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Exploring the Fluency in Reading among Rural Primary School Students and Parents' Role

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ABSTRACT

Reading is one of the foremost components in English education that determines the general level of English mastery as well as the literacy level in the respective language. However, there is a gap between the fluency of reading in the rural readers who reside in the countryside and their urban counterparts. The main focus of this research is to explore the fluency of reading English text among the students of rural primary schools, as well as the role played and influence of the parents in this matter. This research employs a qualitative approach that provides a ranged discussion on the topic of concern. The researcher uses thematic analysis, which is intended to compare and find intertwining patterns of background as well as fluency in reading, which consists of word recognition and reading intonation among the targeted participants in rural areas in Pahang. The results of the data convey that the fluency of reading among rural primary school students is below a satisfactory level in terms of speed of reading, word recognition and rhythm. This is, to an extent, influenced by the roles of the parents. They could not encourage their children to be fluent readers due to their own lack of English proficiency, inability to be present for reading activities and the constraints of financial aspects. The findings suggest the awareness and importance of the roles of parents in enhancing fluency in reading at a young age, hence further promoting literacy, especially in rural Malaysia.

Keywords: Fluency of Reading; Rural Readers; Reading Activities; Word Recognition; Speed of Reading; Rhythm

1. Introduction

1.1. Overview of Reading Practices in Relation to Literacy

Reading is broadly defined as the interaction between a reader and symbols that involves the interpretation of meaning to build up comprehension. To simply define reading, it is the process of viewing a series of symbols and deriving meaning from them. Lately, the process of reading has been added some description, in which the active process of assembling meaning from the reading process involves not only the reader's linguistic knowledge but also schema such as background knowledge[1]. Reading, a major part of literacy, is a lifelong process and linearly developing; it consists of five stages of development[2]. The first stage is that of the emergent pre-readers, which involves the exposure to sounds, letters, words and images for young readers to initiate their development of reading skills.

The second stage is called novice readers, which usually involves children six to seven years old. In this stage, the children begin to learn the relationship between letters and sounds and read short sentences in books to learn pronunciations. The third stage comprises decoding readers, where the reader is capable of reading short words and sentences with fluency, recognizing patterns in words and looking for meaning. Next, readers who have progressed to the comprehending phase will begin to seek knowledge by reading textbooks and newspapers with an intermediate level of sentential difficulty. Finally, the fifth phase is called expert readers, who will be able to read broadly across the disciplines, including the physical, biological and social sciences as well as the humanities, politics and current affairs.

Fluency in reading could be a major determinant of readers' other literacy components, where fluency skills have a relationship with reading comprehension and accuracy in writing[3]. Components of fluency in reading that consist of speed could be parallel to the accuracy in writing and the articulacy in speaking. Most importantly, fluency in reading greatly contributes to reading comprehension, where comprehension is the primary goal of reading, and deprived vocabulary aspects could heavily impact the command of understanding of the text[4]. Fluency in reading also mirrors the readers' speaking literacy, where the utterance of words in communication could be harder than pronouncing the words in a text, and shows the capability of said literacy component.

Hence, it is considered as a foundation for overall literacy that also helps language acquisition where the learner is exposed to vocabulary and grammar discourse within the written text. With the aid of oral language skills in reading, the reading process would be more effective when the learner comprehends the purpose of each word used and the syntactic arrangement of phrases in sentences to show passive/active sense in the text. To illustrate one of the efforts to build the aforementioned foundation via reading 'read-alouds' that emphasizes interactivity in schools are imperative, as teachers play a crucial role in determining the fluency of reading the communicative aspects of the targeted language[5]. Overwhelmingly, reading literacy development, as the foremost literacy component, is commences through the learner's ability to make sense of the sound of words, the syntactic purposes of each sentence, knowledge of the writing conventions of the text, as well as the fluency of the process.

Reading literacy development at an early age also involves specific skills such as fluency in reading, phonological awareness, print knowledge and oral language skills. Fluency in reading conveys the ability to read the textual content precisely, quickly and with expression to portray comprehension, where complex processes such as sight word fluency (swift decoding of a word seen in a text), decoding fluency, vocabulary, processing rate and letter-sound fluency accumulate to form distinguished fluency in reading.

For instance, a relatively fluent reader will most likely read through a simple passage with no major problems within a moderately short period. Moreover, fluency in reading heavily involves psychological aspects within the scope of cognition and is also a product of simultaneous decoding and understanding at the same time. This array of skills often develops at a young age simultaneously with emergent literacy effectively with thorough supervision which is commonly seen in the form of parental support[6].

1.2. Reading Practices in Rural Malaysia

The issue of low to below-average literacy levels of reading English texts in Malaysia has been a prolonged issue commonly found in local schools and universities, where students are still struggling to read in English. One of the

core factors of the aforementioned issue traces back to the students' early reading development prior to school, where parental factors play a major role in dictating the pathway towards early reading literacy levels to further develop in formal schooling. For instance, it has been broadly perceived that students are expected to have a certain literacy level before progressing to the stages of education, hence proving that home literacy development at an early age is one of the crucial prerequisites before progressing to primary school[7]. Thus, appropriate development of reading skills supports the determination of success in the curriculum as well as being crucial to improving other areas, such as mathematics, cognitive skills, and vocabulary development.

The inability to read in English with satisfactory appropriateness in school could result in the impediment of students' motivation and attitude towards school and the language per se. In rural Malaysia, the lack of early development of reading English has caused an issue, where students used to struggle to learn science and mathematics in English prior to the abolition of Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran Sains dan Matematik dalam Bahasa Inggeris (PPSMI)[8]. The scenario is similarly seen in some cases, where some students transitioning to tertiary level find it difficult to shift from school learning culture to university/college learning culture as well as the content of academic texts[9]. Through reading, not only can a reader acquire new knowledge, but they can learn about the insights behind the writing pattern and the knowledge behind the books. This could also make the reader more critical and attentive in terms of thought processes and ideas[10].

For example, good English communication skills at the workplace are portrayed as the ability to convey and receive information clearly to resolve conflicts in certain contexts and employers, especially in the private sector, seek candidates with a better command of English to engage in their services, presentations and marketing. It is a responsibility for all parties to support children, especially the marginalized ones in rural areas, to close the gap of disparities in terms of literacy levels all across Malaysia to progress towards a better nation; literate and competent citizens. Hence, this research endeavors to explore the types of collaborative efforts among multiple parties to mitigate the socioeconomic factors that affect young readers at schools.

1.3. The Fundamentals of Reading as a Literacy Component

Reading is fundamental to improving various aspects that cover individuals, localities and the nation. However, the problem that impedes reading achievement in Malaysia heavily revolves around illiteracy, which relates to social problems such as poverty or marginalization. Hence, the aforementioned role of reading in general growth is not consistent, where the extent of the 'connection' between students and teachers is ineffective and inadequate[11]. Literacy in terms of reading English texts is imperative, as it further inculcates writing and other communication skills as well as overall language proficiency. To further illustrate, the aforementioned aspects of literacy in reading are found unsatisfactory among students reared in poverty, such as in most rural areas in Malaysia[12].

This is emphasized by the fact that mastery of reading skills in the first few years of schooling is imperative to determine the overall educational outcome[13]. All in all, one of the main causes of unsatisfactory literacy levels among Malaysian learners is that it is learned and developed as a set of skills, not as a social practice that connects to the real-world context[14]. Moreover, it could also further promote literacy as an autonomous skill in the future.

In terms of the relationship between fluency and comprehension in reading, most struggling learners could neither read fluently with acceptable rapidity, accuracy, and prosody nor could they read silently with comprehension[15]. According to the respective researchers, low-performing learners would be tasked with two different processes of reading, where decoding (pronouncing the word) and comprehending practices would not combine into one linear and instantaneous process. To illustrate, the learners would focus on figuring out how to pronounce the words first before understanding their contextual meaning; hence, the automaticity is seen as far-fetched and ineffective. Moreover, the lack of facilitation from external parties would also cause the students to be slow, inaccurate and ineffective readers.

Students in Malaysia go through 11 years of schooling and learning English but the level of English literacy is still a problem. The researchers mentioned that the problem of low performance in English literacy components could still be seen among students even at the tertiary level and could

continue without any much-needed interventions. Several local researchers have noticed and supported that the problems could mainly lie in the practice of literacy per se, where the paradox between views and practice of literacy is seen. English, in most areas, especially in rural areas of Malaysia, is not seen as a lifelong skill, but rather just a language learned to pass examinations [16].

Hence, the initial mindset in regards to the language does not align with the true potential of English literacy, especially the benefits of reading in that particular language. For instance, most students in rural areas would give up instantly when they are asked to read texts in English, citing fluency and incomprehension due to the lack of context as the main reasons, which limits the development process prematurely [17]. This is further emphasized by the fact that mastery of reading skills in the first few years of schooling is imperative to determine the overall educational outcome [18]. The overwhelming elements that influence the problem are characterized into two: internal factors that highlight the reader's psychological aspects or state as well as external factors that involve socioeconomic status and social environment.

Various researchers have also highlighted the effort of mitigating illiteracy problems and improving reading quality throughout the world. It is claimed that voluntary readers in many different countries have reported an increase in vocabulary, improvement in writing style, as well as the development of grammatical aspects [19]. It is similar in Japan, a country that views English as a foreign language rather than a second language, where participants reported better language skills and strategies learned via voluntary and extensive reading [20]. In Malaysia, the common contributing setbacks to the low proficiency of English among Malaysians are due to multiple factors, such as the strong influence of Bahasa Malaysia at home and the local environment, especially in rural areas [21].

Moreover, home literacy could also dictate the students' reading capabilities at school. To exemplify, the lack of adequate home literacy could prove to be problematic in terms of reading at school, where it affects the students' competence in all subjects. The incompetence of reading in English, such as not being able to understand the meaning of the texts, results in ineffective learning outcomes and low grades in examinations [22]. Furthermore, students who are illiterate in reading English texts, for example, throughout primary school, could

not meet the 'requirement' or expectancy to progress to the next level of English proficiency, thus prolonging the deficiency of growth for reading literacy [23]. One of the reasons for this problem is that the students do not employ the strategies that require them to be analytical and critical, in which the role of teachers in the process of teaching reading skills is seen to be imperative. All in all, without the needed guidance or facilitation from the teachers and parents, developing learners could not use their contextual knowledge to figure out the meaning behind English sentences, which impedes their literacy growth.

1.4. A Review of Past Studies

Fluency in reading is a matter that has been considered a center of attention in recent years. Fluency in reading is often defined as the proper process of understanding connected text at an adequate degree with appropriate prosody and is often measured as a combination of rate and accuracy—the number of correct words read aloud in one minute [24]. To further clarify, fluency in reading is also portrayed via the combination between the accuracy of pronunciation and the degree of rate per word, which is the number of precise words pronounced per minute. Fluency of reading is, heavily revolving around prosody, also described as the observance of the reader's expressiveness and syntactical accuracy in reading [25].

Alternatively, fluency of reading is described as 'breaking words down' as well as interpreting in a linear process and further added that the degree of rate per word and accuracy are the signs that mirror the reader's fluency [26]. All in all, the aforementioned fluency is a concept that is complex in nature and multi-layered.

Conceptually speaking, proficient reading is mostly about accuracy and efficiency and occurs at a reasonable speed, which of course depends on the text, that yields upright comprehension. The definitions above in accordance with various scholars, emphasize the multi-layered scopes of fluency in reading that are embodied in proficient readers. However, researchers emphasized more on the 'comprehension' part rather than the accuracy of reading as proposed by other scholars [26]. The researcher also justified that prosody (expressiveness in reading) mirrors more of the reader's comprehension rather than being able to pronounce the word correctly. For instance, if the reader's tone of reading 'aligns'

with the setting/content of the text, it shows that the reader is immersed in the process.

In other words, it is implied that being able to read does not completely embody the fluency of reading per se.

Similarly, in Malaysia, recognition of English words does not portray comprehension among readers, where most students can pronounce the words but seldom understand the context of their reading. Hence, this conforms to Daane's abovementioned claim where the rate of word/recognition does not mirror comprehension. Alternatively, spelling errors among Malaysian learners are very common and the learners would confuse the sound and the spelling of the words encountered. In short, commonly found spelling-to-pronunciation errors consisted of 'nock' for knock and 'fasen' for 'fasten'.

In order to examine the fluency of reading in English in rural Malaysia, this research also endeavors to examine the origins of the language per se and its legacy throughout the timeline of the country in terms of education, policy and issues that arose. For instance, the lack of fluency in reading English contexts and comprehension caused a major policy change in the education of the country. Hence, the history and social aspects that surround the language played a major role in determining the current state of fluency in reading in the country, which will be discussed further in the next subsections.

1.4.1. The Relationship between Socioeconomic and English Literacy

Apart from education as a part of human capital, it is also imperative to measure the extent of the correlation between socioeconomic status and language competency among marginalized learners. Generally, a family with a steady income would likely be a major influence on their children's performance in school, in which they are provided with sufficient support in terms of financial aspects[24]. This situation is inversely in contrast to those families who are marginalized in terms of socioeconomics, where the affected children are deprived of materials and a productive environment for proper educational development, where the parents are not good role models for their children to refer to in terms of parental environmental influences to dictate their course of learning[23].

Another study that reviews the extent of low socioeconomic status' impacts on learners' performance illustrates lower literacy and competency levels, negative behavior in class and lower retention rates compared to their privileged counterparts[21]. The marginalized students would be unlikely to be literate in terms of reading/writing and also in areas such as technology and multimodality applied in recent learning pedagogies. Hence, they will be left out due to illiteracy, creating inhibitions and major impediments that obstruct them from progressively developing in classrooms.

This is also due to psychological factors, where socioeconomic status can affect physical and mental aspects among students, in which language development among marginalized learners is likely to be obstructed by the aforementioned financial setbacks. For example, poverty can decrease functionality in their "perisylvian" area in which language is concerned, hence resulting in the decrease of phonemic awareness skills, vocabulary and syntax[4].

Hence, the development of their literacy components such as phonemic awareness, fluency, and vocabulary will not be fully developed to achieve the adequate level of literacy as preparation for higher education and employment. According to the respective researchers, poverty has the likeliest balance of probability to create a stressful condition for mental health, and this can further create impediments in terms of language learning such as self-consciousness and demotivation that are complementary to the aforementioned negative setbacks. Henceforth, language learning aspects are heavily dependent on executive functioning and memory and are quite prone to stress and demotivation, resulting in a lack of overall language development and competency.

To further illustrate, poverty also creates considerably bad cognitive and negative linguistic behavior towards a language[8]. Marginalized students are most likely to possess limited vocabulary within their mental lexicon, unable to compose or comprehend complex sentence structures and develop an unproductive stance towards language lessons in the classroom. To further exemplify, children aged 4 and below who come from poor families generally have heard of thirty million words fewer than their affluent counterparts[14].

This will also create another chain effect such as readiness for school, which dictates the trajectory of future processes and outcomes outside of classrooms, where most marginalized students are deprived[14]. Moreover, it also creates long-term and sustainable negative outcomes for future children if the low socioeconomic level among marginal-

ized families is not alleviated, in which their children would not be nurtured with early reading habits and discouraged from strong and solid work ethics, thus demonstrating less in terms of language competency [9]. Hence, it can be concluded based on the research above that students reared in poverty exhibit less in terms of language literacy and competency than their more privileged peers in classrooms.

The literacy components/aspects such as phonemic awareness, comprehension level and vocabulary among marginalized students are in significant disparity compared to their privileged counterparts. In a nutshell, the relationship between socioeconomic status and language performance is direct, and factors such as financial readiness and the ability to supply learning resources will both directly and indirectly cause hindrances to language development and performance [19].

1.4.2. Students in Rural Areas and Literacy

Student factors are one of the core trajectories that dictate the outcomes of a learning process, in which it is imperative to examine the potential factors that act as obstructions to the expected products of learning. Marginalized students, in general, should be administered to examine their preferred learning styles, language strategies and emotional intelligence [15]. If these components are not addressed, poverty can inflict prolonged absence in class, disciplinary issues and hopelessness among students, increasing the risk of dropping out of school [14]. Apart from that, internal as well as external factors influenced by poverty that contribute to the impediment of language development and illiteracy should be measured in order to propose a suitable model to apprehend the aforementioned setbacks. Commonly, most marginalized students are limited in terms of school facilities and suitable pedagogies for facilitating an equally conducive learning environment compared to those who are more affluent [23].

This scenario correlates to the abovementioned human capital theory, where external factors such as infrastructure and proper learning materials play a major role in determining the conduciveness of the learning environment and both indirectly and directly regulate the student factors in learning in a classroom. Other than that, this has also resulted in less exposure within the boundary of literacy in terms of learning accessibility such as modern, up-to-date e-books and digital equipment for a more refined way for language acquisition and computers to learn interactively [27].

Teachers are also a factor, where low-quality teachers, commonly found in rural areas, are not ideal for marginalized students to refer to [28]. Digitally illiterate teachers, for instance, are not good role models for students to learn how to improve their language using modern and interactive mediums in instruction, and thus, the initiative to address illiteracy among marginalized students cannot be proposed through illiterate teachers.

Marginalized students should also be individually assessed in terms of their internal factors and inclination of multiple intelligences in order to specify the common individual obstructions in their learning process Emotional intelligence is one of the multiple intelligences, which consists of feelings and moods that influence their interpersonal ability in communication and language [29].

Determining their intelligences and preferred learning styles will provide insights and initiatives on how to provide suitable modules/guidelines in the teaching process that meet the marginalized students' needs [14]. Moreover, multimodal learning activities that comprise a large variability of learning preferences could be applied in order to increase motivation and further address the multiple diversities in learning style preferences in a varied class that consists of marginalized students. The marginalized students need to be addressed in terms of their motivation, feelings and inhibitions in order for them to alleviate the obstructions in terms of student factors. Hence, all of the factors mentioned above, both internal and external, should be considered by instructors in order to provide specialized instructional methods that conform to the marginalized students' needs [30].

1.5. Research Objectives and Hypothesis

The students' fluency in reading as well as the role played by the parents in shaping the fluency in reading were investigated. The research objectives of the study are as follows:

- To investigate the parental roles in developing fluency in reading among primary school learners in rural Malaysia
- To explore the fluency of reading in English among primary school learners in rural Malaysia

It is deduced that the parents play a fundamental role in shaping reading capabilities for their children. Factors such

as socioeconomic aspects, availability of materials and learning initiatives that contribute to determining the effectiveness of the role would serve as some of the major foundations in their children's fluency in reading.

2. Method

Qualitative procedures provide a comprehensive discussion on the topic of concern, where the research involves exploring an issue of concern in a situated area and the members in it. Hence, this research employs a qualitative approach to embark on a case study to discover the fluency of reading among primary school learners as well as the parents' role in determining the aforementioned fluency in a rural district in Pahang.

2.1. Participants

Most of the parents work as farmers, rubber tappers, mechanics and small shopkeepers. They live in a neighborhood that is sporadic in terms of proximity and the number of community members is also limited and isolated. This is due to the remote area in which accessibility and contact are restricted due to the lack of infrastructure and road connections. The chosen primary school learners were in their Standard 4, where they have been through multiple years of schooling and are suitable to measure reading proficiency; fluency, rhythm accuracy and word recognition.

2.2. Sampling Procedures

The data of the research is collected via multiple interview sessions as well as observations with 5 families in Kampung Bukit Rok, a rural village in Bera. Moreover, the research is also carried out in Kampung Tebing Tembah, another rural district in Pahang, which involves another 5 families of similar milieu. To elaborate, all of the chosen families share the same background; their children's schooling level, occupation, monthly income and neighborhood. An interview is an instrumentation that is a form of conversation by asking questions to produce information.

In contrast to quantitative instrumentation, interviews are inclined towards personalization rather than generalization, where the data are interpreted individually. In this case study, the researcher works directly with the interviewees,

which consist of two different groups of participants; primary school learners and parents. The interview consists of open-ended questions relating to the research concerns and is reciprocated by participants with unconstrained responses from their authentic input.

The primary school learners were observed throughout a reading-out-loud session. To elaborate on the process of gaining the impression of the participants' fluency, the present researcher required the students to read multiple simple sentences that are taken from a storybook. The justification for the selected material is that the book is suitable for beginner readers and consists of easy to intermediate levels of sentential difficulty. The sentences chosen consisted of both easy and intermediate levels of difficulty for the participants to read. Hence, the data regarding speed of the reading, word recognition, and rhythm were collected.

2.3. Data Analysis

For the analysis of data collected from each interview session, the researcher uses thematic analysis, which are aimed to compare and find intertwining patterns from the collection of data. First, the researcher familiarized with the data by transcribing the audio recording into written text to get an actual overview of the raw data. The data were transcribed, coded and assigned into themes in accordance with parental involvement[31] and automated fluency in reading[32]. Parental involvement includes the provision of things such as health, housing, and home environment to support their studies, and parental skills in parent-child associations, whereas automated fluency in reading alludes to a person's ability to recognize and process information with fewer efforts. This theory has been used to determine the ability of a student to look at words and read them without thinking (fluent readers).

2.4. Limitation of the Study

The research encountered a number of challenges that limit the scope of the study. The participants in the targeted location mainly consist of Malay residents, which is the entirety of the racial percentage. Hence, factors such as race could yield different angles in terms of data collection and analysis. For instance, the data could be enriched with different fluencies/disfluencies in reading in accordance with

racial upbringings, socioeconomics, as well as the auxiliary environment. For future studies, the collection of data that involves different races in Malaysia is recommended to provide more context for this area of research. For instance, the differences or similarities in terms of fluency in reading could be examined in comparison to two or more races in Malaysia, where the scope of the study in rural areas is beyond socioeconomics which is exclusive in the present research.

3. Results

The objective of the research is to explore the results of fluency in reading based on the cultivation among parents for their children in rural areas. Before the fluency in reading can be examined, the core factor that is determinant in shap-

ing the aforementioned should be explored. As mentioned in the discussion above, the role that parents play in cultivating literacy at home is imperative, especially for young learners. Recalling the framework of parental involvement by Epstein (2009), the results are divided into two (2) categories, namely economic state of affairs and material accessibility/activities at home. As for the fluency in reading, the data is collected and analyzed based on the familiarity of words, the speed of reading and intonation/rhythm.

3.1. Economic and Family State of Affairs

Based on the interview, socioeconomic factors play a major role in determining whether their children have accessibility in terms of reading materials as well as activities at home. The economic and family state of affairs of the interviewed parents are presented on the **Table 1**:

Table 1. The economic and family state of affairs among parents.

	Findings
Average income	The average income of all interviewed parents is RM1800.00 per household
Average number of children	The average number of children of all interviewed parents is 5
	A few children in 2 out of the 5 families do not attend school from Standard 1. A few children in 3 out of the 5 families did not finish Standard 6

From **Table 1**, the average income for the majority of households ranges between RM1200.00 to RM1800.00 due to the types of occupations available within the proximity. The highest paying occupation in this research context is small shopkeeper, with RM1800.00 as the maximum amount but rather inconsistent between months. The lowest paying occupation is rubber tappers, which puts RM1200.00 as the average income. This is due to various factors such as the weather and the condition of the plantation. A number of interviewed families possess children that do not finish primary school or attend school at all. This is due to the relationship between family income and the cost of education.

The aforementioned relationship is heavily influenced by the number of children needed to be catered to. According to the interviewees, 'sacrifices' have to be made, especially among older children, to pave the way for the younger ones to be able to attend and finish primary school. Due to the high cost of living, the interviewees have to put their livelihood first before education, as education is not the primary concern in rural and sometimes, poverty-reared areas in Pahang. Hence, the parents are not fully invested in the idea of investing a bigger sum of their resources to fund all of their children's education. The review interview findings are presented on **Table 2**.

Table 2. The implications on material accessibility and activities.

	Findings
English reading materials	Very few, scarce, unrelated and inadequate reading materials at home among all participants
Reading activities and aid for English homework	There are no reading activities commenced at home and the parents only aid in non-English homework
Extracurricular activities	The children do not attend extra tuition classes or external English camps during school holidays

As a result of the lack of funding and commitment for education at home, English reading materials are almost non-existent in some of the interviewed families. The reading materials available at home consist of newspapers, magazines, comic books, dictionaries, and religious manuscripts, which are in Bahasa Melayu. These materials do not assist in the betterment of English literacy among young learners at home, where the exposure to materials is inadequate at best. The interviewed families are all monolinguals and do not speak or practice English at home as well as within the community. Moreover, the parents do not send their children to tuition classes or English camps during school holidays because of financial constraints. The children often assist their parents with their daily occupations during off-school periods.

3.2. Fluency in Reading

These findings are categorized into three (3) categories to measure the learners' fluency in reading English passages. The 4 sentences below are excerpts from a book employed to test the aforementioned fluency aspects in reading in English.

The three fluency components that were tested among participants that consist of Standard 4 learners are the familiarity of words, speed of reading and intonation/rhythm. For instance, familiarity of words (word recognition) plays a major role in determining the speed of reading, where a reader will instantly identify the word and pronounce it rapidly. Moreover, good word recognition, apart from assisting the speed of reading, will also contribute to the correct use of rhythm, intonation and stress manner. The sentences are as follows:

1. I said we didn't have any equipment but that my Gramma keeps her side door unlocked and I might be able to sneak in and borrow her mower for a few hours.
2. Luckily, Gramma wasn't home, so it was easy to get the mower out of her house. We rolled it over to Mrs. Canfield's yard, and then we were ready to get to work.
3. That's when me and Rowley realized neither one of us had ever actually operated a lawn mower before. So, the two of us poked around for a while and tried to figure out how to get the thing started.

The difficulty of the passages is relatively easy, comprising simple vocabularies and basic complex sentences/phrases. These sentences are read individually by each participant to measure the difference in fluency levels among the eight participants in the short reading session. The findings of word recognition are presented on **Table 3**.

Table 3. The word recognition among Standard 4 students in rural areas in Pahang.

	Findings
The readers' familiarity with the words to aid them in forming comprehension and fluency	The participants were also observed to have possessed a really basic level of recognized words, which comprised a few frequently observed words, such as 'easy', 'house', 'operated' among others. However, the more advanced words, such as proper nouns (names), would be harder for the readers to identify based on their familiarity with English names, as illustrated. The participants took their time and halted their continuous reading flow to process how to pronounce 'Mrs. Canfield' for a few seconds.

The longer passage above illustrated that the participants needed more time to recognize the words, decide on how to pronounce them and combine the sentences in the effort of creating comprehension. This shows that familiarity and word recognition are hindering factors in the reading process. The limited vocabulary among the participants also caused inconsistency in terms of linking the contextual meanings behind the words in the passage. Compound and complex sentences are the most common in texts; hence, the variable between the period of recognizing words and formulating comprehension is dependent on familiarity. The findings of word recognition are presented on **Table 4**.

It is shown that there are significant pauses between words in the phrases above. This is justified by the time taken by the reader to figure out how to pronounce the meaning of the word as well as combining the words to form a sentence.

Table 4. The word recognition among Standard 4 students in rural areas in Pahang.

	Findings
The numbers (seconds) in the bracket show the time taken between pauses.	I said we [00.05] didn't actually have any [00.07] equipment but that my Gramma keeps her side door [00.07] unlocked and I might be able to [00.03] sneak in and [00.03] borrow her mower for a [00.05] few hours.
	I guess [00.05] Mrs. Canfield must [00.04] have been pretty [00.05] desperate to get her [00.05] lawn mowed because she went along [00.05] with my plan.
	That's when me and [00.06] Rowley [00.06] realized [00.04] neither one of us had ever [00.04] actually [00.07] operated a [00.04] lawn mower before. So, the two [00.03] of us [00.03] poked around [00.03] for a [00.03] while and tried to [00.07] figure out how to get [00.04] the thing started.

To elaborate, the pauses consist of silent pauses, fillers and corrections of mispronunciations. This is due to the unfamiliarity with words that they do not recognize; they try to pronounce them with uncertainties and attempt to correct their mispronunciation with several pronunciations.

Overall, the speed of reading is slow. The timestamps are mostly filled with fillers and stutters before pronouncing the words and this pattern of reading among the participants is linear. The participants were also observed to have possessed a really basic level of recognized words, which comprised frequently observed words, as illustrated above, such as 'door', 'pretty', 'borrow', among others. This has helped the readers to easily process and pronounce the words that they already know and aid the speed of the reading. In this case, their mental lexicon aided them with the reading, not necessarily with comprehension, with the readily available simple vocabularies.

However, the more unique words such as proper nouns (names) would be harder for the readers to identify based on their familiarity with English names as illustrated in the passages. The readers took their time and halted their continuous reading flow to process how to pronounce the proper noun 'Mrs. Canfield' for a few seconds. Due to the unrecognition, the participants stopped and processed how to combine the pronunciation of the prefix 'Can-' and the suffix '-field'. In their defense, the suffix is also an easily recognized word and it aided them to some extent. The findings on intonation accuracy are presented on **Table 5**.

Table 5. The intonation accuracy among Standard 4 students in rural areas in Pahang.

	Findings
The ability to use the correct stress, rhythm, and intonation of spoken English. The capitalized words are the words stressed by the readers.	I said WE didn't have ANY equipment but that my Gramma KEEPS her side DOOR unlocked and I might BE able to sneak IN and borrow HER mower for A few hours
	Luckily, Gramma wasn't HOME, so IT was easy to get THE mower out OF her house. We rolled it OVER to MRS. CANFIELD's yard, and then we WERE ready to get to work.
	That's when me AND Rowley realized neither one OF us had ever actually operated A lawn mower before. So, the two OF us poked AROUND for a while and tried TO figure OUT how to get THE thing started.

The participants stressed the incorrect words and impeded the supposed rhythm of the passages, and the 'mood' of the passages is altered to some extent. As discussed, the probability of this occuring could be caused by the difficulty for the readers to combine the sentences together and create one linear flow. This is also another result of word unfamiliarity among readers. The stressed syllables within stressed words are also inaccurate, whereby, for instance, the word 'Mrs. Canfield' is stressed at the syllable '-field', and the remaining syllable 'Can-' is not stressed.

Apart from that, the word 'around' is also stressed at the incorrect syllable, where the participants stress the syllable 'A-' instead of '-round'. The researcher has inserted the factor of monolingualism in which they reside that contributed to the way they pronounce and stress the respective words. In other words, 'Manglish' is rather prominent in terms of pronunciation aspects.

Moreover, the aforementioned mispronunciation and correction of words are the stark aftereffects of low-level vocabulary. The participants encountered unfamiliar words

such as 'poked', 'desperate', 'lawn', etc., and were unsure how to pronounce them as they should be. For instance, the word 'poked' is pronounced as /pəʊk/, but the participants pronounced it as /pɔːkəd/.

Another illustration is that of the word 'unlocked', where it is pronounced as /ʌnˈlɒkt/ but the participants pronounced it as /ʌnˈlɒkəd/. A feature of interest in the aforementioned scenarios is that they are the product of a 'guess' of how the words are pronounced. As theorized, the aforementioned unfamiliarity was portrayed in the shapes of misspeaking and mispronunciation.

4. Discussion

The present study has concluded that the fluency of reading English texts and passages is still average at best, if not below average, for young learners in rural Malaysia. Based on the findings, the fluency in reading aspects such as the speed of reading is rather below the expected outcome, where the participants were stuttering a considerable number of times, which compriseed obstructive fillers, mispronunciations and silent pauses. The main factor that lays the foundation of this issue is the lack of exposure to the theoretical, practical and social aspects of the language on the surface. This level of fluency, in theory, should not have occurred after years of schooling. A theoretical deduction, based on the years of schooling, suggests that the readers should have been able to greatly mitigate the problems they encountered based on the findings.

The environment of their home and residence played a major influence in dictating the interference for participants to seek scaffolding and help. The lack of motivation festered among participants even at home because of factors such as the lack of prioritizing education in general, inadequate materials and activities needed to cultivate English literacy at home. There are other factors that have severe impacts on fluency in reading such as teachers' roles, peer support as well as the abovementioned perception of English as 'bahasa penjajah' in rural areas. It is recommended for future researchers to embark on further studies to dive deep into the hindrances that obstruct the progression of English literacy in rural areas all over Malaysia.

This research only highlights some of the factors that contribute to overall reading proficiency in rural parts of Malaysia. The focus of this study was to examine the direct relationship between parents' support, which would be determined by financial standings and initiatives, and fluency in reading among their children. Future research could also engage in other components of reading literacy, such as comprehension and reading skills. With the same controlled variables, this alternative area could expand the comprehension behind the reading capabilities among learners residing in rural areas in Malaysia.

It is highly recommended for future research to gain access to data and variations of information, such as the role of school facilities for those who live in rural areas, to be included. Other than that, the present research emphasizes solely the Malay ethnicity, and further variations of other ethnicities should provide a wider overview of the issue. More detailed and comprehensive research is needed to examine the influence of race and ethnicities on the ways participants handle their current state of fluency.

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