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FACTORS THAT MOTIVATE PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS TO READ
EXTENSIVELY IN ENGLISH IN THE RURAL AREAS

NOOR AZLEN BINTI SALLEH

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the award of the degree of
Master of Education (TESL)

Faculty of Education
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

MARCH 2008
"I declare that this thesis entitled "Factors That Motivate Primary School Students to Read Extensively in English in the Rural Areas" is the result of my own research except as cited in the references. The thesis has not been accepted for any degree and is not concurrently submitted in candidature of any degree."

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Name       : NOOR AZLEN BINTI SALLEH
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For my beloved “other half”.
None of this would have happened without your patience, your understanding, your wise counsel and most of all, your friendship.
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ABSTRAK

This study seeks out the factors that motivate the primary school students in the rural areas to read extensively in English. The expectancy-value model proposed by Day and Bamford (1998) was utilised in this study for this purpose. In addition, this study also aims to investigate the students’ perceptions as well as the teachers’ perceptions towards reading extensively in English. This study involved 313 students (year 5 and year 6) and nine teachers from three primary schools that were located in three different districts in Johor. Questionnaires investigating the students’ motivation towards reading in English as well as investigating the students’ and the teachers’ perceptions were administered to all the participants. Questionnaire data were analysed using factor analysis to determine the factors that motivate the students to read extensively in English. The data to determine the students’ and teachers’ perceptions were analysed and presented in frequency distribution. In addition to the questionnaire used as the primary research instrument, interview sessions were also conducted with six students and six teachers from the primary schools. The findings from the factor analysis found that the expectation of the English materials emerged as the strong factor in influencing a student to decide to read in English. The findings from the frequency distribution as well as the interview found that many of the students and teachers expressed favourable attitudes towards reading extensively in English.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Many language professionals acknowledge that motivation may be one of the key predictors of success in second/foreign language learning. As a result, a great deal of studies had been carried out in order to investigate what constitute motivation and how it functions. Although there are discrepancies among researchers regarding exactly what encompasses motivation, existing research reports in motivation suggest that motivation is a multi-faceted, complex construct comprises of various sub-constructs. In the field of second language acquisition (SLA), many research studies had been done as well to investigate second language (L2) learning motivation ever since Gardner and Lambert first shed light on the role of attitudes and motivation in SLA (Gardner & Lambert, 1959), which include a large number of studies on L1 reading motivation of children in the fields of educational psychology and reading education (Wigfield, 1997; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997).

It is believed that if a child’s reading motivation is high, the amount and breadth of reading increases (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997) and if the amount and breadth of reading increases, a child will achieve more academically (Anderson, Wilson & Fielding, 1998). Thus, it is possible to say that motivation is one of the main determinants of L1 reading achievement. Most education systems worldwide
have emphasised a high level of reading and a love of reading as important educational objectives (Elley, 1994). Nevertheless, the lack of reading habit in capable readers (Harris & Hedges, 1995) has been a serious concern for school students in many countries, including Malaysia. In that case, how do we motivate the students to read in English when generally they simply do not read, let alone reading for pleasure during their leisure time, as motivation is one of the key factors that determine the rate and success of L2 attainment (Ellis & McRae, 1991). Motivation provides the main incentive to initiate reading in English and later the determination to persevere and sustain the practice. Without sufficient motivation, even individuals with the best abilities cannot accomplish long-term goals.

In the rural school situations particularly, students’ motivation to read might have a crucial influence on their reading achievement. However, little research has been conducted in the field of L2 reading motivation among primary school students particularly in the rural settings in Malaysia. Thus, there is a need to examine what components of motivation are most closely related to these students’ reading behaviour. Ambigapathy (2001, p.2) refers reading behaviour as “ability and willingness to read for information and leisure as well as reading practices that engage different print and audio-visual contents”. In this study, the researcher will investigate the construct of primary school students’ L2 reading motivation in the rural areas by using expectancy-value model proposed by Day & Bamford (1998).

If we wish to see our students’ transformation in their current reading habit, more attention should be placed on extensive reading which is viewed as a valuable source of input. Research suggests that one of the best ways to help students increase their language proficiency is to encourage them to read extensively (Ratnawati & Ismail, 2003). This is because the language is not only presented in the context of grammatical items, instead, interesting reading texts are presented that will challenge and interest students enough so that they will be drawn into negotiation for meaning without conscious attention given to the surface structure, as eliciting meaning is the central focus of language learning (Krashen, 1985). As a result, teachers should put
more effort and emphasis in organising reading programme particularly in choosing suitable materials to encourage and sustain students’ interest in the language.

Extensive reading or pleasure reading has the potential to help English language learners become better readers and make improvements in other aspects of their English skills. This is because in extensive reading, English language learners read for information and enjoyment, with the primary goal of achieving a general, overall understanding of the reading material. Over time students are also encouraged to expand their reading comfort zone, which mean the range of materials that they can read easily and with confidence will increase eventually. Extensive reading has been gaining popularity in the second and foreign language curriculum all over the world for its effectiveness in promoting favourable attitudes toward the target language (Cho and Krashen, 1994; Day and Bamford, 2000; Elley, 1991; Elley and Mangubhai, 1981; Hafiz and Tudor, 1989; Mason and Krashen, 1997; Robb and Susser, 1989).

1.1 Background of the Study

One of the most frequently cited models of second language learning motivation is probably the socio-educational oriented work proposed by Gardner and his associates (e.g. Gardner, 1985, 1988, 1996; Gardner and Lambert, 1959; Gardner and Smythe, 1975; Gardner and MacIntyre, 1991, 1993). Realising the importance of socio-psychological aspects of second language acquisition, Gardner’s socio-educational model of language learning includes integrative motivation as a key construct, and attempts to measure it together with other motivational constructs such as instrumental orientation using a standardised motivation assessment instrument called the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB). The results of Gardner and his associates’ work repeatedly suggest a strong correlation between integrative motivation and achievement (Gardner, 1979, 1985, 1988; Gardner and Lambert,
1959) and between integrative motivation and motivational behaviour (Gardner, 1985).

Most of the existing works, however, focus on students’ motivation to communicate or interact with people in the target language cultures. Therefore, many of their findings may not be directly applicable to students in Malaysian contexts particularly those who live in rural areas where they have very limited contact (or none at all) with the target communities. Furthermore, students with limited opportunities to use the language inevitably have to rely on written texts as a major source of input. In addition, the gap in the proficiency of English between students from urban and rural areas is miserably noticeable. This is because unlike urban school students, those from rural areas study English in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, as there is limited exposure to English outside of the classroom. Because of this inadequacy for them to practice English once they leave the classroom at the end of the day, in addition to very limited resources available to them, they become ignorance to the fact of how English is imperative in their future lives. As such, this study wishes to examine motivation to read in English among primary school children as there were not many studies involving primary school students as the subjects of research in previous studies in Malaysia. In addition, location also plays a part in exploring its relation to students’ attitude in second language reading, so this study employs rural setting in its design in the attempt to investigate how certain variables can be the predictors of students’ motivation to read in English.

Reading is a primary goal of learning English and the most important of the four skills in a second language (Takase, 2003). As for many English teachers, promoting reading to their students is an important issue. It is widely recommended that the endeavour of developing reading habit has to start at an early part of one’s life and that there should be a conducive reading environment to stimulate lifelong reading (Ambigapathy, 1997; Sanacore, 1990). If our students are not motivated to acquire the language, how can we motivate them to read? According to Feather (cited in Day & Bamford, 1998), motivation has two equal components, which are
expectations and value. The gist of these expectancy + value model is that people do what they expect to accomplish successfully and tend to avoid what they expect they cannot accomplish. This is balanced by people who have the tendency to undertake tasks that they value, and tending to avoid those things that have little value for them, even though they reasonably expect that they could do them.

Hence, to relate expectancy-value model with reading or specifically extensive reading, Bamford and Day (1998: 27-28) suggested that “unless students have a reasonable expectation that they will be able to read a book with understanding, they will most likely not begin to embark on reading”. But, expectation of success or failure is only half of the picture because “if students place a high premium on reading, believing it to be of value in learning to read and a source of pleasure and information, they may consequently try to read even the difficult ones because they value the result of the effort”. In such cases, the value attached to the act of reading might outweigh the expectation that they will have a hard time reading. This is what this study is trying to seek by compiling subjects’ own expectancy and value on reading extensively in English, as this is the point of departure in deciding whether extensive reading will succeed in its contribution to our education system. In the SLA field, Day and Bamford (1998) proposed a L2 reading motivation model in their books entitled “Extensive Reading in the Second Language Classroom”, which is also based on expectancy-value theory. Their model includes four major variables that influence an individual to decide to read in the L2, which are an individual’s (i) expectation of the L2 materials, (ii) expectation of his/her reading ability in the L2, (iii) value of his/her attitudes toward reading in the L2, and (iv) value of the sociocultural environment influence, including influence of parents and friends. Among these four variables, “materials in the L2” and “attitudes toward reading in the L2” are considered to be the primary variables (the strongest influence to motivate an individual to read), thus the lack of access to the appropriate materials or a negative attitude would result in lowered degrees of motivation to read in the L2. Although this model is designed to apply to L2 reading contexts, it is currently unsupported by empirical evidence (Nishino, 2005; Mori, 2002), which prompts the researcher to verify the model, especially in Malaysian context.
This is why an extensive reading programme with the primary focus on reading for pleasure would be particularly helpful in Malaysia, where students find it embarrassing to speak English before they feel confident in their use of lexis and syntax (Hill, 1997). This is because extensive reading outside the school would “provide students with an excellent opportunity to practice in private” and thus “improve their lexical-syntactical knowledge”, which would have a knock-on effect on their overall ability and understanding, which would in turn “help boost their confidence and foment a more positive attitude” (Hill, 1997; p.81). There are several reasons why it is beneficial to encourage students to read extensively. Studies show that when students read extensively, they do not only improve their reading fluency, but also build new vocabulary knowledge and expand their understanding of words they knew before (Ono et. al, 2004). Additionally, extensive reading can help students to write better as well as to improve their listening and speaking abilities, and perhaps the best result is that students develop positive attitudes toward reading in English and eventually their motivation to learn the language will increase as well.

In this study, given the Malaysian rural school context in learning English and the facilities available to the students, it is anticipated that a reading program such as Nadi Ilmu Amalan Membaca (NILAM) which is currently being put into practice in primary and secondary schools, requires a great deal of support from various parties, specifically from school administrators, language teachers and parents to make it work. This study is not intended to evaluate NILAM explicitly in its context as a successful extensive programme. Instead, this study is intended to find out how students in Malaysian rural schools responded to a program on extensive reading, especially the students’ attitudes towards reading in English (their expectation and value in reading in English), what motivates them to pick up and read English materials, the difficulties they had in reading in English and their perceptions on extensive reading. The focus is on the students themselves, not the NILAM programme. Since they have the experience in NILAM programme, it is anticipated that they will not have difficulties in participating in this study. In addition, it is also important to look into the teachers’ perceptions on extensive reading as they are the role models in reading and responsible in guiding the students to reading extensively inside and outside the classroom. Optimistically, the result
will be a foundation for us to see whether students from the rural areas and English teachers are well prepared for an extensive reading programme to be implemented as part of the existing curriculum and whether extensive reading is able to increase the students’ favourable attitudes toward reading in English.

As the method of finding out the participants’ expectation and value towards reading in English, questionnaire using five-point Likert scales was used as the prime instrument. 331 primary school students and 9 teachers from three schools located in the rural areas in Johor were selected for this study. As quantitative data alone is insufficient to come to a conclusion of the study, the other instrument utilised was interview that acts as the cross reference to the affirmation of the findings from the survey. It is anticipated that the overall results will lead us to a decision in confirming extensive reading as the finest approach in motivating rural school students to read extensively in English.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

According to the Report of the Malaysian Quality of Life in 2002, published by the Economic Planning Unit, the literacy rate of Malaysians aged 10 years and above up to the year 2002 is 93.8%, which is an increase of 0.8% from the findings of a literacy survey conducted by National Library in 1996. Although the figure is considered high for literacy rate or ‘ability to read’, the survey revealed that the actual reading practice of Malaysian is 87%. The survey also revealed that Malaysians read an average of 2 books a year. This is an improvement compared to an earlier survey conducted in 1982 which revealed that an average Malaysian reads a mere one page or two pages a year. Sadly, a 2005 National Library study which was carried out by the National Statistics Department reported that more than half of the 60,441 Malaysians surveyed read less than 7 pages a day (Malay Mail, August 27, 2006). Surprisingly, those 10 years and above still read about 2 books a year. The
survey revealed that reading is not even a favourite past time of Malaysians as most prefer to watch television and video. The reading habit looks to be a thing of the past as the survey also unearthed the trend among the young who read only to acquire knowledge, understandably mostly happened at schools. It is unfortunate that too many Malaysians seem to take a rather laidback attitude in reading. If the focus of the survey is on English materials alone, the figure is believed to be even lower.

Consequently, public attention has been drawn to the growing problem of non-reading among Malaysians, specifically among the students. Questions have been raised with regard to the readership behaviour among school students. In a general Malaysian scenario, students learning to read in English do not like reading and they rarely read. The deficiency in reading habit is indeed a widely recognised problem faced by learners throughout the ESL/EFL world, which is associated with the lack of motivation to read extensively in English. This has often been linked with classroom methodology in reading lessons, particularly where such lessons focus on language development rather than reading per se. A number of specialists have commented on a common practice in intensive reading lessons, where texts are often treated as vehicles for the presentation, practice, manipulation and consolidation of language points, rather than the encouragement of reading itself (Nuttall, 1982; Alderson & Urquhart, 1984; Susser & Robb, 1990). There are several obstacles to students’ potential enthusiasm for reading. Students are genuinely pressed for time to complete their reading, especially if they are involved in classroom reading activities. Some students avoid reading because they find the task very difficult, time-consuming and unrewarding and some remain reluctant to read, no matter what materials are being offered or which instructional strategies are being employed.

Typically, English teachers are the ones responsible in selecting the texts during classroom reading activity, which mean the students have no liberty to make their own decision in selecting what to read. The reading is most often taught by close study of short passages followed by analysis of the language, which is famously known as intensive reading. The value of this intensive reading procedure with its focus on the teaching of discrete reading skills has been questioned by some
who claim that teaching students reading strategies does not necessarily make them better readers (Takase, 2003). Consequently, the lesson becomes dull and boring which in turn makes the students become de-motivated to read in English as they had the first hand of dull classroom environment. It is widely believed that people who become good readers through reading have their focus of attention on the meaning rather than the language of the text. In fact, exposure to the richness of real English which can only be found by reading a huge number of books other than the selected texts chosen by teachers, will develop language awareness, language competence and passive vocabulary assimilation (Ellis & McRae, 1991). Moreover, in intensive reading there are little chances to learn the patterns in English and readers will not be able to read at his/her own level of reading ability because all the students read the same material. This is not to say that intensive reading is necessarily bad, only that it is limited by what it tries to do as a result of the type of texts used and tasks involved. What students need in addition to this kind of reading (including exam-oriented) is fluency practice through extensive reading or pleasure reading.

For most of the time, students in Malaysia have often associated reading with academic tasks and not for knowledge or pleasure. Subsequently, it has been a persistent problem by many English teachers in the attempt to sustain genuine interest among their students in continuing to read in English once the examinations are over or when they leave school. The greatest concern of most teachers in Malaysia is on how to motivate their students to read in English. How do we spark off their interest to read when English is not seen as important for their immediate needs other than to pass school examinations? How do teachers create a healthy balance between preparing students for the standardised examinations and for life-long language skills? Even NILAM seems to receive a cold shoulder from many schools (Utusan Melayu, March 26, 2002). A study was conducted in 2004 by the Education Technology Department (ETD) with aim to examine the extent of achievement of the NILAM Reading Programme. The study indicated that after six years of its implementation for Standard 6 primary school students and four years for the Form 4 secondary students, the number of books read is considerably low in volume. It was recognised that the students participated in the study generally did not interest to take part in any of the reading activities due to their attentiveness and
priority in academic performance only. Therefore, it is significant to know why students seem to be de-motivated to read extensively and why succeeding in examinations becomes such an important goal that it often replaces students’ original goal of acquiring the language. There is a need to figure out why students do not have the desire to pick up reading habit especially in the English language. Thus, by knowing what motivates an individual in the decision to read in English can be a major finding in using the right approach in encouraging students to read extensively in English, hence becomes a fundamental revelation in the current education system.

One of the major problems that caused students to be de-motivated to read extensively is the classroom reading that usually employs long and boring texts in English lesson. Williams (1984, p.54) feels that a starting point for motivating students to read is “to discover their wants, needs and interests” and thereby we can “select texts that satisfy these interests”. Other than that, a typical ESL classroom in Malaysian schools is of mixed ability. Consequently, it becomes a problem for textbook writers to decide at which level of proficiency to pitch their materials. If we only cater to the average students, the handful of high flyers would find the textbooks too simple and therefore, boring, while at the other end, the low achievers would find themselves struggling to cope with the texts. Day and Bamford (1998; pp.27-29) believe that “for students to be motivated to read more and study more, they must be reading texts that reflect their language ability” which means “texts they find easy and enjoyable at every step of the way”. They further suggest that for the purposes of developing reading fluency and confidence, L2 students need to read interesting, understandable materials that are basically at the $i$ minus 1 level, that is, below their linguistic ability.

Low-level reading abilities would normally lower expectations of success, and thus lower the motivation to read (Day & Bamford, 1998). It is important to explore how students come to have conceptions of their reading ability and the impact it has on students’ motivation. In the minds of many students, self-esteem becomes equated with achievement in school. Hence, to be valued, one must do well in school. Under