

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS OF DATA AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction

The main objective of this study was to investigate the existing reading problems among urban secondary school students from a teacher's perspective. The teachers' observation of their students provided the invaluable data gathered by means of the questionnaire and interview. The data collected were aimed at answering the following research questions:

1. What are the reading problems among secondary school students in an urban setting?
2. What are ESL teachers' attitudes toward students with reading problems?
3. What are the existing measures taken by ESL teachers in handling students with reading problems ?
4. How can reading problems among secondary school students be remedied?

All the data collected were summarised by counting the frequencies of occurrence for the responses on each item of the questionnaire and converted into percentages. The results were analysed through tabulation with accompanying graphic presentation.

4.1 Findings and Discussion

The summarised data from both the interview and questionnaire were interpreted accordingly to uncover some answers and explanation to the abovementioned questions.

4.1.1 Interview

Responses that needed further clarification were used as a basis for interviewing the respondents. This was necessary to obtain an indepth understanding of the responses to answer the research questions of this study. This tool was valuable to explain the data obtained from the questionnaire. It also gave ample room for the respondents to explain themselves beyond what had been stated in their questionnaire responses. Such being the need for this tool, the analysis of the interview findings has been incorporated within the questionnaire findings throughout this chapter. A combined discussion is relevant to understand the research problem.

4.1.2 Questionnaire

A total of 30 respondents had participated in this study. The analysis and presentation of the data were based on the following:

- (a) Description of the sample
 - (i) Teaching background of the respondents

- (ii) Exposure in the field of remedial reading
- (iii) Defining remedial reading based on respondents' knowledge
- (b) Nature of reading problems
 - (i) Description of the reading problems :
 - word-recognition skills
 - vocabulary knowledge
 - comprehension skills
 - (ii) Description of the miscues exhibited by problem readers
 - (iii) Reading problems of problem readers who can read
 - (iv) Classification of reading deficiency levels
 - (v) Problem readers' attitudes toward reading
- (c) Teachers' attitudes towards problem readers and their reading problems
 - (i) Characteristics of students with reading problems
 - (ii) Effects of inability to read as a student
 - (iii) Respondents' perception of ESL teachers' role in addressing reading problems
 - (iv) Factors that can be considered in handling problem readers
 - (v) Respondents' perception of parents' role
 - (vi) Factors affecting respondents in implementing a remedial reading programme
- (d) Measures adopted by the respondents in handling the reading problems
 - (i) Existing teaching practices in a classroom setting
 - (ii) Teachers' efforts beyond the classroom setting
 - (iii) Other remedial reading approaches currently used by the respondents

This division would provide the relevant distinction between the areas to facilitate the discussion. Tables will be used to aid interpretation of the findings.

4.1.2.1 Description of the Sample

The respondents' teaching background and knowledge of remedial reading are discussed here.

4.1.2.1.1 Teaching Background of the Respondents

This section reports the following findings:

- (i) the respondents' experience in teaching English as illustrated in Table 4.1
- (ii) the respondents' teaching experience in urban schools as illustrated in Table 4.1
- (iii) the respondents' academic and professional qualification as illustrated in Table 4.2
- (iv) the levels of English taught by the respondents for the last three years as illustrated in Table 4.3

Items 1 - 3 in the questionnaire provided the data to validate the respondents' eligibility. All the respondents were ESL respondents currently teaching in urban secondary schools. Their teaching experience in teaching English is shown in Table 4.1 below:

Table 4.1: Teaching Experience

No. of years	Teaching English		Teaching in Urban Schools	
	No.	%	No.	%
3 - 5	3	10	9	30
6 - 8	3	10	7	23
9 - 11	8	27	4	13
12 - 14	5	17	3	10
15 - 17	5	17	3	10
18 - 20	4	13	3	10
> 20	2	7	1	3
Total	30	100%	30	100%

It was found that 80% (24 respondents) have more than 9 years of experience in teaching English. Their observation of their students would indeed be credible and aid in this investigation. This fact strengthens the credibility of the responses obtained in the questionnaire. About 37% (11 respondents) have more than 15 years of experience and the maximum range of more than 20 years comprised about 7% (2 respondents). In other words, more than one third of the respondents have more than 15 years of experience and this does favour the reliability of the findings.

Teaching experience in an urban setting is also illustrated in Table 4.1. 67 % (20 respondents) have 3-11 years of experience in urban secondary schools. The remaining 33% (10 respondents) have more than 12 years of exposure. Although the majority (30%) falls within the lower range i.e. 3 - 5 years of teaching experience in urban schools, their contribution is still valuable. The urban environment of the last 3 years has seen many changes with much rapid development in recent years. Hence the experience of teaching in an urban school setting over the past three years

is more significant for this study in order to investigate the prevailing reading problems among urban secondary school students.

The respondents' academic and professional qualifications are summarised in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Academic & Professional Qualification

No	Qualification	No.	%
1	Sijil Perguruan Asas & Dip. in TESL	2	7
2	Sijil Perguruan Khas & Dip. in TESL	1	3
3	Diploma & Degree in TESL	1	3
4	Sijil Perguruan Asas & Sijil Perguruan Khas & Degree in TESL	2	7
5	Sijil Perguruan Asas & Degree	9	30
6	Sijil Perguruan Asas & Sijil Perguruan Khas & Dip. in TESL & Degree (TESL & Lit.)	1	3
7	Degree in TESL	5	17
8	Degree & Dip. in Ed. (TESL)	6	20
9	Degree & Dip. in Ed. (TESL) & Masters Degree	3	10
	Total	30	100

Out of the 30 respondents, only 10% (3 respondents) do not have a diploma or degree. In fact 73% (22 respondents) have undergone TESL training and out of this, 43% (13 respondents) have a Bachelor's degree in TESL. 10% (3 respondents) possess a Master's degree. This was an added advantage in obtaining reliable data.

The respondents' observation and opinion as TESL trained respondents set a firm foundation in the investigation process. 80% (24 respondents) have a Bachelor's degree and 10% (3 respondents) have a diploma. All of them are trained ESL

teachers. During teacher training, these respondents would have been exposed to the teaching of reading, since it is within the teacher training syllabus. Although the nature of exposure varies according to the various levels of training, the basic knowledge in this area and the relevant teaching experience would suffice in providing the data. The respondents are familiar with the components of reading skills referred to in section D of the questionnaire.

The levels of English taught by these respondents for the last 3 years are shown in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Levels of English Taught

Levels	No.	%
Remove	5	17
Form One	14	47
Form Two	13	43
Form Three	20	67
Form Four	12	40
Form Five	11	37
Form Six	0	0

The majority of the respondents i.e. 67% (20 respondents) have been teaching the Form 3 level, 80% (24 respondents) the Form 3,4 and 5 levels whereas the rest were involved with the Remove, Forms 1 and 2 levels. The large number of respondents teaching the upper secondary levels would provide data to show that this problem can exist at the upper levels among more mature students. These subjects' responses would indeed reveal some significant truths about this problem.

4.1.2.1.2 Exposure in the Field of Remedial Reading

Being an ESL teacher does not mean that one has adequate exposure to the field of remedial reading. Items 4-6 in the questionnaire attempted to investigate this.

Table 4.4: Attendance at In-Service Courses on Remedial Reading

	No.	%
Yes	5	17
No	25	83
Total	30	100

The data in Table 4.4 shows that only 17% (5 respondents) had attended in-service courses in remedial reading in contrast to 83% (25 respondents) who did not attend any at all. This indicates the lack of exposure among the respondents in the area of remedial reading.

Among the 5 subjects who have attended such courses, 2 of them only attended a one-day course at their schools. That leaves 3 respondents (10%) who had a substantial amount of exposure. One of these 3 subjects had undergone a course in remedial education at the IAB, Genting Highlands, for a duration of 2 weeks in 1992. The second respondent attended a course at MPIK, Cheras for 6 months in 1984 and the third respondent at UPM, Serdang for 1 semester in 1997. Upon probing during the interview, the second respondent revealed that this particular course was undertaken during his teaching service in the primary school as this course was

exclusive to primary school teachers. This information raises a serious implication if the reading problems are exhibited by secondary school students and there are no trained teachers to handle remedial students.

Table 4.5: Level of Knowledge in Remedial Reading

	No.	%
Very high	0	0
High	2	7
Moderate	16	53
Low	9	30
Very low	3	10
Total	30	100

Table 4.5 shows that 53% (16 respondents) rated themselves as moderate with regard to their level of knowledge in this area of remedial reading. Among these 16 were the 3 respondents who had attended courses in remedial reading. Only 7% (2 respondents) gave themselves a high rating. One of them is the subject who had attended the 6-month course at MPIK, Cheras. The other respondent did not have any formal exposure to remedial reading. 30% (9 respondents) reported their knowledge at the low level and 10% (3 respondents) at the very low level.

Data from item 6 in the questionnaire has been summarised in Tables 4.6a and 4.6b.

Table 4.6a: Remedial Reading Exposure in Teacher Training Course

	No.	%
Yes	9	30
No	21	70
	30	100

Table 4.6b: Levels of Exposure To Remedial Reading

Levels of exposure	No.	%
Very high	0	0
High	1	11
Moderate	8	89
Low	0	0
Very low	0	0
Total	9	100

To the question of whether the area of remedial reading was covered in their teacher training, 70% (21 respondents) reported that it was not whereas 30% (9 respondents) claimed it was covered. Of the 30%, only 11% (1 respondent) had indicated the high level of exposure and coincidentally it was the same teacher who had attended the 6-month course at MPIK, Cheras. This reflects that even if remedial reading was included, the lack of emphasis had resulted in inadequate knowledge in the area. The rest of the respondents i.e. 89% (8 respondents) indicated a moderate level of exposure to remedial reading during their teacher training. Of these 30%, 89% (8 respondents) had a Bachelor's degree in TESL and 11% (1 respondent) had a Bachelor's degree in education. This could imply to a certain extent that such a course could provide the exposure to remedial reading.

4.1.2.1.3 Defining Remedial Reading Based on Respondents' Knowledge

Data from item 7 in the questionnaire are illustrated in Table 4.7. Based on the table, it is obvious that the majority i.e. 80% (24 respondents) found the first definition apt. They linked remedial reading to reading problems. Only 40% (12 respondents) identified remedial reading with language ability and individualised programmes. However 67% (20 respondents) agreed that remedial reading is related to giving personal instruction to problem readers and 63% (19 respondents) linked remedial reading to a measure of accommodating reading lessons to the students' level. 50% (15 respondents) understood remedial reading as teaching how to read and 53% (16 respondents) reported remedial reading as improving reading skills.

Table 4.7: Respondents' Understanding of Remedial Reading

Description		No.	%
Teaching students with reading problems		24	80
Giving personal instruction to students with reading problems		20	67
Making the reading lessons appropriate for the student's level		19	63
Improving reading skills		16	53
Teaching students how to read		15	50
Individualized programmes		12	40
Improving students in their language ability		12	40
Others	Adapted strategies	1	3
	Looking into individual reading problems	1	3
	Getting into the root of the problem-social factor & home environment	1	3
	Dyslexia	1	3

Zintz (1972) has defined remedial reading as instruction of a corrective nature for people whose functioning level in reading is below their capacity level for reading. He clarifies that reading instruction takes place outside the usual class procedure and is highly individualised. However, from the data, the item on individualised programme only had 40% agreement (12 respondents) in contrast to giving personalised instruction (67%). The majority of the respondents did not link these two parallel descriptions. Even with the first definition i.e. teaching students with reading problems, 20% (6 respondents) were unable to associate it with remedial reading. It simply portrays the lack of substantial understanding and awareness among ESL teachers with regard to remedial reading. In fact, one particular respondent had given dyslexia in the "others" column and had ticked only the first description. This reflects how little respondents are acquainted with this term. It is a clear implication that attempts should be made to increase awareness among ESL teachers of the relevance of remedial reading programmes among problem readers.

4.1.2.2 Nature of Reading Problems

This section discusses the findings related to the type of reading problems exhibited by problem readers.

4.1.2.2.1 Description of the Reading Problems

Knowing that students have reading problems is not good enough because a teacher needs to know the nature of the problem. This is what will help the teacher to provide the required guidance. It would be pointless if the teacher tried to help without understanding the problem. Here, the researcher tried to gain insight into the nature of the reading problems among the students. Different students will have weaknesses in different areas. Perhaps one of the first tasks a language teacher has to undertake would be to identify the type of weakness. There are numerous diagnostic tools for this purpose but the access to and knowledge of these tools could still be a hindering factor. In this section, the problem has been looked into through various language skills required in reading, mainly the word-recognition and comprehension skills. A student with reading problems would possess a deficit in any one or more of these areas and the findings from items 8-11 in the questionnaire are reported in Table 4.8

Here it was discovered that 83% (25 respondents) often found their students were unable to obtain the meaning or pronunciation of a word by seeing the entire word as a unit. If the students are unable to know the meaning of a particular word, then this would get accumulated until the text becomes incomprehensible.

Table 4.8: Difficulties Exhibited in Word-Recognition Skills

Difficulties	A	F	S	N
Unable to obtain the meaning or pronunciation of a word by :				
- seeing the entire word as a unit	7 (23%)	18 (60%)	5 (17%)	- 0
- sound-symbol relationship :				
(i) consonants sounds	5 (17%)	15 (50%)	10 (33%)	- 0
(ii) vowel sounds : long	7 (23%)	17 (57%)	6 (20%)	- 0
short	7 (23%)	18 (60%)	5 (17%)	- 0
Structural analysis	9 (30%)	19 (63%)	2 (7%)	- 0
Contextual clues	5 (17%)	22 (73%)	3 (10%)	- 0

One of the difficulties studied was the sound-symbol relationship, better known as phonetic analysis. The respondents felt that students with reading problems had difficulty using this skill to obtain the pronunciation and the meaning of an unknown word. Some of these students may know the meaning of the word if they know the pronunciation because they may have been exposed to them verbally. This difficulty was studied through two differing sounds namely consonant sounds and vowel sounds. Some students with reading problems may not display deficits for both sounds. It was discovered that 67% (20 respondents) have always noticed the inability to use consonant sound-symbol relationship among their problem readers. The irregularities in the pronunciation of English words may also affect the acquisition of this skill.

As for the vowels, the researcher had divided them into long and short vowel sounds. 80% (24 respondents) have always noticed that the problem readers have difficulty identifying long vowel sounds and 20% (6 respondents) occasionally notice this difficulty. A similar finding was obtained for short vowels. 83% (25 respondents) have always noticed their students displaying this difficulty whereas 17% (5 respondents) only sometimes identified this among their students. A slight variation in the length of the sounds can give a totally different meaning to the sound. It does show that this is not an easy task for students with reading problems.

The subjects often found their students exhibited difficulties in structural analysis. 93% (28 respondents) reported this. The unknown word most likely would remain unknown without the necessary structural knowledge of the word. Their lack of knowledge in identifying the parts using the subskills i.e. prefixes, suffixes, root words etc., disables them from deriving the meaning or pronunciation of the unknown word.

A large number of these respondents, 90% (27 respondents), have noticed that their problem readers faced difficulties in using contextual clues in deriving the meaning or pronunciation of an unknown word. Only 10% (3 respondents) sometimes noticed this. The use of contextual clues is an asset when tackling a text with unknown words. They give credible hints to the meaning or pronunciation of the unknown words. However, here it is apparent that these problem readers have not acquired this skill.

The dictionary has always been considered a must when one is studying a language. However, not everyone knows how to utilise the dictionary to its maximum capacity. It is stated in 2.2 of the English Language syllabus for secondary

schools (please see Appendix F) that students should be taught to use a dictionary effectively. Items 12-14 in the questionnaire attempt to reveal the problems associated with vocabulary knowledge and Table 4.9 illustrates the findings

Table 4.9: Difficulties Exhibited in Vocabulary Knowledge

Difficulties	A	F	S	N
Unable to use the dictionary	5 (17%)	13 (43%)	10 (33%)	2 (7%)
Have poor spelling skills	5 (17%)	13 (43%)	12 (40%)	- 0
Limited vocabulary knowledge	8 (27%)	18 (60%)	4 (13%)	- 0

The researcher discovered that 60% (18 respondents) very often noticed the difficulty in using a dictionary to aid understanding of a text among their problem readers. Only 33% (10 respondents) occasionally noticed this inability.

Another area of difficulty among problem readers is spelling skills. 60% (18 respondents) usually noticed this difficulty among their students with reading problems. 40% (12 respondents) only sometimes noticed this. Most of the problem readers may consider spelling skills as less important than being able to read and understand. When they are still struggling to read well and understand, spelling skills may appear pointless.

Students with reading problems would seldom read. Their reading difficulties would hinder them from reading. Even if they speak the language, the vocabulary used might be limited to the ones they have heard. So, if in their environment the language is not a popular means of communication, then the vocabulary heard would

be limited. If that is the case, the individual may have a very limited source to enhance vocabulary knowledge. It was discovered that 87% (26 respondents) very often noticed this deficit among their students with reading problems.

Comprehension skills are another major component of reading. It is not enough if a student can read but cannot understand what is read. Therefore, when we consider reading difficulties, comprehension is crucial. When a student can read but does not comprehend, he or she has reading difficulties. Findings from items 15-16 in the questionnaire revealed some information pertaining to comprehension difficulties and this is shown in Table 4.10.

Table 4.10: Difficulties Exhibited in Comprehension Skills

Difficulties	A	F	S	N
Literal or factual comprehension	5 (17%)	13 (43%)	12 (40%)	- 0
Interpretive or inferential comprehension	8 (27%)	16 (53%)	6 (20%)	- 0
Comprehension difficulties when :				
Reading silently	9 (30%)	15 (50%)	5 (17%)	1 (3%)
Reading aloud	6 (20%)	17 (57%)	6 (20%)	1 (3%)
Someone reads to them	4 (13%)	14 (47%)	9 (30%)	3 (10%)

Comprehension has two levels, namely literal comprehension and interpretive comprehension. For the literal comprehension level, 60% (18 respondents) have often found their students with reading problems unable to comprehend. The remaining 40% (12 respondents) found their students not competent with literal

comprehension. This level is the level of factual comprehension which normally requires recognition of the basic facts found in the text. Questions which elicit literal comprehension usually use wh-words, such as what, when, where etc.

The interpretive or inferential comprehension level is a higher level and requires a deeper understanding of the information in the text. Here, it was discovered that 80% (24 respondents) found their students with reading problems often incapable of comprehension at this level.

Students can read a text either silently or aloud. When they read aloud, emphasis would be on the pronunciation of the word in addition to the intonation and stress unlike silent reading. Reading silently mainly involves the reader's interaction with the text. A student may also become very conscious of his or her pronunciation and give less emphasis to comprehension. This can be true because when reading aloud, others can listen to the mistakes and it can be an embarrassing situation especially for teenagers. In contrast, silent reading is only between the reader and the text. The researcher discovered that 80% (24 respondents) found their problem readers often display comprehension difficulties when they read silently. Conversely, 77% (23 respondents) found their students with reading problems showing comprehension difficulties when reading aloud.

When the students were read to, they seemed to have fewer difficulties in comprehending the text. Only 60% (18 respondents) found their students encounter difficulties when someone reads to them. If the students' listening and speaking skills are better, reading to them would help reduce the comprehension difficulties. It indicates that comprehension can be improved if someone reads to these problem readers rather than they read silently or aloud.

4.1.2.2.2 Description of the Miscues That Distort Meaning

77% (23 respondents) found their students with reading problems make errors while reading that distort the meaning of the text. As we have noted earlier, these problem readers have problems with sound-symbol relationship. The meaning would differ if they misread a word. Various other errors, such as substitution, omission, insertion, repetition etc. which are commonly known as miscues (oral reading errors) can also distort the meaning of a text.

The researcher had further studied the types of errors or miscues that these students make while reading obtained through item 18 of the questionnaire and this is reported in Table 4.11.

Table 4.11: Types of Miscues or Oral Reading Errors

Miscues	No. of teachers	Percentage %
Ignoring punctuation	28	93
Substitution	27	90
Hesitation	27	90
Omission	24	80
Use of non-words	19	63
Word reversals	14	47
Repetition	13	43
Insertion	12	40

Ignoring punctuation is at the top of the list with 93% (28 respondents) agreeing that their problem readers exhibit this error. Without the proper punctuation

stress, the meaning of a text can be distorted. Followed by the abovementioned errors are substitution and hesitation errors. 90% (27 respondents) notice this among their problem readers. Substitution errors are made when the students replace the word in the text with another without realising the difference. They probably face this sort of difficulty when the words appear to have almost similar sounds. They may not have acquired the skill to discriminate the sounds. The hesitation error is probably expected of a problem reader because they may not spontaneously know the pronunciation of the next word as they may be engaged in word-by-word reading.

The other errors identified by the respondents among their problem readers are omission of words (80% of the respondents), use of non-words (63% of the respondents), word reversals (47% of the respondents), repetition (43% of the respondents) and insertion (40% of the respondents).

4.1.2.2.3 Reading Problems of Problem Readers Who Can Read

Some of the students with reading problems can read but face other difficulties that need to be attended to. Data obtained from item 19 in the questionnaire is summarised in Table 4.12. It can be seen that 90% (27 respondents) found these students are able to read i.e. identify the words but unable to derive meaning from the text. 83% (25 respondents) stated that their students with reading problems can read but cannot answer questions beyond the literal comprehension level and they are only able to read lower level texts. 77% (23 respondents) found their students unable to answer open-ended questions and read very slowly. These students have a deficit in comprehension skills and this depends on the level of the

text read. These students may not have a severe reading problem. 60% (18 respondents) stated that their problem readers can read but do so reluctantly. This is probably due to their inability to read as well as their peers and as such, to avoid embarrassment, they avoid reading.

Table 4.12: Reading Problems of Problem Readers Who Can Read

Problems	No. of teachers	Percentage %
Cannot comprehend	27	90
Read only lower level texts	25	83
Cannot answer beyond literal comprehension	25	83
Read very slowly	23	77
Cannot answer open-ended questions	23	77
Read reluctantly	18	60

4.1.2.2.4 Classification of Reading Deficiency Levels

Table 4.13 illustrates the various types of readers based on their reading level as discovered through item 20 in the questionnaire. The respondents classified these students with reading problems as disabled readers (63% of the respondents), reluctant and slow learners (53% of the respondents), underachievers (37% of the respondents) and retarded readers (27% of the respondents). It was, however, rather alarming to know that 30% (9 respondents) had reported their students as nonreaders. These students have unfortunately accumulated their deficits to the secondary level.

Table 4.13: Types of Problem Readers

Description	No. of teachers	Percentage %
Disabled reader	19	63
Reluctant reader	16	53
Slow learner	16	53
Underachiever	11	37
Nonreader	9	30
Retarded reader	8	27

Students with reading problems have deficiencies in various areas of reading. The different levels of deficiency as revealed by item 21 in the questionnaire are illustrated in Table 4.14 below.

Table 4.14: Levels of Deficiency in Reading Skills

Levels	No. of teachers	Percentage %
Mild	2	7
Moderate	19	63
Severe	16	53
Nonreader	6	20

Most of the respondents felt that problem readers have a moderate (63% of the respondents) level of deficiency followed by a severe (53% of the respondents) level of deficiency. The majority of these problem readers were identified by the respondents to fall within these categories. This leaves the other two levels of

deficiency, i.e. mild (7% of the respondents) and non-readers (20% of the respondents).

4.1.2.2.5 Problem Readers' Attitudes Towards Reading

Teachers are often blamed for a student's failure to perform as desired. However, they are not the only party involved in the education process. As we had seen earlier, a lot of other factors come into play in order to achieve results, including the students themselves. Students' attitudes towards reading are crucial in minimising the level of deficiency and Table 4.15 illustrates this argument as discovered from item 22 in the questionnaire.

Table 4.15: Problem Readers' Attitudes Towards Reading

Attitudes	No. of teachers	Percentage %
Reading is boring	25	83
Reading is a waste of time	18	60
Learning to read is for academic purposes only	16	53
Reading is not useful for the future	11	37
Most books are uninteresting	8	27
Reading is a good pastime	1	3
Reading is useful for overall academic achievement	1	3

The majority of the respondents felt that students regard reading as a boring activity (83% of the respondents). Reading is not one of their favourite activities. Some even considered reading as a waste of time (60% of the respondents) and they

learn to read for academic purposes only (53% of the respondents). Some students feel that reading skills are not useful for their future (37% of the respondents) since they are confident of surviving without learning to read in English. They do not place themselves in future situations where knowledge of reading in English would be beneficial.

4.1.2.3 Teachers' Attitudes Toward These Problem Readers and Their Reading Problems

This section discusses the findings related to the respondents' perception of the students with reading problems in their classroom.

4.1.2.3.1 Characteristics of Students with Reading Problems

Students with reading problems tend to display particular features with respect to cognitive, social and emotional characteristics. Information regarding the characteristics of these students in secondary schools, as well as their interaction with the secondary school environment, is vital to a teacher. Some of these characteristics may represent the more manageable difficulties especially the educational characteristics, in contrast to the more baffling difficulties in the noncognitive areas. As a result of continued years of frustration and school failure during their primary or earlier education, these students have accumulated their deficits towards secondary education.

Table 4.16 (based on item 23 of the questionnaire) illustrates some of these characteristics. In table 4.16, we can study the characteristics of problem readers in secondary schools as perceived by the respondents. 77% (23 respondents) agreed that

Table 4.16: Characteristics of Problem Readers

Description		SA	A	U	D	SD
Have poor self-image		5 (17%)	18 (60%)	3 (10%)	4 (13%)	- 0
Restless during a lesson		9 (30%)	18 (60%)	2 (7%)	1 (3%)	- 0
Have poor writing skills		13 (43%)	17 (57%)	- 0	- 0	- 0
Talkative		5 (17%)	5 (17%)	4 (13%)	14 (47%)	2 (7%)
Lack basic intelligence to read		5 (17%)	8 (27%)	6 (20%)	8 (27%)	5 (17%)
Fail language tests		7 (23%)	15 (50%)	1 (3%)	5 (17%)	2 (7%)
Lack general knowledge		3 (10%)	14 (47%)	7 (23%)	5 (17%)	1 (3%)
Have potential to progress through a remedial reading programme		10 (33%)	11 (37%)	9 (30%)	- 0	- 0
Come from deprived home environment		6 (20%)	10 (33%)	8 (27%)	6 (20%)	- 0
Lack motivation		9 (30%)	17 (57%)	1 (3%)	2 (7%)	1 (3%)
Others	Medical problems – hearing, sight, speech etc.	1 (3%)	- 0	- 0	- 0	- 0
	Inability to identify letters	1 (3%)	- 0	- 0	- 0	- 0
	Lack support	1 (3%)	- 0	- 0	- 0	- 0
	Mother tongue interference	1 (3%)	- 0	- 0	- 0	- 0
	Lower self-esteem & confidence	1 (3%)	- 0	- 0	- 0	- 0
	Dyslexic	1 (3%)	- 0	- 0	- 0	- 0

these students have poor self-image. These students, having undergone 6 years of primary education, would have had the traumatic experience of being a problem reader. Repeated failure academically would have left scars in their self-image. They have been neglected and still carry the stigma of being a backward student for years. Their emotional upsets in and out of school could have had a great impact socially due to their inability to partake in school activities effectively.

A high percentage of the subjects (90% of the respondents) described these students as being restless during a lesson. Their inability to read as well as their peers creates a barrier in participating in language activities. They are unable to follow the lesson at the appropriate pace and as such become impatient to see the end of the 'foreign' lesson.

All the respondents (100%) found these students to have poor writing skills. It is quite obvious that a poor reader with reading problems would have poor writing skills as well. Inability to read limits one's vocabulary knowledge which is a tool necessary for the acquisition of writing skills. This deficiency would also reflect poor spelling skills.

73% (22 respondents) stated that these problem readers fail their language tests. The language paper at secondary level is divided into two parts comprising paper I and paper II. Students need to handle at least 4 comprehension passages, cloze tests, essay questions and a variety of other questions testing grammar knowledge. Without the adequate reading skill, students would be unable to attempt most of the questions and may randomly choose the answers for the objective

questions. The probability of getting through the paper would be slim without being able to read and write well.

As for general knowledge, 57% (17 respondents) found their students lacking in this area whereas 23% (7 respondents) were uncertain and 20% (6 respondents) did not support the idea. Inability to read can prevent one from seeking reading materials which is the gateway to general knowledge. It is inaccessible to these students with reading problems as the content is incomprehensible. They may get some knowledge through other means but it is meagre compared to the reading materials. Thus, their general knowledge level will remain low.

The majority of the respondents i.e. 70% (21 respondents) are in agreement that these students have the potential to progress through a remedial reading programme. This indicates that the students possess the cognitive capabilities but, due to other factors, have acquired the deficiencies. It is a known fact that not all problem readers have severe mental disabilities. Some deficiencies are caused by environmental, both school and home, motivational and other factors which can be remedied through an intensive programme.

About 30% (9 respondents) are uncertain as to whether their problem readers have the potential to be corrected. This may be the result of lack of information on the students' background with which to study the causative factors. Without a systematic diagnosis, it can be difficult to understand the problem. Non-form teachers who are not in charge of any particular class have limited contact with these students, thus preventing a thorough observation of them.

53% (16 respondents) think that students with reading problems come from deprived home environments whereas 20% (6 respondents) disagree. The remaining 27% (8 respondents) were uncertain. Students from deprived home environments have limited exposure to relevant reading material. They may even lack the time to spend on reading activities at home since some students spend more time helping their parents than on their education. Neglected students also could find it difficult to focus on useful activities without proper guidance at home. The respondents who were uncertain may not have had the time to probe into the students' background. 5 English lessons a week (40-45 minutes per lesson) leaves much to be desired for personal contact with a large group. The respondents who disagree probably due to students' attitudes toward reading even though their homes provide the necessary opportunities. Some students find going to school a bore and develop a dislike to anything related to studying.

Motivation seemed to be an important link to students with reading problems. 87% (26 respondents) agree that these students lack motivation. Students at the secondary level are constantly being exposed to information through various kinds of media available outside of their school environment. This might appear more attractive to them and result in diverting the students' focus from education to entertainment. Reading activities or language activities may look childish and tedious in comparison to these other activities. Repeated failure in reading since primary level would have damaged their self-confidence and many would have given up their battle. There may be other activities which give them the satisfaction that reading does not. 10% (3 respondents) did not find their students lacking motivation. There are students who would have realised that their reading problems are a handicap as

far as upgrading their social status or academic excellence is concerned especially among the upper secondary students who are mature teenagers. They can be self-motivated but that does not mean the reading problems are going to disappear within days. It is a long-term effort. There were respondents who suggested other characteristics such as lower confidence levels and dyslexia i.e. a condition described by Selikowitz (1993) as a delay in reading ability among children with average and above average intelligence.

Table 4.17 reports the respondents' perception of the basic needs of students with reading problems as elicited through item 24 in the questionnaire.

Table 4.17: Problem Readers' Needs

Needs	SA	S	U	D	SD
Personalised instruction	14 (47%)	16 (53%)	- 0	- 0	- 0
Cannot be attended to during normal lessons	7 (23%)	15 (50%)	3 (10%)	2 (7%)	- 0

47% (14 respondents) strongly agree and 53% (16 respondents) agree to personalised instruction for problem readers. In other words, there is 100% support for personal attention to cater for students with reading problems. It appears to be common knowledge among respondents that these students need a "special" arrangement to remediate their reading problems. 73% (22 respondents) have difficulty in attending to these students during normal lessons. Their needs cannot be given due attention during normal classroom activities which usually involve about

40-50 students. Some schools even have more than 50 students in a class. Since they need personalised instruction, normal lessons cannot accomodate these problem readers. Factors like size of the class and duration of the lesson do play significant roles. Furthermore, a teacher's job is to teach the whole class and not just focus on a small group.

4.1.2.3.2 Effects of Inability to Read as a Student

All problems produce implications. Here, reading problems could lead to other problems along the educational process. Items 25-28 attempt to investigate these implications and Table 4.18 illustrates the findings.

Table 4.18: Respondents’ Perception of Implications of Reading Failure

Implications	SA	A	U	D	SD
Disciplinary problems during a lesson	3 (10%)	11 (37%)	7 (23%)	9 (30%)	- 0
Failure in overall academic performance	10 (33%)	14 (47%)	3 (10%)	3 (10%)	- 0
Creates a dislike towards English Language	13 (43%)	17 (57%)	- 0	- 0	- 0
Eventually drop out if ignored	7 (23%)	17 (57%)	4 (13%)	2 (7%)	- 0

47% (14 respondents) agree that the problem readers cause disciplinary problems and only 30% (9 respondents) disagree. This indicates that these respondents regard problem readers as trouble makers in their classroom. These students with reading problems probably have difficulty following the lesson and

channel their attention to other activities. The findings from the questionnaire revealed that 80% (24 respondents) confirmed the notion that inability to read is the main cause of failure in overall academic performance against only 10% (3 respondents) who opposed it. It seems significant that reading is an important skill to have for academic achievement especially at the upper secondary level.

English language is taught as a single language subject and not used as a medium of instruction for other content subjects. Consequently, students may develop the notion that they can survive without the acquisition of this second language. As such, students tend to lack the motivation to acquire the language especially if it is not used as a means of communication at home. With this being the scenario, inability to read would further create a dislike towards the language lesson as discovered by 100% (30 respondents) of the subjects.

The above argument lead to another discovery. 80% (24 respondents) felt that these students will eventually drop out if their reading deficiencies are not dealt with. Inability to read may affect their overall academic achievement as we have seen earlier.

4.1.2.3.3 Respondents' Perception of ESL Teachers' Role in Addressing Reading Problems

Findings from items 29 and 30 in the questionnaire revealed some information pertaining to ESL teachers' role as perceived by the respondents. Only 57% (17 respondents) place themselves as an important factor in addressing the reading problems as compared to 36% (11 respondents) who disagree with this as

indicated in Table 4.19 below. When interviewed, 3 respondents mentioned that parents play a more important role than respondents do. This may seem reasonable only if the parents are able to provide support academically which means they have to be literate. In some students' lives, teachers are the only people who are directly in contact with their educational problems. Even educated parents may not be equipped to deal with reading problems. In fact, their approach may clash with the students' needs as stated by one of the respondents during the interview.

Table 4.19: ESL Teachers' Role

Teachers' role	SA	A	U	D	SD
Most important factor	9 (30%)	8 (27%)	2 (7%)	10 (33%)	1 (3%)
Teachers should conduct remedial reading sessions	11 (37%)	13 (43%)	3 (10%)	3 (10%)	- 0

Out of the 30 respondents, 80% (24 respondents) agree that remedial reading sessions should be conducted by teachers with problem readers. This clearly indicates that the respondents do accept the responsibility of helping these students with reading problems. Only 10% (3 respondents) disagreed with this statement. They fall within the category of respondents who find the implementation of remedial reading sessions obstructed with constraints. Furthermore, these 3 respondents do not have training in remedial reading. They may not have been exposed to the possibilities of conducting such sessions.

4.1.2.3.4 Factors to be Considered in Handling Problem Readers

Remedial reading is an area for all ESL teachers who aim for versatility. Being able to teach all students regardless of their proficiency level or reading ability is what makes the teaching profession professional. Therefore, the exclusion of remedial reading from any teacher training programme does not support the idea of professionalism in the teaching profession. This and other factors that need to be considered in handling problem readers are studied through responses from items 31-33 in the questionnaire which are reported in Table 4.20.

Table 4.20: Factors to be Considered in Approaching Reading Problems

Factors	SA	A	U	D	SD
Remedial reading made compulsory in the teacher training programme	11 (37%)	16 (53%)	3 (10%)	- 0	- 0
Compulsory diagnosis of reading problems	12 (40%)	15 (50%)	2 (7%)	1 (3%)	- 0
Mainstreaming problem readers	2 (7%)	6 (20%)	3 (10%)	16 (53%)	3 (10%)

From Table 4.20 we can see that 90% (27 respondents) agree that remedial reading is relevant and should be made compulsory in teacher training programmes. This proves that respondents have identified exposure to remedial reading as a crucial aspect in their training. Earlier it was noted that only 30% (9 respondents) have been exposed to this area during their teacher training programme. This means that even those who had been exposed find it all the more relevant for it to be made

compulsory. It further strengthens the idea that remedial reading is very crucial in equipping a teacher with the skills to teach. During the interview, it was also discovered that the respondents felt that knowledge of remedial reading is specialised and therefore needs a systematic approach.

A compulsory diagnosis for reading problems is indeed a time- consuming procedure for teachers especially at the beginning of the year when they have numerous clerical burdens e.g. registration, collection of fees etc. However, the diagnosis would go a long way in aiding the teachers to become familiar with their students' entry points i.e. the existing reading level of the student. 90% (27 respondents) were in favour of this procedure and this proves that the majority support a diagnosis which would assist in the daily planning of lessons. Having a clearer picture of their students' abilities may enable the respondents to execute activities to their maximum capacity. Only 3% (1 respondent) disapproved of this suggestion.

After diagnosis to identify problem readers comes the next question of whether they should be mainstreamed. Here, only 27% (8 respondents) agreed to mainstreaming whereas the majority, 63% (19 respondents), disagreed. This probably results from the notion that students with reading problems need specialised instruction and varying activities which may prove difficult during a 40 or 45 minute lesson. On the other hand, the grouping of students based on their proficiency level could result in the lowering of the self-confidence of the students as they have been "branded" problem readers. Either way, problems can be foreseen.

During the interview, one of the respondents stated time as a major setback to mainstreaming. He had experienced having students with reading problems in the

normal classroom who had encountered great difficulty and disappointment. He could not cater to the activities for these students during the short ESL lessons. Lack of focus on these students had led them to dislike his lessons and the language as well. He did suggest that effective remedial reading approaches could only be implemented if the students are not mainstreamed.

4.1.2.3.5 Respondents' Perception of Parents' Role

Parents play a very important role in dealing with reading problems among students. Bond et. al. (1984) have cited that apparent lack of support by the parents or overconcern for the child's difficulty in learning may result in anxiety, lack of confidence and perhaps attention-seeking behaviour. Similarly Kaluger & Kolson (1978) have mentioned the influence of parents as vital not only to the child's mental health and personality development, but also to intellectual and conceptual growth. They also add that if parents demonstrate a positive attitude towards the child's education, such as involvement in the school activities, the child is more likely to respond favourably to learning.

How this positive attitude can be demonstrated has been elaborated by Spache (1981). He reported that parents have been employed in volunteer or paid para-professional working relationships where they serve as aides to teachers. They are permitted to tutor pupils under the supervision of the respective teacher. Parents' involvement in a child's education can be invaluable and schools can come up with steps to enhance this involvement positively.

From item 34 of the questionnaire, as shown in Table 4.21, the researcher has attempted to elicit response from the teachers on parents' participation with students who have reading problems.

Table 4.21: Parents' Role in Addressing Reading Problems

Measures	SA	A	U	D	SD
Parents sign their child's workbook at the end of every month	3 (10%)	18 (60%)	3 (10%)	6 (20%)	- 0
Discussion with the teacher once a month	6 (20%)	19 (63%)	3 (10%)	2 (7%)	- 0
Provide time for reading	8 (27%)	21 (70%)	1 (3%)	- 0	- 0
Motivate their child when they read at home	12 (40%)	18 (60%)	- 0	- 0	- 0
Have a progress record	8 (27%)	17 (57%)	3 (10%)	2 (7%)	- 0
Help teachers in teaching and handling of these students	7 (23%)	15 (50%)	7 (23%)	1 (3%)	- 0
Others	Involve parents in reading activity at home				
	Inculcate reading as early as possible, 3-6 years range				

From the data above it is clear that 70% (21 respondents) agree that parents should go through the students' workbook at the end of every month whereas 20% (6 respondents) oppose this suggestion. This may reflect the problem of getting back the books in time for the following lesson.

83% (25 respondents) of the respondents agreed that parents should hold discussions with teachers. Only 7% (2 respondents) of the respondents disagreed

with this suggestion. This indicates clearly that the respondents think that parents can make a significant contribution to help curb reading problems.

The table also shows that 97% (29 respondents) agree that parents should make time to expose the students to reading materials found in places like the library. It strongly proves that the respondents expect parents to assume a vital role as educators too. In addition, 100% (30 respondents) agree that students need to be given adequate time and personal attention by their parents. Parents, being in closer contact with their children, should be able to gauge the problems better and take the right course of action.

84% (25 respondents) agree that each of these students should have a progress report to monitor their progress. This record will help teachers to provide the necessary follow-up. Besides, the record can also be a guide during parent-teacher discussions. However, 7% of the respondents (2 respondents) disagree with this suggestion probably due to the fact that some parents are not equipped with the knowledge of remedial reading. Hence, their assessment may not provide the relevant information for the teacher. It was noted during an interview that some of the parents are illiterate and therefore they cannot record the problem readers' progress in the various reading skills. However, another respondent suggested that the teacher identifies any member of the student's family who has a fairly good command of the language to undertake the responsibility. In this way the student has someone to oversee his or her progress at home.

It was further observed that 73% (22 respondents) indicated that parents can work hand in hand with teachers in teaching and handling these students. One of the respondents had mentioned that parents must be involved in the reading activities so

as to help the students attend to the problem at home and another strongly believes that parental involvement helps the slow readers to improve their reading skills. Parents need the relevant exposure to their child's problem in order to help. One of the respondents also stated that parents are in a better position to assist the child since teachers may not have the time to attend to them individually. This respondent finds that the best way to help a problem reader is through one-to-one sessions. However, this is not practical in schools. Only 3% (1 respondent) disagreed with the parents' assistance in the teaching process and this could be attributed mainly to the fact that he feels parents may not have the necessary pedagogical knowledge to contribute effectively.

The response from the subjects pertaining to parents' active involvement in the students' remedial activities shows that parents were seen as vital in addressing the problem at home. One of the respondents suggested that parents should inculcate the reading habit at the earliest age, possibly between the ages 3-6 years. Thus, students will start school with the ability to read and not learn to read at school. It was also stated that without reading ability, students generally do not progress much in comparison to those who already know how to read. It was also mentioned that the school administrators could play a significant role by providing adequate facilities and time for students to get the relevant exposure to reading. An example given was that parents could spend an hour a fortnight in the school library after school hours with their children.

4.1.2.3.6 Factors Affecting Respondents in Implementing a Remedial Reading Programme

A teacher will have to consider numerous factors before conducting a remedial reading programme including the school environment, time, support and various other factors which either encourage or hinder such a notion. 80% (24 respondents) have found it impossible to undertake a remedial reading programme with their students. Only 20% (4 respondents) are able to conduct it with their students. Even among the respondents who have undergone remedial reading exposure, only 2 of them have considered the possibility of conducting this programme. As mentioned earlier, the factors affecting a teacher's decision whether to do or not to do so play a crucial role as students are in contact with their teachers only for a short period of time. A study of these contributory factors shows that the teacher's efforts alone cannot produce the desired results. He or she needs valuable support in terms of the teaching-learning environment, parents' and administrators' involvement and the students themselves. The various constraints faced by the respondents have been studied through the responses from item 35 in the questionnaire and the results are presented in Table 4.22.

Table 4.22: Constraints in Conducting a Remedial Reading Programme

Constraints	No. of teachers	Percentage %
Time	28	93
Extra responsibilities other than teaching	25	83
Class size	24	80
Disciplinary problems	18	60
Reluctance of students	18	60
Students lack motivation to read in English	18	60
Lack of relevant materials	17	57
Lack information on remedial reading	17	57
Not supportive parents or guardians	9	30
Uncooperative administration	8	27
Others	Students themselves are not very receptive to upgrading their reading skills	
	Students lack self improvement	

The researcher found that 93% (28 respondents) indicated time as the major constraint. Most respondents are involved in activities other than academic which consume a lot of time. This has been confirmed with 83% (25 respondents) stating that they have other responsibilities besides teaching tasks. Apart from time, 80% (24 respondents) have found class size a deterrent factor. The population of students in schools is ever increasing with limited number of classrooms to accommodate them resulting in floating classes (i.e. due to lack of classrooms, particular classes are required to move and occupy any vacant classroom whenever available). Sometimes the classes are expanded to the maximum capacity of 50 students. In some of the respondents' schools, the number has even exceeded 50. Such a large number will prevent a teacher from giving personal attention to problem readers.

60% (18 respondents) are of the opinion that disciplinary problems among students affect a teacher's decision whether to conduct a remedial reading

programme. Unruly students can disrupt a lesson and if a teacher concentrates only on a few students who display reading difficulties, the situation can get worse.

The researcher discovered 56% (17 respondents) have problems with access to relevant materials for a remedial reading programme. The lack of these materials can also hinder a teacher's move to conduct such a programme. As has been noted earlier, very few respondents are adequately trained to handle a programme of this nature. Consequently, it will indeed be a difficult task for the respondents to adapt their classroom materials to suit the problem readers' needs.

The problem readers' attitude towards remedial reading programme can be a deciding factor as well. 60% (18 respondents) indicated reluctance of students as one of the constraints. Students at the secondary level may deny the fact that they are problem readers. They may fear rejection by their peers if they begin a remedial reading programme. One of the respondents did mention that these problem readers do have a very low self-esteem and confidence level (please see Table 4.16, p. 93). Furthermore, it was found that the 6 respondents who are currently conducting a remedial reading programme with their students are having the sessions after school hours. All of them have difficulties achieving full attendance. Lack of motivation and awareness among the problem readers have been found to be the causes of poor response.

Administrators do play an important role in implementing a remedial reading programme. They are the ones who allocate the funds and time to facilitate such a programme. Thus, administrators' cooperation is indeed a crucial factor to the teacher concerned. Similarly, the support of parents or guardians is also another vital contributor to the success of a remedial reading programme. With strong backing

from these two parties, the teacher can go a long way in helping the problem readers. It was discovered that only 27% (8 respondents) regard their school administrators as uncooperative. This proves that most administrators including the respondents themselves are in favour of remedial reading programmes. As for the unsupportive parents or guardians, only 30% (9 respondents) considered it a constraint. This again indicates that the majority of them do give support to help the teachers help their children who have reading problems.

57% (17 respondents) stated that the lack of information on remedial reading was a constraint to conducting a remedial reading programme. Since the scope is very wide, one has to know how to classify the reading problems displayed in order to embark on the remedial process. One of the respondents interviewed stated that teachers need to upgrade their knowledge in this area through reading journals and other relevant reading materials. They should make the attempt to be exposed to the latest teaching techniques used in handling these problem readers. However, it was added that it is easier said than done since teachers' access to these reading materials can be very limited. Besides, they also realise that not many of them get the opportunity to attend in-service courses. As shown earlier, only 17% (5 respondents) had had the luxury of attending a remedial reading in-service course (please see Table 4.4, p. 75).

Even if all the above constraints can be overcome, respondents have to face yet another major constraint, i.e. the students themselves. The problem readers are not very receptive to upgrading their reading skills and lack the desire for self improvement as mentioned by one of the respondents. 60% (18 respondents) identify lack of motivation among students to read in English as a constraint. Students use

Bahasa Malaysia for all content subjects and many are comfortable with conversing in this language or their mother tongue. This leaves very little room for English to be a necessary language in their daily activities.

One of the respondents had suggested during the interview that a simple investigation into the home and school environment has to be done to better understand a student's inability to read. This would probably prevent a teacher from undertaking the wrong course of action to remedy the situation.

Suggestions pertaining to remedial reading were also elicited from the respondents through item 35 in the questionnaire and the findings are summarised in Table 4.23. 73% (22 respondents) think that students should be grouped according to ability. A mixed ability group will not benefit a student with reading problems as he might continue to lag. If the gap between the weakest and the best reader in the class is wide, then the problem reader may not get the attention he needs.

80% (24 respondents) supported the idea that students should have ample and suitable reading materials. The problem reader may struggle with reading materials of their age level. As such their teacher should be sensitive to their needs and provide the relevant materials suitable for their reading ability. 53% (16 respondents) suggested that the materials should be attractive. The main reason could be to motivate the students to read.

An in-service course in the area of remedial reading would be an asset when dealing with problem readers. 77% (23 respondents) are in favour of this suggestion. It has been noted earlier that most of the respondents rate their level of knowledge in the area of remedial reading between moderate and low (83% of the respondents). With this fact, we can deduce the reason why in-service courses are seen as crucial.

47% (14 respondents) have also suggested that diagnostic teaching should be conducted by teachers. Diagnostic teaching could help teachers to identify the areas of difficulty in language learning of the students and thus lead to the appropriate approach and strategy to deal with these areas of difficulty. It was also suggested that teachers should be selected to be trained as specialists in remedial reading and they be posted to schools to teach the illiterate and semi-illiterate students only. This may give the teacher ample time to interact with problem readers.

Table 4.23: Suggestions to Help Teachers With Remedial Reading

Suggestions		No. of teachers	Percentage %
Students be grouped according to ability		22	73
Ample and suitable reading materials		24	80
Materials should be attractive		16	53
Attend in-service courses		23	77
Conduct diagnostic teaching		14	47
Others	Teachers should be selected and trained as specialist remedial reading teachers and sent to teach the illiterate and semi-illiterate students only		
	Do simple investigation into home and school environment		
	Upgrade knowledge through reading journals and get to know the latest techniques		

4.1.2.4 Measures Adopted by the Respondents in Approaching Reading Problems

This section discusses the findings related to the respondents' efforts in handling the students with reading problems in their classroom.

4.1.2.4.1 Existing Teaching Practices in a Classroom Setting

In the teaching-learning process, there are two main groups of individuals interacting, namely the students and the teachers. The method adapted to suit the students' needs is part and parcel of the process. Strang (1965) has stated that the teacher's study of the pupil is not regarded as "an extra"; rather, it is an intrinsic part of the teaching-learning process. Thus, we can see that students are very dependant on teachers to impart knowledge to acquire language skills. What the teachers practice in the classroom is what the students gain. Based on this implication of the effect of the teachers' practices, item 36 was included in this research. The existing teaching practices in a classroom may shed some light on problem readers. Table 4.24 below illustrates the findings.

Remedial approaches are available for teachers to use on their problem readers. However, the knowledge of these approaches may remain beyond a teacher's reach. The application of the various techniques needs prior knowledge and training in order to achieve the desired results. 53% (16respondents) only sometimes work individually with their problem readers and in fact, 23% (7 respondents) do not give individual attention at all. This contradicts an earlier response in item 24 (please see Table 4.17, p.97) where 100% indicated support for personal instruction. It probably is a frustrating discovery where these respondents are well aware of their problem readers' needs but face various obstacles to meet them in their existing classroom situation. However, this definitely indicates that problem readers are not getting the

due attention they require. Only 23% (7 respondents) frequently work individually with students with reading problems.

Table 4.24: Teaching Practices in an ESL Classroom

Approaches	A	F	S	N
Work with students individually	- 0 (17%)	7 (23%)	16 (53%)	7 (23%)
Present information at a slower pace in a different sequence	5 (17%)	11 (37%)	13 (43%)	1 (3%)
Demonstrate difficult tasks	6 (20%)	9 (30%)	12 (40%)	3 (10%)
Modify test-taking procedures	- 0	3 (10%)	12 (40%)	15 (15%)
Use easier texts	8 (27%)	14 (47%)	8 (27%)	- 0
Give easier tasks than those given to other students	6 (20%)	8 (27%)	12 (40%)	5 (17%)
Provide additional drill or practice	4 (13%)	15 (50%)	8 (27%)	3 (10%)
Use cooperative learning	3 (10%)	9 (30%)	15 (50%)	3 (10%)
Use supplementary instructional techniques :	1 (3%)	7 (23%)	15 (50%)	7 (23%)
- Audio visual aids	2 (7%)	14 (47%)	13 (43%)	1 (3%)
Newspapers, magazine, comics	-	7 (23%)	19 (63%)	4 (13%)
Language games	0 -	1 (3%)	14 (47%)	15 (50%)
Music	0 -	3 (10%)	12 (40%)	12 (40%)
Children's story books	0			
Others	Completing crossword puzzles Realia Video recordings Dramas UPSR test papers			

43% (13 respondents) only sometimes present the same information at a slower pace in a different sequence to their students with reading problems. Presenting information at different levels targeting different groups of students in one class does strain one's knowledge in adapting materials. Inadequate knowledge in this area would restrict the teachers who may find it a difficult task. Nonetheless, 54% (16 respondents) often adopt this technique to achieve a meaningful lesson for all the students in the class.

40% (12 respondents) only sometimes demonstrate difficult tasks to their problem readers. In fact, 10% (3 respondents) never do this at all. Teachers need time to demonstrate difficult tasks and it would seem unimportant if it only addresses the needs of a small number of students. However, it was discovered that 50% of the subjects (15 respondents) very often demonstrated difficult tasks to their problem readers. It was found that it was done to pave the way for better participation from these students.

All teaching would eventually lead to assessment which is a necessary tool to gauge a student's achievement level in the areas taught. If the problem readers are struggling to follow their lessons in their classroom, then how are they going to fare in the assessment? So, it is quite obvious that problem readers may not be able to undertake the same assessment as the other students. A teacher may want to modify the test-taking procedures for their students with reading problems in order to provide them a fair chance to attempt the questions. Unfortunately, the researcher found that 50% (15 respondents) never modify their test-taking procedures. They use one standard form of procedure for all types of students. 40% (12 respondents) only sometimes make modifications and it was found that this only applies to monthly

tests. The mid-term and final examination papers are standardised without any modification.

Most textbooks used in schools are prescribed by the Ministry of Education. The blanket use of textbooks can be an advantage to the policy makers but not for the teacher who has to face a mixed ability group in his or her ESL classroom. 74% (22 respondents) often used easier reading texts than found in the prescribed textbooks. This encouraging finding shows that the respondents are making an attempt to make a difference.

Another encouraging finding is the teachers' practice in providing easier tasks for the problem readers than those given to the other students. 47% (14 respondents) always provide easier tasks for their problem readers. Only 17% (5 respondents) never do this at all. A meaningful lesson is what every teacher would aim for. If some of their students cannot follow their lesson or complete the assigned tasks, then the target is missed.

Problem readers may require additional drill or practice in order to perform well in tasks. Some students with reading problems may not understand what is being taught compared to the other better and more able readers. Their inability to read well enough may hinder their perception level. 63% (19 respondents) provide additional drill or practice for their problem readers. By providing this additional practice, the respondents are actually bridging the gaps that the students might have developed as problem readers. They provide the problem readers with an opportunity to proceed normally as the other students, from one lesson to another and so forth. Hence, the degree of reading difficulty among problem readers is minimised at the end of the year.

Students with reading problems can be difficult to handle solely by the teachers. Sometimes, peer influence is beneficial and an important tool when approaching these problem readers. 40% (12 respondents) seem to have realised this and have used cooperative learning i.e. working together in groups of mixed ability. Meanwhile, 50% (15 respondents) occasionally use cooperative learning in their ESL classroom. Not all language activities in an ESL classroom can be conducted in groups. Individual and pair work are just as useful. As such, teachers need not implement cooperative learning at all times.

Supplementary instructional techniques have been lauded as the answer to monotonous and boring language lessons. The use of such techniques has always been considered helpful in enhancing the effectiveness of a language lesson. As such, these techniques should also help problem readers in gaining as much as they can from a language lesson. Based on this assumption, the researcher had tried to elicit responses from the respondents as to their use of these supplementary techniques. It was found that 23% (7 respondents) never use audio visual aids at all to help their students with reading problems. 50% (15 respondents) occasionally use them to aid in teaching problem readers. Only 26% (8 respondents) often use them in the ESL classroom. Here it should be noted that the availability of such aids do play a role in the usage because some schools may not be equipped with these facilities due to lack of funds.

Another supplementary instructional technique which is the use of newspapers, magazines, comics etc., seemed more popular among the respondents. 54% (16 respondents) use them with their problem readers. This technique is considered more accessible compared to the use of audio visual aids. 63% (19

respondents) occasionally use language games with their students with reading problems and 23% (7 respondents) frequently use them.

Besides language games, the use of music such as songs and jazz chants has also been regarded as a language teacher's tool. However, the usage again depends on who the students are and whether the teacher knows how to conduct a language lesson using music. 50% (15 respondents) never used music to teach students with reading problems and 47% (14 respondents) only sometimes used music with their problem readers. One of the respondents stated that with the number of students in the class reaching 50 students, music-based activities do not serve the purpose of learning. Besides, the students' interests in music vary especially with regard to the language or singer of the song.

Finally, we come to the use of children's story books as an instructional technique. It was found that 40% (12 respondents) never use this technique and another 40% (12 respondents) occasionally use this technique. It may be quite difficult to use children's stories for secondary school language lessons since the storyline may appear childish for the students. The other techniques suggested by the respondents were completing crossword puzzles, use of realia to aid understanding of words, video recordings, dramas and the use of UPSR (Primary Year 6 examination) test papers in their ESL lessons.

The majority of urban schools have a large population. As such, a classroom may consist of 40 to 50 students. In one of the schools where the research was conducted, the population of students in a class even exceeded 50 due to the lack of teachers. Based on this scenario, the researcher attempted to investigate

how the students with reading problems are attended to through item 22 in the questionnaire.

Table 4.25 : Attending to Problem Readers in a Large Class

	A	F	S	N
Is it possible to attend to problem readers in a class of 40-50 students?	- 0	1 (3%)	14 (47%)	15 (50%)

As illustrated in Table 4.25, 47% (14 respondents) found that it is sometimes possible to attend to these students with reading problems but 50% (15 respondents) have found it impossible. This clearly indicates that the size of the class plays an important role in attempting to address reading problems among students. As discovered earlier in item 20 (please see Table 4.22, p.108), class size was one of the major hindering factors with 80% (24 respondents) citing this as a constraint.

4.1.2.4.2 Teachers' Efforts Beyond the Classroom Setting

Parents are vital in a child's development and they should be made aware of their child's reading problems. The teacher should make an attempt to discuss the matter with the parents in order to understand the problem better and also to embark on ways to counter this problem. The respondents were asked whether they met and discussed their students' reading problems with the parents and Table 4.26 below (items 38-41 in the questionnaire) illustrates the findings.

Table 4.26: Teaching Practices Beyond Classroom Setting

Practices	A	F	S	N
Discussion with parents .	- 0	1 (3%)	11 (37%)	18 (60%)
Discussion at the language teachers' meeting	4 (13%)	3 (10%)	15 (50%)	8 (27%)
Separate the class according to proficiency levels	1 (3%)	3 (10%)	12 (40%)	14 (47%)
Provide remedial tasks as homework	1 (3%)	6 (20%)	8 (27%)	15 (50%)

Most of the respondents i.e. 97% (29 respondents) seldom contact the parents to discuss this problem. They may have their own valid reasons to support their practice but nonetheless it seems to contradict an earlier response in item 29 where 80% (24 respondents) (please see Table 4.19, p.100) accept the responsibility of helping problem readers. Discussion with parents is crucial to understand and tackle the problem. Here, the respondents assumed a less important role in addressing the problem and placed parents in the foreground. But parents cannot be made aware of their child's condition if discussion is scarce or non-existent.

One of the respondents who has never met the parents of his students mentioned that some parents never make an attempt to come at all even if requested by the teacher. This poses a serious problem whereby the teacher is at a loss as to how the problem readers are going to be helped. The teacher needs the parents' help to understand the home environment in addition to the child's educational background. Another respondent stated that she never had the opportunity to meet the parents due to lack of time since she was left with very few free periods after performing her non-academic duties. However, she feels that both parties have to

make the effort to meet and talk since it would help the student to progress in his or her educational life. Being left behind would further worsen the situation. One other respondent revealed that she is unable to meet the parents except on open days but could never discuss their child's reading problems because she was involved in various other activities that needed to be carried out such as exhibitions.

The majority of schools conduct a language teachers' meeting, currently known as the "panitia" meeting, at the beginning of each new term. Teachers normally plan for the year based on the syllabus. During these meetings, teachers do discuss students' performance and ways to solve problems. Emphasis is usually placed on how to make the students achieve better grades. Teachers with problem readers need the support of the committee to carry out remedial programmes with their students.

50% (15 respondents) stated that the issue of reading problems among students was sometimes discussed at the meetings. 27% (8 respondents) said this matter was never attended to at all. This indeed makes things worse since the teachers with problem readers are most of the time left alone to deal with these students.

Students may or may not benefit from a mixed ability group. A weak student may find it difficult to penetrate into the better students' circle and so he or she becomes isolated. It is quite a difficult task for a teacher to monitor these groups in order to achieve the desired results. Instead of being helped by the better students, the weaker ones may slacken further due to the limited participation. So it does give rise to the credibility of the rationale for forming such groups for varying proficiency levels. As expected, this practice of separating the students according to their

proficiency levels does not seem very popular among the respondents. 47% (14 respondents) never separate their class according to their proficiency levels at all. 40% (12 respondents) occasionally adopt this measure.

Limited time has been a big constraint for respondents who have to deal with students with reading problems. Most of the time the lesson has to be focused on the majority. Little time is left for the teacher to help the problem readers during an ESL lesson. Therefore, remedial tasks can be given as homework for these students. Unfortunately 50% (15 respondents) have never provided these problem readers with tasks as homework. The lack of practice can affect the problem readers' progress. However, 23% (7 respondents) often provide these remedial tasks for their problem readers. These tasks might help to motivate the problem readers as well if they can see for themselves the marked improvement in their reading abilities.

4.1.2.4.3 Other Remedial Reading Approaches Currently Used by the Respondents

The respondents were also found to adopt other remedial reading approaches. To conclude on the teaching practices of the respondents with problem readers, responses were elicited through item 42 in the questionnaire on other remedial reading approaches that they might be using or consider useful. Various suggestions were obtained and this indicates how seriously the respondents regard reading problems. One of the suggestions was selecting stories from newspapers especially the children's column. Another respondent had suggested that these students be made

to learn a word a day. Video tapes of songs were also suggested. The students have to read and sing along.

Another respondent favoured discussion after reading a text and accompanied with writing tasks. As the students read aloud, the teacher identifies their strengths and weaknesses. Vocabulary drilling by identifying words in the reading texts was also one of the suggestions. Use of pair work where one reads while the other listens was suggested by one of the respondents.

Another suggestion was that these students be taught independent learning. They should be taught to gain information through the self-access approach. Finally, one of the respondents stated that practice on sight word recognition skills or the phonic skills can be of help to problem readers. These and many other approaches can help a problem reader if the teacher understands the nature of the problem.

The findings of the questionnaire and interview have revealed that various reading problems exist among secondary school students and teachers are aware of these problems. However, due to numerous factors, teachers are unable to attend to the problem readers' needs. These findings will be summarised and discussed in the following chapter together with some recommendations to guide teachers when faced with a problem reader in their classroom at secondary level.