Developing and Sustaining Reading Habit Among Teenagers

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Abstract Reading avidness is recognized as one of the predictors for academic achievement and as motivators for adult to be a life-long learner. The fact is that the number of avid readers is dwindling, and a recent survey showed that Malaysians read an average of two books per year. Thus, the focus of this research is to identify the factors that first led to students’ interest in reading and then to sustain this interest. The case study uses observations, interviews and documentary analyses method to collect data from seven 15-year-old Malaysian teenagers selected based on their reading avidness and various backgrounds. Through the course of this research, it was recognized that a key factor for reading ability stems from the home and choice of early childhood education. On the other hand, although parents do encourage and sustain interest in reading, the greater force seems to be from peers with similar interest. Like other facets of a teenager’s life, peer influence or as in this case positive peer influence, can be a key to unlock the dilemma of ‘reading reluctance’.

Keywords Reading habit · Early childhood education · Peer influence · Case study

Introduction

Language theorists (Miller and Gildea 1987; Sternberg 1985; Vygotsky 1978) and researchers (Cunningham and Stanovich 1997, 2003; Stanovich 1993) all agree that there is a strong correlation between avid reading and vocabulary development which occurs indirectly through continuous language exposure. Studies have found that a good language student is also a good reader (OECD 2011). Reading teaches a learner to be a good writer because reading inculcates the skill of arranging words into sentences to form meaning (Pretorius 2000). Research has also shown that there is a strong correlation between good readers and good writers of the language (Eldouma 2005).

Consequently, further research on achievement predictors has proved that avid readers, especially students who are highly engaged in a wide range of reading activities, are more likely to be effective learners and to perform well at school (Cunningham and Stanovich 2001; Mokatsi 2005; Savolainen et al. 2007). More research involving adults also documents a strong link between reading practices, motivation, attitudes, judgement and proficiency among adults (Sheehan-Holt and Smith 2011). Reading influences the extent to which a person can process information, and their accuracy in doing this, as well as being crucial for individuals to make sense of the world they live in (Eyre 2005; Satija 2002). In short, reading is an essential prerequisite for success in today’s society and enables people to continue learning throughout their lives.

Unfortunately, a survey by Small 1998 reveals that 87 % of all Malaysians practise reading, but that they only read a mere two books a year! These findings are similar to those of a small-scale study done by Long (1984) on the reading habits of high school students and of studies by Razali (1997) and Szarina et al. (1994) on reading habits among pre-university students. All three studies revealed that secondary school and university students were reluctant to read material other than that related to academic topics. A more recent study on reading habits by Pandian (2000) found that this pattern may not have changed for the better.