

THE USE OF METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES IN STORYTELLING TO EXAMINE PRESCHOOL CHILDREN'S LISTENING COMPREHENSION SKILLS

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ABSTRACT

Listening comprehension is necessary for successful learning and communication in this modern digital age. Studies have shown that early exposure to listening activities can significantly impact the development of listening comprehension skills, especially in preschool children, as their cognitive and linguistic abilities rapidly develop. The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the use of metacognitive strategies in storytelling to examine preschool children's listening comprehension skills in preschool children in Kepong, Malaysia. Data was collected through the checklist and anecdotal observation to observe six children's engagement in 3 storytelling sessions. The study was done in 2 phases: Phase 1 involved data collection of the teacher's current teaching instructions and challenges faced during teaching and learning. Phase 2 involved designing appropriate metacognitive strategies to examine children's English listening comprehension skills. The study showed metacognitive strategies could help preschool children with listening comprehension skills.

KEYWORDS

Metacognitive Instructions, Storytelling, Listening Comprehension Skills, Preschool Children

1. INTRODUCTION

Stories have existed since cave drawings as far back as 30,000 years. Now storytelling has become an important component of education as it has many advantages as a teaching technique. Storytelling can motivate children (Kasami, 2021), assist children in remembering new words (Wood, 2016), encourage learning English (Isbelle, 2022), and have access to low-cost media to teach rich language experiences (Wright, 2008). Children can develop early literacy through reading and storytelling and simple games such as letter games, listening for sounds and words and looking for pictures, letters, and words in the environment (Lasim & Andy, 2017). Storytelling can also address literacy development by improving listening, oral language, reading comprehension, and writing. According to Abdul, Luqman and Zaini (2017), stories are useful materials teachers can use to develop listening comprehension and literacy in their first and second language. This reinforces Mello (2001) research on how storytelling could enhance fluency, vocabulary, writing, and recall literacy.

Lately, research has shown that children in Malaysia perform poorly in English language examinations due to their inability to comprehend the language (Hazita, 2016; Kaur, 2014). This was further confirmed in Ho's (2016) study on the relationship between speaking, reading, and writing skills and listening comprehension skills. Despite beginning to learn English at a young age, Ho's research revealed that many Malaysian children lack the listening and speaking abilities necessary for fluency. Storytelling is an effective method for listening activities recommended in the National Preschool Standard-Based Curriculum (NPSC). Although the NPSC learning standards clearly state that children should listen, respond, and talk about the story told, teachers only use the storybooks to read as a fun activity to create interest in the language without any specific task to enhance listening comprehension. Studies have shown the benefit of storytelling in improving children's attention span, comprehension and listening skills (Koroglu, 2020).

According to research, listening comprehension is a complex cognitive process that involves various cognitive and linguistic skills, such as attention, memory, inference, and knowledge of vocabulary and syntax

(Goh, 2010). Studies have shown that early exposure to listening activities can significantly impact the development of these skills, particularly in preschool-aged children (Hakuta & Ramos, 1986; Lems, 1999). Therefore, it is crucial to instil listening comprehension skills early, particularly in preschools, when children's cognitive and linguistic abilities rapidly develop. Furthermore, children exposed to listening activities and language-rich surroundings tend to perform better academically and grow cognitively (Hart & Risley, 1995; Ramani et al., 2017). If listening comprehension involves complex cognitive processes, could metacognitive strategies be a good strategy to help children improve their listening comprehension as it helps to make individuals aware of their thought processes?

Kao and Wang (2018), in their research on college-level EFL learners in Taiwan, found that students who were taught using metacognitive strategies showed significant improvement in their listening comprehension skills compared to those who did not. In addition, Cross (2010) explains metacognition can assist listeners in coordinating, regulating, and controlling their listening processes. Since preschool children are still too young to be aware of their thought processes, it would be timely to explore if metacognitive strategies used during storytelling can help children in their listening comprehension skills. Therefore, the research objective of this study is to examine preschool children's listening comprehension skills when metacognitive strategies are used during storytelling.

2. METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES AND LISTENING COMPREHENSION SKILLS

Recent years have seen a rise in interest in the study of metacognition as a topic of particular significance in educational research due to its capacity to provide students with the vocabulary and abilities to monitor, manage, and hopefully improve children's thinking processes (Vandergrift, 2019). However, much of this research was for older children, and not many involved preschool children. However, de Boer et al. (2018) say metacognitive knowledge and skills emerge early. Still, it takes time, explicit teacher teaching, scaffolding, modelling, and plenty of practice for students to become proficient metacognitive adults. There was also much evidence supported by various meta-analyses showing a strong relationship between metacognitive strategies and children's achievements (de Boer et al., 2018).

With this in mind, research has shown that experienced listeners use twice as many metacognitive strategies as less-skilled listeners (Vandergrift 2003). Their strategies are more towards comprehension monitoring, a combination of questioning and world knowledge, and logical possibilities, unlike less-skilled listeners who tend to use more mental translation. This is not surprising if we revert to Imhof's (2010) definition of listening, which states that listening is an intentional action that requires self-regulation. This would clearly explain why metacognitive strategy improves listening skills.

Hence, preschool teachers must make children aware of what they are listening to. Teachers that use metacognitive strategies can explain to students why they are learning a concept, how it relates to other concepts, what they are expected to accomplish, how to do it, and what success looks like. This strategy is doable for preschool children. They should also be given the time and space to clarify their comprehension, ask questions, and get precise, useful feedback on various performance-related areas. These kinds of strategies can be used in storytelling sessions to examine preschool children listening comprehension skills.

In this study, the researcher used metacognitive strategies such as connecting to children's schemata (prior knowledge), explaining the storytelling's objective, predicting and using questioning techniques and scaffolding. These strategies were used during pre and post-storytelling sessions to examine preschool children's listening comprehension skills.

3. LISTENING COMPREHENSION PROCESSES

Listening comprehension is a complex cognitive process that involves the interaction between the speaker's message, the listener's background knowledge, and the listener's attention and memory processes. It involves many processes that many second-language learners with low-level languages, such as preschool children, find difficult. However, native and proficient second-language speakers have no problem understanding complex speech comprehension. According to Pourhosein and Ahmadi (2011), despite second-language learners'

problems, they can control their learning and listen actively. He further explains this can be done by relying on listening strategies to overcome incomprehension.

Most listening combines top-down and bottom-up processes to increase listening comprehension, called interactive processing. Applying prior knowledge, contextual information, and linguistic information makes comprehension and interpretation easy. If the content is familiar to the listener or the listener is listening to topics stored in long-term memory, then the long-term memory can assist the listener in understanding. Prior knowledge can be used to predict and eventually understand the input (Vandegrift, 2019). However, if the content is unfamiliar to the listener, he depends solely on his linguistic ability, especially lexical and syntactic knowledge, to understand information (Pourhosein & Ahmadi, 2011). Preschool children, especially in Malaysia's interior and rural areas, are rarely exposed to English aural/oral language in their lives. These children will have difficulty recognising word segmentation and word and grammar form. If teachers could trigger children's prior experience, this would assist them in their listening comprehension skills. With this in mind, metacognition strategies would help hasten the bottom-up and top-down processes. According to Vandergrift (2019), self-regulation strategies become procedural knowledge when listeners are aware of their metacognition. One way to improve children's metacognition abilities is to expose children to listening sequences in the first two years of language learning (Vandergrift, 1999).

This research split the storytelling session into three parts pre, while and post-listening. Pre-listening is a phase for the preparatory activity to make the content explicit and explain objective and foreground roles, procedures, and listening goals. This activity aims to make children retrieve their prior knowledge and make the listener, speaker and thinking on a common level, making listening comprehension easier (Iliyas, 2017). While listening, the teachers told the story with the help of compensatory mechanisms such as pictures to help children compensate for their lack of knowledge of the target language. Post-listening is a follow-up to pre-listening meant to check comprehension and evaluate listening skills and strategies (Saha & Talukdar, 2000).

This study would be beneficial as previous research has always used metacognitive strategies with older children or adults (Cao & Lin, 2020; Du Toit & Kotze, 2009; Gaylo & Dales, 2017).

4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 1 explains the conceptual framework of the research. In the storytelling, the researcher used four metacognitive strategies: connecting the concept of the story to the schemata (children's prior knowledge), explaining the objective of the storytelling, using questioning techniques and scaffolding (giving options, moment-to-moment feedback and chunking information). This would help the children in their listening comprehension skills. The children's listening comprehension was assessed using the following activities: retelling the story, arranging the story's sequence using pictures, completing oral questions with options given (read aloud from the worksheet), and justifying the answers given and justifying the given answer.

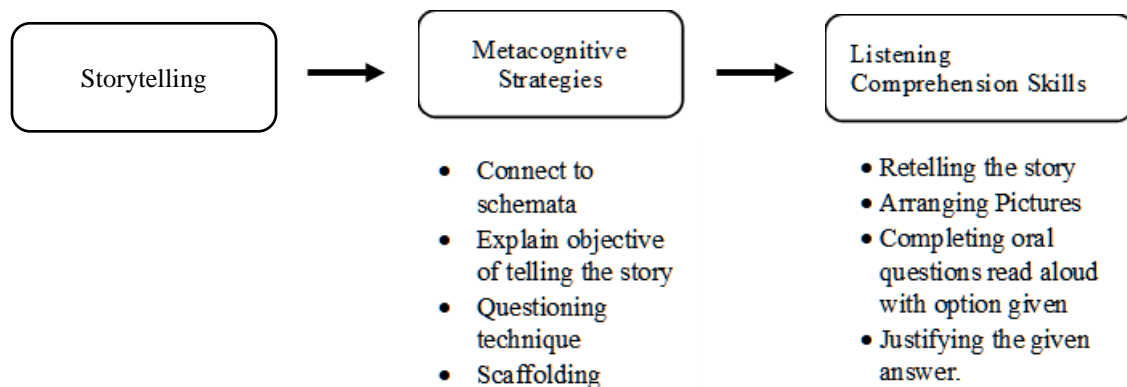


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

5. METHODOLOGY

This research employed a qualitative research approach and a case study as its research design. This approach was chosen to help the researcher comprehend what was practiced in the natural setting. Checklists and anecdotal reports were the primary methods for collecting data on children's listening comprehension skills. The research was done in 2 phases to allow the researcher to understand better what is being practiced in the natural setting. In the first phase, it was essential to understand private preschool teachers' current teaching strategies and the difficulties faced when developing children's listening comprehension skills. The teachers were interviewed, and the data were transcribed verbatim. The transcription was then coded, and common themes were extracted. This stage was crucial because it provided insights into practitioners' perspectives on the issues and strategies used during storytelling. The practitioner's perspectives were essential for developing acceptable and helpful strategies to improve the children's listening comprehension skills during storytelling. The researcher created three lesson plans in the second phase based on the information gathered in phase one, the National Preschool Standard-Based Curriculum (NPSC), listening and learning theories. Preschoolers need a systematic approach to improve their listening comprehension skills. The study employed the Mastery Learning Model, Metacognitive strategies, and cognitive Constructivist theory as a framework to create the teaching strategies needed in the three lesson plans. Three subject-matter experts reviewed the teaching strategies used in the three lesson plans. Each lesson's duration was 45 minutes, as preschool lessons were generally between 30 to 45 minutes in Malaysian preschools. Before implementing the lesson, the teachers underwent 3 hours of briefing. A dry run was done to foresee potential problems during the lessons. The lessons were recorded using two cameras placed at different classroom corners. The decision to use three lessons was based on previous research done by Santos (2018) to study children listening comprehension skills. Three storybooks chosen for this research were based on the complexity and familiarity of the books to the children, as the respondents were Chinese-speaking children who lacked the vocabulary and were more familiar with Asian culture.

Table 1. List of Storybooks

Lesson	Title of Storybooks	Author
1	1. The Blue Balloon	Mick Inpen (2019)
2	2. The Ugly Duckling	Hans Christian Anderson (2019)
3	3. My Monster and Me	Nadiya Hussain (2019)

Each storytelling was divided into three parts: pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening. Metacognitive strategies were used in all three stages. In the pre-listening stage, the teacher discusses the book cover to help children understand the concept of the story and link it to their prior knowledge, build interest in the story, explain difficult words found in the story and inform the children of the objective of listening to the story. This is especially important for inexperienced listeners such as preschool children. The while-listening stage was the storytelling session, where the teachers used facial and body expressions, proper speed in telling the story, and cues and pictures to help them understand the story. The teachers also gave facilitation and support through scaffolding throughout the lesson. Scaffolding is an essential component in metacognitive instruction as it helps children realise their thinking processes and give children the knowledge to complete their listening task and motivate them (James 2010). Post-activities were carried out to reinforce and help teachers assess children's understanding. Refer Table 2.

Table 2. Implementation of the lesson

Stages	Activities
Pre-listening Stage	<p>The teacher showed the cover of the book:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss and ask questions about the book cover and explain how it relates to children's experiences. • Using their prior knowledge, children make predictions about the plot and the characters in the story. • Go over the meanings and appropriate usage of challenging words. • The children were made aware of the purpose of listening to the story.
While-listening Stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teacher told the story using varying intonations and facial expressions. Point to pictures and tell the story with excitement.
Post-listening Stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teacher encouraged the children to retell the story. Children's thought processes were aided by repetition, scaffolding in the form of immediate feedback, dividing the narrative into smaller components, questioning, and encouragement. • Small-group post-listening exercises included rearranging picture cards, role-playing, drawing, and short questions in worksheets that were done orally as a group.

6. SAMPLE

A private registered preschool in Kepong, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, provided the data for this study. The researcher chose this preschool because it satisfied various study requirements. The National Preschool Standard-based Curriculum, which is the school's primary curriculum, qualifies this preschool as appropriate because it would provide the researcher with a thorough picture of the actual scenario. Since the researcher wanted to ensure the study was conducted in a realistic preschool setting, using the National Preschool Standard-Based Curriculum was vital. Due to the limited sample size, non-probability sampling was used in this case study. The study aimed to investigate a real-world phenomenon rather than draw any generalisations from the data (Yin, 2009).

In this study, six preschool children from two classes were selected purposively, four children were males (M), and two were females (F). The children were grouped into advanced, average and weak groups based on the children's English progress report. These children were in the same age group and were born in 2014 (6 years). Refer Table 3. Qualitative data were collected using anecdotal observation.

Table 3. Demography of Participants

Class	Preschool Children	Mastery of English	Gender	Language Spoken at Home
Class 1	Child 1	Good	M	English & Mandarin
	Child 2	Average	M	English & Mandarin
	Child 3	Weak	F	Mandarin
Class2	Child 4	Good	M	Mandarin
	Child 5	Average	F	Mandarin
	Child 6	Weak	M	Mandarin

7. METHODS OF DATA ANALYSIS

This research used the checklist to record the children's listening comprehension. In addition to the checklist, anecdotal data were gathered to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the children's listening comprehension abilities. Anecdotal data provides qualitative observations and descriptions of children's

behaviour, engagement and interactions during the storytelling sessions. Triangulating the data with anecdotal data allows a more holistic assessment of children's listening comprehension skills.

Two video recorders were placed at different corners during the teaching and learning session to record the teachers conducting their lessons and the engagement of the six children in the study. After each session, the researcher immediately watched the video and recorded the observation using the checklist and anecdotal records.

8. RESULT

The research used metacognitive strategies in storytelling to examine children listening comprehension skills. A checklist was developed to assess children's listening comprehension skills by observing their abilities in doing three main tasks: retelling the story, organising the sequence of the story using picture cards and answering oral questions with given options. The checklist had nine items based on the three main tasks, and the children's abilities were assessed on a scale from 1 to 5. (Refer Table 4).

Table 4. Scale used in checklist

1 Cannot Perform	2 Poor	3 Average	4 Good	5 Excellent
Unable to do the task even with assistance given	Able to do the task with many missing information or mistakes or with a lot of assistance	Able to do the task with some missing information or mistakes or with some assistance	Able to do the task with very little missing information or mistakes or able to do with little assistance	Able to do the task well without any assistance

Anecdotal observation was also done during the storytelling session. This was used to triangulate the data from the checklist to allow for a more holistic assessment. The researcher looked for reoccurring behaviours, interactions or responses that stood out and were aligned with the research objective. The observation was coded and grouped in the anecdotal record to facilitate looking for common patterns or themes. This would give a deeper understanding of how they may influence the children's listening comprehension abilities. The data were then compared and contrasted to the checklist data. The children were categorised into three levels of English competencies based on their class English performance. The result of this study will answer the research objective of examining preschool's children listening comprehension skills. The result will be presented based on the three levels the children were categorised in.

8.1 Advanced Children

Child 1 and Child 4 were categorised as Advanced children. Child 1 is fluent in English language and speaks both languages at home. Child 4, on the other hand, even though he is fluent in English, only speaks Mandarin at home. Referring to the checklist, Child 1 scored 5 for retelling for all three sessions. He had no problem retelling the story in all three lessons but Child 4 scored 3 in the first session and 4 in the other two. He had issues in the first session in retelling the main events and key details. He always missed out on relevant information. Both children had no problems with the story sequence during the retelling session. Based on the anecdotal report, child 4 always seem to be in haste when retelling the story. However, when Child 4 was questioned and asked to justify his answers, he could answer confidently. This showed Child 4 did comprehend the story but left out relevant information due to his haste. He, however, manages to give the gist of the story. Both children had difficulty inferring in the third story as it needed extra thinking, as the monster is a metaphor for the boy's emotions. Child 1 could not infer story 3 at the beginning; however, when the teacher broke the information into chunks and gave moment-to-moment feedback, he could provide an accurate answer confidently. The anecdotal report showed both children were very responsive and actively answering questions, especially in the third storytelling session. Both children were active and dominant during the post-listening

activities, especially during the card activity, where the children arranged the picture cards according to the sequence of the story.

8.2 Average Children

Child 2 and Child 5 were categorised as average children. Child 2 is timid, does not speak much English in school, and only speaks Mandarin at home. Child 5 is a fun boy who likes interacting with friends. He converses primarily in Mandarin in school and only Mandarin at home. Child 2 scored 1 in the first storytelling session and scored 4 in the second, and 3 in the third. In the first storytelling session, Child 2 could not retell the story but looked blankly at the teacher. Being a timid child and having to retell the story for the first time, the experience could be too overwhelming for her. She could not say anything even when the teacher tried to coax her. The second story was more manageable as she heard the story before. In the third session, Child 2 retelling abilities improved although it was a new story, she could retell part of the story with assistance. Child 2 showed improvement in her ability to tell the story's sequence and could answer specific questions. Child 2 showed noticeable improvement in listening comprehension. Child 5 scored 2 for retelling the first and third story and 3 for the second story. However, he got the sequence of the story correct. Child 5, although he listened attentively to the story, he did not seem to understand the story completely. Refer Table 5. Child 5, however, was confident in answering the questions as options were given to assist him in answering the questions. This showed that although he had some understanding, it was difficult for him to communicate what he understood due to his limited vocabulary.

Table 5. Transcribed data on anecdotal records for average children

Observation	Sub Category	Source
<i>Although the teacher read the sentence several times, Child5 continued to misunderstand until she explained the sentence in Mandarin to everyone (Child 5)</i>	Unable to understand	C5AR3

8.3 Weak Children

The weak children were Children 3 and 6. Both children could speak mainly in Mandarin but could understand English and respond when needed. Child 3 is very passive and has a limited vocabulary. He had difficulty retelling the story. In the first session, he could not retell the story and just said I forgot (refer Table 6). However, in story sessions 2 and 3, the teacher got him to continue retelling the story after assisting with the first part. This strategy helped the child (refer to Table 7). Child 6 also had a problem retelling the stories. However, she did put in effort when assistance was given. Both children could arrange the pictures with assistance from the teacher. Both children could answer the questions as options were given to assist them. This showed that some understanding did occur.

Table 6. Transcribed data on anecdotal records for weak children

Observation	Sub-category	Source
<i>Child 3 could not retell the story. When the teacher encouraged him, He explained in Mandarin that he had forgotten. (Child 3)</i>	inability to understand	AR L 22-L23
<i>The teacher tries to scaffold by asking, " What happens when the monster gets smaller"? Bob answered while looking at the space, " The boy says with the monster and the monster will do". (Child 3)</i>	inability to understand	AR L32-L33

Table 7. Checklist

Lesson	1						2						3					
Child	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
Retell the main events and key details from the story	5	1	1	3	2	1	5	4	2	4	3	3	5	3	2	4	3	2
Include relevant information while retelling the story	5	1	1	3	4	1	5	4	2	4	4	3	5	3	2	4	3	3
The sequence of the event in the retelling was accurate	5	1	1	5	5	1	5	4	3	4	5	5	5	4	2	5	4	4
Identified the beginning, middle and end of the story based on the picture sequence	5	1	4	5	5	4	5	4	4	5	5	4	5	5	4	5	5	3
Able to explain why the pictures were arranged in a particular order	5	1	4	5	4	4	5	4	4	5	4	4	5	4	3	5	4	4
Answered specific questions about the story accurately	5	3	4	5	5	4	5	4	4	5	4	4	5	3	4	5	3	4
Provide evidence, infer or give details from the story to support their answers	5	1	2	4	5	2	5	4	3	4	5	2	3	2	2	2	3	2
The child understood the vocabulary used in the question and responded appropriately	5	3	2	5	3	2	5	4	3	5	3	3	5	3	2	5	3	2

9. DISCUSSION

This qualitative study involved six preschool children in a private preschool in Kepong, Malaysia. The research objective was to examine private preschool children listening comprehension skills when metacognitive strategies were used during storytelling. The result indicated metacognitive strategy had a positive result on the listening comprehension of the six preschool children. This result tallied with (Heong, 2018) study, where metacognitive strategies were applied to Advances program students at the Thai Nguyen University of Technology and (Hashiemian & Farhang-Ju, 2020) study, where metacognitive strategies were tested on L2 learners listening comprehension skills in Iran.

Although the results were not apparent for the weak students, they showed some improvement according to the teachers, as previously they could not answer any questions. This study showed that a successful strategy was needed to facilitate second-language listening comprehension, especially for these children with little English mastery. Metacognition is a difficult strategy for young children; however, it managed to help them in their listening comprehension. Metacognition strategies used during the pre-listening skills helped the children acquire the top-bottom process quickly. They were given specific instructions and made aware of the objective of listening and linking the story to their prior knowledge.

Furthermore, the study introduced difficult words in the pre-listening stage, which helped the children. Children who are poor speakers of English tend to translate what they listen this will overemphasise the bottom-up process (Goh, 2000). Furthermore, studies by (Goh, 2000; Liu, 2003; Osada, 2001) suggest that L2 listeners must develop better word recognition skills and resist mentally translating and overemphasising

bottom-up skills, which delay the children's comprehension. Even the teachers said they felt the translation of words helped the children understand better.

The result of this study has a significant impact on teaching listening skills in preschools. It does not only assist children but also preschool teachers. It significantly impacts teachers' existing practices in teaching listening skills to preschool children. Malaysian preschool teachers' pedagogical knowledge of teaching listening skills is limited (Rezaei & Fatimah, 2013). Teachers must be aware that listening is an essential skill, and if not mastered, it will affect children's mastery of speaking, reading and writing (Hassan, 2008). Teachers' pedagogical content knowledge in teaching English needs to improve with periodical training. Teachers must be exposed to different strategies to develop listening comprehension skills. This study's teaching strategy can be used as a reference to the parties involved with planning, developing, and implementing the curriculum to improve the existing curriculum, especially in approach and listening skills. Changes must be made to make English language learning at the preschool level more effective.

Using digital technology could also be the way forward in helping children to increase their listening comprehension, such as using digital storytelling and using gamification as post-listening activities. However, technology-based learning resources can be ineffective in and of themselves; if they are not flexible, authentic, and engaging, neither teachers nor students will find much value in them. This means they won't be as effective as intended unless good instructional practices are employed with technology or multimedia (Jones, 2008). Digital tales, in particular, and internet-based technology often encourage L2 learning. Additionally, they introduce novel linguistic constructions, syntax, vocabulary, phrases, and formulaic speech within a significant and organised context that aids in understanding the story world.

This study produced a teaching strategy that could increase children's interest in learning English. Through the activities and strategy used in the study to develop children listening comprehension skills, the children showed interest and better comprehension of the stories.

Future research could also look into digital storytelling and integrating gamification into storytelling, especially in the pre-listening stage.

10. CONCLUSION

This qualitative study was interesting as not much research was done on listening comprehension skills at the preschool level, especially in Malaysia. The study showed although listening comprehension skills involve a complex multistep procedure, providing metacognitive instructions helped enhance preschool children's listening comprehension skills. The children showed interest and better comprehension of the stories, which was impossible before. Developing listening comprehension skills also allows children to be active listeners, which is essential in communication, especially in the digital era.

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