

Exploring the Reading Habits of Primary ESL Teachers in SJKC Regarding Reading in English

James Ngu Ming Zhi

Institute of Teacher Training Ilmu Khas Campus

May 2021

Abstract

Reading is considered by many to be a very important skill among four macro skills for English as a second language and is highlighted in Malaysia Standard Curriculum for Primary School (KSSR) and English language curriculum in Malaysia. However, poor reading habits among Malaysian students especially in English remained a pressing issue in Malaysia. As teachers are role models for students, their reading habits play an important role in encouraging pupils' reading in English. The aim of this research is to explore the reading habits in English of primary ESL teachers in a National-type Chinese primary school (SJKC). This study focuses on the patterns of reading habits in English of four primary ESL teachers as well as the manifestation of their reading habits in their teaching and learning. The research instruments consist of qualitative survey and one-to-one interviews. The findings reveal that the primary ESL teachers perceived good reading habits in English and the manifestation of their reading habits vary. This study identified four emerging categories of the manifestation of primary ESL teachers' reading habits in English which are teaching and learning activities, selection of English reading materials, reading encouragement, and reading programmes. The findings inform that teachers who are avid readers and acquire good reading habits in English are able to cultivate good reading habits in English among their pupils.

Keywords: ESL teachers, reading habits in English

Introduction

Reading is considered by many to be a very important skill among the four macro skills for English as a second language and is highlighted in Malaysian Standard Curriculum for Primary School (KSSR) and English language curriculum in Malaysia (*Dokumen Standard Kurikulum Dan Pentaksiran*, 2015; Malaysia Education Blueprint, 2013; Tharumaraj & Noordin, 2011). (Tharumaraj & Noordin, 2011) Besides emphasizing English reading in the curriculum,

Exploring the Reading Habits of Primary ESL Teachers in SJKC Regarding Reading in English

policymakers in Malaysia also sought to inculcate good reading habits among Malaysian. For instance, the Reading Promotion Policy was initiated to implement the objective of the National Library of Malaysia which is to promote and facilitate the development of reading habits (Mohd Nazri Latiff Azmi, 2013). Moreover, the Ministry of Education (MOE) Malaysia also conducted several reading promotion programmes including 'First Step Reading Module' and '10-year National Reading Decade (DMK) 2021-2030' (Azura Abas, 2018; Mohd Nazri Latiff Azmi, 2013) with the hope to turn Malaysia into a Reading Nation.

Problem Statement

It was reported that Malaysians only keen on reading books that are related to their work field or the light genre such as newspapers and spend their spare time surfing the Internet and watching TV than reading. (as cited in Manyin, 2017; Mustafa, 2018). As teachers are role models for students, their reading habits play an important role in encouraging pupils' reading in English. This is also supported by Campbell's (1989) study where children spent more time reading if the teacher also read. However, many teachers do not make reading a priority, especially during their leisure time (Nathanson et al., 2008). There was a need to find out the reading habits among the primary ESL teachers particularly in reading in L2 (English) were directly or indirectly displayed in their teaching and learning of English.

Objectives and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to explore the reading habits in English of primary ESL teachers in a National-type Chinese primary school (SJKC) and how the primary ESL teachers' reading habits in English were manifested in their teaching and learning.

The study seeks to answer these research questions:

1. What are the reading habits of primary ESL teachers in SJKC regarding reading in English?
2. How are the primary ESL teachers' reading habits in English manifested in their teaching and learning?

Methodology

A generic qualitative approach was used in this study as the research design. It enables the researcher to discover and understand the central phenomenon of the study which is the reading habits in English of primary ESL teachers. Purposeful sampling will be utilized in this study whereby four primary ESL teachers from a SJKC in Kuala Lumpur were selected as the participants to provide rich data for the study.

Exploring the Reading Habits of Primary ESL Teachers in SJKC Regarding Reading in English

Qualitative survey was used as one of the research instruments to explore the reading habits in English of primary ESK teachers. It was administered to the participants and returned completed. Yes/ no questions were analyzed using frequency count and tabulation of data whereas Likert-type items were analyzed using ranking. Next, one-to-one interview was also utilized. Each participant was interviewed, and the interviews were transcribed verbatim. Then, the researcher analyzed the data through “coding, describing and developing descriptions and themes” as proposed by (Creswell, 2014).

Findings and Discussion

The findings revealed that all participants possess good reading habits. This can be demonstrated by their time spent reading in English as all of them spent at least one to three hours reading in English a week. Besides, most participants indicated that their English reading is sufficient for them as a primary ESL teacher. Based on Table 1, it was also found that the participants prefer to read reading materials in English which ranged from academic, fiction, non-fiction, magazine, newspaper, website, and online reading materials. This is important as teachers need to read a variety of reading materials to be the prime source for students in cultivating their reading habits (Jose & Dharma, 2011).

Table 1: Genre and Language Preferences of Participants in Reading

Genre Preferences	Language Preferences			
	English	Malay	Mandarin	Others
Academic	4	1	2	0
Fiction	4	1	2	1
Non-fiction	4	1	2	1
Magazine	3	0	1	0
Newspaper	4	0	2	0
Website	4	1	1	0
Online reading materials	3	1	0	0

The findings from the questionnaire indicated three main purposes of reading in English during their spare time. First, participants read in English for pleasure. In this study, Teacher 3

Exploring the Reading Habits of Primary ESL Teachers in SJKC Regarding Reading in English

indicated reading for pleasure enables her to relax and destress. This coincides with Ramsay (2018) and Chiles (2009) study that developing the habit of reading for pleasure enables readers to calm the mind, relax, and reduce stress levels. Second, participants read to obtain general information. This is important as teachers will be able to transfer their general knowledge in enhancing pupils' competence in the tasks of life (Hirsch, 2010). Third, participants also read for academic purposes. This is because reading for academic purposes enable teachers to prepare for teaching and write their lesson notes, acquire knowledge, develop language skills and creative thinking skills (Dogan, 2014; Sangkaeo, 1999).

The researcher used Ismail & Elias (2009) suggestions to describe the dimensions of reading attitudes and habits in English of the participants. It was found that participants belong to 'the avid readers' dimension' and 'reading in English for study-related needs dimension'. As participants belong to 'the avid readers' dimension', this indicated that they perceive reading in English as part of their hobby. For instance, they indicated that reading in English is enjoyable and relaxing. The 'reading in English for study-related needs dimension' indicated that participants are aware of the importance of reading in English for their study-related needs. Therefore, they indicated that reading in English enhances their study-related knowledge and skills which leads to competency in their study.

Four emerging patterns of manifestations of the primary ESL teachers' reading habits in English in their teaching and learning were identified. One of the manifestations is teaching and learning activities including reading aloud in English, spelling activities, picture search activities, and reading comprehension activities.

Excerpt 1

It is still one of the best reading strategies because without letting the students read aloud, we do not know whether they truly know how to pronounce the words.

Line 314 - 315

Interview Session 2, Teacher 2

Based on Excerpt 1, participants indicated that reading aloud is one of the best reading strategies to determine students' ability to pronounce the word correctly. This is agreed by Huang (2010) that reading aloud is a very good pronunciation practice as it focuses on the pronunciation of the words as well as stress intonation and rhythm.

Exploring the Reading Habits of Primary ESL Teachers in SJKC Regarding Reading in English

Next, the selection of English reading materials was also one of the manifestations which include videos, E-books, stories and graphic novels.

Excerpt 2

I have actually found out Vooks, animated storybooks library.

I will carry out the spelling activities in quiz form. I will design a series of activities for them.

Line 144, 151

Interview Session 3, Teacher 3

Excerpt 2 indicated that Teacher 3 selected E-books and designed a series of activities based on E-books. Research findings also revealed that students showed excitement by having access to the e-book world (Soan et al., 2019). Therefore, the excitement of pupils may encourage them to ignite reading habits in English.

Reading encouragement was also one of the manifestations identified. Participants used reward system, shared their favourite English reading materials, and set up realistic goals to encourage pupils to read in English.

Excerpt 3

I do promote titles that might interest them. For example, Harry Potter.

Line 129

Interview Session 2, Teacher 2

Excerpt 3 indicated that participants shared their favourite English reading materials to encourage pupils to read in English. This is crucial as teachers who read themselves and share their loves of books in the primary classroom can encourage children to read more (Bowers & Davis, 2013). Hassen (2016) also stated that if the culture of showcasing the reading materials that teachers enjoy reading in the school, pupils will be cultivated with good reading habits.

The fourth manifestation was reading programmes which include NILAM programme, floating book boxes programme, air broadcasting and reading corner.

Excerpt 4

We work closely with school library, so pupils have to complete their NILAM report after reading a book. So, when they have hit a target, the school will reward them with gifts.

Excerpt 4 indicated NILAM programme is carried out in the school by integrating with reward system to promote the reading habits among the pupils. This is supported by Zin (2008) that school are encouraged to integrate the NILAM programme with other activities as it encourages students to read.

Conclusion, Recommendations, and Implications

Among the recommendations for future study are the same study should be carried out with primary ESL teachers from Malay-medium National Schools (SK) and National-type Tamil primary schools (SJKT). Next, researchers should conduct the study for longer periods. Moreover, researchers should investigate the reading habits of primary ESL students to indicate whether the primary ESL teachers' reading habits in English influence their pupils' reading habit.

This study has several implications in encouraging pupils' reading in English. First, primary ESL teachers who are avid readers are able to use more suitable literacy practices in their teaching and learning to foster good reading habits in English among the pupils. Second, MOE should reduce teachers' workload so that they can concentrate on their teaching and learning tasks and spend their time reading for the materials that are useful to enhance their teaching and learning practices. Besides, MOE should reduce the number of students in a class so that pupils are effectively encouraged to read in English.

In conclusion, teachers who are avid readers and acquired good reading habits in English displayed a wide knowledge in their literacy practices which leads to the development of good reading habits in English among their pupils.

References

- Azura Abas. (2018, December 13). Malaysia pushes reading nation aspiration under National Reading Decade programme. *New Straits Times*.
<https://www.nst.com.my/news/government-public-policy/2018/12/440330/msia-pushes-reading-nation-aspiration-under-national>
- Bowers, J., & Davis, S. (2013). *Why teachers should read more children's books*. The Guardian.
<https://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/teacher-blog/2013/jul/25/teachers-read->

Exploring the Reading Habits of Primary ESL Teachers in SJKC Regarding Reading in English

- Mohd Nazri Latiff Azmi. (2013). National Language Policy and its impacts on second language reading culture. *Journal of International Education and Leadership*, 3(1), 1–11. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/National-Language-Policy-and-Its-Impacts-on-Second-Azmi/e6775413ae08a0eaef033c44f0805f9c1025be60>
- Mustafa, Z. (2018, July 25). Boosting the reading habit. *New Straits Times*. <https://www.nst.com.my/education/2018/07/394232/boosting-reading-habit>
- Nathanson, S., Pruslow, J., & Levitt, R. (2008). The reading habits and literacy attitudes of inservice and prospective teachers: Results of a questionnaire survey. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 59(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487108321685>
- Ramsay, M. (2018). *Reading for pleasure and well being during Youth Week*. National Library Blog. <https://natlib.govt.nz/blog/posts/reading-for-pleasure-and-well-being-during-youth-week-19-27-may>
- Sangkaeo, S. (1999). *Reading habit promotion in ASEAN libraries*. 65th IFLA Council and General Conference Bangkok, Thailand, August 20 - August 28, 1999. <https://archive.ifla.org/IV/ifla65/papers/091-114e.htm>
- Soan, T., Maknun, J., & Herman, N. D. (2019). E-Books in teaching and learning process. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, 299, 281–287. <https://doi.org/10.2991/ictvet-18.2019.64>
- Tharumaraj, J. N., & Noordin, N. (2011). Analysing teachers' reading habits and teaching strategies for reading skills. *Malaysian Journal of ELT Research*, 7(1), 203–245.
- Zin, S. H. M. (2008). *The role of NILAM programme in motivating primary school students to instill reading habit: A case study*. Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.