

**READING HABITS OF TEACHERS IN FOUR GOVERNMENT-AIDED
SECONDARY SCHOOLS (MISSION SCHOOLS) IN KUCHING DISTRICT**

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ABSTRACT

Specifically, this study attempts to investigate the different types of reading materials, frequency of reading, teaching load and factors that influence reading habits among teachers in the four (4) government-aided secondary schools (Mission Secondary Schools) in Kuching District. The respondents in this study were 118 teachers from the four schools. The main methodology employed in this study was a survey questionnaire. Interviews were also conducted on twenty (20) of the teachers who had responded to the questionnaires. The data were analysed and concluded that most of the teachers have poor reading habits. The findings showed that most of the teachers read both academic and non-academic reading materials, having reading frequency of only a few hours a week and prefer to read at home while some teachers have heavy teaching load that inhibit their reading habits. Based on this study, it will raise awareness on the importance of readings among teachers. The result of this study has an implication on the importance of inculcating the reading habit among school children at an early age.

ABSTRAK

Secara khusus, kajian ini bertujuan mengkaji pelbagai jenis bahan bacaan, kekerapan membaca, beban mengajar dan factor-faktor yang mempengaruhi amalan membaca para guru di empat buah sekolah menengah bantuan (Mubaligh Kristian) di daerah Kuching. Responden dalam kajian ini adalah terdiri daripada 118 orang guru yang mengajar di empat buah sekolah menengah tersebut. Kaedah kajian yang utama digunakan ialah soalselidik. Temuduga juga di jalankan ke atas 20 orang responden yang turut menjawab soalselidik. Maklumat yang diperolehi dirumus dan didapati kebanyakan para guru mempunyai amalan membaca yang kurang memuaskan. Hasil kajian juga menunjukkan kebanyakan para guru membaca pelbagai bahan bacaan akademik dan juga bukan akademik, mempunyai kekerapan membaca cuma beberapa jam seminggu dan memilih untuk membaca di rumah manakala segelintir para guru mempunyai beban mengajar yang berat sehingga menghalang mereka daripada membaca. Hasil kajian ini dapat memberi kesedaran kepada para guru betapa pentingnya amalan membaca. Hasil kajian ini juga mempunyai implikasi betapa pentingnya amalan membaca dipupuk dikalangan kanak-kanak sekolah sejak usia muda.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Teaching is a challenging career as teachers carry the responsibility of moulding the character of their students and guiding them to be good citizens. According to The Borneo Post, May 27, 2006, teachers hold the key to the future of the nation as they have strong influence on their students who are our future generation. Thus, the recent announcement of the existence of 162,000 “illiterate” students in Malaysia had shocked teachers, students and parents.

In view of this, something has to be done to reduce and if possible, to totally eradicate illiteracy among students. Therefore, to start with, teachers must be seen as role models for the students to emulate. Teachers must read a lot in order to keep abreast with the fast-changing information age.

Teachers should involve themselves in reading because according to Eskey (1986. p.21, cited in Renandya & Jacobs, 2002): “Reading...must be developed, and can only be developed, by means of extensive and continued practice. People learn to read, and read better by reading.” This view on extensive reading as a reading habit is also shared by Krashen (1993, p. 23, cited in Renandya & Jacobs, 2002) that through

reading we “develop a good writing style, an adequate vocabulary, advanced grammar and ... becomes good spellers”.

Finnochiaro (1989) also suggests that teachers need to read to help facilitate their teaching-learning activity in the classroom as information obtained through their reading will help them keep in touch with current issues and to apply them in their classroom discussion. An effective teacher is a teacher who always keeps abreast with changes be it in teaching or learning aspects. In view of the above mentioned problems, the researcher would like to investigate the reading habits of teachers in the four schools.

The poor reading habits among Malaysians can be seen in surveys conducted by the Ministry of Education on National Literacy in 1982 and 1996 (Kaur and Thiagarajah, 1999). In the earlier survey, an average Malaysian citizen read a mere page or two a year whilst the later revealed an average of two books a year.

In view of this, the research looked into the reading habits of teachers in four government-aided secondary schools (Mission Schools) in Kuching district. The study focused on the types of reading materials that they read, whether their teaching loads inhibit their reading habits, factors that influence their reading habits, time spent on reading and reasons for reading.

1.2 Background of Study

Reading is an important part of learning. It helps a person acquire knowledge of the world and improve ones language skills. Reading is a unique process, as it requires certain skills in getting meaning from a written text. These reading skills will enable a reader not only to read the written form as meaningful language, but also to read it with independence, comprehension and fluency. William (1984) usefully classifies reading

into three purposes; getting general information from the text, getting specific information from the text; and for pleasure or interest. Getting information from texts is one of the ways to gain knowledge of the world and by having more knowledge will make a person knowledgeable. However, lack of motivation in reading is one of the most common problems among Malaysians. This problem has prevented them from acquiring knowledge of the world and from improving their language skills.

In view of this problem, the government has done its best to inculcate an interest in reading among Malaysians. The Ministry of Education came up with the NILAM (*Nadi Ilmu Amalan Membaca*) programme in 1998 to nurture the reading habits among school children (Kaur and Thiyagarajah, 1999). Other extensive reading programmes have also been implemented over the years such as Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading (USSR), 'Drop Everything and Read' (DEAR) and the Book Flood Approach (Elley and Mangubahi, 1983 as cited in Renandya and Jacobs, 2002). The purpose of the programme is that readers read large quantities of books and other materials in an environment that nurtures a life long reading habit. While much effort has been put into reading campaigns and programmes, indication is that more and more Malaysians are not interested in picking up the habit. Malaysian students at the tertiary level have indeed shown our students' poor regards for reading (Mohd Sallehudin 1994, as cited in Normah 2004).

In Asia, recent surveys have shown that books are being put aside for video and CD games, television and other electronic forms of entertainment (NST Computimes May 3, 2004, cited in Normah, 2004). However, in investigating the effects of pleasure reading among adult learners in Hong Kong, (Yang, 2001 as cited in Normah, 2004) found that readers made substantial proficiency gains in the language. They were also motivated to read more.

A study by Kaur and Thiyagarajah (1999) found that most of their respondents showed very positive attitude towards reading, whereby 85.7 percent of them read in

English because they felt that it could improve their English language proficiency. About 74.7 percent read to obtain good grades in their coursework and 71.4 percent read in English because they wanted to become good English language teachers upon graduation.

While for teachers reading is beneficial to them as information obtained through reading will help them to be in touch with current issues and they will be able to relate such issues in their classroom discussions. Finnochiaro (1989) pointed out that teachers need to read because reading helps facilitate teaching and learning. Chitravelu et al. (1997) stressed that appropriate teaching styles of a teacher in an English Language classroom can increase the students' interest in learning English. They summed up by saying that English language teachers needed to read academic materials related to English Language teaching and learning as this will further enhance the students' learning needs and preferences.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Two surveys conducted by the Ministry of Education on National Literacy in 1982 and 1996 revealed that in the earlier survey, an average Malaysian citizen read a mere page or two a year whilst the later revealed an average of two books a year (Kaur and Thiyagarajah, 1999). The researcher's own experience and observations as a teacher cum teacher trainer also suggest that teachers do not read much nowadays. Therefore, in view of the problems, the researcher would like to investigate the teachers' reading habits namely; the type of reading materials, their frequency of reading, their workload and other factors that inhibit their reading habits.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to:

1. ascertain the types of reading materials read by teachers in the four government-aided secondary schools;
2. examine teachers' frequency of reading academic and non-academic materials;
3. investigate whether the teaching loads inhibit teachers' reading habits; and
4. investigate factors that influence teachers' reading habits;

1.5 Research Questions

This research aims to address the following questions;

1. What types of reading materials do teachers in the four government-aided secondary schools (Mission Schools) read?
2. How frequent do teachers read academic and non-academic materials?
3. Do teachers' teaching loads inhibit their reading habits?
4. What are the factors that influence teachers' reading habits?

1.6 Significance of Study

It is hoped that the result of this study could contribute to further understanding of the reading habits of secondary school teachers particularly in the four schools. The result of this study can also be used as a basis for further research in areas related to reading such as doing research on literacy or library facilities in schools. The result of

this research could also lead to further research on the various reading programmes currently implemented in schools throughout the country.

1.7 Scope of the Study

This study was only confined to teachers in four government-aided secondary schools (Mission Schools) in Kuching district. The study looked into both academic and non-academic reading materials frequently read by the respondents, factors that influence their reading habits, time spent on reading and reasons for reading.

1.8 Limitation of the study

Firstly, the study was only limited to teachers from four government-aided secondary schools (Mission schools). The reason being there are the only four mission secondary schools in Kuching district that receive aids/funds from the government unlike the fully-government secondary schools. Thus, the findings of this research may not in any way reflect the real situation in all schools but rather confined to respondents in the four schools.

Secondly, the study meant only to describe the reading habits of the teachers in the four schools and no comparison of reading habits of teachers between the government-aided and the fully-government secondary schools.

As such, the findings of this research neither represent the general population of teachers in Kuching district nor the state of Sarawak.

1.9 Definition of Terms

- 1.9.1 Mission Schools – schools set up by the Christian missionaries during the colonial days. It uses the name “Saint” before the name of the school. For example, Saint Thomas Secondary School.
- 1.9.2 Chung Hua Middle School – schools set up by the Chinese community during the colonial days, with Mandarin as a medium of instruction.
- 1.9.3 Academic Materials – any reading material aimed at academic purposes for example, school’s textbooks and reference books useful for teaching and learning activities.
- 1.9.4 Non-academic Materials – any reading material read for general knowledge and leisure for example newspapers, magazines or books for personal growth.
- 1.9.5 Teaching Loads – refers to teaching periods only. Teaching period of more than 24 periods (40 minutes per period) per week is considered heavy where as teaching period of less than 24 periods per week is considered light.
- 1.9.6 Extra Class – classes conducted as directed by the school authority or self- volunteered.