

Reading Skills in the Malay Language among Students with Special Educational Needs for the Visually Impaired (MBPKP) At Sekolah Kebangsaan Klang, Klang, Selangor

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ABSTRACT: This research discusses the level of mastery of Malay reading skills among Students with Special Visual Education Needs (MBPKP) at Sekolah Kebangsaan Klang, Klang, Selangor. Weaknesses in reading skills cause pupils to have difficulty understanding what is read, which affects their ability to follow the learning process. Therefore, this study aims to identify difficult Malay language characteristics in reading skills and analyse factors contributing to these difficulties among MBPKP students. Data were collected using qualitative observational methods. Research instruments included observation checklists, a Malay reading skills test using Braille Malay texts, and questionnaires distributed to respondents. The target group consisted of MBPKP students with Level 1 and Level 2 Malay reading skills in Braille. Findings show that the overall Malay reading proficiency of MBPKP students is at a moderate level. Of the four characteristics studied, pronunciation and fluency were the weakest aspects compared to punctuation and intonation. The study also identified several factors that contribute to difficulties in mastering Malay reading skills among the respondents. This research is expected to raise awareness among the community and educators on the importance of improving the teaching of Malay reading skills for students with special visual education needs.

KEYWORDS - Reading skills, Malay language, braille, mastery level, MBPKP

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

Malay is the medium of instruction in schools and plays a vital role in the national education system. According to Ramlah (2014), Malay is a compulsory subject taught at all levels in national-type schools. Its status as the medium of instruction is enshrined in the Education Act 1961 and the Education Act 1996. The Revised Primary School Standard Curriculum (KSSR) 2017 is the National Curriculum implemented in all Malaysian primary schools under the National Education System, guided by the Curriculum and Assessment Standard Document (DSKP). KSSR is based on four main principles: an integrated approach, holistic individual development, equitable education for all pupils and lifelong learning.

The reading skills model in the DSKP emphasises reading alongside other language skills. Reading skills involve the ability to read with correct pronunciation, intonation, pauses and fluency, as well as comprehension and critical reasoning of texts. These skills are divided into clusters, including reading and understanding words,

phrases and sentences correctly; reading aloud fluently with accurate pronunciation and intonation; understanding explicit and implicit information; reasoning to transfer information accurately; and reading various literary and non-literary texts to foster interest.

Smith (1995) defines visually impaired individuals as those whose vision is limited even with corrective lenses, including the blind and partially sighted. In special education, learning is conducted through tactile, auditory and aesthetic methods without reliance on vision (Nur & Haris, 2017).

Reading is a complex process involving cognitive, perceptual, linguistic and psychological aspects. MBPKP must first master pronunciation, punctuation, fluency and intonation before achieving reading proficiency. However, some MBPKP excel in learning despite these challenges (Che & Abdullah, 2004). Societal assumptions that MBPKP cannot read Malay fluently are therefore misleading, as recent reports show many have succeeded. The limited research on Braille literacy in Malay among MBPKP highlights a knowledge gap. This study seeks to address this gap and raise awareness of the Braille literacy capabilities of these students.

1.2 Research Objectives

This study was conducted to examine the level of mastery of Malay reading skills among Students with Special Visual Education Needs (MBPKP) at Sekolah Kebangsaan Klang, Klang, Selangor. Therefore, the two main objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To identify the characteristics of the Malay language that are difficult to master in the reading skills of Students with Special Visual Education Needs (MBPKP) at Sekolah Kebangsaan Klang, Klang, Selangor.
2. To analyse the factors that contribute to difficulties in mastering Malay reading skills among Students with Special Visual Education Needs (MBPKP) at Sekolah Kebangsaan Klang, Klang, Selangor.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Che and Abdullah (2004) examined the difficulties faced by deaf students in mastering the Malay language from a linguistic perspective. Their study found that deaf students experience challenges in key linguistic aspects such as word formation, affixation, sentence structure and sentence types. These difficulties arise from the inherent complexity of the Malay language, even though deaf students are required to sit for public examinations while relying on various communication approaches in practice, including speech and Malaysian Sign Language.

Farah (2022) investigated the reading proficiency of students with special educational needs and identified several Malay language features that are difficult for these students to master, particularly various syllable structures. The study demonstrated that the use of the Cepat Baca method effectively addressed these challenges and led to notable improvements in the reading skills of students with special educational needs.

Goudiras et al. (2009) explored the factors influencing the choice of reading media among visually impaired adults. The findings indicated that reading fluency is affected by insufficient Braille training and a limited supply of printed Braille materials. Adults who received Braille and computer training showed higher levels of Braille use and greater reliance on screen-reading software compared to those with inadequate training.

Nur and Haris (2017) focused on the relationship between academic achievement and socio-demographic factors among students with visual impairments. Their study revealed that these students generally achieved a moderate level of academic performance, which was strongly influenced by socio-economic factors, particularly family income, highlighting the significant role of socio-economic background in shaping academic outcomes.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed qualitative methods to identify the characteristics of the Malay language that are difficult to master in reading skills among MBPKP students and to analyse the factors contributing to these difficulties. To achieve the first objective, a Malay reading skills test using Braille texts was conducted to collect data. Additionally, the researcher used a checklist to identify the Malay language characteristics that students found challenging during the reading skills test. For the second objective, a questionnaire was distributed to teachers serving in the Special Education section who have experience teaching MBPKP students using Braille reading materials. The questionnaire aimed to obtain teachers' perspectives on factors that influence MBPKP students' difficulties in mastering Malay reading skills. The respondents for the first objective consisted of six MBPKP students at Sekolah Kebangsaan Klang, Klang, Selangor. For the second objective, the targeted respondents were three teachers working in the Special Education section at the same school.

IV. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings on the Characteristics of the Malay Language that Are Difficult to Master among MBPKP at Sekolah Kebangsaan Klang, Klang, Selangor

Findings on Malay Language Features That Are Difficult to Master from the Aspect of Pronunciation

According to Ahmad (2006), pronunciation or oral skills training refers to the ability to identify and differentiate various aspects of intonation and pronunciation so that students are able to convey meaning accurately. Pronunciation ability is very important for an individual in delivering information and communicating effectively.

Table 1: Malay Language Features That Are Difficult to Master from the Aspect of Pronunciation

Respondent	Malay Pronunciation Features Mastered/Difficult to Master
1	The respondent is able to pronounce each word clearly.
2	The respondent is able to identify letters but has difficulty pronouncing syllables in certain words. For example, the word "di", which is a combination of the letters "d" and "i", the respondent does not know how to pronounce the syllable.
3	The respondent is unable to pronounce all the words in the braille text. All word pronunciations by the respondent are unclear and vague.
4	The respondent can pronounce most words correctly, but there are several words that are pronounced incorrectly, such as the word "tiba-tiba" becoming "siba-siba" and the word "terserempak" becoming "terserimpak".
5	The respondent can pronounce most words correctly, but there is one word that is pronounced incorrectly, namely the word "licik" becoming "lecek".
6	The respondent is able to pronounce all the words found in the braille text correctly.

Based on Table 1, the researcher found that two respondents, namely respondent 1 and respondent 6, were able to pronounce all the words in the braille text correctly. Two out of the six respondents, namely respondent 4 and respondent 5, were able to pronounce most words correctly; however, there were minor errors made by respondent 4, where the word “tiba-tiba” became “siba-siba” and the word “terserempak” became “terserimpak”, while respondent 5 mispronounced the word “licik” as “lecek”. One respondent, respondent 2, was able to read the Malay braille text but had difficulty pronouncing the syllable “di”, which is a combination of the letters “d” and “i”. Furthermore, the researcher found that only one out of the six respondents was unable to pronounce the words in the braille text, namely respondent 3.

Findings on Malay Language Features That Are Difficult to Master from the Aspect of Punctuation

According to Anne and Saidatul (2020), punctuation is the most basic method to assist the process of reading information from written text and to understand the emphasis intended by the writer in each sentence. Without the use of punctuation, readers are unable to comprehend intonation emphasis and the emotions that the writer wishes to convey in their writing.

Table 2: Malay Language Features That Are Difficult to Master from the Aspect of Punctuation

Respondent	Malay Punctuation Features Mastered/Difficult to Master
1	The respondent is able to identify all punctuation marks such as full stops, commas, and hyphens correctly.
2	The respondent is unable to identify all punctuation marks such as full stops, commas, and hyphens correctly.
3	The respondent is unable to identify all punctuation marks such as full stops, commas, and hyphens correctly.
4	The respondent is able to identify all punctuation marks such as full stops, commas, and hyphens correctly.
5	The respondent is able to identify all punctuation marks such as full stops, commas, and hyphens correctly.
6	The respondent is able to identify all punctuation marks such as full stops, commas, and hyphens correctly.

Based on Table 2, the majority of respondents were able to identify punctuation correctly. The researcher found that four out of six respondents, namely respondent 1, respondent 4, respondent 5, and respondent 6, were able to identify punctuation correctly. Only two respondents were unable to master all aspects of punctuation in Malay braille texts, namely respondent 2 and respondent 3.

Findings on Malay Language Features That Are Difficult to Master from the Aspect of Fluency

According to Samuels (2006), it is concluded that there are three components involved in reading fluency, namely accuracy in identifying and understanding words correctly, speed, which refers to the ability to identify words quickly, and intonation, which refers to the ability to read with correct pronunciation and appropriate intonation that matches the emotions intended by the writer.

Table 3: Malay Language Features That Are Difficult to Master from the Aspect of Fluency

Respondent	Malay Fluency Features Mastered/Difficult to Master
1	The respondent is able to read and identify all words well with slight intonation; however, the reading is slow because the respondent takes time to identify each letter in the braille text. For example, there are pauses between one word and another during the respondent's reading. Therefore, the respondent's reading fluency is at a moderate level.
2	The respondent is unable to read fluently because the respondent cannot identify all words in the text and is unable to read with intonation.
3	The respondent is unable to read fluently because the respondent cannot identify all words in the text and is unable to read with intonation.
4	The respondent is able to read fluently because the respondent can identify each word in the text well, read quickly, and use intonation.
5	The respondent is able to read fluently because the respondent can identify each word in the text well, read quickly, and use intonation.
6	The respondent is able to read and identify all words well with slight intonation; however, the reading is slow because the respondent takes time to identify each letter in the braille text. For example, there are pauses between one word and another during the respondent's reading. Therefore, the respondent's reading fluency is at a moderate level.

Based on Table 3, the researcher found that there were two respondents, namely respondent 1 and respondent 6, who were able to read each word fluently but still exhibited pauses between words. This is because both respondents took time to identify the letters in the Malay braille text. For respondent 2 and respondent 3, reading fluency was disrupted because respondent 2 was unable to pronounce the words in the text, while respondent 3 was unable to master the aspects of pronunciation and punctuation. In addition, there were two respondents who were able to read each word fluently, namely respondent 4 and respondent 5.

Findings on Malay Language Features That Are Difficult to Master from the Aspect of Intonation

According to Allen (1971), intonation is a linguistic quality that encompasses both melody and rhythm. He further stated that intonation is produced through variations in pitch height and depth, along with stress, loudness, and differing pause lengths.

Table 4: Malay Language Features That Are Difficult to Master from the Aspect of Intonation

Respondent	Malay Intonation Features Mastered/Difficult to Master
1	The respondent reads the braille text with flat intonation. The respondent reads without variation in pitch depth, stress, loudness, and pause length.
2	The respondent reads the braille text with flat intonation. The respondent reads without variation in pitch depth, stress, loudness, and pause length.
3	The respondent reads the braille text with flat intonation. The respondent reads without variation in pitch depth, stress, loudness, and pause length.
4	The respondent reads the braille text with good intonation. The respondent is able to read with varied pitch depth, stress, loudness, and pause length.
5	The respondent is able to read with varied pitch depth, stress, loudness, and pause length.
6	The respondent reads the braille text with good intonation. The respondent is able to read with varied pitch depth, stress, loudness, and pause length.

Based on Table 4, the researcher found that there were three respondents, namely respondent 4, respondent 5, and respondent 6, who were able to read Malay braille texts with accurate intonation. For the other respondents, two of them, namely respondent 2 and respondent 3, were unable to produce appropriate intonation due to a lack of skills in pronunciation, punctuation, and fluency, while one respondent, respondent 1, read the Malay braille text with flat intonation

4.2 Findings on Factors Contributing to Difficulties in Mastering Malay Reading Skills among MBPKP at Sekolah Kebangsaan Klang, Klang, Selangor

This section explains the findings of the study for the second research objective. Among the factors that cause difficulties in reading the Malay language among MBPKP at Sekolah Kebangsaan Klang, Klang, Selangor are the family's standard of living, students' self-motivation, students' ability to receive Braille language input during Malay language lessons and limited access to Braille reading materials.

Family Socioeconomic Status

A low family socioeconomic status among MBPKP contributes to difficulties in purchasing sufficient learning support facilities. For example, electronic devices such as smartphones and laptops are now equipped with various special features that can facilitate reading, writing and information searching for individuals with visual impairments. Among the special features available on smartphones that can assist individuals with special needs are VoiceOver, TalkBack and Braille keyboards. However, the cost of purchasing such assistive devices for MBPKP is usually high and can reach thousands of ringgit. As a result, MBPKP from low-income families are unable to afford the cost of assistive learning tools that could facilitate their learning process.

Students' Self-Motivation

Two respondents stated that low self-motivation among students affects their mastery of Malay language reading skills, particularly in terms of vocabulary acquisition. According to Mariam and Zanariah (2015), motivation is an internal state that drives an individual's feelings, thoughts and behaviors toward achieving a targeted goal. Some students with disabilities have low self-confidence because they perceive themselves as different from other students due to their limitations. Consequently, low motivation among MBPKP can disrupt their belief in their own abilities to perform tasks, including their ability to read. Zamry and Nur (2021) also stated that students fail to master basic reading skills due to a lack of self-motivation and a lack of interest in learning things they perceive as difficult.

Students' Ability to Receive Braille Language Input during Malay Language Learning

Students with low ability to understand and receive Malay language learning input in the form of Braille experience difficulties in mastering reading skills, even though teachers at school teach these lower primary students using the same syllabus. For example, some students are able to memorize Braille codes easily, while others do not have the same ability, causing them to struggle to memorize Braille writing codes. Generally, the problem of students with lower abilities in understanding a syllabus does not only occur among MBPKP; it is also faced by some mainstream students. Therefore, this issue is not unfamiliar to educators throughout Malaysia.

Limited Access to Braille Reading Materials

Students can only access and learn to read Malay language texts in Braille through teacher guidance at school, but this does not occur when they are at home. This is because access to Braille reading materials is usually limited to school and not all parents have knowledge of Braille writing. This situation indicates inequality in access to education for students with special needs at home. One possible solution is to provide digital Braille reading resources that can be accessed online and to offer interactive exercises or teaching materials through online learning platforms. This would ensure that students can continue learning Braille outside the school environment, reduce access limitations and increase their independence in learning Malay through Braille.

4.3 Discussion of Research Findings

This study discussed the research findings in relation to the research questions, with a focus on the difficulties faced by MBPKP in mastering Malay language reading skills at Sekolah Kebangsaan Klang, Klang, Selangor, as well as the factors contributing to these difficulties. The findings revealed that several characteristics of the Malay language pose challenges to MBPKP in reading, which were examined through four key aspects: pronunciation, punctuation, fluency and intonation. In terms of pronunciation, not all respondents were able to pronounce words accurately due to differences in individual reading proficiency levels. For punctuation, most respondents were able to identify punctuation marks correctly and pause appropriately while reading. However, reading fluency among the respondents was generally unsatisfactory, as many students required additional time to recognise Braille characters, resulting in frequent pauses. Intonation also varied, with some students able to read expressively, while others read in a flat and monotonous manner due to weaknesses in fluency and punctuation skills.

With regard to the second research objective, the study identified several factors that contribute to difficulties in mastering Malay language reading skills among MBPKP. These factors include family socioeconomic status, limited access to Braille reading materials, low self-motivation and students' limited ability to understand and receive Braille-based learning input. A low family standard of living restricts the ability to purchase specialised learning aids, such as electronic devices designed for Braille learning, thereby limiting opportunities for independent learning at home. Additionally, the lack of Braille reading materials means that students depend heavily on teachers and school-based learning, as many parents do not possess Braille literacy.

Low self-motivation further affects students' persistence and effort in mastering reading skills, while differences in cognitive ability influence students' capacity to benefit from the same syllabus.

The findings related to Objective 1 were found to be consistent with the study by Che and Abdullah (2004), which also identified characteristics of the Malay language that are difficult for students with special needs to master. However, while the earlier study focused on linguistic aspects such as word formation and affixation among deaf students, this study identified reading-related characteristics which are pronunciation, punctuation, fluency and intonation among students with visual impairments. These differences can be attributed to variations in research focus and the type of disability examined, although both studies highlight the presence of inherent challenges in mastering the Malay language.

Similarly, the findings for Objective 2 showed partial consistency with the study by Nur and Haris (2017), particularly in relation to family socioeconomic status and students' ability to receive Braille-based learning input. Higher family income enables parents to provide adequate learning facilities, which positively influences students' motivation, confidence and academic performance. However, this study also identified additional factors, namely self-motivation and limited access to Braille reading materials, which were not emphasised in the previous study due to differences in research objectives. Overall, the findings demonstrate that difficulties in mastering Malay language reading skills among MBPKP are influenced by a combination of linguistic, cognitive, motivational and socio-environmental factors.

V. CONCLUSION

Overall, this study proves that MBPKP students face difficulties in Malay reading, as reflected in their tested reading skills. The respondents were assessed across four aspects of reading skills: pronunciation, punctuation, fluency and intonation. Weaknesses in mastering reading skills indirectly affect their potential and motivation to acquire other skills in the Malay language subject. The researcher concludes that there is a direct relationship between the respondents' level of reading skills and the factors contributing to their difficulties in mastering Malay reading skills. The study also found that all selected subjects exhibited different levels of cognitive development. For future research, it is recommended that the study scope be expanded to include a larger number of respondents, involving MBPKP students from other special education schools, to obtain more detailed information. Additionally, further studies are suggested to broaden the scope to include other Malay language characteristics that are difficult to master in reading, such as affixes and vowels, to enhance the research findings.

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