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Motivating Reluctant Readers Using the Bibliotherapy Technique: A Case Study in UiTM Melaka

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ABSTRACT

Aliteracy has become a widespread concern in our country. Our young generation has become a group of reluctant readers due to the learning environment, among other factors. The learning environment focuses on academic achievement and most reading outcomes expected are confined only to academic success, neglecting the aesthetic appreciation of texts for its own sake. The researchers set out on a quest to find ways of motivating adolescent students in the ESL classroom, to begin to enjoy the pleasure of reading and through this, the other benefits of reading which they have deprived themselves of : knowledge, developing a personality, becoming a more interesting and wholesome individual, an asset to the community and workplace. The researchers believe that reluctant readers can be reached, given motivation and guidance. It is this that formed the basis of this current research which aimed at investigating the potential role of bibliotherapy, in encouraging unmotivated young adults to read extensively. Basically, bibliotherapy is a process/treatment which focuses on personalized and meaningful reading. A case study was conducted with five participants from the Pre-Test group of UiTM Melaka. The methodology included questionnaire, face-to-face interviews and log sheet. The findings of this research indicated the effectiveness and success of bibliotherapy in motivating reluctant readers. All participants responded encouragingly to the sessions and have begun reading independently. The researchers recommend that bibliotherapy be used as an alternative method in teaching reading.

Background of Study

Studies have shown that students can increase their language proficiency by reading extensively. A study on the importance of reading and language proficiency by Krashen (1993) and Hayashi (1999) (as cited in Mohd Asraf and Ahmad, 2003), reported that students who read habitually experienced significant improvement in their reading ability and vocabulary knowledge than those who read less. In a related study conducted by McQuillan (1994) (as cited in Mohd Asraf and Ahmad, 2003), students showed an overwhelming response to reading extensively. They found reading as not only pleasurable, but more effective for language acquisition than grammar instruction. Similar results were also found in a related study by Dupuy (1997) (as cited in Mohd Asraf and Ahmad, 2003).

Studies have also shown that reading leads to greater writing proficiency. In a study conducted by Janopoulos (1986) (as cited in Mohd Asraf and Ahmad, 2003), it was found that writing ability correlates positively with the amount of time spent on reading for pleasure in the second language. Similar studies done by Tudor and Hafiz (1989), Robb and Susser (1989), and Tsang (1996), have all indicated that students' writing skills and content improved significantly. Besides cognitive benefits, reading is said to help to develop a positive attitude and motivation to read further in the second language. (Hayashi, (1999); Hedge, (1985); Constantino, (1994); Day and Bamford, (1998); all as cited in Mohd Asraf and Ahmad, 2003). It cannot be denied that the more one reads, the easier reading becomes and this will help to develop a positive attitude towards books when readers are involved in meaningful text.

Statement of the Problem

Virtually every individual has the potential to be joyful readers, yet few ever attain such pleasure. Many readers can decode and understand text, but never learn the pleasure and power of reading. They tend to avoid or to be indifferent to reading. Without doubt, aliteracy (having the ability to read but lacking the motivation to read) has become a widespread concern throughout this country. When students, and in this context, young adults, who can read choose not to read, it is likely to encounter a generation of non-readers and perpetuate the problems of reluctant reading.

A survey conducted on the reading behaviour of 22,400 individuals and 6,050 households by the Ministry of Education revealed that only 20 per cent of Malaysians read regularly (Pandian, 2001). This survey also stressed that the small figure includes students who merely read to pass their examinations.

Among the reasons given for the poor reading habit is that most Malaysians find reading as boring and which involves a lot of effort. Children prefer to watch television and play computer games than read good books. Reading is perceived as a chore than a pleasure. Besides that, children spend too much time studying that there is literally no time to read.

Other reasons attributing to this poor reading habit is the exam-oriented educational system in Malaysia. Pandian, (2001) further said that studies have also shown that many students are found to be reluctant readers both for information and pleasure. This phenomenon is a concern shared by many academicians, government officials, NGOs and pressure groups who have stressed the need to investigate the reasons for reluctant reading or poor reading behaviour of young Malaysians. If this problem is left unattended, Malaysia will soon witness the growth of young Malaysians who are 'retarded' in terms of knowledge, intelligence and maturity (Pandian, 2001).

Objectives of the Study

Reading benefits are widely recognized. However, in Malaysia, the young adults in general choose not to read. Some are avid readers in their first language, but do not become readers of English. Perhaps, the traditional approaches and classroom practices, which focus on passing the examinations, have ignored the larger context of students' attitudes and motivation towards reading. Inevitably, the result of such learning environment is students with little or no interest in reading in English.

The researchers believe these reluctant readers can be reached and given proper motivation and guidance, these groups can develop a positive attitude towards reading in English. This study introduces "bibliotherapy" as a way of improving reading motivation. The study aims at explaining why and how bibliotherapy can be a key factor in encouraging young adults to read in English.

Research Questions

This study will undertake an investigation with the hope to answer the following questions on whether Bibliotherapy, a technique used in developmental counseling is able to motivate adolescent reluctant readers.

1. Can Bibliotherapy motivate adolescent reluctant readers?
2. How effective is Bibliotherapy in motivating adolescent reluctant readers?
3. Can Bibliotherapy be used as a reading tool in English language classrooms?

Significance of Study

There are many reluctant readers today and this has brought about a non-reading population in our country. Reading extensively is beneficial and it is important to inculcate the habit of reading. Learning institutions and specifically teachers need to motivate their reluctant readers to read. Bibliotherapy, is believed to be as one of the ways in motivating reluctant readers. This study hopes to contribute significantly to these following groups of people: the reading teachers and the institution. It is hoped that students who are able to read but choose not to do so, will become avid readers with Bibliotherapy. It is hoped that UiTM will produce wholesome graduates who will spearhead the direction and development of this country. Graduates who are avid readers will be knowledgeable, display more maturity whilst discussing issues and be in a position to support solutions

Scope of the Study

This study is confined to UiTM Pre-Tesl Part 2 students. Since reading ability and choice to read are very much linked to language proficiency, the researchers selected the subjects for the study among the Pre-Tesl students who generally have average to good language proficiency. Hence, reading English language books will not be a struggle for them except for the motivation factor, which seems to be absent among these students. Many of them, who are able to read, choose not to do so.

Limitation of the Study

A longer period of observation would yield a more concrete result of the bibliotherapy approach in motivating reluctant readers. As motivation may deteriorate with time, it is important to observe and monitor the reading habits of the subjects for a longer period of time.

Choice of books to read is limited as the books which are available in the library, are not of interest to the subjects. Therefore, the researchers had to select and purchase the story book used in this study in a local bookshop based on the feedback received from the subjects on the type of novel which might interest them.

An Explanatory Model of Reading Behaviour

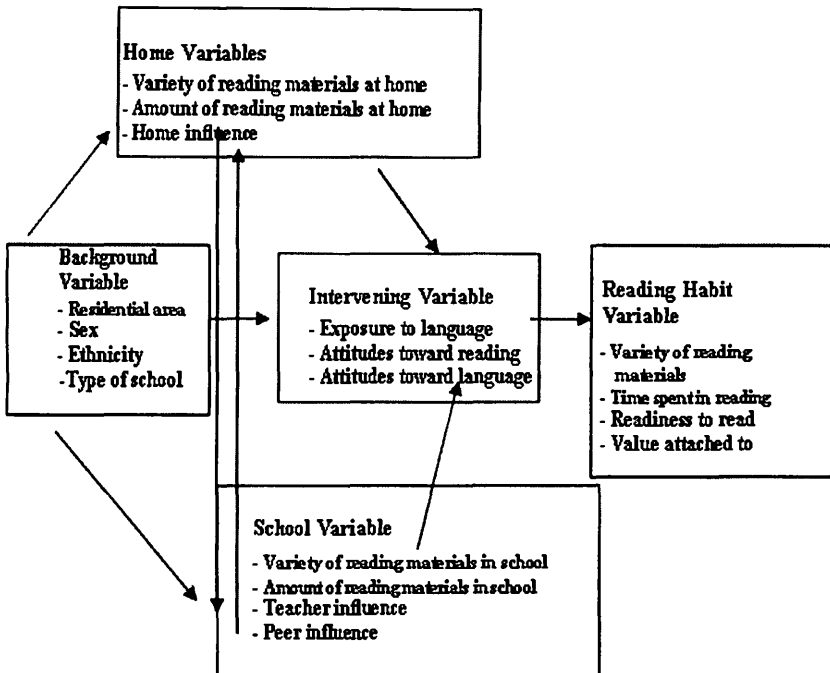


Figure 1: Model of Reading Behaviour

Literature Review

Past research in the area of reading has highlighted the concern about reading attitudes in classrooms. Turner (1992) reported that those students who are considered reluctant readers not only include poor readers but also many capable readers. Beers (as cited in Trelease, 2001) pointed out that many teenagers who know how to read choose not to read. This choice of not to read prevails throughout their education days as they advance through school and universities. Their choice to avoid reading can eventually lead to a decline in their reading ability.

Aliterates or reluctant readers can be divided into three groups – dormant readers, uncommitted readers and unmotivated readers. (McDuffee, 2004) as follows:

- Dormant readers – these readers read for pleasure when they have time.
- Uncommitted readers – these readers have an open attitude towards reading. They do not care for it as they do not find it to be enjoyable. However, they

respect those who do read and believe that they may, sometime in the future grow to like reading.

- Unmotivated readers – these people dislike reading. They view reading as meaningless for themselves. They often are not able to form a connection visually and emotionally to the plots and characters in the books.

Research has also indicated a long-term impact of low level reading skills. There is a strong link between low reading levels and dropping out of school, juvenile crimes and unemployment. Literacy is important in almost any job. Moreover, students who cannot read cannot succeed in today’s information-rich and technology-literate age.

Students who read for pleasure usually score higher on standardized reading tests (Kaczmarek and Stochowick, 2004). The highest scoring students on the reading tests read five times as much as the average scoring readers, and 200 times more than the poorest readers (Anderson et al. as cited in Trelease, 1998).

The model in Figure 1 describes certain factors related to students’ background, home, schools, and the social psychological factors have significant effects on students’ reading behaviour. While the researchers of this study agree that the various variables described in the model all play a significant role in determining reading behaviour of their students, they however, will focus on two variables – reading habit variables and school variables which can be controlled more by the ESL reading teachers with the hope of motivating their students to read. The other variables are more difficult as reading habits are usually already formed by the time students enter school.

Reading Motivation Model Incorporating Bibliotherapy

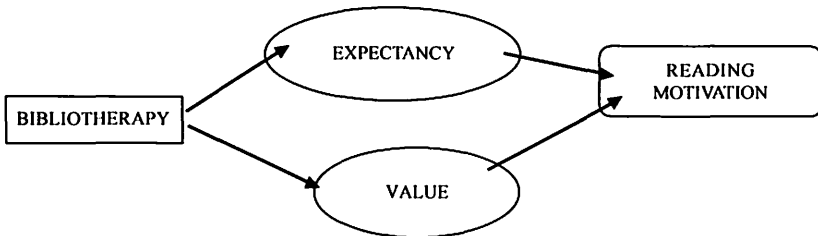


Figure 2: Model of Reading Motivation

Based on the reading model, bibliotherapy is able to create both positive expectancy and values to reading as illustrated in Figure 2. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to indicate that when bibliotherapy is applied, it can be of benefit to students in the educational institutions in providing meaningful,

personalized reading. When reading in classroom fulfils both the expectation of the readers and highlights the positive values in reading as fostered in bibliotherapy, then reading motivation grows and develops.

Methodology and Research Design

For this research the instruments used included questionnaires, face to face interviews and log sheets. The participants underwent 5 weeks of bibliotherapy reading treatment and contact was made with them after the treatment via e-mail to get feedback from the students on their reading progress. The first instrument used for this research was a profile questionnaire (Appendix 1). The objective of administering this questionnaire was to determine the existence and degree of aliteracy in the targeted classroom. The questionnaire was also aimed at gathering information on the reasons for choosing to read and not to read. Besides, it also set out to find out the respondents' self-perception rating of reading motivation. The rating was based on a 1-5 scale where 1 denoted the lowest and 5 denoted the highest self-perception rating.

A second questionnaire was administered to find out the participants reading preferences (Appendix 2). The responses of the first and second questionnaires helped to give a general overview of the reading habits of the population and the choices of reading material they would like to transact with. From the data here, the researchers were guided into selecting the most suitable respondents for the case study – the reluctant readers.

The final questionnaire used in this study was a questionnaire created by Wigfield and Guthrie (1995, 1997) and adapted by Setsuko Mori, (2002) (Appendix 3). This questionnaire referred to the theory of reading motivation. This questionnaire will henceforth be referred to by the acronym MRQ (Motivation for Reading Questionnaire). Wigfield and Guthrie (1995, 1997) identified 11 components in their MRQ but this research did not include three of these components due to their irrelevance for this particular research. The three components left out were Competition in Reading, Reading Recognition and Social Reasons for Reading. These were left out as these scales were specifically developed for primary school students learning to read in their L1, which was not the case here. Thus, the questionnaire also included items that attempted to tap into some integrative reasons for learning to read in English.

The four factors that appear on this questionnaire are:

- Factor one: Intrinsic Value of Reading
- Factor two: Extrinsic Utility Value of Reading
- Factor three: Importance of Reading
- Factor four: Reading Efficacy.

This questionnaire was administered to gather information on the motivational level for reading among the participants prior to and at the end of the bibliotherapy sessions. A face to face interview was carried out by the researchers with the five subjects after the 'treatment' on how they felt about the whole Bibliotherapy reading sessions that they went through. They were asked to give their feedback and whatever they thought was good or lacked in the sessions.

Log sheets were distributed to the respondents to fill out the number of books read by them after the bibliotherapy treatment. The time duration listed on the sheets began with one month to three months after the treatment. Where possible, students were asked to list the titles of the books read on it. The complete schedule is shown in Table 1.

The Bibliotherapy Procedure

In general, activities in bibliotherapy are created to provide information, insight, encouragement of discussion of problems, communication of new values and ideas, creation of awareness that other people have similar problems and suggestion of ways to solve them.

According to Aiex, (1993), the basic procedures in conducting bibliotherapy include the following:

- i. Selecting suitable reading material.
- ii. Motivating readers with introductory activities.
- iii. Providing time for reading.
- iv. Allowing incubation time
- v. Providing follow-up discussion time
- vi. Conducting evaluation and directing readers toward closure.

Table 1: Schedule of Events

Week	Schedule of Events during Treatment
1	Ice breaking activities for participants to get to know one another better. (Simple introductory preliminaries). A questionnaire was given out to determine reasons why the participants read and their preferred choices of books.
2	Selection of books were made based on participants' preferences as stated in the questionnaire.
3	Participants were given a copy each of the book to be discussed for the duration of the experiment
4	Participants met and discussed the early parts of the book, with the teacher merely acting as a facilitator.
5	Continued discussion of parts of the book, lesser teacher intervention.

-
- 6 Independent discussion of some questions posed by the researchers. Participants conducted their own discussions, without the teacher's presence. The teacher-researcher remained outside the classroom to enable participants to be less inhibited and express themselves more freely.
 - 7 Three participants were reading the book at a rapid pace and thus formed a group together while the other two formed a group of their own. The same procedures continued, that is, participants met weekly and discussed without the presence of the teacher.
 - 8 Most discussion sessions were over. Participants filled out a similar self perception rating form of their level of reading motivation. They rated themselves from between 3-4 (as opposed to 1, earlier on)
 - 9 Face to face interviews are held with the participants to get feedback from them on the Bibliotherapy approach and how they felt about it. Researchers take notes on feedback received.
 - 10 – 19 Incubation period where participants do not meet the researchers.
 - 20 Participants are contacted and via e.mail fill out a log sheet stating titles of books/ authors read during the duration of time from the incubation period to this point of time.
-

Results

A questionnaire on students' motivation of reading was administered to the 5 subjects before and after the bibliotherapy session. Responses to the questions were tabulated. Scores for each question were added. An increase in the scores would indicate a raise in the reading motivation and vice versa. A comparison of the participants' level of motivation on reading reported by percentage is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: A Comparison of Participants' Level of Motivation Based on the Reading Motivation Questionnaire

Participants	Pre-	Post-	Post-	Post-	Difference Pre-treatment and Post-treatment Week 5
	treatment	treatment Week 1	treatment Week 3	treatment Week 5	
S1	63	67	76	94	32.9%
S2	62	70	78	90	31.1%
S3	64	65	74	88	27.2%
S4	62	70	80	96	35.4%
S5	61	69	78	92	33.6%

To ascertain whether the bibliotherapy method of motivating reluctant readers can be sustained for a long period of time, and to find out the amount of

independent reading done by these subjects after the treatment, the researches have kept in touch with them over a period of 3 months. Table 3 presents the results of this finding.

Table 3: Number of Books Read by the Participants after the Bibliotherapy Treatment

Participants	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Numbers of books read	
				Titles of books read	
S1	1	1	2	i.	The Rainmaker
				ii.	Sabrina and Friends
				iii.	A Pirates's Love
				iv.	The Seductress
S2	1	1	1	i.	The Strangers
				ii.	Hardy Boys
				iii.	The summons
S3	1	1	1	i.	The Exiled Princess
				ii.	The Chamber
				ii.	Sweet Revenge
S4	1	2	2	i.	Parson's Pleasure
				ii.	The Rocking Horse Winner
				iii.	The Inspector Calls
				iv.	Haunted
				v.	Key of Knowledge
S5	1	2	2	i.	The Sin
				ii.	Honest Illusions
				iii.	River's End
				iv.	Carolina Moon

Based on the amount of independent reading done by the participants, it can be concluded that the Bibliotherapy method is able to motivate reluctant readers to read extensively. The level of motivation sustained is very encouraging. The participants seem to have developed a love of reading without the intervention of the researchers.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In conclusion, the findings of the study seem to indicate the effectiveness and success of bibliotherapy in motivating reluctant readers. All participants have indicated a positive response WITH the treatment. Reading motivation has increased and this can be seen not only from the self-perception rating of reading motivation but also from the number of books read by the participants. All participants have embarked on independent reading and this further

strengthens the claim that when reading is personalized and made meaningful, reading motivation increases. Besides, when students are allowed to take part actively in the choice of book to read and given the freedom in expressing their feelings and thoughts of the reading, motivation increases. Bibliotherapy, therefore, is concluded to have a positive role in motivating reluctant readers to read.

Since the Bibliotherapy model has been found to be successful in improving reading motivation and shows promising results, the researchers believe that it may be a good area to add into the curriculum of schools as well as in higher institutions of learning. The reading teachers can employ the bibliotherapy method to encourage students to read. This study has also highlighted the importance of making reading meaningful. Reading becomes meaningful to adolescents when they can apply literacy processes for pleasure and personal growth, for better understanding of their world, and expanding comprehension. As such, group discussions and classroom talks should be encouraged where students can exchange views and opinions while expanding their knowledge through the experiences of others. Students will find this type of activities interesting and 'real'.

This research has not taken into consideration other variables. These include the home, background and intervening variables (Pandian, 2001). The home environment and background play an important role in the formation of habits – specifically, reading habits. Hence, future research can consider and take into consideration the home and background factors.

If future research could be taken on ethnographically, whereby the researchers live with the learners, some of these variables could be looked into. This would certainly be of help in reshaping and fine tuning these research findings. In addition, it will also be able to investigate peer influence and other intervening factors to some extent.

All these areas are possible directions and angles that future research can look into. The findings of these may be of great value in yet, introducing another methodology to increase motivation in reading. Not just reading for academic purposes but for total pleasure and enjoyment in the reading activity itself – for its aesthetic purposes.

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APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE 1

Date administered: 26 July 2005

Dear participants

We would be grateful if you could kindly answer this questionnaire. We are conducting a research on motivating students to read extensively. For your cooperation, we thank you.

SECTION A

Instruction: This section requires a written answer in brief and circling the most suitable choice A or B.

1. How regularly do you read books/novels?
 - A. Almost everyday without fail
 - B. At least every alternate day
 - C. Occasionally
 - D. Seldom
 - E. Never

2. State reasons for the answer given for question 2. (You may tick some of the reasons given below and/or add your own.
 - A. I love reading
 - B. I find reading as relaxing
 - C. I find the stories interesting
 - D. I am busy with assignments
 - E. I cannot find interesting books to read
 - F. I cannot understand the language

3. Between the scale of 1 to 5 (1 not motivated at all to 5 extremely motivated), could you please rate your level of motivation for reading at present. Please circle the appropriate number.

1 2 3 4 5

APPENDIX 2: QUESTIONNAIRE 2

Date administered: 30 July 2005

Dear participants

Thank you for volunteering to be the participants of this study. Kindly answer the questions that follow.

SECTION A

Personal data

Please fill in your personal data/information required.

1. Name : _____
2. Age : _____
3. Course : _____

SECTION B

Please circle the best choice.

1. In a story, which theme would you prefer to read? (tick against a maximum of 2 boxes).
 - a. romance
 - b. war
 - c. violence
 - d. divorce
 - e. others (please state in the space provided below)

2. What is the length of book you feel comfortable with? (tick against one only)
 - a. less than 100 pages
 - b. 101-200 pages
 - c. 200-300 pages
 - d. above 300 pages

3. Your preferred choice of context? (circle only one)
 - a. local
 - b. foreign
 - c. both

4. Your choice of language level? (circle only one)
 - a. elementary
 - b. intermediate
 - c. advance

APPENDIX 3: MOTIVATING FOR READING QUESTIONNAIRE (MRQ) (Wigfield and Guthrie, (1995, 1997))

Date administered : 1 September 2005 (pre-treatment)
: 14 October 2005 (post treatment week 1)
: 28 October 2005 (post treatment week 3)
: 11 November 2005 (post treatment week 5)

Name: _____

Instruction: Please answer the following questions by circling the appropriate number.
1 – Disagree 2 – Seldom Agree 3 – Sometimes Agree 4 – Agree 5 – Strongly agree

Intrinsic Value of Reading

1. By learning to read in English, I hope I will be able to read English novels	1	2	3	4	5
2. I get immersed in interesting stories even if they are written in English	1	2	3	4	5
3. Long and difficult English passages put me off	1	2	3	4	5
4. I am good at reading in English	1	2	3	4	5
5. I like reading English novels	1	2	3	4	5
6. By learning to read in English, I hope to be able to read English newspapers and/or magazines	1	2	3	4	5
7. It is fun to read in English	1	2	3	4	5
8. I like reading English newspapers and/or magazines	1	2	3	4	5
9. I enjoy the challenge of difficult English passages	1	2	3	4	5
10. I do not have any desire to read in English even if the content is interesting	1	2	3	4	5
11. I would not voluntarily read in English unless it is required as homework or assignments	1	2	3	4	5
12. I tend to get deeply engaged when I read in English	1	2	3	4	5
13. It is a pain to read in English	1	2	3	4	5

Extrinsic Utility Value of Reading						
14.	I am learning to read in English because I might study abroad in the future	1	2	3	4	5
15.	By being able to read in English, I hope to understand more deeply about lifestyles and cultures of English speaking countries (such as America and England)	1	2	3	4	5
16.	Even if reading were not a required subject, I would take a reading class anyway	1	2	3	4	5
17.	I would like to get a job that uses what I studied in English reading class	1	2	3	4	5
18.	By learning to read in English, I hope to learn about various opinions in the world	1	2	3	4	5

Importance of Reading						
19.	Learning to read in English is important in that we need to cope with internationalization	1	2	3	4	5
20.	Learning to read in English is important because it will broaden my view	1	2	3	4	5
21.	Reading in English is important because it will make me a more knowledgeable person	1	2	3	4	5
22.	It is a waste of time to learn to read in English	1	2	3	4	5

Reading Efficacy						
23.	I am good at reading in English	1	2	3	4	5
24.	I liked reading classes at junior and senior high schools	1	2	3	4	5
25.	English reading is my weak subject	1	2	3	4	5
26.	My grades for reading classes are not very good	1	2	3	4	5
