

6 ICLICE 2017-008 Noraïen Mansor

### Exploring ESL Students' Reading Interest

Noraïen Mansor  
Universiti Malaysia Terengganu  
Terengganu 21030  
aïen@umt.edu.my

#### ABSTRACT

Malaysians' reading habit and interest are still less than satisfactory as Malaysia is far from a reading society. The government should revise their policy of exam-oriented education which places too much prominence on examinations and not enough on the importance of the reading process. Thus, this study intends to explore ESL students' reading interest focusing on the printed materials as well as online reading. The findings revealed that online reading dominated the ESL students' reading interest compared to printed materials such as books, newspapers and magazines. Hence, it is important for ESL teachers to develop teaching approaches involving Information Communication Technology (ICT) to inculcate students' reading interest that will endure and produce sustained independent readers. Therefore, it is time for the government and the community to strengthen their moves to promote effective reading interest to overcome the vital contemporary issue.

*Keywords:* reading interest, reading society, motivation, reading skills.

#### Introduction

Reading is the ability to make sense of written or printed words or symbols, whereby the readers use the information gleaned as guidance to achieve higher intellectual levels in their lives. It is generally accepted that reading skill is an essential element of learning. Krashen (2004) believed that reading builds literacy skills and improves writing.

Nevertheless, reading is still considered as a crucial issue discussed by the society specifically in Malaysia. Nowadays, people are reading less and less. Ironically, "...a book is born every 30 seconds" (NST, Nov. 2005). Thus, there are too many books but too little time to read. People buy books but do not necessarily read them. Even if books are read, the kind preferred are "light reading materials" that do not require much time to comprehend, such as romance and thrillers. "Heavy reading materials" are largely ignored.

The reading interest does not appear to be a prominent feature in the lives of most Malaysians as students are inclined to read mostly textbooks and read little of miscellaneous genres. Further, the excessive emphasis on passing examinations among parents, teachers and pupils, pushes recreational reading into the background (Doraisamy, The New Straits Times, 15 September 1983; Philips & Norazit, The Sunday Star, 25 June 1993). To date, the situation has not changed much.

Identifying students' interests in reading will also guide ESL teachers in rectifying students' lack of motivation in reading English materials. By assessing the reading materials, ESL teachers will be able to gauge students' capabilities in reading accurately. Hence, students will fully enjoy selected texts in the classroom as they are more compatible with their reading interests. Therefore, this study will explore the ESL students' reading interest focusing on 4 main categories of reading materials namely newspapers, magazines, books and online reading materials.

### **Literature Review**

Various aspects of reading have been heavily investigated over the past years as reading has been considered the most important of the four language skills. One of the most prolific research reported in the literature has been concerned with the readers' interests as educators have recognized the importance of reading interests as a motivating factor in the reading process. Reading experts believe that reading interests play a very important role in reading instruction and improvement. Edgier (1999) claims that interest is a powerful psychological factor in learning.

Al-Kutob (1981) investigated the reading interests of Kuwaiti young people and found that newspapers, magazines and books focusing on religion, literature, art and social issues were the most popular printed materials. Busch (1994) investigated the reading interests and information needs of a German ethnic minority group in Australia. The findings showed that the males preferred magazines, newspapers, and books of history, literature and adventure, while females showed preference to books of cookery, literature and history.

In his research investigating the reading interests and habits of teenagers, Meehan (1999) found that 66% of the respondents read magazines, 59% read newspapers, and 48% read the backs of cereal boxes or other packages. In addition, favourite genres are mysteries, adventure, horror, and true stories and the favourite books are classics, bestsellers, and young adult novels. They also found that the teenagers read for pleasure, personal satisfaction, and for study purposes.

In a research conducted by Al-Shorman and Bataineh (2005), they revealed that internet materials, sports magazines, mystery books/magazines and fairy tales has been the top reading interests of the respondents involved. Their research also revealed that the majority of the participants claimed to be reading out of obligation rather than of a desire to do so, which was further supported by their claims of reading mainly for school-related purposes.

The review of the literature on reading interests revealed that most of the studies in this field were conducted in the western countries where English is the first language, whereas very few studies were conducted in countries where English is a second or foreign language. Thus, this study is hoped to give insight on reading interest of the ESL students in a different part of the world.

### **Methodology**

This study was carried out at Universiti Malaysia Terengganu involving 30 students from English for Occupational Purposes course conducted by the researcher. A set of questionnaire was delivered to the students to elicit their reading interest on materials such as newspapers, magazines, books and online reading materials. They were to respond to the statements provided for each reading materials using the Likert Scale which allow the students to express how much they agree or disagree with the statements given.

### **Results and Discussion**

The statistical analysis of the questionnaire returned by 30 respondents revealed that the most popular reading material is online reading compared to the other three reading materials. Online reading materials dominated the category with 69% followed by newspapers 55%, books 48% and magazines 45% (see figure 1). 90% of the students have a computer at home and they also use computer laboratories at their school and these are the factors that contributed to their reading interest. The students also are more interested to read online reading materials during their free time with 69% showing their interest.

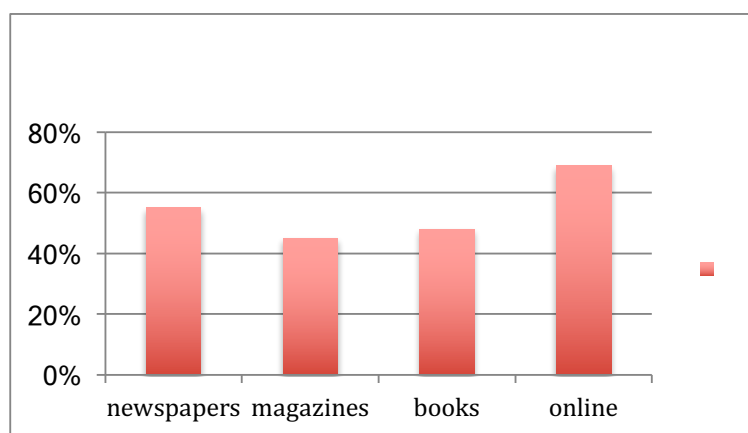


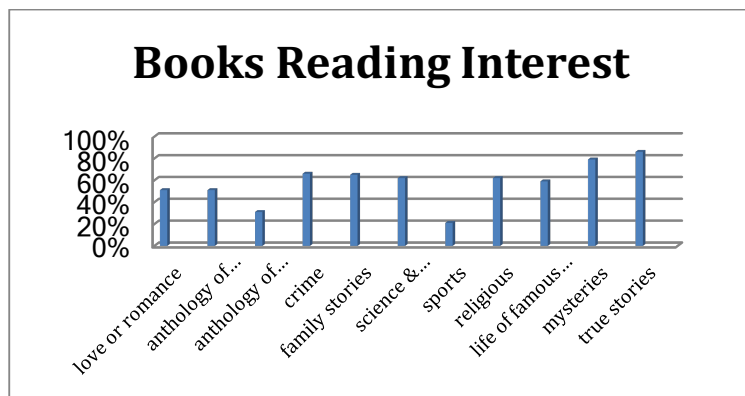
Figure 1. Reading Materials of Students' Interest

The findings of this study also displayed that the students have a broad range of reading interests. As for the newspapers (see figure 2), headlines (93%) and short stories (82%) being their main concern whereas political news (16%) hit the least interest. Further, the students prefer to read local news (65%) compared to foreign news (55%) and this shows that they are more interested to read on local events focusing on television programmes, entertainment columns as well as fashion columns and the weather forecast.

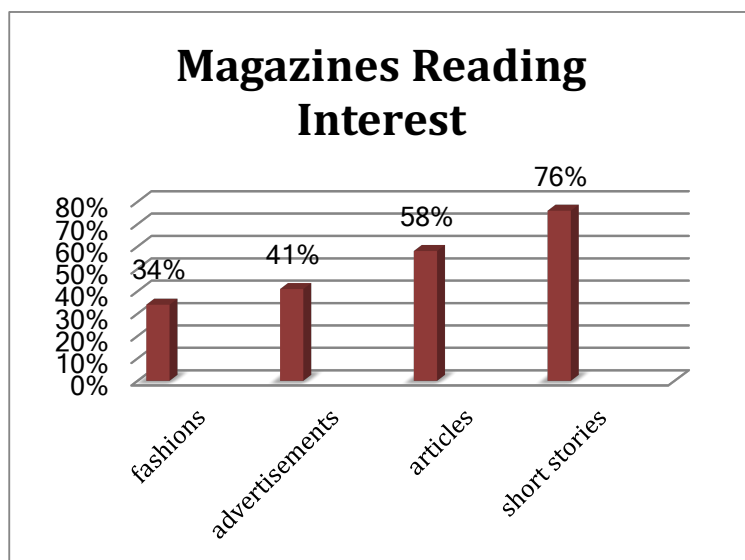


Figure 2: Newspapers Reading Interest

Another broad range of reading interest is also proven in reading books and the findings showed the students love to read books on true stories, mysteries, crime, religious, family, science and technology, love/romance, life of famous people, and short stories. Books on true stories (86%) and mysteries (80%) reached the highest percentage of interest (see figure 3). As for magazines, the students focused on short stories (76%) and articles (60%) rather than fashion and advertisements (see figure 4).



**Figure 3: Books Reading Interest**



**Figure 4: Magazines Reading Interest**

On the other hand, 93% of the students like to browse via Google for their online reading and they focus on reading blogs (55%), online news (52%) and emails (50%). Besides, they also read journals (31%) and advertisements (34%) (see figure 5). Apart from reading online materials, they also love to file their reading materials.

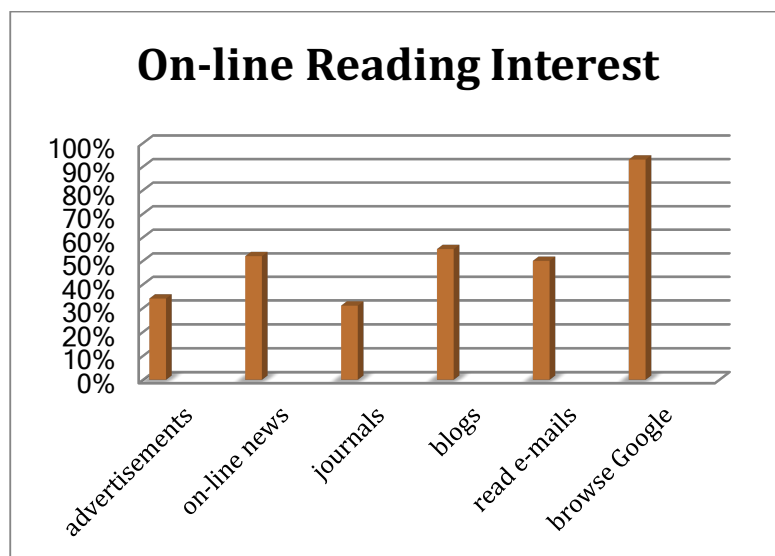


Figure 5: Reading Materials of Students' Interest

### Conclusion

Reading skills is crucial for students' knowledge development as well as fundamental to function in today's society. Reading is important because it develops the mind, develops the imagination and enables us to take advantage of today's overflow of information. To be able to read efficiently becomes more crucial nowadays with the emergence of the new media and new text formats. The internet, particularly provides new text formats, new ways to interact with information and is the world largest interconnected environment (Ali, 2009; Cairo, 2003; Ramli & Adnan; 2006).

ESL students nowadays are facing greater challenge as our country is moving towards information explosion, particularly in the new media or the internet (Ali, 2009; Cairo, 2003). The students would need to read the materials on the internet for them to gain the latest information and the findings of the study reveal good sign of students' interest towards online reading materials. Thus, teachers should play their role to instill reading interest among students by providing an assortment of appropriate materials in the classroom. A good teacher should understand the individual needs of students of diverse backgrounds, with varied habits, interests, attitudes and motivation towards reading. Teachers need to be aware of students' reading attitudes when preparing teaching and learning plans.

### References

- Ali, Salman. (2009). ICT, the New Media (Internet) and Development: Malaysian Experience. Ph.D Dissertation. National University of Malaysia.
- Al-Kutob. (1981). Attitudes and Motivations of Kuwaiti Youth towards Reading in the Contemporary Kuwaiti Society. Kuwait University, Kuwait.
- Busch, P. (1994). Peter Busch A study into the reading interests, information needs and public library usage of German born immigrants in Melbourne APLIS, 7 (1) (1994), pp. 158–166 (EBSCO, AN: 9701211582, ISSN: 1030-5033)
- Cairo, J. (2003). Reading comprehension on the Internet: Expanding Our Understanding of Reading Comprehension to Encompass New Literacies. International Reading Association, 5(56).
- Doraisamy, J. (1983, September 15). Books and bookworms: Is reading a dying art in Malaysia? The New Straits Times.
- Edgier, M. (1999). Promoting interest in middle school reading. ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED432003.

- Krashen, S. D. (2004). *The power of reading: insights from the research*. Westport., CT: Libraries Unlimited, Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Meehan, F. (1999). A survey of teens' reading interests, habits, and attitudes.
- Philips, J. A. & Norazit, L. (1993, June 25). Don: We are not yet a reading society. Sunday Star.
- R.A. Al-Shorman, R.F. Bataineh. (2005). Jordanian upper basic stage students' reading interests Lagos Papers in English Studies (The Journal of Lagos State University), 1 (3) (2005), pp. 182–207.
- Ramli Mohamed & Adnan Hussin. (2006). **The Media In Malaysia: Aspirations, Choices And Realities**. Kajian Malaysia, 1 & 2, Vol.14.
- Retrieved November 17, 2011 from [www.usm.my/km/24-06/KM%20ART%201.pdf](http://www.usm.my/km/24-06/KM%20ART%201.pdf)