

Implementing HIP Reading Activities and the Enhancement of Reading Skills in Malaysian Secondary Schools: A Literature Review

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Abstract

The Highly Immersive Programme (HIP) was introduced by the Ministry of Education in Malaysian language classrooms geared towards mitigating the prevalent lack of English language skills among English language learners. The goal of implementing HIP into the language learning classroom is to provide students with a more engaging, dynamic and interactive learning environment, as the traditional methods of teaching English were proven to be ineffective. This paper aims to provide a comprehensive literature review on implementing the HIP reading activities program to enhance reading skills among secondary school learners. This paper reviewed nine articles related to HIP activities in the language classroom and five papers related to teaching reading skills. This paper includes the benefits and challenges of implementing HIP reading activities, and the integration of the program into the existing curriculum based on past studies. A systematic literature review was employed to select relevant literature for the paper. The selection involved comprehensive database searches overlooking reading skills and the efficacy of the implementation of HIP. This study proposes that future researchers look into a wider perspective of HIP implementation in the language classroom, impact of the implementation on students' proficiency and to explore the adaptability of technological tools to the HIP program.

Keywords: English as a Second Language (ESL), Highly Immersive Programme (HIP), Malaysian Secondary Schools, Reading Activities, Reading Skills

Introduction

English is known to be one of the fastest-spreading languages in history, making it a *lingua franca* in most parts of the world. In Malaysia, the language is regarded as its second language, after Bahasa Melayu as stipulated by the National Language Policy (Article 152, Federal Constitution). The significance of English in Malaysia can be traced as early as the British colonial period. At that time, the language was regarded as a language of communication in

many areas including education, international communication, commerce and trade. This perception and importance have remained the same in Malaysia since then.

Most countries have adopted the teaching of English as a part of the school curriculum. As part of the national education syllabus, English is taught in Malaysian preschools, which continues at the primary school level. This is due to the importance of this language to enable Malaysians to participate in the global economy rigorously and the implementation to promote the learning of this language in the country. Many efforts have been made to improve the teaching and learning of this language in schools by the government. Back in 2011, the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 was launched with the aim of improving the quality of education in the country, which emphasised elements of the teaching of English in schools including the importance of providing students with opportunities to use English in diverse situations, either through immersion programs or by using authentic materials. Despite that, the level of English proficiency among Malaysians remains a concern. Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018 reported that Malaysian students scored below the international average in mathematics, science and the lowest score in reading which has led to many ongoing debates about the effectiveness of teaching English language in Malaysia (Hin, 2020).

English language teaching in Malaysia typically focuses on the development of four main language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing skills essential for effective communication and to improving proficiency in English language skills. These skills are taught by teachers, adapting various teaching methods, strategies and techniques to aid and help students develop the fundamental skills needed to learn the language. As teaching of these skills is an ongoing process, it requires a collaborative effort to ensure effective learning outcomes.

Despite the time allotted in the classroom to learn this language, the government is taking a more significant step to improve the teaching and learning of the English language among students so that they may obtain a better understanding and learn the language more efficiently. The Highly Immersive Programme (HIP) was first introduced to all students in Malaysia in 1999 under the Upholding the Malay Language and Strengthening Command of English (MBMMBI) policy (Jiew, 2017). This program initiated by the Ministry of Education to enhance the teaching and learning of the English language among students in Malaysia is an effective approach to improving language proficiency among Malaysian students. The program was implemented in Malaysian schools to engage and immerse students in an English setting and provide a highly immersive language-rich atmosphere in the classroom in all schools to foster the use of English (Catherine et al., 2020). Students who participated in this program have made significant gains in their language proficiency compared to students who did not participate in the program (Saminathan et al., 2020).

The HIP reading activities aim to enhance students' reading skills through an immersive and interactive learning experience often involving authentic materials to create a context-rich learning environment. Several studies have been conducted on the implementation of HIP reading activities in secondary schools which explored the effectiveness in improving students reading skills and engagement as well as the challenges faced in implementing these activities in the classroom. For example, a study by Lee and Yoon (2017) found that using HIP reading activities significantly improved the reading comprehension skills among Korean High School students learning English as a foreign language.

Teachers play a crucial role as the agent of knowledge in developing human capital and a knowledge-based economy in the world. Their role is multi-faceted and impactful as they work to assist and guide students in developing fundamental language skills and literacy.

Besides that, it is crucial for a teacher to foster critical thinking abilities, support students' personal growth and be able to persuade students to learn and use the English language in varying contexts and situations (Saminathan et al., 2020). By adapting this program into the language classroom, it is hoped that it would help the teachers to expose the reading activities to ensure that students would be motivated to read.

This review addressed two research questions, "what are the benefits of adapting HIP reading programmes in the language classroom?", and "what are the challenges in implementing this programme in the language classroom?". Hence, this paper is hoped to explore further understanding of the best practices for implementing the best reading activities that could be implemented in the language classroom to enhance reading activities in secondary schools.

Methodology

This literature review paper focuses on the effectiveness of implementing HIP reading activities to enhance and improve reading proficiency among secondary school pupils. To gather relevant information regarding the topic of the study, two prominent databases were used including Google Scholar and the Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC). To narrow the selection of papers and obtain input from relevant studies, the papers selected were articles written in English and the year 2018-2022. These databases were set to find papers "since 2018" which enabled a search for papers published within the recent time frame before inserting the keywords. The search for relevant papers began with formulating search queries such as "Reading Activities for Highly Immersive Programme", "Reading Activities for Secondary School", "Enhancing Reading Skills", "Challenges of Implementing Classroom Reading Activities" and "Interventions for Reading Skills Activity". The articles used in this paper were selected using a systematic approach method to gather comprehensive and relevant information regarding the topic using the search queries above. This approach used to select the paper utilises a structured and methodical process needed to search, select and interpret the findings from the relevant articles focusing on fulfilling the need of the article. Nine papers from 2019- 2022 were selected that could give clear and concrete input regarding the topic. The articles selected provided a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of highly immersive programs in the language classroom.

Findings from the Literature Review

Based on the research question, this review was able to identify 4 areas of concern, which will be elaborated in the following subsections.

Reading Skills

According to McArthur and Castles (2017), a substantial proportion of children struggle to learn reading. They continue to add that the learners are highly heterogeneous and do not display the same type of reading impairment. Students with early reading issues have been proven to have challenges in academic achievement, according to Metsala and David (2012), as reviewed by Ahmad and Khoo (2020), causing underperforming students with reading abilities to be more likely to drop out of high school (McArthur & Castles, 2017). As reading is a crucial skill due for its lifetime benefit, learners need to learn and acquire the foundation and development of reading skills, leading to overall attainment and future success both in school and life. As such, the English Language teacher at the grassroots level plays an important role in developing a regular habit to gauge students' interest and motivation in reading to ensure that students will be equipped with skills to succeed in later life.

Next, reading skills help ESL students lay a solid foundation for understanding and interpreting simple sentences, thereby improving their vocabulary and language skills. This skill is one of the essential language skills needed in one's daily life. In regards to this, English teachers should encourage reading in the classroom environment, in which teachers should introduce different kinds of reading materials to pursue students' reading habits. Reading materials such as storybooks, magazines, newspapers, and many more should be made available and versatile for ESL Learners in the classroom to ensure continuity in the reading habit ensuring that students grasp a strong groundwork when it comes to reading from a young age.

Reading skills require the correct pronunciation of words and the understanding of the meaning of the words used or the English language's semantic structures (Kiew & Shah, 2020). The complexity of the English language, which includes vocabulary, grammar and lexical form, makes reading difficult for learners to acquire, despite learning this language has been introduced to the learners from a very young age. In this regard, the English Language teacher needs to promote and encourage learners to read in the classroom by implementing a reading session during the ESL Lesson. The implementation of reading sessions ensures that students would make reading a habitual process from a very young age, as this is a vital skill needed in students' lives.

Heeding to reading skills, this skill helps in self-development, which includes building vocabulary, improving learners' sentence structure and helps to increase the learner's knowledge. According to Alfansi (as cited in Kiew & Shah, 2020), reading is an important skill to be acquired which involves a complex cognitive activity that integrates memory and constructing meanings to obtain information among society. It is said that reading connects learners' source of information to their prior knowledge before evaluating and applying the information to reflect their response. Through this, learners will be able to increase their knowledge and expand their vocabulary and also improve their sentence structure as they develop in the reading process.

Benefits of Implementing HIP Reading Activities

The HIP is one of the efforts that the government is taking to improve the teaching of this language. The implementation of this program incorporating it into the teaching of reading skills is said to bring several benefits to the students in learning. Asiri and Mommani (2017) found out that students who have participated in reading activities have shown improvement in their reading capabilities, especially in their comprehension, vocabulary and critical thinking skills. Incorporating fun reading activities under the HIP program, such as completing the puzzle passage would help students to develop their critical thinking skills and also boost their vocabulary knowledge. This simple activity would help students to understand the formation of sentences, and the arrangement of paragraphs which would help them to develop a creative learning experience.

Not only that, another study by Kamsin and Mohamad (2020) shared that the implementation of the HIP program has been shown to be an effective way of promoting cross-curricular learning. It is also said that this implementation allows students to learn and acquire knowledge across different subject areas while simultaneously improving language proficiency. This is because students are encouraged to apply language skills to different subject areas such as the learning of Maths and Science in the English language. This would be able to help students to see and understand how different subjects are connected and they would be able to develop a deeper and better understanding. Beneficially, this method of learning would be able to help students to better understand things they are learning as they have the ability to read and understand the language.

The use of authentic and engaging reading materials would help to aid the student's interest in reading (Lustyantie & Aprillia, 2020) and adapting this activity into the language classroom would help to foster the student's interest in reading. Authentic materials such as real-world text and literature would help in making the reading experience relatable to students' lives, especially if the topic relates to their interests and experience. The activities planned often utilizes materials and topics that are relevant and interesting for students. When students are engaged and interested in the content they are reading, it can further enhance their comprehension skills. This is especially important for students who may struggle with traditional reading materials, integrating virtual such as videos, images, and interactive components can help support comprehension and engagement. By selecting texts or materials that align with students' interests, educators can promote better understanding, retention, and application of reading comprehension strategies. This would captivate students' attention, ignite their curiosity and create a sense of enjoyment which could nurture a lifelong love for reading.

HIP activities often require students to analyze, evaluate, and make connections between different concepts as it aims to involve students in an English- rich environment (Saminathan et al., 2020). This aims to involve and immerse students in which they will be immersed in a variety of English language learning experiences that would help to spark their curiosity and interest to learn the language (Saminathan et al., 2020). Engaging students in reading activities that would be able to challenge their thinking and encourage them to consider multiple perspectives can enhance their critical thinking abilities and would allow them to benefit better in their language proficiency. Through the implementation of HIP activities to improve students' reading skills, students can develop skills such as making inferences, drawing conclusions, evaluating evidence, and expressing reasoned opinions. This could help in improving their comprehension skills in the future.

In short, the implementation of HIP reading activities offers vast opportunities for students to develop and improve their language proficiency beyond reading. Through this implementation, it would be able to help students to learn the language through a variety of fun and interactive activities. Instead of adopting the usual read aloud technique to attempt a reading comprehension passage, by employing the HIP activities into the classroom, reading could be done in various interesting methods that would be able to captivate the students interest to read the passage. By adapting this approach, it would also boost students' critical thinking skills as they work to complete the task assigned. Not only improving their critical thinking skills, the adaptation of the HIP programme into the language classroom would also open up room for students to improve their vocabulary and learn new words in a meaningful context. Additionally, HIP activities often incorporate various strategies such as explicit vocabulary instruction, contextual clues, and repeated exposure, which can further support vocabulary acquisition. While there are many benefits to implementing this programme in the language classroom, it is also important to understand that the success of the implementation in the language classroom depends on many factors including the student's characteristic, the approach of instruction and also the method of implementation for the activities in the classroom. All in all, implementing this programme would bring a positive impact towards reading proficiency and help in improving students overall language development.

Challenges of Implementing HIP Reading Activities

Despite the positive impacts of the implementation of the HIP program, this program is seen to have various drawbacks faced by the teacher when executing this program in the language

classroom. The main challenge faced by the teachers is the lack of time to plan and prepare for the activities during the in-class session. According to Saminathan et al., (2020), teachers reported that they often lack adequate time. This is due to the limited hours allocated in a week to teach this language in school causing teachers to rush through the activity or skip some parts due to the limited time. The implementation of immersive programs in the classroom generally may require additional time for planning, preparation and classroom instruction. As a teacher, numerous responsibilities are being held such as covering curriculum, managing assessments and also the needs to address individual needs. By incorporating immersive activities in the classroom, teachers might necessitate careful time management and the integration of new instructional strategies into their lesson planning to ensure it would be sufficient to help learners achieve their learning objectives.

Besides that, lack of resources is seen as another challenge in implementing the activity in the classroom, which includes the materials and lack of equipment such as computers and projectors needed to implement the activities effectively (Saminathan et. al, 2020). Creating or assessing high-quality immersive materials or resources for reading can be challenging. Immersive programs often require a wide range of engaging texts, multimedia content and interactive activities. Teachers may need to invest significant time and effort in finding or developing materials that align with the objectives of the program and to also ensure it meets the diverse needs and interests of the students.

Furthermore, students' English proficiency level can also pose a challenge in implementing HIP reading activities. Abdullah and Mohammad (2020) indicated that the most common challenge in the implementation of this program is due to the lack of language proficiency skills among the learners. The implementation of the immersive program helps to aid in the teaching of these language skills and it aims to cater to students' diverse interests, needs and abilities to learn (Saminathan et. al, 2020). However, it could be challenging to provide individualised support and to adapt instruction for students with different reading proficiency levels, language proficiency or learning styles. Teachers may need to put in extra effort to modify the activities or to provide additional support to students who struggle in learning the language. Not only that, some students may not be motivated to participate in certain classroom activities which could affect the overall effectiveness of the language program. It is important for teachers to employ strategies that would be able to address and fulfil the needs of students

Overall, the implementation of HIP activities has shown to be effective in helping to improve and enhance the teaching of language skills including reading skills among students. However, there are several drawbacks that need to be addressed to ensure a successful implementation in the classroom. There is limited research on the challenges faced by students with the implementation of HIP programs and activities, specifically reading skills. By implementing the HIP fun activities in the classroom, would help to address the issue to ensure students will be able to learn and acquire the language and skill in a fun and exciting manner. To ensure a successful implementation of this program in the language classroom, it is important for teachers to provide guidance and support to students when selecting and using appropriate teaching strategies, as well as to address motivational and time management issues.

The Effectiveness of the Integration of HIP Reading Activities into Existing Curriculum

There are several advantages of implementing HIP reading activities into the existing curriculum. Firstly, by including this programme in the classroom learning experience, students will be able to engage in authentic and meaningful reading experiences which could be relevant to their lives. Emak and Ismail (2021) noted that incorporating reading activities

in English Language lessons would help students to get a better learning experience. This was shown in a study conducted by the researcher which resulted in improved reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition and critical thinking skills among the learners when reading activities are implemented in the classroom.

Nextly, the integration of HIP Reading Activities into an existing curriculum has the potential to enhance students' reading skills and engagement in the learning process. Besides that, integrating any reading activities under HIP programs into the existing curriculum can have advantages and drawbacks. One of the main advantages is that it allows for a more holistic approach to language learning. When adapting the HIP programme into the language classroom, students are exposed to varying authentic materials. Students are encouraged to engage with them in a meaningful way. This can lead to improved reading skills, as well as a deeper understanding of the language and its cultural context (National Research Council, 1998).

Not only that, the implementation of HIP in the classroom can help to foster a more student-centred approach to learning. The implementation of this programme opens up room for students to explore and interact with materials based on their learning styles and preferences. By adapting this programme, it would lead to increased motivation and engagement as they are able to learn according to their preferred style and learning preferences. One of the activities that could be conducted by adapting the HIP reading activities is the book review activity where students are assigned to read a book and to provide their personal review and feedback. By encouraging and engaging students in a book review activity it would be able to boost students' reading ability and motivation. Besides promoting active reading, adapting this effective programme would help to enhance students' critical thinking skills while reading (Mustafa & Zaman, 2015).

Additionally, integrating HIP reading activities into the current curriculum may have its own several drawbacks. One of the significant challenges is that the planning could be time-consuming to design while the implementation of such activities may require significant resources both in terms of materials and technology (Smith et al., 2020). Teachers and students may be burdened by this implementation, particularly for those with low budgets or access to technology. In particular, looking for appropriate reading materials that are both relevant to their students' interests and appropriate for their reading levels may be a challenge to the teacher. Additionally, the implementation of HIP Reading Activities may require teachers to make additional planning and preparation in order to carry out the activity in the classroom, which could be a barrier to adoption (Saminathan et al., 2020). Another potential challenge of this implementation is that some students may struggle to adapt to this approach to learning, particularly if they are used to and prefer a more traditional, teacher-centred approach method of learning. Changing their learning styles could lead to frustration and disengagement in their learning. Due to that, they may require additional support and guidance from the teacher to better comprehend the subject.

The HIP focuses on a student-centred language learning experience process that involves the use of authentic material and real-life situations. This would help and engage the students in the learning process. There have been several studies conducted to look into the effectiveness of implementing immersive reading activities in a language classroom for language learners. Studies have highlighted that HIP reading activities can enhance students' reading skills and overall reading abilities. Aziz et al. (2019) examined the effectiveness of HIP reading activities on the reading comprehension skills of Malaysian ESL learners involving 90 students. It is understood that students who were given HIP exposure to reading performed better on the test compared to students who learned reading using the traditional method. Thus, this study

indicates that students exposed to HIP activities perform better compared to traditionally taught students. Not only that, the implementation of this program would help to aid in the learning of vocabulary among students. According to Ansawi (2017), the introduction of HIP had a positive impact on students' language competencies and indicated the students showed significant gains in their vocabulary skills. This helped in enhancing student's competency in language, a positive change.

In conclusion, including the HIP reading activity in the existing curriculum may have both benefits and challenges, while its effectiveness in teaching reading skills may vary depending on several factors. While this program may benefit students with improved reading skills and a more student-centred approach to learning, it is also important to ensure that the resources and materials that would be used to implement this activity in the classroom should be suitable for all students. On the other hand, the effectiveness of the implementation of this program may vary depending on certain factors which include their proficiency level and also on the specific learning outcomes that have been targeted. It is important for teachers and schools to carefully consider and examine the needs and characteristics of the learner when deciding on these factors to organise the best activities that would suit integrating the activity into their curriculum to ensure that all students would be able to benefit and improve their reading proficiency skills through the implementation of HIP reading activities.

Conclusion

The implementation of the HIP reading activities program is shown to be an effective method to improve student's language proficiency in general. The use of authentic materials and real-life situations would help engage learners in the learning session. Besides that, conducting in-class activities for reading would help to promote students' active participation throughout the learning process. The effectiveness of the implication of this program in a language classroom depends on varying factors which include the learner's proficiency level and the targeted outcomes of the lesson. While there are many concerns regarding the effectiveness of HIP reading activity for low-proficiency learners, it is important to understand that every student's learning method varies from one another and the response towards the teaching methods differs. Therefore, teachers and educators need to play an important role in considering and catering to the needs and characteristics of the students before implementing HIP reading activities in the classroom.

In order for teachers to implement and choose the best activities to be implemented, teachers should also receive adequate training and support. Adequate training and support are necessary to ensure the activities that are being integrated into the curriculum can be effectively carried out. On top of the challenges faced, there are some benefits to the implementation of HIP reading activities in the language classroom. The implementation of the activities would help to boost language skills and also aid in improving students' motivation and confidence in learning and using the language as a language of communication. As such, the implementation of the HIP reading program in the language classroom should be considered and looked at as a valuable addition to any English language teaching program. As the implementation of HIP is a fun topic to explore, future researchers should look into the wider perspective of HIP implementation in the language classroom and the impact of the implementation on students' proficiency, exploring the adaptability of technological tools to the HIP program that could aid in English language learning in the language classroom.

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