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بِوَسِيْلَةِ سُنَّتِيْ اِسْلَامِيَّةٍ اَنْبَارٍ اَبْحَثْنَا مِلْدِيَّتِيْ

ENGLISH LANGUAGE READING CULTURE
AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN
TERENGGANU

BY

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requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
(English Language Studies)

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ABSTRACT

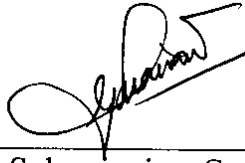
In this study, the researcher focuses on the main element of literacy which is reading. This exploratory study examines the English language reading culture among primary school students in Terengganu. For this study, reading culture is defined as the summation of all the attitudes that have become habits due to many related factors. The study examines four issues related to reading culture in Terengganu. Among them are: first, reading habits; second, reading strategies; third, reading interventions and finally language policy. The researcher obtained data from various sources: reading assessment, questionnaires, semi-structured-interviews and document study. The sample included 1820 students and 346 teachers throughout Terengganu. The students were not only asked to answer questionnaires but also sat for an established reading assessment called 'The San Diego Quick Reading' assessment. Meanwhile, teachers were given a questionnaire comprising a set of a Likert-scale and open-ended questions. The views of 11 experts were also incorporated on this issue. Besides that, students' English performance records throughout the year were also scrutinized in order to fulfill the objectives of the study. The findings of the study reveal that students' reading ability is low; added to that is the revelation that reading culture only moderately exists in schools. There is almost a non-existent reading culture in most homes. On a positive note, both students and teachers feel that parents can create a true English reading environment for the students.

ملخص البحث

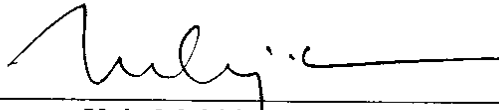
يركز هذا البحث على القراءة باعتبارها ركناً أساسياً في معرفة القراءة والكتابة، و يفحص نمط قراءة الكتب باللغة الإنجليزية لدى تلاميذ المدارس الإعدادية بولاية ترنجانو. وتعنى بنمط القراءة في هذه الدراسة كل الممارسات التي صارت عادات ناتجة عن عوامل ذات الصلة. وينظر البحث في أربعة أمور تتعلق بثقافة القراءة بولاية ترنجانو، ومنها: عادات القراءة، وإستراتيجية القراءة، وتدخلات القراءة، والسياسات اللغوية. جمع الباحث معلوماته من مصادر مختلفة، شملت تقييم القراءة، والاستبانات، والمقابلات شبة الموجهة، ودراسة الوثائق. وتتكون عينة البحث من ١٨٢٠ طلاب و٣٤٦ مدرّسا من ولاية ترنجانو. لم يطلب الباحث من الطلاب تعبئة استبانة فحسب بل أخضعهم لامتحان القراءة عن طريق برنامج ب"سان ديغو لتقييم القراءة السريعة". أعطى أيضاً المدرسين استبانات متعلقة بمقياس لاكيرت وأسئلة غير مقيدة للإجابة عنها. واستأنس أيضاً بأقوال أحد عشر خبيراً في هذه القضية. وإلى جانب ذلك تم تقويم أداء الطلاب خلال السنة الدراسية لاستيفاء متطلبات الدراسة. وكان من نتائج الدراسة أن قدرة الطلاب على القراءة منخفضة، فضلاً عن ذلك فإن نمط القراءة كان على مستوى متوسط. ولا يوجد أيضاً اهتمام بالقراءة في معظم الأسر التي جاء منها هؤلاء الطلاب. ومع ذلك كان مما يدعو للتفاؤل أن كلا من الطلاب والأساتذة شعروا بأن إيجاد بيئة صالحة للقراءة الإنجليزية أمر غير معذر لدى الآباء والأمهات.

APPROVAL PAGE

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degree at IIUM or other institutions.

Mohd Nazri Latiff Azmi

Signature..........

Date 13/5/2010.....

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**ENGLISH LANGUAGE READING CULTURE AMONG
PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN TERENGGANU**

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

For the past nine consecutive years, Terengganu which is known as one of the less developed states in Malaysia has scored outstanding results in the Primary School Assessment Test (known as UPSR). The results of the English paper have constantly improved year by year. What is the secret of this impressive result especially in the English paper? As reading is the key of learning, has an English reading environment contribute to this excellent result? Does an English reading culture exist among primary school students in Terengganu?

Reading is an important component of learning. It is also one of the fundamental skills upon which all formal education depends. Studies conducted by prominent international and national bodies (the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the USA, 2005, International Reading Association, the USA, 2005, and National Library of Malaysia, 2004) show that a child who does not learn the basics of reading early in life, is unlikely to learn them at all. Any child who does not learn to read early and well will not easily master other skills and knowledge and is unlikely to ever flourish in school or in life (Robb, 2000).

The value of education, in general, is associated with the experiences of the child, the importance of education in the home environment and the relevance of reading to the child's personal development. Children often inherit values presented to them in their environment. If reading is neither considered a valuable asset, nor has any connection with the child's world, it may not be a priority for the child.

According to the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (2001)

reading literacy is defined as:

The ability to understand and use those written language forms required by society and/or valued by the individual. Young readers can construct meaning from a variety of texts. They read to learn, to participate in communities of readers, and for enjoyment (Campbell et al., 2006:3).

In Malaysia, the objective of English literacy covers the use of English in written and spoken forms, understanding various types of texts and appreciating the aesthetic element of the language (Hazita, 2004). According to her, all major races of Malaysia namely the Malays, Chinese and Indians, have accepted the importance of English literacy and its hugely positive effect on their future career.

Students who read a great deal have also benefitted more in terms of language. Significant research studies in 2003 by Robert E. Slavin of John Hopkins University and Alan Cheung of Success for All Foundation on Effective Reading Programs for English Learners report that when students become better and more confident readers, they write better, listen and speak more ably and have greater control over the use of a range of words. Moreover, they develop positive attitude toward learning and are motivated to study the new language.

The most significant factor in determining the preparation of a child to read is his or her readiness to read. Reading readiness is determined by the child's self-concept, his or her value of education, physiological and psychological maturity, and a desire to discover reading (Yoko, 1999; Tabors, 2002). A child's self-concept governs the ability to relate to success, and predict how well he or she will perform a task in his / her reading performance (Sharon, 1974; Swan, 1997). When children believe that they can accomplish a task, they are more likely to engage in the task, and when faced

with challenges, they are more likely to continue working on it until they ultimately complete the task (Wigeld, 1997; Bandura, 1977; Young, 2006).

Davis (1995) suggested that the English as second or foreign language learners' classroom "will be the poorer for the lack of an extensive reading programme of some kind, and will be unable to promote its pupils' language development in all aspects as effectively as if such a programme were present" (p. 335). Clearly, this substantiates the fact that reading is important for the teaching and learning of all languages.

According to Pandian (2001), the use of the conventional approaches to teaching reading such as by mastering dictionary skills, skimming and scanning and other related skills as well as knowledge that students transfer from their first language are not sufficient. Implementing technologies for instances using audio visual aids and ICT would enrich vocabulary skills, improve reading comprehension and rating, and enable them to monitor their own improvement. He suggested that some of the latest approaches are non-risky and that teachers should consider these in preparing for a second language or an English language reading class or any other related subjects. Based on accumulated research knowledge, Pandian (2003) highlighted that, for the student, learning to read in a second or foreign language is a process that involves learning skills, learning new vocabulary and collocative patterns, and cultivating the ability to transfer these skills from the classroom to the real world, where English may be utilized. Therefore, the use of technologies is highly recommended.

Reading is also regarded as the process of constructing meaning through the dynamic interaction of the reader's existing knowledge, the information suggested by the written language, and the context of the reading situation (U.S. Department of

Education (2002)). According to Davies (1995), “reading is an act of creation... The meaning... emerges anew in each encounter of a reader with the text” (p.260).

In each reading situation, “the reader needs to possess two kinds of knowledge which are the knowledge of the language,” which Gardner (1987:17) calls the formal knowledge and “the knowledge of the substance, or the content information.” In other words, Gardner agrees that one needs the ability to understand the print as well as be willing to put in effort to connect all the information to his or her reading.

Reading is also a very complex process that presents many challenges to young learners learning to read in their native language, and even more challenges to young second language learners (Adams, 1990). Pandian (2007) added that not only is reading one of the most important processes that children must master to manage information in the modern world, but also that the early development and acquisition of skills critical to reading is essential to children’s long term success.

Over the decades, scholars debated the advantages and disadvantages of differing approaches used to teach children how to read (Adams, 1990). According to Kamhi-Stein (1998), many researchers believe that the actual process of reading is identical regardless of language. The proponents of this belief maintain that first language reading strategies will automatically transfer to the second language reading process. This position has been gradually subjected to some criticism and a renewed interest in the critical role of language proficiency emerged in the 1980s. Currently, there seems to be a general agreement among researchers that language proficiency plays a critical role in reading comprehension. Gibbons (2002) claims, “reading requires a relatively high degree of grammatical control over structures that appear in whatever reading materials are given to second language students” (p.226).

Most relevant current researches (Anderson 2003, Bialystok 2002, Pandian 1999) concentrate on investigating the reasons as to why proficient first-language readers often experience difficulties in reading in a second language. Researchers have observed that students reading in a foreign language often do not understand the meaning of what is read. These students also read at a slower rate, and experience a great deal of difficulty during the reading process (Alderson, 1984).

In Malaysia, although starting from kindergarten students are exposed to various reading strategies, such as whole-word-reading and phonemic reading, the question of whether the students are able to cultivate reading as a culture is still to be ascertained (Razali, 2001). Basically, it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of reading based on written examinations which do not really encourage students to read extensively. This is because reading readiness and motivation to read develops slowly and is impacted by many factors (Fatimah, 2002).

Even though since 1970 all public universities use Bahasa Malaysia as the medium of instruction, English has remained an important second language in the education system (David and Govindasamy, 2003). This is because plenty of reference books are in English and major educational functions or conferences are held in English. Therefore, English has become a subject of study in all institutions of higher learning institutions; this is mainly to ensure that university students are competent in English. Given the above aspiration, Malaysian students are expected to show a high level of proficiency. However, successful second-language learning is dependent on the complicated interaction of individual and group learner characteristics and motivations. It also depends on the individual strategies used by the language learner and the conditions in which the learning takes place (Pandian, 2007).

Furthermore, the importance given to English in the schools in the country should have been translated into high proficiency in the language. Given these circumstances, to what extent are Malaysians, particularly students proficient in English? This study explores students' ability in one major skill area, which is reading. The study also examines the prevailing reading culture as perceived by students, teachers and scholars. The value of this study is in its ability to capture the English language reading culture in Malaysia and provide the impetus for overcoming deficiencies, if any exist.

1.2 ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN MALAYSIA

During the British era, English was taught and used at English-medium schools. Only the urban schools had the opportunity to implement the use of the language due to economic and social factors. Vernacular schools (using medium such as Chinese and Tamil) alongside Malay schools flourished in the rural areas. After independence, this scenario changed. Malay assumed greater prominence in education particularly after 1967. All English schools were converted into Malay-medium institutions. This conversion was done in stages and these schools were subsequently classified as national schools (David and Govindasamy, 2003).

With the implementation of Malay as the sole medium of instruction in national schools, English was taught as merely a subject. Two decades later, when the government realized that there were some general decline in students' competency in English, various measures were taken. This included the introduction of Self-Access-Learning Centres (SAL), Extensive Reading Programmes, Class Reader Programmes, English Hours, Children's Contemporary Literature Programme, and the introduction of a literature component in the English syllabus, the imposing of Malaysian

University English Test (MUET) for pre-universities and matriculation centres, and finally the teaching of Mathematics and Science in English in 2003. However, in July 2009, the Malaysian Cabinet decided that the medium of instruction for Mathematics and Science will revert to Bahasa Malaysia in national schools and to mother-tongue languages in national-type schools from 2012 onwards (New Straits Times, July 9, 2009). The reversal of the teaching of Mathematics and Science in English (PPSMI) will be done in stages. The Education Minister added that there will be greater emphasis on learning the English language where English literature will be re-introduced, as will grammar and composition. According to him, “The gap between rural and urban students has widened since PPSMI started, and only 19.2% of secondary teachers and 9.96% of primary teachers were sufficiently proficient in English,” (News Straits Times, July 9, 2009). In an effort to emphasize the learning of English, the number of English teachers would be increased by 13,933 and retirees would be hired, as well as native speakers if need be. At the same time, primary schools will also increase time allocation for English classes by 90 minutes a week. The outcome of the reversal of the PPSMI and the latest measures to improve the performance of English among school students can only be seen in the years to come.

1.3 READING CULTURE

From a learning perspective, ‘culture’ means the development of the mind especially by education through a socially transmitted pattern of human communication that includes thought, speech, action, institutions and artifacts. Therefore, reading culture deals with the attitudes that have become habits due to many related factors (Stahl, 2001). According to Stahl, language is inseparable from culture and in order to communicate effectively in an authentic cultural context, students must be aware of