ATTITUDES TOWARD READING AMONGST PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ATTITUDES TOWARD READING AMONGST PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Statement of Originality

The work described in this research paper, entitled "Attitudes toward Reading amongst Primary School Students" is to the best of the author’s knowledge that of the author except where due reference is made.

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ABSTRACT

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Students with positive reading attitudes tend to read more and are more likely to gain higher academic achievement (Mullis, Martin, Kennedy & Foy, 2007). However, results from the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2011 and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2009 indicated that reading attitudes have deteriorated since prior assessments. Moreover, Malaysian students’ performance in reading literacy in PISA 2012 was definitely a cause for concern. This research aimed to investigate students’ attitudes toward print and digital reading between gender and achievement level. To carry out this research, 18-item questionnaires were distributed to 65 students, from Year 1 to Year 5, employing a cross sectional research design. Results revealed that there was no significant difference in attitudes toward print and digital reading between boys and girls. Likewise, attitudes toward print and digital reading between high and low achievers were also not significantly different. Furthermore, no correlation between reading attitudes and academic achievement was found. Implications of this research are presented towards the end of this report, and recommendations are made to policy makers and future researchers.
ABSTRAK

SIKAP TERHADAP MEMBACA DI KALANGAN MURID-MURID SEKOLAH RENDAH

Emmaline Rose Sam Sen

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This research studied attitudes toward reading among primary school students. This chapter includes the background of the study, problem statement, research objectives, research questions, significance or contributions of the study, limitations of the study, definitions of terms and summary.

1.1 Background of Study

Children's ability to read begins in the very early stages of their lives, initialized by regular interactions with adults during infancy (National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), 1998). At first, young babies learn to 'read' sounds or spoken words and associate them with familiar objects or individuals. Throughout time, this collection of symbols increases, which eventually forms a more developed system of speech (Genishi, 1988). Exposing young children to an abundance of oral language supports the development of phoneme awareness and other necessary reading components such as, fluency, automaticity, and ultimately comprehension (Lyon, 1997).

As young children get exposed to a variety of print resources in their environments, such as books, toys or electronic devices, their oral language progressed to include written language. Frequent experiences with words, logos and labels, enable young children to recognize that print carries meanings (Alleyne, n.d). Subsequently, they establish connections between letters and sounds, thus increasing their awareness of the alphabetic principle (Texas Education Agency,
2002). In light of this, many children who are brought up in print-rich environments have already acquired the basic skills of reading prior to receiving formal education. It has been reported that children who receive regular exposure to print are more likely to have positive reading habits and literacy success later in school (Green, Peterson, & Lewis, 2006; Lindsay, 2010; Lyon, 1997).

Reading is an acquired skill that varies between one individual and another, depending upon cognition and instruction. Some children can be taught to read from as young as four years old, while others require specific and individualized intervention throughout primary education (NAEYC, 1998). The process of creating meaning from print involves three major components, namely word recognition, comprehension and fluency (Leipzig, 2001). Reading print is a complex process that requires a considerable amount of time and effort. To ensure that children reach their potentials as competent readers, they need collaborative support from families, teachers and their communities to continuously promote literacy development. Children also need help to maintain their motivation to read in order to reach the fundamental goal of reading, which is constructing meaning in the context of the situation (Lyon, 1997; Wixson, Peters, Weber, & Roeber, 1987).

Though the definition of literacy is constantly changing, it is commonly associated with the ability to read (Cambridge Assessment, 2013). In view of social and cultural contexts, literacy is defined as the abilities to understand, use and apply information to perform everyday tasks and function as a contributing member of a community (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2000). The National Literacy Trust (2009) describes a literate person as someone who is capable of using language as an effective medium of communication and possesses a deep understanding of print. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2006) views literacy as a fundamental right for
all human beings and instrumental in achieving the goals of Education for All. Hence, literacy skills are crucial for life’s success as it affects both personal and public gains (Dugdale & Clark, 2008).

With the development of information and communications technology (ICT), reading materials are available in forms other than traditional print, prompting more people to consider the internet as a primary source of information (Khare, Thapa, & Sahoo, 2007; Reuters, 2007; Ricketson, 2008). The internet has a profound impact on reading outcomes among young people and is a medium of choice among students with learning disabilities and from low-income groups (Rich, 2008). Reading fluency can also be enhanced by technological affordances available in other multimedia content devices that do not require network connections such as digital video disc (DVD), video compact disc (VCD) and television (UNESCO, 2006). Technology scaffolds reading through read aloud functions, built-in dictionary options and feedback on reading comprehension, whilst giving flexibility to let readers control the flow of the presentation (Sherman, Kleiman, & Peterson, 2004). The advancement in technology promotes new literacy skills beyond reading comprehension to include competencies in navigating, evaluating, prioritizing and presenting relevant and credible information (Armstrong & Warlick, 2004; Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2004; Palincsar & Ladewski, 2006).

Reading is a vital component that forms the foundation of a child’s learning process. It allows children to connect their prior knowledge with new information retrieved from print to understand the world better (Wixson et al., 1987). Through a variety of reading materials, children are able to gather a mass of information about people, places and cultures that they may not encounter in their own surroundings (Dugdale & Clark, 2008). Moreover, reading sparks the imagination, supports creativity and encourages inventiveness (Cullinan & Bagert, 1993).
1.2 Problem Statement

Unlike speaking, reading is not a natural skill (NAEYC, 1998; Lyon, 1997). Being exposed to print materials alone does not support literacy development in young children. Rather, it requires adequate support from adults to carry out carefully planned instructions to ensure that children are able to reach developmentally appropriate goals in reading (NAEYC, 1998). Besides the ability to read fluently and accurately, competent readers can comprehend what they read by connecting reading contents with their own physical and social experiences (Lyon, 1997). However, without constant practice and diligence, these skills are difficult to attain, particularly for those who have difficulties in learning to read.

In most schools around the world, the reading curriculum is driven by a common goal of developing positive reading attitudes among students (Lyon, 1997; Mullis, Martin, Kennedy, & Foy, 2007). Reading attitude influences the amount of time reading, which in turn contributes to attainment (Mullis et al., 2007). Thus, students who do not enjoy reading are more likely to gain lower academic success compared to those who read regularly (Clark, 2013).

Reading attitudes among fourth grade students from 45 countries were measured by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) through the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2011. On average, internationally, a majority of students (57%) reported to enjoy reading but only to a certain extent (Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Drucker, 2012). A comparison with data from the previous PIRLS 2006 (Mullis et al., 2007) further indicated that the average percentage of students who did not like reading had significantly increased from 8% to 15%. Additionally, the gender gap favouring girls in reading achievement for most of the participating countries remained unchanged between 2006 and
2011. The 2006 international assessment also revealed a total of 11 countries that had more than 25% of students who reported to never or almost never read novels or stories outside of school.

Similar findings relating to attitudes and gender differences in reading were found in a 2012 survey, which was carried out by the National Literacy Trust (Clark, 2013). Children and young people of ages 8 to 16 showed unfavourable attitudes toward reading, resulting in an increased percentage of participants agreeing to statements such as “I only read when I have to”, “I cannot find things to read that interest me”, “I would be embarrassed if my friends saw me read” and “reading is more for girls than boys”. In light of this, the 2012 survey recorded the lowest percentage of frequent readers since 2005. Besides gender gap, age factor was another cause for concern over reading engagement. Older participants reported lower levels of reading enjoyment and attitudes, compared to their younger counterparts. Just as in PIRLS 2011, the National Literacy Trust survey also found that girls enjoyed reading more and showed more positive reading attitudes than boys.

Data from the triennial Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2009 developed by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) found that 37% of 15-year-old students across OECD countries did not read for pleasure at all (OECD, 2010). On average, these students scored 460 points on the reading assessment, which is Level 2 or baseline level on the reading proficiency scale. This score is well below OECD mean of 493. In 18 countries, Level 2 was the highest proficiency level for most students. With regards to gender differences, girls outperformed boys in all of the 65 countries that participated in the assessment. In OECD countries specifically, boys’ reading proficiency was behind girls’ by 39 points on average, which is equivalent to a year of schooling. Overall, gender gap remained unchanged in all countries since 2000.
In investigating reading attitudes of 15-year-olds, OECD (2010) discovered that a majority of students do not enjoy reading for pleasure. On average across OECD countries, 45.7% students reported to read only for information, 41.2% read only when they have to and 24.2% felt reading is a waste of time. In almost all countries, students reported to reading fiction the least. Additionally, the percentage of students reading newspapers and magazines has fallen since 2000. Overall, reading for pleasure has declined by an average of 5%, and the issue is more apparent among boys.

Due to the advancement of digital technology, it is now possible for readers to assess alternative reading media other than printed documents. Electronic documents have redefined the way we read, including changes in reading duration and the development of screen-based reading strategies (Liu, 2005). Data from PIRLS 2006 (Mullis et al., 2007) showed that students spent between 0.3 to 2.4 hours a day reading online. In most countries, boys spent significantly more time reading online than girls. A report from the National Literacy Trust Survey (Clark, 2013) revealed that the proportion of students reading magazines, newspapers, fiction, comics, poems and non-fiction have decreased from 2010 to 2012. Conversely, more students reported to reading websites, social networking, blogs and e-books. According to OECD (2010), students who engage in online reading, including searching and social activities, perform better in reading tasks compared to those who do not. In comparing between genders across OECD countries, girls are more likely to go online to chat and read e-mails, whereas boys prefer to search for information and read the news.

Malaysia participated in the international assessment for the first time in what was known as the PISA 2009+ project (Walker, 2011). Though the instruments were identical to the ones used in PISA 2009, the assessments were administered later in 2010. As in PISA 2009, results
from all ten participating countries showed that girls performed better than boys in reading literacy. On average, 15-year-old students from Malaysia achieved a score of 414 on the reading assessment, which is significantly lower than OECD average of 493. Data indicated that a majority of students performed at baseline Level 2, out of 7 levels, on the reading proficiency scale. Meanwhile, an alarming 44% of students, mostly boys, performed at even lower levels of 1a and below on the reading scale. Overall, Malaysia was ranked 55th among 74 participating countries in the reading assessment.

In 2012, average scores for Malaysian students in reading proficiency fell to 398 (OECD, 2014), and so did the average score of students who performed at Level 2 and above. Data showed an 8.8% increase of students performing below Level 2 since 2010, consisting of 62.9% boys and 43.1% girls who participated in the assessment. Percentage of students proficient at the lowest level has also increased to 5.8%. Specifically, 9% boys and 2.8% girls from Malaysia could not complete the minimum reading tasks in PISA.

Malaysia's Education Minister, Muhyiddin Yassin was among the many who expressed his concern for Malaysians’ interests in reading (Malaysians Still Not Reading Enough, 2009). Commenting on a report published for the UN Development Programme 2007/2008, he added that Malaysians are more inclined to read light materials, such as newspapers, magazines and comics, in comparison to American readers who mostly read fiction books. He further added that positive habits could increase Malaysia’s literacy rate so it could match those of developed countries, such as the United States, Germany, Australia, England and Japan. According to The World Factbook (2013), Malaysia’s estimated literacy rate in 2010 was 93.1%, compared to 99% for all the aforementioned countries.
Williams and Ortlieb (2014) argued that struggling readers are more likely to develop negative attitudes toward reading. Without intervention, it can cause poor readers to further withdraw themselves from participating in any reading activity (Briggs, 1987). In the long term, negative attitudes will persist into adult life, affecting not only economic status, but other social outcomes as well (National Literacy Trust, 2009). Thus, attitudes toward reading among primary-aged students need to be better understood so that early intervention can be provided. Gaps in the literature also indicate the need to carry out this research. Although there are several researches on Malaysian’s reading habits (Mohamad Jafre Zainol Abidin, Pour-Mohammadi, & Anita Jesmin, 2011; Mohammad Jafre Zainol Abidin, Pourmohammadi, Nalini Varasingam, & Ooi, 2014; Shahnil Asmar Saaid & Zaliffah Abd Wahab, 2014; Wan Zah Wan Ali et al., 2005) and attitudes (Inderjit, 2014; Nor Shahriza Abdul Karim & Amelia Hasan, 2007; Zurina Khairuddin, 2013), there is no known study that investigates attitudes toward digital and print reading among primary school students in Malaysia.

1.3 Research Objectives

The following describe the general objective, followed by specific objectives.

1.3.1 General objective

The purpose of this research was to investigate primary school students’ attitudes toward reading.

1.3.2 Specific objectives

The specific objectives of this study were as follows:

(i) To examine attitudes toward reading among primary students.