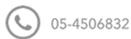




KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS READING ENGLISH  
TECHNICAL MATERIALS AMONG STUDENTS IN SELECTED TECHNICAL  
SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN PERAK

MUHAMMAD PUTRA ADHA



THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SCIENCE  
(TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION  
(MASTER BY RESEARCH)



# KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS READING ENGLISH TECHNICAL MATERIALS AMONG STUDENTS IN SELECTED TECHNICAL SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN PERAK



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## ABSTRACT

This study was aimed to determine the status of reading knowledge, reading skills, reading purpose, reading interest and reading preference toward English technical materials among students in selected technical schools in Perak. The study was also intended to measure correlations between these variables and its significant differences based on selected demographics of students. The samples consisted of 120 students selected by simple random sampling from four schools. The instruments used were questionnaires and reading comprehension test. Statistical Package for Social Science version 20 was used to analyze data to obtain frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, t-tests, Anova and Pearson correlations. The findings showed that the levels of reading skills, reading purpose were found to be high while their reading knowledge, reading interest and reading preference as they perceived were moderate. This study also revealed that male students obtained significantly higher mean scores in reading skills, reading purpose, reading interest and reading preference than their female counterparts. It was also reported that respondents who used mixed spoken languages at home obtained significantly higher mean scores in reading purpose, reading interest and reading preference. However, these three variables did not show significant differences among students whose parents come from different educational background and place of residence of parents. This study also indicated positive and moderate relationships existed among four reading abilities; reading skills, reading purpose, reading interest and reading preference. The findings of this study concluded that students' responses toward reading abilities reflected variability, and also, reading abilities among students in technical schools were still inadequate, particularly among female students and those from parents who only used mother tongue at home. Thus, this study recommends that greater efforts should be geared toward skills-upgrading courses in English language; developing innovative teaching methods and instructional materials as well as better access to quality reading English technical materials for technical and vocational instructors.



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## ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menentukan status pengetahuan, kemahiran, tujuan, minat dan kesukaan membaca terhadap bahan pembacaan teknikal bahasa Inggeris dalam kalangan pelajar sekolah menengah teknik terpilih di Perak. Kajian ini juga berhasrat mengukur korelasi di antara pemboleh – pemboleh ubah ini dan perbezaan signifikansinya berasas kepada demografi terpilih pelajar. Sampel kajian terdiri daripada 120 pelajar yang dipilih secara rawak mudah daripada empat sekolah. Instrumen yang digunakan ialah borang soal selidik dan ujian kefahaman pembacaan. *Statistical Package for Social Science versi 20* digunakan untuk menganalisa data bagi mendapatkan kekerapan, peratusan, min, sisihan piawai, ujian-t, Anova dan korelasi Pearson. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan tahap kemahiran membaca dan tujuan membaca adalah tinggi manakala pengetahuan membaca, minat membaca dan kesukaan membaca berasaskan persepsi pelajar adalah sederhana. Kajian ini juga menunjukkan pelajar lelaki mendapat skor yang lebih tinggi daripada rakan perempuan mereka dalam kemahiran membaca, tujuan membaca, minat membaca dan kesukaan membaca. Dilaporkan juga responden yang menggunakan bahasa pertuturan bercampur di rumah memperolehi skor min yang lebih tinggi dalam tujuan membaca, minat membaca dan kesukaan membaca. Walau bagaimanapun tiga pemboleh ubah ini tidak menunjukkan perbezaan yang signifikan dalam kalangan ibu-bapa pelajar yang berlainan latar belakang pendidikan dan tempat tinggal keluarga. Kajian ini juga menunjukkan terdapat hubungan yang positif dan sederhana dalam kemahiran membaca, tujuan membaca, minat membaca dan kesukaan membaca. Dapatan kajian ini menyimpulkan respons pelajar terhadap pemboleh ubah ini menggambarkan keragaman dan kebolehan membaca bahan teknikal dalam bahasa Inggris di sekolah teknik pula masih tidak mencukupi, terutamanya dalam kalangan pelajar perempuan dan keluarga mereka yang menggunakan bahasa ibunda sahaja di rumah. Oleh itu, kajian ini mengesyorkan agar usaha yang lebih perlu digerakkan terhadap kursus peningkatan kemahiran Bahasa Inggeris; pembentukan kaedah mengajar dan bahan instruksi yang inovatif serta akses yang lebih kepada bahan pembacaan dalam Bahasa Inggeris yang berkualiti untuk tenaga pengajar teknikal dan vokasional.



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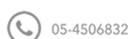
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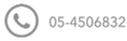
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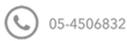
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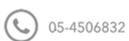


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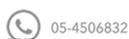
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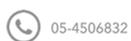


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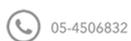
EAP	English Academic Purpose
EFA	Education For All
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELT	English Language Teaching
EPRD	Educational Planning Research Division
ESL	English as Second Language
ESP	English For Specific Purpose
EteMs	English For the Teaching of Mathematics and Science
ETP	English For Technical Purpose
FL	Foreign Language
IRA	International Reading Association
IT	Information and Technology
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
MUET	Malaysian University English Test
MoHE	Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training
UK	United Kingdom
UNESCO	United Nation Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization





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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.0 Introduction

English has been widely acknowledged as an international language (Tsui in Mohd Sidek, 2010). According to Bruthiaux (2004; 415), “English has all the key characteristics that make it likely to remain the dominant worldwide language”. The importance of the English language has been established universally as a tool for social, economic, and political success. As a result, many non-English speaking countries promote English proficiency as an effort toward modernization and internalization (Pennycook, 1994; Tollefson, 1995). For example, in Hong Kong, the shift from English to Chinese language instruction was rejected by many education stakeholders, such as parents, because English continued to be seen as the language of economic opportunity (Tsui et. al, 1999).

English is a mandatory subject in Malaysian schools and formally offered as the second language for students from primary to secondary school. English is a means of communication in everyday activities and private section. It is an important language to enable Malaysia to engage meaningfully in local and international trade and commerce. It also provides an additional means of access to academic, professional and recreational materials (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1998). English has also seen as a main language in areas such as education, administration and trade to continue study to the higher levels, to hold the professional positions to be absorbed into the administrative and public service of Malaysia and to be legalised in posts, all requires passing grade English, Lim Hock Yuan in (Evelyn lim, 2003).

As a developed nation, Malaysia have to compete with the other developed nations because of globalization. Therefore, it is necessary to be competent in the language; the language of technology, the language used globally, the language that will enable developing nations to survive. English is taught as a subject from year one in all Malay medium primary schools and year three in Chinese and Tamil schools. However, in higher educations, most of the reference widely used as texts are in English. University undergraduates study English as a compulsory subject on condition that it plays an important role in the social, economic and educational life of the students (Manjet, 2012). In addition, regarding the decline in the English language and the need to improve English language proficiency among students, the Ministry of Education in Malaysia implemented the teaching of Mathematics and Science in English in the year 2003 (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2002).

Technical secondary schools are a type of educational institution offering technical and vocational subjects that was introduced by the British in 1987 to train local youths as technicians and engineers (Ramlee Mustapha, 1999). Basic technical and vocational education under the Ministry of Education begins at the primary school level. Whereby, students are introduced to the study of pre-vocational subjects that cover various aspects of manipulative skills. As the students progress into the lower secondary level, pre-vocational education is continued through a living skills subject, which exposes students to various basic vocational skills. The upper secondary level (Form 4 and Form 5) is where technical and vocational education formally commences. The technical and vocational schools offer the same core subjects as normal academic schools including languages, mathematics and sciences, but in addition, students are required to take selected technical and vocational subjects from a group of several different options (The Ministry of Education, 2010).

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The teaching of English for specific purposes (ESP) was flourished in the 1950s and 1960s. However, ESP gained popularity and became a vital and innovative for the teaching of English in the 1970s. This is because much of its infancy, ESP was dominated by the teaching of English for Academic Purposes (EAP); most of the material produced, the course descriptions written and the research carried out were in the are of English for academic Purposes. As the main branch, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) was developed and offered for many reasons: to help international students reach their full academic potential, to expose these students to the expectations and requirements of the faculties in terms of target situation needs and academic culture. EAP programmes are offered in academic institutions of English-speaking countries such as USA, UK, Canada, Australia and New

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Zealand. In addition, EAP programmes are also offered in academic institutions of many developing countries, Jordan, Dudley-Evans & St. John in (Momtazur rahman, 2012).



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In the Malaysian polytechnic education system, English for Technical Purposes (ETP) is taught 3 semesters for certificate courses and 5 semesters for diploma courses. It is exactly called by English for specific purposes (ESP). The course content for ETP prepares students with fundamentals study skills in information processing, reading, oral communication, report writing, occupation hunting, and description of object / product specification. These skills will initially be required during a mandatory one-semester industrial attachment programme with either government agencies or private organizations. Information collected from Malaysian polytechnic graduates through the Graduate Tracer Studies (2004 to 2008) confirmed the concern expressed by the employers when the respondents opined that they lacked skills to converse and write in English. Responses from open-ended questions obtained from the graduates on the quality of teaching and learning in the polytechnics indicated their disappointment with the teaching of English in polytechnics (Ahmad Yasruddin et al., 2010).



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The English language competency issues have raised concerns in Malaysia. The issue of competence in English among students regained attention of language policy makers in Malaysia in the 1990s (Ridge, 2004). In line with language competence, Brown (2004) said that competency is ability, expertise or proficiency implying a high level of skill, well - developed knowledge or polished performance.



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Tsui and Tollefson (2006) labelled proficiency in the English language as the “global

literacy skill” which has become a commodity for communication (Crystal, 2003). Communication in terms of language skills are listening, speaking, reading and writing. The importance of English is prominent at school level in this era of globalization. For students who are learning a second language in an academic context, especially in Malaysian schools and colleges, second language reading is extremely important because most of the target language input is obtained through the channel of reading.

One of language skills that should be learnt by English learners is reading. Reading is considered as a necessary skill because of its essential role in facilitating learners to master English. Reading is a complex cognitive process of decoding symbols for the intention of deriving meaning (reading comprehension) and/or constructing meaning. Reading is a means of language acquisition, of communication, and of sharing information and ideas. Like all language, it is a complex interaction between the text and the reader which is shaped by the reader’s prior knowledge, experiences, attitude, and language community which is culturally and socially situated. The reading process requires continuous practise, development, and refinement.

While reading skill is a door for getting information, reading knowledge become a key for knowing the meaning of a text and opening the reader’s mind. Background knowledge plays an important role in understanding reading of a text. Readers comprehend the texts better when they are able to relate to the text as it is culturally familiar. When the text is culturally unfamiliar, it is important that teachers activate background knowledge by the use of text previewing which can be

in the form of various types of pre-reading activities leading learners towards a better understanding of background knowledge.



Besides, reading attitude comprising of interest, preference and habit is highly interconnected in which reading interest is important in enhancing students's success in school and out of it while reading habit influences to what extend someone can understand and command his reading skill (Zurina Khairuddin, 2013). Therefore, reading attitude is a key for reinforcing reading skill. Reading attitude is an integral part of the development and use of lifelong reading skills. Having positive attitudes toward learning is one of the most important psychological concepts in education. A positive attitude determines the success of any instruction, so it is crucial for instructors to engage, maintain, and rekindle students' positive attitude. Positive reading attitudes affect the students' ultimate academic success by increasing the amount of time that is spent on reading. Whether students read or not is largely determined by their attitudes toward reading. If students do not like to read or think reading is boring, negative attitudes are likely to hold back their reading improvement. Poor readers generally have more negative attitudes than good readers (Inderjit, 2013).

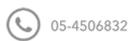


## 1.1 Research Background

Learning to read is one of the greatest accomplishments in childhood because it is the foundation for learning and academic achievements. In the world today, the ability to read English fluently will be useful particularly if one needs to obtain information from internationally-based references and materials. As students gain wider access to



electronic data bases through the Internet, it is reading, more than any of the other English language skills, that offers access to information. The ability to read has long been considered by literate societies to be one of the basic building blocks affecting commercial exchange, cultural advancement and personal independence. High levels of literacy are even more important as we move through the 21st century. In fact, we are now exposed to more information that requires reading and synthesizing. Now we depend on our reading abilities in every area of our life: our careers, assembling household items as well as being an informed citizen. The demands on students to read, comprehend and evaluate complex information have never been greater. Jobs in technology, information and management dominate the workplace, leaving few opportunities for the uneducated. Students in schools today require a strong foundation of literacy to enable them to participate in an increasingly educated workforce (Euphrasia Lee Chin Yan, 2007).



Learning to read and then improve and sustain reading skills involves a variety of interconnected elements. These include students' attitudes to reading and motivation to read for enjoyment. Based on the aspirations to become an industrialized nation, Malaysia has made many conscious efforts to improve and develop literacy so that it will achieve a literacy rate of 100% by the year 2020. The country still has a long way to go but there are positive indications that the literacy rate is increasing. The World Education Report (1993) states that Malaysia then had one of the lowest literacy rates (78.4%) compared to her other Southeast Asian neighbors like Singapore (100%), Indonesia (81.6%), Thailand (93%), and the Philippines (89.7%), respectively. Today the country's population is close to 20 million, the Malaysian literacy is 85%. It indicates that there has been an increased



focus on reading instruction in higher education in recent years. Eventually, in an effort to improve the quality of instruction, much research has been conducted to break down and understand the complex process of reading (Interjit S, 2014).



In English language classroom, reading is one of the most emphasized skills to study. This emphasis is necessary considering that reading is not a skill that can be automatically learned. Rather, it involves a complex process of making meaning from a text for variety of purposes and in a wide range of contexts (Allen & Bruton, 1998). In Malaysia, emphasis is given by the Ministry of Education in trying to develop reading skills in English language especially among the primary students. This can be seen through the introduction of reading programmes such as ‘The Structured Early Reading Programme’ which aims to inculcate a love for reading at a young age. Schools are given ‘big books’ to be used with students through an extensive induction programme (UNESCO, 2004). Presently, there is also a move to include the literature component in English, Primary School English Syllabus as a further effort to instil positive reading habits among the young school children as stated in Krishnasamy & Jenan Isa (2009).



Reading is a skill that must be learned, yet the process of learning to read can become pleasurable and easy for some students or displeasing and complicated for others. Some will employ reading as a learning opportunity while others will avoid it because they find it complex and they struggle at it (Wallace, 2007). This could be the reason why students nowadays are said to be lacking the interest in reading, Ley, Schaer & Dismukes in Zurina (2013). A Malaysian Reading Profile Survey conducted in 2010 also reported that Malaysians who are at the age of 10 and above only read



approximately eight to twelve books a year (National Library of Malaysia, 2010). This number is worrisome (Imran Ariff, 2010). He also stated that students nowadays have higher interests in reading; nonetheless, they still do not adopt reading as a habit.

On the other hand, developing good reading skill will help poor readers keep up with their classmates, open new worlds to them, and help them succeed in life. Students who are not good readers fall behind their classmates. They don't understand the lesson and they come to school unprepared. By learning to read, these students can keep up with their classmates. They can learn their lessons and be active participants in class. When students improve their reading skills, they can travel to different places and experience new ideas without ever leaving their classrooms. Students who can't read well will know only what they see around them. Students who are poor readers are severely handicapped. Someone without good reading skills will have to work at most manual jobs. Good readers, on the other hand, have the whole universe open to them. They will have the possibility to learn any job that interests them.

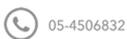
Reading in English must be stressed and guided to students to make them skillful and not perplexed when finding technical English materials. Most text that students encounter in their studies is either narrative or expository. In science courses, much of the text that students will encounter is expository. Students also generate their own knowledge in science and technical courses by the nature of the activity-centered learning found in such content areas. Essentially, scientific/technical contents (materials) are found in publications such as: Reference books, Newspaper articles, Websites, Blogs, Editorials, Instruction manuals, Direction sheets, Science

fiction, Scientific papers, Article abstracts, Biographie, Magazine articles, Lab reports and Field studies. Students often treat expository text found in science textbooks as just a listing of facts. By first understanding the different ways in which scientific and technical information is presented in text, teacher can then develop strategies to enhance students' understanding and comprehension (Mark Van Hecke, 2009).

A great number of researchers had attempted to identify the problems confronted by low English proficiency students by examining the differences between successful and unsuccessful learners. These two groups of learners were distinguished by their academic performance in tests, examinations, or learning tasks. Studies found that major differences lie in aptitude, learning strategies, beliefs and learning behaviors (Huang & Tsai, 2003). For example, the behaviors of underachievers have some characteristics. They lacked good learning attitude, motivation, or persistence. In class, they need more personal attention, take longer time to finish a learning task, often skip class or attend class late, and often delay or do not submit homework assignments Chang in (Lina Hsu, 2008).

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

Prior to this study, little was known about the level of reading knowledge, skills and attitude in terms of understanding technical materials in English among form four students in technical secondary schools in Perak. Therefore, a new study was needed to fill a gap in the research.



Problems related to the teaching and learning of English language is recently realized among secondary school students in Malaysia. As English is not students mother tongue and not widely spoken at home, they tend to face problems in reading skills. Some of the problems that can be identified here are, students are unable to express their ideas the way it should be; students prefer to communicate with their peers in their mother tongue rather than the second language; students have difficulties to comprehend what they are reading and having difficulties pronouncing certain words which leads them to do any reading in English at all (Salehuddin, 2002).

Studies on the mastery of the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and reading habits indicated that although students perceived English to be important for their academic needs, the language was mostly used for reading purposes only (Tan cited in Othman, 2005; Kaur & Thiyagarajah, 1999). In ranking the importance of the skills, students ranked writing as their least competent skill and regarded speaking and reading as the most important skills needed to master the language. Pandian as cited in Mohamad Jafre (2011) revealed that only 20% of the Malaysian populations are 'regular readers' and the rest 80% are 'reluctant readers' of English language materials. It was also found that students' purpose of reading is only to pass exams. Malaysian students were reluctant to read for information or pleasure. It was also added that if this phenomenon was left unattended, the future of Malaysia would eventually be directed by 'reluctant readers' who were 'retarded' in terms of knowledge, intelligence and maturity.