READING MOTIVATION OF STUDENTS IN A SECONDARY SCHOOL

IN RURAL AREA OF JOHOR

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Special Dedication

To my beloved Mama and Abah

To my loving husband and son

To my supporting brothers and sisters

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In the name of Allah, The Most Gracious and the Most Merciful

ABSTRACT

The problems of reading among Malaysians are worsening. Based on National Literacy Survey, it is proved that Malaysians hardly ever read. The Malaysia exam-oriented education system as well as the issue of reverting back to Malay language as the medium of instruction in schools were also the main concerns of this study. This study is conducted to find out the problems that learners face in reading in English and the factors that affect learners' motivation in reading. The study is also carried out to examine the way in which the factors affect learners' motivation in reading. Twelve learners of a rural secondary school in the district of Kulai were chosen for the interview sessions while 100 learners were randomly chosen for the quantitative data collection. The instruments used for this study were interviews and questionnaire. Results from the interviews conducted with twelve learners from different levels of English proficiency revealed that the lack of English reading resources especially in schools and their financial problems has hindered their access to their favourite reading materials. Learners also faced problems in comprehending certain texts, especially the difficult and complicated ones and they did not have adequate background knowledge related to the texts. The other problems revolved around vocabulary use, had difficulty with unfamiliar and unknown words and the lack of interest towards English reading materials. It was also discovered that there were 5 main factors that affect learners' motivation in reading namely intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, competency and reading efficacy, social aspects for reading and encouragement from English teachers. Furthermore, extrinsic motivation factor was found as the most important factor to motivate learners (mean=3.86). It is hoped that the findings of the study would provide useful insights to the language teachers and educators, parents and school administrators in planning and executing their roles more efficiently in the future. This is to ensure that more learners especially from the rural schools would become more motivated to take up reading English books as a pastime as this would definitely help them become more proficient in English.

ABSTRAK

Masalah membaca di kalangan rakyat Malaysia semakin membimbangkan. Berdasarkan soal selidik literasi negara, adalah dibuktikan bahawa rakyat Malaysia jarang membaca. Sistem pendidikan yang menjurus kepada peperiksaan serta isu penggunaan semula Bahasa Melayu sebagai medium pengajaran di sekolah merupakan sebab utama kajian ini dilaksanakan. Tujuan kajian ini dijalankan adalah bagi mengenalpasti masalah-masalah yang dihadapi pelajar dalam membaca dalam Bahasa Inggeris dan faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi motivasi pelajar untuk membaca dalam Bahasa Inggeris. Kajian ini juga dikendalikan untuk menilai bagaimana faktor-faktor tersebut mempengaruhi motivasi pelajar untuk membaca dalam Bahasa Inggeris. Dua belas pelajar yang terdiri daripada pelajar sebuah sekolah menengah di luar Bandar yang terletak dalam daerah Kulai telah dipilih untuk sessi temuduga manakala seratus pelajar telah dipilih secara rawak bagi pengumpulan data kuantitatif. Instrumen yang digunakan untuk kajian ini adalah temuduga dan soal-selidik. Hasil kajian temuduga terhadap dua belas pelajar yang terdiri daripada tahap penguasaan Bahasa Inggeris yang berlainan mendapati bahawa kekurangan sumber bacaan dalam Bahasa Inggeris terutamanya di sekolah serta masalah kewangan menyekat akses pelajar terhadap bahan bacaan yang menarik minat mereka. Pelajar juga menghadapi masalah dalam memahami teks tertentu, terutamanya teks yang susah dan rumit serta mereka juga tidak mempunyai pengetahuan sedia ada berkenaan teks yang dibaca. Masalah lain adalah berkaitan dengan penggunaan kosa kata, sukar memahami perkataan yang susah dan tidak diketahui maksudnya serta kekurangan minat membaca bahan bacaan Bahasa Inggeris. Terdapat 5 faktor utama yang dikenalpasti mempengaruhi motivasi pelajar untuk membaca iaitu motivasi dalaman, motivasi luaran, kompetensi dan pembacaan kendiri, aspek sosial dalam membaca dan galakan daripada guru-guru Bahasa Inggeris. Tambahan pula, motivasi luaran dicatatkan sebagai faktor paling penting untuk memotivasi pelajar (min=3.86). Adalah diharapkan dapatan daripada kajian ini akan memberikan kefahaman dan kesedaran yang berguna kepada guru-guru bahasa, ibubapa dan pihak pentadbiran sekolah dalam merancang dan memainkan peranan mereka dengan lebih berkesan pada masa akan datang. Ini adalah untuk memastikan bahawa lebih ramai pelajar terutama daripada sekolah-sekolah luar bandar akan menjadi lebih bermotivasi untuk menjadikan buku-buku Bahasa Inggeris sebagai kegemaran dalam membantu mereka menjadi lebih mahir dalam bahasa Inggeris.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter gives an overview of the study. It covers the background of the study which clearly explains the overall view of the nature of reading motivation and the need to carry out the research. Next, it also lays the problems related to the research topic. This chapter also covers the objectives of the study as well as the research questions. In addition to this, the significance and scope of the study will also be highlighted. Terms related to the study are also defined.

1.1   Background of the Study

According to (Carell, 1988, cited in Carell, Devine and Eskey, 1988), reading is considered by many students the most essential of the four language skills, especially in English as a second or foreign. This is because reading is considered the main reason students learn the language. Without solid reading proficiency, second language readers will not be able to excel academically. Thus, it is vital for students to be able to read effectively in English. Chitravelu et al, (2005) highlight that real reading involves not merely sounding of the words in a text but understanding the meaning or message the words intend to carry. Students who have knowledge of phonetics rules of English, would probably be able to read a text aloud, but without the aid of their prior knowledge of the world, they would not be able to make sense of what they read. The aim of reading is comprehension. Therefore, it is essential for students to utilize their existing knowledge where their minds generate ideas as they interact actively with the text. By doing this, students can successfully comprehend the message that the writer of the text is trying to convey. Thus, acquisition of reading skills is very important to readers especially those who need to read in a second language.

Grabe (2002) states that reading can simply be defined as the process of negotiating meaning between the reader and the written text. Reading is not a passive process. It is interactive whereby when people read, they generate their ideas in a way that a cognitive process takes place. This cognitive process acts as a thinking process where readers grasp the meaning of the information provided to them. Reading involves more than what we expect. It involves challenging processes such as asking questions, extracting information, inferring or drawing conclusion. All these processes are needed to equip readers with adequate knowledge in order for them to become good and critical readers. As readers ask questions while reading a text, they automatically interact with the text in a way that they extract the whole idea of what the text is all about.

Reading skills can be mastered provided that the readers are motivated to read. Guthrie et al, (1999) describe motivation as those personal characteristics which influence the activities and achievements of individuals in the forms of objectives, convictions and needs. Students for example are motivated in completing a task due to the fact that there are tangible rewards offered such as prizes, or it is because of their own personal interest to complete the task assigned to them. This personal interest comes from the inner side of the students. Those who are motivated to do a task, will put a lot of effort in order to ensure that their mission is accomplished. This also applies to reading activity. Wigfield and Guthrie (1997) point out that the amount and breadth of reading will increase if the child is highly motivated in reading. A child will tend to read more, if he is highly motivated to read the reading materials presented to him. This is also supported by Anderson, Wilson and Fielding (1988) who highlight that a child who is highly motivated in reading will achieve more academically if the amount and breadth of reading increases. Therefore, it is proved that a child who has high motivation will be more successful academically. Thus, it is essential for motivation to be integrated in reading in order to produce successful readers.

In relation to reading motivation, researcher was interested in investigating the nature of reading motivation of a secondary school from a rural area of Johor. The school was chosen due to the fact that the researcher aimed to discover the reading motivation of a group of Malay students from a rural area of Johor. The students came from different family backgrounds with the main language of communication which is Malay language. As for the range of language proficiency, most of the students of the school are intermediate and low proficiency students in English, with a small amount of high proficiency students. The students are exposed to English solely from the teaching and learning process from the English teachers, as well as the external exposure such as the use of beneficial learning websites to aid their understanding of the lesson. The other problem revolved around the lack of exposure to useful English reading resources in the school. Therefore, based on all the reasons below, the researcher intended to explore the reading motivation of each student, as it may vary from one another based on the exposure that they had. Other than that, the researcher also wanted to study the level of reading motivation from a group of students who are lack of exposure towards English reading resources to see whether there exist any difference between the three different groups mainly the high proficiency students, intermediate students and the low proficiency students. This study is also conducted to investigate the problems that students face in reading in English, as well as the factors that affect students' motivation in reading and how the factors affect students' motivation in reading.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The problems of reading among Malaysians are worsening. Based on the National Literacy Survey carried out by the National Library in 1982, it is found that Malaysians only read an average of one to two pages a year. However, there has been improvement on the reading habit among Malaysians to two books per year when the National Literacy Survey was conducted in 1996. Nevertheless, the last National Literacy Survey done in 2005 reported that Malaysians still read an average of two books a year. It is clear that there had been no improvement on the reading habit among Malaysians.

Referring to the above statement, it is proved that Malaysians hardly ever read. There were also some other statistics regarding Malaysians reading habit carried out by the National Library Survey in 2005. Those 10 years and above read about two books a year. The figure excludes text books for students and books that are work-related for working adults. This shows that the percentage of reading among students is also low. Since our Malaysian education system is exam-oriented, students read because they have to read to pass the examination. The reading materials that they are engaged with are mostly their textbooks due to the need to excel in academic successfully. With the education system reverting back to Malay language as the medium of instruction in school, the need to read English reading materials is slowly decreasing. This issue in a way affected the motivation of students to read in English.

In solving this problem, the government has done its best to instill an interest in reading among Malaysians. There were many reading programmes conducted by the Ministry of Education such as the NILAM (Nadi Ilmu Amalan Membaca) programme in 1998 to nurture the reading habits among school children (Kaur and Thiyagarajah, 1999). Other extensive reading programmes have also been carried out throughout the years such as Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading (USSR), 'Drop Everything and Read' (DEAR) and the Book Flood Approach (Elley and Mangubahi, 1983 as cited in Renandya and Jacobs, 2002). The latest reading programme is Mari Membaca 1Malaysia and READ2010 Campaign conducted by the Ministry of Education to inculcate students to read. The rationale of the programme is that readers read large quantities of books and other materials in an environment that nurtures a lifelong reading habit. Although the government has done its part in conducting beneficial reading campaigns and programmes, it is indicated that more Malaysians are not interested in picking up the habit.

In addition to that, students also have problems in terms of vocabulary acquisition. According to (Garcia, 1991; Nagy, 1997; Verhoeven, 1990)**,** one major determinant of poor reading comprehension for English language learners is low vocabulary. Lack of knowledge of the lower frequency academic words encountered in textbooks impedes reading comprehension. This is supported by Elfrieda H. Hiebert, Michael L. Kamil (2005) who highlight about the reading difficulties created by lack of breadth and depth of English vocabulary for English language learners. Lack of familiarity with a high proportion of the vocabulary in text reduces opportunities for productive contextual analysis. Likewise, unfamiliarity with less frequent meanings of words with multiple meanings, coupled with lack of awareness that many English words are polysemous, leads to faulty interpretation of text. Thus, it is identified that students who lack of vocabulary will have problems in comprehending a text. This is due to the fact that they do not have any background knowledge of the meaning of the words. As a result of this matter, the students' motivation to read English reading materials will gradually declining.

Apart from that, the need for students to excel academically is important for the sake of their future. In order to get excellent academic result, English plays a major role. It is undeniable that students need to have good command of English language in order to succeed in their studies. Students who are proficient in English will not have problems in understanding the lesson delivered by the teacher. In addition to that, students who are equipped with adequate English proficiency will also be able to communicate effectively in English. Having the ability to have the control of the language helps the students to improve themselves, thus assisting them in attaining success. Therefore, it is important for students to read and understand the materials related to their study. In the process of interacting with the materials, motivation plays a significant role.

Knowing the purpose of reading has a significant influence on students' motivation to read. Students read because of the enjoyment the task brings to them and they are really motivated to read the English reading materials. This type of motivation is closely associated with the term intrinsic motivation.

As for extrinsic motivation, students are motivated to read because they see the importance of reading especially in terms of reading English materials and the usefulness of the task especially in learning the language. Students also read because they want to get rewards and good grades for their examination. On the other hand, some students read because they personally believe that they are good at reading based on their past academic achievement. This is related to competency and reading efficacy. Another aspect would be social aspects for reading which highlight that students are willing to share about their reading materials with others especially their family members, teachers and friends. Thus, it can be concluded that reading and motivation are two interrelated aspects. They are related in a way that students need a force of motivation in order to encourage them to read as well as to assist them in their language learning.

In relation to this research, students from SMK Sultan Alauddin are chosen as the respondents of the study. They consist of the Form 1 to Form 5 students. These students come from different family backgrounds, with different levels of academic qualifications and English language proficiency. They are required to engage in English reading materials specifically in their English lesson and during other learning activities related to English. Some students portray astonishing interest towards reading in English. Some students have the interest in reading English materials but face problems in understanding the text, thus lowering their motivational level. On the other hand, some students especially the weak ones refuse to read any English reading materials. Thus, it is the purpose of this study to examine the factors that motivate them to read in English and the way in which the factors affect their reading motivation. This study is also conducted to identify the real problems that these students faced in reading English materials as well as to provide solutions to the problems.

1.3   Research Objectives

Based on the problems identified, below are the objectives of the study:

1.3.1   to find out the problems that students face in reading in English.

1.3.2   to investigate the factors that affect students' motivation in reading.

1.3.3   to examine the way in which the factors affect students' motivation in reading.

1.4   Research Questions

This research aims to seek answers to the following questions:

1.4.1   What are the problems that students face in reading in English?

1.4.2   What are the factors that affect students' motivation in reading?

1.4.3   How do these factors affect students' motivation in reading?

1.5   Significance of the Study

Findings from this study will benefit school administrators, language teachers and language instructors as well as parents as on the role that they could play in motivating the students to read. As for the school administrator, the findings could be utilized to reflect and improve on their language programmes so that they would perfectly cater to the students' need. The language programmes conducted by the school administrator should manage to attract the students' attention to participate in the programmes actively.

Furthermore, the findings of this research would be very useful to language teachers as well as language instructors in planning their reading lessons. They need to be aware of the motivational factors that affect their students' reading motivation, such as the need to find suitable reading materials and to employ suitable teaching techniques in order to motivate their students to read. They can also know the approaches that they can use to motivate their students to read.

In addition to that, the findings would also provide insights to parents on the right ways to encourage their children to develop the love for reading. Parents should play their role in motivating the students to read, choosing the right and useful reading materials that could help their students to be proficient in English. The study would also be beneficial to students. Since motivation in reading is essential, this study will provide an insight into the factors that affect students' motivation to read. Therefore, the motivational factors identified can help students to read more and become successful readers. This will surely help the students to develop good reading habits in order for them to obtain knowledge and thus succeed in their studies.

1.6   Scope of the study

The respondents of this study are students of SMK Sultan Alauddin, Felda Bukit Besar, Kulai. They consist of Form 1 to Form 5 students who are chosen as they could reflect the different reading motivation that can be found among ESL learners. Their age range is between 13 to 17 years old. The English language proficiency of these students varies from one to the other.

1.7   Conclusion

In conclusion, this study is conducted to investigate the reading motivation of students from SMK Sultan Alauddin, Felda Bukit Besar, Kulai. There are many problems that are highlighted on the topic of reading motivation such as poor reading habit and lack of vocabulary and background knowledge of the words. Based on the problems above, the study aims to seek answers to three research questions which are to find out the problems that SMK Sultan Alauddin students face in reading in English, to investigate the factors that affect SMK Sultan Alauddin students' reading motivation as well as to examine in what ways the factors affect their reading motivation.

1.8   Definition of Terms

The following are definitions of key terms which are used throughout the research:

1.8.1   Reading

A meaning making process and focus on developing strategic readers who can interpret and evaluate what they have to read from the printed and non-printed materials. (Walker, 1996)

1.8.2   Motivation

Motivation is an internal state or condition (sometimes described as a need, desire, or want) that serves to activate or energize behavior and give it direction. Kleinginna (1981).

1.8.3   English Language Learners (ESL Learners)

English language learners are individuals who are learning English. The term is usually used in education to refer to students who are acquiring English as a second language.

1.8.4   SMK Sultan Alauddin students

Form 1 to Form 5 students from SMK Sultan Alauddin, Felda Bukit Besar, Kulai.

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