

CHAPTER TWO : LITERATURE REVIEW

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Approach to the Literature Review

A search was made on the CD-ROM network at the University of Malaya Library (UML) of the following database : Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC). Printed materials, periodicals and newspaper cutting collections at UML were also searched for issues related to the topic discussed.

The keywords that were used to retrieve the literature were leisure reading habits, interests, students and a combination of these.

The findings from the literature are summarised in the following sections :

Research on Reading

Reading is the most productive process by which individuals may develop informed and imaginative minds. As a result of this process, they may become the designers and controllers of the increasing technologic energy of their contemporary, complex society. Reading is regarded as desirable by most educated people, a habit which has a positive influence on an individual and hence a nation. In developed countries, vast number of researches have been conducted concerning reading habits throughout the century. These trends have started to pick

up rapidly in developing countries of late with the realization that surrounds the crucial role it plays in determining the quality and productivity of man's cultural, political and spiritual evolution. In Malaysia especially, there is growing awareness of the importance of basic research to provide the insights necessary to formulating programs specially geared to local needs and conditions.

Studies on gender differences

A study conducted by Mellon (1987) on the reading habits of the adolescents revealed some very interesting findings. One female student commented, "Reading for fun takes you to different places and lets you be who you want to be. You could go to the moon, to New York City, or be stranded on an island thousands of miles from nowhere. Or, you can be an old lady in distress from robbers, or a beautiful young lady in love with the finest guy you've ever seen. With reading, you could be anything or anyone or go anywhere." Another male student said, " I like to read because a lot of time the characters I read about influence the way I act after finishing a book. I like learning new words and reading about new situations. I try to imagine myself in the character's shoes. I think about what would happen and what I would do if faced with the situations in the books I read."

Mellon (1987) found that 72% of males and 92% of females in North Carolina where the research was carried out were readers for pleasure. The adolescents like to read what pleased them and not what the teachers pushed on them.

Mellon's (1987) findings were similar with Walter's (1927) report. Walter found that both male and female adolescents, while not pursuing reading as a major activity, nevertheless consistently pursued some degree of reading for fun. Girls, more than boys, pursued leisure reading of books. Moffitt (1992) in her study of youth and reading found that sports was both the female and male preferred activity. For females, reading was the third most popular activity, after sports and being with friends. For the males, reading, talking on the phone and watching television all ranked fourth after sports, being with friends and music and solitary activities.

Measurements of the favourite types of leisure reading reveal that the romance novel is the most popular type of leisure book for female adolescents. As first choice, the romance novel was nearly four and one-half times as popular as the second-ranked preference which was adventure. Male readers, however, preferred more different types of books than females. These included fantasy / myth, science fiction and sports as reading material.

Fendrick (1941) who investigated selected subject preference in newspaper reading among secondary school students noted that female students showed less enthusiasm for sports news and male showed a fairly marked favourable attitude towards scientific news. Generally, both gender apparently read newspapers with extreme regularity.

As for Wall (1948) who did a study on the number of kinds of newspapers read and interests over variety features of the daily newspaper among adolescents and adults, it was discovered that the editorial section was popular among the female and news of sports were popular among the males.

In a survey conducted by the Herald in UK in 1997 revealed that newspapers are still popular with teenagers. As many as 70% of those questioned said that they read a paper but again there are significant differences between the genders. More than three-quarters of boys said they spent on average 10 minutes a day reading a paper, with the sports pages being the most popular. Only 13% of boys said they read the whole newspaper. Television listings were the only other area of the newspaper specifically mentioned. Only 63% of girls claimed to be readers of newspapers and while 16% read the whole paper, 12% said that they used the newspaper for the television pages and 11% noted the sports section as the most important (The Herald, 1997).

The survey also revealed that nearly 80% of teenagers said that they usually read a magazine. The average girl spends one hour and 35 minutes every week reading through a magazine while 17% of the girls said that they spent more than three hours week reading through a magazine while 17% of the girls said that they spent more than three hours every week reading the articles in their favourite magazine (The Herald, 1997)

When asked how much time they spent reading books, 38% of all respondents failed to give any reply. What lies behind the headline increase in the amount of time that boys spend reading is a widening gap between the readers and the non-readers. Those who are reading, are reading more but there is a growing percentage of boys who are not reading at all (The Herald, 1997)

It is interesting to note that it is often the boys who are spending a lot of time on computers who are also reading most whereas those spending a significant amount of time watching television

do not seem to read as much, perhaps because they are often watching sports' programs (The Herald, 1997).

Studies on the Purpose of Leisure Reading and Attitude Towards Leisure Reading

According to Leedy (1956), one reads with a reason, a purpose or with a particular aim in mind. Various dominating motives were given, for example, information-getting, recreational, aesthetic and critical understanding of the book (Butler, 1940) and the desire to know, to be curious, well-informed and to understand rather than to be ignorant (Gates & Jennings, 1961). In Emans and Patyle's study conducted in 1967, they categorised reading motives as reading for recreation, information, identification and for aesthetic appreciation.

Reading for academic needs appeared to be the primary reading motives among students at the London School of Economy. There was minimal connection between students course interests and their non-course reading (Oppenheim, 1962). Reid-Smith in 1965 'carried out a study to find out what students read and why, whether the reading was done obligatory, recommended or voluntary. He noted that as students advanced in their course, they read less books or proportionately for leisure and make more use of 'reading list' books because of the pressing question of examination.

Greenberg's study (1970) analyzed that the influence of motivation and purpose of reading on the students reading activity in relation the selection of reading materials. She discovered that purposes of reading may include elements such as reading for information, for academic needs and for enjoyment.

In order to get some idea of how 18-to-25 year olds felt about some of their reading moments in school, a reading interest survey was given to 189 college students at the University of Wisconsin, La Crosse (Nelson, 1989). It was found that females reacted more positively to questions about the impact of teachers, home life, and methods on their feelings for reading. Oral reading was disliked by these students when they were in elementary school, and assigned readings were disliked most in high school most in high school. The factor listed most often as influencing the development of a real love of reading was caring teachers who were models of reading to their classes, and whose love for reading was apparent. Recommendations based on the survey include (1) reading materials need to be interesting and life-like; (2) reading groups should be modified and possibly changed frequently enough so that a student is not stigmatized; (3) oral reading should be carefully watched and purposefully used; (4) an attempt should be made to promote reading in the home; (5) teachers must care about students and show that they care and (6) teachers need to be models of reading.

On a larger basis, Sahai (1971) in his study on reading purposes stated that some read to further their education and knowledge, some to meet the practical demands of the vocation and to improve upon their occupational status, some to meet their intellectual curiosity and others to satisfy their recreational interest and pass their leisure.

Studies on the scholastic ratings, success in life and leisure reading

Various studies have stated that there are positive relationship between reading interests and academic achievement (Connor, 1954; Long & Henderson, 1973; Whitehead, Capey & Maddren, 1975).

Connor, for example, found that students who have reading as an interest, will read more and do more quality reading. Other studies involving mature students showed that academic achievement depend on the quality of books read (Sharon, 1973-4) and also depend on the enjoyment of reading (Himmeiweit & Swift, 1976).

Morrow (1983) found that students who have high reading interest will obtain above average academic achievement. In another study of volunteer readers, students who read widely have been found to achieve higher scholastic rating (Greaney, 1980; Whitehead, Capey & Maddren, 1975).

Dretze and Keniston's (1989) study involving university undergraduates taking psychology course, showed that interest and enjoyment in reading has a positive correlation with the course's grade achievement. A study by Muhammad Haron (1982) showed that a positive and significant relationship between the frequency of reading magazines and newspapers and high grades in Bahasa Malaysia.

In a survey of children's reading in their leisure time of which 2,122 subjects were drawn from nine schools in London, it was found that Grade A pupils, who were high achievers in the

school academic assessment, stood clearly apart from all others in reading far more (Darcy, 1973). Grade A pupils also read magazines of a more specific, educational or mature type together with the 'teenage' magazines. Assessed by their teachers according to education achievement, Grade C or Grade D pupils mentioned fewer authors as they grew older whereas A and B pupils showed an increasing awareness of authors. The slow pupils also stuck for much longer to more childish books (eg. those about animals).

Asheim (1957) have suggested that students read because they think they must in order to make a respectable academic record. His study showed a similar pattern to that of Darcy; that students with a higher scholastic rating tend to do more "free" reading. The students on the lower end of the scholastic reading, on the other hand, do almost noncurricular reading on their own.

Another study conducted by Sister Melanie Grace's investigation (1942) of the recreational reading of 405 students in Seton Hill College showed that the five students with the lowest scholastic ratings read more books than the five students with the highest scholastic ratings, but the proportion of quality books was much lower among the poorer students. In this case, it appears that the poorer students were neglecting their studies for a poor grade of recreation reading.

Besides high scholastic achievement associated with reading, the latter has also been linked to a higher socio-economic status or to a certain extent, success in life. Brennan (1998) has reported that reading and learning are the keys to success as shown in the high readership of newspapers by people with professional jobs, higher incomes and higher education. People

who succeed in life are the ones who realize that learning is a lifelong process with reading being the most successful informal learning process.

The Newspaper Association of America (NAA) research shows that 69% of people with annual household incomes of US\$75,000 or more read newspapers daily and 78% read newspapers on Sunday. Among household incomes of US\$40,000 or less, the numbers drop to 53% and 60%. Among college graduates, 67% read the paper daily and 77% read it on Sunday. The numbers drop to 59% daily and 67% on Sunday for high school graduates. The numbers drop to 43% and 47% on Sunday for people with less than a high school diploma.

Among home values, owners of 69% of residences with a value of US\$75,000 or more read the paper daily and 78% on Sunday. The numbers drop to 53% daily and 59% on Sunday for people with homes valued at less than US\$50,000.

The above shows that in the division of society of people who are acquiring wealth and people losing wealth, there are divisions into a society of people who are information rich and information poor. Unfortunately, home life reinforces these trends. At home, children learn and acquire the characteristics of their parents.

School is the one place where children have the opportunity to break out of the mold. The classroom is the great equalizer. In school, the disadvantaged student receives the exposure to reading and learning and the opportunity to catch up to classmates. In school, disadvantaged students can develop the resolve and find the resources to overcome their home environment.

The challenge to inspire children to become learners and readers falls on our educators. They have to make students aware of the opportunities that become available with learning and reading. They have to make student aware of what they lose when they do not read. These days, the challenge is more difficult because distractions are so many. Teachers have to compete with the electronic gadgets, the influences of a growing drug culture, the erosion of the traditional two-parent family and the apathy among alienated parents. But they can find a strong ally in books, magazines and newspapers. They can direct students to the resources that will make their lives better. In addition to teaching curriculum, they can teach the values of reading.

Studies on reasons for engaging in leisure reading act

A study by Waples, Berelson and Bradshaw (1940) hypothesized five basic reading effects. The list of effects represents various motivations of readers in broad personal and social terms.

These are:

- The instrumental effect (e.g. fuller knowledge of a practical problem and greater competence to deal with it).
- The prestige effect (e.g. relief of inferiority feeling by reading what increases self-approval).
- The reinforcement effect (e.g. reinforcement of an attitude or conversion to another attitude toward controversial issues).
- The aesthetic effect (e.g. obtaining aesthetic experience from specimens of literary art).

- The respite effect (e.g. finding relief from tensions by reading whatever offers pleasant distraction).

That education has an influence on continued learning has never been doubted by most people. Recently, sociologists have been exhaustively comparing the available data in the United States, and Hyman (1975) summarized existing firm evidence of the enduring effects of education. The findings were that higher proportions of individuals with more formal schooling, compared to those with less schooling, regularly use the print media: newspapers, magazines and books. There is evidence that education is positively related to newspaper reading and the effects of education on subsequent adult reading is even more dramatic. The impact does not deteriorate with age.

Gray and Rogers (1956), on the other hand, suggested that education is not seen as bearing a direct, simple, causal relationship to the reading pattern but rather as a clue to the social role, which is more nearly a determiner of the reading pattern. Within the educated population, there are those who can, but do not read. Perhaps they could be called 'book-leavers'. Some have been conditioned in school to avoid reading. This conditioning has not been deliberate on the part of teachers or school authority, but it could have taken place subtly, through peer influence, through lack of appropriate materials in the academic library, and not primarily through teacher activity.

An exploratory sociological study in Brazil on the influences which produce reading habits was conducted by the Latin American Centre for Research in the Social Sciences by a team which investigated the influence of the family on reading (De Medina, 1976). Fifty families of varying

socio-economic levels, varying sizes, and with children of different ages were carefully studied, and their reading of various types was analysed. Several factors emerged as having significant influence on the habit of reading. First was the existence of privacy in which reading could take place. Since reading is a relatively solitary activity which requires some degree of concentration, this finding was not a surprise. Second, the purchase of books by adults, indicating a value judgement, is a reflection of socio-economic status. The third element which was believed to condition reading habits, as measured in the study, was the presence of at least one adult who lives with the family, or who visits the family regularly, who reads frequently.

Balckwood (1991) discussed a study which examined how much time college students spend reading for pleasure, when they did the most pleasure reading, and whether or not parental encouragement plays a role in pleasure reading habits. A total of 332 college seniors at a small public liberal arts college complete three questionnaires as part of the institution's outcomes assessment program. The first questionnaire elicited demographic information; the second determined whether students were learning oriented or grade oriented; and the third obtained information on students' pleasure reading habits. The results indicated that most of the subjects (approximately 88%) did read for pleasure; choices tended towards current events and literature, with newspapers as the preferred choice of medium; subjects read more during vacation than during the school term; and parental encouragement, parent occupation level, and parent educational level had no significant effect on the subjects' pleasure reading habits.

In another study, it was found that statistics on the reading habits of adult Americans are rather grim (LaBonty, 1990). Based on a study of 158 undergraduate education students from two

universities, the surveys of teachers revealed that inadequate and unimpressive figures in recreational and professional reading and awareness of children's literature. Studies showed that, as a whole, teachers were not avid readers. Furthermore, older teachers tended to be more prolific readers of both recreational and professional materials. For recreational reading, students often selected magazines and newspapers. Research on the reading habits of adults clarifies the need for education students to become role models for young readers.

Smithies (1983) found that students at a Papua New Guinea university read little professional material unless they were to be tested on it. Preferred reading materials were comics and fiction.

Local Studies on Reading

Sad to say that in the local scene, the habit of reading does not appear to be a prominent feature in the lives of most Malaysians.

In 1978, the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP) began to consider the need for a systematic and coordinated readership promotion campaign. The campaign plan devised three main strategies :

1. Educating the general public to feel that reading is essential in modern society;
2. Producing more books since efforts to motivate the reading habit would hardly be successful without sufficient reading materials and
3. Reaching more readers by improving marketing and distribution networks.

To implement the three strategies, five types of activities were planned. They were :

1. Providing information, education and motivation through the mass media
2. Improving library services
3. Improving promotional activities, distribution and marketing of reading materials
4. Providing training and exposure to the committee members involved in the readership promotion campaign at all levels and
5. Planning and undertaking research and surveys on reading habits

Based on the survey headed by Professor Atan Long in 1982 it was found that Malaysians in general had poor reading habits and did not like reading.

About one-fifth of the respondents ranked reading as their first choice activity, second only to the more popular activity of television watching (37%). Most Malaysians indicated that they had no fixed time for reading but most of them tended to read at night. The majority of them spent half to an hour to one hour reading newspapers and two to four hours a week for reading books and magazines.

Newspapers were most read (97%) followed by magazines (67%) and books (42%). The data also indicated that those who read most frequently (heavy readers) were from the high socio-economic status, middle-aged and had an English educational background.

On 4th July 1997, the Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak chaired a meeting to discuss the findings of a study on the reading habits in Malaysia which was commissioned by the National Library and conducted by Frank Small & Associates (The Star, 1997). The survey

showed that the functional literacy or the reading habit of Malaysians has been pegged at 87 per cent of the population aged at above 10 years. Out of the 87%, 79% read newspapers, 52% books, 47% magazines and 32% comics, with newspaper and magazines being read for leisure while books were mainly read in relation to work and studies. An average of two books per person is read per year.

The study also showed that 93% of the Malaysian population is literate with the majority of the illiterates being in the age group of 55 years and above. There is a wide gap between the ability to read and actual reading, and comics are the main reading matter. In addition, only 30 minutes a week are spent on reading newspapers. The meeting has assigned Director-General of Education Datuk Matnor Daim to lead a task force to promote the reading habit among students in light of the Ministry support to promote the reading habit campaign.

Other studies have been carried out on specific groups of individuals including pre-university students, trainee-teachers and urban working professionals, executives and managers (Lim, 1974; Ong, 1997).

Lim (1974) discovered that the secondary students surveyed normally spend some of their time outside school hours reading books, magazines and newspapers. Majority of them (56.07%) read between one to three hours daily.

Textbook reading was the predominant habit. Their general attitude towards reading was more instrumental rather than recreative. Female students were found to favour reading family

stories and romances. Among ethnic lines, Malays read both in BM and English whereas the Chinese and Indians preferred to read in English.

In an exploratory study of reading habits and interests of selected TESL trainee-teachers (Lim, 1993), it was found that only 39% of the sample preferred reading to any other recreational activity. Fortunately, only 4.7% of the sample said they had not read any newspaper in the month prior to the survey.

The main reason given by the subjects for their library visits was to look up reference materials. In all probability, the reference materials were related to their course. This leads one to surmise that their reading was "utilitarian" rather than for recreation. The fact that only 6% of the subjects went to the library mainly to browse among the bookshelves and 9% mainly to read newspapers and magazines could point to a general lack of interest in reading. However, it could also indicate that their college library was not well stocked with suitable materials for recreational reading.

The study also found that there is evidence of some relationship between the reading habit and gender in the sample. Many more females than males indicated that reading was their favourite pastime. In addition, more female trainees frequented their college libraries, although the reason for these visits was to look up reference materials.

Lim further concluded that this lack of interest in reading gives cause for concern considering that the subjects are future teachers of primary school children. As primary school teachers, they will have an important role to play in inculcating the reading habit amongst their charges in

the early years of their formal education. This will be difficult to do if the teachers themselves are not readers both by habit and inclination.

Ong (1997) who undertook a study to examine the reading habits of urban working professionals found that in general the reading attitude is quite encouraging. For example, 78% of the reading agree that they always try to read whenever they have the time and 78.5% enjoy reading a lot. 62.2% of the respondents disagree that they not only read if they did not have anything else to do.

Many respondents believe that reading plays an important role in their profession. 87.3% agree that they can be more competent in their job with the new knowledge acquired through reading and 97.3% agree that reading can enhance their job-related knowledge and skill.

Conclusion

From the various literature cited above, it can be seen that reading research has been explored in great depth in developed countries. Nevertheless, the same has yet to be undertaken in Malaysia. Studies on readers of higher learning institutions should unfold findings that might prove vital for the betterment of our society.