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A Survey of Life-long Reading Habits Among UiTM Undergraduates

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ABSTRACT

This study intents to look at the English Language reading habits of Universiti Technologi MARA Johor undergraduates for the purpose of finding out the reading culture among the undergraduates and the strategies to enhance life-long reading habits. It will thus look at the internal and external factors such as self-motivation, availability of reading materials, role of peers, role of motivators (i.e. family, teachers, government, media) and competition from modern devices (i.e. computer, video games, television etc) that challenges the acquisition of life-long reading habits. It would be interesting to see if these factors influence good reading habits in line with the government's goal of eradicating illiteracy among Malaysian students. The study in the form of a survey uses the Likert scale for analytical purposes where the respondents comprise of undergraduates from University Technology MARA Johor (N = 250). The study also encompasses a structured interview. The framework used is adapted from Blooms Taxonomy's affective domain.

Keywords: *reading habits, life-long reading, internal factors, external factors*

Introduction

Reading may seem like a simple and natural process for a child but in reality, it involves more than just recognizing words and understanding the meaning of the arrangement of words. A lot of what it takes to be able to read also has to do with interests and willingness to read as well as encouragement and motivation

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from parents, teachers and peers. Thus, internal and external factors are important to enable the building of a reading culture in any society.

Life-long reading habits would dictate reading as being a natural process of daily life. It cannot be cultivated overnight. Badioze Zaman (1998) stated that information has always existed but has only recently been regarded as so important that it represents the very symbol of our society – the information society. Research shows that students in Malaysia tend to read for the sake of passing examinations and fulfilling the school requirements (New Straits Times, 29 August 1996, as cited by Ambigapathy, 2000). The National Literacy Survey conducted by the National Library in 1996 reported that an average Malaysian reads only two books a year (Sarjit & Rosy, 2000; The Star, 16 July, 2006). Acknowledging the poor reading habits of Malaysians, Tan Sri Dato' Seri Musa bin Mohamad, the education minister at that time, pointed out in his speech at the opening ceremony of the 31st IASL Conference 2002 that strong actions to cultivate a reading culture begins at school.

When students reach tertiary level, reading widely both for academic purposes and for leisure are expected of them. The expectations of the lecturers are that they have proficiency in reading in the English language. Failing to meet this demand would mean inability to perform academically. Stoynoff (1997) stated that academic success in the tertiary level includes language proficiency, learning and study strategies and certain personal characteristics. Thus, it would be interesting to look at undergraduates' acquisition of life-long reading habits at the tertiary level.

Anderson et al. (1985) defined reading as the process of constructing meaning from written texts and considered it a complex skill requiring the coordination of a number of interrelated sources of information. Wixson, Peters, Weber, and Roeber (1987) stated that reading is the process of constructing meaning through the dynamic interaction among:

1. the reader's existing knowledge;
2. the information suggested by the text being read; and
3. the context of the reading situation.

Generally, linguists agree that reading requires both the ability to break down the written symbols and codes, and the ability to understand the meaning intended by the writer. Collaboration is therefore required between the left and right brain visual skills in order to be a strong reader.

When a reader reads, he is translating the written words into meaningful language. The reader is using cognitive devices to decode symbols and codes in the written text to formulate thoughts and ideas that are comprehensible to him. Reading is therefore a highly complex cognitive processing operation that involves processing of ideas generated by others through printed text and transmitted by language (Nunan, 1999).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to find out the challenges faced by undergraduates of Universiti Teknologi MARA Johor in acquiring life-long reading habits in the English language. The study will investigate the internal and external factors that influence the cultivation of good reading habits in line with the government's goal of eradicating illiteracy by the year 2020. This will help students and language instructors to see the problems that students face in order to find ways to help cultivate life-long reading habits especially in the English language.

Theoretical Framework

Reading habits are cultivated by means of the process of receiving the reading materials, responding to the materials read by showing some comprehension, valuing the reading by relating them to ones' beliefs or attitudes, organizing the value of what has been read and finally, placing them in the reader's value system of the whole world. This is in relation to cultivating life-long reading habits. The framework for this study is adapted from Blooms taxonomy (figure 1) for a general understanding of the affective domain in human behaviour (Krathwohl, Bloom & Masia, 1964, as cited in Brown, 2000).

Level 1	Receiving
Level 2	Responding
Level 3	Valuing
Level 4	Organization of values
Level 5	Value System

Figure 1: Bloom's Taxonomy of Affective Domain

(adapted from Krathwohl, Bloom & Masia, 1964, cited in Brown, 2000)

At the fundamental level, the development of the affective domain begins with receiving. Learners must be aware of their environment and be conscious of situations, phenomena, people and objects. They should be willing to receive or tolerate and pay attention to a given stimulus.

In the second level, learners must start responding. They may respond by committing themselves in at least some small measure to a phenomenon or a person. The response may even extend to the learner voluntarily responding without coercion and then receiving satisfaction from that response.

The third level is valuing. The learner may place worth on a thing, a behaviour, or a person to the extent of not merely being willing to be identified

with it, but committing themselves to pursuing it, seeking it out, and wanting it up to the point of conviction.

The fourth level is the organization of values. This refers to the organization of values into a system of beliefs, determining interrelationships among them, and establishing a hierarchy of values within the system.

Finally, the fifth level is the value system. The learners act consistently in accordance with the values they have internalized and integrate beliefs, ideas, and attitudes into a total philosophy or worldview. The learner therefore, goes through the five levels of Bloom's taxonomy for a deeper appreciation of reading when they reach the final level of value system.

Literature Review

Ambigapathy (2000) claimed that when adults in today's age who can read, choose not to read, they are likely to create a generation of non-readers as well as perpetuate the problem of reading reluctance. When ESL students were asked what they considered to be their major reading problems in tasks relating to academic work, "68% attributed their major deficiencies in vocabulary; 19% to complexities of syntax; 6% to problems related to rate of reading" (McKinley, cited in Gorman, 1979).

Ambigapathy's study (2001) revealed that 76.2 percent of secondary school students under study in Malaysia were reluctant readers of the English language. His investigations showed that students who come from higher socio-economic status (SES) families tend to have a greater amount and variety of reading materials at home, more positive home influence, parents who are more likely to read and serve as reading models and a greater reading area at home. Students who fared well in the English language at the PMR level come from homes where there is more amount and variety of reading materials in English, positive home influence and parents serving as reading models.

Jacobson (2002) reported that in Bush's programme "Building Language for Learning", children are exposed to books and vocabulary as part of their daily routine in the American school curricular. This programme was initiated from the realization that children don't learn to read naturally (Canizares, 2002). This means that reading is a skill that has to be taught. Neuman (2003) reported that Bush's reading programmes were in line with the "No Child Left Behind" act that provided a historic opportunity to prevent reading difficulties. Bush's education legislation, according to Neuman, offered high quality education as an entitlement for all children, regardless of their life circumstance. The programme therefore is a means to promote reading habits from early childhood for the purpose of life-long learning.

Feng provided some suggestions for efficient teaching of reading such as encouraging students to broaden their background knowledge, develop cultural

awareness, encourage students to make guesses, determine the meaning from the context and associate the known with the unknown.

Ambigapathy (2000) conducted a study on trainee teachers to find out their literacy behaviour. He stated that teachers should understand the critical role they play in the education of young people. As such, teachers themselves needed to be informed. He claimed that the teachers' literacy behaviour influences their students' literacy behaviour. This literacy behaviour (being informed) contributes to their ability in producing educated and informed citizens.

The studies conducted by Ambigapathy show the lack of reading habits among students and teachers alike. Other researchers (i.e. Feng, Jacobson and McKinley) also found that reading is indeed important to cultivate, but remains an issue to account for.
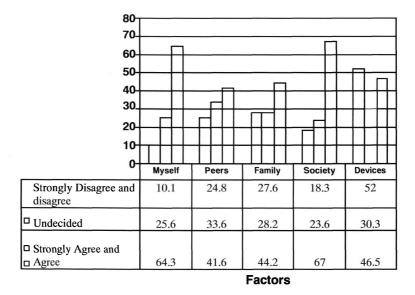
Methodology

The descriptive survey method was used in this study in the form of a questionnaire and a structured interview. The questionnaire consists of 30 questions in which the respondents will have to choose answers based on a Likert Scale. The questionnaire is adapted from The success of the national reading program (Soo, 2005), The Rhody Secondary Reading Attitude Assessment (Tullock-Rhody et al., 1980) and The National Literacy Trust Survey on Reading (Clark and Akerman, 2006).

The Likert Scale is a scale that is normally used to measure attitude or tendency and goes by a preference of more than, less than and neutral. The structured interview is a predetermined list of questions based on a text adapted from Mark Hanger's Good Morning (Mikulecky & Jeffries, 2004, p. 4-6) The interviewees have to respond to the questions after reading the text to test their comprehension of the text for the purpose of reading for pleasure. For the purpose of this research, two hundred and fifty undergraduates of UiTM Johor were selected for the questionnaire. Fifty undergraduates were then selected for the structured interview session from the two hundred and fifty undergraduates. The disproportionate stratified random sampling method was used to select the respondents. The total number of undergraduates in UiTM Johor is approximately 5000 undergraduates in 6 Diploma parts and Bachelor courses. Thirty five undergraduates from each diploma parts were randomly picked to represent their parts and forty undergraduates from a bachelor course were selected using the same method. In statistics, stratification is the process of grouping members of the population into relatively homogeneous subgroups before sampling. The strata should be mutually exclusive: every element in the population must be assigned to only one stratum. The strata should also be collectively exhaustive: no population element can be excluded. Then random or systematic sampling is applied within each stratum. This often improves the

representation of the sample by reducing sampling error. A disproportionate stratified random sample indicates that each of the strata is not proportional to that of the total population. Thus, the sample size (N = 250) taken randomly from each diploma part and one bachelor group is disproportionate to the number of undergraduates in each part and bachelor course but is meant to represent the student population of UiTM Johor.

Results and Discussions

Based on the data collected from the questionnaire, an overall analysis of the factors affecting life-long reading habits was tabulated as shown in Figure 1.

Comparison of Factors Affecting Life-long Reading Habits

	Myself	Peers	Family	Society	Devices
Strongly Disagree and disagree	10.1	24.8	27.6	18.3	52
▢ Undecided	25.6	33.6	28.2	23.6	30.3
▢ Strongly Agree and ▢ Agree	64.3	41.6	44.2	67	46.5

Factors

Figure 1: Analysis of Factors Affecting Life-long Reading Habit

Figure 1: Analysis of Factors Affecting Life-long Reading habitThe diagram also shows 33.6% were undecided the external factor 'peers' was a factor that affected life-long reading habits. This was followed by the external factor 'modern devices' 30.3%, the external factor 'family' 28.2%, the internal factor 'myself' 25.6% and the external factor 'society' 23.6%. The results indicated that the respondents were most undecided about the external factor 'peers', followed by the external factor 'modern devices', the external factor 'family', the internal factor 'myself' and the external factor 'society'.

In the diagram, it can be seen that 52% of the respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed that the external factor 'modern devices' affected life-long reading habits. This was followed by the external factor 'family' 27.6%, the external factor 'peers' 24.8%, the external factor 'society' 18.3% and the internal factor 'myself' 10.1%.

In the structured interview, the respondents indicated that they liked the story they read (92%). They were also able to identify the characters they liked with reasons for their choice (70% chose Joe, 6% Old Ranger, 16% Mr Appleby, 2% Mrs Appleby and 6% the children). The majority liked the ending and provided valid reasons (88%) while 12% of the respondents stated they did not like the ending with reasons that they could not understand the text. Less than half the respondents (46%) stated that they have read similar stories while 56% stated that they have not read or preferred non-fiction texts. The majority could infer from the text the reason for the author's choice of the title 'Good morning'. Only five respondents (10%) had no idea for the author's choice.

Conclusions

The findings in this study indicated that the UiTM Johor undergraduates' feel that internal and external factors affect life-long reading habits (52.7%). This indicates that more than 50% of the respondents felt that the above factors do affect their life-long reading habits. Therefore internal and external factors should be considered in nurturing life-long reading habits.

The analysis of the data also showed that the respondents felt that 'society' (67%) and 'myself' (64.3%) played a major role in life-long reading habits. More than 50% of the respondents felt that they strongly agreed and agreed to this. This means that the university environment, the lecturers, book sales and exhibition and the government's reading campaigns have been instrumental in affecting their life-long reading habits in a positive manner. They also felt that the internal factor 'myself,' which constitutes their self-motivation to read for the purpose of pleasure, finding a job, improving proficiency of English and knowledge, also affected their cultivation of life-long reading habits.

However, the study also showed that the respondents disagreed that the external factor 'modern devices' (52%) affected their life-long reading habits. This means that the respondents felt that watching television, surfing the internet, playing video games, watching movies and chatting do not affect their life-long reading habits.

Since the factor of 'society' plays the most significant role in affecting life-long reading habits, it is suggested that the role of 'society' should be increased in nurturing life-long reading habits.

The analysis of the structured interview showed that the undergraduates were able to comprehend and appreciate the reading material. They were also

able to relate and respond to the characters in the text. 92% of the respondents said that they like the story and 88% liked the ending. This shows that the respondents were able to relate to the text. It is therefore suggested that internal and external factors do assist in comprehension of reading materials for the purpose of cultivating life-long reading habits.

The findings of this study show that there is room for future studies in this area of research. As such, in future it would be interesting to look at life-long reading habits of primary and secondary undergraduates as well as working professionals. Since 'society' plays a crucial role in affecting life-long reading habits, future research should be focused on this factor.

The government in recent times has seen it fit to emphasize on life-long reading habits as we move towards the status of an industrialized nation with 100% literacy by the year 2020. Thus it would be interesting to see to what extent undergraduates in the tertiary level at UiTM Johor have been able to acquire such reading habits and what the constrains to their developing such skills are. This study would therefore be especially helpful to other researchers who are looking at reading abilities, instructors who are teaching reading, undergraduates who wish to improve their reading abilities as well as policy makers and curriculum developers. For future studies, it would be interesting to investigate reading habits of undergraduates from different age groups and level of English language proficiency.

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