A STUDY OF PROBLEMS IN READING ENGLISH TEXTS AMONG THE ESL TRAINEE TEACHERS

By

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Dedicated to
my beloved husband,
mother, mother-in-law, father-in-law
and my late father
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Jayanthi Mala a/p V.Marimuthu.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Background</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.1 The importance of English in Malaysia today</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.2 The trainee teachers</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.3 The importance of reading in the English language</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.4 Factors affecting reading comprehension</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.4.1 Reader factor</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.4.2 Text factor</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Statement of the problem</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Purpose of the study</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Research questions</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 Significance of the study</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7 Limitations of the study</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER TWO : REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

2.2 Importance of English at the national and international level

2.3 Attitude Studies - The role of reading attitude
   2.3.1 Importance of attitude
   2.3.2 Learning a language and not teaching it

2.4 Reading
   2.4.1 Importance of reading and the reading habit
   2.4.2 Bottom-up and top-down processing of reading
   2.4.3 The reader and the text
   2.4.4 The schema theory and background knowledge
   2.4.5 Content area reading and the importance of teaching
         Reading
   2.4.6 Reading strategies
   2.4.7 Other studies on problems in reading comprehension

2.5 Socioeconomic status and academic background as factors contributing to reading problems

CHAPTER THREE : RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

3.2 Research design

3.3 Description of the sample

3.4 Piloting
3.5 Lecturers
3.6 Instrumentation
  3.6.1 The trainees' questionnaire (Appendix A)
  3.6.2 The lecturers' interview questions (Appendix B)
  3.6.3 The prognostic test
  3.6.4 The semester 1 and 2 final examination English paper
3.7 Collection of Data
  3.7.1 Using the trainees' questionnaire
  3.7.2 Using the structured interview
3.8 Examination of relevant documents
3.9 Data analysis

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS
4.1 Introduction
4.2 Data from questionnaires
  4.2.1 The socioeconomic status based on the parents’ salary, education, occupation and types of schools attended by trainees as contributing factors to reading problems
     4.2.1.1 Parents’ salary
     4.2.1.2 Parents’ education level
     4.2.1.3 Parents’ occupation
     4.2.1.4 Types of schools and size of classrooms
  4.2.2 Academic background of trainees and its relationship to reading problems
     4.2.2.1 Academic achievement of the trainees
4.2.2.2 Trainees' SPM English results

4.2.3 Attitude of the trainees regarding English and their perception of their reading skill

4.2.3.1 Importance of English to trainees

4.2.3.2 Trainees' attitude to the English language

4.2.3.3 Trainees' perception of their reading skill as compared to actual achievement

4.2.3 Attitude towards the English Course and their confidence on being good English teachers as contributing factors to reading problems

4.2.4.1 Trainees' confidence on being good English teachers

4.2.4.2 Trainees' attitude towards the English Course

4.2.5 English usage as a contributing factor to reading problems

4.2.5.1 Speaking English with family members, friends and lecturers

4.2.5.2 Reading of English materials

4.2.5.3 Exposure to media

4.2.6 The reading strategies employed by the trainees as a contributing factor in reading problems

4.2.6.1 Trainees' basic skills related to reading

4.2.6.2 Trainees' reading frequency for various purposes

4.2.6.3 Trainees' strategies when required to read a book or article

4.2.6.4 Strategies employed by trainees while reading

4.2.6.5 Strategies employed by trainees when faced with problems in understanding an English reading assignment
4.2.6.6 The procedural steps indicated by trainees while carrying out a reading assignment and their contribution to reading problems

4.2.7 The problems faced by the trainees in reading English materials

4.2.7.1 Degree of text difficulty faced by trainees when reading various English materials

4.2.7.2 Factors that hamper reading of English academic materials

4.3 Analysis of data from the structured interview

4.3.1 Views of English Unit lecturers concerning reading

4.3.1.1 Importance of reading English materials for the English option trainees

4.3.1.2 The reading proficiency of the English option trainees

4.3.1.3 Suggestions to overcome reading problems

4.3.2 Suggestions to improve the present training programme for the English option trainees

4.3.2.1 Proficiency component

4.3.2.2 Intake requirements

4.3.2.3 Major and Minor studies

4.3.2.4 Classroom size

4.4 Summary of findings

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

5.2 Purpose of the study

5.3 Summary of the findings and recommendations
5.3.1 The SES and the academic background of the trainee teachers

5.3.2 English use and the attitude of the trainee teachers towards the English language and the English course

5.3.3 The reading strategies employed by the teacher trainees

5.3.4 The problems faced by the trainees in reading

5.3.5 Perceptions of the English Unit lecturers regarding the importance of reading and the reading proficiency level of the trainees

5.3.6 Suggestions for a better training programme

5.4 Implications of the study

5.5 Suggestions for future research

BIBLIOGRAPHY

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A - Questionnaire

APPENDIX B - Interview schedule

APPENDIX C - English Studies syllabus components and subjects and the reading list
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Salary of parents of the English option trainees in semester 2.</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Parents' education level.</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Parents' occupation.</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Types of schools and size of classrooms.</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Academic achievement of the semester 2 English option trainees.</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Trainees' SPM English results.</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Importance given to English by trainees.</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Trainees' perception of the English language.</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9a</td>
<td>Trainees' perception of their reading skill.</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9b</td>
<td>Prognostic Test results - Reading Section.</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9c</td>
<td>Results of Reading Comprehension Section in the 'English Major' final examination paper for semester 1 and 2.</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Trainees' confidence on being good English teachers.</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Trainees' reasons for taking up the English course.</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Trainees speaking English with parents, siblings, friends and lecturers.</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Trainees reading English materials - Newspapers, Novels, Academic books, Magazines and Journals.</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Trainees' exposure to English media.</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Trainees' basic skills related to reading.</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Trainees' reading frequency for the various purposes.</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Section</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Trainees' strategies when required to read a book or article.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Strategies trainees employed while reading.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>What trainees did when facing problems understanding an English reading assignment.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Steps taken by trainees carrying out a reading assignment.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Trainees' degree of difficulty when reading English materials.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Factors that hamper reading of English academic text.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

The trainee teachers in the English option of Maktab Perguruan Batu Pahat (MPBP) face problems in the reading comprehension of texts written in English. These trainees, when they graduate, will be English teachers posted to primary schools all over the country. In order to be good English teachers, it is one of the essential requirements for them to be able to comprehend English texts. In addition, with the advent of the computer and other technological advancements in this era, there is a greater need for these readers to be able to comprehend the information they obtain from this media. The Ministry of Education is also very concerned over the deterioration of English proficiency among Malaysians.

This is the first study of this kind which deals with reading problems among English option teacher trainees from a teacher training college in Malaysia. The researcher believes that the findings of this study have significance over the teacher training English programme and hopes that the teacher development unit of the Education Ministry of Malaysia considers some of the suggestions put forward.

This is a quantitative study aimed at exploring the reading problems faced by the trainee teachers of MPBP in semester two. Data for the purpose of this study were gathered using the questionnaire and the structured interview. Forty-seven trainees were chosen to answer the questionnaire. The structured interview involved the lecturers in the English Unit of MPBP.
The researcher investigated the problems that the English option trainees faced when reading English texts in relation to the reading strategies used, their attitudes and perceptions, their socio-economic status (SES) and academic background.

The researcher had looked into a number of researches based on reading-related problems with the view of finding solutions in order to improve the level of reading proficiency. It is found that the scopes that can be studied and analysed regarding reading associated problems are very wide and the findings have been diverse. Nevertheless, the literature review in this study discusses some of the important aspects such as the importance of English, attitude studies, reading strategies, socio-economic status, the schema theory and others.

Some of the findings in this study are similar to that of other studies. Among the similarities are the influence of SES on proficiency, the employment of ineffective reading strategies, the lack of use of English and others. There are indications in this study that the socioeconomic status of most of the trainees under study is between average to low. This study has discussed the influence of socioeconomic status over the reading abilities of the teacher trainees. Most of the trainees admit to having difficulty in understanding their academic texts. There is also an indication that the trainees may be employing some ineffective reading strategies such as looking up every word that is not understood. The English language usage among the trainees was also found to be low. Although the trainees are weak in English reading proficiency, an interesting finding is that the general attitude towards English among the trainees is on a positive note. Another
finding that is of concern is that, a significant number of the trainees under study admitted to not employing any particular reading strategy when handling reading assignments.

A number of recommendations have been put forward and the possible causes of the problems have also been highlighted in relation to previous studies. Suggestions have been made on ways in which the English training programme in teacher training colleges may be improved. Among others, the suggestions include having only English major for the English option trainees with no minor studies, teaching all other subjects only in English and ensuring very stringent intake measures for English option candidates. These measures are an attempt to ensure higher levels of English proficiency among the future English teachers and consequently a better future for English in Malaysia.