

**EXTENSIVE READING AND ITS IMPACT ON STUDENTS'
COMPREHENSION, VOCABULARY AND READING
ATTITUDE**

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EXTENSIVE READING AND ITS IMPACT ON STUDENTS' COMPREHENSION,
VOCABULARY AND READING ATTITUDE

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DEDICATION

*This piece of work is dedicated specially to my
beloved late father, my mother
&
my heroes; Chandraprakash, Prashaant and Shanan
for their love motivation and support.*

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ABSTRACT

This current study investigates the impact of extensive reading on students' comprehension, vocabulary and reading attitude. The study also explores the effectiveness of extensive reading and seeks to answer if extensive reading helps to promote positive attitude among students precisely in reading. The study is based on comprehensible input theory where students were engaged in large quantity of reading to achieve better comprehension and enhanced vocabulary together with positive attitude. The sample in this study consisted of 30 students of an intact class of Year 5. All of the students are of an average proficiency level. The extensive reading programme was administered for 12 sessions of 30 minutes each, outside the school timetable. Statistical and descriptive analysis were used for the findings purpose. Mean, standard deviation and the margin of improvement were calculated using the repeated measures T-test. The results of the data analysis indicated that extensive reading helped to improve the comprehension skill and vocabulary acquisition among the students. This was proven in terms of the marks obtained in the post-test after conducting the T-test using the SPSS. Extensive Reading has also helped to promote positive attitude toward reading which was seen through the descriptive analysis of attitude questionnaire and interview. Limitations, pedagogical implications and suggestions for future research are also indicated in this study.

ABSTRAK

Penyelidikan ini mengkaji keberkesanan “extensive reading” terhadap kemahiran pemahaman, perbendaharaan kata serta sikap murid. Kajian ini bertujuan juga untuk melihat samada “extensive reading” boleh melahirkan murid yang bersikap lebih positif terhadap kemahiran membaca secara ekstensif. Kajian ini berdasarkan teori “comprehensible input” dimana murid-murid diberi banyak bahan bacaan untuk memperkayakan perbendaharaan kata serta memantapkan kemahiran pemahaman. Seramai 30 orang murid Darjah 5 telah dipilih untuk menyertai program membaca ini. Kesemua murid mempunyai kebolehan berbahasa yang sederhana. Program ini dijalankan selama 12 sesi, dimana setiap sesi berjalan selama 30 minit diluar jadual waktu kelas harian. Min, “standard deviation” serta beza pencapaian diantara pra ujian dan pos ujian dijalankan dan dianalisis menggunakan T-test. Selepas kajian, didapati “Extensive Reading” telah membantu murid memantapkan kemahiran pemahaman serta meluaskan perbendaharaan kata mereka berdasarkan pencapaian murid yang positif secara keseluruhan. Ia juga telah mempromosikan sikap yang lebih positif di kalangan mereka di mana analisis berdasarkan soal selidik dan temuramah di kira. Implikasi untuk teori kajian dan praktis susulan disarankan. Cadangan kajian lanjutan turut dibincangkan.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

"A Reading Society, A Successful Society"

(Bangsa Membaca, Bangsa Berjaya). – The Reading Promotion Tagline.

*The Reading Campaign concept and implementation strategy under the
auspices of the Information, Communication and Culture Ministry*

has been given a new and fresh approach every year.

(New Straits Times, Tuesday, October 2, 2012)

Reading is one of the major skills that students need to master in their early years of school. The usage of English Language in the primary schools in Malaysia is very limited in the classroom, which is only during the English Language lessons, that is about 7 periods of half an hour each per week. During these hours, teachers need to cover all the four skills namely, listening, speaking, reading and writing.

One of the aims of the English Language curriculum for the primary schools is to enable the students to read and understand different kinds of texts for enjoyment and information. “Schools are encouraged to stock a range of reading material suitable for all levels of learners. At this stage, pupils should be reading fiction as well as non-fiction written for children. Pupils should be taught to read with understanding and enjoyment, building on what they already know. They should also be taught to get the meaning of the whole text as well as learn to use various clues, including an understanding of grammatical structure, to get the meaning of words and phrases” (Curriculum Specifications for primary school English Language, Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2004).

Teachers on the whole are usually engrossed in completing the syllabus for the mid-year and final year examination. The scenario is even worse among the Year 6 teachers who are always busy drilling and giving a lot of written exercises to the pupils as preparation for the UPSR examination (Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah / Primary School Assessment Examination). The activities tend to focus more on writing activities and some comprehension tasks, other than grammar and vocabulary drill as these aspects of language carry the most marks in the English Language examination. Writing basically carries 50% of the whole grade whereas reading comprehension questions and cloze passages carry about 30% of Paper 1 English Language paper. In the class, the teachers teach students comprehension passages of linear and non-linear texts as well as grammar items and word attack skills from the textbooks the traditional way without giving much focus on extensive reading.

Adding into the timetable is the NILAM (Nadi Ilmu Amalan Membaca) Programme which was initiated in all Malaysian primary and secondary schools in 1999. This extensive reading programme aims to instil the reading habit among school children. Students who read the most number of books in a year will be rewarded. The prizes will be given by the school using the school co-academic fund and the reward will be given based on the following criteria:

Table 1.1 : Criteria of NILAM award in schools

| Number of Books | Recognition | Rewards |
|------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|
| 90 – 179 | Bronze | A certificate and a prize. |
| 180 – 269 | Silver | |
| 270 – 359 | Gold | |
| 360 and above | NILAM | |

It is quite discouraging that, only half an hour per week is allocated for this programme. During the half hour class, students are required to fill in a few details in a NILAM record book whereby they find it troublesome and burdening which leads to frustration and not wanting to read a book. In addition, in the midst of completing the syllabus, teachers most of the time do not take the students to the library which lead to the failure of implementing the NILAM programme or also known as extensive reading program.

According to Richard & Schmidt (2002), extensive reading is to read in quantity and to gain a general understanding of what is read. They further elaborated that extensive reading intended to develop good reading habits, to increase knowledge of vocabulary and structure, and to support a liking for reading which I think is suitable to be carried out among my Year 5 learners in school.

Thus, this study was conducted to investigate the effectiveness of extensive reading among the Year 5 students of an average level to enhance their interest in reading and to enhance their comprehension level and at the same time to change their attitude towards reading. Therefore, this study was conducted among thirty average Year 5 learners of Sekolah Kebangsaan Taman Perling, Johor Bahru, regarding the effectiveness of extensive reading among the Year 5 pupils and their comprehension level. This study particularly aimed to seek whether extensive reading would improve students' comprehension level in answering the comprehension questions and to investigate its impact on their attitude towards reading.

1.1 Background of the Study

I have been teaching primary school students for the past 18 years and have been teaching the examination classes, that is the Year 6 classes for the past 15 years. It is observed that many of the students of the average group are not proficient in reading and are not keen to read English storybooks. The English Language paper in the upper primary school consists of Paper 1 (objective questions) and Paper 2 (writing). In Section D of the English Language paper, the students are evaluated on their understanding based on a cloze passage whereas in Section E of Paper 1, the students are evaluated on their comprehension skill. They are required to read two passages and answer 10 comprehension questions.

Most of the pupils in the average and below average group are not able to answer the questions as they lack in comprehension and are lazy to read as they could not comprehend the passages. Other than that, based on the final year examination, I have since noticed that the comprehension level of the students are not quite good as more than 50% of them managed to answer only 5 out of 10 questions correctly on average based on the checklist of the academic audit of the final year exam last year. This is due to poor understanding of the text as the vocabulary knowledge is not good and wide enough for them to comprehend the texts which also lead to frustration and they became lazy to read any texts especially in English. Lacking in comprehension somehow or rather affects the score in the comprehension reading passages as students do not know to locate answer for the questions.

Readers are supposed to comprehend what they read. Texts should contain words and grammatical structures familiar to the learners (Van Duzer, 1999) which in many ways will help them to comprehend what is read. In order to have familiar structures or vocabulary, one has to do ample reading to come across many words and sentence structures and thus understanding will be enhanced.

Reading as we know has a number of reasons and Wallace (1992) suggests three potential reasons for reading which has been long proposed by Rivers & Temperly (1978). They are reading for survival, reading for learning and reading for enjoyment.

Reading for survival is to be able to read in our environment. For example, reading maps, signs, labels etc. It is to help one to survive. Reading for learning is to acquire language and knowledge. It is done to pass the examination as what the students are doing in schools and universities and for other learning purposes. Not only books, newspapers and magazines can be considered as some of the materials that one can read to learn something. On the other hand, reading for enjoyment or pleasure can be referred as aesthetic reading (Rosenblat, 1978). The materials used are such as magazines and novels which can bring pleasure to an individual.

Nevertheless, today the second language learners do not often read for pleasure, instead they read to pass the examination. According to Christopher Fernandez in an article in *The Star* online entitled “*Of English Teachers Then and Now*” dated 11th. November 2012, “in those days, students did not read to win prizes. It was for sheer pleasure but today it is vice-versa.” Students are not to be blamed as the policy maker is more interested to test the students in the examination. In Malaysia the education system gives too much emphasis in examination. In practice, most of the time, students are not allowed to speak and express themselves as it is not required in grading them for the exam purpose.

Once the formal education is over, not many of the second language learners will continue reading in English for pleasure because they do not enjoy reading in second language as this habit is not instilled during their school days and for some, they do not see the importance of reading. Navinder Kaur et.al (2008) in their research entitled “The Effects of Extensive Reading on Language Proficiency and Motivation to Read”, cited Day and Bamford (1998), “if an extensive reading programme is set up and carried out appropriately, it will help students learn to read in the second language and enjoy reading. This will encourage them to continue reading long after formal study of the second language is over. Extensive reading will also help to consolidate students’ learning of the second language and increases their language proficiency.”

According to Day & Bamford (1997), extensive reading is to read large number of printed materials with only one aim and that is to get an understanding of the material read. Learners read to get the meaning of the overall text rather than

meaning of each word. It also aims to get the learners to enjoy reading in the second language. Enjoyment in doing something will lead one to continue doing it and the more they read, the more fluent they become. Not only will they develop the love for reading, learners' general language competence will also increase (Day & Bamford, 1998) which our students lack in.

Nuttal (1982) also points out that extensive reading can be used to promote good reading habits in ESL/EFL teaching as it provides comprehensible input for the students, providing the reading materials are easy enough to allow them to read without difficulty. Many more researchers agree that extensive reading has beneficial results for foreign students learning to read in English (Constaino, 1995; Bell and Campbell, 1996; Elly and Mangubhai, 1983; Hafiz and Tudor, 1989, Krashen 1993, Robb and Susser, 1989), so it is for the benefit of the students and to carry out the extensive reading programme so they understand the importance of reading and change their attitude.

Day and Bamford (1998), suggested an extensive reading programme if set up and carried out appropriately, could help students learn to read in the second language and help them to enjoy reading. This encourages them to continue reading long after formal study of the second language is over. Extensive reading helps students to increase their language proficiency. Extensive reading is an activity which allows students to practice reading without much stress, to practice the language at their own pace, to feel comfortable with the material chose and allow them to have enough time to strengthen what they know. Extensive Reading improves and enhances not only their writing skill but also their vocabulary.

According to Cobb (2007), extensive reading is an aid to language learning, including foreign language learning, by means of a large amount of reading. The learner's view and review of unknown words in specific context will allow the learner to infer and thus learn those words' meanings. To learn meanings of words can also be done by referring to the dictionary or using contextual clues.

In my study, I planned a programme which provided the students with conducive ways of learning and using the language without having to worry about

examination or other types of evaluation throughout the programme. I designed this programme according to my students' need and level with the aim of allowing them to comprehend what they read and at the same time learn meanings of words and thus acquire vocabulary.

I empathise my students and know that they need help to at least answer the comprehension questions correctly to improve their examination grades. They really enjoyed reading storybooks according to their level of interest and so I have used the extensive reading activity to help them acquire vocabulary, answer the comprehension questions correctly and change their attitude towards reading.

1.2 Statement of Problem

Many students in my school are not interested to read books in English especially those in the average and below average group as they get less motivated when the vocabulary in the books read is too difficult which would hinder their comprehension. The students are not interested as they could not understand what they read. Based on the library record of Sekolah Kebangsaan Taman Perling, most of the students from the first classes of Year 3, 4, 5 and 6 who have good command of English are keener to borrow books compared to the other students from the average and below average classes.

Although most of the students do not read for pleasure, they are aware that it is necessary to read in order to answer comprehension questions. Therefore, it is a must in every lesson to the pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading activity without realising that students are bored and stressed with the conventional way of learning grammar, vocabulary and sound system day in and day out. Teacher should put in a little effort to teach students reading in a more relaxing way and this study may be significant to teachers and students in order to develop and improve their reading skill and answering comprehension questions.

Reading in English for second language learners is seen as a difficult task as it is not given much emphasis by teachers. Reading comprehension passages are done

just to answer comprehension questions correctly. Trying to motivate students to read and improve their reading skill is a challenge that a teacher has to face. Throughout my teaching years I see that most of my students do not see the importance of reading be it reading for pleasure or reading for a purpose like examination.

It is not a good setback to see students in upper primary are not able to read simple books fluently and would not put much effort in improving themselves in reading as they rather spend time playing video games, watching television or surfing the internet. According to an article entitled, *The Reading Habits of Malaysians: Some Stats.*, dated August 28, 2006, reading is not even the favourite pastime to Malaysians as most prefer to watch television and video. The writer elaborated that “the reading habit looks to be a thing of the past as the survey conducted unearthed the trend among the young who read only to acquire knowledge.” This is due to the education system in our country that requires students to pass the examination whereby most of the time they are required to recall information.

Looking at the reading trend among the students and according to the 2012 NILAM reading record of Sekolah Kebangsaan Taman Perling, until the month of September, each student borrowed and read only 2.5 books at average whereby they are supposed to read at least 7 books a year. The books can be either fiction or non-fiction of any number of pages and any number of words but then students find it burdening and bored.

According to the teacher who is in charge of the NILAM project in the school, students are either not interested to read in English or too lazy to read. She added that sometimes teachers themselves do not bring the students to the library as they are busy completing the syllabus in the classroom especially during the examination season where students will rather stay in the classrooms and do revision.

Based on these existing setbacks, I was driven to conduct this study to see whether the extensive reading can help students to comprehend better and help improve their vocabulary and at the same time to see the change of attitude among my students towards reading.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to investigate whether extensive reading programme would give an impact on attitude and comprehension towards year 5 students of an average level in a primary school in Taman Perling, Johor Bahru, which is located in a semi urban area of Johor Bahru.

1.4 Research Objectives

The objectives of this particular study are:

- To investigate if there is improvement in students' comprehension after the extensive reading programme.
- To identify whether extensive reading could enhance vocabulary among the students.
- To discover students' attitude on extensive reading programme.

1.5 Research Questions

Three research questions were formulated for the purpose of this study.

The research questions are:

1. Does extensive reading enhance the students' comprehension?
2. Does extensive reading improve and help the acquisition of vocabulary among the students?
3. Does extensive reading enhance students' attitude towards reading?

1.6 Significance of the Study

As mentioned earlier, attitude of students and commitment of teachers could contribute to the lacking of reading and based on these existing setbacks, I was driven to conduct this study to see whether the extensive reading could help students to comprehend texts better and at the same time acquire vocabulary. It was also conducted to see whether the extensive reading programme could change the students' attitude towards reading.

It is hoped that the students can gain a lot of benefits because extensive reading has given them opportunity to use or practice the language among their aged group friends which is less stressful. As for the school as well as the policy makers, the findings of the study may give significant pedagogical implications in implementing extensive reading among the ESL learners.

This study can also provide some insights and suggestions to the Education Department as well as the Ministry of Education so that extensive reading can be given emphasize as one of the school language programmes especially in primary schools. It was hoped that extensive reading can help and guide students to develop and improve their reading, comprehension skill, vocabulary acquisition and at the same time, change their attitude towards reading.

1.7 Scope of the Study

This study primarily focussed on whether extensive reading among selected Year 5 pupils would help enhance their comprehension skill, vocabulary and attitude. In relation to the study, 30 participants were chosen for the extensive reading programme. Scores from the pre-test and the post-test were collected and analysed to distinguish the effectiveness of the extensive reading programme, whether there was an improvement.

Prior to this study, the students have not done any extensive reading programme so this study helped the researcher to observe whether extensive reading could lead to the acquisition of vocabulary and enhanced the comprehension level.

The finding of this study is expected to provide better understandings of using extensive reading for the Year 5 students.

1.8 Definition of Terms

The following are some of the terms which were used throughout this research and they are described according to the purpose of this study. The definitions were taken from the linguist point of view to facilitate better understanding of the readers.

1.8.1 Reading

Reading which involves cognitive process should be acquired by everybody. In order to acquire the reading skill, certain skills should be acquired. In the book *Interactive Approaches to Second Language Reading* by Patricia L. et. al (1988), it is stated that, according to Eskey (1970,p-1), the ability to read the written language at a reasonable rate with good comprehension has long been recognized to be important. Thorndike (1917: 323-332) characterized reading as reasoning and assumed that it was an active process related to problem solving.

Smith (1994: 171-182), defined reading as an interaction between readers, writers and the text. Reading is thinking and can never be separated from the purpose, prior knowledge, and feelings of the person engaged in the activity nor from the nature of the text being read.

1.8.2 Attitude

“Attitude is a predisposition or a tendency to respond positively or negatively towards a certain idea, object, person, or situation. Attitude influences an individual’s choice of action and responses challenges, incentives and rewards or stimuli. It is elaborated that there are four major components of attitude and they are :

- (1) Affective: emotions or feelings.
- (2) Cognitive: belief or opinions held consciously.
- (3) Conative: inclination for action.
- (4) Evaluative: positive or negative response to stimuli.”

(Adapted from : Business Dictionary.com)

1.8.3 Reading Attitude

It is a complex theoretical construct described in a few ways. For instance, “a system of feelings related to reading which causes the learners to approach or avoid a reading situation”(Alexander and Filler, 1976:1) or “a state of mind, accompanied by feelings and emotions, that make reading more or less probable”(Smith,1990:215). According to Reeves (2002), there is considerable agreement among contemporary researchers that reading attitude is defined based on cognitive (personal beliefs), affective (feelings and emotions) and conative (action readiness and behavioural intentions).

1.9 Summary

Overall, this study mainly intended to investigate whether extensive reading would help students to improve their comprehension, vocabulary and attitude towards reading. Krashen (1993), elaborated as a result of an examination of research on “in-school reading” and “out-of school self reported free voluntary reading” conducted in many different countries, concludes that free voluntary reading or sustained independent reading results in better reading comprehension, writing style, vocabulary, spelling and grammatical development.

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