



ESL READING ATTITUDE AMONG LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN MALAYSIA

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Active reading is key to the successful learning of a foreign language (Mikulecky 2008). At the secondary level, students must read a wide array of textbooks and related materials. Therefore, the lack of adequate positive reading attitude is bound to impede the students' progress towards mastering English as in the most important second language. This study investigated the reading attitude among lower secondary school students towards reading in L2 (English). This study also aims to explore relationships between reading and variables such as students' gender, level of education, and family socioeconomic status. A 28 item questionnaire based on the Adult Reading Attitude Survey (ASRA) from Smith's research (1991) was developed and administered for the data collection on approximately 300 Grade1 and 2 secondary school students. The questionnaire looked at the general demographic questions, student's behavior, interests, and attitude towards reading in English. Two questions were formulated in order to achieve the purpose of this study

RQ1. What is the lower secondary school students attitude towards reading in English?

RQ2. Is there any difference in the attitude towards reading in English among :

- a) Male and female students

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Research findings by quantitative analysis showed that despite their minimal satisfaction with it and the subsequent anxieties and difficulties, the secondary school students had an overall poor attitude towards reading English (ESL). Based on the findings, there were few suggestions for improving English reading among those secondary school students.

KEYWORDS – *Attitude, ESL(English As Second Language), Reading, Gender, Family Income*



1.Introduction

Reading is considered one of the essential literacy skills. Akindele (2012) asserts that "Reading is characterized as an essential fundamental ability."

Everyone is involved in some reading every day, such as Facebook status, a tweet on Twitter, newspapers, signboards, instructions, and more. Having the capability of reading does not mean we choose to read daily. Indulging ourselves in reading is very important in this digital era.

Reading plays a significant role in second/foreign language acquisition. Adult learners much neglect it due to the predominant use of the internet and different electric gadgets. Reading is an essential skill for learning English as a foreign or second language. Many have discussed on reading, but looking into it is mostly all L1 reading. There is still a lack of research on L2 reading. As indicated by Pop (2011), studying a second language, from kindergarten to college, gives an individual a more desirable grammar understanding, which in turn will prepare the student to precisely express their thoughts. It will give them stable vocabulary abilities and a more extensive point of view in their thinking."

2.Problem Statement

Despite the government's effort to initiate a program to develop a positive reading attitude in teenagers, statistics have shown that student's interest in reading has not improved much. For example, a study by Central Connecticut State University (CCSU) shows that Malaysia was positioned 6th from the bottom out of 61 nations in the World's Most Literate Nation (WMLN) positioning. This study does not specify which category of people surveyed, but a more specific study focused mainly on adolescent reading attitudes conducted by Steyer (2014). According to this study, "In 1984, 8% of 13-year-olds and 9% of 17-year-olds said they 'never' or 'barely ever' read for delight. In 2014, that number had nearly tripled, to 22% and 27%. Although these statistics referred to reading in L1, from this study, we can deduce that the scenario is worse when it comes to L2 reading. This phenomenon is worrying the society as they



are not sure about adolescents reading attitude because a prosperous nation must have educated youths.

Another vital fact that influence reading attitude is gender. McCoach, O'Connell, Reis, & Levitt (2006) show that girls tend to be more efficacious and abler readers, even from a very young age. In another study, however, Bozack (2011) suggested that boys' motives for reading may evolve. In addition to this, findings have shown that both boys and females who take part in insightful reading will, in general, be more persuaded to read than the individuals who read for review (Applegate and Applegate, 2010). Various relationships between gender and reading exist, and since studies are inconclusive, it leads to further questions regarding the relationship between gender and reading. Thus this current study is going to evaluate the reading habit among both the genders.

3.Research Question

Two questions formulated in order to achieve the purpose of this study

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4.Research Design

In order to comprehend the lower secondary school students reading attitude, the quantitative method approach was used. Quantitative strategies focus on mark estimations and the factual, scientific, or number-based analysis of selective information. Through view, polls, and studies, or by controlling previous measurable information utilizing a computational system of rules. Quantitative inquiry concentrates on social event numerical information and summing it up crosswise over individuals' gatherings or to clarify a specific post (Babbie,2010).



5. Population

This study was conducted on lower secondary school students studying in various schools located at few Terengganu districts. In this case, this study's population is all lower secondary students (GRADE 1 and 2) studying in that selected schools for this study. Therefore accessible population for this study will be lower secondary students who meet the criteria and available for the research study.

6. Research Instrument

The main instrument for data collection is Adults Survey Of Reading Attitudes (ASRA) by Smith(1991). A 28 items questionnaire will be used. ASRA was developed for adults' reading attitudes, but in this case, it was adopted for lower secondary school students. The questions were divided into three categories: activity of reading, enjoyment of additions, anxiety, and difficulty in reading to measure the students' attitudes and preferences towards reading. For the current study, the ASRA questionnaire was adopted and modified to measure lower secondary school students' attitudes. The questionnaire was modified based on the literature review (Chapter 2) and other research instruments used in similar research studies—the questionnaire administered in both English and Malay languages.

7. Method of Data Analysis

Data analyzed by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, version 21). Descriptive statistics consisting of mean and standard deviation and inferential statistics will be used to analyze the data.

Regarding Data Analysis Method, Table 7 shows the number of research questions, the research questions, and the type of analysis made in this research.



Table 7 Data Analysis Method

	Research Question	Type of Analysis
RQ1	What is the lower secondary school students attitude towards reading?	Descriptive Analysis -Mean (M) -Standard Deviation (SD)
RQ2	Is there any difference in the attitude towards reading among: a) male and female students	a) Independent Sample T-Test

8.Results of Data Analysis

8.1 Demography of Respondents

Table 8.1 Distribution of Respondents Questionnaire

Demography	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	143	47.7
Female	157	52.3
Grade		
Grade1	170	56.7
Grade2	130	43.3
School		
SMK Kompleks Mengabang Telipot	155	51.7
SMK Kompleks Gong Badak	145	48.3
Preferred language to read		
Bahasa Malaysia	270	90.0
English	30	10.0

8.2 Gender

Out of 300 respondents, 143 respondents (47.7%) are male students, and 157 respondents (52.3%) are female students. The number of girls leading the number of boys in this research from both the schools.

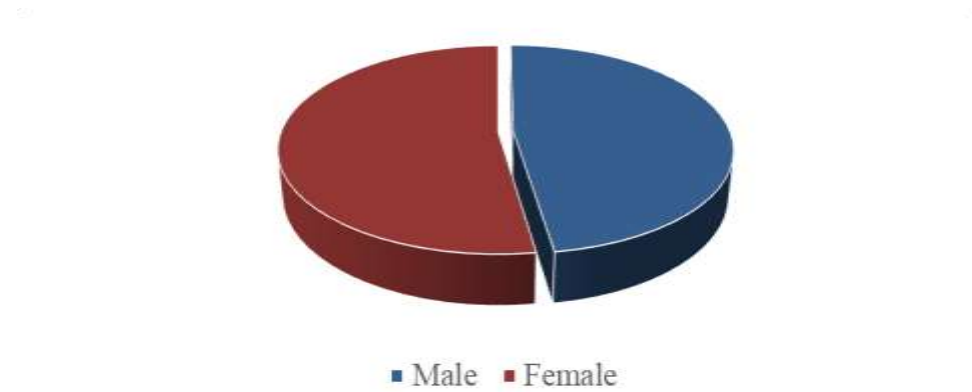


Figure 8.2 Gender

8.3 Grade

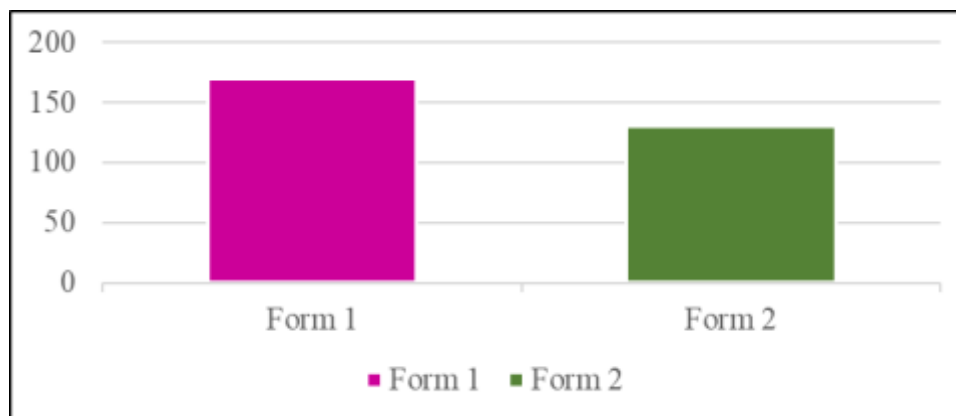


Figure 8.3 Grade

Figure 8.3 provides data on the categories of the participant according to grades. Generally, in a school usually there are students from different grades; hence the researcher chose this particular range this current study. The researcher discovered that with 300 respondents, the data gathered



is saturated. This means the researcher sees a similar pattern in the questioners responses. A further collection of new data will not necessarily contribute to a discovery of the issue. According to Ritchie et al., it is best to gather data until theoretical saturation is reached. There is a point of diminishing return to a qualitative sample—as the study goes on, more data does not necessarily lead to more information.

8.4 Level of Reading Attitude

The results of this study were to address the first objective of the study, which is to investigate the reading attitude among lower secondary school students towards reading in L2 (English). To give a clearer picture, a descriptive analysis is shown in Table 8.4 below.

Table 8.4 Reading Attitude

No	Statements	Mean	SD
B1	I can read English, but I do not understand what I've read	3.15	1.035
B2	There a better way to spend time rather than reading books	3.45	1.009
B3	I'm a good reader	3.41	.912
B4	When I'm at home, I read a lot.	2.93	.878
B5	I want to have more English books of my own	3.08	.950
B6	I try very hard, but I just cannot read English well.	3.49	1.090
B7	My friends and I often discuss the English books we have read.	2.95	.980
B8	It is easier for me to understand what I'm reading in English if pictures, charts or diagrams are given	3.79	.925
B9	When I read English, I usually get tired and sleepy	3.07	1.083
B10	I have a lot in common with people who are poor readers	2.74	1.010
B11	I spend a lot of my spare time to read English	2.76	.912
B12	Reading is easy for me compared to speaking, writing or talking English.	3.45	1.029
B13	Reading is one of my favourite activities.	3.19	1.077



B14	I read English when I enjoy reading it.	3.32	.939
B15	I get a lot of enjoyment while reading English.	3.18	.928
B16	I like going to library to read English books.	2.70	.867
B17	Reading English is one of the most interesting things I do.	3.01	.947
B18	I'm a kind of person who enjoys reading a good English book.	3.32	.977
B19	I like when I receive a English book as gift for reading.	3.08	1.000
B20	I need a lot of help in reading English.	3.69	1.024
B21	I get upset when I think about having to read English.	3.02	1.052
B22	I think it's easier to read in English compared to Malay.	2.48	.966
B23	My parents always buy me English books to read.	2.76	1.081
B24	Encountering unfamiliar words is the hardest part of English reading.	3.48	.983
B25	I worry a lot about my reading English.	3.47	1.045
B26	I try to avoid reading English because it makes me nervous.	3.31	1.079
B27	I have trouble understand English when I read.	3.24	1.148
B28	I'm afraid to read English that people may know that I'm a poor reader.	3.05	1.220

Overall

3

(Level: Low = 1.00 – 2.33, Moderate = 2.34 – 3.66, High = 3.67 – 5.00)

In this study, the reading attitude among lower secondary school students towards reading in L2 (English) was measured by 28 items. Table 8.4 shows the frequency and percentage scores for each item of the reading attitude towards reading in L2 (English). The results showed that two items had high scores, while twenty-six items had moderate scores.

8.5 Histogram

Based on the plotted histogram Figure 8.5, it shows that the study sample is normal as the curve on the histogram shown is bell-shaped for all data distributions. Therefore, the assumption of honor is fulfilled.

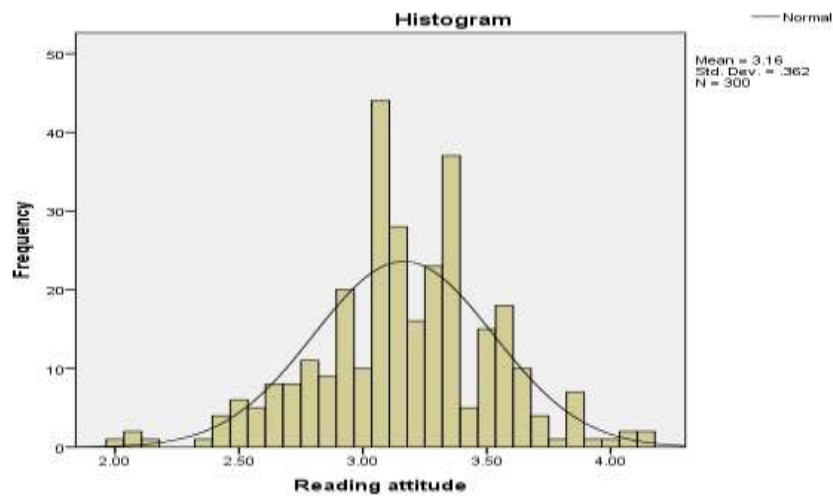


Figure 8.5 Histogram Of Reading Attitude

8.6 Comparison of Mean Differences In The Attitude Towards Reading In English Based On Gender

An analysis of the t-test to test the differences in the attitude towards reading in English among lower secondary school students based on gender is shown in Table 8.6.

Table 8.6 T-Test in Differences in The Attitude Towards Reading In English Based On Gender

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig. P
Reading attitudes	Male	143	3.11	.386	-2.715	.007
	Female	157	3.22	.332		



Results from t-test analysis are shown in Table 8.6 show that there is a significant difference in attitude towards reading in English [$t = -2.715, p = 0.007$] among lower secondary school students based on gender. This finding shows attitude towards reading in English among female students (mean = 3.22, SD = 0.332) higher compared to the male students (mean = 3.11, SD = 0.386).

9. Conclusions

In response to our first objective, we attempted to investigate the reading attitude among lower secondary school students towards reading in L2 (English). From the inferential analysis (see chapter 4), the overall reading attitude among lower secondary school students towards reading in L2 (English) is at a moderate level. The moderate mean score on the questionnaire indicates that the lower secondary school students took on reading acquisition with very positive attitudes, despite the effort involved in reading and comprehending when the grapheme-phoneme correspondences have not yet become automatic. Similarly, the participants showed a high interest in reading English, which is not surprising.

The study's second objective aimed to explore relationships between reading and variables such as student's form, gender, and family income. From the results shown above, it is clear that there are no significant differences in the attitude towards reading in English among lower secondary school students based on grade. Most studies in this area, especially cross-sectional ones, have reported a gradual increase in negative attitudes toward reading across elementary school. In a major study conducted in the United States, McKenna et al. (1995) administered the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS; McKenna and Kear, 1990) to a stratified sample of 18,185 first to sixth drawn from 229 schools in 38 states. This cross-sectional study revealed an overall negative trend in attitudes toward reading across these s. Whereas pupils starting school generally had positive attitudes, by the end of secondary school, these had been replaced by indifference and even negativity, especially with regard to academic reading. These authors underscore that more than sex, it is a gender identity that predicts reading motivation. Therefore,



it is crucial that reading not be associated with sex; ideally, neither would it be associated with the female gender. Along these lines, both fathers and mothers must offer an example of reading as an instrumental and enjoyable activity for both men and women so that boys and girls would see both models. Even though in our study and others, the differences between boys' and girls' attitudes toward reading are small in the early stages of schooling, the fact that they appear so early, and that they become increasingly linked to gender more than sex, makes this a top educational concern.

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