

## Conference Abstract

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#### **“I read English well but I don’t understand much!”**

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Students in Malaysia have to read texts in English for various academic purposes. However, the majority of teachers in schools and in institutions of higher learning do not realize that reading is an activity which has to be taught ; it does not come naturally with learning the language alone. The notion of a Reading teacher who teaches only reading, therefore, does not exist. Teachers hold the assumption that once you learn the English language, you WILL be able to not only read in English but to also display your comprehension of what has been read, in English.

Malaysia assesses the academic performance of school students en masse through various national-level exams. Students who are not able to write answers to comprehension questions in English will fail. This is to say that they have not understood what they have read and that is why they cannot answer. This assumption displays teachers’ simple and naïve subscription to an isomorphismic equation which, in actual fact, does not tally.

Reading research on bilingual linguistic memory has been extensively addressed in much research in the west (Kintsch, 1974; McCormick, 1977; Kolers et al., 1980, 1984). However, investigators are still trying to determine whether the bilingual’s semantic memory is internally represented as a single abstract system or as two separate systems. The present research tries to understand the nature of L2 text comprehension, storage, and retrieval of university students who are bilingual and who have gone through at least thirteen years of English language learning in schools. Data from their Retelling protocols should be able to throw some light if at all students in this research display a subscription to what has been described as the independence or interdependence hypothesis.

As English progressively thrusts its way into the global village, the importance of reading as a mode of information dissemination cannot be ignored. Furthermore, trans-education and cross-border learning is fast becoming a reality. E-learning and Distance education requires students to hear and understand most of their lecturers’ view through the written texts – albeit with some contact, perhaps, in the virtual *chat-rooms*. Nonetheless, whatever is the mode that they choose to upgrade themselves, students must be prepared to deal with L2 texts in a way that will benefit them throughout their lives.