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# Readers and reading teachers of ESL: Perceptions of future English language teachers

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## ABSTRACT

Reading is one of the most important skills in second language learning. This is especially true at the tertiary level because it secures success in academic learning and facilitates in other parts of language learning (Carrell, 1989). However, teaching reading is somewhat complicated as reading is an intricate and complex cognitive process itself. In Malaysia, the issue of non-proficient graduates in the English language is continually being debated, which implies that the students are not well-prepared to cope with academic literacy (David & Govindasamy, 2006; Pandian, 2000). Along the same line, a growing body of research suggests that the beliefs, attitudes, expectations and perceptions of pre-service teachers should be highly addressed (Pajares, 1992; Young, 1998; Kagan, 1992). Thus, the present study seeks to explore the self-perceptions of the undergraduates of a Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) program, as readers and also as future teachers of ESL reading. It is hoped that through this study, a better understanding of the perceptions can be obtained so as to increase the quality of new teachers entering the world of teaching. It is assumed that those students who possess positive self-perceptions as readers will also have positive self-perceptions to become reading teachers.

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## Introduction

Reading unlocks the key to success. And for English as Second Language (ESL) learners, reading is the most vital skill to master so as to ensure success in academic learning and also to develop better skills in other parts of language learning (Carrell, 1989). The importance of reading is further seen at the tertiary level as the main medium of instruction is the English language. In Malaysia, the issue of non-proficient graduates in the English language is continually being debated at the national level. Both lecturers and employers claimed that students do not reach the expected level of proficiency (Kaur & Thiyagarajah, 1999). This implies that the students are not well-prepared to cope with academic literacy (David & Govindasamy, 2006; Pandian, 2000).

At the tertiary level, students are required to read, provide explanations, critically review extensive academic passages and process the acquired information in the forms of speaking and also writing (Nambiar, 2007; Levine, Ferenz & Reves, 2000). These unmet demands signal how important reading is, and thus worthy of serious attention.

### Statement of Problem

Teaching reading in a second language classroom is not an easy task as reading is an intricate and complex cognitive process. It is of great significance therefore, to look into student teachers' perceptions as readers themselves and also as future reading teachers, where they can be effective teachers once embarked upon the teaching profession.

### Research Objectives

The present study seeks to explore the self-perceptions of the undergraduates of a Teaching English as a Second Language

(TESL) program, as readers and also as future teachers of ESL reading. It is hoped that through this study, a better understanding of the perceptions can be obtained so as to increase the quality of new teachers going into the teaching career. It is assumed that those students who possess positive self-perceptions as readers will also have positive self-perceptions to become reading teachers.

### Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. Is there any relation between student's self-perceptions as readers and as future reading teachers?
2. Do the students' self-perceptions as readers predict them as good future reading teachers?

### Review of Literature

A growing body of research suggests that the beliefs, attitudes, expectations and perceptions of pre-service teachers should be highly addressed (Pajares, 1992). Young (1998) and Chong, Wong & Lang (2005) highlight the importance of getting pre-service teacher perceptions in which the pre-service teachers' opinions and attitudes toward teaching will shape their decisions on the use of teaching techniques and methods in the future. This view is shared by Kagan (1992), who observes that pre-service teachers may bring their pre-conceived ideas on teaching into their profession if they are made aware of them. Additionally, pre-service teachers' beliefs may perhaps sift the knowledge and transformation they will undergo throughout their teacher education.

Along the same line, Joram & Gabriel (1998) also identifies several pre-conceived beliefs that pre-service teachers may embrace during their college training namely, "1) Pre-service

teachers may think that the learning at job is the most effective way to learn to teach while they may devalue the theoretical knowledge that they gain in the teacher education courses, 2) Pre-service teachers' own memories in which they remember themselves as "model" students may lead them to overestimate their future students' abilities and learning styles, and therefore not be able to recognize the problematic learning issues their students might have and 3) Pre-service teachers may think that the skills to manage a class are the most important competencies as a teacher" (cited in Aldemir & Sezer, 2009: 106).

A number of other researchers have also come out with studies regarding pre-service teachers' perceptions. They have discovered the advantages in facilitating pre-service teachers to reflect on their beliefs. In a qualitative study, Almarza (1996) uncovered some issues which characterize the process of learning to teach a foreign language from the student teachers' perspective.

There are also evidences that pre-existing beliefs are so influential that attempts to change teaching styles are ineffective, unless these beliefs are directly questioned (Johnson, 1988; O'Loughlin, 1988). The earlier a belief is incorporated into the belief structure, the more difficult it is to alter (Pajares, 1992).

Smylie (1998) in his study of 56 teachers who underwent a staff development process, concluded that "teacher's perceptions and beliefs are the most significant predictors of individual change" (p. 23). In another study, Brown & McGannon (1998) trace the changes in the beliefs of 35 trainee teachers regarding language learning and the roles of teachers during their teacher education.

Tercanlioglu (2001) found that pre-service teachers did not describe themselves as very competent, but possess intrinsic reasons when they read. They also think that good reading teachers should also be good readers who read alongside their students.

The related literature signifies that examining the perceptions and beliefs of pre-service teachers is beneficial. However, research in the area of reading in the second language and also of undergraduates' perceptions is still lacking. Thus, the present study is anticipated to contribute to the existing second language teaching landscape.

## Methodology

### Sampling Procedure

Using convenience sampling method, undergraduate students of B. Ed TESL program (N=60) from a Malaysian public university were purposively selected to participate in the research. The age range was from 19 to 24 years old (M= 21.90, SD= 1.55), consisting of 9 males and 51 females. A set of questionnaire was then distributed to be completed by the respondents.

### Research Framework

It was a correlational study which was based on the quantitative approach in collecting the data. The aim was to see the relationship between the respondents' self-perceptions as readers and as future reading teachers. Regression was used to investigate the strength of the two variables. It is assumed that positive self-perceptions as readers may predict the positive self-perceptions of future reading teachers. The independent variable was the self-perceptions as readers, while the dependent variable was the self-perceptions as future reading teachers.

### Hypothesis 1

Ho: There is no relationship between self-perceptions as readers and as future reading teachers.

Ha: There is a relationship between self-perceptions as readers and as future reading teachers.

### Hypothesis 2

Ho: The independent variable does not significantly predict the dependent variable.

Ha: The independent variable significantly predicts the dependent variable.

### Description of Instruments and Variables Involved

The questionnaire was adopted from Tercanlioglu (2001), which was adapted from Henk & Melnick's (1995) Reader Self-perception Scale (RSPS). For demographic data, it covered the questions on age and gender. The first part of the questionnaire consisted of 33 questions that provide information concerning how the respondents feel about themselves as readers. A 5-point Likert scale of strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree and strongly disagree was employed. The second part, Teaching Reading Self-perception Scale (TRSPS) contains 5 items related to beliefs and attitudes toward the teaching of reading. 1 more item was inserted to draw respondents' evaluation of their teacher education program in preparing them as readers and as reading teachers. The same 5-Likert scale was used.

### Data Analysis

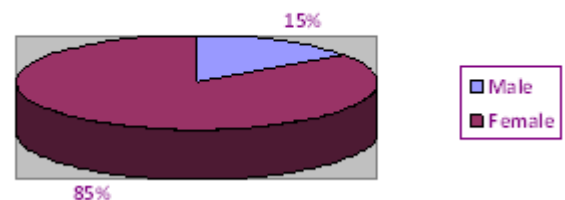
The data was analysed using SPSS 20.0, and basic descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were computed for all the data. Percentages were used to report the proportion of participant's responses for the RSPS. Bivariate correlation was used to explore the relation between the respondents' self-perception as readers and as future reading teachers and between their self-perception as readers and their perception of how well their teacher education program was (Research Question 1). Regression was also conducted to find out how strong the relationships were (Research Question 2).

### Demographic Findings

#### Gender

There were 60 respondents in total. In terms of gender distribution across the cohort, there were 51 female students (85%) and 9 male students (15%) who participated in the study (See figure 1).

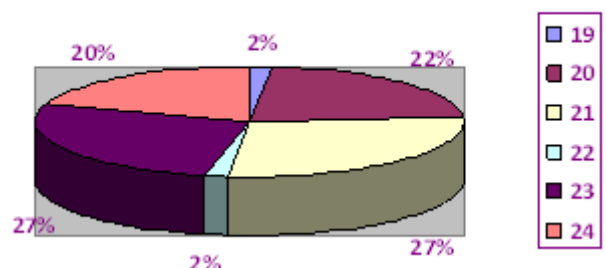
Figure 1: The gender of respondents



#### Age

The participants' age ranged from 19 to 24 years old (M= 21.90, SD= 1.55). The frequency distribution of ages across the sample is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Age of respondents

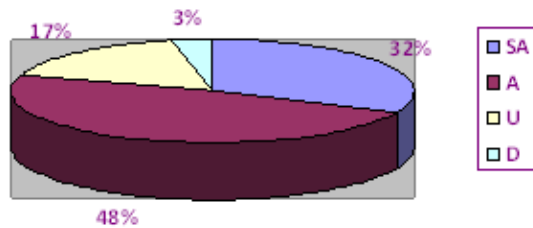


### Perceptions toward teacher education program

It was found that 80% of the participants felt 'strongly agree' (31.7%) and 'agree' (48.3%) that they were trained well to teach reading in their current teacher education program (M=

1.92, SD= 0.79). No single response was recorded for ‘strongly disagree’.

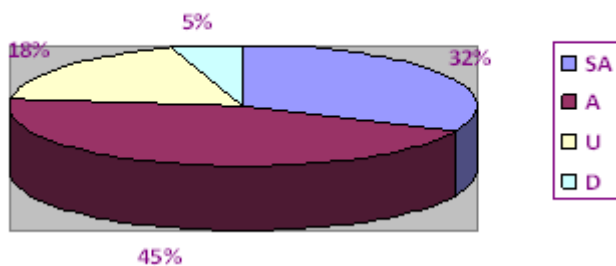
Figure 3: Perceptions toward Teacher Education Program



#### Being future reading teacher

77% of the respondents reported that they want to teach reading in the future, 31.7% chose ‘strongly agree’ and 45% chose ‘agree’ (M= 1.97, SD= 0.43). No single response was recorded for ‘strongly disagree’.

Figure 4: Becoming future reading teacher



#### Answers to Research Questions

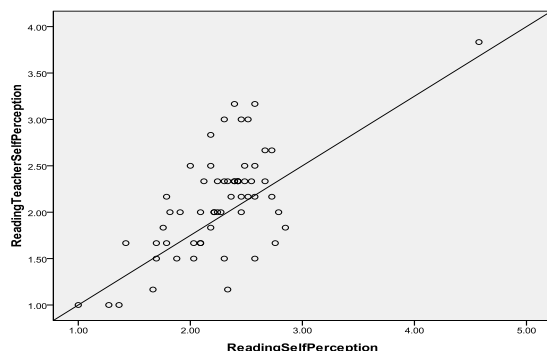
**Research Question 1: Is there any relation between students’ self-perceptions as readers and as future reading teachers?**

Table 1. Correlation

Variable	1	2
1. Reader self-perception	---	.675**
2. Reading teacher self perception	.675**	---
<i>M</i>	2.260	2.106
<i>SD</i>	.496	.567

\*\* $p < .01$

The relationship between ‘Reader self-perception’ and ‘Reading teacher self-perception’ was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. The result showed  $p = 0.000$ . We then reject null hypothesis. So it meant that there is a relationship between the respondents’ self-perceptions as readers and as future reading teachers. The coefficient correlation was  $r = 0.675$ . It also suggested that the relationship was positively strong. It can be seen in the figure below.



**Research Question 2: Do the students’ self-perceptions as readers predict them as good future reading teachers?**

From the above table, it can be concluded that the independent variable ‘Students’ self perceptions as readers’ included in the model explains 45.5% of the variance in the

#### Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.675 <sup>a</sup>	.455	.446	.42238

a. Predictors: (Constant), RSPmean

dependent variable ‘Students’ self perceptions as future reading teachers’. The remaining 54.5% of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by other predictor(s) that are not included in the model.

#### ANOVA<sup>b</sup>

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	8.651	1	8.651	48.488	.000 <sup>a</sup>
Residual	10.348	58	.178		
Total	18.998	59			

a. Predictors: (Constant), RSPmean

b. Dependent Variable: RPTmean

From the ANOVA table above, a statistically significant  $p$  value of 0.000 indicated that the prediction model is statistically significant  $F(1, 58) = 48.488, p = 0.000$ .

#### Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	.360	.257		1.404	.166
Reading SelfPerception	.772	.111	.675	6.963	.000

a. Dependent Variable: ReadingTeacherSelfPerception

From the above COEFFICIENTS table,  $p$  value of 0.000 indicated that ‘Reader self-perception’ is a significant predictor ( $t = 6.963, p = 0.000$ ) of the outcome ‘Reading teacher self-perception’. Based on the results, the prediction equation to predict the outcome of ‘Reading teacher self-perceptions’ using ‘Reader self-perception’ as the predictor can be constructed as the following:

$$\text{Reading teacher self-perception} = 0.360 + 0.772 (\text{Reader self-perception})$$

#### Conclusions and Recommendations

Correlation Coefficient was conducted to explore the relationship between the respondents’ self perceptions as readers and their perceptions as future reading teachers. On average, the result showed that the respondents had a positive self perception on themselves as readers ( $M = 2.260, SD = .496$ ). It also suggested that their perceptions on becoming future reading teachers was good ( $M = 2.106, SD = .567$ ). The  $p$  value of correlation coefficient in this study was  $p = 0.000$ . We then reject null hypothesis. So it meant that there is a relationship between the respondents’ self perceptions as readers and their self perceptions as future reading teachers. Meanwhile, the score for coefficient correlation was  $r = 0.675$ , which suggested that the relationship was positively strong. Furthermore,  $p$  value in regression,  $p = 0.000$  also suggested that the two variables were statistically significant; meaning that, the self perceptions as readers significantly predicts the self perceptions as future

reading teachers. Thus, findings in the present study conformed to the previous studies which revealed that teachers' self beliefs denote a significant notion embraced by those who join the teaching line.

The researchers would also like to put forward some recommendations based on the findings of the present study. Firstly, teacher education programs should focus more on student teachers' perceptions regarding their reading capability. This is so because the perceptions will guide their options and preference as future teachers. The concept shapes a critical construct in the arena of teacher education. Therefore, teaching institutes should attempt to discover various aspects of student teachers' beliefs on teaching and learning, and seek for insights on how the beliefs interrelate with the gist of the existing teacher education programs (Kagan, 1992; Pajares, 1992). Secondly, having known the importance of teachers' beliefs, continuous and purposeful efforts should be made. Educators, researchers and also administrators should work hand in hand in developing high-quality teacher education program.

To date, many researches support the idea that pre-service teachers' beliefs are an important element in teaching and learning, because they may perpetuate in either effective or ineffective teaching practices in the future. Research efforts such as the present study, is indeed a value-added attempt towards producing effective teachers in schools.

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