

CHAPTER

7

INTERVENTIONS FOR STRUGGLING ENGLISH READERS

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7.1 INTRODUCTION

Aiding young learners who are struggling in English reading goes beyond worksheets and texts. It begins with an understanding of how they learn, the strategies they can use, the way they decode words and how they make meaning.

In Malaysian primary school classrooms, teachers hold the special key to valuable learning data for the learners. Teachers can detect challenges and observe the learning patterns among children. With this direct knowledge, teachers have the power to initiate changes. Teachers' professional judgement matters a lot in assisting learners' development through shaping strategies and supports to enhance the children's learning.

This chapter explores the challenges faced by the struggling English readers by outlining an intervention to help learners develop their reading skills and comprehension. The intervention emphasises the use of reading strategies and how it would affect the students' reading performance and the practice of the reading strategies after the intervention. This study originally stemmed from the low English reading comprehension scores of four Year 6 students in a primary school in Johor, Malaysia. Despite having six years of formal English language learning experience, the students exhibited limited proficiency

in reading. The relatively low scores created an urge to investigate and understand the students' reading practices when engaging with English as a second language (ESL) texts. These findings sparked the curiosity of the researcher to investigate the strategies employed by the students, if there are any, and how the practices were impacted in reading ESL texts. Relying on the quantitative data per se would not allow the researcher to clearly understand the students' practice of reading strategies and their ability to comprehend the ESL texts before, during, and after the intervention. To gain rich insights into the phenomena, gathering qualitative data following the quantitative (data) was taken as an added value to this exploration (Dawadi et al., 2021)

As this study searches deeper into the application of strategies in reading ESL texts by struggling ESL learners, a profound research design is needed to frame the study, specifically the data collection and analysis, to meet the objectives of the study. For this, the researcher employed a sequential explanatory research design by collecting data from two domains, starting from the quantitative data, followed by the qualitative inquiry. Initially, the figures from reading comprehension test scores were gathered, which supported the measurable insights into the learners' reading performance. At a later stage, qualitative information from observation, interviews, and students' diaries was gathered and contextualised to seek a deeper understanding of the students' reading practices. The mixed-method approach, specifically via sequential explanatory design, is often utilised to clarify and interpret quantitative results through the collection and analysis of subsequent qualitative data (Creswell, 2009).

This study aims to measure the extent of the instruction of reading strategies in the ESL classroom and the effects on the English language learners' reading performance. Furthermore, the second objective of the study is to identify the reading strategies utilised by struggling English language learners (ELLS) when engaging with ESL texts. The third objective is to identify the relationship between the use of reading strategies and the reading performance of the participants.

Importantly, these objectives were formulated to investigate and understand the practice of the participants before and after the intervention. The findings significantly contribute to both practical and theoretical implications of the teaching of reading at the primary level in Malaysia, especially involving students who are struggling.

7.2 UNLOCKING LITERACY

This section explores how struggling ESL learners start to develop the essential reading skills. While acquiring the skills to read is essential, the processes to improve and remove the blockades hindering learning are equally vital. By understanding the curriculum and policy, struggles, and past interventions, this section examines the foundation of literacy skills needed by the struggling ESL learners.

7.2.1 English Language Education in Malaysia

In the past, the English language was introduced formally to Malaysian children at the age of five to six as they entered preschool, working as the preparation stage before primary school (Azman, 2016). In Malaysia, the compulsory education starts at the age of seven (Year 1 class of the Malaysian primary schools), indicating that the learner's exposure to the English language extends to almost a decade as they advance into secondary education. Despite learning for six years at primary schools, Malaysian English language competency has always been an obstacle to securing academic success at the university level or job opportunities afterwards (Yamat et al., 2014).

The evolution of Malaysia's English language curriculum, spanning from the pre-independence era to the integration of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), illustrates a remarkable transformation in educational practices. This progression reflects a deliberate shift towards a more holistic and effective approach to language learning, emphasising not only proficiency in communication but also a deeper understanding of cultural nuances and practical