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Effects of Book Illustrations on Reading

Chua Yan Piaw*, Mabel Tan Hwee Joo, Christine Wong Siew Kuan, Sakthi Velan Narayanasamy, Lu Huong Ying, Dharmalingam Vyapury, and Noor Azzam Syah Mohamed

Institute of Educational Leadership, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Abstract
This experimental study examined the effect of illustration on reading time, reading comprehension, and reading motivation among Malaysian student teachers from a teacher training institute at the central zone of Peninsula Malaysia. These 62 students were divided into control group and treatment group based on simple random selection. These students sat for pretest and posttest in first week and fifth week of the study. The aims of this study were to examine the effect of book illustration on reading time, reading comprehension and reading motivation. The results show that there are interaction effects of illustration on reading time and reading motivation. However there is no significant effect on reading comprehension.

Key words: Illustration, reading motivation, reading comprehension, experimental study

1. Introduction
In every culture and nation, the topic of how learners learn and what motivate learners of different background to learn has been of great importance. There is an increasing emphasis of research in finding out what are the factors that affect the motivation of learners reading, writing and comprehension [1]. This includes research focusing on relationship of reading motivation, reading amount, and reading comprehension on special learners such as deaf and hearing adult students [2]. The finding of a study shows that one of the six factors that influence elementary schools children general reading interest is the characteristics of a book [3]. Books with rich illustrations that are humorous and funny are perceived as one of the main choices of book children love to read [4]. Illustration derived from the word “illustrate” which means to explain, clarify by giving related examples, demonstrate a fact with pictures, drawings or even photographs [5]. Illustrations always play an important role in decoding information that could be complex to be understood by reader. For example, the famous cartoon strips such as Tom and Jerry has been used widely in Hong Kong schools to engage primary school children to learning [6]. It is widely accepted in many school systems that adopts illustrations to teach for reasons such as pictures facilitate learning, including increasing motivation, focusing attention, depth of processing, clarification of text content, dual coding theory, distinctive encoding, decreasing interference/decay, processing support for the type of information typically extracted from a specific type of text and serving as mental models [7]. Illustrations are used widely in many countries to help learners with reading difficulties. However, there is always debate on how much illustration should be used and whether understanding or process of reading should be the emphasis [8].

2. Literature Review
Looking from the perspective of cognitive psychological research paradigm, knowledge acquired from text and pictures have been
interpreted as an interactive process between the learner and teaching materials [9]. Pictures in a book and reading materials are thought to have more positive impacts on children’s literate behavior [4]. Fang listed six roles of pictures in building the interest in children’s reading motivation. Pictures help to (a) establish the setting, (b) define/develop the characters, (c) extend/develop the plot, (d) provide different view point, (e) contribute to the text coherence and (f) reinforce the text [4]. Previous research conducted primarily during the 1970s and 1980s supported the assertion that carefully constructed text illustrations generally enhance learners’ performance on a variety of text dependent cognitive outcomes [7]. In elementary school environment, it was also found that one of the factors that motivate children to pick up general reading materials is the characteristics of a book [3]. Books that are rich in illustration are generally found to increase the likelihood of children to read them [7, 9]. Illustration helps learners in retaining the information in the minds of the learner [5]. Retention usually refers to keeping information available in the long term memory, but the ability to retain needed information in working memory is equally important to learning and performance. Some researchers [3, 7, 18] explained the illustrations’ effect based on the Dual Coding Theory [10]. The theory suggested that presenting a combination of visual and verbal information in reading material is likely to increase the chances of recall and it increases reading comprehension. However, it had been cautioned that illustration alone with no adequate explanation would lead learners to misunderstand of what is the actual information to be addressed to learners [11]. When meaning of text is represented in language and images, inviting the reader to attend to both in order to make sense of the text being read, readers are required to “navigate” through the text, illustrations and design elements in order to construct their understandings [11]. There have been some findings that actually do not support the positive effects of illustration on children’s reading comprehensions [12, 13]. Although it is generally agreed that while using appropriate illustrations could be beneficial among early readers to achieve full understanding of texts, over relying on illustrations might give negative effects on competent readers. This is especially true when the learners could decode the text fully and recognize words easily but stumble over words or reading incorrectly when illustrations are present [14]. Research into this observation has revealed that when the brain areas that deal with visual processing are engaged, the part on linguistic processing is affected [13].

3. Research Questions
Taking into consideration all the issues discussed above, this study was conducted to answer the question “Are there significant effects of arts book illustrations on reading time, reading comprehension and reading motivation?” This study is significant because besides examining the effect of illustrations on reading comprehension, it has two additional aims; to identify the effect of illustrations on reading motivation and reading times.

4. Methods
The participants in this study were 62 Malaysian student teachers from a teacher training institute which is located at the center zone of peninsular Malaysia. Among the participants, there were 23 males (37.09%) and 39 females (62.91%) with an average age of 19.3 years old. The participants were randomly selected from a student teachers’ population (N=223) based
on the Sample Size Determination Table [15] at a 95% (p<.05) confidence level. They were enrolled in a teacher education programme. Participants have the same educational history and background. To attain the requirements of the experimental design, the participants were randomly assigned into two groups through a simple random sampling procedure, each with a sample size of 31.

The overall study of the effect of book illustration on reading time, reading comprehension and reading motivation was a pre post equivalent groups design. The independent variable in the analysis was book illustrations which consist of multiple forms of illustrations. The dependent variable was reading time, reading comprehension and reading motivation.

Measures of reading time, reading comprehension and reading motivation were given before and immediately after a two weeks intervention to Malaysian student teachers from a teacher training institute at the center zone of the Peninsular of Malaysia. Repeated measure analysis of variance tests were used to analyze the data collected from the participants.

During the first week (at the beginning of the semester), the treatment group answered the Reading Motivation Questionnaire [16]. The two groups were then given the first chapter from Essential Arts Education Book [17] to read. The control group received the text only (TOV) version while the treatment group received the text with illustration version (TIV). The participants were asked to read the contents within nearly an hour time in the classroom. The reading time for each participant was recorded right after he or she has stopped reading. A pretest for reading comprehension was given to them after the reading. It was a 40 minute written test which consists of 20 short structured questions; a maximum of 10 marks were given for each question. As a result, scores for reading time, reading comprehension and reading motivation were collected and recorded.

At the second week (before the semester break), the participants were given the first chapter again to read. The reading time for each participant was recorded right after the participant has stopped reading. Then he or she took a posttest for the chapter, the content of the posttest was alike to its pretest. At the end, data for the posttest scores for reading comprehension and reading time besides reading motivation were collected after the test.

The Hawthorn was also observed when they noticed unequal treatments being given amongst them. Some participants were given treatment and some were not. To reduce the Hawthorn effect, the experiment had to be conducted in two different classrooms to minimize the possibility of them realizing that they were given different treatments.

There were two instruments used in the study to collect data from the participants. The two instruments are the Essential Arts Education Book [17] and the Reading Motivation Questionnaire [16]. The textbook was used to collect data for reading time and reading comprehension, while the Reading Motivation Questionnaire was used to collect data for eleven dimensions of reading motivation. The Reading Motivation Questionnaire is a 54 item questionnaire which is designed to assess 11 possible dimensions which is composed of reading efficacy, reading challenge, reading work avoidance, reading curiosity, reading involvement, importance of reading, recognition for reading, reading for grades, competition in reading, social reasons for reading, and compliance of reading motivations including four sub groups of reading efficacy, several intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, and social aspects of reading.
The Essential Arts Education Book [17] consists of 20 chapters that cover up to 314 pages. In this experimental study, the first chapter which has total of 79 illustrations in 12 pages was used as the research instrument. The chapter was tailored into two versions; the text only (TOV) version and text with illustration version (TIV) version deliver the same content. In this study, the two treatment groups were asked to read the TIV version while the two control groups were asked to read the TOV version.

5. Results

Table 1 shows that there is significant effects of illustration on reading time [F(1,60)=4.57, p<.05]. However, the illustration has no significant effect on reading comprehension. The data shows that reading time for pretest for the control group (mean=11.52) is lower than treatment group (mean=12.74) and for posttest for the control group (mean=12.13) is higher than treatment group (mean=11.71). It means that the illustrations have significantly reduced reading time of the participants.

Table 1. Effect of illustrations on reading time and reading comprehension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>Post</td>
<td>Pre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>(SD)</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td>(1.8)</td>
<td>(2.4)</td>
<td>(1.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note: *p&lt;.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 presents the analysis of data to show the effect of illustration on overall reading motivation and four reading motivation dimensions (self efficacy, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and social motivation). The data in the table shows that reading motivation [F(1,60)=37.62, p<.01] is significant. The mean score of posttest out performed its pretest score for the treatment group indicates that the illustrations have a positive effect on reading motivation of student (mean: pretest=124.06; posttest=163.10). Besides that, the data also shows that three of the four reading motivation dimensions yielded significant results. The dimensions are self efficacy [F(1,60) =45.26, p<.01], intrinsic motivation [F (1,60)=66.94, p<.01] and social motivation [F(1,60) =20.78, p>.01]. The mean scores of posttest out performed their pretest scores for the treatment group indicates that the illustrations have a positive effect on self efficacy, intrinsic motivation and social motivation.

Table 2. Effect of illustrations on reading motivation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading motivation</th>
<th>Control Pre</th>
<th>Control Post</th>
<th>Treatment Pre</th>
<th>Treatment Post</th>
<th>Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>(SD)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>(SD)</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Self Efficacy</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>(4.7)</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>(4.6)</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Motivation</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>(2.0)</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>(2.8)</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Efficacy</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>(2.3)</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>(3.6)</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Challenge</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>(2.9)</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>(2.4)</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Involvement</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>(2.9)</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>(2.4)</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Importance</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>(2.9)</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>(2.4)</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Work</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>(2.4)</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>(3.6)</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. avoidance</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>(3.5)</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>(3.7)</td>
<td>33.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Extrinsic Motivation</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>(2.9)</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>(3.6)</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Curiosity</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>(1.1)</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>(2.0)</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Competition</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>(2.2)</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>(2.2)</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Recognition</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>(1.4)</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>(1.2)</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Grades</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>(4.2)</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>(2.3)</td>
<td>28.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Social Motivation</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>(2.8)</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>(2.7)</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Compliance</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>(2.5)</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>(2.4)</td>
<td>17.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Overall Reading</td>
<td>123.1</td>
<td>(19.2)</td>
<td>136.2</td>
<td>(16.4)</td>
<td>124.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Motivation</td>
<td>37.62**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *p<.05, **p<.01
6. Discussion and Conclusion
This study shows that there is positive effect of illustration on reading time and reading motivation. However no significant effect on reading comprehension was found. The results are provided evidence for the claims that books with rich illustrations increase reading motivation of readers [3, 4, 7, 9]. On the other hand, the finding was consistent with the finding of Khoi & Forouzesh [18] that using reading passages with illustrations does not have any significant effect on the learners’ progress in reading comprehension. They reported that illustrations were ineffective because students might have shifted their attention from the text to the accompanying illustrations when they realised that they did not fully comprehend the text.

This finding has contributed towards our understandings of the theories concerning the effect of illustrations on reading comprehension. The finding did not support the Dual Coding Theory [10] which has suggested that presenting a combination of visual and verbal information in reading material is likely to increase the chances of recall and it increases reading comprehension. However, the finding supports the Mental Model Theory [19] that although illustrations can reduce the cognitive load associated with complex reasoning tasks because they can present essential information more concisely than equivalent textual statements, due to illustrations could not fully reflect the text’s linguistic complexities, illustration tend to interfere with readers’ ability to construct a mental model as complex as the text. Hence illustrations reduce reading comprehension. Another finding of this research is the book illustrations significantly increase reading motivation while at the same time reduce reading time. The illustrations enhance reading motivation in terms of self efficacy, intrinsic and social motivation of the participants. The treatment group have reported higher levels of motivation on specific aspects of reading motivation, namely efficacy, challenge, curiosity, involvement, and social interaction motivation.

However, all the dimensions under extrinsic motivation and social compliance dimension do not really indicate any significance differences between the control group and treatment group. The participants may have thought since the reading material contains many illustrations that have little relation to their studies, they do not value the illustrations, and thus they are not anxious in reading the material. Besides that, no significant effect of the illustrations on social compliance indicated that their willingness to read the book was not forced by external reading motivation factors.

In summary, the study has shown that there is no significant effect of illustrations on reading comprehension. However, illustrations in the book have effectively fostered reading motivation of the participants. This finding has practical implication because increasing reading motivation of a reader will increase his reading rate [2]. This study has enriched the body of knowledge in the field of effects of art book illustrations and reading motivation.

References

*Corresponding Author: Chua Yan Piaw
Email: chuayp@um.edu.my