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LEVEL OF ARABIC TEXT READING SKILLS AMONG FORM TWO STUDENTS IN THE INTEGRATED DINI CURRICULUM

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Abstract

Reading skills are one of the basic skills that need to be mastered in learning a foreign language. Thus, in line with 21st Century Education, this article aims to identify the level of mastery of Arabic text reading skills and inquiry practices among form two students in Government Aided Religious Schools. This article is a first phase study which is a needs analysis study of three phases encompassed in the design and development research approach or called Design & Development Research (DDR). The needs analysis phase was implemented by using a survey study through the distribution of questionnaire instruments on 350 forms two students from six Government Aided Religious Schools (SABK) in the states of Melaka, Selangor, and Terengganu. Next, the data were analyzed using GNU PSPP 0.8.0 statistical software. to describe percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations. The findings of the study found that the level of mastery of Arabic text reading skills among students showed a moderately high level with a mean of 3.69. However, based on the total mean of 8 items were at a high mean level, 9 items were at a medium-high mean level and 3 items were at a medium-low mean level. In conclusion, this study shows that there is a need for the development of a model of Arabic text reading skills based on inquiry activities to produce students who master the skills of Arabic text reading well.

Keywords: Arabic Text; Reading Skills; The Integrated Dini Curriculum; Readability; Textbook

INTRODUCTION

The ability of a person to master foreign language reading skills is increasingly important in today's technological era. According to Cook (2017), the monolingual group, in which its speakers or users know only the mother tongue in this era, has become a minority group as compared to the group that knows more than one language. In line with the role of reading as a key skill and prerequisite in the acquisition of knowledge (Yusuf Marwan 2008; Al-Hallaq 2010; 'Isani 2012), the same notion is applied in foreign language reading skills (Grabe 2012 & Eskenazi & Folk 2015). In fact, according to (Celik, 2018), the four basic skills in language learning can only be achieved if reading skills are well mastered.

To further elaborate, (Richards & Richard 2010; Yusuf Marwan 2008) defined reading skills in terms of education, as a process of recognizing letters, words and being able to pronounce them correctly as well as the ability to understand written texts or symbols seen. In addition, (Rumelhart 1977; Richards & Richard 2010) defined reading

as the process of interaction between the reader and the text that involves cognitive activities such as recognizing words and making an analysis of grammatical structure by translating the meaning of words in sentences. Meanwhile, (al-Zaiyat, 1998) stated that reading skills include two (2) elements, namely identifying words and understanding the text read. Identifying words means the ability of the reader to identify words, to pronounce and to distinguish the sounds of letters as well as to know the structure of words such as nouns, verbs, and particles. On the other hand, understanding the text being read refers to the reader's ability to derive meaning from the text. While the process of meaning acquisition involves the reader, text, and context.

Several studies on foreign language reading skills have been conducted such as the problem of English reading skills among Chinese speakers (Li, Tao, Joshi, & Xu, 2017), the views of English teachers in Norway on why students need to read foreign language texts (Synnøve & Elisabeth, 2018) and differences in mother tongue and second language reading skills (Grabe & Jiang, 2018).

In order to achieve the goal of producing students who are proficient in foreign languages, reading skills are one of the elements that need to be emphasized (Roohani & Asiabani, 2015 & Celik, 2018). However, a study conducted by (Vered, 2016) among university students found that mastery of their reading skills is still low. Even scholars with more than 20 years of experience in education at the university, noted that students' weaknesses in writing skills are due to their weaknesses in reading skills (Egege & Vered, 2019).

In Malaysia's educational context, the learning of a foreign language is enshrined in the education act (Malaysia Commissioner of Law Revision, 1996). The tracing of the historical development of foreign language education, especially Arabic in Malaysia, goes back to the practice of reading Arabic texts, which has long been implemented in institutions of cottage education and is continued in the present-day curriculum. This practice of reading Arabic texts is a legacy passed down from generation to generation (Ahmad Sabri Noh, 2017). Furthermore, as an effort in strengthening Arabic language education, the Ministry of Education Malaysia has set a commitment standard under the Malaysian Education Development Plan 2013-2025 to elevate the Early Curriculum as the National Curriculum (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). Thus, in 2015, the Early Curriculum was aligned with the existing National Curriculum and named the Integrated Early Curriculum with Arabic as the medium of instruction.

Although formal Arabic language education in Malaysia has started in 1977 (Awatif Abdul Rahman, Siti Nurhajariah Mat Isa, Norfaezah Mohd Hamidin, & Idi Hamdi, 2017) and in addition, various initiatives have been undertaken by the government in improving Arabic language proficiency among the students, proficiency in reading Arabic texts is still at a low level. This is evidenced by the findings of a study on the mastery of Arabic text reading skills in Malaysia of all levels be it at the primary, secondary, or tertiary institutions (IPT). In general, the study found that the achievement is not satisfactory and still does not achieve the targeted objectives (Ismail Muhamad et al., 2013 & Zamri Arifin et al., 2013 & Mohamad Syukri Abd Rahman et al. 2017 & .Aisyah Sjahrony & Maimun Aqsha Lubis Abidin Lubis 2017; Mohd Hazli Yah @ Alias et al., 2019). While a study by (Mohd Hazli Yah @ Alias et al., 2019) concluded that students' mastery is at a weak level in terms of language components involving syntax, vocabulary, sentence structure, and understanding of Arabic text.

In addition, the findings of the study by (Ismail Muhamad et al., 2013) recorded the mastery of the majority of students in Arabic text reading skills is at a moderate score

(51.57%) and only (23.9%) students are at a high score. Similarly, a study (Aisyah Sjahrony & Maimun Aqsha Lubis, 2017) found that the average achievement of test scores for Maharat al-Qiraah subjects was only 10% to 61%. Weaknesses in the aspect of Arabic text reading skills are further strengthened by a study by (Mohd Ridhuan Jusoh, 2018), in which it is found that the level of Arabic text reading skills of students at the Institute of Teacher Education Malaysia (IPGM) is only 75% which is low.

In line with the challenges of 21-st century education and the Industrial Revolution 4.0, the learning of foreign language reading skills should be implemented based on a student-centered approach and the inquiry approach has been introduced as one component under this student-centered approach (Education, 2005). Therefore, teachers need to be creative in guiding students to boldly ask questions, make investigations, collect and analyze information, share information as well as make assessments. This approach is seen to be able to develop high-level thinking skills, can form a positive attitude among students (Ministry of Education Malaysia 2016a), develop intellectual strength and produce creative and positive students (Education, 2005). However, in the context of inquiry learning, studies show that the readiness of teachers is still low (Nur Farah Diana Mohd Senari & Kamisah Osman, 2018) and teachers are not confident to use inquiry approach in their teaching (R. Mahalingam & Mohd Isa Hamzah, 2017).

Thus, based on the discussion of previous studies' findings, it is clear that there is a problem with Arabic text reading skills which is still at a low level among students at all levels of study, and inquiry-based learning skills learning is less practiced. In this regard, this study aims to identify the level of mastery of Arabic text reading skills and inquiry practice among form two students of the Early Integrated Curriculum in Government Aided Religious Schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are various dimensions of research related to foreign language reading skills. This is in line with the view by (Ta'imah, 1986), where he outlined four main dimensions in reading skills namely (1) recognition, meaning the reader's ability to recognize symbols, writing forms and the ability to link between pronunciation and words, (2) comprehension, (3) criticism and (4) interaction. Knowledge of the dimensions in reading skills elements is important because teachings related to it should be organized and implemented stage by stage and according to the level of student's proficiency. Next, the teacher can focus on a dimension that is felt necessary during the teaching and learning process.

Meanwhile, (Mahmud Ismail et al., 1985; Yusuf Marwan, 2008; Al-Hallaq, 2010; 'Isani 2012) have generally outlined nine (9) dimensions of Arabic text reading skills that need to be achieved in stages according to the level of ability of students, namely: : (1) able to recognize single letters, connected letters and words as well as able to pronounce them correctly. (2) able to distinguish the pronunciation of letters such as the letters of 'sin' (س), 'syin' (ش), 'sod' (ص), 'dal' (د) 'dhod' (ض), 'zal' (ذ), 'tha' (ث), 'ta' (ت), 'to' (ط). (3) able to read aloud by pronouncing letters and words with the correct pronunciation. (4) able to read with correct intonation according to the appropriateness of the sentence. (5) able to read according to punctuation (الترقيم علامات) such as exclamation marks, commas, periods. (6) able to read the line at the end of each word and its icrab (Nahu).

(7) able to interpret a well-read text. (8) able to analyze the words read and (9) able to critique the text read.

McKenna & Stahl, (2015) in the Cognitive Model of Reading Comprehension described the relationship between reading comprehension with three dimensions in shaping a reader's comprehension. The dimensions are word identification, language comprehension, and knowledge of strategies. Word identification refers to the ability to identify words that go through several processes such as fluency, coding, phonological awareness, and basic description of the word. Meanwhile, the dimension of language comprehension includes vocabulary, existing knowledge, and knowledge of sentence and phrase structure. Respectively, knowledge of strategy means the reader has knowledge of reading strategy and knows the purpose of reading whether it is for specific or general purpose. According to the findings of the studies related to vocabulary dimensions, it is stated that a student should master 4000 to 8000 foreign language words to improve their comprehension when reading a text (Laufer, 2010 & Schmitt et al. 2011), While (Masrai, 2019) suggested that low-level students should master at least 3000 words and high-level students with 8000 words.

Meanwhile, a study conducted by local scholars related to vocabulary mastery shows that the level of mastery of students is at a low level (Uraidah Abdul Wahab, Mat Taib PA, & Lily Hanefarezan Asbulah, 2021), (Nur Naimah Akmar Kamarudin & Harun Baharudin, 2017) and the same level occurs in term of the level of readability Arabic texts (Ahmad Sabri Noh, 2017; Kamarulzaman Abdul Ghani, Ahmad Sabri Noh, & Nik Mohd Rahimi Nik Yusuff, 2017 & Aisyah Sjahrony, Maimun Aqsha Lubis, & Nik Mohd Rahimi Nik Yusoff, 2017). Apart from that, there are also studies related to comprehension dimensions (Mohd Hazli Yah @ Alias et al., 2019; Aisah Hasmam, Nik Mohd Rahimi Nik Yusoff, Maimun Aqsha Lubis, & Aisyah Sjahrony, 2017; Aisah Hasmam et al., 2017) which found that students' level of understanding is at a low level.

Based on the inquiry learning model (Alberta Learning Education, 2005; Chu Samuel et al., 2017) outlined six processes of the inquiry model namely 1) The planning phase; the main phase in the whole process whereby teachers stimulate students' minds to arouse curiosity while students are expected to understand the objective of inquiry learning i.e. to develop learning skills for learning. Learning begins with students figuring out what questions need to be explored, how to find the information needed, and how to convey the information to other students. 2) The information-gathering phase is the process in which students think using existing information (schemata), find and collect new information that they have explored, select appropriate information and review the queries. 3) The information processing phase begins when students focus on the aspects explored, collect and relate information, select relevant information as well as record the information obtained. This phase is difficult because there is a possibility that student acquires too little or too much information and may have a problem in fitting information that is too simple to in-depth as compared to their thinking ability. 4) The information formation phase is the process by which students organize, analyze and interpret information. 5) Information sharing phase is the process of sharing findings with other students and lastly 6) the Evaluation phase whereby students should be willing to accept the views of other students and be able to defend their own ideas and findings wisely.

In general, this study aims to identify the mastery level of Arabic text reading skills and elements of inquiry activities among form two students of the Early Integrated Curriculum in Government Aided Religious Schools. The specific objective of this study is to identify the level of students' problems in mastering the skills of reading Arabic texts.

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METHOD

This study uses a quantitive approach under Design and Development Research (DDR). In specific, this is a first phase study also known as a needs analysis study. In order to obtain the required data, an instrument of a questionnaire was adapted from (Ku Fatahiyah Ku Azizan et al., 2019; Mohd Ridhuan Jusoh, 2018; Misbahul Jannah, 2016; Azarudin Awang et al., 2011; Phakiti, 2003) study is used. In terms of sample size, this study uses purposive sampling(Palys 2008; Robinson 2014; Ilker et al., 2016; Ashley Crossman, 2017) involving 350 (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970) form two students from the states of Melaka, Selangor, and Terengganu which have a population of 5473 students (Islamic Education Division, 2019). The rationale of selecting respondents from these three states is based on an interview made with Tuan Shamsul Shah Tarjo, Head of the Islamic Education Division, KPM. on 23 August 2018 who stated that the quality of students in these three states is on par. This is due to the fact that the State Islamic Religious Department (JAIN) which manages SABK for these 3 states has proven excellent management as compared to other states. In addition, the procedure of form-one student intake for these three states is also similar. He also added that continuous monitoring from JAIN also helps in improving the excellence and quality of students at the SABK. The justification for this sample size is inconsistent with (Cooper, 1982) who stated that the number of respondents can be reduced if it is uniformly determined based on the conditions of students' admission to the schools.

The questionnaire contains 20 items that measure students' level of mastery in Arabic text reading skills. These items are adapted based on the basic elements of reading skills (Ta'imah 1986; Armbruster et al., 2006), inquiry (Bruce & Davidson, 1996), and the practice of Quran recitation (Siti Sofiah, 2013). The questionnaire involves 5 Likert scales with a scoring method of Strongly Disagree (SD) with a one-point score, Disagree (D) with a two-point score, Not Sure (NT) with a three-point score, Agree (S) with a four-point score, and Strongly Agree (SA) with a five-point score. The research instrument used in this study has been validated in terms of its content and language appropriateness by experts and linguists in the respective study fields. According to (Palaniappan, 2019) content validity refers to the extent to which the items in the instrument can represent the aspects tested and conform to the content of the field under study. (Palaniappan, 2019) also added that content validity is one category under instrument validity that can be used in pilot studies. In this study context, the research questionnaire was presented to a content expert in the field of Arabic language and a Munsyi Bahasa from Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka in order to obtain the validity of the instrument. Ghazali Darussalam & Sufean Hussin, (2016) argued that the validation process should be implemented to ensure that the items of the questionnaire match the content and are appropriate to the research objectives, other than to ensure the language is correct, clear, and easily understood by respondents. Meanwhile, (Mohd Majid Konting, 2004) argued that content validity refers to the extent to which an instrument can collect data that cover the content of a particular field being studied. Next, to measure the reliability of items in the questionnaire, the researcher used GNU PSPP 0.8.0 statistical analysis software to obtain the value of Cronbach's Alpha coefficient (α) and the overall value obtained was $\alpha = 0.84$.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the results of the analysis of the Level of Mastery of Arabic Text Reading Skills.

Table 1: Level of Arabic Text Reading Skills

No	Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
1	I know the Arabic noun (الاسم)	4.42	0.68	High
2	I know the Arabic verb (الفعل)	4.33	0.71	High
3	I know the Arabic letters (الحرف)	4.25	0.82	High
4	I read the Qur'an to gain pronunciation fluency of the Arabic letters.	4.17	0.87	High
5	I read the Qur'an every morning.	4.16	0.91	High
6	I would ask the teacher if I do not understand the Arabic texts being read.	4.05	0.89	High
7	I read a verse in Arabic repeatedly when I didn't understand it.	4.03	0.92	High
8	I can recite the Qur'an based on correct *Tajweed*/reading rules.	4.02	0.87	High
9	I read from line to line so as to be able to understand the meaning.	3.91	0.85	Moderate High
10	I share information with other students who do not understand Arabic texts.	3.81	0.91	Moderate High
11	I know the reading marks of (علامات الترقيم) and their functions - for example, the question mark (?).	3.80	0.94	Moderate High

12	I guess the meaning of the unfamiliar word forms based on the root word I know.	3.78	1.00	Moderate High
13	I pay attention to the correct pronunciation of letters when reading out the Arabic texts aloud.	3.70	0.82	Moderate High
14	I underline the words (important content) when reading the Arabic text.	3.54	1.07	Moderate High
15	I like to read out the Arabic texts aloud.	3.41	0.98	Moderate High
16	I read sentences in Arabic text with proper pronunciation, tone, and intonation.	3.38	0.97	Moderate High
17	I write/ take note of important points briefly while reading Arabic texts.	3.08	0.98	Moderate High
18	I understand the meaning of the verse in the Arabic text being read.	2.96	0.77	Moderate Low
19	I first read the lessons in Arabic texts before class begins.	2.63	1.03	Moderate Low
20	I read books in Arabic after school.	2.37	1.00	Moderate Low
	Overall Mean Value	**3.69**	**0.90**	**Moderate High**

Table 1 shows the distribution of mastery level of Arabic text reading skills among students. The findings of the study showed that eight items were at a high level of data interpretation. The items were mean value of (4.42) for "*students are able to recognize nouns*", mean value of (4.33) for "*students are able to recognize Arabic verbs*", mean value of (4.25) for "*students are able to recognize Arabic letters*", mean value of (4.17) for "*students read the Qur'an to improve the pronunciation of Arabic letters*", mean value of (4.16) for "*students read the Qur'an every morning*", mean value of (4.05) for "*students ask the teacher if they do not understand the Arabic text being read"*, mean value of (4.03) for *"students recite verses in Arabic text repeatedly when they do not understand them*" and mean value of (4.02) for "*students can recite the Qur'an according to the correct reading rules / tajweed ".*

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Next, nine items showed a moderately high level of interpretation with scores mean value of (3.91) for "*students read from line to line to understand the meaning*", mean value of (3.81) for "*students share information with other students who do not understand the Arabic text"*, mean value of (3.80) for *"students know the signs Arabic text reading and its function",* mean value of (3.78) for "*students guess the meaning of the unfamiliar word based on the root word"*, mean value of (3.70) for *"students pay attention to the correct pronunciation of letters when reading Arabic text out aloud*", mean value of (3.54) for *"students underline words (important content) when reading Arabic text",* mean value of (3.41) for "*students like to read Arabic text out aloud",* mean value of (3.38) for "*pupils read sentences in Arabic text with correct pronunciation, tone and intonation"* as well as mean value of (3.08) for "*students write important points (content) briefly while reading Arabic text".*

Meanwhile, there are only three items shown to be at a moderately low level. These items were mean value of (2.96) for *"students understand the meaning of sentences in the Arabic text read",* mean value of (2.63) for *"students first read the lessons in Arabic before class begins"* and the last item is mean value of (2.37) for "students read Arabic books after school hours".

DISCUSSION

This study is related to the level of mastery of Arabic text reading skills among Early Integrated Curriculum students in Government Aided Religious Schools. The four aspects of these Arabic reading skills being investigated consist of identification dimensions, comprehension, inquiry, and practice of reading the Qur'an. The overall findings of the study showed that the level of mastery of Arabic text reading skills is mean value of (3.69). This means that it is in line with the findings of the study conducted by (Aisyah Sjahrony & Maimun Aqsha Lubis, 2017) on 162 students of the Faculty of Islamic Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and (Ismail Muhamad et al., 2013) on 159 students from eight primary schools.

Next, most of the respondents have mastered the dimension of identification i.e. the ability to recognize symbols, writing forms, and the ability to relate between pronunciation and words. According to ('Isani, 2012 & Mohd Ridhuan Jusoh, 2018) reading out the Arabic text aloud can help students in recognizing and understanding the words being read. However, the results of this study showed that reading out aloud the Arabic text in order to improve the pronunciation of letters, reading tone and intonation is still at a moderate level. This finding can be closely related to one particular factor found in a study conducted by (Siti Nurul Aishah Abdul Hamid, Siti Katijah Johari, Nurul Ain Zulhaimi, Nur Shafiekah Sapan, & Siti Aishah Ramli, 2020) in which they stated that there is a difference in term of pronunciation organs of Malay and Arabic letters that cause difficulties to non-Arabic speakers to achieve almost similar pronunciation of the words by native Arabs. For example, letters coming out of the pronunciation cavities like pharynx (halqum) and uvula]غ] [ق] [خ] [ح] [ع]. In addition, a study by (Kaseh Abu-Bakar & Muhammad Faiz Abdullah, 2018), showed that students are still weak in pronouncing Arabic words with the correct tone and intonation, especially those with medium and long syllables (KVV) and long (KVVK) and (KVKK). In reference to the reading skill objectives of the Al-Muasirah Form Two Arabic Curriculum Standard Document (Curriculum Development Division, 2015), it is evident that students have not yet reached the desired level.

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According to al-Zaiyat, (1998) & Wan Sakinah Wan Ngah, (2016) the concept of reading does not only involve the process of pronouncing letters and words but also must be understood in terms of meaning and interpretation. Therefore, the findings of this study show that the level of understanding of students is still at a moderate level and has a low mean score. These findings are in line with the findings obtained by Mohd Hazli Yah @ Alias et al., (2019) & Nik Mohd Rahimi Nik Yusoff, Sarizan Sulong, & Siti Nuhajariah, (2016). Hence, the issue of weakness in understanding the Arabic text should be a concern and should be taken into account by teachers and KPM because all KBD subjects use entirely Arabic texts as a medium of instruction, assessments, and learning materials.

Meanwhile, items being tested in this study that is related to the Qur'an scored a high mean value. This shows that the activity of reading the Qur'an can improve students' proficiency in Arabic, especially in terms of pronunciation and this coincides with a study by (Syafrimen Syafril & Nova Erlina Yaumas, 2017) in which the activity of reading the Quran with correct tajwid can improve students' proficiency in pronouncing letters and reading the verses well. Students should always be given encouragement as well as motivation to read the Qur'an every day.

CONCLUSION

Arabic text reading skills are one of the many skills that need to be mastered by every student who follows the Early Integrated Curriculum apart from other skills (Curriculum Development Division, 2015). However, studies related to this area that have been conducted previously show that activities that focus on reading skills strategies are less being practiced. Furthermore, it is also found that form two students who study the subject of al-Lughah al 'Arabiah al-Mu'asirah need to be actively engaged with elements of inquiry in their learning. In this regard, this study is expected to be an alternative and guide to teachers who are directly involved with the subject of al-Lughah al 'Arabiah al-Mu'asirah.

Overall, the main purpose of this study was to identify the mastery level of Arabic text reading skills and inquiry practices among form two students of the Early Integrated Curriculum in Government Aided Religious Schools. The findings of the study showed that the mastery level in Arabic text reading skills among the students is moderate. The findings also showed that inquiry-based learning is less practiced among students. Therefore, in line with the challenges of 21-st century education and the Industrial Revolution 4.0, student-centered learning should be practiced more widely.

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