Students' Reading Motivation Across Gender and the Teachers' Perception in Malaysian Primary Classroom

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ABSTRACT

The research was carried out to investigate the level of motivation to read English books across genders and teachers' perceptions on students reading motivation in Malaysian classroom. Respondents in this research were 20 students currently studying Primary Four in a co-ed urban school in Johor Bahru. The data was collected using adapted Motivation to Read Profile from previous research (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling & Mazzoni, 1996) renamed as The Reading Motivation Profile (RMP) and Teachers' Perception Interview (TPI). After triangulating the data, the result analysis indicated that female students have a higher reading motivation to read English books than male students and teachers' perception agrees with the result of the RMP. In conclusion, teachers and the school should incorporate a variety of reading activities and programme to promote reading that will help foster reading motivation.

1. Introduction

It is undeniable through decades that motivation plays a crucial role in academic achievement. This also applies to choices of reading strategies that always starts off with basic reading skills, for example, comprehension, word recognition and decoding (Roembke, Hazeltine, Reed, & McMurray, 2019; van den Broek, Kendeou, Lousberg, & Visser, 2011; Wang, Sabatini, O'Reilly, & Weeks, 2018). Hence, for the love of reading, it is expected that young avid reader would share and discuss passionately about books that they are fascinated to read such as "Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone" or "The Diary of a Wimpy Kid".

Teachers should understand that motivation is one of the important influences in language literacy which demands both affective and cognitive elements. Many recent research has proven that motivation has a powerful correlation with improved reading achievement, endurance in challenging reading tasks and enhanced cognitive skills (Parsons, Malloy, Parsons, & Burrowbridge, 2015; Retelsdorf, Köller, & Möller, 2014; Ritchie, Bates, & Plomin, 2015). Conversely, pupils will not be able to attain their literacy. competency if teachers neglect to acknowledge reading motivation (Marinak, Malloy, Gambrell, & Mazzoni, 2015).

A few studies, also, has pointed out a significant difference in reading achievement between genders (Mccormick & O 'Connor, 2014; Quinn, 2018; Retelsdorf, Schwartz, & Asbrock, 2015; Schwabe, McElvany, & Trendtel, 2015). Quinn's meta-analysis using the random-effects odds ration model across sixteen works of literature with a restricted use dataset of the present analysis (N = 552,729) on gender differences (2018) has revealed that males are 1.83 more likely to have reading problems compared to females. Although there is a

discussion about the differences between gender and sex, still the variance does not make any contrasting effect on reading achievement across the literature.

As important motivation to read is to students, it is also imperative to observe teachers' perception of their students reading motivation. Only a few studies (Coddington & Guthrie, 2009; Sweet, Guthrie, & Ng, 1998; Yunus & Chun, 2016) around teachers' perception of students' reading motivation. Therefore, there is a need to explore teachers' perception of students' reading motivation.

Likewise, while recent studies about reading in Malaysia on reading research often highlight methods and strategies to reading (Azman Shah & Yunus, 2017; Wong & Yunus, 2017; Xavier, Yunus, & Badusah, 2017; Sevakumaran, Yunus & Badushah, 2017), gender differences in reading motivation is rarely recognised. Regarding gender differences, it is very likely that there will be a variation in the extent to which males and females have higher reading motivation. Thus, it is noteworthy to examine whether children's reading motivation is better predicted by gender differences or not. Hence, this paper will investigate the reading motivation in Malaysian primary school which focuses on readers of different gender and teachers' perception of students' reading in English as Second Language (ESL) classroom.

2. Literature Review
2.1 Reading motivation

Maehr and Meyer (1997) stated that motivation pivots the route, focus, and passion of a person. Hence, reading motivation can be assumed as an individual's focus and passion to the act of reading. Reading motivation can be divided into intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation (Cerasoli, Nicklin & Ford, 2014) refers to total participation of an activity due to self-interest towards the activity. In contrast, extrinsic reading motivation can be inferred to be an engagement to a task that is not influenced by personal satisfaction.

Self-concept in reading is part of reading motivation. Children who have high self-concept in reading are highly motivated to read books (Viljaranta, Kiuru, Lerkkanen, Silinskas, Poikkeus & Nurmi, 2017). It is possible that children who perceive themselves as capable readers are willing to take the risk of reading more books. Gambrell and her colleagues (1996) agree with this notion and added that these children are willing to put more effort into reading activities as well as making reading their habit. This inference can also be applied in reading English books, particularly among ESL students.

Low motivated readers produce low self-concept readers (Bates, D'Agostino, Gambrell & Xu, 2016). The reason is that readers who are less likely to read declined to practice their reading skills habitually likewise those who are inclined are frequently improving their reading skills. This, therefore, relates strongly to academic self-concept (Retelsdorf, Köller & Möller, 2014). The fact that learners are not improving their reading skills suggests that they are not able to derive information from texts. Hence, it is imperative for learners to gain self-concept in reading because the concept is regulated during initial reading experiences both in the accomplishment in reading and the development of reading-related self-perceptions (Chapman & Tunmer, 2003; Schiefele, Stutz, & Schaffner, 2016).

Moreover, reading self-concept is also strongly influenced by one's expectation of success or failure at a task as well as the "value" or relative attractiveness the individual places on the task (Guo, Nagengast, Marsh, Kelava, Gaspard, Brandt & Brisson, 2016). Consequently, a study on the bidirectional relationship of reading motivation and reading skills (Morgan & Fuchs, 2015) suggests that both skill and factor correlate for ESL learners to be proficient language user. It is thus inferred that the better value of the reading task for a student, the higher reading motivation of the student and vice versa.

Malaysian National Library had conducted a survey in 2005 which reveals that an average Malaysian overall reading is only 2 books per year, that is either English or Malay books. A study on teachers' perspective of reading habits in a Malaysian National Type Primary School (Chinese) (Yunus & Chun, 2016) brings to light the fact that most primary school pupils, who were mostly second or third language user of English, only read English books for specific purposes and not for leisure. Given the evident language anxiety that is almost prevalent among Malaysian students, it is thus important to identify reading motivation among Malaysian as early as in primary school.

2.2 Reading Motivation & Gender

Extensive and recurrent pieces of evidence on gender differences can be found when examining younger reader's motivation (Marinak & Gambrell, 2010; Mucherah, Finch, Smith, & Ambrose-Stahl, 2014; Quinn, 2018). It has been proven through times, that males and females have differences in their levels of motivation to read, perceptions and purposes to read (Mccormick & O 'Connor, 2014; Mucherah & Yoder, 2008; Quinn, 2018; Schwabe et al., 2015)

A study by Mucherah, Finch & Smith (2008) on 7th grade students from a public school; 49 females and 55 males, explored the relationship between aspects of classroom climate and reading achievement through reading motivation. The students completed the classroom climate and reading motivation questionnaires. The result thus showed that female students place themselves higher in reading motivation. Both Quinn (2018), Mccormick and O'Connor (2014) agreed with Mucherah et. al (2008) on the basis that females are more motivated to read than males.

However, McGeown and her colleagues (2012) questioned about the differences between sex and gender. They carried out a study that explored the sex differences in reading skills and motivation, and how the differences should be explained by sex or gender characteristics. It was found that females have considerably higher intrinsic reading motivation compared to male by gender identity. Moreover, it was identified that several aspects in reading motivation are closely connected to feminine identity. Hence, either by gender or sex, females are found to be more motivated to read than men.

2.3 Teacher's Perception on Students' Reading Motivation

Teachers play an influential role in motivating students to read. Thus, it is crucial to take teachers' perception of students reading motivation as one of the main factors that shape how the classroom reading instruction is carried out. Coddington and Guthrie (2009) specifically carried out a comparative study between teachers' perception and students' reading motivation on the distinction of students' efficacy, reading strategies and perceived reading difficulty. The samples were 40 boys and 42 girls with eight female first grade teachers from eight classrooms in two different schools. The researchers were using the Young Reader Motivation Questionnaire to measure the students reading motivation, the Woodcock-Johnson Letter-Word Identification subtest to measure students' ability to decode words and the teacher rating form. The result of the study indicated that teachers would rate their students' reading motivation accurately based on the students' ability to identify word rather than the students' self-perception.

Retelsdorf, Schwarts & Asbrock (2015) argued that the relationship between teachers' gender stereotype to reading favours female students in a longitudinal study. The sample of the study consists of 1,358 students and 54 teachers in a secondary school. By using the multilevel modelling, the researchers controlled the self-concept in reading, achievement in reading, school track and teachers' negative association with gender stereotyping at the beginning of grade 5 and the level of reading self-concept on male students in the second half of grade 6. The

relationship of the stereotyping did not occur to have any major connection with the female students. However, it is proven that teachers stereotype their pupils reading self-concept based on gender and this belief will influence students' motivation to read in the classroom. Therefore, it is important to consider teachers' perception of students' reading motivation across gender.

2.4 Motivation to Read Profile

The Motivation to Read Profile (MRP), developed specifically by Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, and Mazzoni (1996), is one of the useful public domain tools to measure early reading motivation. The tool assesses Self-Concept and Value of Reading among early young readers. Gambrell and her colleagues argued that other than producing other extrinsic motivation that encourages reading, teachers should give more emphasis on students' self-concept and the value of their reading task. It is crucial for educators to gain efficient and reliable resources to assess both factors. By conducting the MRP, the results could, therefore, provide teachers with definite answers to the construction of their reading activity.

The construction of the MRP was in line with Eccles (as cited in Gambrell, Palmer, Codling & Mazzoni, 1996) expectancy-value theory which stated that motivation is an individual's expectation to accomplish or fail in a task and the "value" the individual portrays in a task. Eccles has brought the expectancy-value theory into the education field to describe students' behaviour or motivation on a specific task is predicted from their self-concept and subjective attractiveness they placed on a specific task. It is found that students are more successful in a task when they place higher value and higher self-concept in completing the task. Gambrell and her colleagues (1996) thus suggested that by using the MRP tool, teachers can predict students reading motivation and the value they place of the reading activities carried out in the classroom or outside the classroom. This paper adapted the MRP instrument by treating both factors; self-concept in reading and value of reading as reading motivation.

3. Methods

3.1 Design, Population, and Sample

The design for this research is a mixed method with the combination of the quantitative and qualitative approach. The reason for this mixed method is to gain tangible data that is supported by the quantitative data to gain inner depth of the problem. The populations are 60 students aged 10 years old and 10 English teachers from a co-ed school of School K in Johor Bahru. The participants are 20 students randomly selected from 10 with average academic achievement students and 10 with above average academic achievement students; 10 males and 10 females equally. The students' family background ranges from the middle class to well-off families. The teacher participants are two English Language teachers who teach the student participants in their classes.

3.2 Instruments

The instrument to measure the quantitative data is the adapted survey of The Motivation to Read Profile (MRP) (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzoni, 1996) which is called The Reading Motivation Profile (RMP). The qualitative measurement which is the student interview is part of the RMP as well as the Teachers' Perception Interview (TPI). The RMP comprises of 13 questions with affective-scale responses. The RMP students' interview contains four questions that dig through several factors that might constitute reading motivation. The TPI is a semi-structured interview that explored through teachers' perception about their students' reading motivation.

The RMP survey on student participants was first carried out. From the questionnaire's scores, the researcher identified 2 males and 2 females participants for the student interview to gain a deeper understanding of the problem. The TPI was carried out after the RMP survey was completed.

3.3 Analysis of Data

The data from the RMP is highlighted into themes. The questionnaire is calculated based on percentage scores and in descriptive statistics. The independent items in the questionnaire are tabulated and presented in a graph. The students' interview and teachers' perception interview are summarized.

4. Findings and Discussions
4.1 Results of Descriptive Analysis

The findings of this study are discussed in three section that is the RMP range scores, students' interview (summary) and teachers' perception interview (summary).

4.2 Reading Motivation

An analysis of RMP score to examine reading motivation score was done to identify gender differences from overall sample.

Score Range (*/40 marks)	Male n (%)	Female n (%)	Total n (%)
0 – 5	4 (10.0)	1 (2.5)	5 (12.5)
6 – 11	8 (20.0)	4 (10.0)	12 (30.0)
12 – 17	7 (17.5)	10 (25.0)	17 (42.5)
18 – 23	1 (2.5)	4 (10.0)	5(12.5)
24 – 29	0 (0.0)	1 (2.5)	1 (2.5)
30 – 35	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
36 – 40	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Total	**20 (50.0)**	**20 (50.0)**	**40 (100.0)**

Table 4.2.1: Percentage of score range of RMP results.

In Table 4.2.1, 2.5 % of female students had scored the third highest score range of 22 - 27 for reading motivation. They also had the highest percentage of 25% students in 12 – 17 score range in reading motivation. Equal distribution of 10% of female students for both the score range of 6 – 11 and 18 – 23 in reading motivation as well as 2.5% female students with the score range of 0 – 5 and 24 – 29 in reading motivation.

Male students, on the other hand, had started to score at the lowest score range of 0 – 5 for reading motivation by 10% of students. 6 – 11 range score had the highest percentage of male students in reading motivation. The male students reading motivation declined from 12 – 17 score range with 17.5% students to only 2.5% of students who scored 18 – 23 score range in reading motivation.
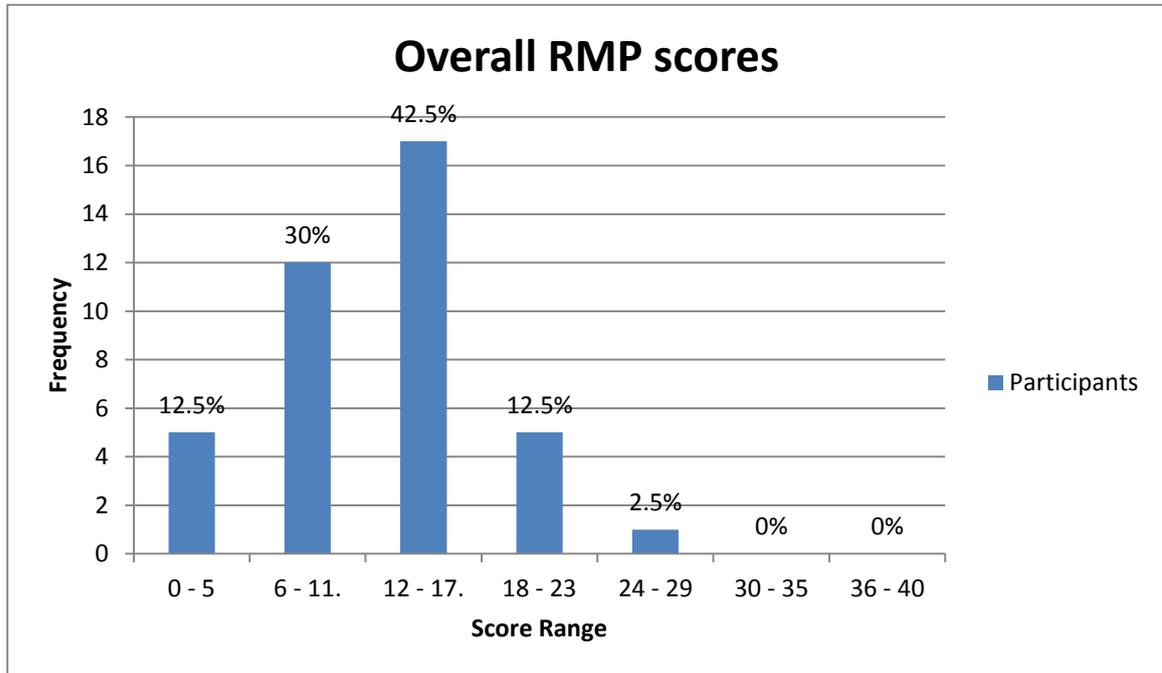
Overall RMP scores

Figure 4.2.2: Overall RMP score

Overall

In Figure 4.2.2 and Table 4.2.1, the students, 12.5% of them, started to score their reading motivation from the score range of 0 – 5. The percentage of students gradually increased until they reached at the peak of 42.5% in the score range of 12 – 17 in reading motivation. However, at the score range of 18 – 23, the number of students who had higher reading motivation started to decrease to 12.5% and stopped at 24 – 29 score range with only 2.5% of students.

4.3 Students' Interview

Female

Female students believed that to be a better reader, they need to read more English books. They also stated that they need help and support from family members to enhance their confidence in their reading aloud and polish their comprehension skills to be better readers. School and public libraries, as well as bookstores, are among the places the female students would go to find books that interest them. They claimed that reading aloud activity either done by themselves or by the teacher is fun. Moreover, they also indicated that the NILAM (Nadi Ilmu Amalan Membaca) programme and Language Arts such as drawing after reading activity are enjoyable. The female students mentioned that people who encourage them to read books are mostly teachers, followed by family and friends.

Male

Male students believed that to be a better reader they need to read more English books and share their readings with friends. However, one student specifically stated reading a dictionary while another had no idea on how to be a better reader. School and public libraries, as well as bookstores, are where male students claimed to find their reading materials while one student identified school textbook as reading material. Reading aloud activity either done by themselves or by teacher or parents are deemed interesting to male students. The male

students credited their family members in encouraging them to read books; English or Malay, followed by their teachers and friends.

Overall

Both male and female students agreed that to better readers they need to read more books and improve their comprehension skills. However, male students mentioned friends while female students suggested family members as part of their plan to be better readers. Both genders shared the same places to look for reading materials. They had the same opinion that reading aloud is an interesting reading activity. In addition, female students found that post-reading activities such as NILAM and Language Arts are interesting. Mostly, the teacher plays an important role in influencing reading English books among female students while parents for male students.

4.4 Teachers' Perception Interview

The teachers identified the number of students, especially the student participants, who can read English books by the School-Based Oral Assessment, NILAM programme and observation done per semester. The students were mostly females. They believed that students read books when they need to read at school (textbooks), they need to be assessed for reading fluency, and they must do their NILAM tasks which they will get prizes. However, the teacher said that "good readers ...they just love reading books".

The teachers said that they motivated their students to read by giving awards during English Week or presents to those who read the most English books that year. They also stated that to organise trips to the public library and introducing eBooks. They admitted that some of the motivation approaches worked while some did not work. The teachers claimed that most of the good readers do aim for prizes will others find it challenging to read English books.

 Moreover, the teachers reasoned that students prefer Malay books to English books due to lack of comprehension skills, vocabulary knowledge, the level of the books was too difficult and there was no encouragement from family members. They also had acknowledged the lack of reading English books among the students. It was implied that the teacher had tried mostly, multiple extrinsic approach to motivate students to read English books.

4.5 Discussion

When scoring the survey, the most positive response to reading English books is assigned with the highest score range while the least positive response to reading English books is assigned with the lowest score range.

The overall analysis in Figure 4.2.1 shows that the percentage of male students are the highest from the lowest score range. It can be inferred that male students have less reading motivation for English books compared to female students. Male elementary students are less motivated to read (McGeown, Goodwin, Henderson, & Wright, 2012). The statement thus clearly indicates that male students are less likely to read books, in this case, English books. The decreasing percentage of male students from the highest level of reading motivation to the lowest level also shows that they are more likely to get the lowest score range. Moreover, in student interview, a male student confessed that he does not know how to be a better reader and prefer to read Malay books. Morgan & Fuchs (2015) found among elementary students that students' level of reading skills is strongly associated with their reading motivation (self-concept in reading). Consequently, students with high reading ability know what they need to do to be a good reader (Wigfield, Guthrie, Tonks, & Perencevich, 2004). Also, from the interview, a male student had randomly select textbooks as interesting reading material. The

choice thus implied that the male student did not put any effort or interest to find any English reading materials to read. Wigfield and Eccles (2000) agree with this and indicated that student with low self-concept (reading motivation) will not put much effort into their activities. Therefore, male students have less focus on their reading task when they have low self-concept to reading. The combined works of literature and findings thus indicate that most male students have low motivation in reading English books.

Female students, on the other hand, showed a normal distribution in the graph. It is clear there is a balanced distribution of female students that have low, average low, average high and high motivation in reading English books from overall analysis. The result thus corresponds with some of the researchers of reading motivation across gender (Mccormick & O 'Connor, 2014; Mucherah et al., 2014; Quinn, 2018) that, females are most likely to have higher reading motivation compared to male.

One of the significant findings is that most teachers' do not know the level of reading motivation among their students accurately. The result shows that by using oral reading assessment and NILAM (Nadi Ilmu Amalan Membaca) programme, teachers were able to roughly identify their students reading motivation who were mostly female students. From the findings, it is true as Coddington and Guthrie (2009) indicate that teachers were rating their students reading ability and not their students reading motivation. Therefore, it is important for teachers to use the right tool to measure their students' reading motivation to improve their classroom instructions.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, higher motivation in reading English books among students correlates with the teachers' perception of their reading motivation. The teachers' perceptions are mostly based on their ratings of their students reading ability compared to their students' real motivation to read and female students have high motivation to read English books compared male students.

The findings of this study confirm with the literature and the teachers' perception that female students have higher reading motivation than male students. Hence, teachers should encourage their students to read more English books by providing activities or appraisals that nurture intrinsic motivation. Teachers should also try to administer a reading motivation test to identify students reading attitudes, books that interest them and many more. In addition, they should different method to foster reading skills such as using Mindomo (Sevakumaran et al., 2017) that could train male students how to read effectively. Schools should also in collaboration with teachers conduct reading programme that expose students to different types of reading materials such as graphic novels (Wong & Yunus, 2017), social media (Xavier et al., 2017), big books, or newspaper, magazines and many more.

Although this research combines quantitative and qualitative methods, the findings only focus on how students perceive themselves as capable readers. Hence, another study in the future should also focus on how students value their reading and ways to improve intrinsic reading motivation. Apart from that, a bigger sample of the study could also complement more accurate results for generalization of the findings.

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