

The Key Factors Affecting English Reading Comprehension Among Malaysian Students

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to examine the key factors that affect English reading comprehension and to identify the relationship between the level of reading comprehension and the three factors, which are; the influence of first language, the lack of background knowledge and lack of interest. The current study employed stratified random sampling to collect the data from 115 respondents in Higher education Institution in Shah Alam, Malaysia. The participation of respondents was from the division of 15 students from each faculty. A set of MUET (November, 2012) reading paper was used to identify the level of reading comprehension and the booklet of the questionnaire were distributed to the respondents. Descriptive statistics used to analyse the data were frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation. The study found that the key factors that affect reading comprehension are, lack of interest and motivation as well as first language influential. In contrast, the highest agreed factor by respondents is lack of interest and motivation, where the participants have less habit of reading daily, no motivation to read different materials like novels, newspapers, stories and essays.

Keywords

Reading comprehension, First Language, Background Knowledge, Interest and motivation

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Introduction

Reading is one of the language skills among writing, listening, and speaking. It is an important language skill that guides an individual to connect and acquire meaning from written language. According to Liu Lan Chen, Nooreiny Maarof, and Melor Md Yunus (2017), reading is a skill that every student needs to adapt to understand a text well. Reading comprehension is considerable expertise that emphasized students' different scholastic errands, which encourages them to content, analyze, clarify, and communicate their very own thoughts regarding composed materials (Gilakjani and Sabouri, 2016).

According to Wutthisingchai, S. (2017), A survey study was conducted in Bangkok, Thailand, for English reading comprehension issues in academic messages, as seen by Mathayom 5 understudies in English Program Thai Christian School. The point of the examination was to explore English reading comprehension issues experienced by Mathayom 5 understudies. The general outcome demonstrated that the vast majority of the respondents stated that they were uncertain whether they had reading comprehension issues.

In general, the respondents comprehended that inspiration might be the primary obstruction Influencing reading understanding. Foundation learning or also known as background knowledge and the lack of reading strategies seen as the second and third obstacle (Rahim, P. R. M. A. (2018).

Malaysian students face problems in reading contents because sometimes the phrases used are complicated and they do not understand what they read well and, as a result, they are unable to get appropriate ideas from their readings to the assigned tasks given (Ahmad M., 2007; Isarji et al.,

2008; Jamaliah and Faridah Noor, 2016; Samsiah, 2016; Wallace, 2007).

Therefore, this study attempts to explore the factors that affect English reading comprehension among Malaysian students in Higher education Institution in Shah Alam. This study aims to uncover the main comprehension problems reported by participating students.

Literature Review

This study also builds on Rumelhart's Schema's theory (1975; 1978; 1984;1990 & 1994). This theory was constructed based on how readers create and activate their background knowledge. It says that readers obtain a conceptual framework called schemata, and they apply it when reading a text and use it to make sense of what they are reading. According to the schemata theory, students understand a text by drawing every input from the text against some extant schema in mind.

Previous studies have been conducted to identify the role of background knowledge through previewing strategy (THIEVES) where it was explored from the perspective of schema theory. Besides that, this study also recommended for teachers to develop the teaching of reading comprehension. The related theories are Piaget (1967) and Vygotsky (1968). For Piaget, learning is a method of the inner construction. In teaching reading comprehension, students must build up knowledge in their perception of more knowledgeable people like teachers. At the same time, Vygotsky's (1968) theory implies reading comprehension. In another study, Al-Jubari, (2016) stated that student's intention also is another issue that affects the students understanding on business and technology that were greatly influenced by how students viewed the positive attitude

toward learning, that looks attractive and advantageous to them.

Many teachers of and researchers on reading have guaranteed that Malaysian university students are not set up to take part in requesting reading undertakings, for example basic reading comprehension, expected of them (Koo 2011, 2008, 2003, Nambiar 2017, Pandian 2007, Thang and Azarina 2008). Crismore (2000) related her five-year experience educating in one of the Malaysian universities and presumed that large portion of the students was badly arranged for academic reading especially when reading the information contained in their course books. Koo (2003) contends that most Malaysian university students are hesitant to practice basic reading since they are acclimated with adjustment to control, loss of intrigue, and dread of being extraordinary. According to (Keat and Mohamad, 2016) teacher's role is relevant to human intelligence and that is more appropriate to be comprehended mainly into two conditions which are the content and processing. The content deals with "what" students have in their mind and it is concerned with biological attribution.

On the other hand, the first language is a local language or native language, which generally known as blood vessel language or L1. It is a language that an individual has been uncovered from birth or inside the essential time frame. In certain nations, the term local language or native language (mother to the tongue) alludes to the language of one's ethnic gathering instead of one's first language (Alan Davies, 2003). Not only that, youngsters raised talking more than one language additionally can have more than one local language and be bilingual or multilingual. According to (Azar and Hashim, 2019) Curriculum designers need to provide and prepare the related material and textbooks to be presented in the classroom and the syllabus designers in their materials and lecturers in their classrooms need to instruct and practice with the students about the strategies employed in the academic review, so that the students can easily comprehend the language.

Conversely, a second language is any language that one talks other than one's first language such as English in our country. Over the decades, the first language has always been a major factor that influences the fluency of people in the second language. The second language (L2) reading process includes the collaboration of two language frameworks. According to (Kaswadi, Malik and Keat, 2016) the relationship of anxiety on academic achievement could be an issue that affect student's understanding in the classroom.

At the point when students read in a second language, they reach to their first language (L1) and frequently utilize their L1 as a reading procedure (Carson et al., 1990; Upton and Lee-Thompson, 2001). Despite everything we don't know whether L2 readers process a content likewise or distinctively in L1 and L2. Classroom observation is a significant approach that assist the student's understanding of the learning module, the teaching approach considered an interesting learning experience for the students (Piyatissai, Johar and Tarofder, 2018).

Another group of Iranian specialists have investigated L1 reading aptitudes and L2 reading abilities and the connection between them (Talebi, 2007 and 2012; Birjandi and Marzban, 2012; Shafiei Ebrahimi, 2012; Pourhosein Gilakjani and Ahmadi, 2011; Nazary, 2008; Parvaresh and Nemati, 2008). In every one of these investigations, Farsi language is considered as the primary language and English language as the second language. Just like how Malaysians have their Bahasa Melayu as their L1 and English as their L2. In the examination led by Talebi (2007), the members were ordered into middle and propelled capability levels. Results demonstrated that the reading system information can be the equivalent in L1 and L2 at two capability dimensions of moderate and propelled levels, in any case, L1 reading technique request had diverse impact on the reading capacity of university students in L1 and L2 (Talebi, 2007).

In an investigation of reading methodologies that utilizing a reading methods survey and a the semi-organized meeting, Shafiei Ebrahimi (2012) found in contrast with the other gathering of understudies propelled capability understudies utilized all the more reading procedures in L2. There was a cover in the sorts of techniques utilized for both L1 and L2 perusing capability levels. The aftereffects of certain examinations demonstrate that the L1 reading and L2 capability collaborate incredibly to L2 reading. Learners' of L1 reading capacity and L2 language capability add to L2 reading Perception (Carrel, 1991). According to Koda (1994) recognized three conditions that recognize L2 reading from L1 reading which includes the impact of earlier education, constrained phonetic learning and cross-linguistic impacts of lower-level procedures. In this segment we can start our exchange with this last condition, with the precedent cross - phonetic impacts since we will better comprehend larger amount forms on the off chance that we quickly expound on lower level procedures, as their significance in L2 reading perception is critical.

Method

A questionnaire was used to gather the data from the students of Higher education Institution in Shah Alam, Malaysia at different faculties. Stratified random sampling was employed to collect the data by dividing the population into smaller groups where 15 students from each division representing each of the seven (7) faculties of the Higher education Institution in Shah Alam was taken. Malaysian University English Test (MUET November 2012) reading paper and questionnaire booklet was used among the 115 Malaysian students from different faculties. First in order to test the student's level of reading comprehension, were given reading passages from MUET November 2012 reading paper. The purpose of this instrument was to assess the students' proficiency in reading and to check whether they have enough ability to answer the reading comprehension questions following the texts. The results obtained from this instrument were used to address the first research question "What is the level of English reading comprehension among Higher education students?". MUET November 2012 reading paper consisted of 6 passages and there were 7 questions for each passage.

This questionnaire consists of fifteen questions on the 5-point Likert Scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". The survey contained three sections of factors; lack of interest and lack of background knowledge was adapted from a Liu Lan Chen, Nooreiny Maarof, and Melor Md Yunus (2017). While the influence of first the language was adopted from Rongqian Geng (2018). The data was analyzed using Statistic Package for the Social Science (SPSS) software version 23.0. significant was acknowledged at 0.05 level of probability. The descriptive statistics include frequency such as mean, standard deviation and range was calculated for each item of the questionnaire. Subsequently, Pearson Correlations was also used to measure the strength of the relationship between the variables stated, namely the influence of first language, lack of interest and motivation, lack of background knowledge and the level of reading comprehension.

Findings and Discussion The first language of the respondents is Malay, Tamil, Mandarin and Iban. The majority of respondents' first language is Tamil where 55 of them said it as their first language because most of the respondents were Indians. Where the Malay language was chosen by 42 (40.0%) of participants as their first language and 6 (5.7%) of them said Mandarin as their first language. The 1% belongs to Dusun language where one participant was from Dusun Ethnicity.

Reading Comprehension

The primary objective of this test was to assess the reading levels of Malaysian students in Higher education. The reading test contains 45 items and each correct item is awarded one mark. The maximum raw score a student can achieve on this reading test is 45. The results of the study indicate the level of reading comprehension of the respondents who took part in this test. Table 1 presents the total scores of the respondents which obtained from the (MUET November 2012) reading paper. The results indicate that only few of the respondents scored between the ranges of 19 to 27, which means the level of reading comprehension of that respondents is satisfactory. There is also one respondent who scored below the level expected which is between the range of 10 to 18. Majority of the respondents scored in between the range of 28 to 36, it can be seen from the data in Table 1 that 75 of the respondents scored good marks in their MUET reading test. Thus, the level of reading comprehension of most of the Malaysian students in higher education is good. Besides that, there were also some students who are skilful in reading comprehension, where we can be seen from the table 1, shows that 24 of the participants scored excellent marks which is between the ranges of 37 to 45.

Table 1: The Descriptive Analysis of Test score

Score	n	%	
0-9	Very Poor	-	-
10-18	Poor	1	1.0

19-27	Satisfactory	5	4.8
28-36	Good	75	71.4
37-45	Excellent	24	22.9
Mean	4.1619		
Std. Deviation	.53930		

Lack of Interest and Motivation

For the questionnaire first part, several questions were asked related to the factor affecting reading comprehension which is lack of interest and motivation. 5 statements were listed in this part to identify the interest and motivation of the respondents towards reading comprehension. The first statement was "My hobby is reading". Based on the results from the table 2, it indicates that most of the respondents 22 (21.0%) disagreed to this statement which means most of the Malaysian students in Higher education did not treat reading as their hobby. Next for the second statement "I read every day", most of the respondents disagreed this statement too, which are 21 (20%) of them. It shows that most of the Malaysian Higher education students are not involving in reading activity every day. Followed by the third statement, "I interest in reading since young", the results say that high percentage of respondents were agreed to this statement which is 19%. From the result it can be said that most of the respondents instil their interest in reading since young. The next statement will be "My interest motivates me to read". For this statement, most of the respondents reacted to disagree where 28 (26.7%) of respondents are not motivated to read. Lastly, for "I read 2 hours every day", the respondents reacted to disagree too. Most of the respondents, 24 (22.9%) of them refuse to read even just for two hours a day. While, the results obtained from these five statements, it can be concluded that lack of interest and motivation is one of the factors affected reading comprehension among Malaysian students in Higher education. Overall, based on the average bar chart below 29 of the respondents have disagreed the statement while 16 of them agreed. Thus, it can be stated that students comprehend better when they are interested in what they are reading and also frequency of reading daily.

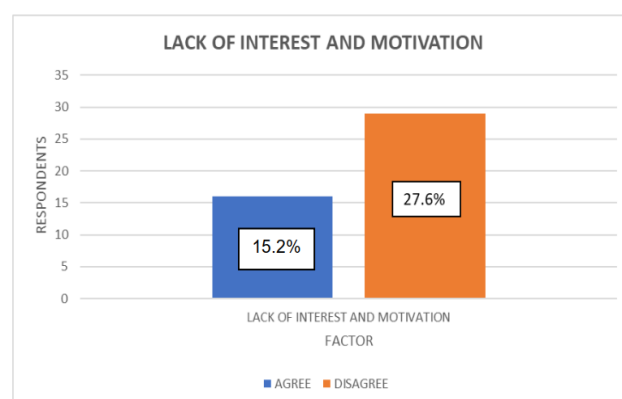


Figure 2: Frequency of respondent for lack of interest and motivation

Lack of Background Knowledge

The second factor that affects reading comprehension is the lack of background knowledge. In order to identify the level of background knowledge of the respondents towards reading comprehension, five questions were asked in a statement form to the respondents. The first statement was "I can connect previous knowledge from different sources in the passage". Based on the results shown in Table 3 below, it indicates that most of the respondents 42 (40.0%) agreed to this statement which means most of the Malaysian students in Higher education are able to connect their previous knowledge from different sources in the passage. Next for the second statement "I relate new information to the background knowledge in my mind to understand the text", most of the respondents agreed this statement too, which are 51 (48.6%) of them. It shows that most of the Malaysian Higher education students are not having problem in relating new information to the background knowledge in their mind to understand the text. Followed by the third statement, "I can imagine some scene described in the passage to facilitate my reading comprehension", the result says that high percentage of respondents were agreed to this statement which is 51.4%. From the result it can be said that most of the respondents are able to imagine some scene described in the passage to facilitate their reading comprehension. The next statement will be "I use my previous knowledge and common sense to predict the main ideas of the passage". For this statement, most of the respondents reacted to disagree where 28 (26.7%) of respondents are hardly predict the main ideas of the passage. Lastly, for "I combine new information with what I have read in the passage to understand well", the respondents reacted to agree scale which shows that most of the respondents, 24 (22.9%) of them are able to combine new information with what they have read in the passage to understand well. The overall results obtained from these five statements, says that lack of background knowledge does not affect student's reading comprehension among Malaysian students in higher education. Wholly, the average frequency of respondent as per the bar chart below total of 16 respondents have agreed to the statement while only 8 of them have disagreed. It shows that vocabulary knowledge of higher education students are good where they are able to visualize some scenes in the passages given in reading level test.

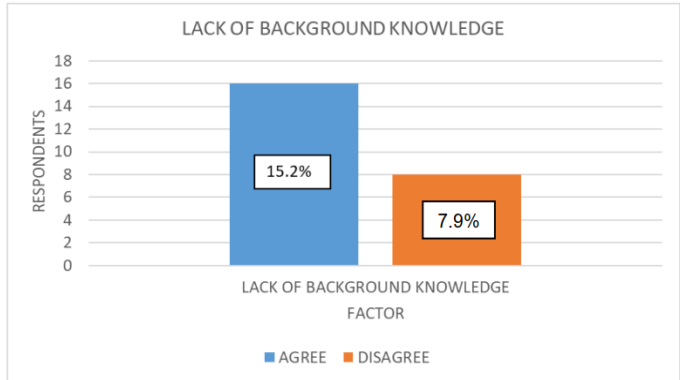


Figure 3: Frequency of respondent for lack of background knowledge

Influence of First Language

Lastly, several questions were raised to discuss the influence of the first language on reading comprehension. Thus, in order to identify the influence of the first language of the respondents towards reading comprehension, five questions were asked in a statement form to the respondents. The first statement was "I always try to solve comprehension problems in my first language". Based on the results from the table 4, it indicates that most of the respondents agreed to this statement which means with the addition of agree and strongly agree, 53 of the respondents did not solve comprehension problems when they read in their first language. In a word, Malaysian students in Higher education, are facing difficulty in comprehending English text. Next for the second statement, "I always translate English into my first language when a sentence is difficult to understand". For this statement, most of the respondents agreed. With the addition of agree and strongly agree, there are total of 49 respondents who agreed this statement. It shows that most of the Malaysian Higher education students are always translate English into their first language when a sentence was difficult to understand for them. Followed by the third statement, "If it is not necessary, I prefer to avoid reading as much as possible in my first language", the results say that high percentage of respondents were agreed to this statement which is 36.1%. From the result it can be said 38 of the respondents are avoiding reading in their first language when it was not necessary. This question is interesting because students should have more inclination to read in their first language. However, the result shows that most of the Malaysian students in Higher education opted to read in English language when it was not necessary. Thenext statement will be "I think I have my own reading skill when I read in my first language". For this statement, most of the respondents reacted to agree where with the addition of agree and strongly agree 50 (47.6%) of respondents have their own reading skill when they read in their L1, and these respondents did not have reading skill when they read in English. Thus, students put more reading skill in their first language, which was not surprising. Lastly, for "I often translate English text into my first language when I am reading", the respondents reacted to disagree scale which shows that most of the respondents, 34 (32.4%) of them did not translate English into their first language very often while reading. The overall results obtained from these five statements, says that the influence of first language affect the reading comprehension of Malaysian students in Higher education. This is because 21% of respondents have disagreed and 11.4% agreed respectively for all the five statements.

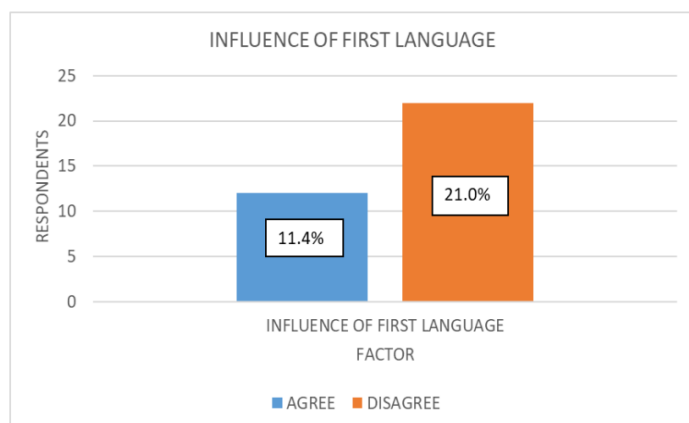


Figure 4: Frequency of respondent for influence of first language

The Relationship Between Lack of Interest and Motivation, Lack of Background Knowledge and Influence of First Language on English Reading Comprehension

From the table 2, the P- value is 0.000 which is less than 0.05 ($P < 0.05$). This proved that the factors that affecting English Reading Comprehension have a significant relationship. At the same time, the table 2 shows that the R is equal to -0.66. Therefore, the R was shown to have a negative value so the factor affecting English reading comprehension has a negative relationship. This correlation indicated that the lower the level of English Reading Comprehension, the higher the lack of interest towards reading comprehension.

Table 2: The correlation between the independent variables and the dependent variable

Reading comprehension	R	P
Lack of interest and motivation	- 0.66***	0.000

*** Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level.

There is a significant, strong and negative correlation between reading comprehension and lack of background knowledge. The P- value is 0.000 which is less than 0.05 ($P < 0.05$). The relationship between the variables is stated as -0.38, which further reinforces the relatively strong relationship between the IV and DVs. This correlation indicates that the lower the level of English Reading Comprehension, the higher the lack of background knowledge.

Table 3: The correlation between the independent variables and the dependent variable

Reading comprehension	R	P
Lack of background	- 0.38***	0.000

knowledge		
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*** Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level.

From the table 4, the P-value is 0.000 which is less than 0.05 ($P < 0.05$). This proved that the factors that affecting English Reading Comprehension have a significant relationship. At the same time, the table 4 shows that the R is equal to -0.29, therefore, the R was shown to have a negative value so the factor affecting English reading comprehension has a negative relationship. This correlation indicated that the lower the level of English Reading Comprehension, the higher the influence of first language in reading comprehension.

Table 4: The correlation between the independent variables and the dependent variable

Reading comprehension	R	P
Influence of first language	- 0.29**	0.000

** Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level.

Conclusion

One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study is that the lack of interest and motivation is the most agreed factor by respondents with a total 27.6% of disagree by respondents compared to the other factors. This indicates that Higher education students have less habit of reading daily, no motivation to read different materials like novels, newspapers, stories and essays. The other factor followed by influential of the first language has gathered a total of 21.0% of disagree by respondents.

The findings of this research provide insights on the two factors that have positively accepted by the students while lack of background knowledge got the least disagree from respondents with a total of 7.9%. Overall, this study proves the relationship between the three factors on the level of reading comprehension among Higher education students. In other words, the level of reading was the lower with a -0.66 R value, while the lack of interest towards reading comprehension was the higher. This factor has the highest negative relationship compared to lack of background knowledge ($R = -0.38$) and the influence of the first language ($R = -0.29$). Based on the discussion, it has become obvious that the lack of interest & motivation and influence of the first language are the two main key factors that affect reading comprehension among the students in Higher education.

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