

The Impact of Technology on Reading Texts Selection among Upper secondary ESL Learners

Munirah Mohd Ghani

munirah@pendidikguru.edu.my

Huzaina Abdul Halim

huzaina@um.edu.my

Foziah Mahmood

foziahm@um.edu.my

Saraswati Rajindra

Abstract: *Today, school children are not only reading the conventional 'print texts' such as storybooks, magazines and newspapers but also 'electronic texts' such as emails, web pages and SMS. This scenario has triggered some curiosity to whether technology has an impact on the type of reading materials language learners choose to read at home and in school. In order to determine the factors for text selection, characteristics of the textual features for both print and electronic texts adapted from Winkelmann (1995) and Meskill, Mossop & Bates (1999) are used. About 600 questionnaires were distributed to respondents in urban and rural schools. The data is analysed and calculated using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, SPSS (Norusis, 1990). A T-test is also used to examine the significant differences between text type selection between ESL learners in urban and rural areas in and outside school. The result shows that there are differences in the type of texts read by ESL learners in both areas. It is also discovered that print text is still the preferred text despite the hype and attractive features offered by electronic texts. The implication behind this revelation is that Malaysian ESL learners are still conventional in selecting their reading text which makes reading a conventional process.*

Keywords: *conventional 'print texts', text selection, electronic texts*

1. INTRODUCTION

Constanzo (1994) stated that "computers are altering the way many of us read, write and even think." The traditional way of reading is now being replaced by interactive reading whereby buttons on the computer screen leads a reader from one page to another. A mouse cursor on the other hand, enables the reader to navigate through the text; choosing the information he needs and discarding those that are irrelevant. An electronic text reader can also change and modify the layout of the text or the presentation of the screen according to his personal preference. This style of reading is called 'electronic literacy' which formally defined as "activities like reading, writing and spelling that are delivered, supported, accessed or accessed through computers or other electronic means rather than on paper" (Topping, 1997; Ulmer, 1989; Reinking, 1997).

The concept of electronic literacy is also built on the types of texts that are produced by electronic gadgets such as the computer. These texts are obviously different in nature when compared to the conventional print based texts. Normally, 'electronic text' is presented on a computer screen and they are digitalised which means that the text is composed and made of electronic impulses (Corbel, 1999). Furthermore, electronic text enables the reader to jump between two consecutive pages in a non-linear fashion. This concept is called 'hypertextuality'; a concept or feature unique to only electronic texts. Print text on the other hand is linear, composed in a line of symbols read sequentially from left to right, right to left or up and down (Topping, 1997). The contrasting nature of electronic and print texts has made a case for educators to understand the potential these texts have on ESL learning. Subsequently, electronic literacy is reshaping how language, literacy and text is taught and learned.

Furthermore, electronic communication gadget such as the mobile phone has changed the process of interaction and communication between humans in their everyday lives. Traditionally, people often communicate by writing letters. Only recently, people started to communicate using mobile phones and the computer to deliver their messages. These high-tech telecommunication systems

have allowed people to communicate electronically rather than using pen and paper. The change in the mode of communication also means a change in the communicational discourse. For instance, a conventional format of an informal letter may include the receiver's address on the top right hand corner of the letter, a salutation "Dear John," and a signature at the end of the letter. On the other hand, an SMS does not have any particular format and uses different writing conventions which include abbreviations and symbols to form messages.

Thus, the 'textual shift' that occurred in today's reading environment is filled with moving and adaptable texts also referred to as 'multimodal' texts (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001; Kress, 2003; Unsworth, 2001). Multimodal texts are those texts that have more than one 'mode', so that meaning is communicated through a synchronisation of modes (Walsh, 2006). These texts may combine writing and image (on screen or page); writing, image, moving image, music and speech (on a CD, on a website); or gesture, speech, image, spatial position (in face to face interaction). The combination of image, sound and writing in texts appeal to the reader's sensory systems such as the visual, oral, performance, touch and also smell thus, making multimodal texts more interesting and meaningful. Furthermore, the visuals in the contemporary texts play a role much greater than a mere decoration on a page. They also take on the role as an 'illustrator'; functioned to make meaning as much as writing.

Central to electronic text is the concept of 'hypertext'. A hypertext contains many segments of linear texts which are designed to be accessed by the readers in any order via embedded structural electronic links (Topping, 1997). Reading in a hypertext environment is very much a cognitive process. It allows readers the freedom to control what they read and be selective with their reading.

2. THE INFLUENCE OF TECHNOLOGY ON EDUCATION IN MALAYSIA

Like any other country in the world, Malaysian is also keeping up to date with the latest technology. In order to prepare the learners for the information age, in 1999 the Ministry of Education in Malaysia developed a new learning institution that has been systematically reinvented in terms of teaching-learning practices and school management known as 'Smart School' (Ministry of Education, 1999). These schools are equipped with the latest teaching and learning facilities such as the computers to integrate learning with technology in order to develop workforces that are technology literate. By 2002, most of the English, Mathematics and Science teachers in the national schools were provided with laptops and LCD projectors. This is to ensure that teachers and learners use technology in their everyday teaching and learning. Additionally, the Education Ministry has also taken serious actions to include current and up to date text types into the ESL curriculum. For example, replicated electronic texts are evident in the new KBSM English textbooks. The integration and implementation of these texts in the ESL classroom will "support more broadly the literacy-based curriculum" (Kern, 2000) and create a learning environment that is relevant and similar to real life situations.

3. THE EFFECT OF TECHNOLOGY ON LANGUAGE LEARNING

Contemporary texts like emails, web chat and Short Messaging System or SMS require the writer to use different types of writing systems from the conventional writing system when writing messages electronically. Some of the features of the new writing systems are abbreviations (e.g. CUL8A meaning See you later.), acronyms (e.g. WOMBAT meaning Waste of Money, Brains and Time.) and combinations of graphics and symbols called emoticons (e.g. :-) meaning happy or a smile known as smiley) (Kell, 2003). Obviously, this new writing system or convention does not follow the Standard English convention. Even so, this type of convention is used by ESL learners when writing their academic essays. This has become a problem because learners' writings that follow the SMS, email or web chat conventions are considered to be wrong. SMS convention have "altered the spelling system of English" (Kell, 2003) and thus, become an unacceptable feature since the Standard English writing system has already a fixed set of conventions. As Mardziah (2003) stated that "while this style is acceptable in online communication, it translates into poor structure in a formal essay." The cause for such influence in learners' style of writing or other linguistic problems is perhaps due to the constant exposure and interaction with electronic texts. Therefore, by investigating the types of texts ESL learners

are currently reading will provide some useful insights into the matter of how much influence technology has on secondary school children's English.

Three research questions were constructed to seek answers to the problem mentioned earlier:

- a) What are the type of texts read by urban and rural ESL learners in their everyday reading practices in and outside school?
- b) Are there any significant differences in the type of texts read between urban and rural ESL learners in and outside school?
- c) What are the factors that influence the choice of texts read between urban and rural ESL learners in their everyday reading practices in and outside school?

4. THE SAMPLE

The study surveyed about 600 urban and rural upper secondary ESL learners of mixed gender, age and socio economic background. 300 samples came from 3 urban schools located in Ampang, Selangor and Kuala Lumpur. The other 300 samples were taken from 3 different schools in the rural area of Sabak Bernam, Selangor.

5. INSTRUMENT

This study only uses the questionnaire. Basically, it is divided into four sections. Section A consists of 11 questions relating to the respondents' background. Section B comprises statements that elicit from the respondents about their literacy practices in school. In contrary, the statements in Section C are aimed to gather information about literacy practices by ESL learners outside school. The statements also indicate the different type of texts read during the literacy practices. They are constructed based on the researcher's interpretation of the description of electronic and print texts as explained by Meskill, Mossop and Bates (1999, 2000), Winkelmann (1995), Reinking (1992), Ulmer (1989) and Corbel (1999). Finally, Section D consists of statements that will illustrate the features or characteristics of both electronic and print texts. The statements were also formed based the researcher's understanding of the features of print text and electronic text adapted from Winkelmann (1995) and Meskill, Mossop and Bates (1999).

6. PROCEDURE

A pilot study was carried out prior to the actual administration of the survey. Later, some of the questionnaires were distributed via post before the researcher's actual visit to the school and was administered by the participating English teacher while some of the questionnaires were administered by the researcher herself. For low proficient learners, the teacher translated the questions orally.

7. ANALYSIS

Data analysis takes place after all the items in the questionnaires are calculated using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 11.5 (Norusis, 1990). The respondents' background information in Section A of the questionnaire are gathered, tabulated and presented in table and graph form.

Next, to determine the type of texts read by urban and rural ESL learners in their everyday reading practices in and outside school, each statement in Section B and C are interpreted into text type. The mean Likert score of each question is calculated to determine the most popular text type selected by the learners. The respondents were asked to rate their responses according to the following Likert Scale value: *always* = 1, *often* = 2, *undecided* = 3, *rarely* = 4 and *never* = 5.

Then, in order to investigate the significant differences in the type of texts read between urban and rural ESL learners in and outside school, the T-test was used.

Finally, in order to determine the factors that influence reading text selection between urban and rural ESL learners in their everyday reading practices in and outside school, the statements in Section D of the questionnaire are interpreted into terms to indicate the text features adapted from Winkelmann (1995) and Meskill, Mossop and Bates (1999). The mean Likert score of each feature is also calculated to determine the most preferred feature when choosing a reading text

among ESL learners. Here the respondents are required to state their views by circling either: 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = undecided, 4 = disagree or 5 = strongly disagree.

8. RESULTS

Section A: Computer and Mobile Phone Ownership, Internet Access, Knowledge of Computer & Mobile Phone and Internet Usage

Based on the findings, it is claimed that 321 respondents own a computer at home while 208 of ESL learners do not have a computer at home. The mean score for overall computer knowledge level among the respondents stands at 2.60 which means ‘fair’ when the minimum mean scale 1 represents ‘poor’ and the maximum mean scale 5 represents ‘excellent’.

From 553 participants, 170 respondents answered ‘yes’ to the question “Do you have an Internet access at home?”. More than half of the respondents (338) answered ‘no’ to the same question which leaves 45 of the respondents with no response. The overall mean score for Internet knowledge among the respondents is 2.43 which indicate ‘fair’, despite the majority of ESL learners claimed to not have an Internet access at home.

Almost 80% of the respondents claimed to own a mobile phone. Only a small percentage of these respondents stated that they do not have a mobile phone that is about 20%. Most of the respondents (453) also claimed that they know how to use or operate a mobile phone. This is coherent with the first claim of mobile phone ownership. From 553 respondents, only 14 respondents stated that they have no knowledge of using a mobile phone.

It is stated that 134 respondents receive SMS more than 7 times a day. This amount is greater than those who receive SMS 2 to 6 times a day that is 126 respondents. 107 respondents claimed that they receive an SMS at least once a day while 186 respondents gave no response. The survey also indicated that 136 respondents sent SMS more than 7 times a day. About 118 respondents sent SMS at least once a day and 2 to 6 times a day. A large number of respondents which is 181 did not give any response.

RQ 1: What are the types of texts read by urban and rural ESL learners in their everyday reading practices in and outside school?

Table1. *Electronic Text Type Read by Urban and Rural ESL Learners In School*

<i>In School</i>	<i>Urban</i>			<i>Rural</i>		
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Electronic Text educational software / CD	275	4.36	.958	275	4.32	.908
Internet – website / webpage	275	3.60	1.202	276	3.89	1.142
email	275	3.62	1.505	274	4.04	1.325
web chat	274	3.47	1.458	271	3.90	1.327

Table2. *Print Text Type Read by Urban and Rural ESL Learners In School*

<i>In School</i>	<i>Urban</i>			<i>Rural</i>		
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Print Text (in English)						
song lyrics	275	2.63	1.329	275	2.71	1.257
newspapers	275	2.89	1.326	277	3.14	1.162
magazines	274	2.91	1.323	277	3.34	1.143
story books or novels	273	2.94	1.200	277	3.34	1.036
comics	274	3.20	1.326	275	3.43	1.195
textbooks	274	2.99	1.234	277	2.69	1.182
notices or advertisements	274	2.52	1.199	277	3.00	1.139

Table3. *Electronic Text Type Read by Urban and Rural ESL Learners Outside School*

<i>Outside School</i>	<i>Urban</i>			<i>Rural</i>		
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Electronic Text educational software / CD	275	4.00	1.176	275	4.25	1.084

The Impact of Technology on Reading Texts Selection among Upper secondary ESL Learners

Internet – website / webpage	275	3.09	1.385	275	3.76	1.305
email	275	3.29	1.553	275	4.12	1.221
web chat	274	3.00	1.439	274	3.77	1.344
SMS	270	2.01	1.323	272	2.14	1.311

Table 4. *Print Text Type Read by Urban and rural ESL Learners Outside School*

<i>Outside School</i> <i>Text Type</i>	<i>Urban</i>			<i>Rural</i>		
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Print Text (in English)						
song lyrics	276	2.50	1.325	272	2.71	1.294
newspapers	275	2.75	1.301	274	3.21	1.144
magazines	275	2.83	1.304	273	3.37	1.110
story books or novels	276	2.90	1.233	272	3.38	1.101
comics	276	3.12	1.332	272	3.46	1.146
textbooks	276	3.13	1.287	274	2.97	1.200
notices or advertisements	276	2.64	1.233	274	3.12	1.183

RQ 2: Are there any significant differences in the type of texts read between urban and rural ESL learners in their everyday reading practices in and outside school?

Table 5 reveals that the overall mean for literacy practices in school with electronic texts in the urban area is 3.7529. On the other hand, the overall mean score for literacy practices with electronic texts in rural schools is 4.0428. The p-value for literacy practices in the urban and rural area is the same which is 0.000. This indicates that the result is statistically significant at 1% level ($p=0.000<0.01$) which means there is a significant difference in literacy practices with electronic text in schools of urban and rural areas.

Table 5 also shows the overall mean for literacy practices in the urban area with print text that is 2.8631 as compared to the rural area which is 3.0930. This shows that the urban ESL learners also read print text more ‘often’ than the learners in the rural schools. The p-value for literacy practices in school with print text for urban and rural areas is 0.003. The p-value for print texts is slightly higher than the p-value for electronic texts. Even so, the p-value for print text shows that there is a significant difference in literacy practices in school between urban and rural schools ($p=0.003<0.01$).

The overall mean for literacy practices in urban schools is 3.2388 (Table 5). This is slightly lower than the overall mean of literacy practices in rural schools which is 3.4857. Despite the mean difference, the p-value for literacy practices in school for both urban and rural areas is 0.000 which also indicates that there is a significant difference between the type of text read in the urban and rural schools ($p=0.000<0.01$).

Table 5. *Overall Mean for Literacy Practices In School with Electronic and Print Texts*

	<i>Area</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Overall mean for literacy practices in school with electronic text	Urban	276	3.7529	1.01988	.000
	Rural	277	4.0428	.89309	.000
Overall mean for literacy practices in school with print text	Urban	275	2.8631	.98894	.003
	Rural	277	3.0930	.79586	.003
Overall mean for literacy practices in school	Urban	276	3.2388	.84862	.000
	Rural	277	3.4857	.71298	.000

p-value = is significant at 1% level

Table 6 shows that the overall mean for literacy practices outside school with electronic text for schools in the urban area is 2.9645 while for schools in the rural area, the overall mean is 3.4507. The mean scores indicate that urban ESL learners choose to read electronic texts more frequently

than ESL Learners in the rural area. On the other hand, the mean value for literacy practices outside school with print text by urban school children is 2.8385 while the mean score for literacy practices with print text in the rural area is 3.1726 (Table 6). Similarly, the mean score for urban ESL learners is smaller than rural ESL learners. This indicates that the frequency of choosing print texts among urban learners is greater than rural ESL learners.

Generally, the overall mean for literacy practices outside school with electronic text in the urban areas is 2.9013 and the overall mean for literacy practices outside school with print text in rural schools is 3.3151 as indicated in Table 6. The difference in mean value also indicates that both ESL learners choose different types of texts to read outside school. Statistically, the p-value for the overall mean for literacy practices outside school with electronic text and print text between urban and rural areas is the same which is 0.000 ($p=0.000<0.01$). This indicates that there is a significant difference in the literacy practices with electronic text and print text in urban and rural schools

Table6. Overall Mean for Literacy Practices Outside School with Electronic and Print Texts

	Area	N	M	SD	p-value
Overall mean for literacy practices outside school with electronic text	Urban	276	2.9645	.98693	.000
	Rural	276	3.4507	.83310	.000
Overall mean for literacy practices outside school with print text	Urban	276	2.8385	1.01048	.000
	Rural	275	3.1726	.86584	.000
Overall mean for literacy practices outside school	Urban	276	2.9013	.86904	.000
	Rural	277	3.3151	.72803	.000

p-value = is significant at 1% level

RQ 3: What are the factors that influence the choice of texts read between urban and rural ESL learners in their everyday reading practices in and outside school?

Table7. Factors that Influence Reading Texts Selection with Electronic Text

Electronic Text Features	Urban			Rural		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
Malleable	275	2.23	1.027	273	2.30	1.070
Mixed Media	276	1.81	1.021	273	2.02	1.158
Anarchy	276	2.33	1.097	273	2.42	.997
Hypertextual	275	1.93	1.080	272	2.15	1.163
Public Activity	276	1.77	1.003	272	2.03	1.163
Fragmentary - Words	274	1.80	1.047	272	1.96	1.139
Fragmentary - Display	276	2.29	1.087	272	2.29	1.104
Non-Linear	276	2.59	1.083	271	2.80	1.022

Table8. Factors that Influence Reading Texts Selection with Print Text

Print Text Features	Urban			Rural		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
Static	274	2.99	1.127	269	2.76	1.039
Private Activity	275	2.16	1.083	272	2.33	1.038
Hierarchical	275	2.65	1.055	271	2.57	.967
Self-Contained	275	2.25	.966	271	2.32	1.014
Linear	276	2.59	1.066	271	2.58	1.116
Whole	276	2.60	1.106	271	2.59	1.094
Restrictive	275	2.49	1.065	272	2.36	1.029

The Impact of Technology on Reading Texts Selection among Upper secondary ESL Learners

Table 9. Overall Mean for Factors that Influence Reading Texts Selection with Electronic Text

Features Electronic Text	N	M	SD
Malleable	548	2.27	1.048
Mixed Media	549	1.91	1.096
Anarchy	549	2.37	1.049
Hypertextual	547	2.04	1.127
Public Activity	548	1.90	1.092
Fragmentary - Words	546	1.88	1.095
Fragmentary - Display	548	2.29	1.095
Non-Linear	547	2.69	1.057
Overall mean	550	2.1681	.82087

Table 10. Overall Mean for Factors that Influence Reading Texts Selection with Print Text

Features Print Text	N	M	SD
Static	543	2.89	1.088
Private Activity	547	2.25	1.064
Hierarchical	546	2.61	1.012
Self-Contained	546	2.29	.990
Linear	547	2.59	1.090
Whole	547	2.60	1.099
Restrictive	547	2.42	1.048
Overall mean	548	2.5176	.79892

9. DISCUSSION

9.1 Technology Facilities in the Classroom

Basically, there are a few implications that can be drawn from the findings in this study. Firstly, the Ministry of Education Malaysia has put in a lot of effort to integrate technology with teaching. It is to our general knowledge that schools all over Malaysia are provided with laptops, LCD projectors, educational softwares and wireless system to teach subjects such as English, Science and Mathematics using technology. Teachers were also sent for computer courses to teach them to use the computers in the classrooms. Generally, based on the response given in the survey, all schools in Malaysia seemed to use some kind of electronic texts in the ESL classrooms. However, the overall mean of electronic texts used in the classroom (3.8981) is quite high which indicates that technology is not fully utilised in the classroom. With the equipments and training provided by the ministry, there should be a higher rate of technology usage in the classroom. Through an unrecorded conversation with some of the teachers, they generally claimed that pushing and setting up the trolley (a storing unit for LCD projector, speaker, laptop and electrical extensions) is a hassle, time consuming and tiring. After a certain period of time, these teachers simply gave up using the equipments provided. This is a classic example of 'teacher reluctance' as observed in many other language researches that involve the use of technology. On top of that, some schools are still struggling in preparing proper classrooms to set up the electronic teaching equipments due to lack of financial support. Additionally, during the administration of the questionnaires, some respondents did say that their school does not have a computer lab and therefore, they do not use any form of electronic text in their English lessons. Based on this perception, most of these respondents circled '5' for statements regarding the use of electronic texts in the classrooms. '5' as indicated in Section B of the questionnaire means 'Never'.

9.2 Exposure to Technology Causes Language Alteration

From a teacher's observation concerning her ESL learners' academic writing, it is assumed that a constant exposure to and interaction with electronic texts such as SMS, email and web chat may cause the shift in styles of ESL writing. From the survey, it is revealed that SMS (2.07) is the number one choice of text read by ESL learners in urban and rural areas. The majority of the respondents (79%) also claimed that they own a mobile phone and know how to operate a mobile phone (97%). Furthermore, the survey also shows that quite a number of learners receive and send

SMS everyday. Another discovery made in this study was that the top three choices of text feature that ESL learners consider when choosing an electronic text are features that appear in SMS (e.g. public activity, fragmentary and mixed media). Therefore, these combined results proved that constant exposure to and interaction with SMS is one of the contributing factor in the shift of style of ESL writing resulting in “unorthodox writing practices” as termed by Herbst (2003).

9.3 Technology Use at Home

Parents nowadays seemed to be encouraging their children to use technology at home. This impact of technology use can be observed through the high number of computer (58%) and mobile phone (79%) ownership among ESL learners. This suggests that literacy practices with electronic texts also occur outside school. Partly, the use of the computer and mobile phone at home may also be the result of the changing ‘working lives’ of their parents where these machines are used to do their work and interact with clients, colleagues and family members. Modern parents themselves are technology savvy thus pass the technological skill, ability and ideology to their children.

9.4 Active SMSing

It is very astounding to see that the activity of sending and receiving SMS is very active among ESL learners. 134 respondents claimed that they received more than 7 messages a day while 136 respondents claimed to have sent more than 7 messages a day. These results are very coherent with the claim made earlier about SMS being the number one electronic text type learners encounter at home. The result is also quite relevant to the claim that the majority of ESL learners own and know how to use a mobile phone. Apart from parents’ willingness to provide their children with mobile phones, capitalism also contributes to the high frequency of SMS activity among modern communicators. Today, the cost of telecommunication services is very cheap. Almost everyone can have their own telephone line by paying a minimal registration fee of RM50. Telecommunication companies offer a variety of mobile communication packages such as prepaid and postpaid telephone lines designed to suit all kinds of users. Furthermore, reality TV shows such as ‘Malaysian Idol’ and ‘Academy Fantasia’ invite the viewer to participate in their SMS voting poll to eliminate or choose their favourite ‘Idol’ or ‘student’. While TV companies are making money from these programmes, the viewers are being exploited to spend their money through SMS voting. All of these contribute to the high rate of SMS usage among ESL learners.

9.5 The Most Popular Print Text

As for print texts, most urban ESL learners stated that ‘notices or advertisements’ (2.52) is one of the most read print texts in school. ‘Notices and advertisements’ are probably often used in the classrooms because they are more available in the immediate environment. They are the most common text type seen at all places. On the other hand, rural school children claimed that they use the ‘textbook’ (2.69) more often in school than other types of print texts. The choice of using the textbooks as the primary teaching material by ESL teachers often due to the fact that the textbooks are accessibly available in school and are provided for free to most learners through the school’s Textbook Lending Scheme.

Finally, ‘song lyric’ is the most preferred print text read by both urban (2.50) and rural (2.71) school children at home. The result is consistent with the fact that by nature, teenagers love to listen to music whether it is pop, rock or traditional. At this age, they also tend to develop a liking towards singers and their songs. Thus, their preference towards a singer or song eventually leads to singing or reading the lyric of their favourite songs which in turn contributes to the result of this study.

9.6 Top Three Most Preferred Feature for Electronic Text

Apart from indicating the most preferred text by ESL learners, this study also shows the type of text features they considered when selecting a reading text. In the survey, the top three features urban and rural school children claimed to enjoy are similar which are ‘public activity’, ‘word fragmentary’ and ‘mixed media’. The view of literacy as a “social practice” (Barton & Hamilton, 2000) is proven through the text feature of ‘public activity’ (1.90) when ESL learners claimed to like interacting with electronic texts such as SMS, email and web chat because messages can be

shared with and forwarded to many users at one time. Furthermore, the wide computer screen enables the text to be visible to other readers positioned near the computer.

ESL learners also prefer reading electronic texts because they can write the messages using short forms which resulted in language fragmentary. By using abbreviations and symbols, the messages can be typed quickly. Large amount of information can easily be transmitted despite limited amount of words used to form the messages. For rural school children, 'word fragmentary' (1.96) is the top reason for selecting an electronic text. Generally, most rural ESL learners have lower proficiency level. Based on this assumption, writing or reading an electronic text is less threatening than writing or reading a printed text since correct grammar is less important than understanding and getting the message across to the reader.

Another feature that is considered when choosing an electronic text is 'mixed media'. Texts produced in the multimedia environment are more attractive than those texts produced before the electronic era. For urban ESL learners (1.81), the ability to mix words with images and sounds probably indicated how technology savvy and up to date they are with the latest mode of communication. However, for rural ESL learners (2.02), images and sounds probably helped less proficient learners to express their messages across better to the receiver thus, making comprehending the messages easier. Based on these reasons, 'mixed media' is another popular feature when selecting an electronic reading text from the other.

9.7 Top Three Most Preferred Feature for Print Text

The top three features that determine text selection among ESL learners with print texts are 'private activity', 'self-contained' and 'restrictive'. Although the choice of features are similar but, the positioning of these features differ between urban and rural learners. Urban ESL learners (2.16) chose 'private activity' as the number one feature when deciding on a printed reading text. Basically, reading can take the reader into another world through active imagination. Thus, reading is considered as a private and personal activity.

'Self-contained' is the second most favoured feature chosen by ESL learners in the urban area (2.25). As explained earlier, 'self-contained' means that the readers would need their background knowledge in order to understand the text they are reading. However, this "top-down" approach is not a priority among urban ESL learners since most proficient readers can extract meaning by reading and interpreting the words in the text through the "bottom up" process. As for rural ESL learners (2.32), 'self-contained' is the number one choice of text feature because they may need the background support or "content schemata" (Carrell, 1983) in order to understand what has been written in the text. Reading can become an enjoyment or as a personal activity after the learners are able to extract the messages and information delivered by the texts. This is why 'private activity' is the second feature chosen by rural ESL learners (2.33).

Finally, both urban and rural ESL learners feel that they like reading print texts because they are 'restrictive' (2.42). When reading a book or any other form print text, it is traditionally taught that a reader needs to read the entire book in order to understand or find a conclusion to the story. Without reading the entire book, the information that needed to be gathered or messages to be delivered by the writer to the reader is incomplete.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

Firstly, with the advancement of technology, the use of and interaction with electronic texts in the future will definitely increase. The new times and the new working conditions will demand workers to be knowledgeable in e-business, e-technology, e-culture, e-commerce, e-learning and e-governance. In order to produce citizens who are e-literate, educational policies on learning with technology should be emphasised. One recommendation is for computer lessons should be made a part of the curriculum and be a compulsory subject for primary and secondary school children to learn instead of it being an extra-curricular activity. Computer lessons will enhance learners' computer skills thus, make them technology fluent and be able to function successfully in their future jobs.

Secondly, technology advancement has also contributed to the emergence of new text types such as email, SMS and web chat. Evidently, these text types have been replicated and included in the

new KBSM English textbooks. This is a brilliant effort by the curriculum developers to familiarise language learners with the electronic text format. However, these replicated texts are insufficient in providing authenticity to the English lesson. Perhaps, an electronic textbook should be created online or offline for teachers and learners to access. This can help to increase authenticity in learning language with electronic texts.

Basically, the ministry has provided schools and teachers with plenty of teaching equipments and training in order to combine teaching and learning with technology. Teachers should make full use of the facilities provided by the ministry in order to produce learners who are technology literate. Unfortunately in some schools, teaching facilities such as computer labs, Internet connection and computers are inadequate. However, teachers should not give up using electronic texts in the classroom based on these problems. They should be more proactive and find alternative ways to make learning with technology possible.

11. CONCLUSION

This study has shown that technology in everyday life does influence the types of texts ESL learners read today. This is evident when SMS is the top text type that ESL learners interact with everyday. This study has also given the implication that all ESL learners are exposed to technology and thus use electronic texts although the percentage is small. However, despite its influence, print text is still considered as the most preferred text to read when the overall mean scores show a lower value than those of electronic text. It is enlightening to see that many modern day ESL learners are not only interacting with print texts but also with electronic texts. The features of electronic texts most learners like are 'public activity', 'word fragmentary' and 'mixed media'. ESL learners like print texts for their 'private', 'self-contained' and 'restrictive' nature. All of the information provided by this study is very useful in helping ESL teachers to be more sensitive towards their learners' reading trends and habits. They can also use the information gathered here to devise ESL lessons that are current and matches with the demands of contemporary reading practices and needs.

Finally, although there is a 'textual shift' (Walsh, 2006) in trends of reading from traditional print texts to contemporary electronic texts, ironically the overall mean score revealed that print text is still favoured by most ESL learners. Learners are still conventional in selecting their reading texts despite the electronic texts being trendy and hype as exhaustedly promoted and exploited by the media. Conclusively, reading is still a conventional process.

REFERENCES

- Barton, D. & Hamilton, M. (2000). Literacy practices. In Barton, D., Hamilton, M. and Ivanic, R. (Eds.) *Situated Literacies*. London: Routledge.
- Carrell, P.L. (1983). Some issues in studying the role of schemata or background knowledge in second language comprehension. *Reading in a Foreign Language* (pp.81-92).
- Constanzo, W. (1994). Reading, writing and thinking in an age of electronic literacy. In Selfe, C.L. & Hilligoss, S. (Eds.) *Literacy and Computers: The Complications of Teaching and Learning with Technology* (pp.11-21). New York: The Modern Language Association of America.
- Cope, B. & Kalantzis, M. (Eds.) (2000). *Multiliteracies: Literacy learning and the design of social futures*. London: Routledge.
- Cope, B. & Kalantzis, M. (2003). Digital meaning and the case for a pedagogy of multiliteracies. In Pandian, A., Chakravarthy, G. and Kell, P. (Eds.) *New Literacies, New Practices, New Times* (pp.26-52). Serdang: UPM Press.
- Corbel, C. (1999). *Computer literacies: Working effectively with electronic texts*. Sydney: National Centre for English Language Training and Research.
- Herbst, C. (2003). Coding the classroom: Technology and the practice of language. *First Monday*, (8)11 Retrieved July 17, 2005 from http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue8_11/herbst/index.html
- Kell, P. (2003). NU 4 U, NU 4 US?: Technology, literacy, new languages and "The system after next". In Pandian, A., Chakravarthy, G. & Kell, P. (Eds.) *New Literacies, New Practices, New Times*. (pp.103-110) Serdang: UPM Press.
- Kern, R. (2000). *Literacy and language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kress, G. (2003). *Literacy in the new media age*. London: Routledge.

- Kress, G. & van Leeuwen, T. (2001). *Multimodal discourse*. London: Arnold.
- Mardziah, H.A. (2003). The impact of electronic communication on writing. *ERIC Digest*. Retrieved July 27, 2004 from: <http://www.ericfacility.net/ericdigests/ed477614.html>
- Meskill, C., Mossop, J. & Bates, R. (2000). Bilingualism, cognitive flexibility and electronic texts. *Bilingual Research Journal*, (23), 2-3.
- Meskill, C., Mossop, J. and Bates, R. (1999). Electronic text and English as a second language environments. Educational Research Center on English Learning & Achievement University at Albany School of Education. Retrieved October 4, 2005 from: <http://www.albany.edu/lap/Papers/E-Text.htm>
- Ministry of Education Malaysia (1999) *Smart School Module*. Kuala Lumpur.
- Norusis, M.J. (1990). *Statistical package for the social science: SPSS*. Illinois: SPSS
- Reinking, D. (1992). Differences between electronic and printed texts: An agenda for research. *Journal of Educational Multimedia and Hypermedia*, 1(1), 11-24.
- Reinking, D. (1997). *Electronic literacy*. Retrieved July 8, 2005 from: <http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu/go/clic/nrrc/reinking.html>
- Reinking, D., McKenna, M., Labbo, L. & Kieffer, R.D. (Eds.) (1998). *Handbook of literacy and technology: Transformations in a post-typographical world*. New Jersey: Erlbaum.
- Topping, K.J. (1997). *Electronic literacy in school and home: A look into the future*. Retrieved July 8, 2005 from: <http://www.readingonline.org/international/future/>
- Unsworth, L. (2001). *Teaching multiliteracies across the curriculum: Changing contexts of text and image in classroom practice*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Ulmer, G. (1989). *Teletheory: Grammatology in the age of video*. New York: Routledge.
- Walsh, M. (2006). The 'Textual Shift': Examining the reading process with print, visual and multimodal texts. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy* (29)1, p.24.
- Winkelmann, C. L. (1995). Electronic literacy, critical pedagogy and collaboration: A case for cyborg writing. *Computers and the Humanities*, (29) 431-448.

Authors' Biography



Church University, UK.

Munirah Mohd Ghani is a lecturer at Institute of Teacher Education Technical Education Campus in Malaysia. She has 13 years of teaching English to second language learners – 7 years in the secondary school and 7 years at the teacher education institute. She has a B.Ed. TESL (Hons.) from University of Exeter and a Masters degree in Education (TESL) from University of Malaya, Malaysia. She also holds a Postgraduate Certificate in Trainer Development, English Language Teaching from University of St Marks and St John, UK. Her area of interests is English as a second language teaching, teacher education, reflective practice, experiential learning and technology in education. Munirah will begin her PhD in Education specialising in curriculum development for teacher education in May 2014 at Canterbury Christ



Foziah Mahmood is a lecturer in the Faculty of Education, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur. She has taught English Language in Primary and Secondary Schools for 10 years. Currently she is a member of the faculty of Education, University of Malaya and has been here for 14 years. She has been involved in TESL teacher training, teaching Language and computing skills for TESL, Early Childhood Education and Counseling students. Her research interests are TESL and Technology, Computing skills for Early Childhood practitioners and Technology Resources for Teaching. She is currently working on her PhD on Technological teaching aids in the ESL classroom.



Huzaina Abdul Halim is a lecturer in the Faculty of Education, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur. She has been working with the Ministry of Education for 10 years. Her area of specialization is TESL teacher training, creativity in the ESL curriculum and literature in education. She has recently completed her PhD at Imperial College London.



Sarasvati Rajindra holds a Bachelor of Education (TESL) Hons 2006 and Masters of Education (TESL) Hons 2010 from University of Malaya. Her research interests include Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and second language acquisition. She is now working as a Lecturer in School of Foundation and General Studies, University of Management and Technology (UMTECH) since 2009. She has been teaching English Language in tertiary level since 2007.