifically, reading skills can be understood as the capacity to comprehend and employ the text for learning and is an elementary and learned skill. In the meantime, 21st-century postgraduate learners need to master all the necessary skills to survive their academic studies. Academic skills involve reading, oral and written communication, critical thinking, 21st-century information literacy, independent and reflective learning, and personal and analytical skills. In the educational context, these are all crucial and transferable skills required for students at the tertiary level to be efficient learners, especially for postgraduate learners who need to cope with their tasks and complete their studies successfully within the given time. Students pursuing a master's or PhD degree are required to read a vast amount of literature; hence, possessing effective academic reading skills is of great significance. However, studies have shown that postgraduate learners face academic difficulties and problems (Lacasse et al., 2019). Their academic skills, such as reading and writing, are often considered poor and below their supervisor's expectations (Shehata, 2019; Sidhu et al., 2016). Thus, the findings highlight the significance of research in this field of study that postgraduate students have minimal reading skills. Shamida et al. (2021) found that postgraduate students' perceptions are much higher than their actual performance in academic reading skills, which has rarely been studied in ESL/EFL reading. Hence, scholars need to explore further and validate this research finding.

Moreover, although various techniques can be employed to improve learners' reading skills, with the advent of technology, traditional classrooms need to be transformed and replaced by more sophisticated and innovative approaches.

In this study, an innovative instructional framework referred to as PAH-Continuum was employed to develop postgraduate students' reading skills. Based on this framework, this study was guided by the following three research questions:
    (1) What are postgraduate students' actual performance of their basic reading skills?
    (2) What are the effects of the PAH Continuum framework as an instructional model to improve postgraduate students' basic reading skills?
    (3) What are postgraduate students' perceptions of the implementation of the PAH Continuum?

2.2 The PAH Continuum
Nowadays, many educators still apply surface approaches and reading methodologies that are teacher-centred and of low levels in Bloom's Taxonomy, such as the bottom-up, top-down and the interactive processing models. On the contrary, the PAH- Continuum framework encourages critical thinking and involves a gradual transition based on theories of pedagogy, andragogy and heutagogy Continuum. It is based on a few theories, such as behaviourism, cognitivism, Krashen's Five Hypotheses, humanism, constructivism and connectivism.
Also, similar to the CSR technique and Jigsaw techniques, which are beneficial for collaborative and peer learning in groups, the PAH Continuum learning framework emphasizes the learning process. At its initial stage, the teacher is not a facilitator but someone who delivers the confidence to understand the subject and make learners study collaboratively. The ultimate goal is to ignite learners to express their preferences because when they are allowed to design their learning activities, they can be deeply involved with the learning process.

Pedagogy- At this stage, it is rather teacher-dominated. Here instruction of basic knowledge of reading skills and learners somewhat depends on instructors for learning to happen. The practitioners should ensure that learners are immersed in learning the subject. This teaching and learning theory provides explicit and direct instruction as it is the foundation for lifelong learners.

Andragogy- More participation and active thinking towards planning students' learning are encouraged at this stage. Adult learners become less dependent and more self-directed. The practitioners' roles become facilitators and someone who provides the resources. Flexibility is its most important characteristic.

Heutagogy- In this theory of self-determined learning, double-loop learning takes place, which involves reflecting moods and emotions. It boosts learners' self-efficacy by helping them better comprehend and apply the skills to improve their language proficiency and empowers them to take charge of their learning (Gkonou & Oxford, 2019).

3.0 Methodology
This study employed a quasi-experimental research design with a mixed-methods approach. The study was conducted at a faculty of education in a private university in Selangor, Malaysia. The medium of instruction at this university is English. The study involved a group

of 50 first-semester postgraduate students, mainly from China, who were undertaking a postgraduate degree, either a Master of Education or a PhD (Education) by research mode.

Data were collected via a three-pronged approach involving pre and post-reading comprehension tests, interviews and reflective journals. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS for descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data involved thematic analysis. Given below in Figure 1 is a visual representation of the quasi-experimental study.
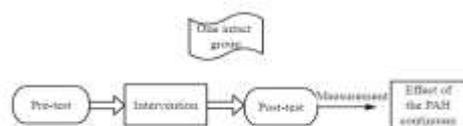

Figure 1: Visual model for the quasi-experimental study

This quasi-experimental study implemented the six-month PAH continuum instructional framework to enhance PG students' basic reading skills. The ADDIE model was employed to direct the study. ADDIE is a design model used by many professional instructional designers for technology-based teaching, which has been almost a standard for professionally developed, high-quality distance education programs.

3.1 The Implementation of the Instruction Design
The ADDIE model involves the following five stages: analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation.

So, the first step was to analyse the students' basic reading skills via a reading comprehension test. After analysing students' learning needs, the researchers designed the six-month instructional PAH-Continuum framework to develop the respondents' basic reading skills. This step was followed by developing relevant teaching and learning materials. Experienced English language instructors from the private university conducted the six-month PAH-Continuum training programme in collaboration with the researchers.

Table 1: Implementation of the PAH Continuum instructional framework

Stage		PAH Alignment
1st	-Blended (F2F seminars and online resources, two offline and one online reading task) - One reflective journal entry	Pedagogy
2nd	- Blended (two full-day intensive F2F seminars and independent work online, one offline and two online tasks) -One reflective journal entry	Andragogy
3rd	-Self-determined learning (One F2F seminar only, no online resources provided) -Autonomous learning tasks (Scopus indexed journals' reading and two self-chosen reading tasks) -One reflective journal entry	Heutagogy

Table 1 displays the outline of the implementation of the three stages of the PAH Continuum. During the implementation, the gradual transition of learners was emphasised from full dependence at Stage 1 (Pedagogy) to Stage 2 (andragogy) and guided to full independence at Stage 3 (Heutagogy).

Stage One was conducted over five weeks. The first week was put aside for orientation to the programme, and each week comprised a one-day face-to-face training seminar for 8 hours. So, under Stage 1 (Pedagogical Stage), students received training for four full-day seminars totalling 32 hours. The training also included online learning on their own, as all learners were encouraged to work collaboratively to complete one online task and two in-class (offline) reading tasks.

The same amount of time (32 hours) was also allocated for training during Stages 2 and 3. At Stage 3, learners were encouraged to learn at their own pace using web-based sources and reflect on their learning via reflective journaling.

The reading skills covered over the six-month training programme were namely skimming and scanning, identifying main ideas and supporting details, inferencing, using contextual clues and basic referencing.

4.0 Findings
Given below is a brief discussion of the main findings of the study.

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4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents
As mentioned above, the study involved a group of mainly international first-year postgraduate (PG, hereafter) students from China studying at a private university in Malaysia. Of the 50 participants, 40% were males, while the remaining were females (60). Participants' age ranged from 32 years to 35 years old. 35. Most of them were lecturers and working adults. A majority (64%) of them are single and were pursuing a PhD degree in education.

4.2 Respondents' Actual Reading Skills Performance
The first research question in this study aimed to examine respondents' basic reading performance in the following skills: skimming and scanning, identifying main ideas and supporting details, inferencing, using contextual clues and basic referencing. Therefore, students were required to sit for a reading comprehension test based on the Malaysian University English Test (MUET). The test comprised four reading comprehension passages and a total of 32 multiple-choice questions. The issue of validity and reliability did not arise as it is a national reading test prepared by the Malaysian Examination Council and has undergone stringent validity and reliability procedures. Given below in Table 2 are the results of the test.

Table 2: Postgraduate Students' Actual Performance in Basic Reading Skills (Pretest)

	Mean	SD
Skimming and scanning skills	3.46	.721
Identifying main ideas & supporting details skills	3.28	.754
Inferencing skills	3.02	.673
Contextual clues and basic referencing skills	3.05	.874
Overall	3.20	.756

Scale: 1=Weak, 2= Limited, 3=Fairly, 4= Good, 5= Excellent

As shown in Table 2, the mean rating of the overall actual performance of participants' basic reading skills is 3.20 (SD=0.756), indicating an adequate performance. The results also indicated better performance for skimming and scanning (M=3.46, SD=0.721) and identifying main ideas and supporting details (M=3.28, SD=0.754). Nonetheless, limited performance was shown in inferencing (M=3.02, SD=0.673), using contextual clues, and basic referencing (M=3.05, SD=0.874).

This fair performance revealed that students needed help in basic reading skills to succeed in their postgraduate study at the said university, where the medium of instruction is English.

Students also admitted this fair performance during the interview sessions and in their reflective journal entries. In this study, interviews were conducted via four focus groups (Group A to D), and in each group, there were about 4 to 5 respondents (referred to as Respondents 1 to 5).

4.3 Effect of PAH-Continuum on Respondents' Reading Skills
Research Question two in this study investigated the effects of the PAH Continuum framework in enhancing postgraduate students' basic reading skills. The result was obtained from the post-reading test. In this study, the same reading comprehension was employed for both the pre and post-tests. The results are displayed in Table 3 below.

From the results shown above, respondents' overall basic reading skills performance improved in all the reading skills. They showed improvement in their ability to identify main ideas and supporting details, skimming and scanning. Their ability in inferencing, using contextual clues and basic referencing showed improvement but were still at a fair performance level.

Table 3: Paired Samples T-test on Basic Reading Skills for Pretest and Post-Tests

	Post-Test	Pre-Test	Mean difference	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Skimming and scanning	4.52	3.46	1.06	5.61	49	.000
Identifying main ideas & supporting details	4.35	3.28	1.07	5.74	49	.000
Inferencing	3.81	3.02	.79	3.51	49	.000
Using contextual clues and basic referencing	3.74	3.05	.69	2.85	49	.000
Overall skills	4.11	3.20	.91	4.73	49	.000

Scale: 1=Weak, 2= Limited, 3=Fairly, 4= Good, 5= Excellent

Nonetheless, the paired t-test conducted revealed an overall significant improvement in their reading skills, and a significant improvement was also recorded for all the reading skills investigated in this study. Furthermore, either for the overall score of basic reading skills or for each item, their p-value is 0.000, less than 0.01, which indicated a significant difference between their actual reading performance after the implementation of the six-month PAH-Continuum Training Programme.

4.4 Respondents' Perceptions of the PAH-Continuum Training Programme

Research Question Three in this study examined respondents' perceptions of the implementation of the PAH Continuum. Information for this question was obtained from the four focus group interviews and students' reflective journals.

Overall, both data sources revealed that respondents viewed the implementation of the PAH Continuum instructional framework with positiveness and highlighted the positive aspects, such as the role of facilitators and collaborative learning. Given below are some excerpts that articulate these thoughts.

'Lecturers were very nice to answer our questions, and their lectures were very vivid with many examples.' (R2)

'It was really a very nice learning journey because we share idea with our friends, we share out experiences.' (R3)

Nevertheless, most importantly, it can be clearly seen in their comments that they favoured the gradual release of teachers' responsibilities.

'At the session, I can reflect a little bit on myself, on the skill I'm good at, on the limitation that have, the strength that I have, and it turn me into an independent learner.' (R3)

From their responses, it can be seen that they have gained the basic reading skills required for a postgraduate student and research skills to some extent. The PAH Continuum also benefited them in studying in an informal learning environment with classmates.

'It was difficult for me to understand the main ideas of academic papers. After this course, I improved and learned effective reading skills.' (C4)

The above excerpts show that the respondents viewed this programme favourably. More importantly, the programme significantly enhanced their reading skills and gave them the confidence to move forward and complete their postgraduate study.

5.0 Discussion

This study aimed to enhance postgraduate students' reading skills performance based on a quasi-experimental design which saw the implementation of a six-month PAH Continuum instructional framework. The first research question revealed that students did not perform well on basic reading skills before the intervention. The levels of all the investigated skills were between the range of fair to good, which is insufficient to complete an academic dissertation at their stage. That likewise recommends that the reading skills be investigated in more detail and further validate the findings of Shamida et al. (2021)'s study.

The findings for the second research question revealed significant improvement in all reading skills, which displayed the effectiveness of the framework. There were significant improvements in all four reading skills, but a fair improvement was seen in students' ability to make inferences, use contextual clues and basic referencing. These findings displayed how a programme with a structured framework like the PAH continuum would positively impact students' literacy skills and further improve the quality of the learning process for the PG students.

For the third research question, the researcher integrated data from both the interviews and reflective journals. Respondents highlighted the program's strengths lay in its instructional design as it gradually helped them learn autonomously and become more efficient in academic reading, digital literacy and reflective thinking. Besides, the reflection motivates them to be more engaged in learning. In addition, participants also expressed satisfaction with the procedure of learning in this program, which helped them develop learners who are capable of acquiring and building upon their knowledge through personal learning environments.

Moreover, during the interviews, participants articulated that after gaining a higher level of basic reading skills, they found it easier to grasp the main idea and find the relevant resources quickly. Participants were also told the rationale of the PAH Continuum teaching framework and found that the teaching procedure was logical. Meanwhile, respondents consider trainers well-planned and very helpful. These are probably factors that motivated them to take more responsibility for their learning.

Compared with existing studies, this study is different in the following aspects. Firstly, it is a quasi-experiment study that tests learners' basic reading skills, unrelated to their academic performance, as other researchers did. Also, this study triangulated the quantitative findings with qualitative data analysis, which made the results more credible. Secondly, the study provides an alternative teaching framework that is rarely explored. The strategies for applying it included employing both F2F and distance collaborative learning, desynchrony learning by assigning group work online and offline, etc. In the future, it can be further developed as a tool for designing and improving other skills. This can be viewed as the innovative point of this study to enhance the quality of the learning environment for PG students by using it.

6.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

In a nutshell, the findings indicated that practitioners at the tertiary level need to learn and apply innovative approaches to help transform EFL/ESL postgraduate learners from novice to proficient readers in academic reading competencies. It caters to the needs of both practitioners and students since postgraduate students are in dire need of being competent in basic reading skills because it is of great significance for their academic lives. They need to be equipped with it to accurately and skillfully read a vast amount of literature so that they can critically think about their own research topics.

Finally, there is no denying that this study is not without some limitations. Firstly, due to the small sample size of 50 students, the findings may not be applicable to the whole population of postgraduate studies. Nonetheless, the study has shed light on PAH Continuum as a viable structured framework to enhance the quality of the PG learning environment in improving the reading skills of EFL students.

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This paper has put forward an effective instructional framework based on the PAH-Continuum that may be expanded to developing other related skills for students in tertiary institutions to become capable lifelong learners who experience learner satisfaction along their learning journey.

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