

## **READING PREFERENCES AND THEIR EFFECTS TOWARDS BEN 7 ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study aimed to identify BEN 7 students' reading preferences that might affect their academic performance. From observation and experience in teaching, reading materials may have impacted students' comprehension and interest, and subsequently their academic performance. In this study, the respondents were 60 final year Bachelor of English with Communication (BEN) students from Faculty of Languages and Communication in UniSZA. The respondents were selected via purposive sampling, and the questionnaires designed were disseminated to them. The software, Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for data analysis and data was presented in the forms of frequency, percentage, mean, median, mode and standard deviation. As this study aimed to identify the reading preferences of BEN 7 students and the effectiveness of the chosen reading materials for their academic performance, this research can probably help to recommend the learners and educators the suitable reading materials based on learning contexts.

**Keywords:** *Reading preferences, reading comprehension, academic performance, reading materials*

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Reading has always been an adjuncts to oral communication ever since. In the beginning, we started to converse people's speech into words later to a written form, barely on papyrus which we wrote it down continuously. The list goes on and on and thus it makes it hard to read sometimes. Thus, the read-out-loud method was implemented. Later when the words are more recognised, the silent reading method was introduced, which people try to have a solid and deep reading on their own. From there, the printing press was built and this has made books' prices cheaper and accessible to mass audience until today.

Nevertheless, the way students learn and their academic life they experience now has changed dramatically over the past decades. Within this context, the process, purpose and also approaches to reading has not escaped from the changing atmosphere. Back then, when it comes to reading, it has always been reading solely from books either it is for academic purpose or non-academic purpose. According to Carr (2011), who is a technology writer, 'we have undergone a revolution of reading from a papyrus to Ipad'. This can be seen in our ways of reading nowadays, which coherently became a primitive reading that interconnected with texts and reads from the screen.

According to Merisuo-Storm (2006), students are very different readers and they are motivated to read very different books and texts. The reader should find the topic of the text interesting and possess enough previous knowledge related to its subject matter. Simply put, because of different qualities that each and every reader possesses, it is vital that students are given a chance to show expresses and select their individual reading preferences. Thus, this environment may call for attention among researchers to study on evolution of university students' reading preferences as well as taking into consideration the factors contributed to their reading preferences.

### *1.1 Problem Statement*

Studies have shown that most of the students only read just for assignment and exam purposes. They will never reads the books if it is only to fulfil their leisure time. This can be proved in Nor Shahriza Abdul Karim and Amelia Hassan (2006, as cited from Pandian, 2000) which has raised two major concerns involving Malaysian readers that only 20 per cent of Malaysian read regularly & the rest of the population are called "reluctant readers". Simply put, the students might read only to pass exams as studies have shown that students were reluctant to read for information or pleasure.

To the matter of fact, reading is actually an interesting activity, however many people may hate books, and might hate reading in general. Often, this is the results of lack of exposure to the activity as well as to quality reading material. If only the parents did not read much therefore not promoting reading activity to their kids, the kids may not be having the same desire or curiosity to step into the world of reading. The case of exposing someone only to wrong and age-inappropriate reading material proved to be hostile in order to develop their interest. For example, if we were surrounded by the wrong type of books, it is considered ordinary that the book does not seem as appealing to us as to the bookworms.

Hence, this study is hoped to gather as many information about the BEN 7 students' reading preferences as in whether they really read for exam purpose and not for pleasure purpose, as well as its impact on their academic achievement which later will be useful contributions to authority acknowledgment.

## ***1.2 Significance of the Study***

This study hopes to find out the relationship of reading preferences towards their academic performances, as it can be positive or negative effects. In addition, the findings might prove to be useful to both instructors and learners because it might also help to overcome the weaknesses of previous reading campaigns and programs so that more effective activities can be conducted specifically to attract and promote reading among university students. The lecturers and teachers will obtain the knowledge to select appropriate materials that suitable for the students' interest and their level of comprehension. This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What are the reading preferences of BEN 7 students?
- 2) Is there any correlation between reading preferences and academic performance of BEN 7 students?

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

Reading is a complex interaction between the text, the reader and the purposes for reading, which usually shaped by the reader's prior knowledge and experiences (Hughes, 2007). However, a more comprehensive meaning of reading from Grabe and Stoller (2002) whose defines reading as "the ability to draw meaning from the printed page and interpret this information appropriately" (p.9). On the other hand, when people heard the term 'academic performance', they often think that it will be revolving of a person's GPA.

### ***2.1 Reading Preferences and Academic Performance***

According to Merriam-webster.com, "preference" is defined as something that is liked or wanted more than another thing consequently something that is preferred. Similarly, the act of preferring or the state of being preferred as well as making choices is explain by the Dictionary.com. It also further elaborates that preference can be considered as an advantage that were given to one over others.

The elements of feeling such as pressure and enjoyment certainly are being emphasis in here as such preference is only acquired after one does have experienced it. In the study, the definition of the academic performance refers to how students' achievements related to their CGPA, and definitely on whether there is connection on how their favourite types of books will help them in achieving good pointer in their study.

The field of academic performance is very wide-ranging and governs broad also variety of educational outcomes, hence the definition of academic performance may as well depend on the indicator that was used to measure it. Therefore, this research shall used one indicator which is Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) to present the data related to BEN 7 students' academic performance.

Thus, it can be concluded that, reading preferences are the reading materials that are favoured by the students, which they put much effort and time as well indulge themselves to read for it. In here, the students can make their own decision and have complete freedom to choosebooks that gain their interest the most.

## ***2.2 Schema Theory***

For the past thirty years, psychologist and linguist have discovered things that are much more complex although they have been using various experimental techniques. The theoretical framework that supports the importance of reading preferences is Schema Theory by Frederic Bartlett, which is an explanation of how readers use prior knowledge to comprehend and learn from the text (Rumelhart, 1980). A schema can be considered as the general description or a conceptual system in order to understand how knowledge is represented and its usage.

According to Anderson and Pearson (1984), Schema Theory states that an individual will draw on their knowledge of the world in order to help them understand what they read. Hence, simply put, “how well people can understand what they read is connected to the topic that they have been presented and the amount of knowledge they hold about it”. This marks the reasons on why different interpretations of text can result from different amount and types of background knowledge of a topic (Hall, 2012).

According to Rumelhart (1980), students develop these units of knowledge known as schemata almost about everything they had personally experienced. Schemata become theories about reality. These theories not only affect the way information is being transferred but also its interpretation which coherently will affect reading comprehension which gradually keep changing as new information being retrieved.

This is further emphasized by Wallace (1992), “there will never be a total coincidence of schemas between writer and reader”. Thus, it can be concluded that in order for one’s to have select their own reading preferences, one’s need to have a little background or prior knowledge about certain genre of the books. The more information and experiences that one’s have towards it, thus the reading preferences will show it as they decide on which books that interests them. Subsequently, that types or genres of the book that they are interested in, will become their reading preferences. This theory also applies for the other research question as the beforehand knowledge that the readers have will determine the correlation between their academic performances.

## ***2.3 Reading Preferences in L2: Potentials***

According to William (2008), media and mass marketing are a few influences that infused many participants’ everyday cultures and as a result impacted the students’ book selection. This explains on why the novels and comic strips remains the highest, as media plays a big role on this. Ponder the highlights being shed on to Harry Potter’s novel, which has been sold almost up to 450 million copies (Collett-White, 2012). There are so many fans turn up for the books’ launching day as they called it Harry Potter’s fever, besides; the some of the fans had even turn up with costume to express their excitement in reading the novels. A good example of this is J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter books, which have been a great success all over the world and which even reluctant readers enjoy (Merisuo-Storm, 2006).

This result is in line with one of the previous research done by Mohd Noor (2011) on “Reading habits and preferences of EFL post graduates: A case study.” She mentioned that in her study, there are also two reasons cited for reading, be it for pleasure and study purpose. According to her findings, the materials associated with academic work would be regarded as important for study, meanwhile pleasure reading material such as novels and comic strips require little processing thus it helps learner to feel comfortable hence they will read in complete leisurely manner.

Bilokcuoglu (2014) stated that by knowing what type or genre of text is may facilitate reading comprehension, as the type of the text will offer detailed evidence of the content of the text. Thus, it can be concluding that some of the learners may not understand the texts which needed them to write on due to have lost interest in the texts itself. Perhaps the teacher has chosen a text that does not entertain to their necessity. In coherence, the students refused to participate in reading activity and this will made them left behind which consequently leave big impact to their academic performance.

#### ***2.4 Reading Preferences in L2: Problems***

Majority of the respondents chose fictions, novels, comic strips and series as their most preferred reading preferences. This is because those kinds of books will give them the urge of escapism of the reading assignments that they have been doing all along. It can be said that the respondents enjoy books that have humours, short chapters and with the expected endings that make them feel what they have been reading activity is interesting. Furthermore, these types of readings can actually help them wider up their vocabulary as they more new words which can be used later in their assignments and examinations.

Nevertheless, there are several factors that indicate a students' academic success as whole. The definition of academic performance may as well depend on the indicators that were used to measure it. In this study, there was no correlation on whether their reading materials carry massive impact in their academic performance. As such, nearly half of the respondents still can score well and gained CGPA up until 3 and above although most of them opt for novels, comic strips, and series and such as their most preferred reading materials.

Thus, it can be inferred that there is no relation found between reading preferences and academic performance. However, Bilokcuoglu (2014) stated that by knowing what type or genre of text is may facilitate reading comprehension, as the type of the text will offer detailed evidence of the content of the text, thus help to improve understanding and their academic performance in general.

The students are free to choose any types of reading materials consequently it will definitely help them in terms of getting new knowledge and enhance their vocabulary usage. In short, one has to know what texts appeals to the learners and to be able to motivate them to continue reading.

### **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

Quantitative based approach was employed to collect the data through questionnaires given. In this research, it was certain that the questionnaire survey was one of the essential ways to gain data quantitatively. The researcher distributed 60 questionnaires to collect the data around UniSZA and were analysed using the Ibm Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) statics software. From the entire population of students in UniSZA, the sample restricted to only 60 final year students from Faculty of Languages and Communication taken Bachelor of English with Communication, consisted of both males and females. Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table had been utilised to determine precise sample size needed.

### ***3.1 Research Instrument***

The research instrument used in this paper mainly focus on the research questions from the questionnaire. In accordance with the purpose of the study, percentage, mean and standard deviation, were also employed in the study. The main instrument of this research was a set of questionnaire consists of three sections, Section A, Section B and Section C. The questionnaire was distributed randomly to respondents and information will be collected using a set of devised questionnaire which consists of 23 questions. The questionnaire was adapted, revised and edited from the two past researches conducted by Nor Shahriza Abdul Karim (2006) entitled “Reading Habits and Attitudes in Malaysia: Analysis of Gender and Academic Programme Differences” which the questionnaires adopted Adult Survey of Reading Attitude (ASRA) and as well as from Mohd Noor (2011) entitled ‘Reading Habits and Preferences of EPL Post Graduates: A Case Study’ and her questionnaire was adopted from Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARSI).

### ***3.2 Data Analysis***

The data from the questionnaires were collected and analysed using IBM Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). Section A dealt with the participants’ demographics and were analysed using descriptive statistics to provide their background information in terms of percentages. Thus, the usage of percentage helped to show the frequent answers made by the participants. Meanwhile, the data that was obtained in Section B dealt with participants’ reading preferences, there were four questions (Question 1, 2, 3 and 10) required them to give one solid reason, therefore the frequency data in percentage unit was used, meanwhile, the other six questions (Question 4 - 9) required the participants to select more than one answer as their response, hence the data were analysed using descriptive statistics to provide the mean and standard deviation.

The survey questionnaire in Section C needed the respondents to respond to statements which they had to rate Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Neutral (N), Agree (A), and Strongly Agree (SA). In SPSS, SD was valued at 1, D was valued at 2, N was valued at 3, A was valued at 4 and SA was valued at 5 for the tabulation of data and identification of responses from the respondents towards the questions given. The data then were treated to Pearson Correlation.

## **4.0 SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF STUDY**

This study employed quantitative design which used a set of questionnaire, intact group comprising 60 final year students who may possess varying reading preferences as their reading materials. This group is selected due learning problems encountered in the class and the relatively convenient accessibility to the sample. Therefore, the study findings may only be applicable to this specific context and cannot be generalised to the UniSZA’s final year student populations.

Since the research design did not have full control over the reading preferences of students, it has less internal validity in its findings (Ary et al., 2010). Hence, there may be extraneous factors such as one’s background, interest and hobbies as well as testing effect which can potentially affect the intervention outcome to a certain degree.

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