

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

#### **5.0 Introduction**

In this study, nine Year Four pupils from an urban school were chosen to participate in a study which sought to identify reading comprehension difficulties they face in the primary school setting.

Reading comprehension is a skill that pupils will need as long as they are in school. Although English is the second language in Malaysia, it has gained a new status with the implementation of Mathematics and Science in English. English is also the language used in private colleges and tertiary institutions. Therefore, reading comprehension skills will be needed beyond the primary school and secondary school setting. In order to identify reading comprehension difficulties faced by pupils in an urban school, the following measures were taken.

A series of six reading comprehension tests were used as a tool to determine their level of comprehension as well as to identify the types of reading comprehension difficulties they face. A questionnaire was also administered to obtain relevant background information on the subjects in order to draw a more informed explanation of the reading

comprehension difficulties identified. The following Research Questions were examined in this study:

1. What are the reading comprehension levels of the subjects as measured by their English language school-based assessment?
2. What are the types of reading comprehension difficulties they face?
3. What are the possible reasons for the difficulties identified in (2)?

This chapter will summarize the findings of this study, draw conclusions and implications from the main findings as well as make recommendations on reading comprehension difficulties faced by Malaysian school children for further research related to reading comprehension difficulties.

### **5.1 Summary of the Main Findings**

As can be seen in the analysis, the level of the reading comprehension of the nine subjects is poor when measured against the requirements of the Year Four Syllabus because the requirements in the sub skills were not met. Nine out of thirty-five pupils failed to perform the tasks set. These nine pupils who were selected as subjects did not fare well in the five subsequent reading comprehension tests.

Specific reading comprehension difficulties were identified in the analysis of the tests. The reading comprehension difficulties are: problems in answering structured and open-ended questions, inability to write relevant and comprehensible answers to the reading comprehension questions and grammatical errors that mar the structure of sentences, hence producing incorrect answers. Vocabulary problems was a reason why the subjects could not express themselves.

These reading comprehension difficulties identified can be attributed to the lack of schemata, lack of vocabulary and grammar knowledge, poor reading comprehension strategies and poor language proficiency. Several factors may contribute to their lack of schemata. There may be other contributing factors such lack of interest in English as a whole, lack of the use of English outside the school environment and lack of motivation to use the language.

The data from the questionnaire showed that socio-economic status is not linked to the subjects' reading comprehension abilities as indicated by the test scores. . Although not all pupils from poor families lack encouragement to read, the general tendency is prevalent. Seven out of nine subjects are from non English speaking homes and the lower income group where their fathers are all blue collar workers. The findings in this study contradicts Entwistle, Alexander and Olson's (1997) study that there may be a link between poor readers and socio-economic status (SES). Entwistle, Alexander and Olson (1997) provided evidence that low SES pupils lost ground during vacation while

high SES pupils made comparable gains and continued to improve academically. Korenman, Miller and Espen (1995) also indicated that lack of emotional support and cognitive stimulation in the home is a disadvantage in the acquisition of verbal, reading and math skills of poor children.

As reported in the *New Straits Times* on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2006, more challenging educational prospects are in store under the Ninth Malaysian Plan, quoted the Education Ministry Parliamentary Secretary, P. Komala Devi, whereby RM40 million has been allocated for the upgrading of special classes known as the Integration Programme in mainstream schools. The Education Ministry also plans to add 46 pre-school classes to the programme. To date, the implementation of the pre-school classes has been done but the results are yet to be documented.

Generally, contend Korenman, Miller and Espen (1995), pupils from high SES background rank among the cream of the crop and pupils from low SES do badly academically. The same may be observed in their reading abilities.

Socio-economic Status and reading comprehension abilities have no link and this may be due to the fact that the subjects who fared better in the reading comprehension tasks read story books and were readers. Although they were from the lower SES, they did better in the reading comprehension tasks, although the reading comprehension level was still poor. The lack of emotional support and cognitive stimulation at home may be

significant reasons why the subjects in general have reading comprehension difficulties, as pointed out by Korenman, Miller and Espen (1995).

As reported in The New Straits Times dated 25<sup>th</sup> May 2006, 162 000 Malaysian pupils leave school without being able to read. Such a situation may be avoided or lessened if remediation is carried out for English in addition to Malay and Mathematics. Hence, pupils may be able to employ various strategies to perform in reading comprehension because they may overcome the lack linguistic competence through remediation. Lack of vocabulary, grammar and syntax problems as well as schemata may improve if remediation is carried out for English in the primary school setting.

However, in the school where this study was carried out, the remedial English programme was not effective because the year end results did not show any improvement in reading comprehension. Remedial English was carried out as a pilot project in Selangor State only and it was done informally and outside the normal school hours as opposed to the Remedial Classes or 'Kelas Pemulihan' which is carried out within school hours and conducted formally. This may be the reason why the remediation program in English was not effective in the school where this study was carried out and therefore may be a factor in the pupils' poor reading comprehension levels. If, however, the remediation programme is carried out within school hours in a formal manner, perhaps the reading comprehension levels of pupils may improve.

Effective remediation programs are necessary so that some background knowledge may be deposited in pupils' schemata as remedial classes are often repetitive.

## **5.2 Discussion**

The conclusions made from the tests and questionnaire show that the reading comprehension level of the nine subjects is poor. The findings reveal that lack of schemata and linguistic incompetence that mar the structural make up of the sentences are the reading comprehension difficulties. The lack of schemata and poor language skills are due to the lack or absence of the reading habit and the lack of exposure to the target language outside the school environment.

Another aspect that mars reading comprehension scores among the subjects was their use of the language. The UPSR English Paper Two marking scheme includes grammar. Paper One is in MCQ format, whereby, grammar may be tested in MCQ format. However, written responses are tested in Paper Two. If candidates lack competency in written responses, chances are that they may not fare well in the overall UPSR English Paper. Hence, their lack of exposure to grammar may be an obstacle in providing the correct answer. Reading comprehension and writing are both important as they are interlinked. According to the sub skills specified in the Year Four syllabus, the reading comprehension skills which are scanning for specific information (3.8.2), reading and obtaining meaning by making references to texts (3.8.3), read and talk about stories

heard or read (3.9.3), read and understand simple texts (3.8.4) and give details about people and animals (3.9.3) are straight forward reading comprehension skills. The sub skills are repeated for all the topics covered in the Year Four Syllabus. Although they are repeated several times in the syllabus, pupils still face reading comprehension difficulties due to the lack of schemata, linguistic incompetence ,vocabulary and grammar problems which effect the structural and grammatical composition of the reading comprehension answers. The pupils' responses may show comprehension, but they cannot be marked as the correct answer in a paper that tests language.

### **5.3. Implications**

The findings of this study present common problems faced in the reading comprehension lessons. According to the researcher's personal observation, the findings of this study are similar to the reading comprehension problems faced by many Malaysian school children. If reading comprehension problems persists in an urban school, it could be worse in the rural setting. The following are some implications for learning and teaching effective reading comprehension.

The subjects in this study need to be pushed to participate in classroom activities. They should be encouraged to actively take part in role-plays to enhance their vocabulary skills.

Pupils should be encouraged to participate actively in reading comprehension lessons. If possible, a double period should be set aside for reading comprehension every week. Pupils may be motivated to read a wide range of English books that are of their level. Since reading tends to improve on their schemata, pupils may be instilled with the importance of owning the simplest form of a personal library at home. Books may be exchanged among friends to increase the number of books per pupil. Even if pupils owned a home library, the size of the library as well as the type of books and how often it is used would have an impact on schemata. In the case of the subjects, it is probable that the library was not utilized in the proper manner or the library did not contain the kind of books suitable for vocabulary building or schemata. Adams' (1982) six-step reading strategy may not be familiar to the subjects or they could be uncertain of the strategy if it was carried out in the classroom.

Workshops on reading comprehension may be held as often as possible so that pupils may participate and benefit from a better learning environment, increase their vocabulary, and expand on their schemata. Hence, remedial classes on grammar, vocabulary may be improved.

Meaningful learning of reading comprehension outside the classroom experience may be conducted by inviting speakers from other schools. Grammar has to be taught in and out of context as the written aspect of reading comprehension is reliant on grammatically correct sentences. Pupils attempting reading comprehension in ESL may not be familiar



with the use of collocations, idiomatic expressions and proverbial phrases, and as such they need to be exposed to them in everyday English lessons and through the reading experience. As pupils read more, they are exposed to grammatically correct sentences and this may be beneficial in increasing the linguistic competence. Materials that are interesting to pupils may be devised so that they would want to participate in reading comprehension with enthusiasm. Self-correction may be introduced in the classroom so that they may practice answering reading comprehension texts at home, in the absence of an instructor. In doing so, they may come out of the “learned helplessness” state as described by Johnson and Baumann (1984) and become more independent readers, even if their families are unable to assist them.

Adams (1982), focused on the six step strategy for reading content area texts - previewing headings, reciting sub headings, asking questions for sub headings, reading to find important details, reading sub headings and reciting important details and rehearsing or reading each sub heading and reciting important details. These pre-reading skills are used in the Literature component in the Malaysian school English syllabus, but not in everyday reading comprehension lessons, perhaps due to the time constraint factor. If the six step strategy by Adams (1982) is carried out on a consistent basis of day to day practice, pupils might be able to comprehend better through means of reinforcement in their schemata. Pupils might be able to understand reading comprehension texts by taking in one piece of information, gradually. The six step strategy is probably not known to the pupils or they are not quite clear at present.

Vacca and Vacca (1998) discussed the reasoning strategy and how to teach it to the students through encoding, inferring, mapping and applying. For pupils with reading comprehension difficulties, especially in Year Four which is the transition period into the Second Phase of Primary education, these skills are imperative. Reading comprehension skills will not only be useful in English, but in Mathematics and Science as well. There is a substantial amount of comprehension of texts required to answer Mathematics and Science questions.

Remedial classes in English may be conducted formally within school hours and early intervention of remediation may be carried out as early as the first three months of Year Two. A change in the policy may help reduce the number of pupils who leave primary and secondary schools unable to read English.

#### **5.4 Suggestions are Made for Further Research:**

1. Reading comprehension difficulties faced by pupils in a rural school.

If the problem persists in an urban setting where pupils are exposed to English, it could be worse in the rural schools where the exposure to the target language is limited. This in return, may have an adverse effect on other core subjects taught in English, such as Mathematics and Science, where comprehension is required.

2. The effectiveness of reading comprehension instructional materials used in Primary Schools.

Suitability of texts is an important aspect in promoting comprehension. Therefore, reading comprehension materials in text books should cater to all the pupils. The reading comprehension texts in text books should be graded to facilitate weak, average and good readers.

3. A comparison of reading comprehension difficulties between pupils in an urban school and a rural school.

The two different types of settings may indicate similar or completely different findings. These findings may be used to improve on pupils reading comprehension skills in general.

4. The effectiveness of grammar testing in reading comprehension texts in Primary Schools.

Grammar indirectly has an influence in reading comprehension answers given by pupils. Instead of grammatically correct answers to indicate comprehension, pupils should be allowed to give one word answers, in addition to multiple choice questions to show comprehension of texts.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

The following research questions have been answered in this study:

1. What are the reading comprehension levels of the subjects as measured by their English Language school-based assessment?
2. What are the types of reading comprehension difficulties they face?
3. What are the possible reasons for the difficulties identified in (2)?

The major findings of this study indicated that the subjects' level of reading comprehension abilities in accordance to the Year Four Syllabus is generally poor. The subjects' test scores and answers provided evidence that they lacked the ability to decode and answer structured and open-ended questions. The possible reasons for the subjects' inability to perform satisfactorily in the reading comprehension tasks is their limited proficiency in English, characterized by their limited vocabulary, poor grammar knowledge and lack of relevant schemata. In addition to that, the subjects were also unable to apply appropriate reading comprehension strategies in their effort to comprehend the reading comprehension texts.