

Exploring the English Reading Habits among Teenagers

Azrina binti Abu Bakar

Academy of Language Studies
Universiti Teknologi MARA Melaka, Malaysia
azrinaabubakar@uitm.edu.my

ABSTRACT

Reading is part of literacy. Despite boasting a high Malaysia's literacy rate, educationists and social analysts lament that the reading habits among Malaysians has dwindled with the prevalence of digital devices. The issue that this study addresses is the lack of teenagers in English reading. To address this problem, the purpose of this study was to investigate the English reading habits of English as a Second Language (ESL) students at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Melaka, Malaysia in order to gain insights on their English reading culture. This study also examined the influences of school or university culture and family culture on students' reading habits. To gather data, 100 students were selected randomly to complete a questionnaire. The data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Statistics 17.0 software. Furthermore, interviews with four students were conducted. The interviews were transcribed and analysed. From the statistical data, it was revealed that the students' reading habits is still considered quite low. The researcher also found that family culture impacts the students' reading habit. Some recommendations were made to educators, the librarians, and parents to nurture the students' English reading habits.

Keywords: *Literacy. Reading habit. Family culture. School culture.*

INTRODUCTION

Reading is a receptive process (Goodman, 2000). It plays a significant role in the process of acquiring knowledge which begins with a linguistic surface of representation encoded by a writer and ends with meaning which the reader constructs (Goodman, 2000). It is also known as a psycholinguistic process. Many language experts and researchers have considered reading as important both in academic and throughout the life of an individual. Thus, the habits of reading should be cultivated since childhood in order to improve students' writing and communication, increase their knowledge, and importantly to create an educated and civilised society.

According to the Adult and Youth Literacy: National Regional and Global Trends 1985-2015 report, literacy levels for Malaysian among the population aged 15 years and older being recorded at an impressive 94.64 per cent ("Malaysia's Literacy Rate is Almost 95%, Not 55%: National Library, 2017). Although Malaysia has a high literacy rate in the South East Asia, many educationists and social analysts are widely concerned with poor reading habits among Malaysians (Asila Jalil, 2017). This has provided the impetus for the researcher to explore the reading habits of students in a public university.

Over the past several decades, some researchers have attempted to determine the reading habit of the kids, teenagers and adults (Fathia Rosyida & M.Ali Ghufuron, 2018; Zurina Khairuddin, 2013). However, little research has attempted to ascertain the English reading habit of university students at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Melaka. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to provide insights into reading habits of diploma university students at UiTM Melaka. The study also examined the influences of family culture and

school or university culture on their reading habits. Three specific research questions were examined by this study:

1. How many books do diploma students read per year?

2. What are diploma students' reading habits with respect to the sources of texts that they read?
3. Who have played a significant role in promoting the reading habits since childhood?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading Habits of University Students

Reading habit is defined as “how often, how well, and what adults like to read” (Scales & Rhee, 2001, p. 178, cited in Rodrigo, Greenberg & Segal, 2014, p.73). For those who have good reading habits, they tend to have better reading comprehension compared to people who have low reading habits. This is because when the students like reading, it will be more easier for them to comprehend the English texts (Fathia Rosyida & M. Ali Ghuftron, 2018). This is supported by Zurina Khairuddin (2013) who stated that students need good reading habits to enhance their success in education and throughout their lives.

Although reading has numerous advantages, Malaysians in general have low reading habits. In 2014, the National Library in Malaysia found that on average, every Malaysian only read 15 books in a year (Nafisah Ahmad, cited in Borneo Post Online, 2017). In addition to that, Mohini Mohamed, Roshanida A.Rahman, Tin, Haslenda Hashim, Hasmerya Maarof, Noor Sharliana Mat Nasir et al., (2011) discovered that 53.48 per cent of the respondents from the Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) read more than 4 books per year. In comparison, in other countries such as China, the Chinese Academy of Press and Publication (2017) reported that the Chinese adults read nearly eight books on average while children and teenagers under 17 read nearly nine books (“Report on Reading Habits a Real Page-turner”, 2018).

Several previous studies have conducted some fascinating research on students' reading habits. For instance, Zurina Khairuddin (2013) raised a major concern involving students in Terengganu, Malaysia. In her study, she revealed that a majority of students had relatively low interests in reading English materials and out of 86 students, there were 30 students who did not like to read any types of English reading materials. Besides, 45 out of 86 students were discovered to read English materials less than four times a week (Zurina Khairuddin, 2013). On the other hand, the findings by Nor Shahriza Abdul Karim and Amelia Hasan (2006) may come to a surprise since in their research, they reported that on average, the students from the International Islamic University Malaysia spent about seven to nine hours per week to read because the students were required to read academic materials. The students also spent most of their leisure time by reading. They also mentioned that most of the students preferred to read newspapers every day for at least a few times a week followed by academic books, websites magazines, fictions, journal articles, and literature. The interesting finding in this study was the researcher found that the use of websites have become popular among students and the trend of conventional reading has shifted to a digital reading habit.

In other researchers' views, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can improve reading habits among university students by helping them in assessing reading materials (Mlay, Sabi, Tsuma & Langmia, 2015). Furthermore, Parlette (2010) discovered that 88 per cent of participants spent a lot of time reading online such as Facebook, blogs, web comics, online anecdotal humour websites, and online articles. As suggested by Ang

Suan Sim, an acting director of Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman's Mary Kuok Pick Hoo Library in Malaysia, smartphone and tablet are the preferred tools to read online by undergraduates because the gadgets are convenient and mobile friendly (“Boosting the Reading Habit”, 2018). Sabi, Tsuma and Langmia (2015) also discovered that there was a significant relationship between the use of ICT and the students' reading habits. Most of the students in the study preferred to use

ICT in accessing reading sources because the ICT resources are considered as more affordable and easier to access compared to physical reading materials (Sabi, Tsuma & Langmia, 2015).

Home Culture and School or University Culture Influence on Students' Reading Habits

Researches on how the home culture and school culture impact on students' reading habits have been carried out by many researchers (Parlette, 2010; Azlin Norhaini Mansor, Mohd Sattar Rasul, Rose Amnah Abd Rauf & Koh, 2013; Mlay et al., 2015). These studies have attempted to investigate the factors of home culture and school culture in cultivating the habit of reading since childhood.

The conduciveness of home factor plays the most significant role in calculating the literacy behaviour during infancy, fostering reading habits of most avid readers during childhood, promoting the habit into the teens, and maintaining the avidness towards adolescent (Azlin et al., 2013). It is very interesting to note that in a study on seven 15-year-old Malaysian teenagers conducted by Azlin et al. (2013), the researchers reported that most of the participants claimed that their mothers influenced them a lot to read early. As claimed by the participants, the mothers simply made efforts to start their children reading such as reading bedtime stories. The influence of home culture in developing the reading habits also is discussed in the research of Parlette (2010) which investigated the reading habits and experiences of the first year undergraduate students at Dalhousie University and University of King's College in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The researcher noted that parents play a pivotal role in encouraging the students to read since childhood. The parents were found to play an active role in cultivating the reading habits among students by encouraging them to read regularly at home as well as providing and reading books for their children. Therefore, parents were said to bring positive impacts on students' reading habits.

Apart from home culture, school culture also plays an important role in initiating students' interest in reading. It is believed that reading could improve the chances of success at school and beyond, thus it should not only be taken as a school activity but a life activity (Jönsson & Olsson, 2008, cited in Mlay et al., 2015). For example, schools can play their roles in sustaining an interest of reading among students through various activities such as organising a silent reading at the assembly ground once a month for a single period (Azlin et al., 2013). Meanwhile, other interesting activities which include "reader-friendly environment, a listing of newly purchased books on the library website and a display of new and interesting items in the collection" are conducted at University of Malaya, Malaysia to foster reading habits among students ("Boosting the Reading Habit", 2018).

Even though school culture affects students' reading habits, some factors might hinder the students' habits in reading. For example, some students did not have access to books in their school libraries and lack of ICT resources such as computers and the Internet connectivity at school (Mlay et al., 2015). Furthermore, as claimed by Azlin et al. (2013), some reading programmes at schools such as NILAM program did not really nurture the students' reading habits because students read story books in order to pass an examination rather than pleasure.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A total of 100 diploma students from four different faculties at UiTM Melaka namely the Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, the Faculty of Business and Management, the Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, and the Academy of Language Studies (23 males and 77 females) participated in the study. Most of them were the first, second, and third semester diploma students and their ages ranged from 18 to 21 years old.

Simple random sampling was utilised in this study using a questionnaire adapted from Dewberry (1976) and Nadelson et al. (2013). All of the respondents took the "Integrated Language Skills" (ELC) subject at the time of data collection. Classes met 4 hours in a week and one of the English components in ELC includes of a reading section which comprised of a reading comprehension. One of the objectives of the ELC subject is to improve the reading skills among students in order to help them perform effectively and competently in the social and academic contexts by using a variety of reading materials such as newspapers and online articles. The reading comprehension section requires a lot of reading skills.

This study used two types of instruments: the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview. The questionnaire was utilised in the study to seek feedback from students on their reading habits. There were 18 items in the questionnaire based on the researcher's survey dealing with the number of books read per year, the students' preferred reading materials, and people who influence them to read since childhood. In addition, the researcher interviewed four students to elicit their responses on the habits of reading. The results obtained from the study were coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Statistics 17.0 software.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings on reading habits were analysed through the number of books read per year, preferred reading materials, and people who have played an important role in cultivating the students' reading habits.

Number of Books Read Per Year

Table 1 presents the number of books read per year by students. It is clear from Table 1 that 43 per cent of the respondents read one or two books a year. This finding is consistent with the finding from the 2005 National Literacy Survey done by the National Library which revealed that Malaysians only read two books a year (Anas Alam Faizli, 2016). Meanwhile, another 42 per cent of respondents were found to read three to ten books per year. Only (4%) of the respondents read more than 40 books annually while 11 respondents of the 100 (11%) reported that they read books between 11 and 40 books a year. In general, a majority of students read between one to ten books per year. This finding is in agreement with that of Mohini Mohamed et al. (2011), who found that (53.48%) of the respondents in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) read more than four books per year and the researchers concluded that Malaysia suffers from a low reading culture even in the higher institution of education.

There are some possible explanations for this outcome. It is possible that one of the reasons for the respondents' poor reading habits is due to lack of time. The students probably have busy social lives, intense lessons, and preparation for tests and examinations. During the interview, a student, R4 was asked to respond on the number of books that she read a year, she commented that:

R4: "Last year I read on average eight books but I do not read books this year. I don't have much time to read books because I have many classes. I have to complete many assignments too".

The current finding appears to support Kennedy's (2013) result that the students only read assigned readings during the semester because they were under stress which affected their feelings towards reading. In addition, the finding collaborate previous research (Ro & Chen, 2014) and confirmed the lack of time is one of the reasons of poor reading habits. In their study, the researchers discovered that the participants did not spare any extra time for the second language

(L2) pleasure reading because they overwhelmed by the Community English Program (CEP) classes and their personal lives. Moreover, less encouragement from parents and educators to read as well as the economic condition of their parents are another possibilities for the poor reading habits among students. According to Affidah Morni and Siti Huzaimah Sahari (2013), the parents' attitude is important in encouraging children's reading culture with sufficient reading materials and positive attitudes towards reading. Also, it appears that the prevalence of digital devices influences the students' reading habits because they find much easier to access the digital devices compared to books. The students may spend much time on social media such as Facebook or Instagram rather than reading books. Finally, environment of residential college, cost of reading materials, and peer influence may be another reasons of poor reading habits among students (Mohini Mohamed et al., 2011).

Table 1 Number of Books Read Per Year

Number of Books Read Per Year	No. Respondents	Percentage Respondents
One or two	43	43
3-10	42	42
11-40	11	11
More than 40	4	4

Ordering of Text Sources Based on Scores

Table 2 shows the participants' reading habits with respect to the sources of texts that they read. The researcher examined the participants' responses based on the frequency which they interacted with various type text sources. As depicted in Table 2, the non-traditional forms of text communication such as mobile devices, Facebook, blogs, wikis, and email dominated the top fourth responses. However, it is very interesting to note that in the middle of frequency distribution, the participants preferred to read printed textbooks. Furthermore, other frequently used text sources were dominated by the non-traditional forms of text communication including online newspapers, online magazines, online textbooks, and online English novel. On the other hand, the respondents read printed newspapers, physical magazines and physical English novels less frequently.

In summary, the findings revealed that students in the sample preferred to use the non-traditional forms of text communication such as mobile texting, tweeting, Facebook, blogs, and email. The result from the present study was similar to those obtained by earlier researchers (e.g., Nadelson, Villagomez, Konkol, Haskell, McCulley & Campbell, 2013; Mohini Mohamed et al., 2011). In their findings, the researchers discovered that students spent much time on reading online materials compared to printed materials whether they are non-academics or non-course related materials (Mohini Mohamed et al., 2011). Wang, Chiu, Ho and Lo (2016) also reported that the university students in Hong Kong read more types of magazines after they started using mobile digital devices such as tablets. It is possible that the students preferred to use the non-traditional forms of text communication because it is much easier for them to access the reading materials broadly through smartphones and other mobile devices. They can also save money for not buying printed reading materials since most of the online reading materials available on the Internet are free. When the students were interviewed and asked to state the preferred types of reading materials, they commented:

R1: "Usually I read threads on Twitter. I prefer to read online materials so I can save time and money".

R2: "I prefer online materials rather than printed reading materials because they are more convenient".

This finding is supported by Ang Suan Sim (2018) who stressed that undergraduates prefer to use smartphone and gadgets in reading because they are more convenient and mobile friendly ("Boosting the Reading Habit", 2018). Moreover, another possible explanation for using digital devices frequently in reading could be probably due to social situations factor, the students interact with the text in place of talking or other interpersonal methods of communication such as texting (Nadelson, et al., 2013). On the other hand, an interviewee in this study had a different opinion on her preferred reading materials. She mentioned that she preferred to read printed materials, as she commented:

R3: "I like to hold a book. When I hold the book, I can absorb and remember more words and meaning as well as remember the physical location of the words".

Table 2 Ordering of Text Sources Based on Scores

Rank	Current Habits: <i>How often do you read from the following tools/media?</i>	Score
1 st	Mobile devices (SMS, texting, tweeting)	410
2 nd	Facebook and other social media sites	408
3 rd	Blogs/ Wikis	362
4 th	Email	342
5 th	Printed textbooks	309
6 th	Online newspapers and magazines	302
7 th	Online textbooks	281
8 th	Online English novel	268
9 th	Printed newspapers and physical magazines	261
10 th	Printed English novel	233

People that Promote the Reading Habits since Childhood

The percentage of people that promote the reading habits since childhood among teenagers is shown in Table 3. The researcher examined either parents or schools and universities have played a significant role in fostering the students' reading habits.

From Table 3, it can be seen that parents play a significant role to cultivate a reading culture among students. 68 respondents of the 100 (68%) reported that their parents have developed their reading habits since childhood. This indicated that parents play a crucial role in boosting the students' reading habits at home. However, only (32%) of the respondents stated that their teachers or lecturers have influenced them to read in schools or universities. When a student was asked who have played an important role in cultivating the reading habits, the findings from the interview revealed that:

R3: "My mother bought books when I was young. She always encourages me to read books"

This finding is in agreement with that Affidah Morni and Siti Huzaimah Sahari (2013), who claimed that parents play a significant role to encourage students to read. Therefore, parents need to supply adequate good and interesting reading materials such as books, magazines, novels, and comics to encourage the children to read at home (Affidah Morni & Siti Huzaimah Sahari, 2013).

Table 3 People that Promote the Reading Habits

People that Promote the Reading Habits	No. Respondents	Percentage Respondents
Parents	68	68
School and University	32	32

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the discussions of the results, several conclusions were drawn from this study and the results can be used to assist the university authority to provide more effective strategies in promoting the reading culture at UiTM Melaka.

A survey on reading habits in the study revealed that the diploma students at UiTM Melaka have poor reading habits. Almost half of the students read only one to two books a year. Students should be encouraged to read more in order to create a highly knowledgeable, mature, and civilised society. The results also showed that parents play a significant role in fostering reading habits among students. The parents should inculcate the habits of reading since childhood and support reading programs at university. Meanwhile, the library in the university can implement more reading programs, create a vibrant reading environment, invite authors and publishers as guests to promote reading habits among university students.

The university authority also should improve access to reading materials. This is because in this study, it is obvious that UiTM Melaka students are more inclined to read the non-traditional forms of text communication. The students have used extensively electronic, web, digital, and social media to read novels, daily news online, thread on Twitter, Facebook, email, and so forth.

REFERENCES

- Affidah Morni & Siti Huzaimah Sahari (2013). The Impact of Living Environment on Reading Attitudes. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 101, 415-425.
- Anas Alam Faizli. (2016, October 24). Inculcating reading culture towards a First World Nation. *Astro Awani Online*. Retrieved 31 November 2018 from <http://english.astroawani.com/malaysia-news/inculcating-reading-culture-towards-first-world-nation-120312>
- Asila, Jalil. (2017, October 26). Low literacy rank because Malaysians don't want to read, say educationists. *The Malaysian Insight*, News. Retrieved 31 November 2018 from <https://www.themalaysianinsight.com/s/20195>
- Azlin Norhaini Mansor, Mohd Sattar Rasul, Rose Amnah Abd Rauf & Koh. B. L. (2013). Developing and Sustaining Reading Habit Among Teenagers. *Asia-Pacific Edu Re*, 22, 357–365. Retrieved November 30, 2017, from Springer Online.
- "Boosting the Reading Habit." (2018, July, 25). *New Straits Times Online*, Education. Retrieved November 31, 2017, from <https://www.nst.com.my/education/2018/07/394232/boosting-reading-habit>
- Dewberry, R.P. (1976). *Reading Interests, Habits, and Attitudes of Eleventh Grade Students in Montgomery, Alabama*. (Doctoral thesis, Auburn University, 1976).

- Fathia Rosyida & M. Ali Ghufron. (2018). Herringbone and Tri Focus Steve Snyder Technique: The Techniques for Teaching Reading Comprehension Viewed from Students' Reading Habit. *International Journal of Instruction*, 11, 603-616.
- Goodman, K. (2000). A definition of reading. In Long, M.H. & Richards, J.C. (Ed.), *Interactive Approaches to Second Language Reading* (pp.12). United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Kennedy, A.L. (2013). *Reading Habits and Attitudes of Pre-Service Teachers: A Case Study*. (Doctoral thesis, Widener University, 2013).
- "Malaysia's literacy rate is almost 95%, not 55%: National Library." (2017, May 5). *New Straits Times*, Nation. Retrieved 31 November 2017 from <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2017/05/236676/msias-literacy-rate-almost-95-not-55-national-library>
- Mlay, S.V., Sabi, H.M., Tsuma, C.K. & Langmia, K. (2015). Uncovering reading habits of university students in Uganda: Does ICT matter?. *International Journal of Education and Development using Information and Communication Technology*, 11, 38-50.
- Mohini Mohamed, Roshanida A. Rahman, Tin, L.C., Haslenda Hashim, Hasmerya Maarof, Noor Sharliana Mat Nasir et al., (2011). Reading behaviors of students in Kolej Datin Seri Endon (KDSE). *International Journal of Educational Management*, 26, 381-390.
- Nadelson, L.S., Villagomez, A., Konkol, D., Haskell, C., McCulley, M., Campbell, D. (2013).
- Messages are Everywhere: Reading Perceptions, Habits, and Preferences Undergraduates. *Journal of College Reading and Learning*, 42. 70-90.
- Nafisah Ahmad. (2017, May 5). Malaysia's literacy rate almost 95 per cent. *Borneo Post Online*. Retrieved 30 November 2017 from <https://www.theborneopost.com/2017/05/05/malaysias-literacy-rate-almost-95-per-cent/>
- Nor Shahriza Abdul Karim & Amelia Hasan. (2006). Reading habits and attitude in the digital age: Analysis of gender and academic program differences in Malaysia. *The Electronic Library*, 25, 285-298. Retrieved 30 November 2017 from Emerald Online.
- Parlette, M. (2010). *Personal Growth, Habits, and Understanding Pleasure Reading among First- Year University Students*. (Masters dissertation, Dalhousie University, 2010).
- "Report on Reading Habits a Real Page-turner." (2018, April 23). *The Star Online*, Asean. Retrieved November 31, 2017, from <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/regional/2018/04/23/report-on-reading-habits-a-real-pageturner/>
- Ro, E., & Chen, C. A. (2014). Pleasure reading behavior and attitude of non-academic ESL students: A replication study. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 26, 49-72.
- Rodrigo, V., Greenberg, D. & Segal, D. (2014). Changes in reading habits by low literate adults through extensive reading, *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 26, 73-91.
- Wang, P., Chiu, D.K., Ho, K.K., & Lo, P. (2016). Why read it on your mobile device? Change in reading habit of Electronic magazines for university students. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 42, 664-669.

Zurina Khairuddin. (2013). A Study of Students' Reading Interests in a Second Language. *International Education Studies*. 11(6),160-170.