Selection of Malay Language Reading Material Based on Readability Factors

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Abstract: In this paper the author discusses the methods that can be applied to select reading material that is appropriate to the reading ability of students. The old assumption that books or materials that written for a certain level is appropriate for all students in that particular level, needs to be changed. This is because students who are in a certain level have different reading abilities. Therefore, this paper will introduce the understanding of readability factors as one way of selecting appropriate reading material for students. The level of readability for reading materials are influenced by a variety of factors, including the reader, environment and reading material. This article focuses on reading material factors such as clear font size and style, illustration and colour, vocabulary and sentence structure. Further, this article will present text difficulty analysis through the analysis of vocabularies. This paper concludes that vocabulary factor should not be overlooked and teachers must understand this because reading materials can be difficult when vocabulary that appear in the reading material does not fit to the level of the reader.

Keywords: Students, Material, Illustration, Environment, Vocabularies

1. Introduction

Reading problems are not a new issue. However, this problem cannot be ignored. The whole student learning system will be paralyzed if they have trouble reading. The problems in this area of reading are very broad, especially in terms of student and reading material. Problems in student aspects can be seen in terms of intellectual, psychological, physical and environmental. Student intellectual factors take into account aspects such as intelligence, language ability, knowledge and experience (Callery, 2005; Pang, 2008; Perfetti 1985). Psychological factors, in turn, indicate the influence of interest, motivation and self-concept. Physical factors, in turn, focus on pupil sight and hearing. Whereas the environmental factors are related to the location of the student, whether at home or at school (Marohaini Yusoff, 1999: 8).

In addition to student factors, reading material factors can also be problematic in the field of reading. These reading materials factors includes of the point of preparation of the material itself such as vocabulary aspects, long and short sentences, content, story structure and usage and organization of graphic materials (Marohaini Yusoff, 1999: 8). To solve problems in reading there are many ways among them is the practice of appropriate selection practices of reading material. Therefore, this paper will introduce understanding of readability factors as one way of selecting appropriate reading materials for students.

![Figure 1. Three Major Factors that Influence the Readers’ Ability to Read and Understand] (Janan (2011))
Gathering the data from the literature and author’s personal conclusions, suggest three major factors that dynamically affect the reader’s comprehension while transacting with the reading material. Author use the term reading materials as it could be either in traditional text forms or any other forms of text that provide various forms of information. Analysing the figure that the author have developed she has great interest to conduct research into the interactions between readers and reading or text materials. According to Gilliland (1974) studies of matching the reader and the text have been called studies of readability. Wray (2004) states that text is the centre of the literacy process. He has suggested that literacy skills are only useful when individuals apply these skills to actual literacy experiences, and that the main factor in the experience is text. Therefore, the study of readability is important because this concept is closely related to the textual elements that influence the reader's success.

2. Definition of Readability

There are several definitions of reading. However, generally the definition of readability is seen in three main aspects:

i. Relation to readability with reading material,
   ii. Relation to readability with readers; and
   iii. Relation of readability to reading behavior.

Klare further states that readability is used in three ways:

i. To show you a clear and easy-to-read handwritten or typed script,
   ii. To show comfort in reading because of interest or good reading; and
   iii. To show comfort in understanding because of the style of writing used. (Klare, 1963)

Dale and Chall define readability as a mix of interactions between the content of the print that affects the reader's success. The success of the reading results from its ability to understand the content of the material, its ability to read it quickly and find it interesting (Chall, 1974).

Harrison argues that reading formulas will not make a book more readable but it helps us to better align the book with its readers while increasing the likelihood of understanding what we direct them to (Harrison Collin, 1980).

Khadijah Rohani defines readability as a mathematical equation through a regression analysis procedure where it looks for equations that can show the relationship between two variables. The first variable is the sentence structure and the second variable is the vocabulary found in the textbook. The formulation of readability is used to estimate the level of readability of other materials by looking at the language structure of the material Khadijah Rohani (1987).

Whereas Marohaini Yusoff defines readability as a concept that refers to the level or difficulty of a material being read. Hardly read materials are said to have high readability. Whereas easy to say materials have low readability. The degree of readability of a reading material can be measured when it is read (1999).

Later, Janan (2011) concluded that the term readability is defined as a complex matching process of dynamic interaction between the reader and the text factors that are bound by certain contexts. She also propose the dynamic interaction between the reader and the text factors as shown in the following diagram.

Therefore, the level of readability of a material varies depending on the level of student acceptance of the material. The level of student acceptance of a reading material refers to the student's reading ability. In conclusion, predictions of readability of a reading material are made to meet different reading ability among students (Janan, 2011).

Why We Predict Readability

Based on the definitions presented reading predictions are created to meet different reading ability among readers. For example, students in level three, not all have the same reading ability. The level of student reading ability depends on several factors such as physical or mental factors, material factors, environmental factors, family and community background.
Choosing reading material for students is an important part of teaching professionals. As individuals, teachers tend to make mistakes in deciding on the difficulty level of a book. Studies show that teacher decision-making is more consistent and reliable. Although the decisions made by teachers individually vary from six to seven years of age, they are able to read and understand the material (Harrison, 1980: 11).

Therefore, reading formulas provide systematic steps in selecting reading material. Selection of reading materials using this readability formula is more consistent and reliable. This is because selection through formulas only takes into account the textual and vocabulary and vocabulary factors. When it comes to teachers' emotions, teachers' academic status regarding teacher teaching experience is not involved. However, this does not mean that teacher predictions cannot be used directly in book selection.

Factors Affecting Material Readability

Studies in reading have listed a number of variables that may affect the complexity of a text. In this study, the researcher will look at the factors of text difficulty as measured by the variables proposed by Harrison 1980, namely, the areas of writing design, illustration and color, vocabulary, sentences, and text organization. Nevertheless, this article will focus deeper on vocabularies uses and sentences structure.

The writing factor is clear

The obvious factors in this writing refer to the design aspects of the writing. This writing design takes into account various aspects such as font size, font type, distance, distance, page size, print thickness, paper thickness and more. All of this, it is found, can affect the material's readability. Different types and sizes of fonts are required for different categories of readers. The examples below explain this more clearly.
This is an example of 12 point. Type sizes in the range 12 point to 14 point are recommended for seven to eight year old children.

This is an example of 11 point. This recommended as being the optimal size of type for ease speed of reading with adult readers.

This is an example of 10 point. The range 10-12 point is recommended for children age nine to thirteen years.

The example above shows the influence of the size of the text. The example below shows the influence of the type of writing.

Berdindingkanpapandanberatapkangenting. (Times New Roman)

Berdindingkanpapandanberatapkangenting. (Impact)

Berdindingkanpapandanberatapkangenting. (Harrington)

Berdindingkanpapandanberatapkangenting. (Chiller)

Berdindingkanpapandanberatapkangenting. (Funstuff)

Berdindingkanpapandanberatapkangenting. (Aladdin)

Berdindingkanpapandanberatapkangenting. (Gigi)

Berdindingkanpapandanberatapkangenting. (Century Ghothic)

Factors and Colors Illustration

Illustrations also help increase or decrease the readability of the material depending on the way it is presented and used in the reading material. Studies show that children are very interested in reading material that contains many illustrations (Andrews, Jamye et al., 2005: 1). This, in turn, makes it easier to read the material because of the interest factor there. In addition, illustrations can also help readers understand concepts such as those illustrated in science books.

However, the use of this illustration also has its disadvantages as it may cause the reader to be lazy and refer only to illustrations for information or concepts. This should be avoided because sometimes the illustration does not contain all the important facts as contained in the text. Therefore, the reader will lose the important facts that they must master.

The use of color also affects the readability of the material. This is because it increases the reader's interest in reading material. The use of colors other than black and the use of paper other than white can reduce the clarity of the reading material. Studies show that the use of black, blue, and green ink is clearer and easier to read (Harrisson 1980: 19).

Vocabulary Factors

Vocabulary is the most important factor in determining the level of reading difficulty. A study by Harrison 1980, has shown that vocabulary is the most convincing factor in predicting text difficulty. There are many ways to measure text difficulty using vocabulary, but two of the most commonly used methods are to measure word length and word frequency.

Word length is calculated by counting the syllables or the number of letters in the word. While word frequency is calculated by looking at how often a word is used. Longer words are often words that are rarely used or words that are commonly used are simple words because they can be more easily recognized and understood.
The examples below show sentences that contain words that are rarely used

i. Kami sudah berkumpul di rumah pasung.
ii. Bercerancangan senjata-senjata itu condong tegak dengan mulutnya terdedah ke atas.
iii. Fajar menjenguh wajahnya dari tirai langit sebelah timur.
iv. Wajah-wajah yang kuning merah itu ditabiri awan yang berkelompok-kelompok.
(Cerpen Kami yang Terlibat, Usman Awang)

Sentence Factors

Understanding the content of a passage can be difficult when the sentence structure is complex. Harisson (1980: 23) states that the difficulty of the sentence can be categorized into five:

i. Verbs instead of passive verbs,
ii. The process of forming a name,
iii. Verbs help,
iv. Number of clauses in the sentence; and
v. Understanding and replacement.


3. Conclusion

The use of reading material that the reader can understand is the most effective teaching tool. Therefore, providing students with appropriate reading materials so that they understand what they are reading is a difficult challenge. Engaging teachers in the aspect of selecting appropriate reading materials for students can greatly reduce this challenge. Teachers' knowledge of reading will help them to better read.

However, it should be noted that readability formulas are only a tool for estimating material readability. It is not possible to measure things in terms of the density of ideas and concepts used. In addition, readability formulas cannot measure the relationship between what is read and the factors of interest, background, culture and beliefs of the reader.

Therefore, reading should not be considered the only answer to the problem of book-level assessment and determining the appropriateness of reading material with students but it can be used as a first step in finding a solution.

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