

CHAPTER 4

4.0 Data Analysis and Findings

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of an extensive reading programme in motivating average proficiency students to read more in English.

This chapter presents the data collected employing five instruments:

- 1) Informal discussions with the subjects.
- 2) Reading Logs kept by 35 students of average English proficiency level.
- 3) Questionnaires distributed to 35 students of average English proficiency level.
- 4) Observations.
- 5) Interviews conducted on 17 students of average English proficiency level.

The data collected would answer the following research questions:

- 1) Does the extensive reading programme motivate students of average English proficiency to read more in English?
- 2) Does the programme encourage students of average English proficiency to read independently?
- 3) Does the programme encourage students of average English proficiency to improve their English Language?

Data from the informal discussion and observations are presented in a narrative form. Students' progress in terms of their language would be analysed from their written work, such as essays and literature responses in class as well as in their monthly examination results. The data collected from the Reading Log is tabulated into percentage and presented in a table form. All the data collected from the

questionnaire is tabulated into percentage and presented in a table form. Information collected from the interview is presented in a narrative form. The summarized data from all five instruments is interpreted accordingly to answer the research questions.

4.2 Informal discussions

The data from informal discussions was used to come up with reading materials for this extensive reading programme. The data helped to identify the reasons behind students' reluctance in reading. The data from the informal discussions also revealed students taste and interest; hence it helped me to come up with reading materials of their interest. I found out that the students liked reading materials, which were within their linguistic capacity. Students professed that they liked 'short and easy stories.' That was the reason why I chose graded fables for this extensive reading programme. Hill (1992), stated three conditions for extensive reading to work: speed, interest, and level of materials. If students are to read in quantity, they need to read quickly, and have access to reading materials of their interest with suitable language level that match their level of proficiency. In order for students to get the momentum in reading, simple, and comprehensible materials should be given to them first as students would be put off by reading materials that have unknown lexical load. The unknown lexical load would make reading a frustrating affair as students have to refer to dictionary from time to time and reading would no longer be a pleasurable activity but a chore. Moreover, if teachers want their students to adopt Nuttall's notion of 'the virtuous cycle of the competent reader,' they have to cater to their students needs and choose and tailor materials according to

their needs.

As the whole aim of this extensive reading programme is to motivate students to read, paramount emphasis should be given to their likes and dislikes. This study proves that students of average English proficiency will be motivated and pick up the reading habit if materials that are easy to handle are given to them. Indeed, motivation is a powerful influence in literacy learning (Gambel, 1996).

4.3 Reading Logs

Analysis of data from the Reading Logs is used to answer the first and second Research Questions:

- a) Does the extensive reading programme motivate students of average English proficiency level to read in English?
- b) Does the programme encourage students to read independently?

All the 35 students were required to record the titles of the graded fables read throughout the two weeks programme. The Reading Log allowed the teacher and the students to regularly check on the students' reading progress towards achieving their goal, which was to complete reading at least eight graded fables by the end of the two weeks programme. This minimum target was set by both the teacher and students.

Table 4.1 below shows the number of graded fables read by the 35 students involved in the programme over a period two weeks. This data is tabulated into percentage form.

Table 4.1: Number of Graded Fables Read During The Extensive Reading Programme

Number of fables read	Number of students	Percentage (N=35)
1	-	-
2	-	-
3	-	-
4	-	-
5	-	-
6	-	-
7	-	-
8	-	-
9	3	9%
10	32	91%

At the start of the extensive reading programme, the teacher had negotiated with the students that at least 8 graded fables should be read by the students at the end of the two weeks reading programme. Based on Table 4.1, we can see that all the students read more than the targeted number of fables. Three students read nine fables while thirty-two students read all the ten fables at the end of the programme. In other words, 91% of the students managed to read all the ten fables and 9% of the students read nine fables.

One of the reasons cited in the reading log on why they liked to read the graded fables was because they liked the big prints used in the fables, which made reading easy for them.

In addition, the students were interested in reading the fables, as they were short and interesting.

Quotes from two students on ‘The Proud Jackdaw’, which exhibits the above statement, is given below.

“This story is longer than other short stories but easy to understand because the words and sentences are simple,” (Wen Yan).

“I wish to read this story in the future to my children when teaching them. This story is interesting,” (Mei Ching).

The stories depicting animals were found to be humorous. The fables on ‘The Lion in Love’, ‘The Man and the Lion’ and ‘The Wolves and the Sheep’ fell under this category.

“This story is funny and interesting. The woodcutter using his own intelligent to free himself and his daughter from the lion. It is funny to see the lion stupid. It teaches us that we must not easily trust somebody,” (Chun Hee).

“The story is funny and interesting to read. It’s just like me and my friend Selvi from Convent. She will tell me about their school’s good things and I will tell her my school’s good things,” (Rita).

Traces of Rosenblatt’s (1976) reader response theory can be seen in the responses above too. According to Rosenblatt, in the aesthetic stance the reader focuses on what he or she experiences, thinks and feels during reading. The quote above shows that the student is taking the aesthetic stance and relating what she experiences in real life. In other words, the text serves to focus the students’ realms of meaning (Luce, 1992).

Moreover, the moral values were explicitly stated at the end of the fables so the students understood and talked about the moral values and the importance of them in their reading logs. They connected the fables to real life situations.

“This story is like real. In real life, we can’t please everyone. We should learn how to tolerate them. Otherwise we will only harming ourselves. I like to read such stories in future,” (Lik Wei).

The student is interpreting the story through interactive process of ‘combining textual information with the information the reader brings to text’ (Widdowson in Grabe 1988, p.56). The student is also exploiting his background knowledge, that is, activating his schemata as well as decoding and interpreting the message beyond printed words.

The students also stated that they could understand the fables because the words used and the sentence structures were simple and easy to understand. Students would be put off by readings, which are beyond their linguistic level. This finding proves what Grabe (1988) suggested, ESL readers need “massive receptive vocabulary that is rapidly, accurately and automatically accessed.” Another fact that caught their eye and propelled them to read the stories were the fact that most of the stories existed in their mother tongue, therefore, they could easily make connections to them.

“I have heard it before in my tongue. It is easy to read and understand the word. I feel happy because it can remind on my childhood when I read this story. I like to read stories like this,” (Wei Khoon).

“My grandmother got tell me this story when I was young. I like this story because it tell people not to be greedy.”

The students’ remarks clearly show that prior knowledge is important for readers in order to comprehend a text (Carrel, 1980). As students have heard this story in their

mother tongue, they find it easier to understand and remember the information. It also creates a feeling of delight as the content is familiar and brings back pleasurable memories. It also proves that students find linguistically easier text easy to comprehend as advocated by Nunan (1991). Moreover, as the text exists in their mother tongue, the students' schema has the content information of the text, thus making it easier for them to comprehend it.

Students also exhibited the aesthetic stance by stating their emotions after reading the fables. For example 'The Lion in Love' prompted these responses:

"I feel very sympathise to the toothless, clawless lion because it was cheated by the woodcutter," (Alvin).

"I angry with the woodcutter's idea owing to this will make the lion died of hunger," (Pooi Yoke).

"I am very interested with this story as I have seen the same thing before in my family. The lion's character almost same with my sister's boyfriend who is greedy, playboy and want to married with my sister. I think this story want to tell us about social isu and to think better before doing something," (Shuang Yan).

The comments above proves Karolides's (1977) opinion, 'that the relationship between the reader and the text is dynamic.' The students come to the text with their own personalities and character traits, their individual memories and experiences, their personal situations and concerns, their cultural background and perspectives, and their backlog of language (Mahzan Arshad, 1998).

The comments or responses in the reading logs clearly indicates that the graded fables used in the extensive reading programme has managed to motivate most

of the average proficiency students to read more English stories during the two weeks allocated for the programme. Therefore the analysis of data from the Reading Log clearly provides the answer for the first research question, which is:

- 1) Does the extensive reading programme motivate students of average English proficiency to read more in English?

The findings reveal a positive 'yes' for the above question. The students read the stories at their own leisure and came up with their own responses. They were very happy to write their views and opinions on the stories. In fact, all the students wrote something about the stories that they have read which is indeed encouraging. This is in line with researches quoted by Spiegel (1998) who contended that learners grow tremendously in their ability to respond to literature as they develop "ownership of what they read and make personal connections." This proves that the extensive reading programme has managed to encourage the students to read independently, thus, providing the answer for the second research question:

- 2) Does the programme encourage students of average English proficiency to improve their language?

The answer to this questions is 'yes' too as students seem to really get involved with the texts.

4.4 Questionnaire

The thirty-five students who participated in the reading programme were asked to complete a questionnaire, which consisted of twenty questions. This survey was carried out after the reading programme was introduced in order to gauge

students' attitude with regards to reading in English.

The data from the questionnaire is tabulated and presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Results from the students' responses to the twenty items in the questionnaire.

No	Items	YES		NO	
		No. of	%	No. of	%
		Ss		Ss	
1.	Reading is for pleasure	30	86	5	14
2.	It's good to spend money on books	25	71	10	29
3.	Reading is useless	1	3	34	97
4.	Reading books are useful	34	97	1	3
5.	Short stories are better than novels	25	71	10	29
6.	Reading is a good hobby	30	86	5	14
7.	I surf the net regularly	24	69	11	31
8.	Novels are lengthy and time consuming	27	77	8	23
9.	Reading can help me in my essay writing	35	100	-	-
10.	I like to choose my own reading materials	34	97	1	3
11.	I like the teachers to choose the reading materials	5	14	30	86
12.	I like to read at home	25	71	10	29
13.	Reading in the classroom is convenient	11	31	24	69
14.	Reading materials found in the internet is interesting	26	74	9	26
15.	I get bored if I cannot understand the story I'm reading	32	91	3	9
16.	Reading stories with pictures are more interesting	35	100	-	-
17.	I like stories that I can understand easily	35	100	-	-
18.	Reading is fun when I don't have to answer questions	25	71	10	29
19.	I learn new words when I read stories	35	100	-	-
20.	I wish we could choose our own stories for literature	32	91	3	9

Table 4.2 above, illustrates the students' responses to the questionnaire which was given to them upon the completion of the extensive reading programme.

The analysis of data from the questionnaire would strengthen the answer to the second Research Question and answer the third Research Question:

- 2) Does the programme encourage students to read independently?
- 3) Does the programme encourage students to improve their language?

In order to aid analysis, the items in the questionnaire will be analysed under three different themes, which are:

- a. Purpose for reading
- b. Preferred reading materials
- c. Reading environment

4.4.1 Purpose for Reading

From Table 4.2, it can be surmised that the majority of students (86%) felt that reading is a pleasurable activity and (71%) of them did not mind spending money buying books. This proves that the students do like reading and enjoy it. The interview revealed that they do read but mostly Chinese books and they profess buying Chinese storybooks and seldom buy English books. Only (3%) of the students felt that reading is a useless activity. Majority of the students (86%) agreed that reading is a good hobby and it is fun when they do not have to answer any questions based on their reading (71%). However, all the students agreed that they learn new words when they read stories and reading indeed help them in their essay writing. This finding coincides with studies done by Hafiz & Tudor (1989) in the UK and

Pakistan, and Robb & Susser (1989) in Japan, which revealed that there was more significant improvement in subjects' written work than in other language skills. This proves that effective reading will lead to the shaping of the students thoughts and help them in their writing tasks. The students answers that reading help them in learning new words and essay writing clearly indicates that they believe that reading helps them to improve their language, thus answering the third research question:

- 4) Does the programme encourage students of average English proficiency to improve their language?

The results above indicate that these students of average proficiency have a positive attitude towards reading as a whole and what they need is guidance and a lot of motivation. In fact, Bamford and Day (1997) and Carrol & Eisterhold (1993) advocate teachers to encourage their students to read for pleasure. When students are reading for pleasure, there should not be any pressure of evaluation. Evaluations impose a rigor on the learning process, which the average student will never equate with pleasure. Therefore, evaluations should be avoided in extensive reading as extensive reading should be "without the pressures of testing or marks," (Davis 1995, p.329)

4.4.2 Preferred Reading Materials

Almost all the students (97%) concurred that books are useful but many (77%) felt that novels are too lengthy and thus preferred short stories. All the students admitted to liking stories with pictures as they felt the stories were more interesting.

An important finding from this research is majority of the students (91%)

confessed that they get bored with stories, which are beyond their level of comprehension and all the students like stories that they can understand easily. This confirms that the application of Schema Theory is appropriate in reading as students are not in favour of reading materials, which are beyond their schemata.

Almost all the students (97%) liked the idea of choosing their own reading materials compared to only a handful (14%) preferred the teacher to choose the reading materials for them. Majority of the students (91%) professed their wish of having a hand in choosing their own stories for literature component in schools.

In addition, many students (71%) profess to surf the Internet and almost an equal number of students (76%) find that reading materials found in the Internet interesting.

From these findings, it can be concluded that these students have a definite preference for the kinds of material they like to read. This has grave implications for teaching and learning as a whole. If a teacher is able to find out students' needs, tastes and interests and able to choose the kind of reading materials which appeal to the students, then the process of teaching and learning will be more enjoyable for both the teacher as well as the students. Students like materials which are within their comprehension level, therefore graded readers should be made available for students by teachers if they want them to read extensively. Graded readers have a controlled grammatical and lexical load, and provide regular and sufficient repetition of new language forms (Wodinsky & Nation 1988). Therefore, students would automatically receive the necessary reinforcement and recycling of language required to ensure that new input is retained and made available for spoken and written production.

In addition, by catering to the students' likes and dislikes in terms of reading materials, the teacher will indirectly encourage the students to read more. And thus, the more the students read, the better they will become at reading. As Nuttall (1996) puts it, reading can only be developed by reading and if students enjoy what they are reading, they will read faster, understand better and read even more. Whenever it is possible, students should be given the opportunity to choose their own reading texts based on their interests as "learners may be motivated to read extensively by being allowed to choose their own texts" (Stroller in Eskey & Grabe, 1988, p. 230).

Table 4.2 also shows that a majority of the students surf the Internet, and like materials from it, teachers can get them to visit websites, which contain interesting stories and get them to read them. Boswood (1997) states that by creating a World Wide Web page with hypertext links to articles on the web, the teacher gives the students access to materials that echo or enhance the reading in the textbook. As many web pages are designed for independent learning (Olive, Omari and Herrington, 1998), students can read independently. They can choose reading materials appropriate to their level and interest. This will develop their reading skills and enable them not only to become better readers but also readers who are independent, and have control over their own development. This finding and discussions answers research question 2, that is, the students are encouraged to read independently and have a preference for their own reading materials. Therefore, teachers need to find out their preference and act upon it.

4.4.3 Reading Environment

Table 4.2 also shows that more than three quarters of the students (71%) prefer to read at home. Students may find reading in the home to be more conducive as it is probably quieter and more relaxing. They can listen to music as they read which would make reading stories all the more enjoyable. Moreover, reading at home allows them to read at their own leisure as well as at their own pace. Only (31%) of the students feel it is more convenient to read in the classroom. The reason behind this is that they have their homework, tuition and household chores to attend to, thus not allowing them time to read at home.

Findings from the questionnaire and the discussions above reveal that the extensive reading programme did encourage the students to read independently and help to improve their language as they admit that they learn new words when they read and reading helps them in their writing.

4.5 Observations

The data from their exercise books and monthly examination results answers Research Question three:

- 3) Does the programme encourage students of average proficiency level to improve their language?

Students' essays and responses to short stories in the literature component showed a marked improvement. They used words and structures from the fables to write essays. Students who normally only write one or two lines in response to questions on the short stories in literature managed to write longer responses and the aesthetic stances can be seen in them. They connected real life experiences and their

background knowledge to respond in response to the questions. They managed to “develop ownership of what they read and their responses, they made personal connections and became more reflective and critical” (Spiegel, 1998). Their monthly examination results too showed marked improvement. They threw in the vocabulary from the fables in their essay writing and literature responses.

This proves that the quality of exposure to language that learners receive is important to their potential to acquire new forms from the input. This is proved by the students’ improvement in their language. Elley (1991) found that in numerous studies, subjects that have been exposed to extensive reading showed rapid growth in language development, “there was a spread effect from reading competence to other language skills – writing, speaking and control over syntax,” (Elley 1991: 404).

Studies by Hafiz & Tudor (1989) in the UK and Pakistan, and Robb & Susser (1989) in Japan, revealed more significant improvement in subjects’ written work than in other language skills. This result and the result from this study again supports the case for an input-based, acquisition oriented reading program based on extensive reading as an effective means of fostering improvements in students’ writing. Effective reading will lead to the shaping of the students thoughts, which naturally lead them to respond in writing with varying degrees of competency. As such, students should be involved in extensive reading programmes and asked to express their feelings on what they enjoyed most in the stories they have read. They can also be allowed to record questions they wish to ask the teacher or other students in class, as this will generate class discussion whereby students would have a chance to express their opinions.

The findings and discussion in this session answers research question three, that is, there is significance improvement in the students' language in terms of writing.

4.6 Interviews

I used interview as a tool to obtain a more complete and clearer view of students' opinions and attitudes towards reading at the end of the Extensive Reading Programme. The analysis of the Interview would provide more insights and help to consolidate the answers to all the three research questions.

Due to practical considerations such as time constraint, only half the students (17) were chosen for the interview. They were chosen at random from the 35 students who took part in the two weeks programme.

Fourteen out of the seventeen students interviewed duly agreed that they liked to read but thirteen of them said that they like to read Chinese storybooks because they find them easier to understand, as it is their mother tongue. Swit Yee confessed, "I orr like the Chinese books orr..because orr easy to understand."

Only one student said that he sometimes read in English. He professed to read magazines on cars and as most magazines on cars are in English, he reads them. But he confessed that he does not understand everything in the magazine. The excuse given by the students in not reading English storybooks are because the books are all difficult to understand. For example, Phaik Yee confessed, "Err...the English books ah...difficult to understand. I don't know the words." For Mei Ching it was "boring to read English...ah...many words cannot understand..ah...have to look

dictionary...ah...wasting time. If ah..short and easy.. ah...I like.” Xiang Si too confessed that he does not like stories with difficult words, “I don’t like ... if the story got err...difficult words,”

The students disinterest in reading in English confirms Tan’s (1999) survey on the reading habits of ESL learners from vernacular schools. Tan’s study revealed that an appalling majority of students do not read English books or other materials.

The data from the interview shows that students are put off by materials which are way beyond their level of comprehension, just as what Rivers (1968) and Harmer (1991) agreed, that is, students may lose interest or become demotivated if they are given difficult and boring texts.

In addition, all the students professed to like choosing their own reading materials rather than have the teacher choose on their behalf. The other three students said that they do not like to read because they are lazy, packed with tuition classes and also because the books that they have come across have difficult words and it is difficult to understand them. One of them, Yew Hong said that his parents want him to do well in his SPM examinations, therefore asked him to concentrate on his studies and read academic books rather than waste time on storybooks. “My parents ah... ask me to study the revision book. I...I want to do well in my exam.”

Fifteen out of the seventeen students admitted that they study by memorising and they have been practising this habit since primary school. For example, Wen Yan said, “I memorise ..err... I memorise forHistory, Physics, essays and literature.” She and the other students confessed that they resort to revision books, which have model essays and model question and answers for literature. They memorise these

answers before the exam. Martin Cortazzi's and Lixian Jin's study on 'Cultures of Learning' of Chinese students seem to be true in Malaysia too. Students resort to rote-memorisation to answer questions in the examination. It is even done for essays and literature.

All the seventeen students interviewed preferred short stories to novels. They said that short stories are easier to understand and can be read in a short period of time. For example, Alvin commented, "I like short stories..because...can finish reading fast." While Cheng Shium said, "Ahhh...I don't like novels, so thick...boring and difficult to reader..cannot understand."

The students responses confirms Vygotsky's claims that "nuturing is essential to assist learners in realising their potential" (cited by Fatimah Hashim, 2001). It is appropriate that teachers give the students reading materials appropriate to their level of understanding and not 'push' things down their throats, just because the reading materials are considered by someone to be appropriate for their age and grade.

Of the seventeen students interviewed, fifteen are Internet savvy (the other two do not have computers in their house) and admit to surfing the net between once to twice a week. They use the Internet to look for information when they have to do their folios and projects. They also use it to chat with friends. However, all of them confessed that they did not know that there are interesting stories in the Internet until I gave them the fables and told them that the fables were from the Internet. All the seventeen said they enjoyed the fables and said they would surf the net for more stories in the future except for Yew Hong, who said "maybe aftererr..SPM." The others said that they would surf for stories similar to the one given to them.

For example, Lik Wei said, “I will look for the stories...err...on animals... because I like animals.” Shuang Yan wanted to “look... for stories like ...err..The Dog and the Shadow....like the one got in Chinese”

The students responses answers research question two:

- 2) Does the programme encourage students of average English proficiency to read independently?

Since the students were eager to look for more such stories in the Internet, it can be concluded that the programme did manage to provoke them to read independently.

All the students professed that they liked the fables because they were short and interesting and the language was simple. One student said she did not get bored with the stories because she could understand it. Another said he enjoyed the fables on animals, as he loves such stories. Chee Soon liked the stories because he found them funny “very funny to see the man lost all his hair.” Mason’s and Krashen’s (forthcoming) notion on psychological benefits of graded readers seem to hold true for the subjects of this study.

The findings above answers research question one:

- 1) Does the extensive reading programme motivate students of average proficiency to read independently?

The programme has managed to motivate the students to read since all the students professed that they liked the fables and read them because the language was simple.

The subjects, who are reluctant readers, seem to be motivated to read because they could process the words faster as they could understand the content of the graded fables. Another factor, which made the story easy for them to understand was

because they existed in their mother tongue. Kah Kei said she liked the stories because "...they also got in Chinese, I got read before, so orr... easy to understand." On Kei too liked the stories because "my grandmother got tell me when I in primary school." These findings support the findings of Johnson (in Carrell and Eisterhold, 1983, p. 80), which suggested that a text on a familiar topic is better, recalled than a similar text on an unfamiliar topic.

All the students that were interviewed agreed that reading could help them to improve their English. Most of them said they learn new words, grammar and learned how to speak since there were dialogues in the story. They also agreed that reading would help them in writing as they learn "how to write correct sentences." Most of the students were happy with the Reading Logs because they could write what they feel about the stories and there seem to be no right or wrong answer. They were happy because they realised that they could use their personal responses to answer literature questions and they did exactly that in their literature class.

These findings answers research question three:

- 2) Does the programme encourage students of average English proficiency to improve their language?

From the students responses, it can be concluded that the programme did help them to improve their language in terms of grammar, vocabulary and construction of sentence structures. They also seem to respond well in the reading logs.

The findings of this study are important as English teachers can use the Internet as a resource for teaching and learning. The students can be assigned to read material they like from the Internet to be shared in class. By assigning reading tasks

in the internet, teachers are gaining from both sides; students find their own reading material which they like and students are encouraged to read more as they are doing what they like which is surfing the internet at their own leisure. Moreover, the students can find materials, which suit their ability and would not be put off by reading. If the students do not have access to Internet, teachers themselves can download stories from the Internet and adapt them to suit their students' proficiency level, as there are a lot of interesting stories in the Internet.

Finally, all the students interviewed admitted that they enjoyed the extensive reading programme as it indirectly forced them to read more English stories. They also agreed that the programme helped them to learn new words, to observe sentence structures and grammatical features such as tenses. They professed that they could answer essays and questions on literature better after undergoing this programme. The results of this study concurs with a research by Tsang (1996), where the subjects of his study showed improvement in written language after some extensive reading was done.

4.7 Summary of Findings

Based on the data gathered from the Reading Logs, the Questionnaires, Classroom Assessments and Observations, and Interviews, certain conclusions can be made regarding the students' motivation to read and the extent of their willingness to read independently after their orientation through the Extensive Reading Programme.

- The intrinsic characteristics of this type of reading programme encourage students to read more.

- All the students managed to exceed the target number of books to be read which was agreed upon at the beginning of the programme.
- The programme motivates students to read more English texts especially short texts, which are easily comprehensible.
- A large number of students reacted positively towards reading in English as a whole, after the programme.
- The Extensive Reading Programme had a positive effect on the students mainly due to the appropriate level of the reading texts and also the fact that students were able to choose the stories they wanted to read.
- Many students came to the realisation that reading could be a fun activity when they understand what they are reading.
- There was a marked improvement in the students' language, especially in the area of writing, which can be seen from their essays and literature responses. An amazing discovery was students began to use the aesthetic approach in their literature responses.

Furthermore the study by Tsang (1996) and the current study provide further persuasive evidence of the effectiveness of extensive reading in fostering learners' language development.

Extensive reading programmes can provide effective platforms for promoting reading improvement among students. The benefits of extensive reading programmes in terms of language and skills development outweighs the investment in time and energy.