# CHAPTER V

## SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.0   Introduction

Self-perception relate very closely to one's reading achievements (Bandura, 1977, 1982; Schunk, 1982,1983a, 1983b; Zimmerman, & Ringle, 1981). A person who perceived himself to have a high reading ability will usually have a high self-perception. This in turn will greatly influence his future associations with any reading assignments. Students who are good readers are those who are versatile in the application of the different learning strategies. They know which, when and where to apply the different learning strategies (Kletzien, 1991).

Poor readers, on the other hand, are always trapped in the cycle of self-fulfilling prophecy. They felt that they are doomed failures and helpless in improving their situation. Thus, their poor self-perception will lead them to avoid further reading associations in the future (Henk, & Melnick, 1992). Poor readers are found to be weak in the ability to apply different learning strategies (Vacca, & Vacca, 1993; Miller, & Yochum, 1991; Loranger, 1994).

### 5.1   Relationship Between the High Achiever's and Low Achiever's Self-Perception and His Reading Ability

Based on the findings, there is a close relationship between self-perceptions and one's reading ability. Students who were from the high achievers group scored high in the reader's Self-Perception Scale (RSPS). On the other hand, students who

were from the low achievers group had an overall low score. The items in the RSPS are divided into four categories; Progress, Observational Comparison, Social Feedback and Physiological States.

In the Progress category, all the four students from the high achievers group obtained scores in the high range. As items from the Progress category centred on various aspects of reading including past performances, task persistence, personal progress and avoidance, it could be interpreted that the high achievers in this study are very much aware of their own progress. These high achievers tend to monitor their progress very closely and try various methods to enhance their performance.

The results of the low achievers group from the Progress category showed that two out of the four students had scores in the low range. The other two students obtained scores in the average range. The low achievers in this study seldom compare their present progress with their past performances. They are frustrated with their ability to cope with their present reading tasks and tend to avoid the tasks as much as possible (Bandura, 1997, 1982).

Observational Comparison was aimed at self-perceptions of reading ability based on how other children perform. Based on research, high achievers score marks in the high range for this category. They know their reading ability is very good as compared to other students of the same age group (Chapman, & Lambourne, 1990). Their constant successes in reading tasks greatly enhanced their self-perception in reading. However, findings from the study showed that only two out of four students

in the high achievers group displayed such pattern. The scores from the low achievers group ranged from average to low. The low achievers know how they fare as compared with other students in their group. Their associations with reading were always met with constant failures and this greatly dampened their spirits in any reading tasks. When they saw their friends succeeding so easily in reading tasks which they tried very hard but failed, they began to accept the fact that they were weak (Ames, 1978; Kifer, 1975).

Social Feedback items tapped direct and indirect feedback from credible human sources. In this category, high achievers should have scores in the high range. Receiving praises, encouragement and positive feedback from friends and parents on their reading performances helped to support their self-perceptions of progress and validated their sense of efficacy (Schunk, 1982). Once again, findings from the study did not show a similar pattern for all the high achievers. The low achievers group in this study obtained scores in the low and below average range for this category.

Low achievers may receive a lot of unkind remarks be it is intentional or unintentional. Teachers and parents tend to be impatient with a 'slow' reader (Brozo, 1990). They either become overly critical of the student's performance or ignored them totally. Low achievers seldom receive praises for any little effort or success that they experienced. This would discourage the reader from trying on further.

Physiological States items derived from bodily feedback such as relaxation and discomfort . In this study, all the high achievers scored in the high range while the

low achievers scored in the average range. Findings from the study showed that high achievers experience a lot of positive feelings such as happiness, good feelings, relaxation when they are reading. It could be that their reading ability is able to cope with the reading level for their age group and thus need not expend much effort when reading. The low achievers may experience difficulties when reading. Although they experienced positive feelings like the high achievers, the feelings were not of the same intensity.

To summarise the above, high achievers in this study tend to have a higher self-perception in reading as compared to low achievers. Their high self-perception in reading would encourage them to associate more with reading tasks.

5.2 The High Achiever's and Low Achiever's Perception of How the Textbook Is Used In the Classroom

All the subjects interviewed could relate how the textbook was used in the classroom. They were very much aware of activities, assignments and research carried out in class based on the textbook. The high achievers were able to comment how useful and complete the information from the book as compared to other books on the same topic. They probably always scout around for good books to help them to understand a topic or concept better. The low achievers were quite content with the information derived from the book. They commented that the book was useful, complete and adequate for their needs.

All the students responded that they did not receive any guidance in the usage of the text from the teacher. One of the weaknesses in our education system is that students are not taught the skills or give any guidance in using a text or seeking for information. They are left on their own to acquire reading skills such as scanning, summarising, note taking, underlining key points or using headings and graphics to obtain information. These high achievers might have mastered these skills early in age (probably through guidance by parents) and thus gave them an edge over the others. Studies had shown that students who were moderate or below average in their studies, improved greatly when they were being taught on how to use learning skills.

The studying styles between the high achievers and low achievers in this case study seemed to be different. The high achievers preferred to read in silent while the low achievers liked to read aloud. Each group felt that their preferred method helped them to remember facts better. The high achievers made use of pictures and graphics more often than low achievers. They were able to interpret data and analyse facts from the graphics. The low achievers tend to read the text more and overlooked the importance of graphics and illustrations.

The high achievers group tend to remember facts by building acronyms, mind-mapping or practising drill questions. They usually remember facts by seeing the whole picture from different angles and building connections between them. The low achievers tend to remember facts by memorising them. They will reread the facts again and again and sometimes skip parts which they do not understand. They also focus more on the minute details rather than making connections between the main

ideas presented. Unlike the high achievers, low achievers do not know how to apply

different learning strategies such as mind-mapping, note taking or making summary to

help them in remembering.

To prepare for a test, the high achievers would read a few books and do

drilling exercises. However, the low achievers varied in their approach such as

reading facts that he thought would come out in the test, asking for assistance or

writing short notes. This approach is not as effective as the approach used by the high

achievers. Comparing the concepts from a few books and doing exercises would gave

the student a better grasp of the concepts tested and ability to apply them.

The high achievers group thought that they could read the text very well or

moderately well. They were very confident of their reading ability. The low

achievers mostly responded that they could read the text moderately or not very well.

They were aware that their reading ability was not as good as their peers.

To summarise the above, although both the high achievers and low achievers

were aware of how the textbook was used in class, each one of them had their own

studying styles and ways of coping with their reading tasks.

## 5.3 Awareness of Different Learning Strategies Between High Achievers and Low Achievers

Based on the findings, both the high achievers and low achievers were aware

of the different learning strategies available. They knew the different type of learning

strategies e.g. making summaries, underlining, locating information in the text to answer question, note taking and so forth. However, being aware of the existence of such strategies does not imply that the subjects would be able to apply them efficiently.

## 5.4 Differences Between the High Achievers and Low Achievers in the Ability to Apply the Different Learning Strategies.

The learning strategies selected to test the differences in the ability to apply between the two groups were :-

i) Summary

Making summary required great cognitive effort (Loranger, 1994) and there was a wide gap between the scores obtained by the high achievers and the low achievers. The high achievers were able to pick out all the main ideas and relevant details presented in the passage. The ability to pick out key ideas was important as most text or information contained a lot of unnecessary details or lengthy elaboration. They could also provide a well-organised summary in the sense that the main ideas presented were in sequence. The low achievers could probably picked only one or two key ideas from the passage just read out and their summary even included unnecessary details.

ii) Note taking

Similar to providing summary, in this exercise the high achievers fared very well as compared to the low achievers. They could produce well-organised and

complete notes. This indicated their high efficiency in note taking. The low achievers were not able to pick up key points well and produced notes that were sometimes difficult to make sense of. All of them knew how useful it was to take notes but the low achievers were still not able to master this skill well.

iii) Usage of the textbook efficiently to answer questions

Questions asked in this exercise required the subjects to think about the answers although part of the information could be derived from the text. The high achievers were able to extract the needed information and answer the questions asked accurately in their own words. From what was being observed, the low achievers did not know how to extract the key ideas and just read out the whole paragraph which contained the answer. Once again, the low achievers did not know how to summarise the facts well in order to answer questions directly to the point.

iv) Underlining

The underlining strategy does not require as much cognitive effort as making summary or note taking (Loranger, 1994). In this exercise, the low achievers fared better although not as good as the high achievers. There were students from the low achievers group who underlined unnecessary details and too much or too little.

v) Providing meanings of words in isolation and from context

Findings revealed that it was easier to guess the meanings of words when it was from context rather than when they were in isolation. This was true for both the

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high achievers and the low achievers. They were able to make use of the context clues and words around the selected word to guess the meaning. When the words were placed in isolation, they had no whatsoever means to help them. They had to rely on their prior knowledge in vocabulary to provide the meaning and they found the task more difficult.

vi) Scanning

Scanning is one of the advance reading strategies which needs a lot of skills and practises in order to apply it well (Maxwell, 1969; Raygor, 1970). Scanning / skimming could only be applied efficiently through series of exercises and under proper guidance. That is one of the reasons why this strategy could only be applied by students who have reached at least 14-years of age. Both groups in this study were not able to use the scanning    strategy efficiently.

vii)  Headings and other graphics

The usage of headings, graphics and diagrams to obtain information also requires skills. Many students are unaware of the vast amount of information that could be derived from graphs and illustrations. Ideas and concepts could be conveyed better to the readers through diagrams (Kirsch, & Mosenthal, 1992; Peresich, Meadows, & Sinatra, 1990) . Readers would have a clearer idea of how the concepts are linked to each other. The high achievers could made use of the headings and graphics more efficiently to locate information than the low achievers.

viii) Awareness of textbook parts

The textbook parts which were tested were the table of contents and index. From the findings, most of the subjects were found to be more aware of the table of contents rather than the indexes. Most of them could demonstrate how to seek information from a broad category e.g. finding information on a general topic and then relate information that they expect to learn based on the subheadings. This reading skill may have been shown by their teachers during class.

However, when they were asked to locate a very specific word, most of them seemed lost. They did not know where to start or just keep flipping the passages to locate the said word. Only one of the high achievers possessed the knowledge of using the indexes to seek information. To summarise the above, the high achievers group were able to apply most of the learning strategies efficiently as compared to the low achievers. The ability to apply the suitable learning strategies at the appropriate time during the reading process enabled them to be in the lead.

Learning strategies are part of the important tools needed to enable a student to become a successful student. Mastering these learning strategies well will give the student an edge over others although he may possess only average intelligence. Successful students are usually the ones who have learn to study smart through the usage of learning strategies (Bartlett, & Knoblock, 1988; Chan, 1992; Paris, & Jacobs, 1984).

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## 5.5 Recommendations

### 5.5.1 Reaching out poor readers

Many poor secondary students bring to the classroom along a history of failure and, likely, a repertoire of strategies designed to avoid reading, so solutions are not simple. Nevertheless, there are teacher-student interactions as well as classroom instructional strategies that can help promote greater feelings of trust between poor readers and teachers, lead to broader self awareness, and encourage these students to make genuine attempts to improve their reading and learning (Brozo, 1990).

i)    Develop a personal rapport with less able readers.

Teachers should try to get to know poor readers as individuals. Extended and frequent informal discussions before, after, and outside class will help the teacher better understand the student's needs and could reduce the student's tendency to bluff. These frequent informal exchange can also be used to monitor the student's progress. Often, informal , personal contact with a student can make the difference between giving up and trying. In a non threatening, informal atmosphere, teachers can offer and suggest alternative reading materials related to the class topics or the student's outside interests.

ii)    Become more aware of behaviours and biases

Teachers should do some soul searching in order to become more self aware of their biases toward certain students and unconscious behaviours that may be estranging poor readers from the main flow of instructional activities in the classroom.

Research on self-fulfilling prophecy and teacher expectations (Brophy, 1983) has

revealed that when teachers are made aware of maladaptive behaviours they can and

do change.

### iii) <u>Teach poor, passive readers to monitor their own performance</u>

Poor readers are often passive, that is, they are unwilling to exert the effort to

improve their reading because of a history of critical and abundant failure (Brozo, &

Curtis, 1987). Johnston and Winograd (1985) recommend that passive readers be

encouraged to monitor their own reading performance so as to see the connection

between effort and its consequences. Teaching students textbook study strategies that

are metacognitive in nature may be very useful in helping to break cycles of passivity

and failure.

### iv) <u>Adapt instruction to low-ability students</u>

Teachers can ask questions of these students that they can answer successfully,

such as opinion questions or questions that ask them to relate their own experience to

the ideas being discussed in class. This strategy along with engaging poor readers in

frequent co-operative learning activities will help them see that their input is valued.

In turn, this will buoy confidence and may catalyse poor readers to keep trying.

### v) <u>Refer to and co-operate with the reading specialist</u>

Poor readers should be referred to a reading specialist for extra help.

However, classroom teachers should not assume that special reading instruction alone

will take care of the students' problems. Working together, the classroom teacher and

the specialist can dovetail their efforts to more effectively meet the literacy needs of less able students. For example, the reading specialist can help the classroom teacher generate and plan individual assignments. In the specialist's classroom, poor readers can be shown how to use literacy tools to expand their understanding of subject area concepts.

### 5.5.2   Confronting the problem

Classroom observational researchers have determined that teachers tend not to reach out to less able students, though there may be frequent non-academic interactions, disciplinary in nature (Brozo, 1990). In fact, teachers behave in a variety of ways that reinforce distance, such as paying less attention to them, calling on them less often, seating them further, and demanding less from them (Johnston & Winograd, 1985).

It should not come as a surprise to anyone that teachers simply find it more stimulating to work with better students. An important philosophical question needs to be asked here, however : Should we allow less able students to avoid confronting their reading problems? Poor readers who are running scared in secondary classrooms will continue to run if they are ignored . And after high school they are likely to find themselves running as adults, avoiding situations in which they might be expected to read.

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A teacher who follows effective instructional guidelines may be reaching most of his / her students, while inadvertently overlooking the serious needs of the poor readers in class who are trying to blend into the walls, precipitate task-irrelevant interchanges, employ apple polishing strategies to manipulate perceptions, or fake academic engagement.

Teachers need to demonstrate that they genuinely care about poor readers and are interested in more than forcing these students to expose their most vulnerable areas of weakness again and again in the classroom. Only then, the researcher believes, will poor readers be inclined to come out from hiding and, with the help of teachers, take realistic and adaptive measures to deal with their literacy problems.

5.6 Conclusion

As this study is a case study of only eight students in a residential school, the data collected may not reflect the real situation of Malaysian students in reading. It is hoped that this study will serve as a head start for future research on reading achievements in Malaysia. The researcher felt that more research in the same line should be conducted in other schools. Suggested type of schools are day schools, schools from the urban and rural areas, national and national-type schools.

A well-structured program should also be designed to help poor readers to deal with their inefficiency in reading. They could be coached on the application of the reading strategies. These readers could also be taught to monitor their own progress closely and teachers / reading specialist should keep track on their progress

before, during and after the program. It is hoped that with their participation in the programs, their reading achievements will improve greatly and they would have a more positive feelings towards any reading assignments in the future.