Maximizing English Reading Resources for A Reading Corner in A Rural School: Teachers' Perceptions on Students' Reading Interast

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Abstract
Education has undergone a significant transformation in recent years, with a shift towards learner-centred approaches that prioritize student development over exam-centred teaching (Blaylock et al., 2016). This shift has also begun in Malaysia since the turn of the millennium, as outlined in the Malaysian Education Plan 2013-2025 (Ministry of Education, Malaysia, 2013). This plan prioritizes learner development and aims to close the gap between urban and rural schools, particularly in English language learning. Furthermore, The World Bank's Malaysia Economic Monitor (2010) has identified the gap between urban and rural schools as a major obstacle to achieving Malaysia's Vision 2020, which aims to become a developed, high-income nation by 2020 (Abdul Rahim & Chun, 2017).
However, the need for education reform is particularly pressing in rural areas, where access to education is limited by factors such as geography. Malaysia's unique geography, which consists of a peninsula and the northern part of the island of Borneo/Kalimantan, poses a significant challenge in this regard. For instance, some schools are situated in areas that are accessible only via limited roads or even rivers, as in the state of Sabah. This undoubtedly hampers the process of revitalizing these schools. Therefore, further research is needed to understand the exact conditions in these schools and to determine the quality of education and services provided (Marwan et al., 2012).

Background of Study

Sabah is home to a significant number of rural elementary schools, with a total of 909 such schools and 184,160 students (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2019), making it one of the states in Malaysia with the highest number of rural elementary schools. The Malaysian Education Development Plan (MEDP) for 2013 to 2025 (Pelan Pembangunan Pendidikan Malaysia, 2013) emphasizes the importance of ensuring equal access to quality education that meets international standards. In line with this plan, the government is committed to providing the same facilities to all schools, regardless of location or student background, to achieve educational equity for all Malaysian citizens (Jamaludin et al., 2020).

One of the indicators of literacy levels in a country is reading interest. Reading interest, especially through reading materials, is the motivational basis for individuals to analyse, remember, and evaluate what they have read. It serves as the foundation for lifelong learning and is important to be developed from an early stage (Aulia & Rachman, 2019). Interest is a positive feeling evoked by an individual during an interaction with a particular topic, object, or activity and is demonstrated by readiness, increased attention, concentration, and participation (Alhamdu, 2016). Interest plays an important role in people's attention, memory, learning, understanding, effort, and personal engagement. These roles shape the nature of learning and reading engagement (Mohamed et al., 2020).

Recognizing the importance of arousing the reading interest among students, especially in rural schools, we strive to support and make efforts to maximize reading resources for a reading corner in one of the rural primary schools in Sabah. As part of our study, we obtained teachers' perceptions of students' reading motivation and interest with the aim of identifying the best steps to take in promoting reading interest among students in rural schools. By doing so, in a bigger picture, we aim to contribute to the larger goal of achieving educational equity in Malaysia by helping to enhance literacy levels among students in rural areas.

Problem Statement

Environmental problems in education have been identified as a result of the school system and language development of students, leading to the creation of a gap among them. In particular, some school systems may prioritize complex curricula over students' diverse needs, resulting in ineffective management (Beare et al., 2018). This, in turn, causes a lack of language use, leading to difficulties in using and utilizing the language. Consequently, students face problems in acquiring reading skills, leading to poor literacy, lack of self-confidence, and other disciplinary issues (Suggate, 2016). This situation can lead to serious emotional problems such as aggressive behaviour, negativity, childishness, and discouragement, which could jeopardize their ability to acquire language skills effectively.

Furthermore, students may lack interest in reading due to difficulties in mastering reading skills, such as confusing lowercase and uppercase letters, unclear pronunciation, and omission of difficult words (Ehri, 2017; Sugiarto & Sumarsono, 2014). This situation can slow down the reading process and cause students to be unable to comprehend the text they are reading. Additionally, students' inability to find information about visual stimuli presented by teachers and poor oral skills may affect their written work. Poor reading skills also lead to disinterest in learning and lack of concentration, (Akubuilo et al., 2015). External factors such as poverty, inadequate attention from parents, disability, illness, and genetic predisposition can also pose significant challenges to the acquisition of reading skills. In rural settings, where these factors may be more prevalent, these challenges may be even more pronounced.

Considering the unique challenges of rural school settings, exploring teachers' perspectives on their students' reading motivation and interest, as well as their strategies for promoting reading, is crucial. Such research can inform effective interventions to enhance reading skill acquisition and overcome the obstacles faced in this context. As Bennett (2014) suggests, diversifying teaching methods to stimulate students' interest in reading is essential, given that reading is an interaction process between the text and the reader's imagination.

Research Question and Research Objective
The main objective of this study is to investigate teachers' perceptions of their students' reading motivation and interest, as well as their experiences in promoting reading in a rural school setting. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the research question: "What are teachers' perceptions of their students' reading motivation and interest, as well as their experiences in promoting reading in a rural school?".

Literature Review
Reading interest is a disposition that motivates individuals to actively seek out reading opportunities and resources (Dewi, 2010). According to Hidi (2001), reading interest can be measured by two factors: first, the level of desire to read when a book is presented; second, the extent to which situational factors such as the genre, individual processes, memory, visual and auditory stimuli affect the reader's interest. Therefore, it is important to identify the factors that influence reading interest in order to promote literacy.

Siswati (2010) pointed out several factors that affect reading interest. Firstly, the characteristics of the text, such as its genre, language level, and topic, have been found to influence the reader's level of engagement. Secondly, the learning environment, including the presentation of the text, the materials used for instruction, and the reader's self-regulation, can also have a significant impact on reading interest. Teachers who can create a conducive and motivating learning environment are likely to foster their students' reading motivation and interest.

However, promoting reading motivation and interest can be a particular challenge in rural school settings. Studies have shown that students in rural areas tend to have lower levels of reading motivation and interest compared to their urban counterparts (Cantrell et al., 2018; Abdul Ghaffar & Abdul Aziz, 2019). This can be due to a lack of access to reading materials, limited exposure to diverse reading materials and experiences, and a lack of teacher training and support in promoting reading motivation and interest in rural schools (Lee & Wong, 2020; Mohaideen et al., 2020).

To address these challenges, various strategies have been proposed to promote reading motivation and interest in rural school settings. These include the use of technology, community-based literacy programs, and the establishment of school-based reading programs such as reading clubs and reading corners (Ariyanto et al., 2020; Samsuddin et al., 2019; Suher Sulaiman et al., 2020). Reading corners, in particular, have been identified as effective tools for promoting reading interest among students in schools. Piyana et al. (2022) found that a well-designed reading corner in the classroom can significantly increase students' interest in reading through literacy programs. Similarly, Batubara and Ariani (2018) suggest that reading corners can bring students closer to books and facilitate reading activities, with students able to visit the reading corner before the learning process begins or during recess. Supporting these findings, another study revealed that good teacher management of reading

corners can increase students' interest in reading, with attractive designs and a variety of books found to be particularly beneficial (Chou et al., 2016).

In addition, teacher training and support in promoting reading motivation and interest have been identified as crucial factors in improving students' literacy outcomes in rural schools (Wawire, 2021). The involvement and guidance of school principals and teachers were also identified as crucial factors in promoting reading activities and enhancing students' understanding of the importance of reading.

In light of these challenges and strategies, it is important to investigate teachers' perceptions of their students' reading motivation and interest, as well as their experiences in promoting reading in rural school settings. This study aims to contribute to the understanding of effective strategies for promoting reading motivation and interest in rural schools by exploring the perspectives of teachers who work in these settings.

Methodology

The study employed a qualitative approach to provide a holistic view of the reading motivation and interest of students in a rural school setting. Three schoolteachers from the selected rural school were invited to participate in the study. The investigation is based on audio-taped interview sessions with the teachers.

A guideline was used to ensure that the analysis and coding process followed all necessary phases. The coding guideline was developed from Allan and Burridge's Theory (2006) and was used due to its systematic and logical processes for identifying the required data. The following table displays the coding guideline used in this study.

Table 1
Coding Guideline for Coders

Coding Guidelines for Coders	
Stages	Steps
Stage 1: Analysis	Read the interview transcripts.
Stage 2: Read Again	Reread the transcripts to obtain a more comprehensive grasp of remarkable or significant terms.
Stage 3: Code the Text	Colour code the significant words present.
Stage 4: Relate General Theoretical Ideas to the Text	Relate general theoretical ideas to the data.

Interview Questions

The following interview questions were used to guide the interviews:
1. What do you think of the students' reading habit?
2. What motivate the students to read?
3. How about the reading resources here? Do you have a lot of reading resources in this school?
4. What are the techniques used by the teachers here to encourage the students to read?

5. What are the challenges faced by the teachers?

Findings and Discussion

This section presents the key findings from the interviews, based on the codes and themes that emerged from the data analysis process. Through the analysis, five main themes were identified related to the research question. Table 2 summarises the information obtained from the coding process.

Table 2
Interview and Codings

INTERVIEW QUESTION	CODE CONCEPT	CODES	EXCERPTS
Q1	Reading habit	Positive	"Most students here like reading. Every morning, we have a program called 'Morning glory'. We start at 6.30am until 7am. Reading is one of the components that was stressed in that program [T1]."
		Lack of interest in English resources	"In my point of view, they don't like reading in English. They feel it's difficult and they don't understand if they read sentences. When they don't understand, they will not enjoy the story [T2]."
		Lack of reading resources	"The students like reading but we are lacking reading resources at the moment. The resource room could not be fully opened yet due to the pandemic. We need to rearrange the books [T3]."
Q2	Motivation	Reading stories	"First, they like reading stories. For example, the level 1 students like reading stories like 'Sang Kancil' and the bigger students prefer reading stories based on movies like 'Upin & Ipin' [T1]."
		Media	"Usually, for me, when teaching them Science, I encourage them to refer to the media like YouTube [T3]."
		Demotivated when mispronounced	"They like to learn English but when reading something, they couldn't pronounce words, then they became shy and demotivated especially when other friends laugh at them. This will demotivate them [T2]."
Q3	Resources	Resource room	"We have got a lot of English reading resources in the resource room [T1]."
		YouTube	"We have a library. Sometimes, they will show them YouTube. They enjoy reading

			something, not on the book but on the screen. They like to read something that makes them interested because they are not in the book. They like something that is out of the box [T2]."
		Library & donations	"The reading resources we are having now most come from our library and donations. Not many. [T3]."
Q4	Encouragement techniques	Morning Glory	"Apart from 'Morning Glory', we also have 'Program Nilam'. From that program, those who read the most will receive medals. We would bring them to the reading competitions at district level and national level [T1]."
		Program Nilam High immersive program	"Our school has HIP, high immersive program. This program is to encourage people to speak, to communicate and to read English in school environment. So, the best way I do is having notice board, which we call 'cube small box'. Students will write and their friends will reply. They read and write at the same time. The students do this in English every day [T2]."
		Essay writing	"Normally, we give them titles to write an essay. This depends on what they read [T3]."
Q5	Challenges	Lack of resources	"We need new books. Now, we are only having the same books as we don't have new books. It would be nice to have new books yearly. Students will get bored reading the same books over years [T1]."
		Bad internet connection	"The internet here is not very good. We must save the YouTube video and show it to them. Sometimes they asked about the other stories, we have to drive our car uphill to get the internet and download, then come back here. Sometimes, I bring them along [T2]."
		Students' incompetency	"The biggest challenge is the students who came to level 1 with no basic skills. Most people don't hesitate [T3]."

As shown in Table 2, the first interview question focused on how teachers perceive their students' reading habit. The thematic analysis revealed three codes under the main theme of Reading Habits. The first code, Positive, highlighted a positive view of students' reading habits. Teacher 1 reported that most students enjoyed reading, as evidenced by the fact that reading

was included as a component in the school's morning program. The second code, Lack of interest in English resources, indicated that students did not enjoy reading in English because they found it difficult to understand the language, as expressed by Teacher 2. The third code, Lack of reading resources, revealed that although students enjoyed reading, the school lacked sufficient reading resources due to the pandemic, as reported by Teacher 3. These findings suggest that while students had a positive attitude towards reading, they faced challenges such as difficulty in understanding English and lack of reading resources.

Based on interview question two, the thematic analysis revealed three codes under the theme of Motivation. The first code, reading stories, suggested that students were motivated to read stories that were familiar and interesting to them. Teacher 1 reported that level 1 students enjoyed reading stories like 'Sang Kancil,' while older students preferred stories based on popular movies like 'Upin & Ipin.' The second code, Media, showed that teachers used media such as YouTube to motivate students in learning, particularly in teaching Science. Teacher 3 reported that she encouraged students to refer to media when learning Science. The third code, Demotivated when mispronounced, highlighted the negative impact of mispronouncing words on students' motivation. Teacher 2 reported that when students struggled to pronounce words, they became shy and demotivated, especially when their peers laughed at them. These findings are consistent with past research, which has shown that students are more likely to be motivated when learning is engaging and relevant, and that negative experiences such as peer teasing can significantly impact students' motivation and self-esteem (Kuh, 2009; Saeed & Zyngier, 2019).

Interview Question 3 focused on the theme of Resources, which revealed three codes. The first code, Resource room, was discussed by Teacher 1 who reported having a lot of English reading resources in the resource room. The second code, YouTube, was highlighted by Teacher 2 who mentioned showing students YouTube videos as a way of engaging them in reading. Teacher 2 also stated that students enjoyed reading material that was not in books, something out of the box. Finally, the third code, Library & donations, was mentioned by Teacher 3, who reported that the school's reading resources mostly came from the library and donations. These findings suggest that the school had a range of resources available, including a resource room and library, and utilised technology such as YouTube to engage students in reading. The use of a resource room and a library is consistent with previous research highlighting the importance of providing adequate reading materials to promote literacy development (Itsekor & Nwokeoma, 2023). Additionally, the use of technology such as YouTube to enhance students' engagement in reading is in line with previous studies showing that the use of multimedia resources can positively influence students' motivation to read (Vijayalakshmi & Kumar, 2020).

Interview Question 4 explored the theme of Encouragement techniques and revealed three codes. The first code, Morning Glory, was discussed by Teacher 1 who highlighted the school's "Program Nilam" where students who read the most received medals and were brought to reading competitions at district and national levels. The second code, Program Nilam & High immersive program, was mentioned by Teacher 2 who described the school's High Immersive Program (HIP) that encouraged students to speak, communicate, and read English in the school environment. Teacher 2 also used a notice board to encourage students to read and write in English. The third code, Essay writing, was mentioned by Teacher 3, who stated that essay writing topics were based on what the students read. These findings suggest that the school employed various techniques, such as reading programs and essay writing, to encourage and motivate students to read in English. These techniques align with previous

studies that have shown the importance of using diverse strategies to motivate and engage students in reading (Barber & Klauda, 2020; Bennett, 2014).

Interview Question 5 focused on the theme of Challenges, which revealed three codes. The first code, Lack of resources, was highlighted by Teacher 1, who reported that the school needed new books and that students became bored reading the same books repeatedly. This observation aligns with past research which has identified a lack of resources, particularly books, as a challenge to promoting reading in schools (Mohamed & Amponsah, 2018). The second code, Bad internet connection, was discussed by Teacher 2, who reported that the internet at the school was not very good and that they had to save YouTube videos to show to students. This finding corresponds with previous studies that have highlighted the importance of technology in promoting reading, but also the challenges that can arise when technology is not reliable or accessible (Abdul Samat & Abdul Aziz, 2020; Sulaiman et al., 2020). The third code, Students' incompetency, was mentioned by Teacher 3, who reported that the biggest challenge was students who come to level 1 with no basic skills. This is in line with past studies which have pinpointed students' poor reading ability and lack of interest in reading as major challenges to promoting reading in schools (Sugiarto & Sumarsono, 2014; Suggate, 2016).

Conclusions

In conclusion, this study has shed light on the various factors that impact students' interest in reading in a rural school setting. The findings suggest that while students generally have a positive attitude towards reading, they face difficulties such as understanding English and limited access to reading resources. However, the efforts made by teachers and the school in promoting reading should not be overlooked. Providing a range of resources, such as resource rooms and libraries, and utilising technology, such as YouTube, as well as using engaging and age-appropriate reading materials, have been effective in engaging students in reading. However, with negative experiences such as peer teasing reported, it is crucial for teachers to address any negative behaviours that could hinder students' motivation and interest in reading. Additionally, employing various techniques, such as reading programs and essay writing, to encourage and motivate students to read in English have also shown potential. It is important for schools to continue these efforts and for teachers, parents, and policy makers to work together to enhance students' interest in reading. This can be achieved through teacher training programs that focus on effective teaching strategies and creating a supportive learning environment that encourages reading. Moreover, providing adequate reading materials to promote literacy development cannot be overstated. Schools can also collaborate with community organisations to provide additional resources, such as book donations and reading programs. Therefore, as part of the current research project, the goal is to help maximizing the impact of the reading corner at the school by donating additional books and resources to the students. Overall, this study underscores the importance of prioritising reading promotion in rural schools and offers actionable steps for educators and stakeholders to take.

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