CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

1.0 Introduction

Recently, much attention has been given to identify more genuine and alternative reading assessment strategies. These strategies should provide information considered more relevant than standardised tests as students were called upon to exercise the range of skills regularly used in school (Sammons, & Davey, 1994).

However, one area that has not been considered in developing alternative techniques for assessment is students' proficiency in using textbooks. Students differ in their approach of handling reading assignments. Their widely divergent pathways are due to their prior knowledge of the topic, their awareness of textbooks parts, their understanding of the task and their use of learning and reading strategies. The student's prior knowledge interacts with text to create psychological meaning. Background knowledge determines the interpretations made from text. Researchers referred to prior knowledge as knowledge structure, scripts, frames or schemata (Mc Neil, 1984). The student's awareness of the textbooks parts will enable a student to locate information efficiently in the text. He should be taught on how to make use of different parts of the textbook e.g. the indexes, glossaries, table of contents, graphics, headings and diagrams.

Most schools do not teach learning and reading strategies directly in their reading programs. Students do not realise that being good readers required them to master a whole range of reading strategies e.g. summarising, note taking, scanning, identifying meanings of words in the passage and locating information.

Another aspect that has sparkled renewed interest among reading educators and researchers is how affective factors influence children's academic achievement and behaviour. As a result, the powerful impact of attitudes, values, beliefs, desires and motivations on literacy learning has received much focused attention. Due to research , it was known that children who had positive associations with reading tend to read more and with greater intensity (Henk, & Melnick, 1995). At the same time, researchers found out that children who displayed a negative attitude towards reading would either avoid reading altogether or read with little involvement.

To help teachers address the role of affect in reading better, there are psychological constructs developed on measuring readers' self-efficacy. McKenna and Kear (1990) had developed the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS), an instrument that measured elementary students' attitudes towards both school-based and recreational forms of reading. The ERAS had been used extensively by primary and intermediate level teachers to determine the overall attitude levels of classes, and it had also provided insights into reading habits and achievement levels of individual children. Another instrument that had been

developed to measure a reader's self-perceptions was Reader Self Perception Scale

(RSPS) by Henk and Melnick. The RSPS is an instrument that measures the way

readers appraise themselves. Valencia (1990) referred to this notion of reader

self-evaluation as "perception of self as reader", a concept important in both

state-wide and individual portfolio assessment contexts. While ERAS can be used

in the primary grades through grade 6, the RSPS purposely focuses on

intermediate- level readers (Grade 4 to 6).

The Reader Self Perception Scale is based on Bandura's (1977, 1982)

theory of perceived self-efficacy. Bandura defined self-efficacy as a person's

judgements of her or his ability to perform an activity, and the effect this

perception has on the ongoing and future conduct of the activity. Self-efficacy

judgements were thought to affect achievement by influencing an individual's

choice of activities, task avoidance, effort expenditure, and good persistence

(Bandura, & Schunk, 1981; Schunk, 1984). Children who believed they were

good readers probably enjoyed a rich history of reader engagement and exhibited a

strong likelihood of continued positive interactions with text. By contrast, children

who perceived themselves as poor readers probably had not experienced much in

the way of reading success. There is a direct link between readers'

self-perceptions and their subsequent reading behaviour, habits and attitudes.

In the Malaysian schools, the same situation may arises. Students who are

good readers tend to have a positive self-perception and proficient in engaging

different strategies when they were approached with a reading task. However,

there have not been much research done in this area. The intention of this research is to investigate the students' skills and strategies in using textbook and their self-perception as a reader. It is hoped that the findings would enable the teacher or reading specialist plan an intervention program to address the areas of need.

1.1 Rationale For the Study

To date, there is a lot of research done in the field of reading in other countries all over the world. However, in Malaysia this field of research is still very much lacking, especially in the area of student's self-perceptions and usage of different metacognitive strategies.

A student's academic achievement is very much influenced by his self-perceptions. It is known that there is a strong link between a reader's self-perceptions and his subsequent reading behaviour, habits and attitudes. Self-perceptions were likely to motivate or inhibit learning activities (Schunk, 1982, 1983a, 1983b; Zimmerman, & Ringle, 1981). One of the aims of this research is to find out how some Form One students feel about themselves as readers based on their reading abilities. The findings are important as readers who have low self-perceptions should be given special attention and will need the speciality of the school counsellor or school psychologist. Early intervention could help to arrest the problem before it is too late.

Textbooks are often the major sources of information in the classroom. Students should have a good understanding about how the textbooks are being used in and out of the class. They should also be able to relate what their teacher does with the textbook in terms of assignments, activities and tests and how they themselves deal with the text.

In dealing with text, there are many different learning strategies that need to be used. One aspect of this research is to find out if there are differences in the awareness and ability to use the different learning strategies between the high achievers and low achievers. The findings could be used to help students to be better readers. Based on the proficiency of using the textbook, the needs and the strengths of the students could be identified and teachers could take the necessary steps to help the students. They could tailor the instructions according to the individual's needs. In this way, students who are far behind as compared to their peers could be given special attention and help. When they could perform to the desired level, then they are allowed to rejoin the mainstream.

1.2   The Problem Statements

The problems to be investigated are as follows :-

a) the relationship between the high achiever's and low achiever's self-perception and his reading ability,

b) exploring the high achiever's and low achiever's understanding about what the teacher does with the textbook in terms of assignments, activities and tests,

c) the differences in awareness and ability to use different learning strategies between high achievers and low achievers,

d) the personal needs and strengths of the students based on self-perception, awareness of different learning strategies and proficiency of using the textbook.

Based on the problems that would be investigated in this research, the following are the research questions being raised.

1.3   The Research Questions

a) What is the relationship between the high achiever's and low achiever's self-perception and his reading ability ?

b) What is the high achiever's and low achiever's perception of how the textbook is used in the classroom ?

c) Are high achievers more aware of the different learning strategies than low achievers ?

d) Are high achievers able to apply the different learning strategies that they know better than low achievers ?

1.4   Significance of the Study

The study enabled us to gain information on some Form One students' proficiency in using their textbooks.   The study also helped us to identify individual student's areas of strength and areas of need when they undertook tasks requiring them to read textbooks. Assessing students' awareness of textbooks parts is important because of the increased emphasis in schools on project work that requires an ability to locate information prior reading (Sammons, & Davey, 1994). From the diagnosis, teachers and reading specialist could tailor their instructions based on the students' needs and abilities. In this way, students with learning disabilities and 'at risk' students could be given special instructions or put in a remedial class instead of following the mainstream.

Secondly, the reader's self-perception score would give us an insight to the reader's judgement of her/his ability. As self-perception has an impact on an individual's overall orientation toward the process of reading, it is best that the student's self-perception score in different scales should be addressed and be given due attention and consideration. The researcher felt that this aspect of affective domain was not given much interest in our Malaysian education system. Hence, a lot of students leave school as they do not have the motivation and interest in reading.

1.5 Limitations of the Study

This study was only carried out for a short duration due to time constraint. If a longitudinal study of more than two years could be done, the progress that the child made in using the learning strategies taught to him could be monitored. It could be determined whether the instructions produced any progress by administering the instrument every six months.

The study was carried out only among some Form One students in a residential school in Ipoh. If the study could be extended to other forms and other schools both in rural and urban areas, there would be more variations in the data collected.

Teachers could be interviewed to give their perceptions of the usage of textbooks in and out of the classroom. They could also give their perceptions of the student as a reader.

As the RSPS had only been administered for readers between Grade 4-6 by Henk and Melnick and had not been used in higher forms, the administration of the instrument had to be limited to Form One students only (which is the nearest equivalent to Grade 6). Lastly, the textbook used for the study by all the subjects was only on Science as a mean of control. If different subjects picked their

preferred textbooks such as Mathematics, History or Physical Health , the results obtained would be difficult for analysis.

1.6   Definition of Terms

Scanning - ability to locate facts quickly (Maxwell, 1969).

Strategies - These referred to conscious behaviour that enabled pupils to verbalise their thoughts and actions when faced with difficulties during reading. If there were no difficulties encountered during reading, the action became automatic and as such unconscious.

Metacognition - transcendent cognition by enabling individuals not just to use particular strategies but to be aware of the importance of these strategies and how to appraise them (Mc Neil, 1984).

Self-perception - the way readers appraised themselves (Winograd, & Paris, 1988; Wixson, K., Peter, C., Weber, E., & Roeber, E., 1987).

Self-efficacy - a person's judgement of her or his ability to perform an activity (Bandura, 1977).

Summarising - summarising can be defined as a strategy of stating briefly or in a condensed form the substance of what has been presented in oral or written form, most of the time with the text removed . It is restating the gist of the matter or the main ideas (Chamot, 1988b; O' Malley *et al.*, 1985b) . There is also a requirement of conciseness without the omission of important points as well.