READING MOTIVATION AND READING STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY UNDERGRADUATES IN A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

There is an alarming concern among educators and parents about children who cannot read but more seriously about those who can read but do not have the motivation to read. The study investigated 245 undergraduates' level of reading motivation and their reading strategies use when they read academic texts. This study aims at finding the connection between reading motivation and reading strategy, to discover the differences between male and female students' reading motivation and reading strategy and the relationship between variables such as program of study and family's income. The results showed that the undergraduates' reading motivation was of moderate level and they mostly use the cognitive reading strategy instead of the metacognitive reading strategy. There seemed to be a connection between the undergraduates' reading motivation and the reading strategy used. The results indicated that their motivation to read had an influence on the use of the reading strategy. Though female students had higher reading motivation compared to male students, both groups only use the cognitive reading strategy. Therefore, the results showed that undergraduates having moderate reading motivation tend to use only cognitive reading strategy. Thus, reading motivation does influence the acquisition of reading skills and there is a possibility that the higher reading motivation, the higher the tendency to use high level reading skills such as metacognitive which is a necessity for students' effective reading. Instructors should motivate students to become active readers by improving students' intrinsic motivation and decreasing their extrinsic motivation. Other results revealed that there was a significant difference among the five Diploma programs and finally, the students' reading motivation had no significant relationship with their economic background.

Keywords: Reading motivation, reading strategies, cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies.

1   INTRODUCTION

Reading is closely related to writing competence, students who do not read in their free time often face problems during their writing assignments and thus many perform poorly in writing tasks. These students would have difficulty in not only the reading skills but the writing skills as well. To improve students' reading motivation, educators should understand how students acquire the motivation to enable them to be engaged readers. It is vital that they know what stimulate students' motivation to read and think of some strategies to improve students' reading ability. Spangler (2000) recommended that if students are to become mature and effective readers, they must have the skill and the will to read. It daunts on us, particularly educators who are concerned about student's reading behaviour and wonder whether they are reading enough in a day and also are they enjoying what they are reading? Morrow and Weinstein (1982) carried out a study on primary-grade children and discovered that very few children choose to look at books during their free time. They believe that children do not spend enough time reading and that they rather do other activities in their spare time. Thus, it is important for educators to motivate their students to read because many students are at risk of reading failure due to their lack of motivation.

Students are thought to be motivated extrinsically which is reading for an external reward or intrinsically that is for the sake or value of doing something. An engaged reader is someone who reads for the sake of reading and not for a grade or for other external incentives (Wigfield and Guthrie, 1997). They claimed that reading motivation does not only explain why some children read more than others but also how the children utilize the strategic skills which allows him or her to engage in the reading. Without motivation children will less likely be using metacognitive strategies such as using prior knowledge, searching for information, self-monitoring, and are less likely to read. Motivational variables, such as self-efficacy, interest, and autonomy, are greatly influential in reading engagement which is an integration of social, cognitive, and motivational aspects.

In reading strategies, two major categories are mentioned: cognitive and metacognitive. Cognitive strategies help the reader to construct meaning from the text. Carrell (1989), Davis and Bistodeau (1993) cited that studies in both first and second language reading research generally provide a binary division of cognitive strategies as bottom-up and top-down. Aebersold and Field (1997) mentioned how the readers' minds repeatedly engage in a variety of processes during reading. Readers normally start by using the bottom-up strategies like processing information at the sentence level. This means that they focus on identifying the meaning and grammatical category of a word, sentence syntax, text details, and so forth. Barnett (1988) and Carrell (1989) added that while the students are processing the information provided by each sentence, they check to see how the information fits, using top-down strategies like background knowledge, prediction, getting the gist of a text, and skimming. On the other hand, metacognitive strategies are used to regulate or monitor cognitive strategies. They check or evaluate the effectiveness of the reading done. Devine (1993) and Flavell (1981) described metacognitive strategies in reading as strategies that act to monitor or regulate the cognitive strategies. Baker and Brown (1984) added that metacognitive strategies include checking the outcome of any attempt to solve a problem, planning one's next move, monitoring the effectiveness of any attempted action, testing, revising, and evaluating one's strategies for learning. Devine (1993) commented that skimming a text for key information involves the usage of cognitive strategy, whereas assessing the effectiveness of skimming for gathering textual information would be a metacognitive strategy. Hence, using only cognitive reading strategy to read is insufficient for effective reading and there is a possibility that the reader may make the wrong interpretation of the reading.

Juel (1988) found that early success of achieving reading competencies or cognitive competencies can influence students' interest in reading. This means that in order for students to be engaged in reading, they must acquire a good reading ability. If they do not achieve a certain level of reading competencies, then they would not want to have anything to do with reading. These students would not be able to read independently even for their own personal interest (Turner, 1992). As a result this may lead to poor academic achievement and a decline in language proficiency and critical thinking skills. Baker (2000) also agreed that cognitive skills are foundational to creating an engaged reader. Thus, having low language proficiency can become barriers in motivating readers to read.

In Malaysia, there is a widespread concern among educators and parents about children not having the ability and lacking the motivation to read. Zulhilmi (2005), in the New Straits Times, observed that reading is often confined to classrooms and for educational pursuits. This could be one of the reasons why children have not developed good reading habits and need further encouragement to motivate them to read. In another situation, in the News Straits Times dated 12th February 2006 reported a survey conducted by the National Union of the Teaching Profession (NUTP) on students' ability to read in various primary and secondary schools in Malaysia. From the 70 secondary schools population of 73,858 students analyzed, 1964 students

could not read. What is more shocking is that these students are in Form five and having had eleven years of schooling yet failed to achieve the basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics. Drastic actions need to be taken to overcome this situation because these students will not only lose interest to read but will face many problems in the future especially in getting a job.

The new curriculum (New Primary School Curriculum, 2001) or popular known "Kurikulum Baru Sekolah Rendah" (KBSR) emphasized that every primary school students must be able to read, write and do arithmetic, the 3Rs before proceeding to the secondary education. It is hoped that once the students have acquired the skills to read, they would then develop their reading habits. Students' reading ability in the first and second language needs to be developed so that they can become active engaged readers. However, the expectation that students would become engaged readers once they have acquired the reading skills and habits does not necessarily prevail. Noorliza (2006) in her study about reading preferences of 30 high achievers Primary students in a rural school in Terengganu, found that they do not usually read when they have free time and this indicates that they lack the motivation to read, and though they have the ability to read does not make them engaged readers.

The lack of reading habits is still prevalent at tertiary levels. Abdul Kadir (2005) conducted a study on Universiti Teknologi MARA Office Management students' inability to timely complete their studies, and found that one of the reasons is due to having poor reading interest. He commented that his students do not make reading their habit and they hardly read any reading material during their free time. He urged that something ought to be done to instill reading interest among the students. Therefore, it is clear that undergraduates are facing problems in their reading. This could be due to incomprehensibility of text, inability to interact with text and low motivation for reading (Palincsar and Brown, 1984). They reiterated that students are adequate decoders but poor comprehenders and this will pose a major hurdle for the undergraduates when they need to read a lot of academic texts in order to do their assignments and it cannot be denied that undergraduates need to read a lot of academic texts, journals, websites and magazines regularly which require them to use high level of reading skills and therefore making reading an effortful activity. Due to this reason many students often choose not to read. They read too little and rarely read for deep understanding (Guthrie, 2001). Thus, if their motivation for reading is low, then it would cause the students to suffer reading failure. Hence, motivation to read is a high priority and students who are at risk of having reading failure can lead to poor academic achievement. This is because for many undergraduates, reading academic texts is a new experience and can be overwhelmingly difficult. This is especially true for those whose reading skills are less than excellent. In schools, students spent 11 or more years basically reading for academic achievement as well as for pleasure. They only do light reading like reading newspapers, entertainment magazines and the like and would spend a short period of time reading. The situation is not similar when they enter higher education as they have to spend long hours surfing the internet for information and reading academic textbooks. They will be unwilling readers or are inattentive about their reading. They feel insecure and easily intimidated by complex material. Furthermore, they feel inadequately prepared for the readings given. They need to interact with their reading text and use the correct reading strategies to understand the text. This may not be easy as part of the learning is to use reading strategies and each time a new and different strategy has to be used when old ones failed. They need to continue, complete, summarize and connect new information to other knowledge they have acquired.

Based on these problems, this study attempts to look into what causes students to not want to read and what could be done to improve students' reading motivation and reading strategies and suggest possible ways that can improve students' willingness to read. Next, the general purpose of the study is to examine students' level of reading motivation and the reading strategies used

when they read academic texts. It also aims at finding connections, relationships and differences between male and female students' reading motivation and reading strategies used and to discover any significance relationship between variables such as program of study and family's income.

2 METHODOLOGY

The SPSS version 11.5 was used to tabulate and code the results. The frequencies and percentages obtained were used to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze and the central tendencies such as mean and standard deviation were obtained. For inferential statistics, the T-test, Anova and Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) were used to ascertain the relationship that existed between variables such as male and female students' reading motivation level, reading strategy, students' program of study and family's income. A questionnaire consisting of two parts was used. Firstly, an adapted reading motivation questionnaire originally created by Wigfield and Guthrie (1997) that consisted 45 items and divided into 11 categories of reading motivation to measure aspects of reading motivation which included self-efficacy, several types of intrinsic and extrinsic reading motives, social aspects of reading and the desire to avoid reading. The second one was a reading strategy inventory developed by Cor and Conny (2003) which included 10 items of the cognitive strategies and metacognitive reading strategies.

3 ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

3.1 Demographic factors

The samples used in the study consisted of 245 undergraduates of which 61 are male and 184 are female. The samples are chosen from five different programs of study in a public university. Their ages ranged from 18 years to 20 years old. They have similar educational background that includes eleven years of primary and secondary education. 85 percent of the samples hailed from the east coast of Peninsula Malaysia, and these undergraduates use Malay language for communication at home and at the university. Only 11 percent speak English at home as well as for communication with others.

Firstly, there is a significant difference between male and female students' reading motivation. From the mean, we can see that female students have a higher reading motivation of 163.93 with Standard Deviation of 23.06 while male students have only 153.28 with Standard Deviation of 12.26. The same result is obtained for students' reading strategy whereby the female students obtain a slightly higher mean of 17.31 with Standard Deviation 1.25 while the male students have a mean of 15.92 with Standard Deviation of 1.38. Though the female students scored higher than the male students, both groups are using more of the cognitive reading strategies than the metacognitive strategies. Next, the results revealed that among all five Diploma programs there were significantly different in their reading motivation. The F probability value is 1.87 and given p is more than 0.05. Similarly, from the SPSS output, the Critical F tables, the F- probability value is 3.088, given p is less than 0.05, shows that the reading strategy used by the five Diploma programs are different. Lastly, the study also found that there seems to be no significant relationship between students' reading motivation level and students' economic background with the Pearson Correlation r of 0.226. Thus, higher income does not associate with having higher reading motivation. This finding is similar to a study done by UNESCO (2003) whose findings revealed that readers who read for pleasure and read a variety of reading materials are better readers regardless of their family background.

3.2 Reading motivation

The reading motivation indicates that, it is around the midpoint range where the scale "Agreed" had the highest mean score for ten of the reading motivation construct with the exception of Work Avoidance which has the highest scale for "Disagree". This shows that students would not avoid reading difficult text and after calculating the average score for all the 11 dimensions, the result show highest score of 'Agree' with 510 points (38%) and the lowest case is 'Totally Disagree' with only 32 or 2.39%. From the Mean obtained that is 3.48 and standard deviation of 7.61, we can conclude that the students' reading motivation is in the middle level that signifies a moderate level because from a scale of 1 to 5, most of the respondents' answers are between the scales of 'Not Sure' and 'Agree'. of more than half or 57.33% of the samples agreed that grades play an important role in their desire to read especially in doing well in tests and examinations and only 1.55% strongly disagreed that grades is the only reason for them to read. Thus, we can conclude that grades are a vital element that would motivate students to read. Lastly, compliance which means doing reading to meet the expectation of others depict quite a large number of the samples that is 57.62% agreed that they read to comply with others like teachers, parents, and friends who want them to do well in their studies and only 4.17% of the samples strongly disagreed that they read to comply with other people's wishes.

Accordingly, the data indicate that the students characterized themselves as motivated readers having moderate scores, which reflected that they have a moderate level of self-efficacy. In other words, respondents thought that they would be moderately successful in their reading. Thus if their expectations for the reading tasks is of a moderate mode, then this would show that their willingness to expend efforts is only of average range or level because they believe partially in their success in the task. They tend to have some perseverance in their reading. , Therefore, when the respondents are faced with difficult tasks, they would still persist doing the tasks till, the end and they would not stop or evade doing them. Thus, this would indicate that the students believe that they are competent enough and are efficacious at reading. This would result in them being engaged in any reading tasks, even the difficult ones. They would also not avoid challenging reading activities. For Work-avoidance category, it reflected that they have some desire to try readings that are difficult.

Next, for intrinsic motivation the data show a moderate to moderately low score. These data reflect students' desire, interests, attitude, value and how much time they would be willing to spend on their reading. Students' desire to read was only moderate, so they have a moderate reading interest. Scores for Involvement and Importance both indicate that students do not enjoy a lot when they read and therefore they would not want to be involved or spend more time reading. Similarly they do not think or value reading as important. The data reflect students' desire, interests, attitude, value and how much time they would be willing to spend for their reading. Students' desire to read was only moderate, so they have a moderate reading interest. Scores for Involvement and Importance dimensions portrayed that students do not enjoy a lot when they read and therefore they would not want to be involved or spend more time reading. Similarly they do not think or value reading as important. On the whole, the students' extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation are moderate and they do their readings for evaluative and comparative purposes as well as reading for interest or pleasure. Lastly, the social purpose of reading indicates that students do most of their readings to meet the expectation of others.

3.3 Reading Strategy

Firstly, for reading strategy, the data reveals that most of the students (61.5%) used a dictionary when they do not understand the meaning of a word or they would ask someone who knows the meaning of the word. This shows the students' attempt to understand meanings of individual word

by using a bottom-up reading strategy. As for understanding a sentence or at intrasentential level, most of them (58.5%) used rereading strategy which is also a bottom-up reading strategy. Skimming and scanning is the most commonly used reading strategy among the students. They used this strategy when reading for general understanding and to better remember facts or information and to know key ideas found in sentences that contain important details. With this strategy, students may read quickly or slowly depending on the difficulty of the text. The samples used a reading strategy called association with prior knowledge before they start any reading to connect new information with the previous stated context and when they do not understand a particular sentence, they realized that they have not develop adequate links or connections with the text. The last reading strategy used by the samples is prediction as when students have problems with reading a text, they will read ahead to predict the likely content of the succeeding portions of the text.

Generally, the data collected from the Reading Strategy Awareness Inventory shows that students used only the cognitive strategies in reading that includes 3 bottom-up strategies and 4 top-down strategies. The 3 bottom-up strategies are using dictionary, 61.5%, intrasentential features, 58.5%, and restatement or rereading, 34.2%.The top-down reading strategies include skimming/scanning, 48.2%, 47.7%, 42.5% and 40%, association with prior knowledge, 42.8%, reference to the antecedent information, 45.4%, and prediction, 40.7%. The data indicated no metacognitive reading strategies were employed by the students at all. Thus, the data reflected that the samples only possess some knowledge about cognitive reading strategies (bottom-up and top-down). Reading researchers such as Carrell, Pharis and Liberto (1989) and Cotteral (1990) commented that students who merely used bottom-up strategies are considered as having a low proficiency in their reading. Although the respondents in the study did use three bottom-up strategies, more of the top-down strategies were used while reading. However, the students do not have the knowledge of the metacognitive strategies, and thus this would affect the students' reading comprehension ability. This is because they do not know how to check or monitor their reading and therefore can make incorrect interpretation of what they are reading. Good readers need to be able to constantly evaluate and monitor their reading in order to overcome reading problems.

4   CONCLUSION

We contend that this study had provided a clear picture about students' reading motivation, their reading ability and the strategies used when reading. We found that students' reading motivation had an overall moderate score for all 11 dimensions. The results reflected that the respondents are not really motivated enough to read. Since they are only having a moderate level of reading motivation, it may not get them to be involved with reading and may also be less engrossed when they read. We strongly believe that, this could lead to a decrease in reading interest and they will not read or share reading with friends and family members. Despite the students' reading motivation being of an average level, there are some strong points about the students' reading motivation that include Challenge and Self-efficacy beliefs. These two dimensions are crucial determiners of students' reading success. This indicated that the students are not struggling readers and with the correct instruction of reading strategies, these dimensions will improve the students' academic achievements especially in reading comprehension.

Next, the data also revealed that students are moderately motivated to read on account when they will be evaluated. This is a common phenomenon during examination time but this type of reading motivation is not long lasting and students should have the intrinsic motivation and further strengthened by the extrinsic motivation. Therefore, motivation for reading should change from time to time increasing in strength, number or type. Students should be encouraged to read not only for examination or evaluation purposes but also for enjoyment, interest and knowledge. It is feared that their reading motivation will decrease when there is no examination or evaluation.

Then their motivation for reading will be less active. Even though extrinsic motivation is important as an external factor to motivate students to read, it is not enough or long lasting.

Consequently, we found that students only used the lower level reading strategies and these strategies were used to understand meaning of words at sentence level or to remember facts. They do not make use of the metacognitive skills which are of higher level reading strategies. One of the reasons could be the students have not mastered the higher level reading strategies. They have only developed the lower cognitive reading strategies such as using dictionary, skimming or scanning and finding word meanings, which are sufficient to answer questions in examination as well as to improve their academic achievement. It is important for students to acquire the different types of reading strategies in order for them to improve their reading motivation. The connection between reading motivation and reading strategy is now clear and results show that students' reading motivation does influence the reading strategies used by them. This is similar to the study conducted by Wigfield and Guthrie (1997) that revealed a significant influence the reading motivation has on the reading strategies.

5   SUGGESTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

We discovered that the students have only acquired a minimum level of competency and their prior knowledge and experience of their reading did little to enhance their reading motivation. Therefore, we can conclude that the students have not acquired a lot of the reading skills or strategies when they were in schools. It is crucial for instructors to teach effective reading strategies to students during class hours. We suggest that teaching reading strategies must start with the bottom-up and top-down cognitive strategies before teaching the more difficult metacognitive skills. Students must be provided with ample exercises to practice the reading strategies taught. Instructors should not assume that their students have acquired the reading skills and have the ability to read well. These skills are difficult to master but they need to be taught and developed from time to time. In short, students must be motivated to learn them and instructors teach them how to read using different reading strategies.

Next, the development of students' reading ability and competencies in reading should be carried out at an early age that is at the primary school level. When students' interest to read is high then there is motivation to read and be engaged in reading. Thus their competency in the second language would be high too. At this point, the students are still learning the English Language, its grammar and vocabulary and whatever knowledge they have acquired from their primary and secondary education may not be sufficient for them to perform successfully at tertiary level. Therefore, they may not have the competency level that is expected of them and these have affected their reading performance.

Moreover, we strongly suggest instructors to motivate their students by providing an array of reading materials. Books and other reading materials should be brought to class and introduced them to their students. It is important to remember to provide students with books that they can and want to read. We also suggest more fiction books that provide textual, realistic characters, readable and convincing text that would interest and fulfill the students' need. This could arouse the students' interest to read more about the subject. A wide selection of books brought to class ought to be carefully selected to boost the students' interest to read them.

Finally, we strongly believe that instructors could try to improve students' reading motivation by improving their intrinsic motivation. This would mean enhancing activities that increase the dimensions such as Challenge, Involvement, Social and Self-efficacy. By doing so, the students

can become more active readers. Active readers would be more engrossed and engaged in their reading. Once they have become engaged in the reading, they would be more intrinsically motivated to read. They will use strategies such as self-monitoring and inferencing to understand text. Nevertheless, students who are less active readers or those who merely have extrinsic motivation will ultimately decrease in the number of their reading and this would decrease the opportunity to be active readers.

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