

## Proposing My Reading Experience Questionnaire (MREQ) as An Instrument to Measure Reading Motivation and Reading Comprehension

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### ABSTRACT

*The reading experience in the Malaysian context is often perceived and understood as being about reading in specific languages. Particularly, research in the field of English as a Second Language is replete with work on reading motivation. However, in this paper, it is argued that reading needs to be seen as going beyond language, setting reading as an experience rather than an ability. This paper therefore sets out to validate the My Reading Experience Questionnaire (MREQ) through a discussion of the questionnaire design as well as the statistical data validation based on the questionnaire items. From there, reading motivation levels of primary school children in Malaysia is analysed. 544 primary school children aged 8 and 11-yearsold completed the MREQ. Findings from the questionnaire were matched with the Malay language reading comprehension levels of these children. Both the validation and comparisons showed that the MREQ not only gauges reading motivation levels but also reveals the complexities that come with Malaysia's multilingual literacy context in schools. This paper concludes by proposing for the MREQ to continue to be used especially with how its design is underpinned by sociocultural theories of language and literacy.*

*Keywords: reading experience; survey; motivation; multimodality; primary school*

### INTRODUCTION

If the breadth of published work indicates how much formal initiative of research would have contributed to an area of study, the current scope of published research on reading motivation in the Malaysian literacy educational landscape would flag up the dearth. This was uncovered when a cursory check on Web of Science of published work on reading motivation and attitudes showed up less publication related to literacy as a broad concept but predictably shows up research work related to reading vis-à-vis English. In this instance, main key words/phrase i.e., “reading motivation”, “primary school” “young learners”, “reading interest”, “willingness to read”,

“reading English” paired with “Malaysia” were used. A further search on Google Scholar using the same key words/phrase showed up the lack of research work on literacy as an overarching concept but instead predictably, showed up substantial work relating to reading research in the sub-field of ESL (Chew, 2012; Kiew & Shah, 2020; Lin, Mohamed, & Mohamad Ismail, 2016). What this suggests is that in order to understand literacy as a broad concept, some reference to literacy in English will be useful to have. This will be highlighted in the sections below. However, it is clear that broad measures of literacy especially in terms of motivation is necessary to provide insight into children’s decisions to read. One of the ways in which national policies-makers can have a better picture of the literacy practice of young children is through surveys that can provide a measure of real readers’ reading motivation. As such, the best way to measure reading motivation of Malaysian primary school children is through surveys.

## PROBLEM STATEMENT AND OBJECTIVES

Within the context of Malaysia’s educational landscape, there has not been a comprehensive targeted survey that has been carried out since the last major one in 1996 (Small, 1996). Second, where it was carried out, the last major survey set out to gauge the reading habits of Malaysians vis-à-vis the view of the time that was spent on reading (e.g., how many minutes or hours are spent on reading). This assumes that these readers are already engaged and motivated in reading. It also assumes that they are located within an environment that is suited to their reading experience. Third, the surveys usually target older participants as they are better able to answer questionnaires unassisted. Students who have reached an adequate level of language proficiency are inadvertently located in urban areas, where support for literacy has been found to be stronger (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015). As an unintended result of this criterion, it follows that groups of young, emergent readers and even those who may not be able to decode yet, were not included in the previous survey. This situation is unfortunate as it is precisely these groups of emerging and struggling readers that has to be understood. As such, what is urgently required is a survey that focuses not just on whether or how often they read but what and how ready is their dispositions and their environment for reading.

Drawing from research in the field of ESL shows up the following features. First, there has been national plans dedicated towards guiding emergent readers into becoming bilingual readers in both English and Malay language (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2012). Second, English and Malay language are compulsory languages in the national curriculum and are taught explicitly to the students. However, research in ESL indicates that despite the policy, literacy levels in English seems to be lower than Malay (Chew, 2012). Also, it was found that for emergent readers, mastery of reading goes beyond the mechanical learning of decoding and phonics, but must include comprehension, motivation and the cultural shaping of reading as an experience (Kiew & Shah, 2020). Kiew and Shah (2020) suggest for further research to examine reading motivation and learning strategies, especially as they relate to genres and gendered reading preferences. However, this gap requires a comprehensive instrument that can gauge young readers’ reading motivation especially in how reading is viewed as an experience. It is this aspect of reading as an experience rather than a skill, that is of interest to this paper.

In view of that interest, this paper argues that reading must firstly be understood as an experience which goes beyond the boundary of language. For that, the My Reading Experience Questionnaire (MREQ) was designed to measure this experience. Therefore, this paper sets out to

validate and verify the My Reading Experience Questionnaire (MREQ) survey that has its main aim set as the following: MREQ should be able to gauge the reading motivation levels of primary school children across the variables of Reading Motivation, Access to Multimodality, Family Literacy, and Places to Read. The reasons for these variables to be made central to MREQ will be made clear.

Apart from the questionnaire items, the MREQ survey was also designed to incorporate a reading comprehension component within the set. The reading comprehension component was considered to be the second part of the survey booklet. Reading comprehension questions were designed for Malay and English for all school types as well as Mandarin and Tamil for the vernacular school types. This meant that all participants regardless of types of school would have attempted the Malay and English comprehension component. The comprehension questions were based on standardized exam questions as adopted by the schools. For this paper, some data for the participants' attempt of the Malay comprehension component will be looked into.

Therefore, the objectives of this paper are three-fold:

1. To confirm the 4 variables of Reading Motivation, Place to Read, Family Literacy and Access to multimodality in the questionnaire survey with the questionnaire items
2. To compare reading motivation levels of 8 and 11-year-olds based on MREQ
3. To associate reading motivation levels of 8 and 11-year-olds with reading comprehension ability

## SELECTED LITERATURE REVIEW

### READING MOTIVATION

From the selected literature search, it was found that large scale surveys especially in English-speaking countries like United States and United Kingdom became popular instruments that were utilised to gauge reading motivation via reading attitudes of young children to young adults. These instruments typically gauged both how much and how positive attitudes were towards reading in the understanding that they were strong indicators of reading motivation levels (Clark & Foster, 2005; McKenna, 2001; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997b). One striking difference is that the research field of motivation in general and reading motivation in particular has seen significant progress in the West. This is possibly because historically, the education systems in both US and UK are in principle, monolingual even if in practice, increasingly bigger groups of school students are English as Second, Other and Additional language users. This largely monolingual context allows and encourages a close scrutiny of literacy practice of school children that are assumed to be learning and using a shared language which happens to be an historically and internationally dominant one. In contrast, there is far less concerted research and advocacy effort in the eastern, often third world context not least made complicated by the presence of mother tongue language, national language and English as a second language usually caught within a literacy framework that is borrowed from the west, and therefore is ill-fitting with multilingual contexts (Chong, 2021). UNESCO has admitted to "...insufficient attention to mother tongue-based literacy in programme design as one of the factors behind literacy's neglect within the broader international education and development agenda, helping explain why...it has been 'a weak link in the EFA (Education For All) movement'" (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2016, p. 7). As such,

research instruments for measuring and testing reading motivation and ability are necessarily more challenging to design in a multilingual context. This reiterates the importance of understanding reading as going beyond language boundaries.

#### ACCESS TO MULTIMODALITY

According to Kress (2010) the term ‘mode’ in the simple meaning-making sense refers to the actual resource with which the reader makes meaning. In other words, an individual could apprehend writing on a signboard in order to understand instructions. Thus, some common examples of modes are writing, image, facial expressions and sounds. However, Kress goes further to differentiate the way ‘mode’ is understood through the linguistic, pragmatist and social semiotic turns.

Drawing on the social semiotic turn, Kress argues that a social semiotically-informed perspective allows for considerations which not only account for the reader’s context but also how her motivations play a part in her meaning-making. The social semiotic turn paradoxically examines the function of mode by striving to suspend the examination of mode. This means that a useful examination of how a reader makes meaning requires an analysis that looks beyond the mode. “It does not deal with the resources used, the modes” (Kress, 2010, p. 57,). Simply put, the ‘survival’ of a mode depends on how it has been socially-determined and how it continues to be socially-practised. Mode is the resource through which meaning tied with culture, history and context can be made. By extension, multimodality refers to the reader’s experience in negotiating with various modes or resources. Through the social semiotic turn, multimodality also takes into account the reader’s interest and agency when negotiating a mode’s potentials and limitations.

Multimodality also has implications towards reading in digital forms (Rowell, 2012). This is because the concept of multimodality accommodates a broad range of material and types of resource upon which symbolic forms can be presented and meaning can be made. Most common platforms of digital reading is through the use of computers (laptops, tablets) and mobile phones where reading can be done through non-printed materials.

#### FAMILY LITERACY

Theories drawn from literacy as a sociocultural practice argue that reading is not a neutral, decoding activity but a complex sociocultural experience (Gee, 2008; The New London Group, 2000) In this body of work, significant focus is placed on family literacy because it is well-known that children from literacy-rich homes far outperform children from literacy-impooverished homes with family literacy becoming a predictor of reading achievement (Van Steensel, 2006). Aliagas and Margallo (2017) for example examines the experience of reading as a family, using digital screens, but focusing on the young reader’s experience across many reading moments. However, in this current paper, this perspective requires a broadening of the definition of literacy so that sufficient focus can also be placed on gauging the role of family literacy as an influence on reading motivation.

#### PLACES TO READ

Ideas about place and space holds importance for the way human beings experience social phenomenon (Massey, 1994). This concept is applicable to the phenomenon of literacy. This explains why library spaces and classroom settings have become important factors to be considered when reading spaces are designed (Loh, 2017). Using the theory of place-based identities (Wyse

et al., 2012), literacy researchers have explored how being literate in specific places can encourage or even discourage reading . This refers not only to the physical measure of reading spaces (e.g. comfort, lighting) but more so to the way a reader identifies with memories and emotions linked with the particular geography of the space. This consideration is important for how teachers and parents can be more sensitive to the experience of reading when taking young readers into account.

#### RESEARCH GAP

In the Malaysian context, there is not a ready-made research instrument that can gauge the reading experience of primary school students in the way that combines reading motivation, access to multimodality, family literacy and reading spaces through the use of the survey method especially underpinned by sociocultural theories of literacy. As mentioned earlier, a previously published study which used a reading survey in the Malaysian context was very dated and was not premised upon the notion of reading as literacy and as a sociocultural practice (Small, 1996). Also, where there were surveys on gauging reading motivation, it was unclear what the variables and questionnaire items were (Yusof, 2010). In an attempt to broaden the definition of reading as well as to accommodate young readers, this paper proposes the My Reading Experience Questionnaire (MREQ) as a way to close this research gap.

#### METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

Because the main focus of this paper is on the design and dissemination of the MREQ, the research paradigm adopted for this aspect of the research is quantitative in nature.

#### QUESTIONNAIRE AND COMPREHENSION PASSAGE DESIGN

From the range of questionnaires that were examined, a comparison was made across the following:

1. Reading Profile of Malaysians (Small, 1996)
2. Reading habits of Singapore youth (Loh & Sun, 2018)
3. National literacy trust (Clark & Rumbold, 2006)
4. Motivation for reading questionnaire (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997a)

The initial analysis of the above questionnaires drawn from Malaysia, Singapore, United Kingdom and United States showed that variables related to reading motivation and reading attitude were central to them. This chimes with the main aim of reading research in general. However, two issues were observed. First, these questionnaires were not suited for younger readers who may be at the emergent reading stage (i.e. early decoding level). This is a problem for studies that aim to gauge reading motivation of young readers (Stutz, Schaffner, & Schiefele, 2016). Second, language access for reading is less highlighted. This implies that the language that is referred to in the questionnaires was a default, mainstream language that may be accessible to a majority of the participants. However, as our study is underpinned by sociocultural theories of literacy (Ehret & Rowsell, 2021; Street & Hornberger, 2008) where the view of reading takes on more than just the ability to decode and considering that Malaysia is a multilingual country, we

found it important to include the factor of multilingual literacy seen especially from how the participants perceive the language or languages which they consider themselves to be literate in.

For the questionnaire design, the questionnaire items were based on variables that were considered important to our questionnaire (MREQ). Refer to Table 1.

TABLE 1. Features of variables and questionnaire items for MREQ

COUNTRY	TITLE OF QUESTIONNAIRE	FEATURES OF VARIABLES	ACTION FOR MREQ
Malaysia	Reading profile of Malaysian (Small, 1996)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demography</li> <li>• Attitude towards reading motivation</li> <li>• Family literacy, support and encouragement</li> </ul>	Items related to young respondents self-reported attitude and feelings for reading were adapted
Singapore	Reading habits of Singapore youth (Loh & Sun, 2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demography</li> <li>• Access to reading spaces</li> </ul>	Items related to multimodality and reading space and were adapted
United Kingdom	National Literacy Trust (Clark & Rumbold, 2006)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demography</li> <li>• Self-perception of reading ability</li> <li>• Attitude towards reading motivation</li> </ul>	The definition of literacy was acknowledged but the term 'reading' was retained in MREQ
United States	Motivation for Reading Questionnaire (MRQ) (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997b)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demography/Background</li> <li>• Self-perception of reading ability</li> <li>• Attitude towards reading motivation</li> </ul>	The stable questionnaire items on importance of reading and reader's attitude towards reading were adapted to represent reading motivation

In total, 37 items were included in the questionnaire representing the four variables. A brief explanation of the questionnaire items under each variable is provided in Table 2.

TABLE 2. Explanation of questionnaire items

VARIABLES	EXPLANATION OF QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS
Reading Motivation	The items are guided by statements that describe reader's self-perception of reading attitude towards reading.
Family literacy	The items are guided by statements that describe reader's self-perception of the family's attitude towards reading. Family is defined as parents, siblings and relatives.
Access to multimodality	The items are guided by statements that describe reader's self-reporting of having access to digital-based modality like computer and handphone.
Places to read	The items are guided by statements that describe reader's self-reporting of where within the school and home they find themselves reading. Following the theory of place-based identity, the questionnaire items differentiate reading in school from the reading corner, classroom and library in order to see how they differ.

A Likert scale of 1 – 4, with 1 being strongly disagree and 4 being strongly agree, was used. Because the intention of the questionnaire was to gauge reading motivation levels of lower primary school children, some of whom may still be at the emergent literacy stage which implies that some may not be able to read fully and functionally, we ensured that the items were represented in short statements and the Likert scale was represented by emojis that would be familiar to the children. Also, UD Digi Kyokasho NK-B font-type was adopted for the



questionnaire to ensure that the letter type in this font was accessible to emergent readers where the letter ‘a’ mirrored their writing font which is learnt in school. Due to the fact that the reference questionnaires were originally in English, our questionnaire was also initially designed in English, but was translated into Malay, Mandarin and Tamil. After the translation was done, a back-translation was carried out in order to check that the meaning of the sentences in English and the translated language was maintained. When disseminated, the questionnaires in Malay, Mandarin and Tamil were used respectively in National (Malay-medium) and Vernacular (Mandarin and Tamil-medium) schools. The questionnaire was piloted to three primary schools in order to test its face validity and its reliability before it was disseminated to the actual participants.

Because of the nature of Malaysia’s multilingual context, our study also aimed to gauge the reading comprehension levels of the students across the languages they are taught to be literate in (Kiew & Shah, 2020). It has been found that from as early as 8-years of age, research on reading fluency and reading comprehension can be tested and gauged (Abd Ghani, Muslim, & Zakaria, 2020) showing that the more fluent the reader, the higher possibility for comprehension to occur. Abd Ghani et al.’s (2020) work is important to point out that even for students whose only language of literacy is Malay, the reading comprehension ability in less fluent readers was worryingly poor. Further to this, the connection between reading motivation and reading ability has been known to be important for influencing the sustenance and amount of reading (Anmarkrud & Bråten, 2009; Ceyhan & Yıldız, 2021). It is also important to examine how this connection across reading motivation and reading comprehension may show up for those who read in more than one language.

The comprehension questions were broadly drawn from ready-made passages that were used by language teachers of years 2 and 5 in their own teaching. The passages were minimally 59 words long for Year 2 and 180 words long for Year 5. Each comprehension passage was followed by 3 comprehension questions. The comprehension questions aimed to ascertain the reader’s understanding ability that ranged across literal questions to inferential questions. Because the basis of this research cut across the four main languages in the education system, the comprehension passages were in Malay, English, Mandarin and Tamil. Specifically, the Malay and English comprehension passages were given to all students regardless of the types of school they belonged to, while Mandarin and Tamil comprehension passages were only given to students from Chinese and Tamil vernacular schools respectively. In this paper, the focus will be on the comprehension levels of Malay language across Years 2 and 5 students. This is because Malay language is the single common language that is learnt across the national and vernacular schools as it is the national language.

#### SAMPLING AND FIELDWORK

Malaysia is made up of Peninsular Malaysia on the west and northern Borneo on the east. The fabric of modern Malaysia’s society is a heritage from its history. The country’s citizenry is today a multiethnic, multilingual and multicultural one. In terms of the schooling system, Malaysia applies a double-track system that sees national schools using Malay as the main medium of instruction and vernacular Chinese and Tamil schools which use Mandarin and Tamil as the main mediums of instructions respectively. However, the vernacular schools also equally place importance on the teaching of Malay as it is the national and common language of the community.

Perak is one of 14 states in Malaysia. Perak serves as a suitable case study because in contrast with the other states in the country, Perak has among the highest percentage of rural

schools in the country. Out of 845 primary schools in Perak, 75% or 636 schools are defined as rural schools while 25% or 209 schools are urban (Jabatan Pendidikan Negeri Perak, 2015). In the Malaysian context, rural schools are often found to be disadvantaged socioeconomically as well as in terms of physical infrastructures with there being many calls for these schools to be given more attention (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015). Through a stratified random sampling frame that was determined along the lines of vernacular/non-vernacular and urban/rural divide, with a sample of one school for every 60 schools, it was decided that 15 schools would be randomly chosen. Refer to Table 3.

TABLE 3. Sampling frame

	Chinese Vernacular		Tamil Vernacular		National		Total
	SJKC* Urban	SJKC* Rural	SJKT** Urban	SJKT** Rural	SK*** Urban	SK*** Rural	
Total	53	132	24	110	123	408	850
Sample	1	2	1	2	2	7	15

\*SJKC – Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina

\*\*SJKT – Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil

\*\*\*SK – Sekolah Kebangsaan

In the actual fieldwork, 13 schools which were agreeable to the research were finally visited for the data collection. From here, My Reading Experience Questionnaire (MREQ) was distributed to 8 and 11-year-olds of these schools. Refer to Figure 1 for the map of the geographic distribution of the participating schools that were selected.

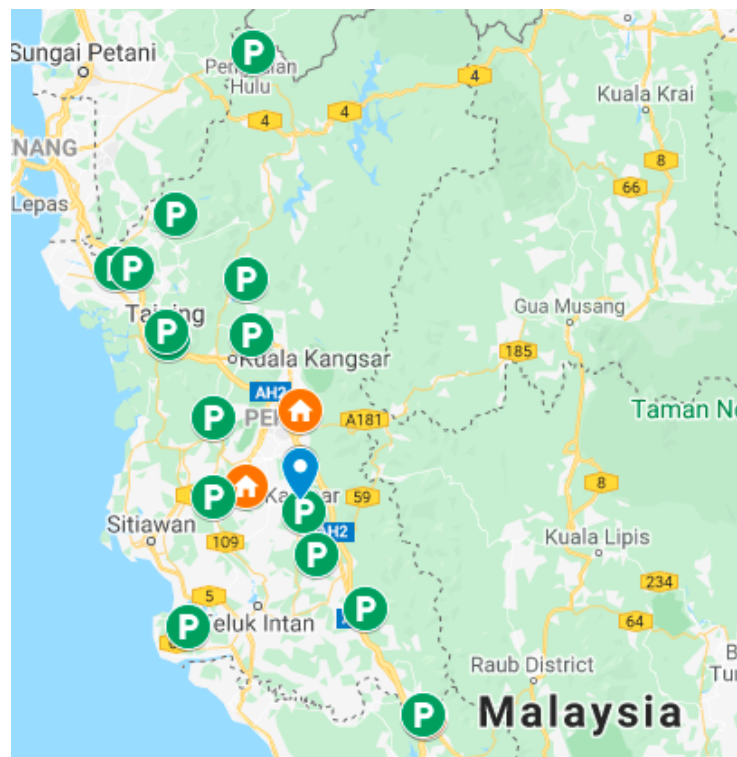


FIGURE 1. Geographic distribution of the participating schools in Perak state (P indicates a school)



## RESULTS FROM THE SURVEY DATA

### DEMOGRAPHY

A total of 544 questionnaires were filled up and collected. From 544 questionnaires, 59.4% were from schools located in rural Perak while the remaining 40.6% are from urban Perak. This is in keeping with the bigger ratio of rural schools in the state as compared to the urban schools. Refer to Table 4.

TABLE 4. Breakdown of rural and urban schools

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Rural	323	59.4
	Urban	221	40.6
	Total	544	100.0

In terms of the type of schools, 56.1% were national schools while 43.9% were vernacular schools. This also reflects the bigger proportion of national schools in the state as compared to vernacular schools. Refer to table 5.

TABLE 5. Breakdown of type of schools

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	National	305	56.1
	Vernacular	239	43.9
	Total	544	100.0

As for the breakdown across the ethnic groups, 50.7% were Malays, 27% were Chinese, 18.2% Indian and 4%, Others. This breakdown does not immediately reflect the exact breakdown of ethnicity groups in the country especially for those from the Indian ethnic group. Refer to table 6.

TABLE 6. Ethnicity

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Malay	276	50.7	50.7	50.7
	Chinese	147	27.0	27.0	77.8
	Indian	99	18.2	18.2	96.0
	Others	22	4.0	4.0	100.0
	Total	544	100.0	100.0	

Of 544 students, 47.1% were those in Year 2 and the remaining 52.9 Percent are in Year 5. Refer to Table 7.

TABLE 7. Year of study

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Year 2	256	47.1	47.1	47.1
	Year 5	288	52.9	52.9	100.0
	Total	544	100.0	100.0	

ITEM RELIABILITY

Item reliability is important to show up the consistency of a questionnaire. In this questionnaire, the four variables of reading motivation, family literacy, access to multimodality and places to read was represented by between 6 – 14 questionnaire items each. The breakdown of the questionnaire items, the average (mean) score, the standard deviation and the reliability value (Cronbach’s  $\alpha$ ) are presented in Table 8.

TABLE 8. Breakdown of questionnaire items, average score, standard deviation and Cronbach’s  $\alpha$

No	Questionnaire items	Mean (1-4)	Standard Deviation	Cronbach’s $\alpha$ (reliability)
<b>Reading motivation</b>				
1	I think reading is important	3.5	0.8	0.78
2	I like reading	3.2	0.9	
3	I read because it is important	3.3	0.9	
4	I read because I have nothing to do	2.7	1.1	
5	I read because it is fun	3.3	0.9	
6	I read because I want to be clever	3.5	0.8	
7	I read enough	3	1.0	
8	I read because I want to do my homework	3.1	1.1	
9	I borrow books from the school library	2.5	1.2	
10	My friends and I share books	2.9	1.1	
11	I read because my father or mother tells me to	2.7	1.1	
12	I read because the teacher tells me to	2.7	1.2	
13	I am good at reading	3.4	0.8	
14	I think reading is easy	3.2	1.0	
<b>Family literacy</b>				
1	My mother encourages me to read	3.3	1.0	0.78
2	My father encourages me to read	3.0	1.1	
3	I see my other family members read	2.7	1.2	
4	I see my mother read	2.8	1.2	
5	My father buys me storybooks / magazines / comics	2.7	1.2	
6	My mother takes me to the library	2.1	1.2	
7	I see my father read	2.6	1.2	
8	My mother buys me storybooks / magazines / comics	2.8	1.1	
9	My father takes me to the library	1.9	1.1	
10	I own storybooks/ magazines/ comics	3.3	1.0	
11	I have time to read at home	3.0	1.0	
<b>Access to multimodality</b>				
1	I like singing	2.8	1.1	0.67
2	I know how to use a mobile phone	3.1	1.0	

No	Questionnaire items	Mean (1-4)	Standard Deviation	Cronbach's $\alpha$ (reliability)
3	I like to play games on the computer	2.8	1.1	
4	I like to play games on mobile phones	3.0	1.1	
5	I read with the handphone	2.5	1.3	
6	I like to watch videos	2.9	1.0	
<b>Places to read</b>				
1	I read in the reading corner in school	2.5	1.2	
2	I read in my classroom	3.1	1.0	
3	I read in school	3.2	1.0	
4	I read in my school library	3.0	1.0	0.69
5	I read at home	3.0	1.0	
6	I read storybooks/magazines/ comics outside of school	2.7	1.1	

With standard deviation (SD) values of no more than +/-2 that is considered to be acceptable, the SD values of all 37 questionnaire items indicate that the data is clustered more closely around the mean. This suggests that the questionnaire items are reliable to test the respective variables. Also, all four variables show up Alpha values that are above 0.67 which is considered to be between marginally acceptable to acceptable in the field of social science research. Reading motivation and family literacy have alpha values that are highest, at 0.78.

Face validity was also ensured when the questionnaire was piloted to a school where the teachers in the school were asked to look through the questionnaire especially in how it appears and its ease of use. Feedback from the teachers were incorporated to improve the questionnaire.

#### READING MOTIVATION LEVELS

The main aim of this survey is to gauge the reading motivation levels of children between the ages of 8 and 11 as it relates to attitude to multimodality, access to reading space and family literacy. After it appeared that there were some incomplete answers for the reading motivation variable, data for these incomplete questionnaires were excluded. This explains why the total number is only 511 instead of 544. Across the four variables, the mean score is between 3.2 – 3.5 with standard deviation between 0.58 – 0.68. This indicates that the students' reading experience is located on the positive end of the spectrum, with 1 representing least favourable experience and 4 representing most favourable experience.

Refer to Table 9.

TABLE 9. Mean score of reading motivation, access to multimodality, access to reading space and family literacy

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Reading Motivation	511	1.00	4.00	3.5	.58
Attitude to multimodality	544	1.00	4.00	3.3	.68
Access to reading space	544	1.00	4.00	3.3	.67
Family literacy	544	1.00	4.00	3.2	.68

More importantly, further comparisons were made across reading motivation levels in terms of the following considerations. First, there has been the dominant impression that children in urban schools fare better academically and therefore read better than children in rural schools. While this may be the case, reading achievement may not necessarily be a direct indicator of reading motivation. Therefore, in this study, a comparison was made across the urban and rural school in terms of the reading motivation levels. When compared across urban and rural schools, there is a statistically significant difference between the mean score of reading motivation in urban and rural schools in Perak. However, the difference is marginal with rural schools scoring 3.4 and urban scoring 3.6. Refer to Table 10.

TABLE 10. Reading motivation levels mean score (Rural and Urban schools)

School	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	T-Test Sig. (2-tailed)
Rural	299	3.4	0.6	.03072	0.000
Urban	212	3.6	0.5	.02842	

This finding suggests that the urban/rural divide in terms of learning and reading achievement is also present in reading motivation levels with those in rural schools scoring a slightly lower level than those in urban schools. Further along this comparison, it was found that those in the early years had reading motivation levels that were higher than those in the later school year with the mean score for Year 2 being 3.6 while the mean score for Year 5 was 3.5. Refer to Table 11. However, this difference was not statistically significant.

TABLE 11. Reading motivation across school year

	Year	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Reading Motivation Levels	2	243	3.6	0.6	.04046
	5	268	3.5	0.5	.03236

The other important variables to consider are the students' attitude towards multimodality, access to reading space and family literacy. These variables are important for how they are correlated to reading motivation so that conclusions can be made from these connections. The data shows that reading motivation correlates positively and statistically significantly with access to reading space and family literacy. This means that these children valued suitable reading spaces and encouragement from their families when it comes to their reading motivation. On another note, the children's attitude towards accessing multimodal and multimedial platforms seems to correlate positively and statistically significantly with access to reading space and family literacy. However, this correlation was weak. On the variable of access to reading space, this correlated positively and statistically significantly with reading motivation, attitude to multimodality and family literacy. Refer to Table 12.

TABLE 12. Variables' correlations

Variables		Reading Motivation	Attitude to multimodality	Access to reading space	Family literacy
Reading Motivation	Pearson Correlation	1	.014	<b>.486**</b>	<b>.390**</b>
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.750	0.000	0.000
	N	511	511	511	511
Attitude to multimodality	Pearson Correlation	.014	1	<b>.124**</b>	<b>.173**</b>
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.750		0.004	0.000
	N	511	544	544	544
Access to reading space	Pearson Correlation	<b>.486**</b>	<b>.124**</b>	1	<b>.560**</b>
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.004		0.000
	N	511	544	544	544
Family literacy	Pearson Correlation	<b>.390**</b>	<b>.173**</b>	<b>.560**</b>	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	
	N	511	544	544	544

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

This finding suggests that in these students' experience of reading, there is a co-dependency between their propensity to sustain their reading habit (represented by reading motivation) and having access to good reading spaces as well as strong familial support.

#### LANGUAGE OF LITERACY AND READING MOTIVATION

With Malay language as the common language of literacy across all schools, it was important for us to also compare the mean score of the Malay comprehension component across the school year, school type and location of school in relation to reading motivation. In this comparison, the following findings were reached. Across Year 2, the reading motivation mean score of national schools was between 3.6 to 3.7 which was higher than that of vernacular schools at 3.5. However, the reading comprehension mean score for vernacular schools was higher than the mean score for national schools. When compared across the schools in terms of whether they are located in the urban or rural area, it was found that urban national schools had the highest mean score for reading motivation, while rural national schools scored the lowest for reading comprehension.

A similar trend was also observed in the data for Year 5 with the reading motivation levels of national schools bearing a slightly higher level than that of vernacular school. The reading motivation mean score for Year 5 national schools was between 3.6 and 3.7 while the reading motivation mean score for vernacular schools was between 3.2 and 3.4. As for the reading comprehension mean score, it was the national school that did better than the vernacular schools. Refer to Table 13.



TABLE 13. Comparison across Malay comprehension score and reading motivation level in school type and location

SCHOOL TYPE	LOCATION	YEAR		Malay score (1-7)	Malay score (1-7)	Reading motivation level (1-4)
National	Rural	2	Mean	1.9		3.6
			Std. Deviation	1.8		0.7
	Urban	5	Mean		4.2	3.6
			Std. Deviation		2.3	0.5
		2	Mean	2.6		3.7
			Std. Deviation	2.1		0.5
5	Mean		4.8	3.7		
	Std. Deviation		1.9	0.5		
Vernacular	Rural	2	Mean	5.2		3.5
			Std. Deviation	2.4		0.7
	Urban	5	Mean		2.0	3.2
			Std. Deviation		2.2	0.5
		2	Mean	4.2		3.5
			Std. Deviation	2.3		0.6
	5	Mean		2.6	3.4	
		Std. Deviation		2.1	0.5	

The standard deviation in this data shows that the spread of the score was wide, thus indicating that within the rural/urban divide, there is further division as far as the learning of reading in Malay is related to either rural or urban schools. This finding raises the question of whether the nature of the wide range of marks may also occur across the national and vernacular school type. When that query was run, it was found that the Standard Deviation was also more than +2. Refer to Table 14.

TABLE 14. Mean score for Malay comprehension component across school type and year

	N	Mean score (0-7)	Std. Deviation
Year 2			
Vernacular Chinese	71	4.8	2.5
Vernacular Tamil	36	5.5	2.2
National	148	2.3	2.0
Year 5			
Vernacular Chinese	95	2.1	2.3
Vernacular Tamil	37	2.3	2.1
National	157	4.6	2.2

In order to match the score with the children's self-perception of their Malay literacy ability, another query was raised. This was captured through a question that asked the students to select the languages they are literate in. The most common language that majority of the students say that they are literate in is Malay, with 79.4% agreeing that they can read in that language. This finding is indicative of the Malaysian education system's philosophy of uniting the nation through the national language. However, the remaining 20.6% did not select Malay as one of the languages they were literate in. This means that 2 out of 10 did not include Malay as part of the language repertoire of reading. Refer to Table 15.

TABLE 15. Malay as Language of literacy

		Malay	English	Chinese	Tamil	Other languages
Valid	Not selected	20.6	51.1	71.5	83.5	94.5
	Selected	79.4	48.9	28.5	16.5	5.5
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.00

Of those who did not select Malay as one of the languages they are literate in, a smaller percentage i.e. 5.2% were from the national schools but a significant percentage i.e. 40.2% were from vernacular schools. Refer to Table 16.

TABLE 16. Type of school vs ability to read in Malay

		Say that they cannot read in Malay	Say that they can read in Malay	Total
National	% within Type of school	5.2%	94.8%	100.0%
Vernacular	% within Type of school	40.2%	59.8%	100.0%

It was important to dive further into the group of participants who did not select Malay as a language they read in. This could imply that they are not literate in the national language. If that were the case, it would be cause for alarm because as the national language, Malay is the common language of learning within the Malaysian education system. In this light, if such a significant number of students seemed to state the absence of reading in Malay in their reading experience, this would need to be further examined.

This discordance in data was further examined through a comparison between the finding and Malay reading comprehension test scores. As pointed out earlier, because the MREQ was also designed with the inclusion of language comprehension tests for Malay, English, Mandarin and Tamil, we could contrast the participants' non-selection choice against their Malay test score particularly. Interestingly, out of those who did not select Malay, only 13% of them actually scored '0' for the test implying that they could not understand the comprehension passage in Malay. The remaining 87% were able to score some marks ranging from 2% to even 100%. Within the 87%, it was those from the Chinese school who seemed to have shown up this incongruence. The implications of this finding will be further discussed in the next section.

## DISCUSSION

The main focus of this paper is three-fold; it is to confirm the 4 variables of Reading Motivation, Place to Read, Family Literacy and Access to multimodality in the questionnaire with the questionnaire items, to compare reading motivation levels of 8 and 11-year-olds based on MREQ and to associate reading motivation levels of 8 and 11-year-olds with reading comprehension ability.

Firstly, the findings from this paper shows that the questionnaire items that relate to the 4 variables of Reading Motivation, Place to Read, Family Literacy and Access to multimodality are generally consistent and valid. This questionnaire therefore can be used as a valid instrument to measure reading motivation in other Malaysian schools. It can also be used in countries like Indonesia as similar notions of reading motivation can be drawn from there. This will be important

as this study has indicated longitudinal research reflecting the Malaysian literacy educational landscape that examines, develops and improves on instruments for gauging reading motivation is few and far between. It also indicates that where empirical research is carried out, there is a preference to measure the experience of older students whether they are secondary or university students (Kaur & Thiyagarajah, 2000). This is presumably because it is more feasible to draw information from older students as young children may have difficulty answering questionnaires. More than that, this implies that only those who can read will be able to answer the questionnaire, while leaving out those who may be beginning readers.

Secondly, findings from the reading motivation score indicate that in terms of self-perception of their reading experience, children across urban and rural schools demonstrate a positive attitude towards the act of reading. With mean scores that are between 3 – 4, which are denoted as ‘Motivated’ to ‘Strongly Motivated’ respectively, this finding provides grounds for educators to tap into this positive intention especially as Malaysia initiates the *Program Penguasaan Literasi dan Numerasi Sekolah Rendah (PLaN)* (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2021). With this dedicated focus on literacy and numeracy, target activities on literacy can be carried out across the curriculum. However, findings from the MREQ survey also suggests that the notion of being motivated to read and having the volition to read can both have a disconnect with the actual ability or skill to read. This indicates that there is a connection between reading motivation and reading skills but this connection is strongest at the early stages. As the reader moves on in later stages, the disconnect widens and the reader runs the risk of being left behind (Guthrie et al., 2007).

This relates to the third research objective that seeks to associate reading motivation level with reading comprehension ability. The comprehension mean score of the participants indicates that a having a strong motivation to read does not guarantee strong reading comprehension abilities. The difference seems to lay in the type of school with the vernacular schools faring better in the early years as compared to the national schools. This could be because of the way in which vernacular schools prioritize the mechanics of language learning and testing because of their added responsibility of having to teach three languages of literacy within any school year. In contrast, national schools are tasked to teach only two languages of literacy. This may be less demanding and may indirectly result in less focus on the mechanics on language learning and testing. However, it is important for both types of schools to consider the connection between reading motivation and reading comprehension. The mismatch between motivation to read and ability to read is potentially what literacy educators need to address so that the gap can be closed. Particularly, the reading motivation of students is well-known for how it declines as the school year progresses (Guthrie et al., 2007). Findings from this study also supports this assumption. This means that literacy educators need to shed the thinking that emergent readers (who may not know how to decode yet) are not yet legitimate readers before they are considered to have the motivation to read. This study shows that the imagined space between these levels may be useful to the actual beginning readers who may be attracted to reading materials even prior to decoding and reading.

Finally, for those who are literate in more than one language, their experience of being skilled at any one language is complexly navigated as described by Vimalakshan and Aziz (2021). This is particularly important to address especially in contexts where a child’s home language differs from school language as well as second language. The range of literacy abilities within one group (e.g., rural/urban, national/vernacular) is wide. This is potentially due to the various permutations of the student’s sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds that mediate their skill level as well as their interest level. This can be seen in the way they individually perceive their literacy

ability in contrast with their actual ability. Definitions of whether they can read in any one language as opposed to whether they prefer to read in the language of choice needs to be further unpacked.

## CONCLUSION

The notion of reading motivation is complex in a multilingual country like Malaysia where differences exist in terms of the mediums of instruction adopted by the schools the students attend. The MREQ survey was designed from a posture that is sensitive to the view of reading as a sociocultural practice. Particularly, this meant that the researchers wanted to spotlight and streamline the variables that could link reading motivation with access to multimodality, places to read and strong family literacy. By this, it implies that understood as a sociocultural practice, the potential reader's desire to read may be present even if the ability to decode may not be strong since there is more to reading than decoding.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work and its continued extension is supported by the generous funding from Yayasan Universiti Teknologi PETRONAS, Malaysia, from Petroleum Research Fund (PRF) with the cost center of 015LC0-191. Early findings of the research was also supported by Fundamental Research Grant Scheme provided by Ministry of Higher Education (FRGS/1/2018/SS109/UTP/02/01).

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