



READING in MALAYSIA

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Contents

Preface ... 7

Chapter 1 Introduction ... 9

Chapter 2 Review of Related Literature ... 17

Chapter 3 Design of the Study ... 40

Chapter 4 Reading Habits in English ... 59

Chapter 5 Reading Habits in Malay ... 82

Chapter 6 Reading Habits in Chinese and Tamil ... 93

Chapter 7 Summary and Implication ... 119

Appendix ... 143

References ... 163

Index ... 171

Chapter 7

Summary and Implication

This study was prompted by an important problem in the field of education that is reading reluctance, the failure of capable readers to develop positive reading habits. Widespread reading reluctance among the citizenry is potentially an expensive problem to the nation.

This study examines the socio-cultural, socio-economic and social psychological correlates of reading habits among university students in Malaysia. Specifically, this study is designed to assess, in the development of reading habits of the university students.

1. The relationships between the background variables and home variables.
2. The relationships between background variables and school variables
3. The ways in which background, home and school variables affect the three intervening variables, namely, exposure to language, attitudes towards reading, and attitudes toward language.
4. The ways in which reading habit variables are affected by background variables, home variables, school variables, and the three intervening variables.

Reading can be viewed as a cognitive as well as a social process. It is assumed that socio-cultural, socio-economic and social psychological factors are at play in determining one's reading habits. It is further assumed that one's past social experiences affect one's reading habits; that is, a person becomes or fails to become a habitual reader because of various social conditions of his or her life. Hence, some selected socio-cultural and socio-economic factors related to students' background, home, and school are hypothesized to have an impact on the development of their reading habits. It is further hypothesized that such social psychological factors as exposure to language and attitudes toward reading and language would have significant effects on reading habits too.

The above assumptions and hypotheses which form the theoretical framework of this study was then incorporated in the form of an explanatory model for the reading habits of the university students' under study. The explanatory model involves four sets of variables, namely, five background variables, four home variables, five school variables, and three social psychological variables. Based on this model, the most powerful predictors of reading habits of the university students of the country was identified.

Most researchers use descriptive statistics, such as, frequency counts and cross-tabulations, to study the reading habits of students or adults. Since this study is a sample study and is multivariate in nature, the main statistical tool used here is multiple regression, a powerful tool which can be used to measure the effects of several factors concurrently, thus offering an opportunity to better judge the "pure" or "true" contribution of each variable without confounding it with the effects of the others (Inkeles 1974:267). Descriptive statistics, however, was also used to complement the multiple regression analysis. To provide a more representative sample of university students, 674 university students from various schools (faculties) in Universiti Sains Malaysia were invited to participate in this study. While the main instrument used in this study is a questionnaire, oral interviews were also conducted for cross-validation purposes. The focus of the study is on the reading habits in English but students' reading habits both in Malay and Chinese or Tamil was also examined.

The Main Findings

In sorting out the impacts of the independent variables on reading habits, some widespread expectations was confirmed, while others empirically unsubstantiated.

Background Variables

Table 7.1 presents a summary of the findings of the impact of background variables on home, school, intervening and reading habit variables in all languages.

1. With respect to reading habits in English and Chinese, but not in Malay and Tamil, students from urban rather than rural areas are found to have a better home reading environment. Rural-urban differences, however, are insignificant on the home variables for reading habits in Malay and in Tamil. It is likely that urban families see the need for their children to read in English and thus provide the environment for their children to read English. It is then important for rural families to create a reading environment similar to that found in urban homes. Among the ethnic groups involved in this study, the Chinese are found to live more in urban than rural areas (Table 3.6); this could be one of the reasons for urban-rural differences being significant for Chinese reading habits.
2. For the various languages, female students tend to have or feel they have better reading facilities at home. This finding could be used as one of the indicators on why female students generally are found to have better reading habits than males.
3. The type of school one attends does not have any significant impact on any of the dependent variables for all languages, except for reading habits in Tamil where students from non-residential schools are found to have good reading models at home. As discussed in Chapter 4, the type of school one attends to have an impact on reading habits in Malay. However, it is likely that the type of school one attends has no bearing on reading habits. I would like to note that it seems logical for students from non-residential schools to have more reading models at home, simply because these students spend more time at home and hence actually see models at home.
4. In all languages, students from higher SES families are found to have a better home reading environment than students from lower SES families. Higher SES families are able to provide a better reading environment, especially reading materials, because these materials are more easily affordable to higher SES families. Reading materials are expensive in Malaysia, more so when there are fewer readers and production costs are high; eventually consumers have to pay a higher price for these materials. As such, lower SES families are less likely to be able to afford to buy these materials for their children.
5. The ethnic differences in the home variables show that Indian students have a better reading environment for reading habits in English, while Malay students tend to have a better environment for reading habits in Malay.

TABLE 7.1 Impact of background variables on home, school, intervening and reading habit variables (All Languages)

Independent Variable	Home Variable				School Variable				Inter. Var. Reading Habit Variable									
	VH	AH	HI	RM	VS	AS	RA	II	PI	EX	AR	AL	VM	AC	IR	EE	VL	HA
Background Variable	Level of Significance																	
Reading Habits in English																		
Residential Area	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	-1	0
Sex	0	-1	-4	0	0	-1	-2	0	0	0	-2	-2	0	-1	0	0	-1	0
School	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
SES	4	4	4	4	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ethnicity																		
Being Malay	-4	-4	-4	-4	0	-2	-2	0	1	-4	0	0	0	4	2	0	0	0
Being Chinese	-4	-4	-4	-4	-3	-2	-4	-2	-1	-4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
#Being Malay	-2	0	0	0	4	0	3	4	0	-2	0	0	0	4	1	0	0	0
#Being Indian	4	4	4	4	3	2	4	2	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Reading Habits in Malay																		
Residential Area	0	0	0	0	-1	-2	-1	0	-1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sex	0	0	-4	0	0	0	0	0	0	-2	-1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
School	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
SES	0	3	4	4	0	1	0	0	0	-3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ethnicity																		
Being Malay	4	4	4	4	0	4	0	2	4	4	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Being Chinese	0	0	4	2	2	2	4	0	1	-4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
#Being Malay	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
#Being Indian	0	0	-4	-2	-2	-2	-4	0	-1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Reading Habits in Chinese																		
Residential Area	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sex	-2	-1	0	-2	-4	-3	-1	-2	-2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
School	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
SES	1	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Reading Habits in Tamil																		
Residential Area	0	0	0	0	-1	-1	0	0	0	0	-1	0	0	0	0	-1	0	0
Sex	0	0	0	-1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-1	0	0	0	0	-1
School	0	0	0	-1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
SES	2	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

0 = Not significant 1 = $p < .05$ 2 = $p < .01$ 3 = $p < .001$ 4 = $p < .0001$

6. With respect to reading habits in Malay and Tamil, but not in English and Chinese, students from rural areas tend to come from schools that provide better reading facilities. Earlier this study found that urban homes tend to provide better reading facilities for Chinese and English. Thus, it can be suggested that there is pressure from the environment, for example via parent-teacher associations requiring the schools to provide materials to meet the needs of the environment. It is also likely that since the Tamil schools are mostly concentrated in rural areas, the urban-rural chasm is almost minimal in terms of facilities available.

7. Sex differences in the school variables are significant for reading habits in English and Chinese but not in Malay and Tamil. Female students tend to come from or feel that their schools provide a better reading environment than do the males.

8. Although SES differences are not significant for reading habits in the ethnic languages, students from higher SES families tend to come from schools that have libraries which provide a greater amount of reading materials in English and Malay, and a wider variety of reading materials in English.

9. While Indian students are found to come from schools that provide better reading facilities in English, the Malay students are found to come from schools that provide better reading facilities in Malay. This study observed a similar finding in relation to the home variables. Since it was stated earlier that Indians are habitual readers in English and Malay students are habitual readers in Malay, the provision of good reading facilities by both the home and school can help in the creation of a reading society. Greaney (1986:817) has come to a similar conclusion:

It is the task of parents and the school to help make encounters with print satisfying and pleasurable, thereby introducing the young person to a new world of adventure and ideas which can illuminate and change his or her future life.

10. Background variables, except for SES, do not have any impact for exposure to Chinese and Tamil. Students from urban areas tend to have greater exposure to English when compared with rural students. In the case of reading habits in Malay, students from lower SES fami-

lies tend to have greater exposure to Malay when compared with students from higher SES families. Exposure to language was found to be a powerful determinant of reading habits in English and Malay. It seems that exposure to English is more available in urban than in rural areas, while Malay is more available in lower SES families, who usually live in rural areas, than it is to higher SES families, who usually are found in urban areas. Hence, in order to increase multilingual reading habits among rural students, it is important to create greater English exposure in rural areas and Malay exposure in urban areas.

11. With regard to ethnic differences, it is found that Indian students have a greater exposure to English than Malay and Chinese students while Malay students have a greater exposure to Malay than Chinese and Indian students.

12. Generally, the background variables have little impact on the attitudinal variables. Urban-rural differences have an impact on Tamil readers only, not on English, Malay and Chinese readers. Indian students from rural areas are found to have a more positive attitude towards reading Tamil materials than those from urban areas.

13. With regard to sex differences, female students are found to have a more positive attitude for reading in English and Malay, but not in the case of Chinese and Tamil.

14. Ethnic differences are weakly correlated with the attitudinal variables. With respect to the Malay language, but not in the case of the English, Chinese and Tamil language, Malay students are found to have more positive attitude toward reading in Malay.

15. None of the background variables, except for sex differences, have a significant impact on attitude towards language. Female students are found to have better attitude than males towards English, Malay and Tamil, but not towards Chinese.

16. The type of school one attends and SES have no impact on any of the attitudinal variables.

17. Background variables have very little direct impact on reading habit variables. All of the background variables are related either to only one or two or in many cases to none of the reading habit variables.

18. Urban-rural differences are related to reading habits in English and Tamil, but not in Malay and Chinese. In the case of reading habits in English, students from rural areas are found to attach more value to reading in English while the Indian students from rural areas tend to be more ready to read in Tamil.

19. Sex differences, as in urban-rural differences, are significant for English and Tamil. Female students are found to be more active in acquiring English materials and attach more value to reading in English. Female Indian students are found to attach more value to reading materials in Tamil.

20. The type of school one attends is not correlated to any reading habit variables. However, SES is positively correlated to Chinese reading habits. Chinese students from higher SES families are found to possess a greater degree of habitualness for reading in Chinese.

21. In terms of ethnic differences, compared to non-Malay students, Malay students are found to be significantly more active in acquiring materials in English and to spend more time reading in English. Malay students, are also found to read a wider variety of materials in Malay and to spend more time reading materials in Malay.

Home Variables

Table 7.2 presents a summary of the findings of the impact of home variables on intervening and reading habit variables in all languages.

1. Home influence is strongly correlated with exposure to English, Malay and Chinese, but it has no impact in the other two intervening variables. Although home influence has no impact on Tamil, it is positively correlated with attitudes toward reading in Tamil.

2. Reading models at home are strongly correlated with reading habits in Malay and Tamil, and to a lesser extent with Chinese, but not with English. Reading models are also significantly correlated with attitudes toward reading in English and in Malay but not in the ethnic languages.

3. Availability of a greater amount of materials at home is positively linked to exposure to English and attitudes toward Malay, but it has no impact on the other intervening variables. Variety of materials at home is positively correlated only with exposure to Chinese and has no impact on the other two intervening variables.

4. Home influence is found to be a stronger influence for students who read in English and Malay but not for those who read in Chinese and Tamil. It is likely that parents pay more attention to the languages

TABLE 7.2 Impact of home variables on intervening and reading habit variables (All Languages)

Independent Variable	Inter.		Var.		Reading		Habit		Variable	
	EX	AR	AL	VM	AC	TS	RE	VL	HA	
Home Variable										
Reading Habits in English										
Variety of Materials (VH)	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	
Amount of Materials (AH)	3	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	
Home Influence (HI)	4	0	0	4	0	0	0	1	0	
Parent/Sibling (RM) as Reading Model	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	
Reading Habits in Malay										
Variety of Materials (VH)	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	
Amount of Materials (AH)	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	
Home Influence (HI)	4	0	0	1	4	0	0	1	0	
Parent/sibling (RM) as Reading Model	4	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	
Reading Habits in Chinese										
Variety of Materials (VH)	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Amount of Materials (AH)	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	1	0	
Home Influence (HI)	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Parent/Sibling (RM) as Reading Model	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Reading Habits in Tamil										
Variety of Materials (VH)	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	
Amount of Materials (AH)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Home Influence (HI)	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Parent/Sibling (RM) as Reading Model	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	

0 = Not significant 1 = $p < .05$ 2 = $p < .01$ 3 = $p < .001$ 4 = $p < .0001$

that they consider more important for their children's education and future prospects as Malaysian citizens, that is English and Malay.

5. With respect to reading habits in English and Malay, but not in Chinese and Tamil, the presence of reading models at home is positively linked to two reading habit variables, namely, variety of materials and time spent in reading. It is likely that parents and siblings who read at home do read a variety of materials, e.g., newspapers and books in English and Malay, and thus spend more time reading. This in turn influences young members of the family to read a variety of materials and thus spend more time reading. This finding supports one of the main contentions of this study, that university students need to continue the habit of reading after they have graduated so that they can break the vicious circle of reading reluctance (Figure 1.1). Reading models are not significantly related to the ethnic languages. The home contributes only weakly in the development of reading habits among the Chinese and Indians, who perhaps learn the orthography and literary conventions of their ethnic languages only in school, accounting for the relatively weak influence of the home on reading habits.

In sum, home variables contribute more, albeit indirectly, to the development of reading habits in English and Malay, but not in the case of reading habits in Chinese and Tamil.

School Variables

Table 7.3 presents a summary of the results of the impact of school variables on intervening and reading habit variables in all languages.

1. Availability of reading area is strongly correlated with exposure to English only. It has no impact on the other two attitudinal variables.
2. Peer influence is positively linked to exposure to language, be it English, Malay, or one's mother tongue. However, teachers' influence is positively linked to exposure to English and Chinese only. The variable "attitudes towards reading" in English and in Malay, but not in Chinese and Tamil, is correlated with teachers' influence but not with peer influence.
3. Variety of materials is not correlated to any intervening variables. However, amount of materials is positively linked to attitudes toward Chinese and Tamil.

TABLE 7.3 Impact of school variables on intervening and reading habit variables (All Languages)

Independent Variable	Inter.		Var.	Reading			Habit		Variable
	EX	AR		AL	VM	AC	TS	RE	
School Variables									
Reading Habits in English									
Variety of Materials (VS)	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0
Amount of Materials (AS)	0	0	0	4	4	2	0	0	0
Availability of Area (RA)	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Teacher Influence (TI)	3	1	0	2	1	0	0	0	0
Peer Influence (PI)	4	0	0	4	4	4	0	0	0
Reading Habits in Malay									
Variety of Materials (VS)	0	0	0	1	1	2	0	1	0
Amount of Materials (AS)	0	0	0	4	3	4	0	0	0
Availability of Area (RA)	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Teacher Influence (TI)	0	2	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
Peer Influence (PI)	4	0	0	2	4	4	1	1	1
Reading Habits in Chinese									
Variety of Materials (VS)	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Amount of Materials (AS)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
Availability of Area (RA)	0	0	0	2	2	2	0	0	0
Teacher Influence (TI)	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Peer Influence (PI)	2	0	0	2	3	2	0	0	0
Reading Habits in Tamil									
Variety of Materials (VS)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Amount of Materials (AS)	0	1	1	2	1	2	0	1	1
Availability of Area (RA)	0	0	0	1	1	2	0	0	0
Teacher Influence (TI)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Peer Influence (PI)	2	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0

0 = Not significant 1 = $p < .05$ 2 = $p < .01$ 3 = $p < .001$ 4 = $p < .0001$

4. With respect to reading habits in Chinese and Tamil, but not in English and Malay, availability of reading area in school is positively linked to three reading habit variables, namely, variety of reading materials, activeness in acquisition and time spent in reading.

5. Peer influence in reading habits in the various languages is generally stronger than teacher influence. It is positively linked to all the reading habit variables in Malay. Peer influence among those who read English and Chinese is stronger too in each case but limited to variety of reading materials, activeness in acquisition of reading materials and time spent in reading. Among those who read Tamil, peer influence is related strongly to activeness in acquisition of reading materials. These findings indicate that peer influence is an important determinant of reading habits in all languages. Since peer influence is stronger than teacher influence, teachers and parents should find ways to capitalize on peer influence to promote reading habits among the students.

6. Teacher influence is found to be stronger among those who read English and Malay, rather than Chinese and Tamil. It is likely that Chinese and Indian students for whatever reasons, did not find this emphasis on reading appropriate or relevant. Certainly, students spend less time learning vernacular languages in the classroom and thus spend less time with these teachers, compared to English and Malay language teachers.

7. The variety and amount of reading materials in the school library are found to be generally correlated with reading habits of those who read English and Malay rather than Chinese. The amount, rather than the variety, of reading materials in the school library is apparently more salient to Tamil readers. This finding indicates that the school libraries should have more copies of books of the same title, especially bestsellers or the most popular titles or authors or more copies of newspapers of the same title rather than have few copies of different kinds of materials.

Intervening Variables

Table 7.4 presents a summary of the results of the impact of intervening variables on reading habit variables in all languages.

TABLE 7.4 Impact of intervening variables on reading habit variables
(All Languages)

Independent Variable	Reading Habit Variable					
	VM	AC	TS	RE	VL	HA
Intervening Variable						
Reading Habits in English						
Exposure to Lang.(EX)	4	4	4	1	2	2
Attitudes toward Read.(AR)	0	4	0	0	1	0
Attitudes toward Lang.(AL)	0	0	0	1	0	1
Reading Habits in Malay						
Exposure to Lang. (EX)	3	4	3	0	3	0
Attitudes toward Read.(AR)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Attitudes toward Lang.(AL)	1	1	1	1	1	1
Reading Habits in Chinese						
Exposure to Lang. (EX)	0	4	0	0	0	0
Attitudes toward Read.(AR)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Attitudes toward Lang.(AL)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Reading Habits in Tamil						
Exposure to Lang.(EX)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Attitudes toward Read. (AR)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Attitudes toward Lang.(AL)	0	0	0	0	0	0

0 = Not significant 1 = $p < .05$ 2 = $p < .01$ 3 = $p < .001$ 4 = $p < .0001$

1. Exposure to language is significantly correlated with each of the reading habit variables in the case of English, with most of the variables in the case of Malay, with only one reading habit variable in the case of Chinese and with none in the case of Tamil. This finding indicates that exposure to language is less important for ethnic languages. This study can explain the different types of impact that exposure has on English, and Malay, compared with Chinese and Tamil in more than one way. One possibility is that Chinese and Tamil, compared with English and Malay are ethnic languages that belong uniquely to

a particular ethnic group. As ethnic languages, the exposure is readily available in the environment, unlike English and Malay in which case the exposure is normally planned, restricted and maybe largely artificial (Elly and Mangubhai 1983:55). Although one could argue that Malay is also an ethnic language, however, in this analysis, Malay is treated as the primary language of instruction in Malaysian schools rather than as a uniquely ethnic language, so that non-Malays have also been included in the analysis of reading habits in Malay.

2. Attitude toward reading is strongly correlated with activeness in acquisition of English materials but not correlated with any reading habit variables in Malay, Chinese and Tamil. It seems, therefore, that attitude toward reading has little impact on reading habits.

3. Attitudes toward language is weakly correlated with two of the reading habit variables in English, weakly correlated with each of the Malay reading habit variables, but has no impact on reading habits in the mother tongue languages. As in exposure to language, it seems that students who have a better attitude towards any primarily non-ethnic language will be more likely to be habitual readers in that language.

In sum, the intervening variables, especially, exposure to language, are found to have a strong impact on English and Malay but not in the mother tongue languages. Hence, with the introduction of 'exposure to language' as an intervening variable in the explanatory model of reading habits, the importance of the socio-cultural, socio-economic and social psychological variables as determinants of reading habits in English and Malay of the university students is confirmed by the study.

Profile of a Habitual Reader

From the findings on reading habits in English, Malay, Chinese and Tamil, it is now possible to provide a profile of a habitual reader in each language.

Profile of a Habitual Reader in English

A Malaysian university student is more likely to be a habitual reader in English if he or she:

1. Lives in an urban area rather than a rural area.
2. Comes from a family with a higher SES.
3. Comes from a home where there is a greater variety and amount of materials in English, more home influence and reading models at home.
4. Has attended a school with a greater variety and amount of materials in English with more teachers who encourage students to read, and more friends who read English.
5. Has more exposure to English.
6. Has a more positive attitude towards reading in English.

Among the habitual readers, this study found that Indian and Malay students are more habitual than the Chinese. However, they do not share the same characteristics. Hence, in terms of ethnic differences, Indian students tend to come from a home where there is a greater variety and amount of materials in English, more home influence and reading models at home; have attended a school with a greater variety and amount of materials in English and a bigger reading area in the library, with more teachers who encourage students to read, and more friends who read English; and have more exposure to English.

Malay students are found to be more active in acquiring reading materials in English and they also spend more time reading materials in English.

Profile of a Habitual Reader in Malay

It was found that a Malaysian university student is more likely to be a habitual reader in Malay if he or she:

1. Lives in a rural area rather than an urban area.
2. Is a Malay rather than a non-Malay.
3. Comes from a home with a greater variety and amount of materials in Malay, more home influence and reading models at home.
4. Has attended a school with a greater variety and amount of materials in Malay, with more teachers who encourage students to read, and more friends who read Malay.
5. Has had greater exposure to Malay
6. Has more positive attitudes toward reading in Malay.

Profile of a Habitual Reader in Chinese

A student is more likely to be a habitual reader in Chinese if he or she:

1. Lives in an urban area rather than a rural area;
2. Comes from a family with a higher SES.
3. Is a female rather than a male.
4. Comes from a home with a greater amount of reading materials in Chinese.
5. Has attended a school with more positive teacher influence, a wider variety of materials in Chinese in the school library, a larger reading area in the library and more friends who read materials in Chinese (i.e. more likely to have attended a Chinese vernacular school or a Chinese independent secondary school).

Profile of a Habitual Reader in Tamil

It was found that a student is more likely to be a habitual reader in Tamil if he or she:

1. Lives in a rural area rather than an urban area.
2. Comes from a family with a lower SES;
3. Comes from a home with a wider variety of reading materials in Tamil;
4. Has attended a school with a greater amount of materials in Tamil and a greater reading area in the library.
5. Has peers who read materials in Tamil.

Profile of a Malaysian Reader

Based on the profile of a habitual reader in each language presented above, holding ethnicity constant, when the profile of a habitual reader in English is matched with the factors that influence reading habits in Malay, Chinese and Tamil, it is likely that a habitual reader of English is not a habitual reader of Malay, Chinese or Tamil.

When ethnicity is considered, a Malay habitual reader in English is also likely to be a habitual reader of Malay but not Chinese and Tamil, while a Chinese habitual reader in Chinese is likely to be a habitual reader in Malay but not English, and an Indian habitual reader in Tamil is likely to be a habitual reader in English but not Chinese.

Implications of the Study

This study has many implications for future research, for the promotion of reading habits by the Ministry of Education, and for the formulation of strategies to address the problem of reading reluctance among students of all levels by the various authorities concerned.

Implications for Further Research

Most but not all of the findings in this study can be explained in relation to reading habits. This is to be expected in a study of this nature which involves many variables and a mixed group of respondents.

1. Some of the variables used in this study could be improved both in terms of conceptualization and measurement. For example, more items could be included to measure reading models at home. Some of the items in the questionnaire can be measured on a Likert scale, rather than being considered dichotomous. For instance, the strength of the influence of reading models (how many, how often) could be more exactly gauged on a Likert scale.
2. Ideally, all the Chinese and Indian respondents selected for this study should have adequate knowledge of Chinese and Tamil, respectively. Separate studies, therefore, for each language could be carried out to get a better picture of factors contributing to the development of reading habits in Chinese and Tamil.
3. Failure to develop good reading habits could also be examined by ethnographic and longitudinal studies. Habitual readers in English, for example, could be interviewed to talk about their personal experi-

ences in becoming habitual readers in English. A study of this kind would enable us to know when students generally start or stop reading for pleasure and why. Alternatively, a longitudinal study over a period of years on some selected students in schools could help us understand the cultivation of actual reading habits among students. Although these types of studies are time-consuming, they have been carried out in the West and would be timely in Malaysia.

4. Even though Indian students are generally known to be relatively backward socioeconomically and educationally, the group of Indian students in this study is found to have better home facilities. It would be interesting to carry out a study on this group to investigate how they differ from the other Indians who do not make it to the university.

5. It is noticed that many students, particularly Malay students, develop the habit of reading in English for pleasure after joining the university. Further research should be carried out to investigate whether these students continue to read after leaving university. In a similar vein, it would also be useful to investigate whether students who stop reading for pleasure after joining university resume it after leaving university. These university students should continue reading after leaving university so that they do not produce another generation of non-readers. Examining the factors that promote reading habits among these university graduates, both while studying in university and after graduation, can help to shed light on the problem of reading reluctance.

6. In most cases, I noticed that the type of school (residential or non-residential) one attends does not have any impact on reading habits. This is surprising since residential schools are generally supposed to be superior to non-residential schools in terms of facilities and teachers. Further research can be carried out to investigate whether the residential schools in fact have no better reading facilities than non-residential schools or whether the facilities in these schools are not fully exploited by the students and for what reasons. One possibility is that the residential school students do not have much opportunity to make use of the school library, considering the regimentation of their lifestyle. It may also be that most of the school libraries are open roughly those hours when the students are most occupied.

Educational and Policy Implications of the Study

The data from the study yield some interesting conclusions which have implications for action. If we recall, the problems related to reading habits were labelled "iatrogenic", that is, they should not be thought of as reflecting reality that is unchangeable, but as an area for possible action.

1. Exposure to language was found to be the most significant determinant of reading habits in English and Malay. By its operational definition, exposure to language includes listening to the radio and watching television programmes. Students who lack exposure should be allowed to listen to English radio and television programmes at home and also in school. Today, radio and television are affordable for most Malaysians. It is a fallacy to assume that reading has no correlation with listening and speaking skills. While parents can encourage the children to listen or watch the educational radio and television programmes, schools can allocate definite time slots in the class timetable for the students to follow these programmes. Campaigns to promote reading habits should also promote languages that we want the students to improve in. The findings support the view that language and reading cannot be separated. While I fully support any slogans and campaigns that promote reading habits, those slogans and campaigns should also promote the use of the language.

2. The Chinese students, culturally goal-oriented, are more likely to be habitual readers in Malay than in English. The importance of being habitual readers in English should therefore be stressed to these students while they are in the primary schools. The same goes for Malay students. Although the Malay students read more materials in English after joining the university, studies can be carried out to investigate whether Malay students have been told of the importance of English and reading in English, or whether these students have not had the opportunity to read materials in English while they are in school. The Indian students seem to be habitual readers in English but not in Malay. Eventhough good reading habits in English of these above average Indian students, is encourage the same reading habits in Malay must also be stressed to these students, both in national and vernacular schools.

3. This study views reading as a social process which involves interpersonal relationships. In my findings on reading habits in all languages, peer influence is found to be another predictor of student reading habits. Hence, curriculum planners should cultivate the bonds among peers through reading-related activities in the classrooms. Teachers have to understand the importance of peer influence and use whatever classroom and outside opportunities they have to encourage reading among the students. For example, peer participation can be encouraged through group work and reading tutorials. In addition, language camps or reading camps where students are allowed to read materials of their choice with their peers can be organized to strengthen peer influence in reading; avid readers in a particular language should be identified to serve as models for other students in the class or school.

4. The multiple regression results on reading habits also provide evidence that these school contributes significantly to the development of reading habits. Specifically, language teachers' encouragement was seen to have a significant impact on reading habits, with the exception of reading habits in Tamil. Many students, especially those from rural areas, lack reading models in English at home. For these students, teachers are the only models. Even it university students should read for pleasure, teachers are no exception. Since teacher influence was found to contribute significantly towards the development of reading habits of students, encouragement by language teachers will be much more effective if they can also serve as reading models, spending some of their classroom time also reading.

More importantly, language teachers need to understand the socio-cultural and socio-economic backgrounds and the social psychological characteristics of their students. They can play a significant part as amateur anthropologists, sociologists or social psychologists themselves, not to mention reading councillors. Teachers need to understand the reading habits of the students and their reading environment before students can be encouraged to read. The teachers must accept what the social experiences a child brings to the class and not complain about what the child does not have. Some of the students may have had previous reading experience while for others, the school may be the only place to provide that experience. Thus, language teachers need to accept what the student has and to compensate

for what the student does not have. (For an initial assesment of the students' reading habits, the reading attitude measure, MBRAM, suggested in this study could be adapted to gauge their reading habits.)

5. The task of promoting reading habits cannot be achieved by language teachers alone. This study showed that the home also plays an important role in promoting reading habits. For greater success in promoting reading for pleasure, language teachers in particular need to build a network with the students' homes and their community. This form of network will help the teachers and parents to understand better the reading needs and interests of the students, and to co-operate in their efforts to tackle the problem of reading reluctance.

6. In Chapter 2, it was noted that the language syllabi, with the exception of that for Tamil, stress intensive reading. However, in order to promote reading for pleasure, language teachers need to promote extensive reading as well, i.e. to encourage students to read books both in and outside the classroom. By reading extensively, the students would have a chance to get a "feel" for reading and eventually find pleasure in reading. Extensive reading should begin in the primary school and continue in the secondary school.

7. In school, language teachers are not to be left alone to deal with the problem of reading reluctance. Although this study has not examined the influence of content area teachers, it seems reasonable to compound the influence of language teachers by the influence of all teachers in school. The school should involve all its teachers to guide the students to read independently and to develop good reading habits. In the development of reading habits in English, for example, content area teachers can set specified homework readings in English, which would also reinforce the relevance and value of reading in English.

8. Many students make use of the school library to develop their reading habits in more than one language. Particularly students who want to do reading in Chinese and Tamil rely heavily on the school. Hence, it is important for the library to be equipped with a variety of reading materials in the students' ethnic languages. The government is currently encouraging students to be multilingual rather than bilingual. To equip the school library so that it caters better for students' different reading needs is in line with the government's intention.

9. The other finding of this study that needs to be stressed is the importance of an adequate reading area in the library in promoting

students' reading habits. Although one can argue that the libraries in many of our schools do not have enough space for the students to sit and read, I suspect that what space is available in the library many a time has not been made accessible to the students. For instance, students may not have the opportunity to make full use of the library because of early closing and undue restrictions. Schools should provide a specified time in the class time-table for library periods. During these periods, students can have the opportunity to make use of the space and facilities in the library. By the same token, public libraries should be made available for students during non-school hours and weekends. This will give an opportunity for the students, as well as their working parents, to exploit the reading facilities available in the library. Money spent on building and equipping libraries is a waste if they are not managed efficiently enough to allow greater access to the students and the public at large, especially working people.

10. If the school library is indeed too small to cater for all the students, I believe that the language teachers can bring the library space to the classroom. A certain amount of time per week can be allocated for the students and teachers (who can then be reading models) to read for pleasure in the classroom. They can each bring a book of their choice and read in the classroom (Parent-teacher associations may contribute materials). By creating the reading environment, in this way, the language teacher is "compensating" for what some of the students may not have at home, that is, opportunities for extensive reading.

11. This study has found that the presence of reading models at home contribute significantly towards the promotion of reading habits. If university students who read will continue to read after graduation, their influence as models in their respective homes, workplaces and schools if they are educators, will contribute to the amelioration of the problem of widespread reading reluctance in the nation.

12. The discussion on the role of language teachers in promoting reading habits is especially rife with implications for teacher training. Trainee teachers should have a vision of their role as a language teacher — not only as a teacher of a particular language but also as an ethnographer and councillor who is sensitive to the needs of the students and the community. By the same token, the importance of extensive reading must also be conveyed to the trainee teachers. As

well as effectively guiding their students to pass examinations, they should promote voluntary reading for pleasure, extensive reading in the true sense. This is an important educational strategy to break the vicious circle illustrated in Chapter 1.

13. In order to produce a reading society, the government and, in particular, the Ministry of Education should conduct a survey to identify schools that are lacking reading facilities and to allocate resources to uplift them. In both cases the important fact to remember is not the provision of libraries alone but the creation of enough opportunities for the students to use the facilities for extensive reading.

Evaluation of Theoretical Model

Using the explanatory model, the data provided by 674 university students was applied to gauge the importance of socio-cultural, socio-economic and social psychological variables in determining one's reading habits. The findings do throw light on the importance of these variables in determining one's reading habits. The model also assesses the relationship of these variables in promoting reading habits in different languages. However, as pointed out in Chapter 4, it was found that one background variable, type of school, has very little impact on reading habits. This variable, for reasons discussed earlier, may be removed from the model.

Using the explanatory model of reading habits, the importance of each set of independent variables is also attested to by the fact that they contribute a certain percentage of the explained variance (Tables 4.6, 5.6, 6.6 and 6.12). Based on the findings laid out in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, and the recommendations made in Chapter 7, I believe this model can be used to develop an adequate explanation of reading habits.

The results of this study have provided strong evidence for the importance of reading models and peer influence, which leads us to suspect that the existence of reluctant readers up to university level probably indicates a lack of reading models and poor peer influence. Since readers are created by readers, national and community lead-

ers, parents, and teachers should seriously consider the factors that seem to influence reading habits as indicated in this study and translate these implications into practical use. This study is almost valueless if its findings do not get a chance to offer insights for practical action. By developing on the insights offered by this study, we can work towards the formulation of more effective social and educational strategies. Accordingly, we not only have hoped that the vicious circle presented in Figure 1.1 can be broken, but we also can strive intelligently to promote and sustain a vigorous reading society in Malaysia that takes advantage of the rich national and international socio-cultural resources that wide reading would put at their command.