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TEXTISM IN ENGLISH: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN USE OF TEXT  
AND READING COMPREHENSION COMPETENCY  
AMONG ESL UNDERGRADUATES

FOONG KOK HEY

UTAR

A RESEARCH PROJECT  
SUBMITTED IN  
PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR  
THE BACHELOR OF ARTS (HONOURS) ENGLISH LANGUAGE  
FACULTY OF ARTS & SOCIAL SCIENCES  
UNIVERSITI TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN

JAN 2021



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FOONG KOK HEY

### Approval Form

This research paper attached hereto, entitled “Textism in English: Relationship between use of textese and reading comprehension competency among ESL undergraduates” prepared and submitted by Foong Kok Hey in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts (Hons) English Language is hereby accepted.

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Supervisor

Ms Bharathi a/p Mutty

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## ABSTRACT

The trend of textism affecting language use in the past decade has led to past studies identifying the various implications of textism on reading comprehension competency among native users of English, but the problem lies in that the literacy skills of the tested participants are polished to a certain extent through exposure to the language since birth, both in its linguistic features, and cultural and educational background. With that, this paper sets out to investigate the behaviour in use of textism, extent of metalinguistic knowledge of textism, and effects of textism on reading comprehension competency among ESL undergraduates. To that end, this qualitative study recruits the use of a three-part measure, including a total of six tasks: semi-structured interview, to test use of textism and use of first language; textism proficiency translation task and textism familiarity translation task, to test metalinguistic knowledge of textism; and nonword task, gap-filling task, and MUET reading model test, to test orthographic awareness, syntactic awareness, and reading literacy ability respectively. Evidently, our study findings echo those of past studies reviewed, showing no clear correlation between textism usage and reading comprehension competency. A gradual change in the digital sociolinguistic setting is also hinted by comparing present and studies from close to a decade ago. Nonetheless, this research study poses few limitations and research gaps, where the inclusion of predictive text and autocorrect is not factored in our framework. Besides, the demographic of the sampled participants could be improved upon, such as their first languages and their general age group.

## DECLARATION

I declare that the material contained in this paper is the end result of my own work and that due acknowledgement has been given in the bibliography and references to ALL sources be they printed, electronic, or personal.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EFL	English as foreign language
ESL	English as second language
L1	First language
MUET	Malaysian University English Test
STPM	Malaysian Higher School Certificate
TF	Textism Familiarity
TMK	Textism Metalinguistic Knowledge
TP	Textism Proficiency
UTAR	Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### *1.1 Introduction*

To delve deeper into the topic, this chapter will include background of the study, operational definition, statement of problem, research objectives, research questions, significance of the study, and the limitations of the study on the effect of use of textese towards reading comprehension competency among English as Second Language (ESL) undergraduates. With that, a better understanding of the topic could be gathered as the paper proceeds.

### *1.2 Research background*

Text messaging has emerged as the primary medium of interpersonal interaction since the dawn of the internet in the 21st century; as a result, textism expands swiftly as the next most popular style of language usage throughout the world (Crystal, 2008). Thus, born was a new form of language: textese. While textese gain its root from English, it is considered as a different language from a linguistic viewpoint, with multiple linguistic features that are none but foreign to proficient users of standard English, harbouring characteristics including but not limited to: lack of punctuations, initialism, elimination of vowels, and assimilation of numbers (Hussain & Lukmana, 2019). This implies that without any metalinguistic knowledge of textism, even adept users of English may not necessarily be able to familiarise themselves with this new form of language.

Textism, as well as its hypernym: digital writing, has its own list of merits including (i) ushering the transformation of language use into the new age, (ii) enhancing depths of meaning of language using multimodal resources (i.e. pictures and videos), and (iii) increasing rate of information transfer (Ferris, 2002). It carries the potential to blur certain traditional standards and values in varying disciplines of writing such as that of academic, journalism, and even

creative writing (Ferris, 2002) by introducing alien elements from internet culture into standard English. Not only that, adopting the behaviourist perspective would also show that prolonged exposure to textism will allow them to form certain persistent habits and reinforce the impression that it is acceptable in formal and informal writings, and thus make it harder for English users to differentiate and establish a clear boundary between the two, not to mention ESL learners where language acquisition is still in progress, hence disrupting the performance of the target language in the norm (Georgakopoulou & Spilioti, 2016).

This is supported by a study conducted by Kemp (2010) on reading of text messages among native undergraduate English users, where it was found that the text production time is faster for textese than it would take for traditional writing, but that the time required to read the former is longer. But even then, he argues that the amount of practices gained throughout the years in textism composition and comprehension by the participants has a hand in assisting towards the results gathered. Establishing that, it might prove even more difficult for ESL learners, whom have yet to acquaint themselves to standard English texts, to overcome those obstacles and acquire a decent operation of the language.

After establishing a foundation towards the topic by the collective effort of linguists and digital literalists in the field, Rosen et al. (2010) carried out a study to divulge the relationship between textism and formal and informal writing among young adults, and in that, they have classified textese into two categories: (1) linguistic textism: acronym, lowercase 'I's, punctuation removal, and words shortening; and (2) contextual textism: emoticons and special characters designating emotion. These two groups of features proposed demonstrated how textism differs from standard English writing, as seen from the inclusion of icons and visual materials that seems to carry pragmatic elements. For example, a combination of the symbol “:.” and “)”

creates the emoticon “:)”, which carries no linguistic meaning if applied with the customs of standard English, but it is widely used in textism to denote a smiley-face, or to convey happiness of the texter.

Taking a look on how the textism could influence the direction of the English language, critiques were lashed against textism due to its detrimental capability in affecting reading and writing skills and to a greater extent, poses threats towards changing the language itself (Vosloo, 2009). While the argument stands accurate, it is also true that language change is inevitable. Even though the next generation of English users might deviate from standard English to any extent, it does not deny the fact that languages are constantly moulded to best fit into the society, and it ultimately develops in the direction that serves communication productivity the most (Keller, 1994). All these factors are what allowed texting to evolve into a new realm of its own, as the spoken form of any languages long precedes their written form, textism could be seen as a way to develop the convention of conversation even through reading and writing alone, that which it has just the perfect capabilities to pull off (McWhorter, 2013; Tagliamonte & Denis, 2008).

To further understand the nature of textism by exploring the factors behind its construction, Plester et al. (2009) had taken a look at the errors committed by various language practitioners in formal and informal writing attributed to text language, where it was found that most of which are mappings of the lexemes’ phonological transcription onto written spelling, displaying attempts of the language users to write as they would speak. As such, according to Plester et al. (2009), the primary circumstances surrounding the origin of textism was of phonological factors, done in order to create an even more linear and efficient way to compose messages with the incorporation of numbers and consonant assimilation, as seen from the use

of the textese “*st8*” to represent the lexeme “*straight*”. This is further elaborated by McWhorter (2013), who perceives this as the next step in the evolution of languages to close the differences between its written and oral representation.

On that interesting note, it would be of great insight to look at how reading skills could be affected by oral literacy skills as one interrelated component, as opposed to two different ones. To elaborate on this, a research was conducted on texts comprehension among two different groups of ESL readers with varying levels of proficiency, where it was found that phonological awareness plays a role in hindering the effectiveness of reading comprehension among less proficient readers, while more skilled users of English are less affected by it (Nassaji, 2003). Not only does phonological skills acts as a viable component in ESL reading capabilities, but due to the inclusion of phonological factors, their first language (L1) background potentially does as well. This lends to the progress of study on textism, as its functionality and features act as a midpoint that bridges between reading and phonology in terms of linguistic skills recruited (Plester et al., 2009).

Hence, it is shown that one of the impacts of textism on language acquisition for ESL learners includes one of the four basics skills of language: reading. Reading competency is undoubtedly one of the most indispensable skills in commanding and learning a new language, as well as in integrating themselves into the concurrent society (Zare & Othman, 2013). To that end, past researchers have presented that reading practices at the early stages of language acquisition allow for better comprehension of the semantic and syntax of the target language, largely dictating their literacy competence in the target language, which in turn assists in developing language performing skills as their literacy performances improve (Paribakht & Wesche, 1993). Thus, the few main crucial components that were deemed to form the basis for the ESL learners’



comprehension competency are the understanding of content words, meaning, and function words (Paribakht & Wesche, 1993).

As discussed above, the textism heavily influences the mentioned components, from slight modifications such as vowels removal, to lines that would be entirely unrecognisable from their standard counterparts such as the omission of function words and morphemes, as they are rendered non-existent. This poses a problem for ESL learners, for textism varies and depends solely on the diction of the users, creating a plethora of forms, styles, and functions that are one of a kind (McWhorter, 2013). Without a proper benchmark and guideline in the target language, the ESL learners might face significantly more resistance in enhancing their reading comprehension competency in the digital environment.

That said, many past studies have identified the effects of textism against language comprehension and performance skills among native speakers of English. The more intriguing question is: does the practice of textism affect the literacy competence of ESL learners who has already completed their secondary education? With that, this study seeks to investigate the effects of textism on reading comprehension competency among ESL undergraduates.

### *1.3 Problem statement*

The trend of textism affecting language use in the past decade has led to past studies identifying the various implications of textism on reading comprehension competency among native users of English, but the problem lies in that the literacy skills of the tested participants are polished to a certain extent through exposure to the language since birth, both in its linguistic features, and cultural and educational background (Kemp, 2010). With that, more research needs to be conducted to investigate the effect of textism on reading comprehension among ESL users,

more specifically, the members of a demographic who have at least completed their secondary education with the adoption of standard English as their second language, while their first languages remained in use. Thus, the presented problem is: are ESL learners, equipped with secondary level education, who engage in textspeak more prone to see negative consequences in reading comprehension competency, or will they be able to actively differentiate the variance in linguistic features between textism and standard English?

#### *1.4 Research objectives*

*RO1:* To identify the behaviour in use of textism among ESL undergraduates.

*RO2:* To explore the extent of metalinguistic knowledge of textism among ESL undergraduates.

*RO3:* To investigate the effects of textism on reading comprehension competency among ESL undergraduates.

#### *1.5 Research questions*

*RQ1:* What is the behaviour in use of textism among ESL undergraduates?

*RQ2:* What is the extent of metalinguistic knowledge of textism among ESL undergraduates?

*RQ3:* What are the effects of textism on reading comprehension competency among ESL undergraduates?

#### *1.6 Significance of study*

This study would cast light onto many factors regarding language acquisition in the field of linguistics mainly on second language acquisition and teaching of reading. This is done by observing the consequences on reading comprehension competency after the exposure to textism among ESL learners, similar to how the introduction of a foreign linguistic elements could interfere with the acquisition of a second language. The research could also grant a better

understanding on how members of the same demographic but different first languages react to the advancement of language, both in form and function.

### *1.7 Scope and limitations of study*

This study seeks to fill in the research gap between the demographic of participants as one of the factors affected by textism, but ultimately lacks the ability to counter other issues such as effect of textism on literacy skills among ESL learners with different L1 and difference in gender use of language. That said, the participants' general proficiency in the English language, namely the completion of at least secondary education, is also not specified. This is due to acquiring a passing grade of the English language paper not being one of the requirements to graduating secondary level education (Darus, 2010), and thus might prove difficulty in differentiating and identifying errors attributed to either the use of textism, or their fluency in English itself.

### *1.8 Operational definition of terms*

To provide for a more standardised comprehension of the subject at hand, as well as to contain disparities, the terminologies adopted in this study has been defined as follows:

1. Digital environment: the online space shared among all users of the internet, including applications where online communication is possible (Lee & Lee, 2020). This terminology will be used synonymously alongside *digital setting* and *digital context* in this paper.
2. Digital writings: writings done online using or on a computer connected to a network for any purposes (Ferris, 2002). This paper will refer to *digital writings* as works written online in all form and function, using any electronic devices with access to the internet.

3. Formal writings: works written using standard English components for official purposes such as university assignments, business emails, and official letters to companies following a given format (Rosen et al., 2010).
4. Informal writings: works written using standard English components for informal purposes such as letters to a friend, personal notes, and expressive essays that tend to be less structured (Rosen et al., 2010).
5. Internet culture: conventions of trend, expression, and style sourced from the *digital environment* (Hanna & De Nooy, 2009). This concept includes the use of textism and multimodal resources in this study.
6. Literacy skills: the ability to comprehend, transfer, and convey ideas from and with multiple language formats, not limited to either spoken or written form (Plester & Wood, 2009).
7. Metalinguistic knowledge: language users' knowledge on linguistic elements based on their own proficiency, personality, and experience (Hussain & Lukmana, 2019). In this research, *metalinguistic knowledge* and *cognitive knowledge* denote the same concept.
8. Phonological awareness: the ability to systematically draw relationship between sound and word units in a controlled context (Nassaji, 2003). This terminology is also used to encompass both speaking and listening skills in this study.
9. Reading comprehension: a skill that involves processing word, semantic, and syntax to extract ideas from texts, using knowledge acquired internally from the texts, and externally from the readers' experience (Nassaji, 2003).
10. Secondary education: compulsory education provided for children aged 13 – 17 in Malaysia, graduation of which allows the advancement of studies to tertiary education (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2020).

11. Target language: the language to be learnt in language acquisition (Paribakht & Wesche, 1993). This terminology refers to English unless otherwise specified in this paper.
12. Textese: the form of spelling that is a combination of spoken and written English (Bushnell et al., 2011). It is adopted to denote all form of language used in *textism* in this study.
13. Textism: the usage of language featuring extensive written abbreviations to compose text messages (Wood et al., 2014). This study will refer to *textism* as the use of all non-standard language form related to text messages, including its other denotations such as *textspeak* and *netspeak*.
14. Traditional language use: language performed adhering to the format of standard English that is taught as part of school curriculum (Plester & Wood, 2009). This paper will refer to *traditional language use* and *standard English* synonymously.
15. Undergraduate: students reading for a degree at either college or university (Cambridge University Press, n.d.). In this study, *undergraduates* will refer to Year 1 Semester 1 students under any courses in Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR), Kampar, with the exclusion of any tertiary education and Malaysian Matriculation graduates.

### 1.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, the linguistic features of textism as well as its negative consequences on literacy skills are discussed, leading to arguments by various parties on its impact on the English language such as raising the difficulty for language acquisition by introducing phonological skills into reading components. Following that is the identified research gap of previous studies, namely the effect of textism on reading comprehension competency among ESL learners. This study also lacks the facilities to test components such as the participants' general proficiency in English itself, as the target demographic is required to have obtained secondary level

education, but due to English not being one of the graduation criteria, their specific fluency could not be determined. All in all, this paper aims to provide for a better understanding of the relationship between textism and reading competency, and the possible future direction of the language itself.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

### *2.1 Introduction*

In this chapter, the researcher discusses and draws relationships between multiple issues related to the effect of textism on literacy, including the convention of textism, reading skills, first language interference in ESL reading, and textism in Malaysia, by looking at literature and past research. With the information gathered, a theoretical framework is developed with related theories and phenomena to aid in the formulation of the research design in methodology.

### *2.2 Effect of textism on literacy*

The effect of textism on literacy has been a long-debated topic in the field of linguistic. Despite unwarranted concerns by the mass public, when the issue is looked at on a wider scale, no significant impact has been found across the board (Drouin & Davis, 2009; Grace et al., 2013; Kemp, 2010; Plester et al., 2008; Rosen et al., 2010). That said, a different finding is generated when certain linguistic features or components are isolated and further tested. More concretely, even though textism bears no apparent consequences towards the literacy performance of English users, it has a fickle nature towards distinct components, such as phonological awareness, spelling, reading, writing skills, and even gender and age of participants (Bushnell et al., 2011; Drouin & Davis, 2009; Drouin, 2011; Kemp, 2010; Plester et al., 2009; Rosen et al., 2010; Waldron et al., 2017).

On phonological awareness, Lyddy et al. (2014) has studied the textual features of textism through analysing the texts sent by 139 undergraduate students who are native Irish and English users, where he argued that the creation of textism demonstrates phonological awareness, due to the assimilation of numbers as homophones. This is in line with another study conducted by Plester et al. (2009), where British children aged 10 to 12 was put through the British Ability

Scales II, Phonological Assessment Battery, and Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing, to which a definite correlation between textism and phonological awareness was discovered. On the other hand, no obvious correlation between textism and phonological awareness is found among young adults, as was revealed by Kemp (2010) where 61 Australian undergraduate frequent texters with English as L1 was tested. As seen, phonological factors play a definite role in the relationship between textism and standard English, however, more research needs to be done to isolate and test the underlying factors affecting them, aside from the age of texters.

In one of the language production faculties: spelling, the findings are slightly more interesting. According to Bushnell et al. (2011), spelling abilities have been shown to be positively affected by the use of textism among Australian child texters aged ten to twelve. In their paper, they stated that as texting is thought to be fun by the children, it actually encourages them to better engage with traditional literacy skills such as reading, writing, and spelling, hence improving their language performances, especially among male students. On a similar topic, Drouin and Davis (2009) set out to investigate the impact of textism on spelling among 80 college students native to the English language, where he has likewise drawn a positive relationship and found that despite the use of textese, texters remain familiar with the standard English vocabulary, if not more proficient compared to non-texters. Armed with this knowledge, Drouin (2011) again tested 152 native-English college students. Similarly, there is a positive relationship between textism frequency and spelling. However, this time around, Drouin (2011) inferred that the actual act of texting does not correlate with the use of textese, and each impact literacy skills differently. In both of the papers, Drouin and Davis (2009; 2011) suggested a longitudinal methodology in future research to identify any potential negative impacts on literacy. Similar



findings are recorded by Kemp (2010) and Plester et al. (2008) among 61 undergraduate and 35 child native English users respectively.

However, targeting the age of texters as one of the affecting factors, further probing by Sánchez-Moya and Cruz-Moya (2015) divulged that even when a positive relationship between textism and spelling is found among teenagers and adults, the former still displays a higher competency in spelling, both in performing and recognising when compared to each other. With that in mind, Waldron et al. (2017) conducted a study with 83 primary students, 77 secondary students, and 48 undergraduates, where they uncovered that although employing the predictive entry method in textism has no notable effect on the spelling abilities of all three groups, teenagers who use predictive entry are more prone to commit spelling errors compared to adults. This contrastive finding could be clarified by Powell and Dixon (2011) who reported no consequences of textism over spelling among adults, but found that their spelling competency improved after exposure of one week to the correct form of spelling, and worsen when subjected otherwise. By this instance, it is apparent that conditioning plays a part in determining language proficiency, no matter the age group. In brief, no major effect was coined, but it would be interesting to further isolate age or generational difference, and duration of study as manipulating factors in the relationship between textism and spelling.

Next, the relationship between textism and reading has been much debated and examined over. To test the association of textism on reading, De Jonge and Kemp (2012) in his study with 52 high school students and 53 undergraduates actually found a negative relationship between the two, but age again reprises a role in this interaction, where against the pattern seen above, undergraduates are found to be more affected by textism compared to teenagers. According to De Jonge and Kemp (2012), more textism used correlates to a weaker performance in reading

and spelling, whereas orthographic and morphological awareness is negatively affected by a higher frequency of texting. Conversely, Drouin and Davis (2009; 2011) and Kemp (2010) presented no negative impact between the two in his study. Instead, Kemp (2010) argued that even though reading textese consumes longer time than reading standard English texts and causes more reading errors, it is due to the difference in exposure and practice of the two; thus practising textism could improve their reading proficiency on textese and neutralise this gap. This notion of reading skills improved by textism practising is also supported by Plester et al. (2009) in their study where textism has a neutral relationship with reading.

Finally, writing makes up a significant margin of language performance, and thus is a frequented field for linguistic research, especially on its potential effect by textism. On said issue, Plester et al. (2008) set out to examine its effect among a total of 100 British children using the Cognitive Abilities Test, reported KS2 assessment score, and textism translation exercises, and established that there is no real negative correlation between textism and writing skills. According to Plester et al. (2008), errors made by the children are insignificant and unrelated to textism, and if any correlations are to be attributed, a neutral or positive relationship is more plausible than a negative one. This finding is assisted by Bushnell et al. (2011) and De Jonge and Kemp (2012).

But Rosen et al. (2010) in his study concerning 1,226 young adults, presented a drastically different set of data, where he contested that formal and informal writing should be analysed separately and each carries different specifications. Through formal and informal writing samples by the participants, they have found that textism adversely affect formal writing skills, but in contrast causes better informal writing skills. Not only that, in formal writing, those graduated with a college degree are less affected by textism compared to those without.

However, as the textism-related data are self-reported by the participants, it proves the potential to be biased. To see how education could potentially affect textism and formal writing, Grace et al. (2013) similarly tested 153 undergraduates around the same age range by detecting traces of textism within their written examination. Unsurprisingly, little to no textism is found in their written work, but as argued by Grace et al. (2013), the lack of textism could be explained by the formal context and pressure of a physical examination instead of a realistic portrayal of their usual conduct.

The findings presented by all the above papers could hint at the influence of metalinguistic knowledge, specifically how texters and non-texters alike switch between formal and informal context, and their subsequent effect on textism and literacy. Undeniably, age also plays a crucial role, especially between children and adults. Consequently, various research gaps proposed by the papers are in regard to the participants' age and gender, duration of study, context of study, and the individual impact of different categories of textism (Bushnell et al., 2011; De Jonge & Kemp, 2012; Drouin & Davis, 2009; Grace et al., 2013; Plester et al., 2008; 2009; Rosen et al., 2010).

### *2.3 Convention of textism*

The convention of textism itself, including how it came to be, its linguistic features, and future direction has regularly been discussed by linguists and digital literalists since its emergence. Regardless of its impact towards literacy, its functionality in facilitating a positive communication is advocated for, even in a mostly formal context such as a classroom setting (Totanes & Lintao, 2019). That brings us to the topic of context and appropriateness of textism usage. Long has textism been considered informal and even dangerous (Crystal, 2006), but as seen in the previous section, it is not strictly the case. Studies have found that adults are able

to clearly distinguish the appropriateness of textism under varying contexts, such as for formal or casual communication purposes as well as recognise their relationship with the recipient, and in doing so change their form of language to best cater to the situation (Kemp & Clayton, 2017), displaying a higher level of metalinguistic awareness towards textism (Shafie et al., 2010).

In attempts to better understand the contemporary form of language, researchers have looked into the features of textism. Among the many papers in this same effort, Rosen et al. (2010) are one of the few to further distinguish between linguistic and contextual textism. As mentioned in the previous chapter (see *1.2 Research background*), Rosen et al. (2010) has in their paper classified textism into two groups: linguistic textism and contextual textism. This separation of contextual textism into its own category allows it greater freedom in including items not found in other papers such as capitalisation of letters and special characters to indicate emotion and action. But otherwise, it is generally similar to a more compact version of textism classification from Hussain and Lukmana (2019) and Lyddy et al. (2014) as elaborated below.

Gathering data from Whatsapp social media of seven postgraduate students, Hussain and Lukmana (2019) counted a total of 250 textese, occupying 74.40% of total lexical items, among the most frequently recorded types of textism are contraction, emoticons, clipping, lengthening, initialism, and number homophone, sitting at a frequency of 223, 27, 6, 6, 5, and 5 respectively. In spite of that, their findings are subjected to discrepancies as the data collected are submitted by the participants themselves, in doing so allowing the data to be viable to the participants' biasness. Similarly, Lyddy et al. (2014) collected text messages from 139 undergraduates, in this occurrence however, only 3,296 linguistic and 676 contextual textism, including emoticons and symbols, out of 13,391 lexical items are found, sitting at a textism density of 29.70%. The

five most occupied types of textism are missed capitalisation, accent stylisation, number homophone, missed punctuation, and contraction, numbered at 728, 615, 429, 360, and 168 respectively. It is worth noting that Lyddy et al. (2014) has pointed out the similarities between their found textism types and those tabulated by Plester et al. (2009). Finally, papers on the features and convention of textism have also consistently uncovered that female texters have the tendency to employ more textese, especially in contextual textism, compared to their male counterpart in their own age group (Lyddy et al., 2014; Rosen et al., 2010; Plester et al., 2009).

Nevertheless, the five most common types of textism found among children, young adults, and adults in the papers reviewed above can be summarised into:

- (i) shortening, which includes vowel removal and clipping, such as “*thurs*” for “*Thursday*” and “*tmr*” for “*tomorrow*”,
- (ii) omitted punctuation, characterised by a lack of punctuation in texts,
- (iii) initialism, including the use of acronyms and initials of a phrase, such as “*brb*” for “*be right back*”,
- (iv) number homophone, which are the assimilation of numbers into lexemes, such as “*l8r*” for “*later*”, and
- (v) emoticon, defined as the use of symbols and emojis, such as “*:)*” to denote a smiley face.

#### *2.4 Reading comprehension competency in ESL context*

Under the umbrella term that is literacy contains various linguistic components such as writing, reading, and phonology as discussed above. The very same can be stated for reading comprehension, which is made out of further smaller components that together contribute and affect the general reading skill. In an ESL context, the reading comprehension components

have been identified by various past researches to be vocabulary, syntactic, orthographic, and phonological skills, and reading literacy itself, which governs the processing of information (Alderson, 2000; Burt et al., 2003; Khor et al., 2014; Nassaji, 2003; Paribakht & Wesche, 1993; Shiotsu & Weir, 2007).

A general overview of reading skills is provided by Burt et al. (2003) in their book targeting adult English learners, where they presented four skills quintessential to reading competency: (i) phonological skill, including the identification and comprehension of sound units upon exposure to texts, (ii) vocabulary skill, which is the meaning acquisition of lexemes, (iii) syntactic skill, demonstrated by the knowledge of grammatical and morphological relationship, and (iv) cultural and metalinguistic knowledge, where it sees the ESL learners relate the texts to their past knowledge. Correspondingly, similar components are reported by Alderson (2020), but the writer also noted that a deficit in linguistic knowledge might be able to be offset by increased vocabulary and cultural knowledge.

Regarding the contribution of vocabulary skill towards ESL reading competency, Zhang and Anual (2008) concluded in their study concerning 37 secondary school ESL students that vocabulary size has a definite importance in determining reading comprehension competency, whereas the students acquire a larger pool of vocabulary knowledge, the difficulty in reading expository texts with uncommon words reduces. Turning to the relationship between syntactic skill and reading comprehension, the same was found. In a paper by Pratiwi (2019) which the researcher analyses the English Proficiency Test of ESL adults, it was discovered that a better syntactic skill relates to higher reading comprehension competency. In hindsight, both vocabulary and syntactic skill is found to have positive relationships with reading

comprehension. Despite that, Pratiwi (2019) wrote that it was possible that the results tabulated were interfered by the vocabulary skill of the participants.

To better explain the relationship between vocabulary and syntactic skill among ESL learners, a longitudinal study was conducted by Paribakht and Wesche (1993) across one semester with a total of 54 hours, surrounding 37 undergraduates with mixed L1, in which they were grouped into two classes: comprehension class, which focuses on reading and listening literacy skills; and four-skills class, which focuses on all four language skills, namely writing, reading, speaking, and listening, with special attention to syntax and vocabulary. By the end of the study, the comprehension class has shown progress in both lexical and function words, while the four-skill class only improved in the former. As further explained by Paribakht and Wesche (1993), this indicates that if the vocabulary knowledge is given explicit focus in a classroom setting, syntax acquisition carries the risk to be neglected. From this study, it was brought to light that certain relationship is definitely held between vocabulary and syntax.

To expand on that idea, Shiotsu and Weir (2007) conducted three studies among UK university students with mixed L1, 182 Japanese English as foreign language (EFL) undergraduates, and 591 Japanese EFL undergraduates in Japan. The collected data across all three studies shows that both vocabulary and syntactic skills are decent indicators of reading comprehension competency, but that the latter has a stronger impact among the two. On the contrary, Susoy and Tanyer (2018) presented an opposite finding indicating that vocabulary skill is the superior among the two, not only that, but they also argued that syntactic skill was not found to be as relatively important as stated by Shiotsu and Weir (2007). Although this is likewise supported by Barrot (2013), Susoy and Tanyer (2018) have also conveyed that the importance of both

components is not to be taken lightly simply due to either of them being a weaker predictor of reading comprehension competency.

Moving on to orthographic skill, Holmes (2009) and Nassaji (2003) explained it as the ability and familiarity in recognising the code and patterns of word spellings. After testing 60 adult ESL readers aged 25 to 35 who are native Farsi speakers, Nassaji (2003) suggested that aside from vocabulary skill being a strong indicator of reading comprehension competency, orthographical skill shares a similar importance, if not second only to it, especially among more proficient ESL readers. This finding is supported by Akamatsu (1999) and Kato (2009). Apart from that, Nassaji (2003) has also displayed the correlation between phonological skill and reading comprehension among weaker readers. This inference is shared by Siegel et al. (1995) that orthographic and phonological skills do indeed affect reading comprehension competency in different ways between different levels of readers.

In a longitudinal study across 12 weeks centred around phonological skill and reading, Yeung et al. (2013) have tested a total of 76 kindergarten children practising Cantonese as their L1 in Hong Kong, and again found a positive relationship. This result is also reflected in other reviewed papers done regarding phonological skills and reading skill in an ESL context, where they are unanimous in demonstrating a positive relationship between the two, such as the studies by Gottardo et al. (2001) and Khor et al. (2014), from which we can determine the correlation of phonological skill as a factor to reading comprehension.

As the issue deals with ESL learners, the researchers are uncontested in stating that the identified components are possibly manipulated by the participants' first language proficiency in the tested components (Khor et al., 2014; Nassaji, 2003; Shiotsu & Weir, 2007; Yeung et al.,



2013). The reviewed papers again identified the factors affecting reading comprehension competency as vocabulary, syntactic, orthographic, and phonological skills, which all together contribute to the ability to process information in texts, otherwise known as reading literacy ability. However, due to the nature of textism being phonologically mapped (Plester et al., 2009) and nonstandard in diction (McWhorter, 2013), assessment of vocabulary and phonological skills will be inaccurate under its influence, and will hence not play a part in this research setting.

### *2.5 Textism in Malaysia*

In a more localised setting, various studies are conducted by past researchers to determine the uses, factors, and attitude towards textism in Malaysia, as well as its effects, where the results might vary from those carried out in a native English sociolinguistic setting. On that advent, this section will focus on the practices of textism in Malaysia to offer for a more focused and appropriate review for this research setting.

To discover the factors leading to textism usage, Tayebinik and Puteh (2012) have interviewed 40 undergraduate textism users aged 20 to 23 from Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, where it was found that textism usage depends on four main factors: (i) fast communication and time saving, which is the shorten time required to communicate, (ii) simplicity, determined by the minimalism and ease in texting, (iii) credit saving and low cost, as seen by the reduced characters in each text, hence saving money, and (iv) trend among youngster, where the texters are intrinsically motivated based on the recognition attained from textism. This is in line with another study conducted by Sulaiman and Zolait (2010) regarding the factors behind texting itself, stating that Malaysian students mainly text due to its increased efficiency and

productivity, lessen amount of effort required, and general fun in texting. Simplicity in texting is also reported among Malaysian young adults by Mokhsin et al. (2015).

In efforts to identify the features of textism used, 50 Diploma Malaysian students were tested in a study by Kho et al. (2012). They have focused on analysing five features of textism characterised by errors in each category, which are (i) capitalisation, (ii) punctuation, (iii) emoticons, (iv) symbols, and (v) abbreviations, in descending order from the most to least frequently used. Interestingly, although this finding differs from that presented by Hussain and Lukmana (2019) as discussed above, it is identical towards the frequency in types of textism recorded by Lyddy et al. (2014) in which capitalisation and shortenings are both in the most and least frequented position respectively, even though the cultural background and sampling size of participants are both dissimilar to each other. Kho et al. (2012) have also reported that discussions carried out across texts carry an uncanny resemblance towards spoken discourse in that they both prefer informal expressions over more formal ones as they should have done, showing potential impact on texters' writing abilities.

Without a doubt, worries over the impact of textism on literacy remains a pressing issue. In divulging this, Shafie et al. (2010) tested 264 ESL undergraduates aged 18 to 22 from UiTM Perlis, in which their texts, submitted course works, and examination scripts are analysed for textism usage and English proficiency. As opposed to findings reported by Grace et al. (2013), Shafie et al. (2010) found a surprising amount of spelling errors in their examination scripts and course works, which is unexpected especially due to the tested texters having demonstrated metalinguistic awareness in being able to switch between textism and standard English to suit the formality of the context. Nevertheless, Shafie et al. (2010) argued that instead of it being strictly correlated to textism usage, it is more attributed to the texters themselves with a weaker

proficiency in English as they are more easily affected by the nonstandard diction possessed by textism.

This could be explained when Malaysian young adults' opinion towards the impact of textism are gathered, as have done by Mokhsin et al. (2015), where the three largest impact reported by the participants are (i) potential miscommunication between text sender and receiver, as they are confused by the textism usage, (ii) accidental use of textism in formal context, due to unnoticed mistakes, and (iii) deviating of the language from the standard variant, where textism could risk harming the authenticity of the language. Besides, participants tested by Tayebinik and Puteh (2012) have also reported effects akin to those mentioned above, where they subconsciously substitute words with their textese counterparts, are unable to recall the proper spelling or orthographic form of lexemes, and faces a drop in grammatical and syntactic skill. This further affirms that although the texters are aware that textism should not be used, again displaying metalinguistic awareness, they are prone to mistakes due to habit formation.

## 2.6 Theoretical framework

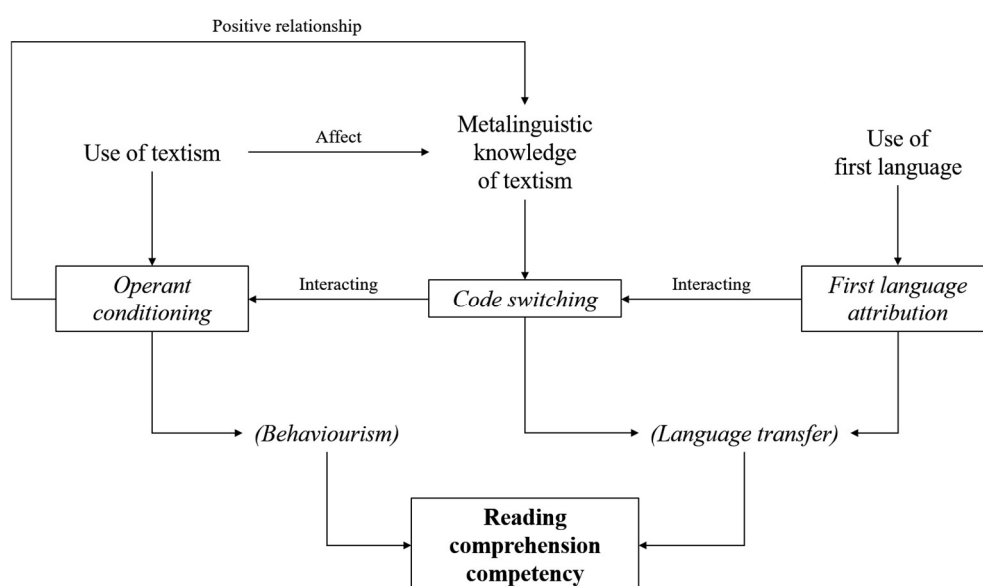


Figure 2.1. *Diagram of theoretical framework.*

The diagram of theoretical framework composed above focuses on three theories and phenomena, which are operant conditioning, code switching, and first language attribution. One of the biggest reasons for language change is the fact that language users have the tendency to magnify the more useful linguistic features, as they should be, due to their success in contributing to our daily communication (Keller, 1994). This demonstrates a form of operant conditioning under behaviourism, which explains language acquisition through encouraging certain behaviour or otherwise with positive or negative stimuli (Skinner, 2012).

To illustrate, a language user might use textism for the first time, and to their surprise, not only does it save time, but their communication partner also understands their message perfectly, that which encourages the texter to use textism more in their future conversations. On the other hand, if the message is not well-received and causes misunderstandings, the texter will refrain from further typing in textese. Apart from that, as part of behaviourism, operant conditioning also defines habit formation (Skinner, 2012), tying into the factor of language change due to its resulting productivity by (Keller, 1994), this forms one of the factors in affecting reading comprehension due to the texters not being able to spontaneously switch between textese and standard English as they better acquaint themselves with their habits of typing.

On the topic of not being able to switch between the forms of languages, subsequent use of textism has been found to have a positive relationship with metalinguistic knowledge of textism among texters (Lyddy et al., 2014; Plester et al., 2009; Shafie et al., 2010). As textism, originating from English, have evolved into a different language altogether (Hussain & Lukmana, 2019; McWhorter, 2013), it stands to point that its linguistic features being considered a code on its own, that is a form or style of languages with meaning (Liu, 2008), is not too far from the truth. This links back to the previous notion that as the texter practises

code-switching, the habit is reinforced, which leads to higher metalinguistic awareness (Odlin, 1989), and the cycle repeats causing greater impact on reading comprehension competency.

Another form of code-switching potentially performed by ESL texters is the attribution error of their L1. More specifically, this framework includes the possibility of ESL learners to falsely transmit their knowledge in their respective first languages into English, resulting in errors committed (Ang et al., 2011; Khor et al., 2014; Nassaji, 2003). These occurrences of language transfer are thought of to yield a higher metalinguistic awareness (Odlin, 1989), relating the attribution of both textism and first language back to the metalinguistic knowledge of textism. Thus, the language transfer between textism and first language, and standard English is identified as another aspect in affecting reading comprehension.

## *2.7 Conclusion*

Overall, existing literature has been reviewed regarding few issues related to this research study, namely the effect of textism on literacy, convention of textism, reading comprehension competency in ESL context, and textism in Malaysia. With the use of textism, although no significant impact has been detected on literacy on a grander scheme, relationships between further isolated components are unclear and could potentially tell a different story. Textism itself has also been narrowed down to five main features, which are (i) shortening, (ii) omitted punctuation, (iii) initialism, (iv) number homophone, and (v) emoticons, where female texters are shown to be more frequent users of textism, especially with emoticons. Various components contributing to ESL reading literacy are found to be vocabulary, syntactic, orthographic, and phonological awareness, however due to the nature of textism, influence of vocabulary and phonological skills are rendered moot. The participants' L1 proficiency in the mentioned components also plays a part in their ESL reading comprehension. In Malaysia, although no

major impact of textism is found, errors committed attributed to habit formation has been proven to be an issue. As ESL texters alter their form of language to better cater to the situation, metalinguistic awareness is demonstrated. With that, all the above literature contributed to the formation of the theoretical framework for this study, consisting of three main components: (i) use of textism, (ii) metalinguistic knowledge of textism, and (iii) use of first language, which are governed by operant conditioning, code switching, and first language attribution respectively.

### 3.0 METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter will take an in depth look at the methodology formulated for this study, including the research design, participants, data collection and its instruments, as well as data analysis. A diagram for the conceptual framework of this study will also be provided and further explained to allow for a broader view of the relationship between each process and component of the current study. All the components mentioned are explained in detail and justified by the researcher to offer for a more comprehensive perspective in their convention.

#### 3.2 Conceptual framework

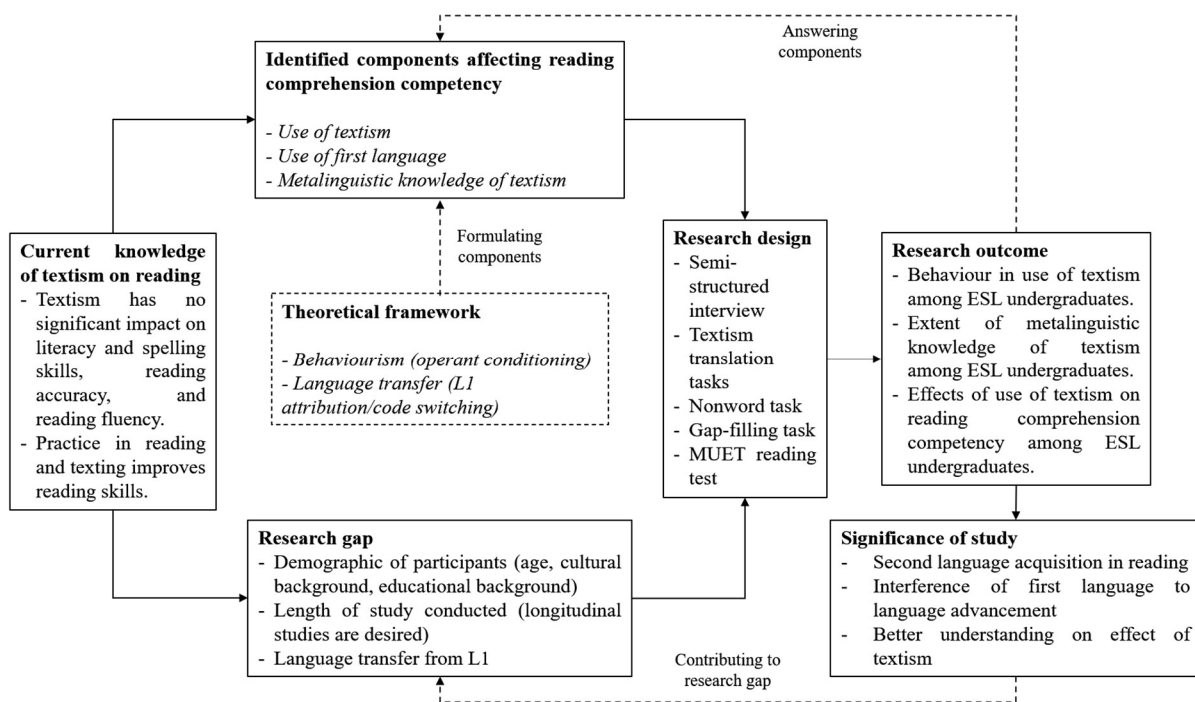


Figure 3.1. Diagram of conceptual framework.

The diagram above demonstrates the general process of the concurrent research, from its planning stage to the results formulation stage. Moving in one swift direction, the study starts from its brainstorming stage. This first stage consists of the researcher selecting the research

field, reading up on the subject, and conducting literature review of related past research to obtain a concrete understanding of existing knowledge in the field, where it was found that textism has no significant impact on reading competency among native English users. This process of literature review will lead to the identification of research gaps, namely the cultural and educational background of participants, and impact of L1. These gaps aid the researcher's effort in formulating the test components: (i) use of textism, (ii) use of first language, and (iii) metalinguistic knowledge of textism, along with the theoretical framework, that is based on operant conditioning under behaviourism, and L1 attribution and code switching under language transfer.

To test the components, six instruments are composed and adopted from previous research, which are (i) semi-structured interview, (ii) textism proficiency translation task, (iii) textism familiarity translation task, (iv) nonword task, (v) gap-filling test, and (vi) Malaysian University English Test (MUET) reading model test. The data collected are then analysed qualitatively to gather the research findings, answering the research questions of behaviour in use of textism, extent of metalinguistic knowledge, and effect of textism on reading comprehension competency. Finally, significances are drawn from the results as contribution to the field of second language acquisition and textism. Knowledge gaps in research will also be identified at this stage, and recommendations for untested components are provided for future studies.

### *3.3 Research participants*

Participants for this research are sampled among the undergraduate students from Kampar campus of UTAR, Malaysia. One participant from each faculty (Faculty of Arts and Social Science, Faculty of Business and Finance, Faculty of Engineering and Green Technology,



Faculty of Information and Communication Technology, and Faculty of Science) is selected, regardless of their courses, to a total of 5 participants. Towards the concerns of one participant not being able to accurately represent their respective faculties, this distribution is only done to diversify the participants gathered in order to acquire a wider range of data, instead of specifically investigating the performance of each faculty. Only Year 1 students are selected, as more senior students might be more inclined towards certain language production practices based on their professional field or discipline such as report or creative writing, hence posing the risk to skew the data collected.

A combination of convenience and snowball sampling method will be implemented due to the set of criteria imposed on the participants, which require them to:

- (i) be a Year 1 student,
- (ii) have no prior certification of higher education,
- (iii) have not acquired the Malaysian Higher School Certificate (STPM),
- (iv) have not acquired the Unified Examination Certificate (UEC),
- (v) have not completed the MUET exam,
- (vi) have completed either (a) Foundation programme in UTAR, Malaysia, or (b) other tertiary education institutions with compulsory English course in Malaysia,
- (vii) have adopted English as second language, and
- (viii) practise regular use of their first language.

This limits the participants down to ESL Year 1 undergraduates who have furthered their studies through completion of Foundation programmes in Malaysia. Through convenience sampling method, participants meeting all criteria are identified, they are then asked for individual recommendations, where more participants are recruited through snowball sampling

method. Potential participants are put through a screening survey where they are required to fill in and submit the demographic information form (see *Appendix A: Demographic Information*) via Google Form to self-report their first language as well as confirm their meeting the criteria. Subsequently, the Google Form is created using the researcher's UTAR email to restrict access to only UTAR staff and students. These requirements are customised for this study in hopes of creating the best circumstance to test each identified component.

Despite the dictated minimum of eleven years of English learning in schools (Che Musa et al., 2012), it is not one of the passing requirements for completion of secondary education in Malaysia (Darus, 2010), and so it remains a concern that the participants might not even be able to complete the tasks designated for this study, thus rendering the tests ineffective in testing the effect of the components on their reading comprehension competency. In attempts to remedy this conundrum, the participants are restricted to those who have completed the Foundation programme in UTAR, Malaysia, due to the compulsory English courses FHEL1012 English for Academic Study and FHEL1024 Academic English undertaken as part of the core programme structure (Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, 2019a; 2019b). As a passing grade is mandatory for the aforementioned courses, the participants would have at least acquired the basic reading and writing skills as per the course outcomes (Centre for Foundation Studies, 2020a; 2020b) regardless of their performance in secondary school. Undergraduate students proceeding from Foundation programmes with compulsory English courses from other tertiary education institutions are also accepted based on the same premise as above.

Besides, another rationale behind the selection of participants is to eliminate any potential interference from the MUET examinations. STPM and other higher education graduates are restricted from participation as they would have acquired a satisfactory grade in the MUET

examination (Darmi & Albion, 2012), which would offer the participants significant advantage in their English proficiency and test familiarity compared to the otherwise.

### *3.4 Research design*

In this paper, the research conduct is separated into three parts, each designed to gather a set of data to test the components proposed. The collected data from all parts of the study will be analysed qualitatively to develop the findings, in hopes of reaching a conclusion capable of answering the research questions. Due to the recent event of Covid-19 pandemic, all interaction between the researcher and sampled participants for the purposes of this study is conducted through the Microsoft Teams platform, attributed to the user-friendly interface as well as functionalities apt for data collection, such as screen sharing, meeting recording, and file sharing.

The components of this study have been identified to be (i) use of textism, (ii) use of first language, and (iii) metalinguistic knowledge of textism. These three components form the main sources of any potential impact on reading competency among ESL undergraduates in this study, and as such, a three-part measure is designed to isolate each item and test their effect to the best of the researcher's ability.

#### *3.4.1 semi-structured interview.*

The first measure is centred around a semi-structured interview to test the first two components mentioned, namely the use of textism and use of first language. Two sections will be included in the interview, where each section will contain their own question items for one of the mentioned components, independent of each other. The question items are composed by the researcher based on past researches (Hussain

& Lukmana, 2019; Plester et al., 2009; Rosen et al., 2010), with modifications and addition of items to better cater to the difference in demographic of participants as well as the components tested. The interview will be conducted via Microsoft Teams as physical sessions are inapplicable in light of the ongoing pandemic.

#### *3.4.2 textism translation tasks.*

Two textism translation tasks are adapted from De Jonge and Kemp (2012) and Drouin and Davis (2009) to test the participants' metalinguistic knowledge of textism, which are curated to determine textism proficiency and textism familiarity. Textism proficiency sees the participants translating standard English to textese, and the opposite is done for textism familiarity. The answers are then broken down and analysed qualitatively, where the combined impression of both translation tasks will generate the inference for the component.

#### *3.4.3 reading comprehension competency tests.*

As discussed in the previous chapter, the three components that constitute reading comprehension competency are orthographic awareness, syntactic awareness, and reading literacy ability. To test each component, various instruments are constructed based on existing literatures, that will generate a set of data each, and combined together to form the reading comprehension competency. The results for these three tests serve to verify the impact of the aforementioned three components on reading comprehension.

Orthographic awareness will be assessed with a nonword task as they have been found to be effective in isolating and testing orthographic knowledge (Nassaji, 2003). The assessment is composed with the help of the ARC Nonword Database (Rastle et al.,

2002) where the participants are asked to identify the item that would fit into the English lexicon among 24 pairs of lexical items consisting of fake words and nonwords, which are pseudowords that adhere to the orthographic patterns of the English language (Siegel et al., 1995). Next, syntactic awareness is evaluated using a gap-filling task, featuring a paragraph with removed words. Throughout the text, 50 words showing relationship between clauses and phrases such as “*are*” and “*before*” are removed, with multiple choices (four) provided for each item. Due to the lack of linking words, participants are required to comprehend the syntax of the text in order to identify the logical lexeme, translating to syntactic awareness in reading (Burt et al., 2003). Finally, reading literacy ability is graded through a MUET reading model test. The MUET reading test is designed to test the reading abilities of students including understanding, transferring, and drawing relationship between information at both sentence and paragraph levels (Malaysian Examinations Council, 2014), which fulfils the scope of this reading component. To further eliminate any discrepancies between the linguistic features of question items, the entire module of the reading test along with its instructions will be employed.

Due to the rather large number of tasks (six) required to be completed by the participants, the data collection will be separated into two sessions. The first session will consist of the answering of semi-structured interview, textism translation tasks, nonword task, and gap-filling task, while the second session will gather data to test the participants’ reading comprehension competency via MUET reading model test. The duration of the former is estimated to last around 90 minutes, whereas the second session will also go on for 90 minutes as per MUET official regulations (Malaysian Examinations Council, 2014). Each session will be conducted individually between the researcher and participant to minimise external noises and influences.

### 3.5 Data collection and instrumentation

To collect data for the facilitation of this study, the researcher has implemented six instruments, with their own approach in scoring.

#### 3.5.1 semi-structured interview.

A semi-structured interview consisting of two sections is curated to test the two components: use of textism and use of first language (see *Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview*). The first respective section contains 12 items, including question items adapted from Hussain and Lukmana (2019), Plester et al. (2009), and Rosen et al. (2010) to enquire upon the proficiency as well as frequency of use of each type of textism. For the second section, 10 question items are included, similarly ranging from the proficiency to frequency of use of L1. This brings the total question item of the interview to 22 items. For question items related to the different types of textism, examples will be given by the researcher to clear up any possible confusion.

The nature of the interview is deliberately constructed to be semi-structured, this is due to the qualitative approach of the study, which may see a difference in each answering style of participants. Taking into the consideration that some participants might provide additional related information or insight, the researcher is to pursue the line of conversation to an extent in order to acquire a deeper understanding of the issue, hence aiding in data collection and results formulation. Question items might also be omitted if the related information has already been answered in any previous question items to avoid redundancy.

### 3.5.2 *textism proficiency translation task.*

To test the participants' proficiency in textism, a standard English to textese translation task is adapted from De Jonge and Kemp (2012) (see *Appendix C: Textism Translation Tasks*). This instrument contains 5 test items in standard English ranging from 33-51 lexemes. Each test item is incorporative of multiple interrelated sentences that serves to create a context. Due to the lack of a standard convention in textism, the metalinguistic awareness of textism among participants can be evaluated based on their diction and structure formation. For each correctly translated item from standard English to textese, a Textism Proficiency (TP) score will be awarded. Total TP score for all test items represent the participants' textism proficiency.

### 3.5.3 *textism familiarity translation task.*

Similar to its proficiency counterpart, this translation task consists of 5 test items adapted from Drouin and Davis (2009) for participants' familiarity in textism via translation from textese to standard English (see *Appendix C: Textism Translation Tasks*). Each of the test item ranges from 35-40 textese, however, some of them are initialised such as “*ttyl*”, and thus might be expanded upon translation. This section judges the participants' knowledge of text as they have to first be able to comprehend the lines, including determine the supposed position of punctuations, decode the texteses, and reform the sentences coherently. For each correctly translated item from textese to standard English, a Textism Familiarity (TF) score will be awarded. Total TF score for all test items represent the participants' textism familiarity.

#### 3.5.4 nonword task.

As a component of reading comprehension competency, the orthographic awareness of participants is tested using a nonword task, which features 24 pairs of test items (see *Appendix D: Nonword Task*). The 24 nonwords are generated using the ARC Nonword Database (Rastle et al., 2002) with the following restrictions:

- (i) only orthographically existing onsets,
- (ii) only orthographically existing bodies,
- (iii) only legal bigrams,
- (iv) monomorphemic only syllables,
- (v) five to seven letters, and
- (vi) Maximum of three phonemes.

This is done to narrow the testing component down to orthographic awareness and to avoid any interference of phonological elements such as pronunciation and phonotactic. In that same effort, each pair of nonword and fake word both possess the same English phonotactic structure, that is the permissible combination of sounds in the English language (Carr, 2013). The participants are required to identify the nonword among the pair without relying on phonological factors mentioned above, in doing so tapping into their knowledge towards English spelling convention.

#### 3.5.5 gap-filling task.

The gap-filling task features a 4 paragraph, 451-words text adapted from a MUET preparation book (Choo et al., 2019) (see *Appendix E: Gap-Filling Task*). In creating deletions within the text, 50 words are omitted with a gap of five words or more between each deletion. These criteria are composed based on past literature where it was found



that 50 deletions are required in order for the test to be accurate, on top of that, a gap fewer than five words between each deletion might render the text incomprehensible, hence making the test less accurate (Alderson, 2000). To facilitate a better comprehension towards the context of the text, the first and last sentences are also kept intact. This exercise is conceived to judge the participants' knowledge on the roles of different words and their relationship between phrases and clauses, which translate to grammatical and syntactic sensitivity in reading comprehension (Alderson, 2000; Burt et al., 2003)

#### *3.5.6 MUET reading model test.*

The instrument adapted to test participants' reading literacy ability is a MUET reading model test from a MUET preparation book (Choo et al., 2019) (see *Appendix F: MUET Reading Model Test*). The paper contains 45 multiple-choice questions, across six sections, and is reported to test the participants in the following areas: (i) comprehension, (ii) application, (iii) analysis, (iv) synthesis, and (v) evaluation (Malaysian Examinations Council, 2014). To bring the test to its full effectiveness, the duration given for the test will be 90 minutes as per the official regulations and instructions (Malaysian Examinations Council, 2014).

### *3.6 Data Analysis*

To administer the study, all interaction will be conducted via Microsoft Teams in the order of the tasks across two sessions. The participants are informed of the aim of the study and their consents to voluntarily participate are collected. Throughout the study, the participants are to share their screen, in order for the researcher to follow and time their workings, as well as to prevent them looking up answers. The microphone is also enabled at all time to ensure

communication between participants and researcher, as well as to ensure efficiency in question-answering.

Before the semi-structured interview, the definition of various registers such as textism, textese, first language, and standard English are explained to the participants, they are then prompted to further elaborate and describe their responses whenever uncertainties are detected. If the participants are indecisive, a short silence will be inserted to allow them to collect their thoughts. They are encouraged to provide their responses with descriptions instead of rating themselves on a scale. For the textism translation tasks, nonword task, gap-filling task, and MUET reading model test, the participants will be sent a PDF document containing all the test items, and a text document with autocorrect disabled as the answer sheet. The answering is done through typing rather than writing in order to simulate the environment closest to the digital setting, hence extracting a more accurate portrayal of their actual conducts.

The first section of the semi-structured interview is analysed qualitatively to determine the participants' behaviour in use of textism, including their preferences and opinions, whereas the second section is employed to investigate their use and proficiency in their respective first languages, their rationale for their behaviour will also be taken into consideration while forming results. For each of the textism translation task, the translated items are reviewed and judged based on their coherence, comprehensibility, and structure. The researcher is to judge the metalinguistic knowledge of textism of the participants with the added total of their TP and TF scores, combined to form the Textism Metalinguistic Knowledge (TMK) score. For a more accurate proportion of each textism component, both scores would be divided by TMK to acquire a ratio number, ranging from 0.00 to 1.00, that would demonstrate the magnitude of each component in regard to the participants' metalinguistic knowledge of textism. Finally,

reading comprehension competency of the participants is appraised through three measures: nonword task, gap-filling task, and MUET reading model test, where the raw scores of each component are totalled. But for a more accurate proportion and representation of each measures, their individual percentage scores will be calculated and the average percentage score for all tasks and tests combined will represent the participants' reading comprehension competency.

In this research, use of textism and metalinguistic knowledge of textism both act as the main tested component in affecting reading comprehension competency. However, to determine whether it is attributed to textism, or their proficiency in English in general, their use of L1 is also analysed as a control factor.

### *3.7 Pilot study*

A pilot study was conducted prior to the actual study to validate the practicality of the constructed test items. For the pilot study, two participants were tested, namely THS and SL, with their names anonymised to ensure the confidentiality of their identities, as is with the actual study.

On 28 December 2020, from 3 PM sharp to 4:56 PM, with a duration of one-hour-and-fifty-six-minutes, THS was administered the pilot study. Whereas for SL, the data collection session was held on 15 January 2021, from 2:20 PM to 5:02 PM, with a total duration of two-hour-and-forty-two-minutes. Upon the request of participant and agreement between them and the researcher, instead of having two separate sessions, all of the tasks were taken in one sitting for both of the aforementioned data collection sessions, which sees no difference with the 2-session counterpart.

A session to acquire the pilot study participants' comments and opinions was done post-test, where they could voice out any of their concerns and feedbacks. In this session, no major concerns were found by the participants. Besides, both participants were administered the test in the exact same fashion, yet SL scored significantly better than THS. The difference in duration aside, results have thus shown that the test items are valid and capable of generating test results reflecting the participants' texting behaviours as well as their proficiency in the English language, hence lending to the accurate analysis of the research topic.

### *3.8 Conclusion*

In sum, this qualitative study recruits the use of a three-part measure: semi-structured interview, to test use of textism and use of first language; textism translation tasks, to test metalinguistic knowledge of textism; reading comprehension competency tests, to test orthographic and syntactic awareness, and reading literacy ability. These measures include a total of six tasks: semi-structured interview, textism proficiency translation task, textism familiarity translation task, nonword task, gap-filling task, and MUET reading model test. The participants for this study are ESL freshman undergraduates, who have completed their Foundation programmes in UTAR, Malaysia. They are selected through a combination of convenience and snowball sampling method via a screening survey. Due to the ongoing situation regarding the Covid-19 pandemic, all physical sessions are moved to be carried out with Microsoft Teams across two separate sessions.

## 4.0 FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

### 4.1 Introduction

Within this chapter, the attained results of the data collection sessions from all five participants, represented by the pseudonyms AA, BRL, CASS, VV, and LKS, are revealed and tabulated, corresponding to each research instruments (see 3.5 *Data collection and instrumentation*). The results are first used to acquire a recurring theme for the tested components, or measurement for those applicable (see 3.3 *Research design*), then analysed in parallel to the research questions proposed (see 1.5 *Research questions*) in attempts to fulfil the research objectives. For components measured using multiple tests or tasks, each will first be discussed individually, then further merged to represent the component in complete by the researcher. Points of interest and inferences noted down by the researcher or found within the results are discussed in this chapter in formulating the findings.

### 4.2 Use of textism

This instrument was constructed to gather the participants' behaviour in use of textism, including the frequency in types of textism used, proficiency in the types of textism used, and their opinions and preferences in that (see *Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview*).

All participants have reported an above average texting frequency, ranging from "texting commonly throughout the day" to "few times each hour". Correspondingly, every participant has reported decent proficiency in the use of textism, and that they are used frequently throughout their texting activities. But even though a decent proficiency is reported, a common theme found among the participants' responses is that they all held reservations towards textism upon first encounter. To quote CASS, "...sometimes I can't recognise the textese, and have to consult internet, especially when I see it for first time.". VV has similarly said that they "...face

situations where I don't understand some textese, and have to Google it...it could also be that others are creating new textese on the spot, which could be annoying.”.

Moving on to the types of textism, the participants were asked questions regarding their frequency of use, proficiency, and comments towards the five categories of textism: (i) shortening, (ii) omitted punctuation, (iii) initialism, (iv) number homophone, and (v) emoticon.

All participants have mentioned that they frequently use shortenings throughout their texts. BRL has said that they use it in “almost every sentence” and LKS said that “I use shortening often, most of the time.”. Upon description of their proficiency and comments, they have all agreed that shortenings allow them to “...send our texts faster, so that others won't have to wait, it also makes it less tedious to read a text.” as said by AA. To quote VV, “It is much more easier to type, much shorter and efficient...easier to understand because it takes away all unnecessary things.”, and further quoting LKS, “...keep it short and simple, easier to communicate.”. From their unanimous responses, shortenings are commonly being used in the participants' texts, and the main reason being that it allows texting to take a more efficient form, hence making texting time more responsive, and increases productivity.

Moving on to omitted punctuations, where unlike the previous trend, the participants have varying opinions. AA and VV have said that they “almost never omit punctuations” and “always include all the punctuations”, whereas BRL, CASS, and LKS have responded that “...most of the time I wouldn't put the punctuations, because I think they would understand me.” and that they “don't usually bother with punctuations because I don't want to fumble with my phone.” For those always including punctuations, they have stated that “It confuses me if punctuations are not there...confused with where all the pauses and stops are, it is harder to

understand.” and that “...the structure of the text will be very jumbled and hard to understand.”. On the other hand, even though punctuations are usually omitted, BRL, CASS, and LKS have still replied that “...sometimes I will misunderstand, then I repeat the text back to them with question mark.” and “I don’t know if they are asking a question, or statement, or something.”. As seen, although the use of omitted punctuations is being split down the line, the participants are still allied in that the lack of punctuation in texts causes confusion, especially concerning syntax and semantic.

Again, a divide down the line is seen among the five participants in the use of initialisms. AA, BRL, and CASS have said that “I don’t use initialisms...prefer to type out the entire phrase.” and “I won’t use initialism often, because I don’t understand them myself.”. But oppositely, VV believes that “everyone uses initialism” and that they “use initialism for almost every text.”. LKS has provided a similar response. AA justified by commenting that “...initialisms could also have another meaning, making it confusing”, which is supported by BRL in that “It is confusing because if you don’t know the textese you might guess wrong, or confuse similar ones.”. In respond, VV countered with “It is quick and serves my purpose, it is easier to understand, but if I don’t, I will just Google or make a guess.”. But the general consensus made is summed up in the line by LKS, commenting that “...using initialisms will make it easier to understand, since it is still the same language...but if I don’t understand I can always look them up, which is not often.” In sum, the concern the participants have with initialisms is that they require a previous knowledge of the textese in order to comprehend the meaning of the overall text, but once the knowledge is acquired, it will ease comprehension of texts.

Regarding number homophones, the participants collectively stand in that they do not use it. AA and BRL have provided an interesting point in their comments, where “I used it a lot few

years back, but nowadays I never use it because my friends now are not using it.” and “I don’t use it because people around me never use it, and I seldom see it.”. Despite the participants not using number homophones, it could be attributed to the preferences of their own social circles. Regardless, CASS has pointed out that “It feels inappropriate, also one of the most confusing, some can bring out a totally different meaning...like *l8r*, I would say it is *layer* instead of the more commonly represented *later*.”. VV and LKS then supported that “...the pronunciation is ruined by the number...because numbers are mixed in, you have to read it aloud to try to understand.”, and that “...because everyone has a different accent, it is harder for me to guess the actual word.”. It is clear that the participants have steered clear of number homophones due to phonological factors, in that without adequate awareness of such, it is rather impossible to understand the texts.

Finally, the fifth and final category of textism is emoticons. All five participants reported very frequent use of emoticons, to quote CASS, “I use emoticons in every text if I can help it, even with lecturers.”. The common reply to the use of emoticon can be summarised by AA, where they mentioned that “It is an easy way to convey emotions, also a way of replying when there’s not much to say, but leaving it there is awkward.”. Similarly said by VV, “It feels awkward without emoticons...they don’t really mean anything, and shouldn’t be confused with the meaning of the text.”. It brings to light that emoticons are used more as a digital mediator than actual meaning carriers. But that is not all, LKS has also mentioned that “I don’t think too much of emoticons I don’t understand, if I can’t relate to the text I will just ignore.”. The inference made from the participants’ replies is that emoticons generally serve little semantical functions, rather much more as an indicator of the texting activity itself, or as well put by VV, “...sometimes emoticons are added purely for aesthetic purposes, and is ignorable.”.



From the findings above, *RQ1* can be answered. To summarise, the most frequently used types of textism are shortenings and emoticons, followed by omitted punctuations, initialisms, and number homophones, whereby the respective textism proficiencies have a positive relationship with their frequency of use. The three main motivators toward the use of textism are (i) increases efficiency and productivity, (ii) enhances comprehension of texts, and (iii) eases induction of pragmatic functions, such as that of emoticons. On the flip side, use of textism also has inverse consequences, which the three main hindrances toward the use of textism are (i) confusion in syntax and semantics, (ii) worsen comprehension due to a lack of previous and contextual knowledge, and (iii) high coinage rate of new registers.

#### *4.3 Metalinguistic knowledge of textism*

The component is assessed using two translation tasks, (i) textism proficiency task, where all five participants translated test items from standard English to textese, and (ii) textism familiarity task, where all five participants translated test items from textese to standard English (see *Appendix C: Textism Translation Tasks*). From these two tasks, the Textism Proficiency (TP) and Textism Familiarity (TF) scores are obtained, and combined to form the Textism Metalinguistic Knowledge (TMK) score, representing the participants' metalinguistic knowledge of textism. A ratio number is also calculated by dividing TP and TF against TMK as to show the extent of both factors in formulating the metalinguistic knowledge of textism.

Textism proficiency is first tested using the textism proficiency translation task, where a score is awarded upon each correctly translation lexeme, of which there are 33 to 51 for all five TP test items. The scores obtained by all five participants are tabulated in the table below.

Table 4.1. *TP scores for textism proficiency translation task.*

	TP 1	TP 2	TP 3	TP 4	TP 5	Total TP
AA	9	10	9	8	14	50
BRL	10	9	8	11	11	49
CASS	7	11	14	15	17	64
VV	7	10	9	13	7	46
LKS	6	5	11	7	7	36

The highest TP score is earned by CASS, at 64 points, whereas the lowest goes to LKS, at 36 points. VV, BRL, and AA scored 46, 49, and 50 respectively. The highest TP score for any test item goes to CASS, at 17 points for TP test item 5. On the other hand, the lowest TP score for a test item is obtained by LKS, at 5 points for TP test item 2. The margin difference for total TP is 28, and the largest margin difference for any one TP test item is 10 points, in TP 5.

Due to the difference in preference of textism usage, some items are translated differently, such as the phrase “I missed you” in TP 1. It was translated into “i mss u” by LKS, and simply “imy” by CASS, showing that diction plays a huge role in textese formation. Regardless, points are awarded based on each translated standard English item. For TP 5 where the biggest margin difference is found, most of the words are monosyllabic lexemes, hence providing the opportunity for more textese. For example, CASS has translated “How are you and your girlfriend...” into “hw r u n ur gf...”, but VV has only managed “How are u and your gf...”, hence the gap in proficiency and subsequently, points awarded. Interestingly, almost all participants who reported use of *omitted punctuations*, have removed most punctuations bar the periods.

Textism familiarity is then assessed using the textism familiarity translation task, by employing the same point-awarding system. There are 35 to 40 textese for all five TF test items. The scores earned in each TF test item as well as the total are presented in the following table.

Table 4.2. *TF scores for textism familiarity translation task.*

	TF 1	TF 2	TF 3	TF 4	TF 5	Total TF
AA	12	12	15	14	23	76
BRL	14	18	23	17	25	97
CASS	19	11	26	22	30	108
VV	19	17	26	21	25	108
LKS	18	17	24	22	28	109

The margin difference for total TF is larger than that of TP, at 33 points, with the highest TF score going to LKS at 109 points, and the lowest to AA at 76 points. The close second is scored by CASS and VV, both placed at 108 points, followed by BRL at 97 points. For an individual TF test item, the highest score is obtained by LKS at 28 points for TF 5, whereby the lowest goes to CASS at 11 points for TF 2. The largest margin difference in an individual TF test item is 11 points, in TF 3.

For the TF translation task, due to the text being in textism and only requiring recognition, the participants may have a higher average score compared to TP, where they have to come up with the textese themselves. Accurately relaying their comments in the interview above, the participants struggled especially with number homophones, such as the textese “ne1” in TF 3. Only CASS is able to correctly translate the item to “anyone”, the rest of the participants ignored the textese, except for BRL who incorrectly translated it to “no one”. Capitalisation and punctuations are also correctly done and inserted for the most parts. On the syntax level, all translated test items are cohesive and shows relationship between phrases. For undeciphered

textese, participants can be seen altering the test items in order for the sentences to remain logical. To demonstrate, BRL in TF 1 has translated the phrase “...ur bro out w/ that grl frm gr8 xcape.” to “...your brother out with that girl.”. Assuming that BRL is unable to translate “gr8 xcape” and not “frm”, they have removed the preposition “frm”, lexically “from”, from the sentence entirely to ensure a logical flow of information. This assumption is justified by BRL’s ability to correctly translate the similarly structured textese “wht” into “what” in the same test item.

In sum, the metalinguistic knowledge of textism is evaluated using the TMK score, acquired by totalling TP and TF score. Furthermore, the ratios of TP and TF to TMK score are also calculated to give an estimation of how much each individual component occupies in relation to the metalinguistic knowledge of textism. The data are displayed in the table below.

Table 4.3. *TMK scores for metalinguistic knowledge of textism.*

	TP	TF	TMK	TP/TMK Ratio	TF/TMK Ratio
AA	50	76	126	0.40	0.60
BRL	49	97	146	0.34	0.66
CASS	64	108	172	0.37	0.63
VV	46	108	154	0.30	0.70
LKS	36	109	145	0.25	0.75

The highest TMK score is acquired by CASS at 172 points, opposingly, the lowest is attained by AA at 126 points; with a relatively large margin difference of 46 points. Due to the higher average scores of TF translation task, both components are not to be compared to each other on equal footing, but rather as reciprocal compliments to reflect the participants’ metalinguistic knowledge of textism in complete. With that, the highest TP/TMK ratio belongs to AA, at 0.40, though the lowest goes to LKS at 0.25. Inversely, highest TF/TMK ratio is obtained by LKS at

0.75, and lowest by AA at 0.60. In terms of TP/TMK and TF/TMK ratios, they are distributed rather evenly in between among other participants.

Based on the participants' performances, we can inference that the combinations of alphabets, numbers, or even punctuations in the composition of textese are arguably unlimited, largely depending on the diction and structure formation of the texters' interpretation, where they all fulfil equally imperative roles. While the results of the TP translation task appear lacklustre, it merely displays the preference of which the participants actively choose to use textism, and thus are not impacting the outcome in a large scale. Plus, LKS who scored the lowest for TP conjunctionally scored the highest for TF among all participants. This shows that "usage" does not necessarily coincide with "understanding" when it comes to textism. While the TP/TMK and TF/TMK ratio numbers are not calculated to equal proportion and distribution, the number of lexemes and textese for both translation tasks are not far apart, ranging at 33 to 51, and 35 to 40 items respectively. This trend still shows that the demographic at large is generally able to understand most textism, regardless of their usage, as long as decent input or exposure is gained.

The formulated findings allow *RQ2* to be answered. On the orthographic level, a functional level in both using and understanding textism is found. While that is true, proficiency in using textism does not necessarily translate to familiarity in understanding textism, whereby the ability to understand textism is largely unimpacted by how the texters are using textism. On the syntax level, texters could accurately identify each pause and supposed location of missing punctuations, creating a sensical flow of information between phrases and even sentences. It is also conjectured that context plays an irreplaceable role in aiding the deciphering or even using of textism, as the participants are not explicitly informed that the test items are interrelated, yet

somehow a logical flow of ideas is found in all the translated work. Nonetheless, participants possess the ability to switch back and forth between standard English and textism to suit the scenario, hence demonstrating decent metalinguistic awareness concerning textism.

#### *4.4 Use of first language*

Acting as a control factor to determine if reading comprehension competency is attributed to the use of textism, or interference from the participants' first languages, a semi-structured interview is held to assess their habitual use in their respective first languages, including frequency and proficiency in the use of all four language skills (see *Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview*). Each participant has been found to practise a very different use of their respective first languages. A total of two first languages have been reported by all five participants, namely (i) Mandarin, by BRL, VV, and LKS, and (ii) Tamil, by AA and CASS. As such, the findings for this section will be sorted according to participants instead of recurring theme.

In alphabetical order, when questioned about the general frequency and proficiency of use in their first language, AA has reported that they use Tamil on a need-to basis, often only with family members. They have further added on that the use of Tamil towards friends and for formal purposes is scarce. Their reported proficiency reflects the frequency of use, in that Tamil reading and writing abilities are close to none, whereas speaking and listening skills only suffice for daily conversation. On Tamil speaking frequency, AA has replied that it depends heavily on the situation and conversational partner, but they would often avoid speaking in Tamil. As such, they have reported some issues with their word pronunciation. Moving on to listening, AA's main source of Tamil audio roots from songs, films, and from conversations, with the frequency arranged in descending order. Keeping with the trend, their reported

listening proficiency shows that “sometimes I couldn’t catch all the words.” To touch on the orthographic side of things, AA has commented that they cannot read in Tamil, bar the exception of the character’s romanisation, due to their practice in speaking. But still, writing in Tamil is impossible.

Offering a different perspective, BRL reported that they often use their first language, Mandarin, and that their proficiency of such in both casual and formal settings is above average. For BRL, Mandarin is the go-to language of choice, especially when it concerns speaking. “I will choose to speak in Mandarin even with lecturers, if I privately consult them.” said BRL. Their proficiency, however, offers an interesting outlook. They have mentioned that due to the local sociolinguistic setting, if code-mixing is applied into his speech, he may perform worse compared to utterances containing only Mandarin, but “...I can probably give a speech or debate in Mandarin formally.”, supported BRL. Similar to AA, BRL has shared that their Mandarin listening frequency is high, mainly from songs and entertainment programmes from China, lending them a decent listening proficiency, from both Malaysian and China accent alike. For orthographic skills however, BRL reported a lower frequency compared to their verbal skills, only occasionally reading from social medias, or taking down notes in Mandarin. But they have a decent reading and writing proficiency, that most Mandarin characters can be recognised, and that word recognition and grammatical problems are minimal.

As for the third participant, CASS, with Tamil as their first language, stated that “rarely use Tamil daily...even with my families I prefer English.” But from the interview, their general proficiency has been found to be above average in both casual and formal situations. For CASS, even though their Tamil speaking frequency is very low, their reported proficiency is average, supported by them that “I can communicate with native speaker of Tamil in the proper structure

with no problem.”. The recurring theme returns that songs and films dictate the main supply of Tamil audio in CASS’s listening skill, and similarly, their listening proficiency is average. Due to CASS’s involvement in their church, they often read and write in Tamil scripts for formal purposes, thus showing a high proficiency in the use of orthographic Tamil.

Back to Mandarin, VV have reported that “I use Mandarin with family and sometimes friends, but not for official purposes.”, and that is displayed in her average proficiency in the language. On speaking, they use Mandarin daily but only with family and occasionally friends, and that “I don’t think I can use Mandarin formally like in a speech or debate.”. Diverging from the trend thus far, VV has said that they seldom listen to Mandarin outside of conversations, but with that, they are still proficient enough to comprehend Mandarin speakers with varying accents. Unlike the verbal skills, VV’s reading skill is elevated, due to their passion and interest in books, including ones written in Chinese characters, allowing them to be “...able to recognise most Chinese characters.”. As there has been no need to write in Mandarin, their Mandarin writing frequency is low to non-existent, leading to a poor proficiency in writing.

Finally, LKS has also offered information regarding the use of their first language, Mandarin. On a daily basis, Mandarin occupies most of their language use, from casual to formal purposes alike, with an average general proficiency. Regarding verbal skills, their Mandarin speaking frequency is high, mainly from conversations, and “...I can use Mandarin professionally if given time to prepare.”. LKS, much like the other three participants, stated that “I regularly listen to Mandarin shows and songs”, and as such, has an above average proficiency with the ability to “...adapt to the situation depending on the spoken accent”. An average read was reported by LKS, however, it does not affect their proficiency too much, as they believe that most of the Mandarin characters could still be recognised. LKS has also said that their



Mandarin writing frequency is very low, as “I can no problem understand the structure and grammar, but it is slightly harder for me to produce a quality work.”. Intriguingly, they have also commented that “...my proficiency in Mandarin could be a problem because I tend to mix it in other language sometimes.”. This issue coincides with the purpose of this instrument, and thus serves as a piece of key information in generating the findings.

From the detailed examination shown above, each participant has adapted a different use of their first languages, in ways best serving their intrinsic and extrinsic purposes alike. In the analysis of the effects of use of textism on reading comprehension competency, this analysis will be taken into consideration, acting as a control factor, to inference on any potential first language interferences.

#### *4.5 Reading comprehension competency*

Reading comprehension competency is measured in this study through the assessment of three factors, namely orthographic awareness, syntactic awareness, and reading literacy ability. The combined raw score and average percentage score of all three factors will represent reading comprehension competency as a complete component.

Orthographic awareness is tested using a nonword task (see *Appendix D: Nonword Task*), with a score range of 0 to 24. The participants’ respective performances are tabulated in the following graph.

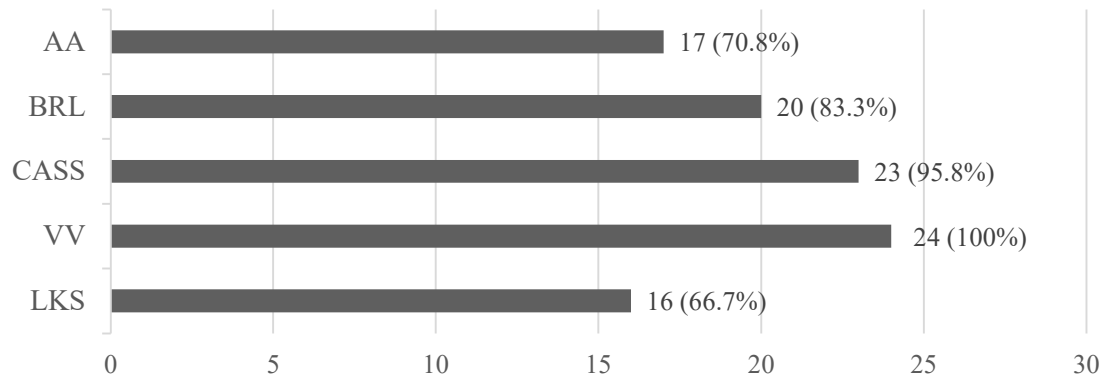


Figure 4.1. *Raw scores for nonword task (0-24).*

The highest score was obtained by VV, with a perfect score of 24 points, and the lowest was scored by LKS at 16 points, with a margin difference of 8 marks. As for the rest, AA, BRL, and CASS scored 17, 20, and 23 points respectively. In general, all participant managed to achieve at least an above-average performance for this task. The percentage score for the nonword task is, in ascending order, LKS at 66.7%, AA at 70.8%, BRL at 83.3%, CASS at 95.8%, and VV at 100%.

For syntactic awareness, it was assessed using a gap-filling task (see *Appendix E: Gap-Filling task*) with a score range of 0 to 50. The results are presented in a graph below.

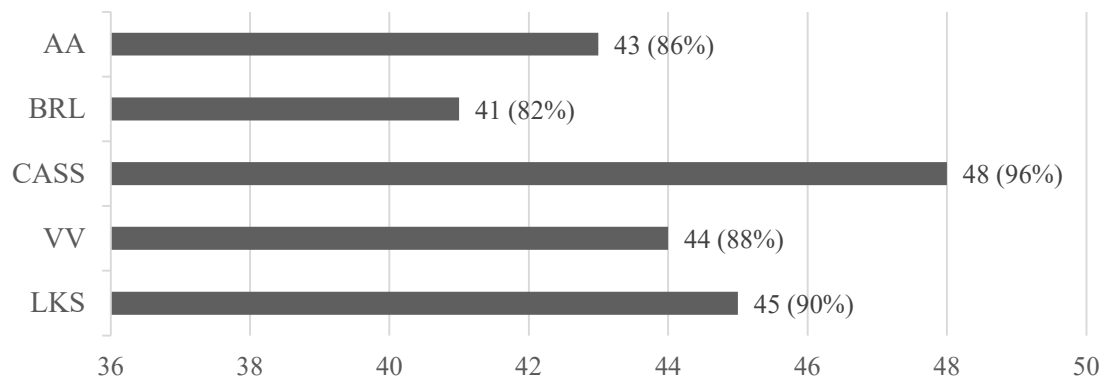


Figure 4.2. *Raw scores for gap-filling task (0-50).*

The margin difference is slightly smaller at 7 points in this task, with the highest score being 48 points by CASS, and the lowest being 41 points, by BRL. The other participants scored 43, 44, and 45 points by AA, VV, and LKS respectively. All participants have scored above the 40-point line. The percentage score for the gap-filling task is, in ascending order, BRL at 82%, AA at 86%, VV at 88%, LKS at 90%, and CASS at 96%.

Finally, a MUET reading model test (see *Appendix F: MUET Reading Model Test*) was used to measure the reading literacy ability of the participants, with a score range of 0 to 45. The results are again displayed in the following graph.

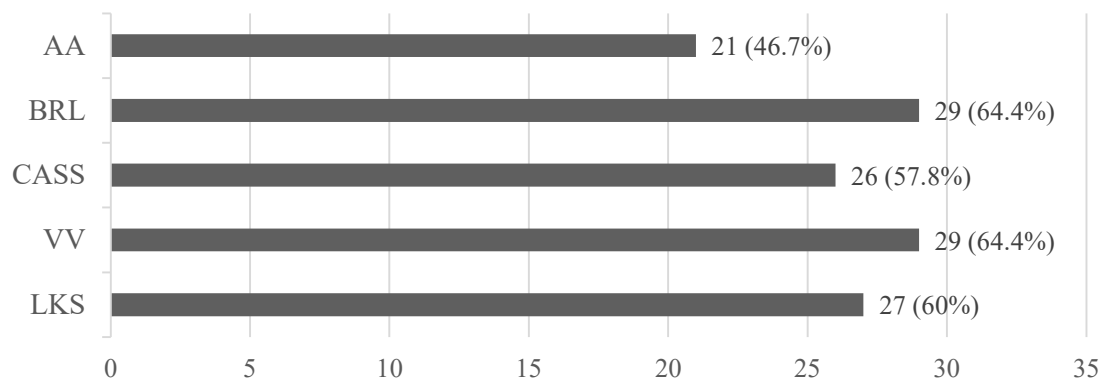


Figure 4.3. *Raw scores for MUET reading model test (0-45).*

The score margin difference of 8 marks is repeated here in this task. With both BRL and VV scoring the highest at 29 points, while the lowest is placed at 21 points by AA. The other two participants have obtained a score in between, at 26 and 27 points by CASS and LKS respectively. Interestingly, all participants have scored above the half-point line except for AA, and even so, none of them have managed to obtain a score within the fourth quarter of the total score, unlike with previous tasks. The percentage score for the MUET reading model test is, in

ascending order, AA at 46.7%, CASS at 57.8%, LKS at 60%, and both VV and BRL at 64.4%.

It is worth noting that all participants have completed the paper within the time limit of 90 minutes as set by the official regulations (Malaysian Examinations Council, 2014).

In total, reading comprehension competency, represented by the scores accumulated by all five participants from the nonword task, gap-filling task, and MUET reading model test are combined in the graph below.

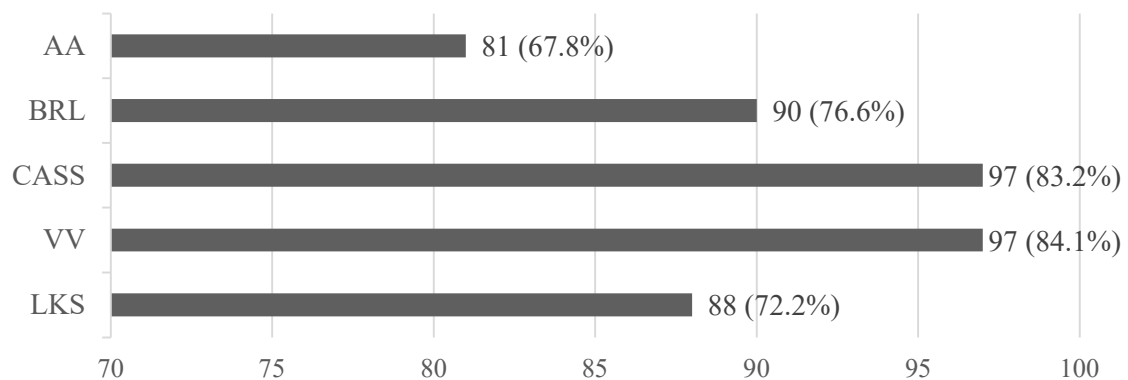


Figure 4.4. *Raw scores for reading comprehension competency (0-119).*

From the above graph, out of 119 points, both CASS and VV have accumulated the highest score among all five participants, at 97 points. Followed by BRL at 90 points, LKS at 88 points, and finally by AA at 81 points, the lowest score recorded with a margin difference of 16 points. Even though both CASS and VV earned the highest score at 97 point, there is a clear top-scorer when the average percentage score is calculated. The average percentage scores that represent the participants' reading comprehension competency in equal proportions are, in ascending order, AA at 67.8%, LKS at 72.2%, BRL at 76.6%, CASS at 83.2%, and VV at 84.1%.

By referring to all the tested components in this research study, the titular question remains, namely, what are the effects, if any, of textism on reading comprehension competency? Starting

with AA, even though they text frequently with a decent proficiency in the use of shortenings and emoticons, their orthographic awareness is seemingly unaffected, being able to achieve 17 points, or 70.8% in the nonword task. Besides, a great score for gap-filling task is recorded at 43 points, or 86%. This could be attributed to the fact that AA never omits punctuations in their texts, hence demonstrating that attention is paid to the syntax of texts. Initialisms, where phrases are abbreviated, are also avoided, supporting the above inference. When compared to the rest of the participants, AA's reading literacy ability falls on the lower spectrum, but no clear correlation can be found between that and their use of textism. If any, a positive relationship is shown between textism familiarity and reading literacy ability, essentially meaning that the more textese one understands, the greater their ability to process information in texts. Their proficiency in L1, being Tamil, also does not seem to have impacted the findings in any way, being that their frequency in use of L1 is low, with the inability to read and write with it. For AA, there is no clear evidence that textism has negatively impacted their reading comprehension competency, on the contrary, there exists a possibility that textism familiarity could enhance reading literacy ability.

Moving on to BRL, who practises frequent textism usage with shortenings, omitted punctuations, and emoticons with good proficiency, they have also acquired an excellent score of 20 points, or 83.3%, in the nonword task. A similarly great score of 41, or 82%, is recorded for their gap-filling task, despite that punctuations are omitted in their texts most of the time. Even with a substantial use of textism, a high orthographic and syntactic awareness is found from BRL, again showing a positive relationship between use of textism and reading comprehension competency. Supporting the previous inference of positive relationship between textism familiarity and reading literacy ability, BRL has obtained a relatively high score for their textism familiarity, and the highest score for reading literacy ability among all

participants, at 29 points, or 64.4%. Looking at any potential interferences from their L1, it does not seem to play a huge role, if any at all, in affecting the findings. Judging from the fact that BRL has a high frequency and proficiency in Mandarin usage, yet managed to obtain substantial results for their reading comprehension competency tasks. It is fair to say that a decent proficiency in the English language itself is held. For BRL, it was found that textism and reading comprehension competency has an overwhelmingly positive relationship, and the impact of textism familiarity on reading literacy ability is also becoming clearer.

Next, CASS, akin to the previously discussed, practises high frequency and decent proficiency in the use of shortenings, omitted punctuations, and emoticons. However, they have achieved an almost perfect score for their nonword task, at 23 points, or 95.8%. Not only that, but they have also earned the highest score for the gap-filling task, at 48 points, or 96%, even though omitted punctuations are often applied in their texts. This again adheres to the concurrent trend that a positive relationship is drawn between textism and reading comprehension competency. Furthermore, the reading literacy ability of CASS is still relatively high, and their textism familiarity contains one of the highest scores among all participants, coinciding with the inference that textism familiarity positively influences reading literacy ability. To discourse on CASS's L1 usage, in spite of them often writing and reading in Tamil formally, the general frequency in the use of L1 is low. Moreover, attributing to their capability in orthographically use their L1 for official purposes, it is surmised that they possess adequate ability in avoiding attribution error in English. Hence, any potential L1 interferences in reading comprehension competency are dismissed. For CASS, in line with the findings shown thus far, there are no definite negative correlations between textism and reading comprehension competency.

So far, the findings have been consistently showing that textism has no negative impact on reading comprehension competency, on the reversed, there are hints of a positive relationship being developed. The same is also upheld from the data provided from VV, who have reported a very frequent use of shortenings, initialisms, as well as emoticons. Orthographic and syntactic awareness are likewise not worsened by the use of textism, as a perfect score is earned in the nonword task, and a commendable 44 points, or 88%, in the gap-filling task. It is clear that their use of textism does not hold any adverse effect on reading comprehension competency. Although their textism proficiency is leaning towards the lower end, their textism familiarity and reading literacy ability are one of the highest among all participants. It shows that the more textism one understands, the better they will be able to comprehend and transfer ideas from written materials. Regarding L1 usage of VV however, an interesting point is discovered. Due to their passion in reading, including materials in Mandarin, their reading literacy ability could be associated with their proficiency in reading instead of textism familiarity. But in general, their L1 usage is below average in frequency and poor in proficiency except for their reading skill. For VV, textism has no negative effects on reading comprehension competency. Although their reading literacy ability can be positively attributed to textism familiarity, it could also be linked to their proficiency in reading in general.

Finally, LKS has noted a high frequency in use of shortenings, omitted punctuations, initialisms, and emoticons, with an average to good proficiency in all. This serves as a turning point in generating findings for this research study, as they have recorded the highest amount of textism types used. While syntactic awareness and reading literacy ability remain principally unaffected by textism, their orthographic awareness seems to have taken a hit, being scored at 16 points, or 66.7% for the nonword task. Taking a look at textism familiarity, for which they have scored the highest, and subsequently the second highest for reading literacy ability, this

further reaffirms the ongoing standpoint that better comprehension of textism lends to that of text materials. Albeit that LKS's orthographic awareness is the lowest among all participants, it is worth considering if it is truly aligned with their extensive use of textism, or perhaps due to L1 interferences. At present, the latter persists as a valid circumstance. In the semi-structured interview session, LKS has listed a tendency to commit language transfer due to their proficiency in Mandarin. As such, considering their high frequency and an above average proficiency in the use of Mandarin, except for their writing skill, it is decidedly possible that their L1 has interfered in decoding the pseudowords in the nonword task. For LKS, due to interference from L1, correlation between textism and orthographic awareness could not be assessed. Aside from that, textism familiarity has been found to aid reading literacy ability.

In conclusion, by referring to the above analysis, *RQ3* can be resolved. There are no definite negative effects of textism on reading comprehension competency, in terms of all orthographic awareness, syntactic awareness, and reading literacy ability. There are also no substantial impacts found in the use of different types of textism towards reading comprehension competency. On the other hand, a positive relationship is potentially hinted between textism familiarity and reading literacy ability, but a more focused study is required to resolve this question. Regardless, in this current research study, textism familiarity remains a potential catalyst to enhancing reading literacy ability.

#### *4.6 Conclusion*

This chapter first analysed the results of the data collection sessions from all five participants, represented by the pseudonyms AA, BRL, CASS, VV, and LKS, according to their performance in each research instruments. From their attained results, their comments and



performances are being used to generate findings and inferences, in efforts to achieve the research objectives through answering the research questions proposed.

From the semi-structured interview, two components are analysed. Firstly, the first section of the interview is used to extract information regarding the participants' use of textism, which is used to answer *RQ1*: What is the behaviour in use of textism among ESL undergraduates? It has been found that the types of textism with highest usage frequency are shortenings and emoticons, followed by omitted punctuations, initialisms, and number homophones in descending order. The comments have highlighted the three main motivators to using textism, namely (i) increases efficiency and productivity, (ii) enhances comprehension of texts, and (iii) eases induction of pragmatic functions. Whereas inversely, the three main hindrances are (i) confusion towards syntax and semantics, (ii) worsen comprehension caused by lack of previous knowledge, and (iii) high coinage rate of new registers. The second section of the interview extracted data on the participants' use of first language, acting as a control factor in detecting any potential L1 interferences.

The textism translation tasks were used to assess textism proficiency and textism familiarity, in doing so answering *RQ2*: What is the extent of metalinguistic knowledge of textism among ESL undergraduates? Evaluating the findings, the participants are competent in both using and understanding textism, but their proficiency in using is not parallel with their familiarity in understanding. Be that as it may, this demonstrates the ability to understand most textism regardless of usage, provided that decent exposure is obtained. With the lack of punctuations and altered syntax in textism, a logical flow of ideas can also be detected and reconstructed in standard English, by relying on the complementary context. The ability to actively toggle the

use of textism is discovered among the participants, showing adequate metalinguistic awareness of textism.

Finally, three tasks are used in assessing reading comprehension competency, specifically nonword task, gap-filling task, and MUET reading model test. By examining reading comprehension competency with the use of textism and metalinguistic knowledge of textism, the researcher has resolved *RQ3*: What are the effects of textism on reading comprehension competency among ESL undergraduates? There is no clear evidence that show a negative relationship between textism and reading comprehension competency. On the contrary, textism familiarity could potentially enhance reading literacy ability.

## 5.0 DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

### 5.1 Introduction

The final chapter of this thesis paper consists of a discussion towards the findings acquired in the research study, their significances, as well as recommendations for future research. The discussion of findings is carried out with relevance to past literature as well as theoretical framework proposed in the previous chapter (see *2.0 Literature Review*) in terms of similarities and differences, to further build upon the understanding of the textism subject in the field of linguistics. In addition, recommendations for future research are suggested, with consideration of the limitations posed in the current study, in order to yet contribute to the existing knowledge in this discipline.

### 5.2 General discussion

Starting with the first component tested: the use of textism. The use of textism component is used to answer *RQ1*, through the frequency in use of different types of textism, and their main motivators and main hindrances in textism usage. Our findings show that the most frequently used textism are shortenings and emoticons, while the least used is number homophones. This calls attention to the study conducted by Kho et al. (2012) on the effects of textism on Malaysian college students' writing skills, where it was found that emoticons are leaning towards the lower end of frequency used, while abbreviation is the least used. Comparing to the current study, the discrepancies are stark. Usage of emoticons aside, abbreviation, which shares the same characteristics with shortenings as named in this study, recorded completely inversed frequency of use. This could be attributed to several reasons: (i) in the paper by Kho et al. (2012), the data was only collected from Facebook, while this research study acquires the data on a general scale, not only that, (ii) their research study was conducted almost a decade ago, as such it is reasonable to factor in a potential shift in the texting paradigm when compared

to the concurrent times. Considering the above, while both research are valid, comparing the two on the same footing does not grant them the same equity.

That said, our findings seem to be reflected in another research conducted among seven postgraduate students, in which shortenings accounted for about 93% of total textism used, followed by emoticons at around 11%, number homophones are correspondingly placed among the lowest at 2% (Hussain & Lukmana, 2019). Following the justification above, it suffices to state that as progressions were had in the digital sociolinguistic setting, more recent studies have the capability to more closely reflect the current state of textism, as opposed to studies conducted almost a decade ago. Aside from that, the digital platform from which data was collected also vary, as the above paper opted to solely collect Whatsapp texts. At this point in time, it is unsure whether the use of different texting platforms influences the data collected in similar research, but it is to be noted that as of 2020, about 98.7% of Malaysian texters advocates using Whatsapp, while only about 53.9% prefers Facebook Messenger (Müller, 2021). Even though that is true, our findings reflect the participants' use of textism on a general scale, hence not restricting the data to any one specific texting platform, showing a greater accommodation for disparity in terms of platform used. As such, it is fair to assume that research with a lower variance in date has a higher accuracy in data comparison.

On the types of textism used itself, with the frequency in use of number homophones trending downward, it is worth reconsidering the argument that textism acts as a bridge between orthographic and phonological skills. As textism shares characteristics of both orthographic and phonological language skills in terms of form and function, it has been thought to be an equidistant of the two (Plester et al., 2009). The convention of number homophones, with their assimilation of numbers and consonants, are thus exemplary examples in supporting this

assertion (Lyddy et al., 2014). However, as it is increasingly neglected, or even actively avoided as is with this study, there poses signs of textism drifting away from this supposition. Still, it remains sound that other formation of textism style, most notably shortening, also prime the texters' phonological awareness (Kemp, 2010), and hence might prove this conundrum to just be a case of correlation between exposure and usage. In more detail, as number homophones fade out from the digital sociolinguistic setting, new texters will acquire less exposure to the textism style, and subsequently are less probable to use it themselves. As language change develops in the direction of maximised productivity (Keller, 1994), this behaviour improves rates of successful text comprehension and rightly justifies itself.

Discoursing on the participants' more general behaviour in the use of textism, the main reasons of them employing textese have been found to be (i) enhanced efficiency and productivity, (ii) enhanced comprehension, and (iii) eases induction of pragmatics, in texts. The same were reported in previous studies administered among Malaysian young adults, showing great regards to efficiency in encouraging textism usage (Mokhsin et al., 2015; Sulaiman & Zolait, 2010; Tayebinik & Puteh, 2012). However, comprehension of texts was not extensively mentioned in any of the local papers. But by going slightly off-tangent, another study conducted among ESL high school students reported that textism usage itself does not necessarily improve comprehension of texts, but rather serve as a source of motivation in encouraging learning (Totanes & Lintao, 2019). From this, we are able to gather the explanation that while performance in textism has no direct correlation to text comprehension, it lowers the anxiety in the learning of English as a second language. Again, the recency of the study could also demonstrate a closer relevance to our findings when compared to the more dated papers.

On the contrary, the three reasons of the participants shying away from textism usage are (i) confusion towards syntax and semantics, (ii) worsen comprehension caused by lack of previous knowledge, and (iii) high coinage rate of new registers. When compared to similar local papers in the past, the spectrum of data collected are significantly different from each other. To start, there are concerns toward unintentional code-mixing of textese in formal writings (Tayebinik & Puteh, 2012) and risk in harming the form of the language itself (Mokhsin et al., 2015), which were not seen in the interview conducted. But, when the concerns reported by past papers and those found in this study are compared in parallel, it is clear that the main hindrances caused by textism are more fixated on micro-linguistic factors now, as opposed to the sociolinguistic concerns as reported half a decade ago. As the use of textism become more widespread, the trend is extremely clear cut, showing that the people have gradually shifted from avoidance and anxiety of using textism, to general acceptance and instead attempt to understand it more, across the span of the past decade.

Besides, narrowing down on the fact that all participants have unanimously commented how new textese are constantly being coined as well as lack of previous knowledge might hindrance textism usage, certain conjectures could be made. It should be made known that a standard is practically non-existent when it comes to textism formation, for each texter could, and do employ an individual texting style unique to their own personality (McWhorter, 2013; Plester et al., 2008). With this, the participants often have to look them up, or ignore the undeciphered textese entirely upon first encounter. Instances such as these led to one major question: With their contradictory statement in both aiding and affecting text comprehension, which stands true, or at least holds a larger edge over the other? The missing piece that completes this puzzle is rather simply, the context of which the texts reside in. Both the use and comprehension of textism pays great consideration to the concurrent context and setting, and as such may alter

according to the case situation (Kho et al., 2012). Even with an unchanging metalinguistic awareness, textism comprehension may degrade if a concrete context could not be identified or formulated.

That which brings us to the following tested component, metalinguistic knowledge of textism. This study concludes that textism proficiency and familiarity, or in simpler terms: using and understanding textism, do not directly correlate with each other. The same findings were presented in studies done previously showing that textism familiarity is generally higher than proficiency, with a complementary rather than a direct relationship (Drouin & Davis, 2009; Kemp, 2010). Nevertheless, exposure to textism still plays a role in this relationship, where a higher exposure generally relates to greater metalinguistic awareness of textism, and weaker otherwise, as consequently justified in past studies as well (Lyddy et al., 2014; Plester et al., 2009; Shafie et al., 2010). Similar account was reported even among different age groups, namely adolescent, children, and young adults (De Jonge & Kemp, 2012).

As previously discussed, the conventional argument against textism usage concerns the corruption of the form of language due to undesired habit formation (Crystal, 2006; Mokhsin et al., 2015; Tayebnik & Puteh, 2012). But as reflected in this study, that is no longer a valid supporting detail, as a high textism metalinguistic awareness is detected among all participants, showing the ability to toggle between the forms of language as desired best catering to the situation. This also coincides with multiple past studies done to understand the effect of textism on language skills, in which all demonstrates metalinguistic awareness of textism among their participants to a functional extent (Drouin, 2011; Kemp & Clayton, 2017; Plester et al., 2008; Shafie et al., 2010). In spite of that being the case, all participant for this study uses textism with a decent exposure on a very frequent basis, and so the extent of textism metalinguistic

awareness remains questionable among ESL texters with little to no exposure to textism. Another point of interest is that multilinguals have a generally higher metalinguistic awareness, granting them higher dimensions of cognitive control over language itself (Simpson, 2013).

On the topic of multilingualism, to avoid over-generalising the correlation between reading comprehension competency and the use of textism, a control factor is introduced in the form of L1 proficiency. In the semi-structured interview held individually between the researcher and all participant, the first languages reported are Mandarin, practised by BRL, VV, and LKS; and Tamil, which AA and CASS practise. While the component serves as a functional benchmark to judge instances where their L1 impedes ESL input, it does not take in account of the forms of the languages itself (Kemp, 2010). Proficiency as a factor of language transfer error aside, known languages with a more identical script will be activated before those with a different typology (Simpson, 2013), like from English to Malay, as opposed from English to Mandarin or Tamil with a different script. This information portrays that while proficiency in L1 still plays a key role, the influences of the linguistic typology in this study remains unknown.

Across the general spectrum, the use of textism does not negatively affect reading comprehension competency, resounded throughout the majority of existing research on the same topic involving native English users (Drouin and Davis, 2009; Kemp, 2010; Kemp et al., 2014; Plester et al., 2009; Wood et al., 2014). Notwithstanding that, a negative relationship between use of textism and orthographic awareness is reported in a study with 53 undergraduates (De Jonge & Kemp, 2012), hence contesting the consensus reached. The study showed that a higher frequency in textism usage correlates to worse performance in orthographic and morphological awareness, even though no certain links could be found between use of specific types of textism and reading skill (De Jonge & Kemp, 2012). While



that is true, in the same paper itself, arguments regarding the initial linguistic abilities of the participants lending to interference with the study surfaced. As an L1 control factor is implemented in this research study and not the mentioned paper, the significance of the latter ultimately lacks the ability to explain their findings in its whole. In line with our paper, other research with college students and undergraduates found no adverse effects of textism on orthographic awareness (Drouin & Davis, 2009; Wood et al., 2014).

On grammatical and syntactic awareness, much like orthographic awareness, we have concluded no definite correspondence with textism usage. The same coincides with other papers testing the same components on young adults as native English users (Kemp et al., 2014; Wood et al., 2014). However, as pointed out earlier in this paper itself, young adults have the tendency to show fewer negative effects regarding textism and grammatical awareness, since they have had more exposure to the standard form of the languages, especially when compared to younger participants whom have seen a parallel experience in both forms of languages (Kemp, 2010; Kemp et al., 2014). As such it would be interesting to conduct a similar research on younger ESL texters to further isolate the tested components.

Finally, no evidence that textism has negatively impact reading literacy ability is found in this study, in agreement with a study done by Kemp (2010). To dispute that finding, Drouin (2011) has presented significant negative relationships between frequency in use of textism and reading literacy score among young adults. In that paper, university students who employ textese in their formal texts to academic staff has scored significantly worse in literacy score. Despite this shocking find, Drouin (2011) also discussed that the study focused solely on select context, and might not represent the students' texting behaviour overall. Still, it proves valuable to further investigate young adults' conscious choice of textism appropriateness.

Relating to the theoretical framework modelled (see 2.6 *Theoretical framework*), as the use of textism does not directly correlate with metalinguistic knowledge of textism, proven by the participants' variance in textism proficiency and familiarity, its exposure still lends to the development of textism metalinguistic awareness (Lyddy et al., 2014; Odlin, 1989; Plester et al., 2009; Shafie et al., 2010). Another point of interest is that, regardless of the model, L1 attribution error does not seem to happen often, if at all, without the conscious knowledge of the texter. Fascinating as it may, it could be explained through the discrepancy in the forms of their L1, where textism, with a closer script to English, is activated before Mandarin or Tamil, which employs a different script to English. Fundamentally, an uncontested matter remains that although the use of textism develops as an individual style suited to the texters' personality, it conforms to communicative productivity, and leans toward the direction of successful exchanges in communication (Keller, 1994).

### *5.3 Recommendations for future research*

Taking in consideration of the limitations of this research study, a few elements could be introduced in future research to satisfy the research gaps present. For starter, the inclusion of predictive text in recent years have seen a massive leap in texting convention, where text autocorrect becomes an everyday feature, potentially eliminating the need for use of textism entirely (Waldron et al., 2017). That said, this study does not isolate the use of predictive text in the participants' texting behaviour. Future studies could involve the use of predictive text as one of the tested components, in judging the impacts of textism as an isolated cognitive processing component without the aid of any external suggestions.

Moreover, the data for use of textism and L1 in this study is collected via a semi-structured interview, allowing the participants to self-report their behaviours. As it stands, there exists a possibility that the sampled research participants might portray themselves in a better light instead of offering more accurate data, hence skewing the findings towards more positive implications. More investigation is required in the format of experimental instruments in gathering naturalistic data such as behaviour in tested components (Drouin, 2011).

Instruments aside, the demographic of sampled participants could be yet refined in terms of age groups and L1 practised. As have been pointed out in the discussion and review of findings, younger ESL texters with a more equal proportion of exposure gained in both English and textism may provide for a more accurate data compared to young adults with significant advantage in either one form of language (Kemp, 2010; Kemp et al., 2014). In terms of L1, the data could also be improved if the sampled participants practise an L1 with the same script as English, for example Malay, French or German. This allows textism to compete with their L1 on the same ground in terms of language transfer into English.

#### *5.4 Conclusion*

Altogether, this paper sets out to fill in the demographic research gap in effects of textism on reading comprehension competency. Past related studies have been conducted with native English users, whereas this paper fulfils the titular research among young adult ESL texters. Various concerns were held since the entry of the 21st century regarding textism usage corrupting the authenticity of languages, by introducing unconventional forms of linguistic and contextual textism. This argument paved the way to a boom in research, evidently discovering that the concerns are unwarranted and insignificant in the grander scheme of linguistic progression.

Following that, this qualitative study puts three components to the test, namely (i) use of textism, (ii) use of first language, and (iii) metalinguistic knowledge of textism. This is done via the employment of six instruments: (i) semi-structured interview, (ii) textism proficiency translation task, (iii) textism familiarity translation task, (iv) nonword task, (v) gap-filling task, and (vi) MUET reading model test. By acquiring the data in the medium of scores and comments, findings were generated according to each component. Finally, the use of textism and metalinguistic knowledge of textism are pitched against reading comprehension competency to fulfil the research objectives, with use of first language acting as a control factor in determining influences unrelated to textism.

Evidently, our study findings echo those of past studies reviewed, showing no clear correlation between textism usage and reading comprehension competency. A gradual change in the digital sociolinguistic setting is also hinted by comparing present and studies from close to a decade ago. Nonetheless, this research study poses few limitations and research gaps, where the inclusion of predictive text and autocorrect is not factored in our framework. Besides, the demographic of the sampled participants could be improved upon, such as their first languages and their general age group.

All in all, the voiced anxiety of textism negatively affecting reading skill is overrated and hyperbolised due to widespread portrayal of media. In fact, it remains a linguistic wonder and perfectly captures the essence of language change in modern times as the digital environment is slowly assimilated into our daily lives.

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## Appendix A: Demographic Information

1. Name
2. Age
3. Faculty
4. Course
5. UTAR email address
6. Race
7. First language (including dialects of listed languages)
8. Are you a Year 1 undergraduate student?
9. Do you have any prior certification of higher education (Bachelor's degree, Master's degree, Doctorate)?
10. Have you acquired the Malaysian Higher School Certificate (STPM)?
11. Have you acquired the Unified Examination Certificate (UEC)?
12. Have you completed the MUET examination (both in-effect and expired)?
13. Have you completed Foundation programme in UTAR or other tertiary education institution in Malaysia?
14. Is English your second language (not mother tongue)?
15. Do you practise daily use of your reported first language?

## Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview

## 1.0 Use of textism

1. How often do you text daily?
2. How familiar are you with textism (texting language)  
(eg. *bro* = brother, *sry* = sorry, *couldnt* = couldn't, *np* = no problem, *str8* = straight)
3. How often do you use the *shortening* type of textese? (eg. *thurs* = Thursday, *tmr* = tomorrow)
4. What is your proficiency with the *shortening* type of textese?
5. How often do you use the *omitted punctuations* type of textese? (eg. *texting without punctuations*)
6. What is your proficiency with the *omitted punctuations* type of textese?
7. How often do you use the *initialism* type of textese? (eg. *brb* = be right back)
8. What is your proficiency with the *initialism* type of textese?
9. How often do you use the *number homophones* type of textese? (eg. *l8r* = later)
10. What is your proficiency with the *number homophones* type of textese?
11. How often do you use the *emoticon* type of textese? (eg. :) = smiley face)
12. What is your proficiency with the *emoticon* type of textese?

## 2.0 Use of first language

1. How often do you use your reported first language daily?
2. How proficient are you in your reported first language?
3. How often do you speak in your first language?
4. Describe your proficiency in speaking your first language.
5. How often do you listen to your first language?



6. Describe your proficiency in listening to your first language.
7. How often do you read in your first language?
8. Describe your proficiency in reading your first language.
9. How often do you write in your first language?
10. Describe your proficiency in writing in your first language.

## Appendix C: Textism Translation Tasks

*1.0 Textism proficiency*

Please translate the given sentences from standard English into textese (texting language, *tmr* = tomorrow). You are urged to make your translation as textism-heavy as possible.

1. We never got together on the weekend because of the weather – I missed you! I tried calling about the formal tickets. Can't wait to celebrate exams being over tomorrow, I hate them.
2. I'm totally excited about going to the formal tonight! Thanks for getting the tickets, I forgot. Kate's buying a dress which is very expensive. She didn't lose weight and is still worrying. She's irritating but whatever, we'll forgive her.
3. I'm excited to see your excellent pictures. We should get together tomorrow afternoon after the debate or whatever. Kate can't today because she'll be studying. Are exams over before the weekend? Bye for now.
4. I'm sorry I forgot to text you tonight. No excuses, please forgive me. Wait at the pictures and I'll pay for a late movie. I heard Oliver failed his exams because he was cheating. I'll never stop wondering whether it's true. I dropped by his house today but no answer.
5. How are you and your girlfriend going to celebrate end of exams? She's better and prettier than your ex, you'll be together forever! Maybe we could go dancing together. See you soon.

*[Adapted from De Jonge and Kemp (2012)]*

## 2.0 Textism familiarity

Please translate the given sentences from textese (texting language, *tmr* = tomorrow) into standard English. You are urged to make your translation as grammatically correct as possible.

1. Ur nt gonna bleve wht i saw i saw ur bro out w/ that grl frm gr8 xcipe. im not 2 sure if he saw me tho i hope he saw me 2 cuz hes such a qt!!! bbfm!
2. Btw im not gonna bcum 1 of thOs stalker grls whol c a qt boi & trn all crz like ur sis did w that boi in ur class but I cud! LOL l8r
3. Wassup? ur bros leavin & i cant bleve ur leavin me 2 2nite do u kno ne1 who wnts 2 C me whn ur away? i dont no y im even frnds w u jk. ttyl!
4. i dnt kno whn ur gonna b hme but i cant wait 2 c u. ur trips lasted 4ever! il admit that i mostly miss ur msgs cuz ther gr8 but I miss u 2, ur frnd carla.
5. R u ok? Doncha tink ur gonna get all dese ri8? im not 2 sure u r il bet dat u dnt kno 2, mayb u do, bt theres no way im gonna hlp u w dese tho sry!

*[Adapted from Drouin and Davis (2009)]*

## Appendix D: Nonword Task

Please select the item that would fit into the English lexicon among each pair of pseudowords.

- |                   |                |                   |               |
|-------------------|----------------|-------------------|---------------|
| 1. csorgue        | <b>psorgue</b> | 13. <b>shomb</b>  | shomg         |
| 2. <b>thaub</b>   | thaucb         | 14. rwieche       | <b>wreash</b> |
| 3. kmeach         | <b>kneach</b>  | 15. <b>gnarve</b> | gnarv         |
| 4. chiuth         | <b>chuth</b>   | 16. <b>jirge</b>  | hjerger       |
| 5. <b>giche</b>   | gichsh         | 17. hiess         | <b>heace</b>  |
| 6. <b>wroun</b>   | wwoun          | 18. <b>gaice</b>  | gaisce        |
| 7. dyeis          | <b>deace</b>   | 19. <b>ghoosh</b> | goushue       |
| 8. wieghue        | <b>wheague</b> | 20. <b>whorb</b>  | whohb         |
| 9. yuouche        | <b>yoosh</b>   | 21. thutht        | <b>thoot</b>  |
| 10. <b>jogue</b>  | jaughg         | 22. <b>rhadge</b> | rhedje        |
| 11. <b>wourse</b> | weesre         | 23. <b>werge</b>  | werj          |
| 12. kglour        | <b>glour</b>   | 24. <b>beigh</b>  | beighe        |

## Appendix E: Gap-Filling Task

Please fill in the blanks in the following article with the word choices provided.

Confession pages have garnered thousands of followers, setting anew trend of cyber confession that spreads like wildfire without anybody knowing exactly how, when and where it started. Typically, confession pages (1. **are/is/of/the**) created by students, who use these pages (2. **for/are/nor/as**) outlets for their innermost thoughts (3. **also/and/but/because**) feelings via anonymous comments and posts. While confessing may not (4. **are/of/be/for**) the most elegant of solutions (5. **for/because/can/that**) students to cope with their difficulties, it (6. **is/but/although/could**) help some of them battle depression (7. **and/between/on/so**) thoughts of suicide.

Students send their ‘confessions’, (8. **which/what/is/also**) could be expressions of their emotions, troubles (9. **before/nor/and/also**) beliefs via private Facebook messaging. These (10. **do/are/but/after**) later being betted by the confession page administrators (11. **may/to/before/although**) being posted on Facebook Timeline (12. **by/after/for/of**) others to see. A secret administrator (13. **who/is/do/but**) remains anonymous then publishes the confessions (14. **these/by/then/on**) a Facebook page. Anyone can start (15. **him/much/a/do**) page and become the administrator (16. **got/so/him/of**) the page. Administrators prefer to keep (17. **will/very/who/their**) identities a secret to safeguard themselves (18. **by/from/with/without**) verbal attacks and also so that they (19. **on/can/the/are**) remain unbiased in their comments. Confession pages (20. **do/shall/very/are**) not sanctioned by schools, colleges (21. **or/but/are/between**) universities. However, pages that gain large followings simply end up (22. **be/as/them/on**) the ‘official’ unofficial page. An established university (23. **after/where/could/is**) gain one thousand followers in just a week, (24. **by/within/before/and**)

schools could have more than three thousands followers (25. **in**/too/did/and) just a month. Administrators would (26. be/do/**have**/both) their hands full as they normally receive (27. is/**between**/up/after) forty and fifty confessions daily.

Universities (28. can/but/nor/**and**) higher education institutions are both very aware of and concerned about (29. into/neither/**this**/their) worrying trend as the pages (30. so/without/**are**/what) not controlled by the institutions (31. as/can/**in**/with) any way. These institutions are unofficially linked (32. **by**/and/them/all) the fact that the students (33. **who**/they/are/too) post their confessions are part (34. at/which/some/**of**) the institution, anonymous confessions that (35. could/**are**/against/do) defamatory in nature could tarnish (36. but/that/**and**/so) jeopardize the reputation of the institutions.

The anonymity (37. because/**of**/and/although) confession pages means that it is difficult (38. by/so/**for**/that) school administrators to shut them down. In cases (39. may/are/quite/**of**) content abuse, users can report content abuse directly (40. from/who/for/**to**) Facebook's administrators and have an offensive post removed (41. from/because/by/**or**) the offender's Facebook account blocked. Administrators (42. them/**can**/into/are) also take precautionary steps to filter out confessions that (43. could/**are**/though/rather) defamatory and offensive. Page administrators are deemed (44. **as**/who/because/so) publishers of content and, as such, (45. they/am/**are**/what) held accountable for all posts on (46. too/so/across/**a**) Facebook page. Administrators are therefore liable (47. **for**/or/and/how) any offensive material published, and a defamation suit can (48. by/**be**/do/really) filed against the institution concerned, (49. **the**/nor/are/they) page administrator and the person (50. both/by/within/**who**) made the post. Institutions too can lodge a complaint with Facebook against any confession page using the institution's name and have it removed.

*[Adapted from Choo et al. (2019)]*

## Appendix F: MUET Reading Model Test

MODEL TEST 1

301

**PAPER 3: READING****800/3**

(90 MINUTES)

**Instructions to Candidates:**

There are **forty-five** questions in this test.

Indicate the correct answer on the Multiple-choice Answer Sheet provided.

Answer **all** the questions.

Questions **1 to 7** are based on the following passage.

Adapted **MUET Apr/May 2009**

**Attitudes towards Advertising in China**

- 1 The amount of advertising in the People's Republic of China has increased dramatically in recent years as economic reforms have swept through that country. Although advertising expenditures in China are trivial by Western standards, amounting to less than \$2 billion per year, the increases are rather dramatic. For example, expenditures were up 40 per cent in 1993 and 30 per cent in 1994. Up to this point, Chinese consumers have exhibited great faith in advertising. In fact, it has been found to be the pre-eminent factor consumers in the People's Republic use to identify leading brands. The following table presents ranked responses for six countries, including China, based on reasons that influence consumers' choice of brand leaders.

Reason	China	France	Italy	Spain	United Kingdom	United States
Advertising	1	6	10	6	7	7
Highest quality	2	3	2	2	3	4
Trust	3	1	1	1	1	2
Stand test of time	4	1	3	3	2	1
Best value	5	5	5	4	4	6
Best service	6	4	3	4	6	3
Sell the most	7	7	6	8	8	8
Industry standard	8	8	7	7	4	4
Most innovative	9	9	9	10	9	9
Growing fastest	10	10	7	9	10	10

Note: (a) 1—Highest rank, 10—Lowest rank

(b) Reasons with the same number for a particular country indicate tied responses.

- 2 Remember that consumers in the People's Republic have had little free choice for decades. Now that increased opportunities are available, consumers in that fledgling economy are somewhat like babies learning to talk—the only way to do it is by copying others. This is what Chinese consumers are doing. They are emulating Western brand preferences and learning about products principally from advertising.

(Adapted from *Advertising, Promotion, and Supplemental Aspects of Integrated Marketing Communications* by Terence A. Shimp, 1997)

- 1 The advertising industry in China has great potential for growth.  
A True                      C Not stated  
B False
- 2 Money spent on advertising in China has exceeded most Western countries.  
A True                      C Not stated  
B False
- 3 The table presents the ranking of ten reasons that influence consumers' choice of brands in six countries.  
A True                      C Not stated  
B False
- 4 Advertising is most effective in China because Chinese consumers are influenced by advertisements.  
A True                      C Not stated  
B False
- 5 Chinese consumers prefer Western brands to local ones.  
A True                      C Not stated  
B False
- 6 In Western countries, trust in the brand and brand longevity have the most influence on consumers.  
A True                      C Not stated  
B False
- 7 Consumers in the West make better purchasing decisions than those in China.  
A True                      C Not stated  
B False

Questions 8 to 14 are based on the following passage.

- 1 A moderate earthquake shook Tangshan early yesterday, striking fear into the hearts of millions of Chinese who feared the workings of fate after the earthquake of 1976 which killed almost a quarter of a million people and heralded the death of Mao Zedong. Superstition now surrounds the years in which the lunar calendar counts the eighth month twice. The so-called double-August occurred in 1976 and began on 26 August this year. It lasts until 23 October.
- 2 Yesterday's quake, registering 5.0 on the Richter scale and felt 160 kilometres away in Beijing, fulfilled soothsayers' predictions that natural disasters and cataclysmic political events, such as the death of Mao, occur in leap-August.
- 3 Hundreds of panic-stricken people ran into the streets as the tremor raced through the industrial city at 6.26 a.m. This time, however, there was no devastation or casualties. About forty aftershocks, the strongest of which measured 2.5 on the Richter scale, were recorded later in the day.
- 4 'It was terrifying. The building shook and my neighbours and I all ran out into the street,' said a telephone operator. 'No one was hurt and no buildings fell down, despite the fact that some old peasant homes were damaged at the epicentre,' Han Shuhua at the Tangshan Seismology Bureau said. 'There is no danger. It was only a small earthquake and we have had a hundred small quakes this year.' He added that he did not believe in the Double-Eight superstition. 'Aftershock activities can last a long time but the impact will not be very strong,' he said.
- 5 At least 240,000 people died in the 1976 quake and hundreds of thousands were injured when heavy concrete buildings collapsed. The entire city of Tangshan had to be rebuilt after several quakes, registering 7.0 on the Richter scale, hit the industrial city.
- 6 Authorities in Tangshan have sought to calm residents by broadcasting on television and radio that there is unlikely to be another strong earthquake. Although the Tangshan Seismology Bureau failed to predict this one, the State Seismology Bureau forecast in March that China would experience a number of strong quakes in future because a new period of seismic activity was beginning.
- 7 This year, China also said it would implement a nationwide anti-disaster programme to protect people and its largest cities, dams and agricultural areas from earthquakes.

(Adapted from <http://www.edict.com>)



- 8 The 1976 earthquake caused more Chinese to be more superstitious.  
A True                      C Not stated  
B False
- 9 There were almost a quarter of a million fatalities in the 1976 earthquake.  
A True                      C Not stated  
B False
- 10 All the houses belonging to the peasants were damaged, especially at the epicentre.  
A True                      C Not stated  
B False
- 11 The following was reported **except**  
A Tangshan was rebuilt after the 1976 earthquake  
B the impact of aftershock activities will not be very strong  
C the mass media was used to inform people of Mao Zedong's death
- 12 The word *predict* (line 24) means  
A notice  
B forecast  
C prophesy
- 13 From the report, we can conclude that  
A the people of Tangshan have forgotten the 1976 earthquake  
B the Chinese authorities are prepared to face future earthquakes  
C the Chinese people are resigned to living in earthquake-prone areas
- 14 The main purpose of the report is to  
A highlight the reasons for the 1976 earthquake  
B provide the latest information about the recent earthquake in Tangshan  
C commend the work of authorities for protecting people against earthquakes

Questions 15 to 21 are based on the following passage.

- 1 For centuries, eclipses have been portrayed as harbingers of doom and destruction by many civilizations, and on 24 October 2009, the sky across Thailand will go dark in the middle of the day for the first time in forty years.
- 2 That is the day we will witness a 'solar eclipse', or a time when the moon sits directly in front of the sun. While scientists can easily explain how it happens, others think solar eclipses bring a period of bad luck!
- 3 'Many astrologers have told me that nothing good ever comes from a solar eclipse,' Dr Dephanom Muangman, Dean of Mahidol's Faculty of Environment and Resource Studies and a notable researcher in what many people call the 'occult', told *NJ Magazine*.
- 4 'Many of them are worried about the woes that may face Thailand as a result of the upcoming total solar eclipse.'
- 5 The last total solar eclipse to be seen in Thailand occurred a little over forty years ago, and the next one won't happen for more than fifty years!
- 6 There are about sixty-six total solar eclipses that can be sighted around the world in the span of one century. An eclipse occurs when the moon's shadow blocks the earth's 'vision' of the sun. The sun is often partially eclipsed, but to be able to see a total eclipse of the sun, you must be between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn, and the moon must totally block the sun. This brings out the stars and makes the usually bright day turn to night for a few minutes.
- 7 The eclipse that will be sighted in eleven provinces around Thailand will last approximately two minutes. Astrologers point to bad luck which occurred after the last few eclipses. For example, a total eclipse was seen by Rama IV on 18 August 1868. About a month and a half later, he passed away.
- 8 'Another total eclipse, which lasted approximately 4 minutes and 40 seconds, was seen

in 1875 in the province of Phetchaburi, and a few weeks later the French navy threatened to invade Thailand. Although France never did launch an assault, we had to give up certain territories to them,' said Dr Dephanom.

- 9 'In 1929, another total eclipse was seen in the Pattani province. A few years later there was a change in our governmental structure, a change from a monarch-only government to a democratic one.'

10 That is not all.

- 11 'On 20 June 1955, a total eclipse was seen in Bangkok and the Bangpa-in area which lasted six minutes. The next few years were plagued with a string of coup d'états and bloodshed.'

- 12 'Fortune tellers are especially worried this time, because the upcoming eclipse will be seen in as many as eleven provinces around Thailand. This has never happened before. They say there will be intense floods, a government will fall, the leader of our country will have bad luck, famous people will die and earthquakes will strike!' Dr Dephanom said.

- 13 'On the other hand, fortune tellers said all these same, awful things would happen when Jupiter was struck by those comets a year ago. They didn't happen.'

- 14 Another eclipse occurred on 22 July 2009. Millions of Thais were ready for the solar eclipse. They joined people across the Asia-Pacific region to see the longest solar eclipse this century.

- 15 And yet, like centuries ago, worries over the eclipse's negative effects have seen superstitions rise, say amulet sellers. Customers, both old and new, have been flocking to their shops to buy charms to ward off bad luck. Some Thai astrologers have predicted the eclipse will bring misfortune to the country in the form of natural disasters and another coup.

(Adapted from [www.bangkokpost.com](http://www.bangkokpost.com), 2009)

- 15 *For centuries, eclipses have been portrayed as harbingers of doom and destruction by many civilizations* (lines 1–2). In this statement the writer implies that
- A people have long believed that eclipses were bad omens
  - B early civilizations believed that anyone who predicted eclipses was doomed
  - C eclipses caused the collapse of early civilizations
- 16 Based on the passage, which of the following phrases show how the Thai government had managed to avoid a confrontation with the French?
- A *France never did launch an assault* (line 26)
  - B *we had to give up certain territories to them* (lines 26–27)
  - C *the French navy threatened to invade Thailand* (lines 25–26)
- 17 Which of the following is true of the monarch-only government in Thailand?
- A It stopped the government structure from changing.
  - B Some think it was abolished as a result of the 1929 eclipse.
  - C The government in Pattani halted the development of democracy.
- 18 Based on the information in the passage, which of the following phrases shows the writer is being objective?
- A *That is not all.* (line 31)
  - B *On the other hand ...* (line 38)
  - C *And yet, like centuries ago, ...* (line 43)
- 19 The phrase *a string of coup d'états* (line 33) means
- A a well-planned attack against a government
  - B a sequence of demonstrations opposing the government
  - C a series of sudden, violent moves to seize power from a government
- 20 Which of the following sentences expresses the main idea of paragraph 13?
- A People should be extra careful during the total eclipse.

- B We must not be too worried about the results of an eclipse.  
 C Fortune tellers are able to make prophecies during a total eclipse.
- 21 The method of development of the passage is through  
 A exemplification  
 B symbolic representation  
 C comparison and contrast

Questions 22 to 29 are based on the following passage.

- 1 Applying for a scholarship to help pay for tertiary education is a high priority for many students as it is basically a cash grant and may not require repayment. Besides easing the financial burden of the family, some scholarships offer the security of a job after graduation. This is particularly crucial in times when there is an economic slowdown.
- 2 Winning a scholarship is often just a dream for some students. Many want it, but only a select few are awarded the privilege. Many students fail to pursue scholarships because they believe the competition is so fierce that only the most exceptional achievers receive awards. The truth is, one does not have to be a super student to win a scholarship. It is also based on criteria other than academic performance, such as background, hobbies and interests, financial need, location and a myriad of other conditions.
- 3 Pursuing scholarships should be done in an organized way. Students need to put some effort into the research and application process. Scholarship providers want to ensure that only the best and most well-prepared applicants are selected so that the money will be wisely spent and efficiently used for the purpose intended.
- 4 The most basic scholarship application strategy is to apply for scholarships that you have a good chance of winning. A proactive first step is to do a free scholarship search online. Begin investigating your options as early as possible.
- 5 After deciding which scholarships to apply for, you should play up your strengths when constructing the scholarship application. If a letter of recommendation is required, ask someone who can write impressively, rather than someone with an impressive title or a friendly attitude, who may not be able to go into the level of detail that scholarship providers require.
- 6 Scholarships that require essays usually receive fewer applications. Therefore, applicants stand a better chance of being accepted. All that is required is writing an effective scholarship essay that highlights the strengths of the candidate. For students who are not particularly skilled wordsmiths, a commendable essay can still be produced if sufficient time and effort is put into it. Enlist the assistance of someone with good writing skills to review the essay and make improvements. It is important to understand the scholarship's mission and also read previous years' winning applications. Essays should be personal rather than dry recitations of information.
- 7 The most useful, and often overlooked, scholarship application strategy is paying attention to detail. Read the requirements carefully to ensure your eligibility. Take note of application deadlines. Many scholarships have early closing dates.
- 8 When filling out the application forms, make sure that every single blank is filled in without leaving anything out. If a particular section of the form does not apply, simply indicate that in the space provided. Leaving areas blank could mean incomplete forms, resulting in your application being rejected. Get somebody to proofread the document as simple errors are common reasons for applications being denied. Taking these steps will ensure that it is the substance of the scholarship application that stands out, not the errors in its presentation.

- 9 Losing an opportunity for a scholarship due to lost mail is indeed frustrating. Therefore, 40  
make a copy and send it way in advance before the deadline via certified or registered mail  
with a return receipt. Never exaggerate your accomplishments or fabricate information.  
Scholarship committees check thoroughly before dispatching finances, and submitting false  
information could get you in a great deal of trouble.
- 10 Be sure to always follow the rules, no matter how tiny or arbitrary, and observe appropriate 45  
scholarship application etiquette.

(Sources: [http://www.scholarshipguide.org/scholarship\\_tips.html](http://www.scholarshipguide.org/scholarship_tips.html)

<http://www.scholarships.com/financial-aid/college-scholarships/scholarship-application-strategies/>)

- 22 Getting a scholarship is crucial during an economic slowdown because  
A there will be an increase in the course fees  
B parents will face financial difficulties  
C some scholarships guarantee a job
- 23 *Many students fail to pursue scholarships because they believe the competition is so fierce that only the most exceptional achievers receive awards* (lines 6–7). This implies that  
A only the best students apply for scholarships  
B average students by and large do not apply for scholarships  
C academic excellence is the main criteria in selecting scholarship recipients
- 24 In paragraph 3, the intention of the writer is to draw attention to the fact that  
A scholarship providers are very strict during the selection process  
B applicants who submit early applications have the best chance of winning the scholarship  
C a scholarship may be awarded to a well-prepared applicant rather than someone exceptional but ill-prepared
- 25 The last sentence of paragraph 4 suggests that  
A there are many different types of scholarships available  
B many of the scholarships have early application deadlines  
C students can choose to apply for prestigious scholarships if they search early
- 26 Nicole is applying for the ASEAN Scholarship to study at the National University of Singapore after her STPM. The best person to write a letter of **recommendation** for Nicole would be  
A one of her parents  
B one of her teachers  
C her school principal
- 27 Which of the following are recommended strategies for writing a scholarship essay?  
I Read previous winning essays  
II Sacrifice a lot of time to write the essay  
III Be aware of the mission of the scholarship  
A I and II  
B I and III  
C II and III
- 28 According to the passage, scholarship application strategies include all of the following **except**  
A getting a letter of recommendation from a well-known person  
B proofreading for errors in application forms and essays  
C sending in applications early, well before the deadline
- 29 From the passage, we can conclude that when applying for scholarships  
A many do not try for scholarships because they lack writing skills  
B a properly filled application form increases the chance of success  
C the most important application strategy is paying attention to detail

Questions 30 to 37 are based on the following passage.

- 1 Hannah Baldwin is passionate about hot-air ballooning. Like many people, she became hooked on the sport after just one flight. Today, she crews for hot-air balloon pilots whenever possible. For Hannah and many of her friends and colleagues, hot-air ballooning is the only way to fly.
- 2 Hot-air ballooning is not for the faint-hearted. On cold winter mornings, Hannah often has to get up at 5 a.m. and wait on a remote field while the pilot decides whether or not to fly. Usually the pilot throws handfuls of grass into the air and lets off children's balloons filled with helium to get a feel for surface winds and low-level air currents.
- 3 However, Hannah is more than willing to wait, hoping for the moment when the pilot shouts, 'Go!' At this signal, she rushes with the other passengers to help get the balloon ready. They hold the ring at the neck of the balloon open to allow a large fan to blow into the massive nylon envelope. The air pushed by the fan begins to lift the balloon slowly from the ground.
- 4 As soon as the neck of the balloon moves up over the propane burner ring above the basket, the pilot lights the burners and the balloon begins to swell with hot air. In a matter of minutes, the balloon is buoyant and tugging hard at the mooring ropes which anchor the basket to the ground. The passengers leap in and the hot-air balloon glides silently into the air, just missing the tops of the hedges and trees. As Hannah says, 'Even though I get vertigo, I am never scared of heights in a balloon. It is almost as if I am dreaming.'
- 5 Often the flight itself is very peaceful and quiet because the hot-air balloon travels with the wind. With good visibility, the views are breathtaking. This combination makes hot-air balloons ideal for watching wildlife on safari or for taking breathtaking photos of people at work on the land below, oblivious to the photographer observing them so silently from above.
- 6 Hot-air balloons work on a very basic scientific theory: that warm air rises up through cooler air. To keep the balloon airborne, the air inside the balloon needs to remain hotter than the surrounding air, so a burner is positioned under an open balloon envelope. As the air in the balloon cools, the pilot can reheat the air by firing the burner. Modern hot-air balloons heat the air by burning propane. The propane is stored in compressed liquid form in lightweight cylinders positioned in the balloon basket.
- 7 Pilots pay particular attention to the weather, and as soon as the balloon is airborne they continually check for a safe landing site in case of an emergency. Pilots must also be aware of hazards such as low-flying aircraft and power lines. Although the controls in a hot-air balloon are relatively simple, piloting a balloon requires a great deal of skill. Would-be pilots require a private pilot licence to fly a hot-air balloon. They then need to gain more flying experience to qualify for a commercial pilot licence to carry fee-paying passengers in a hot-air balloon.
- 8 Although hot-air balloons come in many different shapes and sizes, the basic design remains largely the same. For example, most hot-air balloons use a wicker basket for the passenger compartment. Wicker is sturdy, flexible and relatively lightweight. The basket needs to be flexible to help cushion the impact of landing. The basket bends and bows so that it takes little damage as it hits the ground—and this movement helps protect the passengers from the shock of a hard landing. As it is, many balloon landings can be bumpy and passengers often have to hang on tightly before coming to a final rest!



- 30 The word *passionate* (line 1) is similar in meaning to  
 A *crews for* (line 2)  
 B *hooked on* (line 2)  
 C *dreaming* (line 19)  
 D *brehtaking* (line 21)
- 31 In paragraph 1, the intention of the writer is to draw our attention to the  
 A search for hot-air balloon pilots  
 B enthusiasm for hot-air ballooning  
 C introduction of a new sport among women  
 D reason why people enjoy hot-air ballooning
- 32 ... *faint-hearted* (line 5) means  
 A lazy                      C sickly  
 B timid                    D desperate
- 33 Which of the following weather conditions is most suitable for flying a hot-air balloon?  
 A Hazy                      C Foggy  
 B Rainy                    D Windy
- 34 The writer cites the example of ... *neck of the balloon moves up over the propane burner ring above the basket, the pilot lights the burners and the balloon begins to swell with hot air ...* (lines 14–15). This is to support the idea that  
 A warm air rises up through cooler air  
 B a hot-air balloon travels with the wind  
 C flying in a hot-air balloon is dangerous  
 D pilots need to pay particular attention to the weather
- 35 All the following are possible explanations for an emergency landing **except**  
 A poor visibility  
 B propane leakage  
 C flexibility of the basket  
 D drastic change in weather
- 36 The main cause of a bumpy landing would probably be attributable to  
 A an inexperienced pilot  
 B the size of the balloon  
 C the low level of propane  
 D the rigidity of the passenger compartment
- 37 Based on the passage, what words of caution would you give balloonists?  
 A Do not fly in small hot-air balloons.  
 B Do not try to pilot your own balloon.  
 C Do not risk your life to experience thrills.  
 D Do not let go of your grip during landing.

Questions 38 to 45 are based on the following passage.

- 1 In September 1995, Pierre Omidyar, a Frenchman working as a software engineer in California's Silicon Valley, set up a small website so that his girlfriend could expand her collection of plastic Pez sweet dispensers by trading with other collectors. Omidyar had unwittingly sown the seeds for an amazing worldwide phenomenon. News about the site quickly spread by word-of-mouth among collectors for whom the site proved an astonishingly easy way to meet up with other enthusiasts in their area of special interest.
- 2 The name 'eBay' is now a household name. eBay is one of the highest traffic sites on the Internet and is now one of the most successful Internet-based businesses in the world. eBay applied Internet technology and the global reach of the Web to the simple idea of a marketplace (where buyers and sellers come together to trade information and strike bargains) to create one of the largest marketplaces open to ordinary individuals anywhere in the world.
- 3 From antique coins, collectibles, computers, memorabilia, stamps, toys or Zimmer frames, you can buy or sell almost anything on eBay. In fact, people seem to sell just about anything on eBay. eBay seems to appeal to people of all ages and from all walks of life.
- 4 However, the secret to eBay's appeal lies in the fact that it is not just a massive classified ads site.

Every sale on eBay is an auction that engages the interest and passion of real buyers for an object that they particularly desire over all others. Bidding in the auction can quickly become compulsive. Over a set period of time, anyone with an interest in a product can place a bid. Having joined, anyone can buy or sell with a few clicks of the mouse. The bids are updated in real time and at the end of the auction, the hammer comes down and the last, highest bidder 'wins'. Bidders often wait avidly until the very last seconds of an auction to put in their final bid—hoping in this way to be the very last bidder in, and the winner of the auction.

5 To sell an item, a potential seller logs in to the website with a personal ID, chooses a category or an item, types in a description, provides details of how they will send the item to the buyer, sets a reserve price (below which they will not sell the item)—and the auction begins. When an item sells, eBay takes a listing fee and a commission based on the final selling price.

6 Buying on eBay is even easier than selling. A buyer simply searches or browses using the helpful categories as a guide. Each item listed shows the current bid price. If the buyer wishes to offer a higher price, they simply put in their own bid. They are then alerted by email if anyone else offers a higher price for that item. This allows them to increase their own bid if they want to. The system works in exactly the same way as a traditional auction room. But in a traditional auction room the bidding process is usually over in a few hours if not a few minutes. On eBay, the excitement and tension runs over a full seven days for some buyers.

7 Once the auction is finished, arrangements are made for payment and postage. It is important for both parties to agree clearly on these details to avoid losing money or goods to a dishonest trader. To help honest traders and the credibility of its auction process, eBay invented a system where a buyer or seller is given a credit rating by the people who deal with them. This self-regulating word-of-mouth system appears to work extremely well. Users of the site go to great lengths to maintain a positive rating and to avoid any negative remarks about their reliability around payment or postage. Adverse comments are taken very seriously on the site, as problems of this nature affect the trust of the whole trading community.

(Adapted from *Just English*, Vol. 2, Issue 5)

- 38 The phrase *worldwide phenomenon* (line 4) is similar in meaning to
- A *special interest* (line 6)
  - B *household name* (line 7)
  - C *highest traffic sites* (line 7)
  - D *largest marketplaces* (line 11)
- 39 In paragraph 1, the intention of the writer is to draw our attention to
- A how Pierre Omidyar started eBay
  - B the reason why Pierre Omidyar still owns eBay
  - C the relationship between Pierre Omidyar and the collectors at eBay
  - D Pierre Omidyar's ambition to make eBay a worldwide phenomenon
- 40 The phrase *all walks of life* (line 14) means
- A people with lots of hobbies
  - B people from all over the world
  - C people from different social classes
  - D collectors who want to sell their collections
- 41 Which bidder is most likely to win the auction?
- A The bidder who is willing to pay the most promptly
  - B The first bidder to click the mouse when the auction starts
  - C The bidder who has placed the highest bid by the end of the auction
  - D The last bidder to offer the reserve price before the hammer comes down

- 42 ... a potential seller logs in to the website ... provides details of how they will send the item to the buyer ... (lines 23–25) conveys the idea that
- A selling on eBay is easy
  - B a personal ID is needed by the seller
  - C buying on eBay is easier than selling
  - D eBay charges a listing fee and commission
- 43 The following are possible explanations for the excitement and tension of the bidding process on eBay **except**
- A buyers have got to match the reserve price set by the seller
  - B buyers can be passionately interested in acquiring the item on auction
  - C buyers must wait until the auction is over to see if their bid was successful
  - D buyers can increase their bid when they receive an email alert on the current bid price
- 44 The success of eBay is mainly attributed to
- A the credit rating system
  - B the number of honest traders
  - C a clear agreement between both parties
  - D arrangements made on postage and payment
- 45 Based on the passage, what words of caution would you give to eBay buyers?
- A Do not trust the credit rating system.
  - B Do not dishonour an agreed-upon deal.
  - C Do not participate in the auction process.
  - D Do not take adverse comments seriously.

**PAPER 4: WRITING****800/4****(90 MINUTES)****Instructions to Candidates:**

Answer **both** Questions 1 and 2.

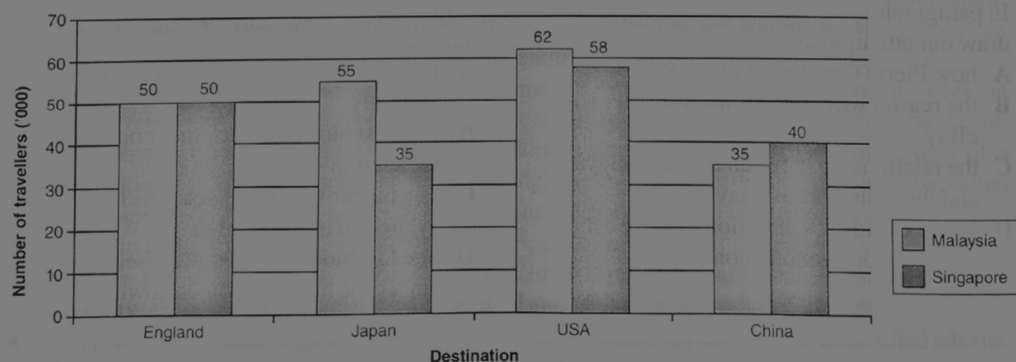
You will be assessed on task fulfilment, language and organization.

**Question 1**Adapted **MUET July 2013**

You are advised to spend about **40 minutes** on this task.

Study the charts and write about the top holiday destinations of young adults. In your writing, compare and contrast the information given. You should write **150 to 200 words**. [40 marks]

Figure 1: Top Holiday Destinations of Young Adults in 2005



[Adopted from Choo et al. (2019)]



## Appendix G: Participant Consent Forms

### PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

#### **Textism in English: Relationship between use of textese and reading comprehension competency among ESL undergraduates.**

Research investigator: Foong Kok Hey

Research participant pseudonym: AA

The data collection for this study is estimated to last **2 to 3 hour**. Risks associated with your participation is not anticipated, but you have the right to stop the data collection process or withdraw from the research at any time.

Thank you for agreeing to participate as part of the above research project. Ethical procedures for academic research undertaken require that participants explicitly agree to being academically tested and how the information contained in their study will be used. This consent form is necessary for us to ensure that you understand the purpose of your involvement and that you agree to the conditions of your participation. You are therefore to **carefully read and then sign this form to certify that you approve the following:**

- the entire data collection process will be recorded, and a transcript will be produced
- if requested, you will be sent the transcript and given the opportunity to correct any factual errors
- the transcript of the data collection process will be analysed by the researcher as research investigator
- access to the transcript will be limited to the researcher and academic colleagues and researchers with whom they might collaborate as part of the research process
- any summary content, or direct quotations from the study, that are made available through academic publication or other academic outlets will be anonymised so that you cannot be identified, and care will be taken to ensure that other information in the study that could identify yourself is not revealed
- the actual recording will be kept
- any variation of the conditions above will only occur with your further explicit approval

All or part of the content of your participation may be used:


- In fulfilment of course UALZ3023 Project II
- In academic papers, policy papers or news articles
- On our website and in other media that we may produce such as spoken presentations
- On other feedback events
- In an archive of the project as noted above

#### **By signing this form, I agree that:**

1. I am voluntarily taking part in this project. I understand that I do not have to take part, and I can stop the data collection process at any time;
2. I have read the above conditions;
3. The transcribed information or extracts from it may be used as described above;
4. I do not expect to receive any benefit or payment for my participation;
5. I can request a copy of the transcript of my data collection process and may make edits I feel necessary to ensure the effectiveness of any agreement made about confidentiality;
6. I have been able to ask any questions I might have, and I understand that I am free to contact the researcher with any questions I may have in the future.

  
Participant's Signature

20/02/2021  
Date

  
Researcher's Signature

20/2/2021  
Date

## PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

**Textism in English: Relationship between use of textese and reading comprehension competency among ESL undergraduates.**

Research investigator: Foong Kok Hey

Research participant pseudonym: BRL

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Participant's Signature

02/02/2021  
Date


Researcher's Signature

2/2/2021

Date

## PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

**Textism in English: Relationship between use of textese and reading comprehension competency among ESL undergraduates.**

Research investigator: Foong Kok Hey

Research participant pseudonym: CASS

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Participant's Signature

28/01/2021  
Date



Researcher's Signature

28/1/2021  
Date

## PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

**Textism in English: Relationship between use of textese and reading comprehension competency among ESL undergraduates.**

Research investigator: Foong Kok Hey

Research participant pseudonym: VV

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Participant's Signature

28/1/2021

Date



Researcher's Signature

28/1/2021

Date

## PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

**Textism in English: Relationship between use of textese and reading comprehension competency among ESL undergraduates.**

Research investigator: Foong Kok Hey

Research participant pseudonym: LKS

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Participant's Signature

2/2/2021

Date



Researcher's Signature

2/2/2021

Date