

EXAMINING THE UTILISATION OF EXTENSIVE  
READING FROM THE PERSPECTIVE  
OF ESL STUDENTS' READER  
RESPONSE

THANGAM A/P RAJA GOPAL

SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

2022

EXAMINING THE UTILISATION OF EXTENSIVE READING FROM  
THE PERSPECTIVE OF ESL STUDENTS'  
READER RESPONSE

THANGAM A/P RAJA GOPAL

THESIS PRESENTED TO QUALIFY FOR A DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
(TEACHING OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE)

FACULTY OF LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION  
SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

2022



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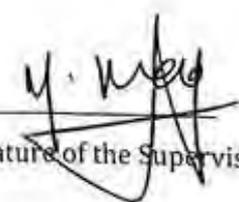
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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative experimental study examines the utilisation of an Extensive Reading Programme from the perspective of ESL students' reader response. It seeks to examine the kind of written responses produced by the mediocre and low proficiency ESL students based on the Reader Response Approach, the outcome of using Reader Response Approach in the Extensive Reading Programme and the experiences of the ESL students towards the Extensive Reading Programme. The study was conducted for a duration of three months in a secondary school in Teluk Intan. The participants of this study included an ESL teacher and six Form 4 students, comprising three females and three males. The researcher documented data through four sources: classroom observations, interviews with the teacher and students, response journals and examination marks. Findings indicated that the Extensive Reading Programme and the use of Reader Response Approach not only enabled the students to come up with various statements but also benefited in their language development. The findings of the study suggests that Extensive Reading Programme and Reader Response should be a part of the curriculum in Malaysian secondary schools as they help in improving students' language proficiency. The study proposes a guideline for the implementation of an Extensive Reading Programme and Reader Response in the language classroom which can be adopted by the ESL educators.





## **MENKAJI PENGGUNAAN BACAAN LUAS DARI PERSPEKTIF PENDEKATAN RESPON MEMBACA PELAJAR ESL**

### **ABSTRAK**

Kajian kualitatif eksperimen ini mengkaji penggunaan Program Bacaan Luas dari perspektif pendekatan respon membaca pelajar Bahasa Inggeris. Ianya bertujuan untuk meneliti hasil penulisan pelajar sederhana dan lemah menggunakan Pendekatan Respon Membaca, hasil penggunaan Pendekatan Respon Membaca dalam Program Bacaan Luas dan pengalaman pelajar ESL terhadap Program Bacaan Luas. Kajian ini dijalankan selama tiga bulan di sebuah Sekolah Menengah di Teluk Intan. Peserta kajian ini merangkumi seorang guru Bahasa Inggeris dan enam orang pelajar Tingkatan 4 terdiri daripada tiga pelajar perempuan dan tiga pelajar lelaki. Penyelidik mendokumentasikan data melalui empat sumber: pemerhatian bilik darjah, temu bual dengan guru dan para pelajar, jurnal tindak balas dan markah peperiksaan. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa Program Bacaan Luas dan penggunaan Pendekatan Respon Membaca bukan sahaja membolehkan para pelajar menghasilkan pelbagai kenyataan tetapi juga mendapat manfaat dari segi penguasaan bahasa. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa Program Bacaan Luas dan Pendekatan Respon Membaca harus dijadikan sebahagian daripada kurikulum di Sekolah Menengah di Malaysia kerana ia membantu dalam meningkatkan penguasaan bahasa pelajar. Kajian ini mencadangkan satu garis panduan untuk pelaksanaan Program Bacaan Luas dan Pendekatan Respon Membaca di dalam bilik darjah bahasa yang boleh digunakan oleh para pendidik ESL.



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

|              |  |
|--------------|--|
| EFL          | English as a Foreign Language                    |
| GER          | Guided Extensive Reading                         |
| L2           | Second Language                                  |
| <i>LPM</i>   | <i>Lembaga Peperiksaan Malaysia</i>              |
| <i>NILAM</i> | <i>Nadi Ilmu Amalan Membaca</i>                  |
| NST          | New Straits Times                                |
| <i>PMR</i>   | <i>Penilaian Menengah Rendah</i>                 |
| <i>PT3</i>   | <i>Pentaksiran Tingkatan Tiga</i>                |
| <i>SPM</i>   | <i>Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia</i>                  |
| STEM         | Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics |



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## W Sample Readability Results



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Reading has always been regarded as a desirable activity for people of all age, be it a small child or an adult. It is part of literacy and essential for everybody, especially in the 21st century as one has to read messages and news from social media, such as Telegram, WhatsApp, WeChat as well as read emails and online newspapers. Ahmed (2016) opines that it is vital for students to possess a good reading habit as it can enhance knowledge and the ability to use the target language more effectively. Grabe and Stoller (2020) contended that reading ability is only likely to develop gradually when L2 learners are continually exposed to abundant meaningful input within their linguistic competence, or extensive reading. Wan Dollah et al. (2017) specified that reading habits play important role in enhancing students' academic performance in schools as it helps them in getting meaningful and desirable knowledge. Students learn



to read by reading (Day, 2018; Nation & Waring, 2019; Renandya et al., 2020; Stoller, 2015). This well-established principle is true for learning to read foreign languages, just the same as for a first language. Reading habits have contributed significantly to all levels of the education system, as they constitute the foundation of knowledge. In the long run, it is vital for students to master the reading skill as with enhanced reading skill, learners will make better progress in all other areas of learning (Ahmed, 2016). Information acquired through reading can be reutilised in spoken or written communication when there is a reader-writer connection during the reading process (Akin et al, 2015). Hence, reading is not merely a process of reading words from texts, but a process that requires interpretation of meaning and the reader takes away a wealth of information from the process.



Extensive reading (ER) is regarded as an effective and promising way of

developing foreign language abilities (Birketveit et al., 2018; Yamashita, 2015). Over the years, a plenitude of studies has revealed that Extensive Reading enables students to reap numerous linguistic benefits, including improved reading fluency (McLean & Rouault, 2017, Nakanishi, 2015), vocabulary acquisition (Zawiah Ghazali & Hadina Habil, 2020; Suk, 2016; Webb & Chang, 2015), and better writing skills (Mermelstein, 2015; Park, 2016). Besides linguistic benefits, students also develop wider and deeper knowledge about the world, which is essential in relating and connecting with the text and other people (Renandya, 2016). Extensive reading provides opportunities for both English as a second language (ESL) and English as foreign language (EFL) students to engage in plentiful English reading materials in and out of the classroom. Reading a variety of materials will directly determine how much additional vocabulary students





gain, how well their reading fluency develops, and how much other language skills improve (Nation & Waring, 2019).

The Malaysian government is constantly urging its citizens to make leisure reading or extensive reading a habit (Jamrus & Razali, 2019). Leisure reading is considered as one of the major aspects in language acquisition and language learning. Lee and Wong (2017), assert that habitual and positive reading habits among students tend to facilitate their language learning, increase general knowledge, and develop vocabulary level. This is predominantly because leisure reading not only aids student's general knowledge but help in their academic growth as well (Ali & Razali, 2019). Indirectly, leisure reading also encourages lifelong learning habit among students (Jayavalan & Razali, 2018).



In spite of all the advantages of extensive reading, studies have revealed that many school going children do not read for pleasure, as there is not enough free time after doing school homework, (Noraien Mansor, 2017). ). Likewise, Daniel, Esoname, Chima and Udoaku (2017) reported that a majority of students read with the sole purpose of passing their examination. Technological advancement and the media have certainly made students read fewer books (Baba & Affendi, 2020) as they spend a significant amount of time surfing the internet and other activities that involve high tech instead of reading (Subashini Annamalai & Balakrishnan Muniandy, 2013; Florence, Adesola, Alaba & Adewumi, 2017). Poor reading habit eventually leads to discouragement from studying outside the classroom, as it is difficult for students to comprehend their texts (Anyaegebu et al., 2016).



Abdul Wahab Ibrahim, Director of the National Book Council of Malaysia commented on the trending reading habits of Malaysians on an average whereby many Malaysians consider it as a boring activity and further stressed on how reading is important for our country to become a developed nation:

Take any developed nation, for example the UK, on an average per person, 16 books are read per year, as compared to Malaysians who read an average of 8-11 books per year. A developed nation is a nation that reads, and until we can reach that average number per year, we will not become a developed nation. Unfortunately, we are not there yet, that is why the Government is striving to change the mind-set of Malaysians toward books, to eventually cultivate a reading culture.

(Malaysian Digest, December 1, 2014, para. 6)

Another educator, Mikel Liow (2014), a Child Development Specialist from Beaconhouse, Malaysia says:

These days, we live in an age of books versus devices, which the latter is of course what children are more attracted to. Nevertheless, as educators, we cannot force these children to read; instead, we can find books with more suitable and interesting content for them to view. Slowly, they will appreciate reading just as much as their other friends do.

(Malaysian Digest, December 1, 2014, para. 20)

Thus, to overcome these shortcomings, Malaysian students need to cultivate the habit of leisure or extensive reading so that they can excel in all other areas of learning in their primary, secondary as well as tertiary studies and it will become a life-long



habit. Parents and teachers should play their part in inculcating the reading habit of a child from a young age, as it is essential for language development.

## 1.2 Background of the Study

When we look at the global literacy rate, there is no doubt that it has been on the rise. According to Roser & Ortiz-Ospina (2018), the global literacy rate has been increasing steadily by 4% every 5 years from 42% in 1960 to 86% in 2015. The latest report reveals that overall; the global literacy rate is high. The literacy rate for all males and females that are at least 15 years old is 86.3% and developed nations as a whole have a literacy rate of 99.2% (World Bank, 2020; World Population Review, 2021). According to the same report, thirty-one nations reported literacy rates of 99.0% or above and four countries, namely, Andorra, Greenland, North Korea and Uzbekistan reported 100% literacy among their people. Malaysia is positioned at 85<sup>th</sup> with a literacy rate of 93.7%. Nevertheless, the high literacy rate does not truly reflect the reading habits of Malaysians as many educationists and social analysts are widely concerned with poor reading habits among Malaysians (Mohammad Fazli et al., 2015; Asila Jalil, 2017).

Though Malaysia's literacy rate stands at 93%, the rate of those who have been reading books only reached 87% (Bahagian Teknologi Pendidikan. 2017). Zahrah Yunos (2020) lamented that the average Malaysian only allocates three hours a week for reading, whereas people in other countries spend an average of 10 hours a week reading. In fact, it is an arduous task getting more Malaysians to read for pleasure and





gain knowledge in Malaysia, despite the government and various individuals doing their part to boost the reading habit among the public.

In order to improve the situation, that is, to increase the language mastery level, especially English, among the citizens, the Education Ministry has declared 2020 to 2030 as the National Reading Decade. Our former Prime Minister, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, an avid reader himself, launched the programme (Borneo Post, 2020). During the launch, Dr Mahathir commented on the importance of cultivating a reading culture, stressing that it is not only a way to obtain and boost knowledge but also enhance a person's emotional intelligence (EQ) and increase the intelligence quotient (IQ). The National Reading Decade programme aims to increase the language mastery level, especially English, among the citizens (Thiagarajah & Razali, 2021). Maszlee Malik (2018), who was the Minister of Education then, aptly put forth that "A nation who loves books is a nation with a high literacy culture."

However, the well-known reality is that in Malaysia, many English as a Second Language (ESL) students are reading books mainly for national examinations rather than to gain additional knowledge or for their own pleasure (Mustafa, 2018). These students find reading in English a difficult process, therefore, they do not like to read anything in English apart from school textbooks and required assignments handed out by the teachers. They perceive extensive reading as boring, tedious and time consuming and shy away from it (Muhamad et al., 2020). Other reasons cited are lack of motivation and interest in reading (Osman & Ahmad, 2017). They fail to envisage extensive reading as an interesting activity that can not only fill their free time but also widen their knowledge. It is crucial for this negative attitude to be conquered to create





an intellectual society, which in turn would ascertain the aspirations of Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013 – 2025 (2013)

In support of the above, the findings of a survey by Malaysian National Library (2006) disclosed that only 19 per cent of children between the ages of 5 and 9 preferred reading to other activities like sports, drawing and painting, computer games and listening to music. More than half the respondents confessed to have read less than seven pages a day. It further revealed that Malaysians read about two books per year and this means that there is no improvement in the reading habits of Malaysians as the same study conducted in 1996 revealed that Malaysians read an average of two books a year only. The number increased to 15 in an interim study done in 2014, but this is a far cry from the 40 books read annually by those in developed countries (Maszlee Malik, 2018). Hence, the Malaysian government is constantly urging its citizens to make leisure reading as a habit (Jamrus & Razali, 2019).

The Malaysian National Library has been trying to inculcate the habit of reading in Malaysians especially the young through the National Reading Icon programme which began in the year 2009 (Nafisah Ahmad, 2015). The first National Reading Icon was National Astronaut Datuk Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor Al-Masrie (2009) followed by Datuk Michelle Yeoh (2010) and Tun Dr Mahatir Mohammad (2012). Chief Secretary to the Government, Tan Sri Dr Ali Hamsa was appointed as the National Reading Icon in 2014. Though this programme was introduced to cultivate the reading habits among Malaysians, the interim study conducted in 2014 only revealed slight improvement in the reading habits of Malaysian (NST Jan 9, 2020) which is not in par with many developed countries. The latest Reading Icon is Datuk Dr Abd Latif (2020),





Director General of Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) who was chosen in conjunction with the National Reading Decade campaign (FRIM, 2020). The latest result of this programme is yet to be seen and probably can only be seen when the next National Literacy Survey is conducted.

On its part, the Education Ministry started implementing the *NILAM (Nadi Ilmu Amalan Membaca)* or The Pulse of Knowledge is through Reading programme in 1998 to nurture the reading habit among schoolchildren and the programme is in effect until now. The NILAM Programme is devised to monitor students' leisure reading, and requires students to read books (outside class time), write a brief summary of the book and submit their NILAM record books. In this reading project, students are awarded marks for the number of books they have read and the Education Ministry has proposed



an award ranking system for primary and secondary schools. The ranking system for secondary schools is depicted in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1

*NILAM Ranking System for Secondary Schools in Malaysia*

| <b>Number of Books Read</b> | <b>Merits</b>          |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| 288 and above               | <i>Nilam</i> (Emerald) |
| 216 – 287                   | <i>Emas</i> (Gold)     |
| 144 – 215                   | <i>Perak</i> (Silver)  |
| 72 - 143                    | <i>Gangsa</i> (Bronze) |

(Giam, 2015, p. 25)





According to *Laporan Kajian Penilaian Programme Nilam* (BTP, 2005), 47% of respondents from secondary schools read less than 72 books, which indicates that they were at the Bronze level (refer to Table 1.1), the most minimum level. Another finding, *Program Nilam: Konsep dan Panduan Pelaksanaan Di Sekolah* (BTP, 2007), reveals that only 67.31% out of 260 respondents claim that they simply do not have time to read. Although the programme is indeed a good platform to motivate students to read extensively, the library record, which is a testimony, shows otherwise as only a limited number of students borrow books for this purpose. Moreover, as there is no supervision and evaluation or grades awarded for completing *NILAM*, students do not take it seriously. It is also difficult to verify whether students had actually read the books because the summary they write could have been fabricated or copied from other sources (Navinder Kaur, 2015). Only a few who are interested in representing the school at the ‘District Level *Tokoh Nilam*’ competition will go to great lengths to complete the tasks diligently.

Many researchers perceive *NILAM* as unsuccessful as students’ involvement is still at a minimum level. The effectiveness of the Nilam Programme is still not encouraging and can be considered as unsuccessful as students do not partake actively in the programme (Navinder Kaur, 2015; Mohamad Jafre, Majid & Low, 2011). Inderjit (2014) echoed the same sentiment when he revealed that Malaysian students’ interest is still at an undesirable level through the *NILAM* programme though they have had 11 years of formal education. *Laporan I-NILAM*, released by Bahagian Teknologi Pendidikan (BTP, 2014) reflects this as only 13.5% of secondary school students from the country got accreditation or due recognition through the *NILAM* programme. Zuridah Hanim, Mohd. Hasani & Khaliza Saidin (2017) concur that although the *NILAM*



programme has been ongoing for 17 years (1999 – 2016), students are still not reading at a desirable level. According to Azlin Norhaini, et.al (2012) as cited in Zuridah Hanim, et.al (2017), one of the reasons for NILAM to be unsuccessful is the long hours' secondary school students spend in school. Zawiah Ghazali & Hadina Habil (2020) mentioned in their study that the *NILAM* programme has failed to inculcate good reading habits among primary and secondary school students in Malaysia. A survey carried out by Bahagian Teknologi Pendidikan (2017) among 260 respondents revealed the reasons for the lack of reading interest among secondary school students. Table 1.2 reveals the data of the survey.

Table 1.2

*Result from a Survey on Why Secondary School Students Read Less*

| No. | Details   | Total | Percentage |
|-----|---|-------|------------|
| 1.  | No time   | 175   | 67.31      |
| 2.  | Reading is boring                                     | 163   | 62.69      |
| 3.  | Lazy  | 133   | 51.15      |
| 4.  | Uninteresting books                                   | 132   | 50.77      |
| 5.  | Non-conducive or noisy environment                    | 100   | 38.46      |
| 6.  | Cannot afford to buy books                            | 83    | 31.92      |
| 7.  | Tired   | 81    | 31.15      |
| 8.  | More inclined to watch television and listen to radio | 79    | 30.38      |
| 9.  | Like to play  | 76    | 29.23      |
| 10. | Not enough books                                      | 62    | 23.85      |
| 11. | Not adept in reading                                  | 60    | 23.08      |
| 12. | A lot of housework / homework                         | 59    | 22.69      |
| 13. | Not interested in reading since young                 | 57    | 21.92      |
| 14. | No encouragement from parents / teachers              | 57    | 21.92      |
| 15. | No opportunity to visit the library                   | 54    | 20.77      |
| 16. | Unsuitable books                                      | 46    | 17.69      |
| 17. | Inclined towards entertainment materials              | 41    | 15.77      |
| 18. | Poor quality writing                                  | 28    | 10.77      |
| 19. | Help parents in their work                            | 14    | 5.38       |
| 20. | Electronic media is more interesting                  | 14    | 5.38       |

(Bahagian Teknologi Pendidikan, 2017)

Note:

1. 260 respondents were involved
2. Respondents were allowed to choose more than one reason



The data reveals various reasons why students are not taking the NILAM programme seriously. The conclusion of all these studies and reports are: students do not take the *NILAM* programme seriously and do not read extensively. As such, the government's effort in instilling reading habits among students is greatly affected and something has to be done to rekindle students' interest in reading.

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a worldwide-recognised study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). PISA examines the scholastic performance of 15-year-old pupils in Mathematics, Science and Reading. According to Mo (2019), PISA reading literacy “encompasses the ability to understand, use, evaluate, reflect on and engage with texts in order to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential, and to participate in society.” Based on this perspective, reading transcends the traditional notions attributed to it and readers not only read texts for private purposes or individual gains but more for public sharing and common good. In short, the focus in reading is to assess students' ability to read and apply their knowledge in real world settings by engaging in higher order thinking skills. However, when we examine the PISA results, it is evident that Malaysian students have not fully developed the above-mentioned skills.

The average performance in reading of 15-year-olds was 398 points in 2012 (OECD, 2014), significantly low compared to an average of 496 points in OECD countries. Malaysia was ranked 52<sup>nd</sup> out of 65 countries. In PISA 2015, Malaysia's result was not listed in the official PISA website because Malaysia was disqualified from the PISA rankings (Pravindharan Balakrishnan, 2019). Although it was reported





that Malaysia followed all protocols in line with the technical standards for PISA, it was disqualified because “the weighted response rate among the initially sampled Malaysian schools (51%) falls well short of the standard PISA response rate of 85%” (World Bank Group, 2017). In 2018, Malaysia scored 415 points (OECD, 2019), which showed a slight increase from 398 points in 2012. Even so, the country is still far behind from achieving the aspiration of being above global average as well as securing the spot among the top one-third countries in PISA. This denotes that Malaysian secondary school students are lacking in terms of displaying higher order thinking skills (HOTS) though HOTS has been given prominence in the MEB 2013 - 2025 (2013).

One of the six key attributes under MEB 2013 – 2025 (2013) is Thinking Skills. Each student needs to be globally competitive by continuously acquiring knowledge throughout their lives and also connect various pieces of knowledge to create new knowledge (MEB, 2013). As such, each child is expected to master a range of important cognitive skills, including critical and creative thinking, reasoning, and innovation. Higher order thinking skills (HOTS) based questions covers 50% in Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM), which is also referred to the standard examination for the final year students (Form Five) in secondary education (Sivapakkiam, Fadzilah, Habsah, Umi, & Rozita, 2016). Teachers indeed play a vital role in the development of students’ HOTS. However, because of either real or perceived constraints, the teaching and learning processes in the classroom may not be compatible with the fostering of HOTS. In Malaysian classrooms, it is believed that the teaching and learning practices remain to be that of teacher-entered (Preece & Adila, 2014), thus, the lack of opportunities in promoting HOTS among students. Fern and Umi Kalsum (2015) argue that the





implementation of HOTS in the Malaysian classrooms is relatively new and that both teachers and students need time to adapt.

Students need exposure to be able to answer HOTS questions effectively. One of the approaches is to give them avenue to write based on their reading as proposed in this study. Teachers can actually implement HOTS through extensive reading. When students read the extensive reading materials, they are expected to argue, criticize or come up with their own views and perspective and not take everything at face value. English language teachers can actually integrate these skills in the reading lessons. The researcher strongly believes that one of the ways to enhance critical thinking is by encouraging students to read extensively and assimilate whatever they perceive in their reading and come up with new dimensions. If students are exposed to extensive reading and reader response in class, they will be able to make their own meaning of the texts by bringing in their previous knowledge and engaging in HOTS.

Another key attribute in the MEB 2013 – 2025 (2013) is for each student to be bilingually proficient in *Bahasa Melayu* as the national language and language of unity, and in English as the international language of communication. It is hoped that students would be able to carry out their duties in both *Bahasa Melayu* and English language environment. The aspiration is for each student to achieve 100% basic literacy in *Bahasa Melayu* and English Language after three years of schooling and by the end of Form Five, 70% will score a minimum credit in *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM)* English (against Cambridge 1119 standard). However, the result of the SPM 2017 English Language was far from desirable as the passing rate declined by 0.3%, from 79.4% in 2016 to 79.1% in 2017. Only 44.6% of those who sat for the paper got at least a credit,





way off from the 70% target set (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2018). Poor performance in English Language will affect these students' chance of gaining employment, as English is deemed essential in the job market (Debbita, Ambigapathy & Paramaswari, 2018; Zahiid, 2015).

The low performance of students in English is certainly a cause for concern in the Malaysian education scene. Measures need to be taken right away to rectify the problem so that the students would be able to achieve the aspirations mapped out in the MEB 2013 – 2025 (2013). It is evident that teachers play a pivotal role in moulding their students to become successful readers (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). In order to do that, they should motivate their students to read as much as they can in English and create such situations in the classrooms. Extensive reading in class can help improve language skills and general knowledge (Nation & Waring, 2019; Lee & Wong, 2017).

This is precisely why the researcher is embarking on this study, as the researcher believes that educators should instil the habit of reading in a subtle way, that is, by kindling students' interest in reading by providing a considerable number of stories that would connect to their inner soul. When this happens, reading would become a natural hobby for students and they would be on a voyage of reading.





### 1.3 Statement of the Problem

Extensive Reading is considered as one of the major aspects in language acquisition and language learning. Krashen (2004) professed that through reading, learners not only develop a good writing style but also possess adequate vocabulary, and grammar; a reader with good reading habit and attitude will then keep on improving his/her language proficiency until adulthood. Despite this fact, extensive reading practices in Malaysia as well as other countries have been declining in the past few decades, and the decline is certainly prevalent among young adults. Most of these students, labelled as 'reluctant readers' (Bennett, 2016), have low interest in reading. Reluctant readers are a problem in all types of classrooms in many countries. This reluctance actually stems from a variety of social causes or pressure on the students. In some countries, secondary school students are burdened with extremely heavy load of homework or pressure to do well in public examinations, so they hardly have time for extensive or leisure reading.

The low level of literacy of the Indonesian students has become a major nation-wide concern in Indonesia (Anandari & Iswandari, 2019) as portrayed by the PISA (2018) results. Erna Iftanti and Arina Shofiya (2018) too contends that EFL students in Indonesian have not established good English reading habits. Over in Kenya, the major complaint in the Kenyan Education System is that Kenyans do not have a reading culture. In many secondary schools, extensive reading has been ignored and emphasis was placed on syllabus coverage (Wafula, 2017) and examinations (Obunga, 2017). Nandiemo (2017:32) too commented that, "teachers are handling students who find reading a boring, time wasting endeavour."





The lack of enthusiasm in reading is prevalent among Jordanian EFL secondary students too as their focus is more on reading for academic reasons rather than reading for pleasure (Banihani & Abu-Ashour, 2015), in fact, reading reluctance is prevalent there. In US, an estimate of 54% of adults aged 16-74 lack reading proficiency as they read below the ideal proficiency level of sixth-graders (Nietzel, 2020). Similarly, the reading habit of students in Malabar, India was not satisfactory because majority of them read one or less than one book per month and spent even less than 2 hours per week for pleasure reading (Anish & Joseph, 2017). Likewise, students in Sri Lanka too only resort to reading when they need to keep up to date with their education background and not for pleasure (Kulatunga, 2016).

Overall, the reading habits of students seem to be on the downside in most countries and the situation is no different in Malaysia. Reading practices in Malaysia have been declining in the past few decades, and the decline is certainly prevalent among young adults. Many students shy away from reading because they do not see it as an interesting activity that not only can fill in their free time but also widen their knowledge. Malaysians in general have low reading habits and many children deem it as a boring pursuit that is irrelevant to their needs (Muhamad et al., 2020). They prefer to use the Internet and watch television (Ahmed, 2016) and only resort to reading books when they are sitting for national examinations and hardly read for pleasure (Mustafa, 2018). Most language teachers not only encounter students with low level of motivation when it comes to reading in English but also those who have preconceived mind-sets that they do not really need to read in English except for their academic pursuits (Muhamad et al., 2020; Ahmed, 2016). Noraien Mansor (2017) asserts that no





constructive effort has been truly implemented to encourage Malaysian students to read more materials in English to improve their language development and reading ability.

As English is a global language, it is essential for one to master it to fit into the real world. For this reason, English plays a significant part in Malaysian Education system, where it is deemed as a second language and a language of knowledge, which can help Malaysians gain better employment and thus gain better social status (Zulkefly & Razali, 2019). Nevertheless, not all Malaysian learners are proficient in the language as some treat it as a foreign language, especially those who live outside major cities and have limited exposure to the language (Darmi & Albion, 2013). Students lack language proficiency due to the present of mother tongue or first language (Kasuma & Tan, 2019; Jayavalan & Razali, 2018).



Many studies conducted in Malaysia have reported that matriculation and university students spend very little time on leisure reading in the traditional sense. These students, from Malay medium instruction and have learned English as a single subject in schools prefer reading in Malay rather than in English (Ahmed, 2016; Subashini Annamalai & Balakrishnan Muniandy, 2013). Similarly, Malaysian Chinese students from Chinese secondary schools who learned English as a subject are more inclined to read materials in Chinese rather than in English or Malay (Mohamad Jafre, Majid & Ooi, 2011). Most of these reluctant readers (Bennett, 2016), have low interest in reading. Due to this, many Malaysian students who have learnt English for 11 years are still falling short of English language competency, especially at levels deemed adequate for employability (Chan & Ain Nadzimah, 2015). This problem continues at tertiary level as many tertiary students are bogged with a lack of receptive and





productive English vocabulary knowledge, poor language proficiency and eventually, poor overall academic achievement and unemployment (Debbita, Ambigapathy & Paramaswari, 2018; Normazidah, Koo & Hazita, 2012). According to Zahiid (2015), one of the reasons why fresh graduates lack employability skills is due to their poor understanding of the English language and communication skills. In addition, dissatisfaction related to the learners' current lack of critical reading skills can be heard from employers who are concerned that most graduates are not able to think and read critically (Achoui, 2019). These problems need to be addressed at school level in order to have students who have better command of the language at tertiary level so that there would not be any hindrance in their academic achievement.

The issue of poor English proficiency and lack of interest in extensive reading among Malaysian students is certainly alarming. The NILAM programme that was structured to inculcate extensive reading habits has not borne much fruit (Zawiah Ghazali & Hadina Habil, 2020; Zuridah Hanim et al., 2017; Navinder Kaur, 2015; Inderjit, 2014; Mohamad Jafre, Majid & Low, 2011). It is unfortunate that despite the numerous benefits that extensive reading in English can offer, in terms of improving word knowledge and overall language proficiency, it remains unpopular in Malaysian secondary education. The Ministry of Education Malaysia has integrated literature as part of the English curriculum to help increase the level of English proficiency among Malaysian students as students can learn both the language and other elements of it, such as, culture, moral values, life lessons and relatable situations. It is believed that learning literature can bring out the enjoyment in learning English especially for English as Second Language (ESL) learners (Arafah, 2018). However, the students' achievement in literature is below what was expected of them, especially in the critical





thinking area of the texts (Othman et al., 2015). Though one of the objectives of including literature is to instil a passion for reading (Atek et al., 2020), it hardly takes place as teachers would resort to becoming the dominant figure in the classroom while the students simply take everything that these teachers provide them, including the answers (Najah Ramlan, 2015). The students do not have personal engagement with the texts and are not encouraged to respond in an aesthetic manner. As such, one way to encourage students to apply the Reader Response Approach and have personal connection and engagement with the literature texts is by slowly introducing the approach through extensive reading.

As aforementioned, the MEB 2013 - 2025 (2013) aims at producing knowledgeable students who can think creatively and critically to compete at the international level and this means language teachers need to incorporate thinking skills in the ESL classroom. It is indeed crystal clear that language proficiency and thinking skills are important and goes hand in hand in shaping students to fit in the 21st century. However, the idea of integrating higher order thinking skills (HOTS) in the language classrooms has been viewed negatively by language teachers (Yoke et.al, 2015). This perception needs to be rectified, as language classrooms are also the avenue for students to process information critically and reflect on their thinking skills (Li, 2016). Moreover, the incorporation of HOTS in the language classrooms may facilitate the production of more critical ideas, at least in writing, which subsequently influences the students' use of language (Gibson, 2012). Azian et al. (2017) believe that Malaysian teachers need to get out of their comfort zone and shift from conventional to a modern way of developing content knowledge in an attempt to promote and enhance critical thinking skills among students. One way of implementing HOTS in the teaching of





English is by incorporating Extensive Reading Programme and Reader Response Approach in the language classroom to enable students to apply, analyse, evaluate and think creatively when they are responding to the stories in their response journals.

According to International Literacy Association (2020), 40% of the respondents from 65 countries and territories, including Malaysia opine that making time for independent reading with student-selected texts during the school day is the best way to help all students grow into strong readers, while, 14% preferred interactive reading experiences where students read independently and then answer questions. Interestingly, the respondents of this study comprised of Higher Educational Professionals, Literacy Consultants, Pre K-12 Administrators and Teachers.



contended:

Valuing time to be spent on independent reading in the classroom makes all the difference, I think, in literacy instruction. If you can inspire children to read and they don't want to put the book down, it solves a lot of these problems! Being patient and finding that key with each student is paramount. (p. 38)

Based on the above, it is apparent that educators should include extensive reading in the language classroom as a means of encouraging students to read and slowly building it up into a practice. Language teachers should take heed of Morrow's (2020) warning, "if schools do not deliberately and thoughtfully entice children to read during their early years, the desire and motivation to learn to read and to acquire the





reading habit may never develop”. Moreover, despite decades of research exemplifying the linguistic and non-linguistic benefits of engaging in ER, it remains underutilized and under-implemented globally (Ewert, 2017). As such, extensive reading should be brought into the classroom as part of the reading lesson whereby everyone in the class will be reading a text or story of their choice. If we continue building the reading habits in students, it can turn into addiction. Eventually, students will show progress in their language acquisition as extensive reading provides opportunities for students to expand their vocabulary, improve writing skills as well as equip themselves with the knowledge of the incidents that is transpiring around them and across the world.

In the Malaysian context, a few studies have been conducted in relation to extensive reading. Some of the studies with regards to extensive reading were carried out in Malaysian Primary schools (Sulaiman et al., 2020; Meganathan et al., 2019), Secondary Schools (Thiagarajah & Razali, 2021; Mahendran & Kalyani, 2018; Narinder Kaur, 2015) Pre-university level (Zawiah Ghazali & Hadina Habil, 2020; Muhamad et al, 2020) and universities Baba & Affendi, 2020; Ruhil et. al., 2019; Debbita et al., 2018; Lee & Wong, 2017; Ahmed, 2016; Aliyah Baharuddin, 2016). Narinder Kaur’s (2015) study focused on the development and implementation of an Extensive Reading Programme to enhance English Language proficiency and motivation to read among Form 2 students in a secondary school in Malaysia. Her study revealed that the experimental group improved in the vocabulary, cloze and reading comprehension tests while the control group did not show any improvement. However, there was no significant difference in motivation to read in both the groups. Similarly, Mahendran & Kalyani (2018) conducted a study on ways to improve Form 4 low proficiency students' motivation to read English books. She used an Extensive





Reading Programme to cultivate the reading habit among the low achievers. The findings showed that the Extensive Reading Programme changed most of the learner's attitude and built their confidence in reading and answering comprehension questions. Ruhil et al. (2019) explored the influence of Extensive Reading Project with the use of graded readers among groups of undergraduate university students enrolled in various compulsory English courses. Results indicated no significance difference among control and experimental groups for pre-tests, post-tests and extensive reading tests. The researchers concurred with (Chiu, 2015) that developing ER habit in ESL University students can be an uphill battle as it is rather challenging to include ER into the formal university curriculum. They opined that it would be easier for teachers to include ER into the timetable. On account of this, ER Programmes should be planned and carried out at school levels before the students step into the universities or tertiary education.



While research involving extensive reading has been carried out as discussed above, they centred on National Secondary Schools (*Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan, SMK*) which comprised of the three main ethnic group in Malaysia, that is, Malay, Chinese and Indian students. No studies have been conducted at a National Type Secondary School, whereby 99.5% of the students are of Chinese origin. Studies related to extensive reading and reader response in Malaysian Secondary schools are scarce too. The aim of this study is to address the above-mentioned gap in literature.

The researcher's desire to embark on this study rooted when she first began teaching in her present school, that is, a Chinese secondary school, also known as National Type Secondary School in a small town in Perak whereby 99.5% of the





students are of Chinese origin. The students in this study live in this small town and nearby villages. They do not have much exposure to English Language except during English lessons in class. Even then, many do not use the language much as they are either shy or unconfident. Most of these students rarely read anything in English except for what is required of them and can be categorised as reluctant readers. Their unwillingness in indulging in extensive reading has impacted their performance in their language skills, especially reading and writing. They are not able to answer HOTS questions, as they cannot give justifications or opinions, and this includes literature questions based on prescribed novel “Sing to the Dawn”. The students are unable to relate to the text, as they are not engaging with the text in an aesthetic manner. They are also unable to come up with points for writing essays. These students lack language proficiency as they always use their mother tongue in the class and the issue of lack of language proficiency due to the presence of mother tongue or first language (Jayavalan & Razali, 2018; Kasuma & Tan, 2019) has been prevalent in the ESL classrooms in the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Grabe and Stoller (2020) mentioned that students bring different attitudes about reading, often related to previous experiences to the classroom and these attitudes influence their motivation in involving themselves in reading and related activities. If these students had been inculcated with positive attitudes towards reading and given appropriate training at school level, they can easily develop potential in reading.

Even though the school library consists of a vast collection of storybooks in Chinese, Malay and English, the students prefer to read only Chinese storybooks. They hardly borrow English storybooks from the school library and their library records are a testimony of this fact. These students have no interest or motivation to read English





storybooks as they find the books in the library uninteresting and too difficult to comprehend. The lack of interest among these students could be because they had their primary education in Chinese vernacular schools and their exposure to the English Language is limited as English was taught from Primary Three onwards only in vernacular schools then. The love for English was probably not cultivated then. The majority of students in this school are of below average ability and they hardly converse in English with teachers or friends. They only use the language when forced by the teachers; otherwise, they use Mandarin in their daily conversation in classroom and outside of it. Furthermore, no attempt was made to involve these students in any programmes to enable them to excel in the target language.

As teachers play a crucial role in shaping their students to become successful readers (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000), they should motivate their students to read as much as they can in English and create such situations in the classrooms. Extensive reading in class can help improve language skills and general knowledge (Nation & Waring, 2019; Lee & Wong, 2017) and the use of Reader Response Approach could potentially enable students to exercise their higher order thinking skills. This is precisely why the researcher is embarking on this study, as the researcher believes that educators should instil the habit of reading in a subtle way, that is, by kindling students' interest in reading by providing a considerable number of stories that would connect to their inner soul. When this happens, reading would become a natural hobby for students and they would be on a voyage of reading.





In this study, the researcher came up with an Extensive Reading Programme using materials downloaded, that is, short stories from the Internet as an attempt to get the students involved in reading in English. The reason why the researcher brought in stories was due to the fact that stories hold a special position as teaching material, especially high-interest stories as they offer a way of making sense of things (Birketveit et al., 2018). The researcher brought in familiar stories to engage the students in reading in English as students are attracted to reading materials that are easily accessible and pleasurable (Birketveit et al., 2018) and this will enable their language skills to improve (Nation & Waring, 2019). The researcher believes that students should be given the freedom to choose and respond to stories of their choice using the Reader Response Approach, as this would enable them to make personal connection with their reading, that is, by bringing in their own life experiences and emotions. They have never been exposed to this approach before and that is why they are unable to answer comprehension questions that ask for opinions or justifications.

The present research is akin to “killing two birds with one stone” as it emphasises the use of Extensive Reading Programme and Reader Response Approach to engage students in extensive reading and honing their higher order thinking skills.

#### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

Research has established that when learning a second or a foreign language, it is of utmost importance that learners receive maximum support in terms of providing a supportive and conducive learning environment, as well as an adequate, meaningful





language experience. (Chan & Ain, 2015). In view of this, the main purpose of this study is to observe the use of an extensive reading programme in engaging ESL students to read and examining their responses to the short stories as in the Reader Response Approach. The researcher hoped that this programme could activate their critical and creative thinking abilities. This would help them to answer various comprehension texts and literature questions that requires them to give their opinion and justifications. Learners would also be able to use certain vocabulary learnt through this programme for other language skills such as writing and speaking. It is hoped that this programme would encourage the learners to be independent and resourceful in their reading in the target language and develop their reading skills in order to empower themselves.

The objectives of this study are as listed below:

- 1) To examine the types of written responses produced by the mediocre and low proficiency students when they are engaged in the reading of short stories based on the Reader Response Approach
- 2) To ascertain the outcome of using Reader Response Approach in the Extensive Reading Programme
- 3) To find out the ESL mediocre and low proficiency students' experiences towards the Extensive Reading Programme





## 1.5 Research Questions

The main purpose of this study is to observe the use of an extensive reading programme in engaging ESL students to read and examining their responses to the short stories as in Reader Response Approach. In order to achieve its objectives, three research questions were formulated to guide this research:

- 1) What types of written responses are produced by the mediocre and low proficiency students when they are engaged in the reading of short stories based on the Reader Response Approach?
- 2) What is the outcome of using the Reader Response Approach in the Extensive Reading Programme?
- 3) What are the experiences of the ESL mediocre and low proficiency students towards the Extensive Reading Programme?



## 1.6 Significance of the Study

Research on the use of Second Language (L2) for reading has been conducted in many countries. As of today, there is very few published research on extensive reading programmes and reader response implemented in public schools in Malaysia. The significance of this study is to examine how Extensive Reading Programme and Reader Response Approach can motivate students to read materials in the target language as well as improve their proficiency level. If students are motivated to read materials in English, they would become lifelong readers and the culture of reading would be instilled in them. They could equip themselves with a wide range of vocabulary, which





they can use in their writing. They will also not shy away from reading other related materials in English and reading tasks will not be an uphill battle anymore. As the Spanish proverb goes, “habits are first cobwebs, then cables”: - if the love for extensive reading is instilled in students and they get hooked to it, then they will turn to be lifelong readers.

Extensive reading and Reader Response Approach can be a stepping-stone to improve their reading skills, as students will not be afraid of reading comprehension passages. They will be able to comprehend passages and answer questions pertaining to it. On top of that, they will also be able to answer questions of higher order thinking skills which is part of the English Language Syllabus as well as the aspiration of the MEB 2013 – 2025 (2013). Moreover, when these students embark on their tertiary education, they will be able to read extensively as constant reading will help students to be prepared to deal with academic texts at higher learning institutions. Extensive reading is a bridge to heavier reading (Krashen, 2004). In other words, extensive reading can help prepare students with the needed competency to comprehend challenging texts.

First, the findings of this research will benefit ESL learners in general as they will understand that conducting extensive reading and recording responses in response journals will enable them to improve their language proficiency. They will be happy to record their responses as they can record their feelings, experience, knowledge, etc. The findings will also provide educators and researchers insights into issues that should be taken into account to ensure students involvement in the reading process.





The insights derived from this study have the potential of informing practitioners in the ESL context about instructional practices and procedures involved when using an Extensive Reading Programme and Reader Response Approach to motivate ESL learners to read. These insights have the potential for underpinning pedagogical practices that engage learners in a meaningful reading environment.

Apart from that, incorporating Extensive Reading Programme into any education programmes involves deliberation, planning, execution and reflection. The results of this study can play a vital role in aiding those stages through insights from the learners as they partake in the programme, and will therefore be useful to curriculum developers, as well as educators and researchers.



### **1.7 Justification of the Study**

As English is once again gaining importance with the advancement of Information Technology (IT) and reading is one of the most effective ways to learn and acquire a language, teachers should put more effort and emphasis in organising reading programmes and choosing suitable materials to kindle and sustain students' interest in the language (Thangam, 2003). The Internet can be churned into a resourceful channel, which can be used to promote reading habits, which in turn would aid language development. Inculcating reading habits is essential as it not only broadens one's horizon but also helps to improve one's language into the more abstract domains associated with increasingly advanced language competence. In addition, extensive





reading materials can be used to enlarge students' vision, foster critical thinking and promote greater cultural tolerance and sensitivity.

Research on the use of Second Language (L2) for reading has been done in many countries. It was found that extensive reading not only helped students to improve their language skills but also changed reluctant readers of English as Foreign Language (EFL) to become eager readers. Krashen (2004) also mentions that "evidence from several areas continues to show that those who do more recreational reading show better development in reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary" (p.1). Success in reading will make students enjoy language-learning experience and realise the values of learning English. In view of that, the researcher felt the best way to encourage students to read materials in English is by having an extensive reading programme in class, as they need guidance and encouragement from teachers if they are to develop a reading habit. It is more effective than *NILAM* programme as students would not resort to copying synopsis or their peers work when teachers ask for responses from them. The researcher believes that Extensive Reading Programme under the guidance of a teacher in class is indeed a small beginning, which will lead to great things, that is a gradual progress towards independent individual reading and learning. In addition, the use of response journals in recording students' personal responses adopting the Reader Response Approach is a stepping-stone to encourage students to personally engage in their reading and bring in their prior experiences to make interpretations move towards higher order thinking.



## 1.8 Limitations of the Study

This study examines the use of an Extensive Reading Programme and Reader Response Approach in the ESL context. This programme emphasises the benefits of the extensive reading programme and reader response as input for learners' English Language learning and skills development. The researcher could only carry out the research over a period of three months due to the students' busy schedule, examinations and various extra-curricular activities. Nevertheless, interesting reading materials downloaded from the internet were used to motivate the students to read. The materials were given to the students and the sampling from only one school, that is, a vernacular school was chosen. The scope of this study was only limited to six students. As only six students were involved in this research, the findings cannot be generalised for the whole population.

## 1.9 Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined to clarify their use throughout the research:

**Extensive reading** is also termed as pleasure reading by Mikulecky (2011) while Krashen (2004), terms it as free voluntary reading or when teachers give students time for reading in class - Sustained Silent Reading (SSR). It is sometimes referred to as leisure reading too. Extensive reading is a prime means of developing a taste for foreign language reading and all it requires is a library or wealth of suitable reading materials.

In this study, Extensive Reading is associated with selecting and reading the short stories placed at a reading corner in the classroom. The stories are downloaded from the internet and some of the stories could be found in the students' mother tongue too.

**Reading interest** has been used to refer to reader's perception with regards to the degree to which a reader enjoys reading or considers it potentially exciting or interesting (Thomas, 2001). Reading interest plays a role in the decision to read and in the level of engagement with the text during reading (Fox & Alexander, 2004). Reading interests is important in enhancing students' success in school and out of it. Reading interest in this study refers to students' enjoyment and engagement in reading the stories.

**Motivation** is the key to all learning and is the backbone of any classroom. When the students are motivated, the teacher can perform his or her job to the best of his or her ability. Psychologists define motivation as an internal process that activates as well as guides and maintains behaviour over time (Baron, 1995; Schunk, 1990). In other words, motivation is the influence of needs and desires on the intensity and direction of behaviour. According to Hall (2011), motivation is a key factor in the accomplishment of a particular activity (p.134). Wafula (2017) contends that availability of relevant extensive reading materials that encourage learners to read extensively can be considered as motivation too. In this study, motivation is referred to the students' attitudes and willingness to engage in the Extensive Reading Programme. My aim is to motivate and increase the students' interest in reading in the hope that their interest for reading will last a lifetime.



**Reading** is a complex interaction between the text, the reader and the purpose for reading, which are shaped by the reader's prior knowledge and experiences, the reader's knowledge about reading and writing language and the reader's language community which is culturally and socially situated (Huges, 2007).

**Reader Response** is a school of literary criticism that ignores both the author and the text's contents, confining analysis to the reader's experience when he or she is reading a particular piece of work. Reader response theorists do not agree with the traditional teaching approaches which imply that a work of literature has a particular interpretation as meant by the author. According to Rosenblatt (1978), one of the primary figures in reader response, all reading is a transaction between the reader and writer (as represented by an immutable text). She further posits that the "stance" of the reader, either "aesthetic" (reading by choice or for pleasure) or "efferent" (reading by assignment or because one has to), has a major influence on the textual experience. In this study, the participants will be adopting the aesthetic stance when they record their responses in Response Journals after reading the stories they have chosen.

**Response Journals:** Response journals are informal, written communications about something a person has read about. These journals can include personal reactions to, questions about, and reflections on what has been read (Parsons, 2001). It is a form of writing in which students make connections to their learning (text to text, text to the world and text to self). Students question, analyse, relate, respond and interpret information from the text to gain new understandings. In this study, Response Journals refers to the students' reflection on the short stories they have read that covers their





thoughts and feelings and presented in the written form. It is a written record of the transaction between the students and the stories of their choice.

### 1.10 Summary

In this introductory chapter, I have described the context and framework in eight main sections. The background of the study, Statement of the Problem, Objectives of the Study, Research Questions, Limitations of the Study, Justification of the Study and Definition of Terms.

Suggestions to incorporate an Extensive Programme in the teaching and learning of English have been made. This move has been done in order to develop learners' reading competence and to nurture positive attitudes towards reading in English. It is essential for students to read extensively in English in order to improve their command of the language. The use of Reader Response Approach in recording responses to the extensive reading materials has also been advocated. This approach was adopted so that the students would embrace the aesthetic stance when responding to short stories in this study. The researcher perceived this as a stepping stone for students to inculcate the use of this approach when responding to questions pertaining to short stories, novel and poems in the Literature Component. The next chapter will discuss the relevant literature review and the theoretical framework of this study.

