

**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HOME LITERACY ENVIRONMENT AND
ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT WITH CHILDREN READING ATTITUDES**

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ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT WITH CHILDREN READING ATTITUDES

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To my beloved husband and child

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the children's reading attitude and identify the relationships between the children's attitude towards reading, home literary environment and academic achievement. The research site was Pasir Gudang district, Johor. Data from a sample of 250 children and 182 parents respectively was collected. Two instruments were used for data collection, namely Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS) for children, and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2006 Learning to Read Survey for parents. Descriptive statistics showed an academic achievement (Self Average Grade) mean of 1.96 with highest proportion of children respondents were moderate achievers. There were high level of children's reading attitude, moderate level of early literacy activities, high level of resources in the home, and high level of parents' attitudes toward reading. Inferential statistics showed that all the three factors of home literacy environment which were resources in the home, early literacy activities and parents' attitudes toward reading were significant factors on influencing children's reading attitude, meanwhile resources in the home was entered first and explained 59% of the variance in children reading attitude. No significant difference was found in attitudes toward reading among Year Five children with high and low achievement. There was significant relationship between children's reading attitude and home literacy environment (early literacy activities, resources in the home and parents' attitudes toward reading), but no significant relationship between children's reading attitude and academic achievement. In conclusion, a rich-literacy home environment was essential to cultivate children's reading attitude.

ABSTRAK

Penyelidikan ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji sikap membaca kanak-kanak, dan hubungannya dengan persekitaran literasi di rumah dan pencapaian akademik. Kajian lapangan dijalankan di daerah Pasir Gudang, Johor. Data diperoleh daripada 182 kanak-kanak dan ibu bapa mereka masing-masing. Dua instrument digunakan dalam kajian ini, iaitu *Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS)* untuk kanak-kanak, dan *Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2006 Learning to Read Survey* untuk ibu bapa. Statistik diskriptif menunjukkan pencapaian akademik (Gred Purata Sendiri, GPS) dengan min 1.96 dan sebahagian besar kanak-kanak berada dalam kategori pencapaian sederhana. Kajian ini mendapati tahap tinggi dalam sikap membaca kanak-kanak, tahap sederhana dalam aktiviti prasekolah, tahap tinggi dalam sumber bacaan di rumah, dan tahap tinggi dalam sikap membaca ibu bapa. Statistik inferens pula menunjukkan bahawa ketiga-tiga faktor bagi persekitaran literasi di rumah iaitu aktiviti prasekolah, sumber di rumah dan sikap membaca ibu bapa adalah signifikan dalam mempengaruhi sikap membaca kanak-kanak, manakala sumber di rumah adalah faktor pertama yang dimasukkan dan menghuraikan 59% varians dalam sikap membaca kanak-kanak. Tiada perbezaan yang signifikan dalam sikap membaca kanak-kanak antara pendapatan tinggi dengan pencapaian rendah bagi kanak-kanak Darjah Lima. Terdapat hubungan yang signifikan antara sikap membaca kanak-kanak dengan persekitaran literasi di rumah (aktiviti prasekolah, sumber di rumah dan sikap membaca ibu bapa) tetapi tidak terdapat hubungan yang signifikan antara sikap membaca kanak-kanak dengan pencapaian akademik. Sebagai rumusan, persekitaran di rumah yang kaya dengan literasi amat diperlukan untuk memupuk sikap membaca kanak-kanak.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Reading is considered as a foundation for functioning in school. Due to the critical importance of reading in today's society, it is important that children develop a positive attitude towards reading at a young age. Positive reading attitudes lead to positive reading experiences. Wang (2000) explains that children's future success in reading was determined by their literacy development, and children's reading habit is determined by their attitudes toward reading. Reading attitude also fulfils a pivotal role in the development and use of lifelong reading skills (Lazarus and Callahan, 2000).

What factors cause one to become an enthusiastic reader and another a non-reader? Why some peoples have motivation to find time to read when others would not even try? The affective components of motivation are interests, values, attitudes, and beliefs. Values, attitudes, and beliefs determine the degree of liking or disliking while interests determine the direction of a child's actions. Once the attitudes formed, it will exert strong control over behaviour, and often are the difference between one who reads and another who doesn't (Kubis, 1994).

According to McKenna, Kear and Ellsworth (1995), reading attitudes have been found to have an effect on both engagement and achievement. Therefore, it is an urgency task to study children's attitudes to reading, as it is significant for education and the future workforce of Malaysian citizens.

Children's attitudes toward reading are of central concern to both educators and society at large. Our society is always looking for ways to engage our children in reading. It is important and need to understand the role of attitude in developing readers for two principle reasons. First, attitude may affect the level of achievement that is ultimately attained by a given student through its influence on such factors as engagement and practice. Second, even for the fluent reader, poor attitude may occasion a choice not to read when other options exist (McKenna, Kear and Ellsworth, 1995). Thus, it is important to understand the factors which influence attitude.

Home is a major source of reading attitudes, it may be a very important contributor toward the formation of a positive or negative attitude toward reading (Kubis, 1994). Thus, it is important to look at the role that home plays in reading attitude. Besides, the question often arises if the academic achievement of the reader affects their attitude. Achievement is often a factor in the children's reading attitudes. This study explores the relationship between home literacy environment and academic achievement with children's reading attitude of Year Five children.

Children develop in a varied milieu of natural environments ranging from the immediate family to the broader aspects of a particular culture (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The environments in which children live are related to various developmental aspects. Early stimulating environments are the possible causes of later performance such as reading and literacy. The home, the school, and the community are the environmental factors in contributing in large measure to what the child becomes. Simply by living, children learn from their environment.

Montessori wanted us to understand that children cannot help but learn (Morrison, 1995). Children learn because they are thinking being. What they learn depends greatly on the people in their environment, what those people say and do, and how they react. Environment influenced appreciably on attitudes, points of view, learning skills and language. Meanwhile attitudes, points of view, learning skills and language affect the processes of learning to read and reading to learn. In addition, available experiences and materials also help determine the type, quality of learning, and thus the individual.

The home environment is a primary context for children's early learning and socio emotional development (Morrison and Cooney, 2001), and it appear to be most vital in the early years of a child and also important for the subsequent years in elementary school learning.

Morrison (1995) summarized that basic essential to good educational practices as relate to parents. Socio cognitive theory posits that social interaction is the primary means by which children arrive at new understanding. The earlier in a child's educational process parent involvement begins, the more powerful the effects in children's reading and academic achievements (Cotton and Wikeland, 2003). The context of the family can influence children's attitudes towards reading (McCarthy and Moje, 2002).

As parents are children's first educators, therefore they play a vital role to enhance children's developmental aspects. Parents influence how much experience children have with books and other reading materials. Parents' attitudes and thoughts about literacy are of great importance in children's literary development and children are influenced by the way in which literacy is used within the family. Young children's success as readers is related to their early literacy experiences in the home. The extent to which children are successful with reading and how much they actually read is directly related to how they feel about reading (Report of the National Reading Panel, 2000). In addition, evidence suggests that there are some

personal attributes and environmental factors that negatively influence the attitudes children have toward reading (Davies and Brember, 1995).

Home literacy environment is inherently environmental variable. It examines surroundings of child and home, including physical, sociocultural habits, patterns, and pressure that shape the literacy practice in the home. However, it is too unwieldy and lacking focus if conceptualizing everything that occurs around and in the home as environment.

Therefore, the researcher discuss about Bronfenbrenner's ecological system model to give a clearer view in home literacy environment. Taking up this challenge, the researcher begin the following chapter with a description of the ecological system view of development and change on home literacy environment, followed by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory to explain the parents' role and influence on children. The study then turn to home literacy environment variable with an eye to the resources of environment, early literacy activities and parents' attitudes that support or constrain children reading, and that, in turn, support children's literacy development, acquisition and reading attitude.

According to Worthy (2002), children's level of engagement in reading is influenced by their attitudes to reading and this impact directly on their achievement as those students who engage more regularly with reading achieve significantly higher results (Worthy, 2002). Yet, to date, studies that evaluate children's reading attitudes in relation to achievement have produced inconsistent results. Many studies are focused only on intellectual gifted children or children with learning difficulties, but the research about the relationship between academic achievement and reading attitude is scarcely dearth. Much of the evidence has consistently linked reading attitude with ability, but studies also do exist that show that there is no correlation between the two. There is a need for more current research.

In view of this, this study is carried out to examine the role of parents as well as the home literacy environment play in the experiences and influence for children. This study focused only on home literacy environment factors. The researcher intended to understand the parents' attitudes toward reading, to have a glance on whether they are interested in reading, how they prepare the home environment for their children's development, how their children's reading attitudes and whether there's relationship between home literacy environment and reading attitude. Other than have a glance at home literacy environment as a factor in reading attitude, the researcher also intends to understand the relationship between children's reading attitudes and academic achievements in this study.

1.2 Background of Study

Education, as the primary pre-requisite for the success of any nation, has been turned into an aspiration value in the concept of "One Malaysia" ("*Satu Malaysia*"). Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak stated that the formal education is not the only focus effort to create a society with knowledge, instead inculcating the reading habit is among the core values of a society with knowledge (Report from Deputy Prime Minister's Office of Malaysia, 26 February 2010).

The Malay Mail on 27th August 2006 carried out by the National Statistics Department looked into local reading habits and what found that more than half of the 60,441 odd Malaysians surveyed read less than seven pages a day. Those at the age of 10 years and above read about two books a year (the figure excludes text books for students and books that are work-related for working adults). Also shocking is that most of those who read books and magazines, read less than three hours a week. The survey also showed that 55% of those aged 10 to 24, read books, compared to 39% within the 25 to 56 age bracket. Only 6% are those aged 57 and above.

The figure is minimal for a nation that has a population of 28 million. Malaysians should realize that the reading culture is able to create Malaysians that exercise an open mind. It can be surmised that rural Malaysians read even fewer books than this. For children to pick up reading skills easily, one of the core pre-requisites is that they understand the pleasure of reading through having books read to them and seeing adults around them derive pleasure and meaning from print. In rural Malaysia, most children come to school without having had this experience. Based on the aspirations to become an industrialized nation, Malaysia has made many conscious efforts to improve and develop literacy so that it will achieve a literacy rate of 100% by the year 2020. The country still has a long way to go but there are positive indications that the literacy rate is increasing.

One might therefore imagine that when the level of literacy has reached 100% and everyone has the ability to read, there would not be much point to emphasizing reading. Unfortunately, it is a mistake to assume that anyone who has the ability to read will therefore use this ability in a significant way. There exists among the literate a large group of non-readers who prefer to spend their leisure time watching television, listening to the radio or taking part in any of the many other forms of recreation. While Malaysia's literacy rate has increased, the incidence of habitual readers among the public does not show a corresponding increase.

Malaysians prefer light reading materials rather than books. Statistics carried out by Ministry of Arts, Culture, and Heritage in year 2006 showed that out of 85% of Malaysians who read regularly, 77% of them prefer newspapers, 3% read magazines, 3% read books and 1.6% read comics. If we were to compare with American citizens, 53% of them read fiction and 43% of them read non-fiction books. The culture of Malaysians from early decades was based on folklore and oral tradition unlike in the West where the reading culture exist for many centuries. Thus, a complete revamping of the thinking, attitude, and lifestyle of the people was required.

In this developing country, the education system develops rapidly, resulting in a compulsory primary education system. As Islam is the official religion in Malaysia, many children have to go for religious classes in the morning or afternoon depending on their school session. Besides, the children have many homework and the competition to get good grades results in a lot of them going for tuition after school. Malaysia's education system is inclined to be exam-oriented. This imposes a further burden upon individuals/parents with their goals set on scoring in exams, rather than having an all-round education. This leaves very little time for other activities, especially reading, which it is not a priority. Since this, children do not have the opportunities to develop their reading attitudes positively and subsequently do not read in their lifelong. That is the reason why Malaysia shows low reading habits statistics (Lee, 2005).

Since 1961, the Community Development Division (KEMAS) of the Ministry of Rural Development (MORD) was entrusted to eradicate illiteracy among adults in Peninsular Malaysia through a holistic education in preschools. In 1963, this function was extended to Sabah and Sarawak.

Amongst the initiatives undertaken by MORD in addressing illiteracy are Harmonious Family Education Program, Religious Education Program, Skill Training Program, and some other programs. Through these programs, adult learners are able to gain knowledge and skills to enable them to be a literate productive citizen.

The National Library of Malaysia act as the Secretariat for the National Reading Promotion Committee since 1991. The Secretariat conducts workshops on reading promotion activities for reading activists from various institutions especially those from the rural areas. The nurturing of reading habit among children and youth has always been an important educational priority of the Ministry of Education. The *NILAM (Nadi Ilmu Amalan Membaca)* program was launched by Education Technology Department, Ministry of Education in all Malaysia Primary and

Secondary schools in 1999. The programme is aimed at instilling the reading habit among school children. It gives recognition to school children who read the most number of books in a year.

The Curriculum Development Centre, Ministry of Education has embarked on a number of reading programmes to support literacy development among young learners of the country. All the activities are related to reading, making use of reading materials available in the library and parents' reading in the home for children. Through the activities, Malaysia's government aims to instil the love for books among the participants and to develop the reading habit.

Understand the critical problems, phenomenon and actions taken in Malaysia are significant important to lead to further considerations in solving the problems. The former National Library Director-General Datin Mariam Abdul Kadir warned that if the situation was not checked, the country would not achieve the Government's goal of having a Malaysian society that was inculcated with the reading culture by the year 2020. As home literacy environment and academic achievement are important affective factors in developing attitude towards reading, thus, the researcher will discuss more as below.

Many reading researches focused on identifying the social and cognitive factors related to children's reading abilities, such as phonological awareness (MacDonald and Cornwall, 1995) and child's socioeconomic background (Noble, Farah, and McCandliss, 2006). In time of this, the contribution of affective factors to reading then also received emphasis (McKenna *et al.*, 1995). According to Kush, Watkins and Bookhart (2005), affective factors are commonly identified as reading attitudes. Attitudes are regarded as the continuum of positive to negative feelings toward reading (McKenna *et al.*, 1995). Reading attitude is generally known as an important component in reading curriculum, and the development of attitudes toward reading in children concerns the engagement in sustained reading throughout their life (Cullinan, 1987).

Many researches study about the parents' influences and their children's reading attitudes. The parental factors include parental reading behaviors, the reading materials at home, the frequency of reading to the child, and parental beliefs contribute to their children in developing positive reading attitudes (Greaney and Hegarty, 1987). Baker and Scher (2002) revealed that the beginning readers in general had positive views about reading, and parental positive reading attitude predicted children's engagement in reading.

Among the family background factors, the parents' education level is a significant factor to children's reading. Baker, L., Serpell, R., and Sonnenschein, S. (1995) found that parents with higher education level placed greater value on education and thus provided more literacy materials and activities for their children. Although the relationship between parental factors and children's reading ability is well documented, the influence of parents' education on children's reading attitudes is not yet well explored.

Furthermore, researches revealed that reading attitudes are associated with many variables, including reading achievement and reading behaviors. Successful readers normally possess more positive reading attitudes than poor readers (Wigfield and Asher, 1984). Kush *et al.* (2005) found the relationship between the reading attitudes and achievement became more closely linked over time.

In 1986, Stanovich has termed a "Matthew effect" (i.e., the rich get richer while the poor get poorer), such that those children with poor reading skills fall further and further behind their more literate peers in reading as well as in other academic areas (Chall, Jacobs and Baldwin, 1990), which become increasingly dependent on reading across the school years. Longitudinal studies have shown that students exhibiting poor reading skills early in school are likely to have poor reading skills later (Good, Simmons and Smith, 1998). Research of this nature is important given the paramount role played by language and literacy in children's academic

development and achievement. For example, Werner and Smith (1992) found that literacy was one of the strongest predictors of children's academic success.

Parents are related with children's reading attitudes (Baker and Scher, 2002). Parents play a vital role in creating a literacy-rich environment in the home for cultivating children's good reading attitudes. Children with poor reading attitudes will be the poor readers and do not have interest in book reading nor involve in reading activities. Many studies found that poor readers do not enjoy reading, do not engage in reading, and spend less time-on-task, which perpetuates the continuation of poorer reading skills (Topping and Lindsay, 1992). Conversely, children who enjoy reading spend more time-on-task and improve their reading skills. Home environment impacts children's reading and in turn their attitude towards and engagement in reading activities (McCarthy and Moje, 2002).

Parents' attitudes influence children's home experiences. Daily routines in the home impact upon children are reading development, and their attitudes to engage in reading activities (Morrow and Young, 1997). Parents are powerful role models as their daily routines provide children with an understanding of the reason their family engages in certain reading practices (Arzubiaga, Rueda and Monzo, 2002). Many parents often do not realize their significant role in shaping their child's reading attitudes and engagement, as they often believe that reading attitude development only occurs at school and not in the home (Myoungsoon and Heekyoung, 2002).

In view of the discussion above and taken into consideration of the reading habits among the younger generation in Malaysia, it might be essential or vital to find out the reading habit and its factors among elementary school children in Malaysia.

Other than home literacy environment as the affective factor in children's reading attitude, ability in academic may affect the reading attitude of children through its influence on such factors as engagement and practice. In addition, even for the high achievement student, poor reading attitude may make him choose not to read when other options exist, or known as aliteracy (McKenna, Kear and Ellsworth, 1995). The attitude of a learner is fundamental to the outcome of their work (Lipson and Wixson, 1992). Since past, educators and researchers have shown an interest in the children reading attitude and what influence their academic achievement. But, the researcher would like to glance into the influence of academic achievement on reading attitude in this study.

Roettger (1980) found that the children had different expectations for reading, which in turn had an impact on their individual attitudes. Walberg and Tsai (1985) studied and measured the correlation of attitude and achievement and found that there is a strong correlation between the two factors. A longitudinal study of the correlation between attitudes and behaviors by Ley, Schaer and Dismukes (1994), once again, found that there was a strong positive correlation between attitude and behavior. But, in a study of McKenna, Kear and Ellsworth that included a large sample of first through sixth grade children, found that first and second graders expressed positive attitudes toward reading regardless of ability. Parker (2004) also examined the relationship between ability and reading attitude to determine the correlation between the variables by using a reading attitude survey and found that there is no correlation between attitude and ability was identified.

Past researches that evaluate the relationship between reading attitude and ability have produced inconsistent results. Some studies have found that there was no statistically significant relationship between attitude and achievement level (Smith and Ryan, 1997), while others have found a relationship between the two. This shows that the abundance of inconsistency results about the relationship between academic ability and reading attitude and further supports the need for current research in this area.

In sum, in helping children to successfully develop a good reading habit, thus, it is urging to understand their reading attitude and the cause affects reading attitude. Parents need to expose children to literacy rich environments. Children's skills in reading develop at the same time and are interrelated rather than sequential (Teale and Sulzby, 1986). Many researchers have conducted research about reading. However, in Malaysia, there is a dearth of research on home literacy environment of the Year Five children, who start a new stage on reading to learn, and whether the home literacy environment has an impact on children's reading attitude. Given the knowledge we have concerning the importance of home literacy environments and their role in literacy development (Roskos and Neuman, 1993), it is imperative that we stop to look at what is happening in home in terms of providing quality literacy experiences for children.

This research might lead educators and parents to understand how critical these home environments are to the development of children and whether academic achievement has a significant relationship with reading attitude. In this regard, it is pertinent to ask whether the home literacy environment has relationship on children reading attitude and also the relationship among academic achievement and reading attitude.

1.3 Statement of Problem

The habit of reading does not appear to be a prominent feature in the lives of most Malaysians. Although Malaysia has a fairly high literacy rate and a good educational system, the reading habit has not developed as it should. The Malaysian Reading Profile Study 2005 by the National Library of Malaysia (PNM) stated that Malaysians only read two books a year on average, and this showed that Malaysians read very few.

Professor Atan Long conducted a study on reading habits and interests of Malaysians in 1984. In his study, Atan Long found that Malaysians had poor reading habits and did not like reading. He warned that the apathy towards reading, if allowed to carry on, would create wide rifts in the socioeconomic and intellectual development of segments of the population. The habit of reading does not appear to be a prominent feature in the lives of most Malaysians. Salleh (1994) reminded the public to emphasize reading, if they were not capable of reading the appropriate information in a timely manner intelligently, they would not be able to go along with development.

The less reading phenomenon was caused by negative reading attitude which is subsequently cause problems in reading habit. Parents do not allow their children to read for leisure, but only allowed to read for academic purpose. Reading for children is a 'task', but not an enjoyment. Many parents do not realize the importance of reading, once the reading habit is cultivated, it is a lifetime benefit for children.

Juel (1988) noted that children with low literacy skills are not only less prepared for school but also perform poorly in later elementary grades and high school (Cunningham and Stanovich, 1993). Children are inquisitive, active, playful, curious, exploratory, and experimental. Children need to be instilled the love for reading since young. As Morrow (1995) stated that parents are the first teachers their children have, and they are the teachers that children have for the longest time. Therefore, parents are potentially the most important people in the education of their children. Thus, parents need to create the enabling environment to fulfill their children's needs through communication and scaffolding the children in their early literacy and language development. Parents need to be the model for their children and prepare sufficient educational resources.

Creating a reading society that will cultivate reading as a life-long habit is integral to the building of an innovative and forward-looking nation. Clearly the agenda on reading is an important one. Therefore, government launched the NILAM

(Nadi Ilmu Amalan Membaca) program in all primary and secondary schools in 1999. The program is aimed at instilling the reading habit among school children. After six years of implementation, question was raised as to the effectiveness of the program in achieving its objectives of encouraging children to read and the efforts made by the schools to inculcate the reading habit.

It needs to be emphasized that this area is acutely under researched in Malaysia as there is scarce documentation. Very few studies have attempted to provide concrete and comprehensive discussion about the social factors particularly in home environment affecting reading habits in Malaysia.

Parallel to the explanation above, understanding home experiences and parents' perspectives on literacy are important considerations in cultivating children's reading attitudes positively. Although there are factors known to positively affect attitude toward reading, the relationship between children's reading attitudes and home literary environments, and also the relationship between children's reading attitudes and academic achievement should be more fully explored. The purpose of this study is to examine the children's reading attitude, following by identify the relationship between the attitudes toward reading of children and the home literary environment in which they were raised. Another primary objective is to examine the relationship between the children's reading attitude and academic achievement. Is it necessary the good academic achiever will be a good reader; and poor academic achiever will be a poor reader?

1.4 Objectives of Study

The objectives of this study are specified as follows:

- (i) To determine the level of academic achievement among Year Five children.
- (ii) To determine the level of reading attitudes among Year Five children.
- (iii) To determine the level of home literacy environment factors (early literacy activities, resources in the home and parents' attitudes towards reading) among Year Five children.
- (iv) To investigate the significant factors of home literacy environment (early literacy activities, resources in the home and parents' attitudes towards reading) in influencing children's reading attitudes among Year Five children.
- (v) To identify the differences of reading attitudes among Year Five children with high and low achievement.
- (vi) To identify the relationship between home literacy environment factors (early literacy activities, resources in the home and parents' attitudes towards reading) and children's reading attitudes among Year Five children.
- (vii) To identify the relationship between academic achievement and reading attitudes among Year Five children.

1.5 Research Questions

Based on the research objectives, the research questions are thus as follows:

- (i) What is the level of academic achievement among the Year Five children?
- (ii) What is the level of reading attitudes among the Year Five children?

- (iii) What are the levels of home literacy environment factors (early literacy activities, resources in the home and parents' attitudes towards reading) among Year Five children?
- (iv) What are the significant factors of home literacy environment (early literacy activities, resources in the home and parents' attitudes towards reading) in influencing children's reading attitudes among Year Five children?
- (v) Is there any significant difference in attitude towards reading between Year Five children with high and low achievements?
- (vi) Are there any significant relationships between home literacy environment factors (early literacy activities, resources in the home and parents' attitudes towards reading) and children's reading attitudes among Year Five children?
- (vii) Is there any significant relationship between academic achievement and reading attitudes among Year Five children?

1.6 Research Hypotheses

From the research questions, five null hypotheses are formulated. The hypotheses are as shown below:

- (i) Null Hypothesis 1 for Research Question (v):
H₀₁ There is no significant difference in attitude towards reading between Year Five children with high and low achievements.
- (ii) Null Hypothesis 2 for Research Question (vi):
H₀₂ There is no significant relationship between early literacy activities and children's reading attitudes among Year Five children.

- (iii) Null Hypothesis 3 for Research Question (vi):
H₀₃ There is no significant relationship between resources in the home and children's reading attitudes among Year Five children.

- (iv) Null Hypothesis 4 for Research Question (vi):
H₀₄ There is no significant relationship between parents' attitudes towards reading and children's reading attitudes among Year Five children

- (v) Null Hypothesis 5 for Research Question (vii):
H₀₅ There is no relationship between academic achievement and reading attitudes among Year Five children.

1.7 Significance of Study

This study provides important implications to most parties involved including parents themselves, educators, education institutions, Ministry of Education and open public. It also informs the parents in Johor Bahru to their own home literacy environment factors in attitudes towards reading, early home literacy activities and resources in the home. This will highlight the attention of the parents to improve their own weakness or foster their ability to be more active involve in their children's reading.

It is also important to stimulate discussion and application of reading into curriculum of primary school. The researcher hopes that this study will help parents to have a true understanding of the importance and benefits of reading.

Besides, this study can act as guidelines for educators or primary school teachers so that they will take a vital responsibility in encouraging parents to get

involve in reading with children. Schools should reach out to all families regardless of their financial status, race or religion.

The educators or teachers also play a role in helping parents to improve and overcome the problems encountered in reading. The diligence and efforts the educators or primary school teachers take in regulating the parents' attitudes and involvements provide empirical evidence consistently.

Last but not least, the researcher hopes to encourage the initiatives of more educational researchers in Malaysia to carry out further refinement in this research area could make reference to this study and in getting more precise results.

1.8 Theoretical Framework

Children are social beings. They develop in a social and cultural context within a society. The children's families are usually the people involved in their immediate environment. Kaiser and Hancock (2003) stated that parents are children's first and most enduring teachers. Numerous researches confirm the parents' role has a critical influence in successful reading acquisition (Pressley, 1998).

Studies on the influence of parents on children reading are still evolving. The theoretical underpinnings of the researcher's approach to home literacy environment cut across behavioural as well as ecological system principles, thus, the researcher had related two theories to support the study. These theories will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. However, the researcher will put forward the connections

between the theories in generating the theoretical framework of this study in this section (Nora, 2010).

Bronfenbrenner ecological systems' theories which study the relationship between parents in the children's environment are used as the foundation in this study. Ecological systems theory emphasizes the mutual dependence between the behaviour of the children and the environment in which the behaviour occurs. The microsystem includes a key circle of influence that surround the child, such as parents.

According to Vygotsky's sociocultural theories, social interaction between a child and his or her immediate learning environment was necessary for the child to be enculturated into the learning community (Liu and Matthew, 2005). The immediate learning environment mentioned in this study is the children's home.

The theories will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter are related on ways in which these theorists view parents as active people in the children's development. It is hoped that by highlighting the interrelated contexts of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, the researcher has provided a key to understand the processes that underline parents' theoretical framework that brings impact on children's development.

Theoretical framework of this study is as shown in Figure 1.1.

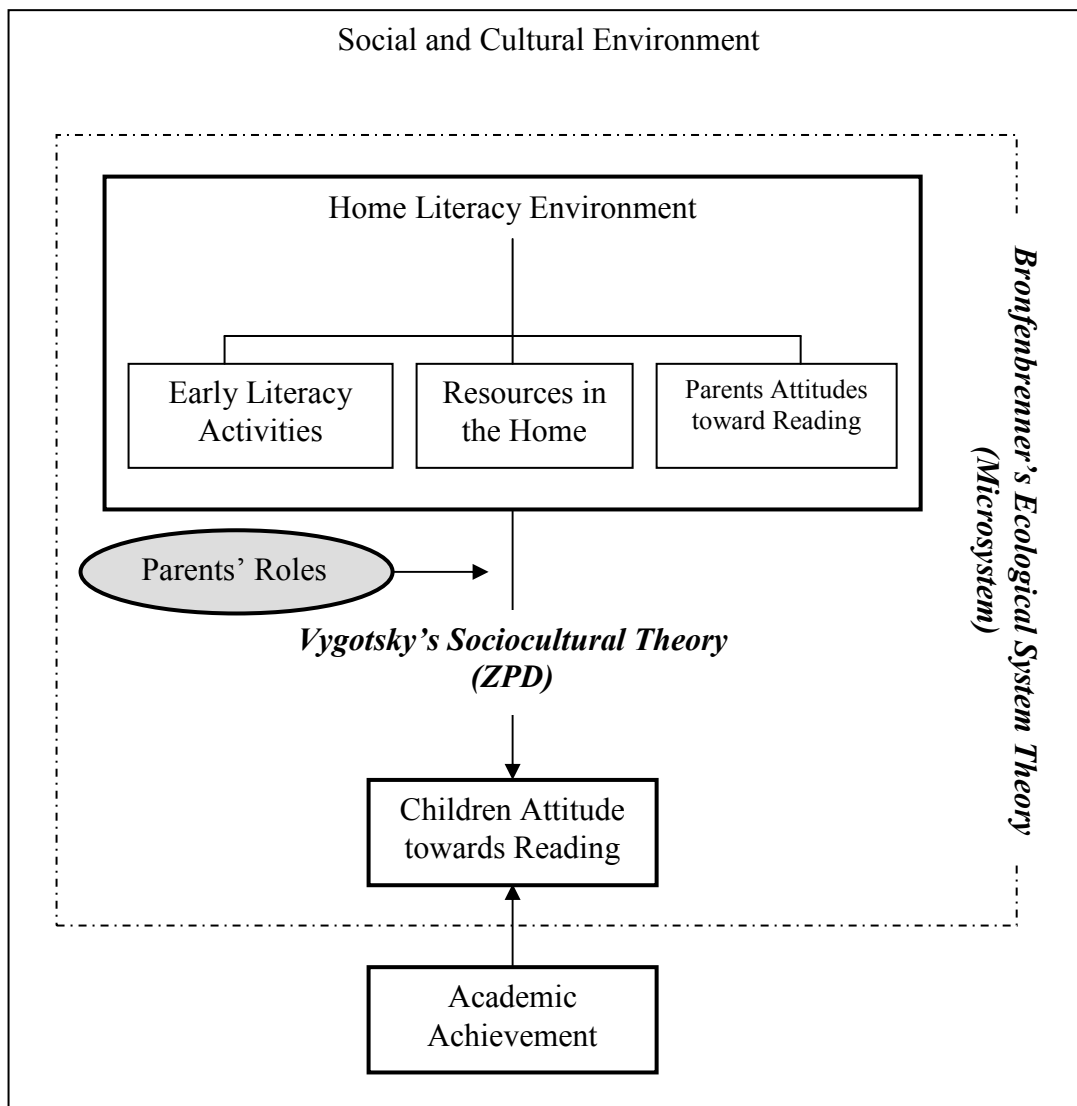


Figure 1.1 Theoretical Framework

1.9 Conceptual Framework

Conceptual framework was developed based on the theoretical framework in this study. The conceptual framework for this study is as shown in Figure 1.2. It showed the relationship between home literacy environment factors and children's reading attitudes, beside, it also showed the relationship between academic achievement and reading attitude among the Year Five children. The home literacy

environment factors discussed in this study are early literacy activities and resources in the home and parents' attitudes towards reading.

The following Figure 1.2 shows the conceptual framework of this study.

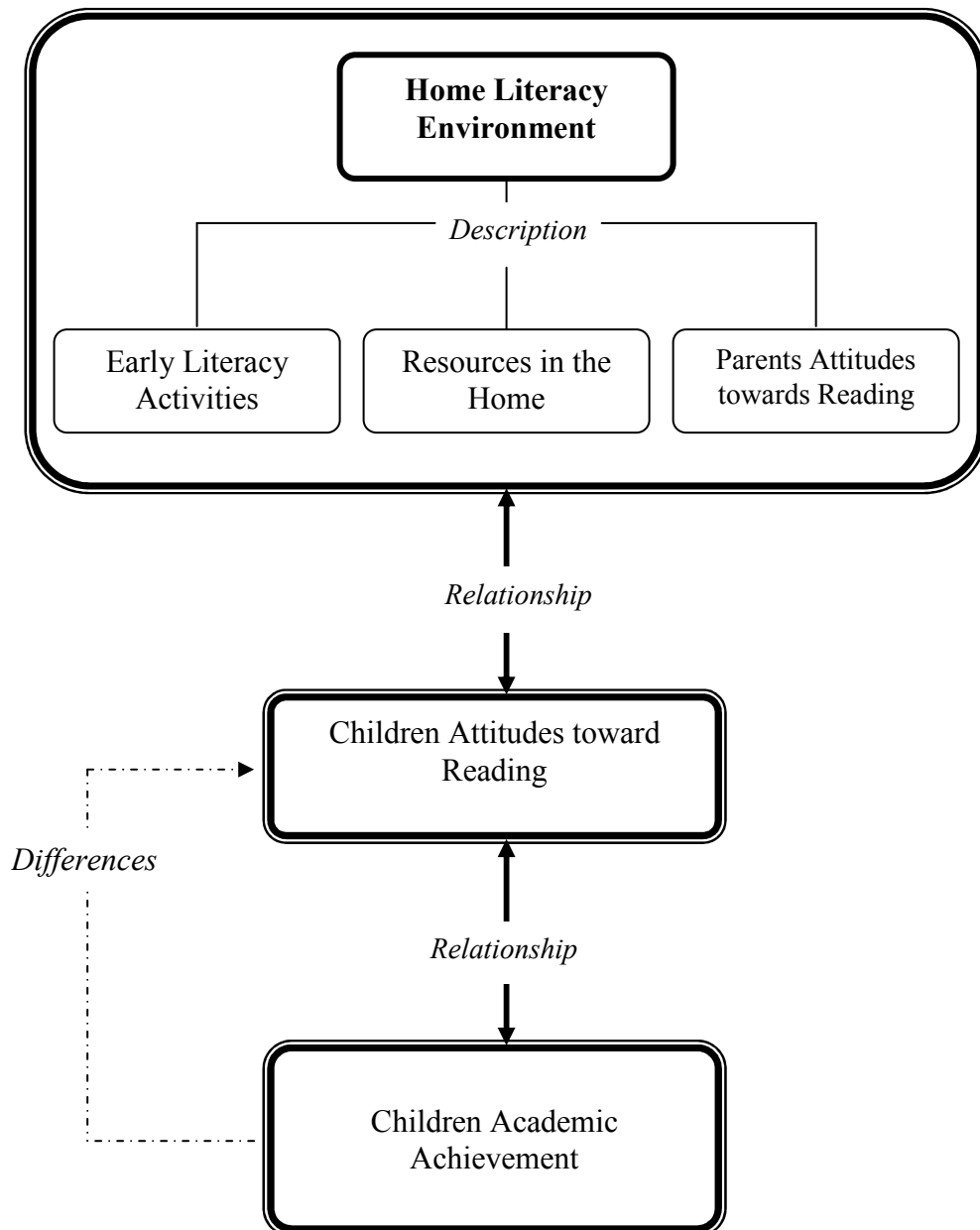


Figure 1.2 Conceptual Framework

Attitude towards reading have an impact upon reading behaviour. Generally, children with low academic achievement will have reading problem also. However,

when they have support from parents with rich-literacy environment in the home, their performance in reading and academic will be much better. In other words, it was hypothesized that there are relationships between (i) home literacy environment and children's reading attitude (ii) children's reading attitude and academic achievement.

Another primary objective which is foreseen to reinforce the aim of this research is to identify the differences of attitudes toward reading among Year Five children with high and low achievement. Besides, the researcher also intends to determine the level of home literacy environment factors such as early literacy activities, resources in the home and parents' attitudes towards reading among the Year Five children from Malay-medium National Schools in Pasir Gudang district, Johor Bahru. Lastly, investigate the level of children reading attitude and academic achievement are also the objectives in this study.

1.10 Scope of Study

The scope of the study includes:

- (i) The age of children participants in this study is Year Five of primary school.
- (ii) The participants comprised of parents and students from Malay-medium National Schools (*Sekolah Kebangsaan*) in Pasir Gudang district, Johor Bahru only.

1.11 Limitation

Several limitations of the study are listed as follow:

- (i) Sample of this study is restricted to randomly sampling of schools from certain Malay-medium National Schools (*Sekolah Kebangsaan*, SK) in Johor Bahru. Johor Bahru is primarily an urban population with a reasonably large number of primary schools. Therefore, the findings of this study may not be generalized to other states or geographical areas and other types of primary schools in the suburban area, rural area or private primary schools;
- (ii) Not all the parental influence factors that were related to the children's reading attitudes were included in the questionnaire. In this study, only the psychological factors (attitude towards reading) and the environmental factors (resources and early literacy activities) were included, yet the physiological factors that cover general maturity, visual, hearing and speech were not included because the researcher does not have the expertise in this field. Demographic factors such as socio-economic status (SES) were not assessed as a variable because all the subjects in this study come from urban areas and they were quite homogeneous in SES, besides, this study did not focus on this factor. Moreover, in Malaysia, the gap between SES in a common housing area is not very significant.
- (iii) The findings of this study relied on the response from the parents involved in this study. Therefore, the reliability and validity of this study also relied on the concern and honesty of the participants in answering the questionnaire.

1.12 Conceptual and Operational Definition

Definitions are provided for key study variables, namely reading, home literacy environment, attitudes towards reading, environment, academic achievement and Year Five children. Conceptual and operational definitions are given below for all the study variables and most related key terms.

1.12.1 Reading

Reading is a complex cognitive process of decoding symbols for the intention of deriving meaning (reading comprehension) and/or constructing meaning. It is the mastery of basic cognitive processes to the point where they are automatic so that attention is freed for the analysis of meaning. Reading is a means of language acquisition, of communication, and of sharing information and ideas. Like all language, it is a complex interaction between the text and the reader which is shaped by the reader's prior knowledge, experiences, attitude, and language community which is culturally and socially situated. The reading process requires continuous practices, development, and refinement.

In this study, reading refers to the ability to understand and construct meaning from a variety of written language forms required by society and/or valued by the individual.

1.12.2 Home Literacy Environment

In particular, scholars have employed the term “home literacy environment” (HLE) to refer to the subset of environmental factors in the home thought to be most germane for literacy growth (Foy and Mann, 2003; Burgess, Hecht and Lonigan, 2002).

HLE are environmental variables. In this study, the home literacy environment is a measurement of the parents’ attitudes towards reading and exposure of children have in their homes to those activities that help in developing literacy. Besides, resources in the home such as number of books in the home, educational aids (computer, study desk/table, books, and access to a daily newspaper) and parents’ education will be assessed. The higher the home literacy environment score, the better the family is prepared to encourage literacy among the children.

1.12.3 Attitude towards Reading

Attitude is a psychological variable. An attitude composes of three components: cognitive, affective, and conative (McGuire, 1969; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Eagly and Chaiken, 1993). The *cognitive* component reflects beliefs of people on the attitude object. The “belief” refers to all thoughts that one has about the object (in this case, reading works of fiction) and is sometimes labelled as cognitions, knowledge, opinions, information, and inferences. The cognitive component is typically operationalized as verbal statements about the perceived utilitarian/functional consequences of the act to one’s goals, that is, its perceived instrumentality (McGuire, 1969). The *affective* component consists of feelings or emotions that people have in relation to the attitude object. Usually it is operationalised as the evaluation (attractiveness) of the beliefs reflecting the

cognitive component (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). The *conative* component encompasses people's gross behavioural inclinations regarding the attitude object that are not necessarily expressed in overt behaviour.

Reading attitudes also has been defined as a system of feelings related to reading which causes the learner to approach or avoid a reading situation (Tunnell *et al.*, 1991).

In this study, attitude towards reading is identified by using the three components mentioned above—cognitive, affective and conative components. Parent's and children's attitudes toward reading will be identified based on belief of them about reading (cognitive component), feelings or emotions that they have in reading (affective component), and also their reading behaviour, such as favourite types of reading material and time spending on reading (conative component).

1.12.4 Environment

Tharp and Gallimore (1988) regard environment as the interaction between context and literacy acquisition and development. Environment to a primary school child refers to the cultural background of the primary school and home. Background included opportunities for play and social experiences; amount of speech and language patterns of adults around the child and the adults' attitudes towards the child's reading such as the availability of books of varied levels of difficulty.

In this study, environment encompasses home environment. Positive environment refers to the presence of someone reading to the child at home; rewards; immediate feedback on the child's reading performance; encouragement and

motivation by parents; opportunities to read at home, and reading materials. Negative environment suggests the absence of guidance in reading at home; lack of praises from parents for the way the child handle his reading assignment; lack of the atmosphere that makes the child feel comfortable to read; lack of activities that could interest the child, etc. (Yeo, 2006)

1.12.5 Academic Achievement

The definition of academic achievement is inferred in (MacGilchrist, Reed & Myers, 2004) as encompassing the following four aspects:

- (i) Capacity to remember and use facts
- (ii) Practical and spoken skills
- (iii) Personal and social skills
- (iv) Motivation and self-confidence

The academic achievement in this study measured largely on (i), (ii) and (iv) above. According to Drummond (1988), academic achievement measures how well students are achieving the minimum level or essential skills being taught. Achievement test are used to measure at all age and grade levels to measure what individuals have learned. They are normally used for placement, selection, and classification of students. Academic achievement connotes to securing marks in examinations.

This study involves standardized achievement test results as the criterion to measure and evaluate individual learners as well as total class progress. In this research, the academic achievement of the sample group is their last average grade achieved namely Self Average Grade (*Gred Purata Sendiri, GPS*) which ranges from

1 to 5. The “academic achievement” of the respondents will be thus measured using their last average achieved (Year Four in 2010). High achievers are those top class’s children who scored a GPS with 2 or less than 2. Meanwhile, low achievers are those children from last class who obtained a GPS with 3.5 or more than 3.5.

1.12.6 Year Five Children

Primary education consists of six years of education, referred to as Year One to Year Six (also known as Standard One to Standard Six). Year One to Year Three are classified as Level One (*Tahap Satu*) while Year Four to Year Six are considered as Level Two (*Tahap Dua*). Primary education begins at the age of seven and ends at 12. Students are promoted to the next year regardless of their academic performance (poor curriculum induced).

Year Five children are those ten to 11 years old children in primary school. In this study, the Year Five children are those students who entered Year Five of Malay-medium National School in year 2011. This age and grade is an important transition point in children’s development as readers, because most of them have already learned to read, and do not read solely for the sake of practicing, but to gain more knowledge and to learn.

1.13 Conclusion

This study is trying to investigate the influence of parents on children’s reading attitude. The researcher intends to have an overview on home literacy

environment factors in the Malay family in Johor Bahru. Besides, this study also intends to investigate the relationship among academic achievement and children's reading attitude. This study is important as an initial study to obtain a comprehensive picture of the parents and children reading at home. The public are also able to recognise the problems or constraints faced by parents in carrying out the reading activities.

Following chapters will discuss the literature review relating to the reading attitude, academic achievement and home literacy environment.

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