

Guiding literacy growth: A school leadership reading intervention project

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Received : October 2024
Accepted : November 2024
Published : December 2024

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to assess the reading proficiency of the After-School Reading Intervention Project in international schools in Selangor. The study was conducted on 20 respondents from an international school in Selangor, using a quantitative research technique. Data were obtained using a questionnaire and the analysis report of the pre-test and post-test in reading proficiency before and after implementing the After-School Reading Intervention Project. The results showed that the students found the improvement project extremely practical and helpful in improving reading skills and proficiency. The After-School Reading Intervention Project significantly improved students' reading skills, especially pronunciation, fluency, and expression. Students showed greater interest and confidence in reading post-intervention, aided by increased parental support and engaging materials. The reading workshops proved effective, and students and parents acknowledged the program's positive impact on literacy development. The implications for students and educational stakeholders, as well as future research suggestions, are highlighted.

Keywords: after-school intervention, reading proficiency, students, reading skills

INTRODUCTION

Reading is essential for children to succeed academically, develop cognitively, and learn throughout their lives. It promotes autonomous study, increases vocabulary, and strengthens language proficiency—all of which support both academic and personal development (Yusuf, 2014; Oladunjoye et al., 2016). Reading entails intricate cognitive processes that convert textual symbols into meaning, claim Aina et al. (2011). Notwithstanding its significance, Malaysian pupils' reading skills fall short of international standards. Compared to the OECD average of 77%, just 54% of Malaysian pupils attained Level 2 reading competency in PISA 2018. The results of PISA 2022 showed a deteriorating trend, with notable drops in reading proficiency and widening student performance inequalities.

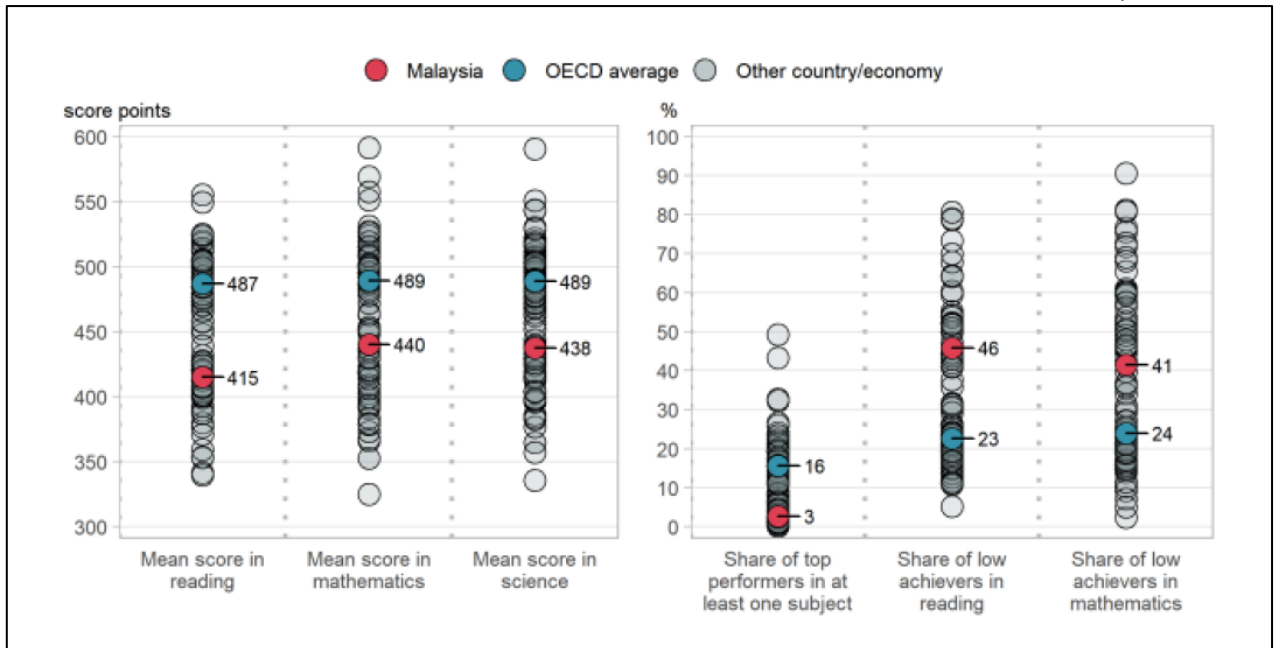


Figure 1. Snapshot of performance in reading, mathematics, and science
 Sources: PISA (2018)

There are cultural considerations as well. According to reports, Malaysians read for an average of three hours a week, much less than their international counterparts do. Teachers and legislators emphasize the necessity of focused initiatives to increase literacy rates and promote a reading culture. Although similar activities are sometimes lacking in private and foreign schools, programs like Malaysia's Nilam Project, introduced in 1999, attempt to foster reading habits in government schools. These institutions' teachers observe recurrent issues, such as restricted reading accuracy and bad pronunciation, frequently caused by inadequate practice at home.

After-school programs (ASPs) assist pupils develop important skills like reading by offering controlled learning environments outside of school hours. These programs frequently include focused interventions that successfully meet the requirements of each person, such as guided reading, phonics training, and fluency practice (Haliru et al., 2015). Students who take part in ASPs exhibit notable gains in vocabulary, comprehension, and general reading fluency, according to studies.

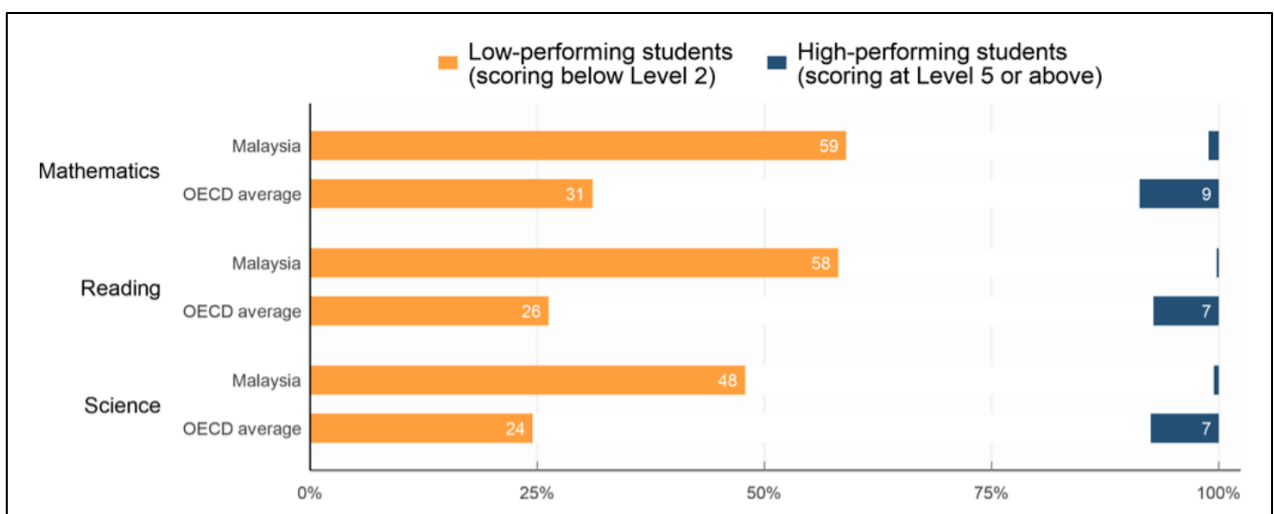


Figure 2. Snapshot of Performance in Reading, Mathematics, and Science
 Sources: PISA (2022)

LITERATURE REVIEW

After-school reading intervention

Programs for after-school reading intervention have become more popular as a way to help struggling readers outside of the typical school day. Through the use of technology-enhanced education, individualised support, and planned exercises, these programs seek to improve students' literacy abilities, including vocabulary, phonemic awareness, and comprehension (Rashid & Asghar, 2016). The beneficial effects of after-school reading activities on academic results are often demonstrated by research. English Language Arts (ELA) and reading proficiency have been shown to increase under initiatives like the 21st Century Community Learning Centres (CCLC). Students in the primary and middle grades benefit most from these interventions, as seen by the noticeable improvements in their literacy and standardised test results. In order to engage students holistically, effective programs usually incorporate both academic and socioemotional learning components. Nonetheless, program execution must be faithful; alterations to the program's design may lessen its efficacy (Research for Action, 2017).

The use of computer-based reading programs (CBRPs) has transformed after-school interventions. Funnix and Headsprout provide explicit phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension education. According to research, these programs help improve basic literacy abilities, particularly among at-risk early-graders. CBRPs provide interactive, self-paced learning with little supervision, making them popular for after-school programs. For example, Headsprout uses gamified settings to teach reading by engaging students with visual and aural cues (Pindiprolu & Forbush, 2022).

Successful after-school programs have various characteristics:

- a) Alignment with students' academic requirements and objectives, resulting in targeted skill development.
- b) High-quality implementation by skilled individuals is critical for attaining the targeted results.
- c) Flexibility in applying evidence-based strategies to local circumstances, as described in every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) framework.

Despite their accomplishments, obstacles persist. For example, while some programs excel at boosting academic abilities, they may lack components that target wider developmental objectives like motivation and self-efficacy. Furthermore, heterogeneity in student participation and external factors such as family support might impact program efficacy (Research for Action, 2017).

Leadership

Leadership is critical to the success of after-school reading interventions since it influences program effectiveness and student results. According to recent research, leadership in educational settings entails guiding teachers and staff and creating a climate favorable to cooperation, participation, and ongoing improvement in reading teaching. Recent research emphasizes the value of instructional leadership in after-school reading programs, where leaders are accountable for defining objectives and monitoring and offering feedback on instructional practices. Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2017) discovered that this leadership style substantially impacted teaching quality and student performance. Effective instructional leadership in after-school programs often includes selecting suitable curricula, providing continual professional development for staff, and ensuring that learning tools are available (Leithwood et al., 2020).

Collaborative leadership models have been effective in fostering a team-based approach to resolving children's reading difficulties in the context of after-school reading treatments. Collaborative leaders value teacher participation in decision-making processes and build professional learning communities where employees may exchange thoughts, tactics, and best practices. Johnson et al. (2019) found that pupils receive more customized and effective education when after-school leaders actively collaborate with instructors. This collaborative atmosphere improves reading outcomes, increases staff satisfaction, and minimizes burnout by making instructors feel more supported in their positions.

Furthermore, leaders who emphasize shared leadership are more likely to develop a culture of accountability and ownership among employees, resulting in a more durable and effective intervention program. In their research on after-school program leadership, Hallinger and Huber (2017) claim that shared leadership promotes a more dynamic and responsive atmosphere for reading teaching, in which both leaders and instructors assume leadership roles. Shared leadership allows leaders to draw on the pooled knowledge of their teams, resulting in more flexible methods for struggling readers.

METHODOLOGY

This study aimed to increase students' reading competency at P International School A by implementing an after-school reading intervention. A quantitative study approach was employed to measure the intervention's efficacy, with data collected via a pre-test and post-test. The purposive sampling method was used to pick 20 Year 5 pupils (13 males and 7 girls) aged 10 to 11. The sample was not typical of the full school population; hence the findings cannot be generalised. Two primary data-collecting techniques were used: a questionnaire and pre- and post-tests. The questionnaire was separated into two sections: Section A collected demographic data, whereas Section B included 12 questions to test students' judgments of their reading ability. The replies were evaluated using a five-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was given before and after the intervention to assess changes in attitudes towards reading. Google Translate was employed to ensure correct replies from non-English speakers, namely Japanese pupils.

The pre-and post-tests evaluated students' reading abilities in five areas: word pronunciation, fluency, volume, expressiveness, and punctuation. The pre-test was administered at the start of the intervention, followed by the post-test at the conclusion. The exam results were used to assess progress in reading competence. The intervention consists of six one-hour weekly after-school programs between October 1 and November 5, 2021. Each session emphasized different elements of reading, such as pronunciation, fluency, loudness, expressiveness, and punctuation. Parents were advised to promote reading at home. If parental assistance was unavailable, children might book 20-minute Google Meet or Zoom meetings with the teacher.

Data was gathered via the pre-and post-tests and questionnaire replies. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and averages. This enabled the researcher to examine changes in reading skills and student attitudes. An operational strategy highlighted the project's major activities and responsibilities, such as meeting with school officials, alerting parents and students, and creating materials. A Gantt chart was utilized to ensure the project adhered to the timetable. The research attempted to increase reading abilities through organized after-school sessions, including pre-and post-assessments and feedback, to assess the intervention's effectiveness.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The study used questionnaires and pre- and post-tests to measure the reactions of 20 kids to an after-school reading intervention. The questionnaire results suggested that respondents had mixed attitudes about after-school reading. Forty percent of kids were uninterested in the intervention, whereas thirty percent exhibited curiosity. Many kids lacked fundamental reading abilities, and barely 30% demonstrated competency. Many students (75%) did not devote enough time to reading outside of school, and 40% were uninterested in various book genres, probably due to a lack of exposure. Reading proficiency was similarly low prior to the intervention. Among 20 kids, 40% scored between 15 and 20 on a pre-reading evaluation, suggesting intermediate competence, whereas 20% earned between 1 and 9 points, indicating weak reading abilities. Pronunciation, fluency, emotion, and punctuation were critical areas for development. Despite low parental support for reading at home, 50% of parents offered assistance when feasible. Students were often more comfortable reading at home than in school, with 55% preferring audio stories for ease of comprehension. The pre-test scores revealed that most children needed to improve in all areas of reading, although a few indicated intermediate or advanced abilities, particularly in pronunciation, expressiveness, and fluency. Post-test findings significantly improved reading skills, validating the intervention's efficacy.

DISCUSSION

The intervention's success was demonstrated by significant changes in student attitudes and reading performance. Prior to the intervention, kids were often uninterested or lacked confidence in their reading skills. Following the intervention, 100% of students indicated passion for reading, representing a significant shift in attitude. Furthermore, students' self-confidence in their reading abilities increased, with 70% feeling more capable after the intervention compared to only 30% before. Improvements were also seen in the technical elements of reading. Students improved their pronunciation by an average of 0.8 points, indicating that activities such as phonics drills and reading aloud aided in articulation. Students improved their punctuation and expressiveness scores by 1.2 points, suggesting a better

awareness of how punctuation affects reading dynamics and emotions.

The intervention's effectiveness was most likely due to a mix of planned reading sessions, focused activities, and a positive learning atmosphere that encouraged children to interact with reading content. By instilling interest and developing technical abilities, the curriculum helped children approach reading with greater confidence, setting the path for long-term academic success. The post-test findings supported the intervention's favourable influence on kids' reading ability, indicating that after-school reading interventions may be an effective strategy for enhancing literacy outcomes.

Table 1. Test Result

Demographic	Pre-Test November 2021		Post-Test January 2022	
	Total Marks	Percentage (%)	Total Marks	Percentage (%)
Student 1	10	50	15	75
Student 2	9	45	12	60
Student 3	16	80	20	100
Student 4	10	50	13	65
Student 5	15	75	17	85
Student 6	19	95	20	100
Student 7	10	50	13	65
Student 8	13	65	18	90
Student 9	17	85	19	95
Student 10	10	50	15	75
Student 11	10	50	14	70
Student 12	7	35	13	65
Student 13	20	100	20	100
Student 14	20	100	20	100
Student 15	5	25	11	55
Student 16	20	100	20	100
Student 17	8	40	14	70
Student 18	15	75	20	100
Student 19	10	50	15	75
Student 20	10	50	15	75

Table 2. Paired Sample t-test Results

	t	df	p-value	Mean	Standard Deviation
Pre-test	7.58	19	0.05	12.84	4.78
Post-test				16.26	3.23

RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

The project sought to enhance reading performance at an international school in Selangor. Initial tests revealed that pupils struggled with reading abilities such as pronunciation, fluency, and confidence owing to a lack of parental assistance. Following the intervention, all kids reported an interest in reading, and their reading abilities were substantially increased. The after-school reading program, supported by instructors and parents, was critical to improving pupils' abilities. Teachers and parents played important roles in fostering a positive reading environment that increased children's confidence and interest. The program employed student-centered sessions to teach fundamental reading skills. Collaboration, good leadership, and active family participation all contributed to positive outcomes, consistent with earlier studies on the value of individualized, family-supported education.

The program's success demonstrates the value of leadership and teacher involvement in developing reading abilities. Transformational leadership, particularly during crises such as the COVID-19 epidemic, was critical for adjusting instructional approaches. Future treatments should begin earlier in the school year and include a complete reading program. Expanding the research to include other schools and employing long-term assessment methodologies may offer further information on the intervention's long-term impact. The researcher suggests commencing the reading

intervention at the start of the school year and providing seminars to all interested kids, not just participants. This technique should involve the entire school, allowing instructors to monitor reading progress throughout the year. Collaboration between the Head of Department (HOD), teachers, and school administration is critical for developing interesting reading programs. Schools should also provide adequate reading resources and promote family engagement to build a strong reading culture at home.

Improving the elementary school curriculum to include various reading materials and test understanding is critical. Creating a literacy-rich atmosphere at home and limiting children's screen time can dramatically enhance their reading habits. Parents and teachers must collaborate to help youngsters develop their reading skills. Setting reasonable objectives and offering feedback might help kids gain confidence and self-efficacy. With their knowledge, teachers could encourage reluctant readers by pairing them with compelling texts and providing tailored assistance to overcome obstacles.

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