

Effects of Using Picture Books on Reading Self-Perception Among Year Two Pupils at A National-type Chinese Primary School

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Abstract

Pupils who feel good about their reading abilities tend to perform better in school. Research has shown that picture books will contribute to pupils taking the initiative to read. The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of picture books on reading self-perception among Year Two pupils at a National-type Chinese Primary School in Hulu Selangor. This study employed a quasi-experimental research with pre-test and post-test designs that involved 75 pupils and four picture books, namely, *No David*, *Swimmy*, *Next Please*, and *The Dot*. This study utilised the Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) that consisted of 33 items and four scales (Progress, Observational Comparison, Social Feedback, and Physiological States). The collected data were analysed using SPSS version 24. The descriptive results indicated an increase in the Mean and Standard deviation scores for reading self-perception levels in the experimental group. A significant difference was observed in the scores between the control group and the experimental group following the intervention. The study subjects from the experimental group had enhanced their self-perception in reading compared to the control group. This study has shed greater light on the application of picture books in the classroom to boost pupils' reading engagement. The results in this study can be used as a guide by pupils, teachers, and parents to enhance pupils' reading self-efficacy levels, especially at the National-type Chinese Primary Schools.

Keywords: Reading abilities, picture book, reading self-perception, Chinese primary school

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Introduction

Reading is important throughout our lifespan and it plays an essential role in education as a means of producing highly literate citizens (Wright & Dunsmuir, 2019). Therefore, all Malaysians should achieve mastery in reading in the process of nation development. Reading is defined as the “understanding, using, evaluating, reflecting on, and engaging with texts in order to achieve one’s goals, to develop one’s knowledge and potential, and to participate in society” (Mo, 2019, p. 2).

Yadav et al. (2016) stated that reading is one of the complex problem-solving processes, in which pupils will not only have to understand the words and sentences, but also the ideas, memories, and knowledge evoked by those words and sentences. Hence, reading involves extracting ideas from written or printed materials to form meaningful and creative selves (Rachmajanti & Musthofiyah, 2017). Pupils’ literacy practices can be influenced by how they see themselves as readers or their level of reading self-perception.

Snow (2002) has conceptualised reading comprehension as a combination of three elements, namely, the reader, the text, and the reading activity. How pupils view themselves as readers is related to their ability to read because pupils who feel good about their reading abilities tend to perform better in school. Thus, to encourage better reading outcomes, the effects of picture books require further investigation, as past research has shown that picture books do contribute towards pupils’ reading process and their initiatives to read (Chen, 2015).

Admittedly, the reading performance of pupils in Chinese primary schools is still unsatisfactory (Liu, 2009). In the 2017 Primary School Evaluation Test (*Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah*), both Chinese language Comprehension and Writing were the least performing subjects among candidates, with the highest number of pupils failing compared to Tamil and Malay language subjects.

Therefore, in 2010, Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah (KSSR) or the Primary School Standard Curriculum had introduced picture books as part of the teaching curricular in the Year One Chinese language textbooks to cultivate the literary standard of Chinese Language. The main purpose of incorporating picture books is to encourage pupils to fall in love with books and nurture independent reading (Ministry of Education, 2011) since picture books convey stories through pictures (Zambo & Hansen, 2007). Since the vocabulary and grammar

used in picture books are easy to read, pupils would be able to remember the plot and make explicit judgements about the stories (Lin, 2011).

van den Heuvel-Panhuizen et al. (2016) indicated that pupils learn better through visual cues rather than words, and picture books convey knowledge and allow readers to monitor their own self-perception after reading stories. Lin (2011) also stressed that pupils comprehend a book better when the stories are presented through pictures. Picture books provide an opportunity for pupils to embrace the journey as they go through the plot and see their own world through the characters in the story, indirectly building healthy emotions, behaviours, and self-perception (Chen, 2014). Furthermore, picture books also inspire them to form new cognitive skills, attitudes, and behaviours that can help them to solve their psychological problems (Cheng, 2017).

Picture books should appeal to readers of all ages and are strongly recommended because of their highly compacted language combined with rich aesthetic displays (Ciecierski & Bintz, 2015; Lysaker et al., 2016). Picture books bring positive messages to the pupils through their cognitive goals and allow pupils to better understand their own behaviour, as well as promote emotional expressions (Cheng, 2017). Picture books can be powerful reading books for building self-perception among young pupils based on their ability to read (Kalb & Van Ours, 2014). Self-perception can impact the development of a pupil's mindset, whether towards a positive or a negative mindset (Gaulton, 2001) because it comes from the inside and cannot be directly taught. However, self-perception can be encouraged and fostered. Picture books that contain information on personality, emotional stability, and social norms are able to teach pupils about moral values. Picture books are often used for teaching languages because of their perceived simplicity, the small number of words, and the supportive frame of pictures (Arizpe & Ryan, 2018).

For that reason, most pupils prefer stories with human or animal characters that display a wide range of cognitive, social, and emotional features (Larsen et al., 2018). When applying picture books in the classroom, pupils identify meaningful and positive messages such as love, which would encourage them to understand themselves and others better (Suprawati et al., 2014). When pupils realise that the characters in the picture books choose to love themselves for who they are, then these pupils are more likely to believe and feel good about themselves. A good-quality children's literature would include texts that evoke sustained

enjoyment and images that build on the story beyond the print (Gibson & Ewing, 2011). Therefore, teachers should select good children's literature to give a positive impact on pupils, which can change their thoughts and behaviours (Aziz et al., 2019).

Reading self-perception is one of the key aspects of reading because it illustrates how pupils value their own reading skills (Flores & Duran, 2016). According to the Department of Education and Skills (2011), reading self-perception among pupils is important for progression in literacy because pupils who view themselves as capable or positive readers will have the ability to perform well in reading. Thus, they will try to read more difficult reading materials and enjoy the activity. This is in line with the self-efficacy theory proposed by Bandura et al. (1996), which stated that in order for pupils to be motivated, they must believe in their capabilities to complete a task. In this study, reading self-perception is defined as how pupils value their own reading skills (Flores & Duran, 2016). Early schooling is an important formative period in the development of the pupils' conceptions of their intellectual ability. According to Peura et al. (2019), self-efficacy is positively related to reading fluency. Therefore, low reading self-efficacy among children needs to be identified and addressed since kindergarten.

Most picture books would contain narratives of how the main characters will eventually solve problems that pupils normally face in real life by utilising their individual qualities and behaviours to achieve their targets positively (Suprawati et al., 2014). Stories that are linked to pupils' real-world and life experiences are more likely to motivate them to increase their knowledge (Law, 2011). Therefore, picture books can teach pupils of adult lessons regarding behaviours and beliefs about success (Suprawati et al., 2014), and serve as a medium for pupils to reflect on their own behaviours and build their self-perception.

This study contributes to the existing literature on the usage of picture books by providing empirical evidence that lead to new knowledge and better understanding of their effects on reading self-perception among National-type Chinese Primary School pupils. Moreover, this study is contextually original by being the first to be empirically conducted and focused on the Malaysian National-type Chinese Primary Schools.

Literature Review

Constructivism Theory

Constructivism is a learning theory that emphasises the role of active learning. The theory of constructivism is grounded in the work of Piaget and Vygotsky (Lourenço, 2012), namely, cognitive constructivism and social constructivism. Piaget believed that mixed-ability learning groups should be used to promote conceptual change. Constructivist frameworks place more emphasis on reading and apply open-ended problems to reading (Bennett-Bogle, 2015). Open-ended questions develop pupils' critical thinking and problem-solving skills. For example, in a reading class, pupils should have the opportunity to engage in the classroom discussion by expressing their ideas, thoughts, and feelings when reading stories, which stimulate their thinking and creativity process or even help them develop their own ideas.

Reading is an active process where words are decoded into knowledge and perception. In picture books, the words and images join together to convey the story and allow the reader to understand the contents. Therefore, reading picture books encourages the mind to think abstractly, memorise, decode, visualise, and understand the vocabulary (Bennett-Bogle, 2015). In addition, teachers would be able to connect the story to their pupils' daily life or personal experiences during reading to activate their prior reading experience. Ulu (2016) found that fluent reading, literal comprehension, and inferential comprehension skills explain 54% of the variance in problem solving. Thus, problem solving exercises can be used interactively with language skills.

The social constructivism theory proposed by Vygotsky (1978) emphasises on social and cultural backgrounds to determine one's behaviour (Matusov, 2015). He observed children's interaction and concluded that pupils solve problems more efficiently in a collective group rather than working alone. The learning process should involve the learners' interaction with others who are more knowledgeable, which may then guide them to tackle and solve various kinds of problems (Kozulin, 2015). In addition, interaction with peers enables pupils to think aloud, discuss, and share what they have read in order to enhance their reading comprehension.

The constructivist learning environment is learner-controlled and pupil-centred. In the

process of reading picture books, teachers should encourage pupils to learn independently and become more actively involved in reading (Schunk, 2012). The purpose of reading is to cultivate pupils' lifelong love for reading and foster creative thinking. Therefore, pupils are responsible for determining their learning goals and regulating their performance towards achieving these goals (Bennett-Bogle, 2015). Pupils also need a simulated environment to encourage exploration and hands-on activities.

Self-Efficacy Theory

The self-efficacy theory is a subset of the social cognitive theory proposed by Bandura (1986). It is rooted in a theory of triadic reciprocal determinism in which a constant interplay exists between personal factors (i.e., self-efficacy beliefs), behaviours, and environmental factors. The self-efficacy theory emphasises on the relative importance of personal factors yet acknowledges that behavioural and environmental factors do have profound effects on the outcomes (Gallagher, 2012).

This theory explains how one's self-efficacy develops and is altered, as well as how it impact one's behavioural change, performance, and personal well-being (Lippke, 2017). Lee and Jonson-Reid (2016) emphasised that self-efficacy affect pupils' learning ability, especially in reading. This is because self-efficacy beliefs have positive relationship with engagement in reading, which lead to greater reading involvement. When pupils think they can finish reading a book, they will indirectly have more confidence when they perform the same task again.

Similarly, Huang (2013) indicated that pupils' performances are based on their own beliefs about themselves. For example, when they believe they can finish a task, then, they will perform better or within a longer period in certain situations. Hence, an individual's belief and efficacy are important mediators towards behavioural achievement.

The tasks chosen by pupils are usually affected by their beliefs regarding their self-efficacy. It can be seen from how much effort pupils put into an activity and how they remain steadfast in facing difficulties while completing it (Lee & Jonson-Reid, 2016). Bandura (1977) listed four major sources of self-efficacy, namely, mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasions, and physiological states. These four sources of self-efficacy can either strengthen or weaken an individual's perceived self-efficacy (Byrd, 2017).

Mastery experiences have the strongest effect on the development of self-efficacy. The way pupils construct their self-efficacy belief is based on their previous performances (Bandura, 1999) and experiences in mastering a related task (Singh & Harun, 2020). When an individual succeeds in completing a certain task, they will be indirectly confident that their success can be repeated with similar tasks (Byrd, 2017). For example, pupils successfully read picture books as these books are easy to understand, which in turn indirectly improve their frequency of success in reading (Lysaker, 2018).

Vicarious experiences are defined as modelling experiences (Byrd, 2017). Pupils observing the successes of their friends become motivated to try tackling a task as they believe that they can succeed too (Cantrell et al., 2013). When reading picture books, collaborative groups enhance pupils' reading self-perception by building upon the comparison of their personal performances with others (Oczkus, 2018).

Social persuasion is encouragement or discouragement from parents or teachers. It pertains to an individual's performance (Bandura, 1997) because it is easily and readily available. Encouragement from parents, teachers, and peers boost pupils' confidence in their capabilities to complete a task (Usher & Pajares, 2008). Most of the time, pupils depend on others to provide evaluative responses and judgements on their performance, as they are usually incapable of making accurate self-appraisals. Therefore, positive feedback will lead pupils to believe that they can successfully complete a task.

Emotional arousal, such as stress, affects an individual's perceived self-efficacy in completing a task. For example, a stressed pupil will start to sweat when a teacher instructs him or her to read aloud. Consequently, he or she will not perform well because this is a symptom of a lack of confidence in reading (Byrd, 2017). Hence, teachers should reduce pupils' anxiety and negative emotions to strengthen their self-efficacy.

Picture Books

Picture books are a type of children's reading books which consist of pictures and texts that allow young and older readers to read and learn (Wolfenbarger & Sipe, 2007). Illustrations use the combination of words and pictures to narrate a story, hence the name 'picture book'. These two mediums compensate each other's shortcomings to provide a

complete yet meaningful story (van den Heuvel-Panhuizen et al., 2016).

Picture books can be divided into two types, namely, picture books with words and wordless picture books. Picture books are created for pupils who cannot yet read or who are in the early stages of learning to read. Therefore, picture books are aimed at their cognitive development, reading ability, and interest. Jalongo and Machado (2016, p. 31) reported that “pupils are able to develop meaningful learning from reading picture books, including develop visual literacy skills, appreciate art and language, understand people, relationship, feelings, and the outside world, and use the vocabulary and language found in picture books”. The themes of picture books are clear, simple, and mostly in a narrative format, such as family, school, growing up, courage, and motivation, typically revolving around the pupils’ daily lives and emotions (Hall, 2012). Furthermore, the themes of picture books are education-related, covering ethics, emotions, life, and society to reflect children’s education.

Therefore, picture books are a high-quality educational resource for pupils that contain meaningful information on how to behave, inspire positive outlooks, and provide positive messages. The contents of picture books may also include self-acceptance, autonomy, and personality, which provide broader, more meaningful reading and educational values for pupils (Chen, 2014). The themes that emerge from a picture book encourage pupils to develop personal, social, and emotional skills. The narrative or images also provide opportunities for discussion of a moral or spiritual nature. The creation of picture books is based on pupils’ vision to meet their cognitive and psychological growth. This type of book helps children establish their reading skills at an early age, develop their ability to read, and have a positive influence on their ability to read texts.

Chaparro-Moreno et al. (2017) found that when learning with wordless picture books, the children produced more word tokens, word types, and utterances, while the teachers showed higher levels of instructional support. Hence, picture books not only provide visual reading and comprehension, they also fulfil the need for better living and growth among pupils. Strouse, Nyhout, and Ganea (2018) found that certain features in story books (e.g., fantasy) were more disruptive to the children in some domains (i.e., problem solving and moral lessons) than others (i.e., word and physics learning) during the reading process. The selected picture books that contain self-identity themes encourages pupils to obtain information, understand the world, develop their thinking skills, solve daily life problems, and lead them to become more educated human beings (Zambo & Hansen, 2007).

Picture books are a high-quality educational resource containing meaningful information that can teach pupils how to behave, inspire a positive outlook, and convey a positive message. Therefore, the appropriate picture book should be chosen to relate to their daily life. *No David* was the first book introduced to the pupils in this study. *No David* is a story about an ordinary and simple boy that pupils can relate to. Teachers can transfer positive information from this picture book to help pupils know themselves better (Shannon, 1998). Meanwhile, *The Dot* reflects a spirit of humanism that helps a little girl to enjoy learning, develop her self-confidence, and use her successful experiences to help other learners (Reynolds, 2003).

The book entitled *Next Please*, even though portrayed as a simple story, can touch a pupil's emotions as it narrates similar experiences among pupils on a psychological level. This picture book has few words and simple pictures, but it conveys the voice of the toys to the hearts of the pupils. The fear of the unknown felt by the toys sitting outside the door is a familiar experience that every pupil would have encountered (Jandl & Junge, 2001). The concept of using these books is to promote change in a person's thinking process and behaviour. For example, the main character in the picture book, *Swimmy*, is different from other fish because of its colour. However, *Swimmy* was able to lead everyone successfully in the end (Lionni & Lionni, 1963). This story delivers a positive message to pupils that everyone is born unique and every individual should know his or her own strength.

Reading Self-Perception

Solheim (2011) defined reading self-efficacy as the perception one has about one's own ability to master the necessary skills to read with fluency. Reading self-perception is how readers view themselves as a reader compared to others. Reading self-perception can impact upon an individual's overall orientation towards the process itself. Pupils who believe they are good readers normally enjoy reading and put more effort into it (Brophy, 2010).

By contrast, pupils who perceive themselves as poor readers were found to associate themselves with poor self-concept (McArthur et al., 2020). At school, pupils would have formed a concept of themselves based on their attitudes, values, and beliefs. The basic self-efficacy model by Bandura (1977, 1982) predicts that four basic factors can affect pupils' capabilities as a reader, namely, progress, observational comparison, social feedback, and physiological state.

Progress is the most influencing factor in forming pupils' self-perception because it represents how one's perception of present reading performance compares with past performance (Henk & Melnick, 1995). Second, observational comparison deals with how pupils perceive their own reading performance compared with the performance of their classmates. Third, social feedback includes direct or indirect verbal input regarding one's reading skills from teachers, classmates, and family members. Fourth, physiological states refer to the internal feelings that the pupils experience while reading a book. Pupils with positive perception of competence in reading will display higher self-efficacy because they are willing to spend more effort to read. Based on the previously mentioned literature, a conceptual model for this study is proposed, as shown in Figure 1.

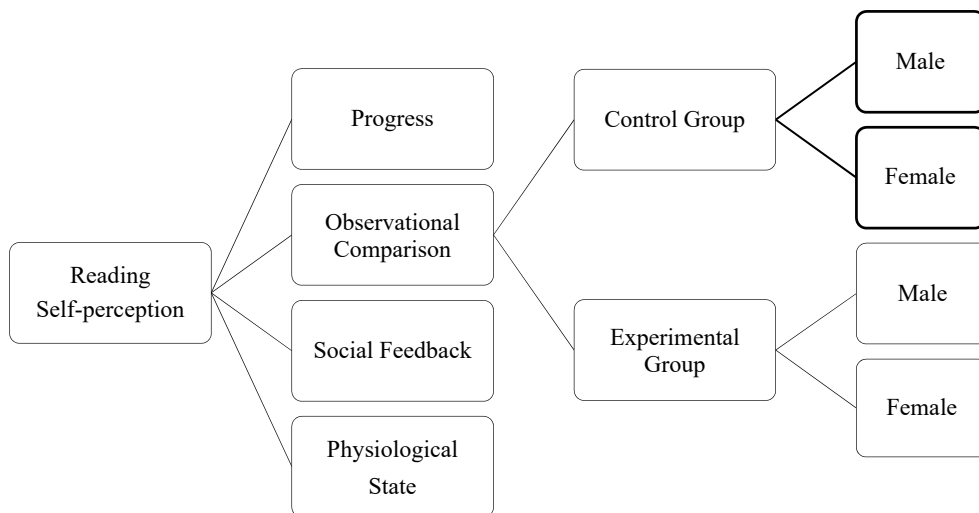


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Reading Self-perception

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Following the discussion on picture books and reading self-perception, two research questions will guide this paper:

- (1) Is there any significant difference in reading self-perception between the control and experimental groups after the use of picture books?
- (2) Is there any significant difference in reading self-perception between males and females in the control and experimental groups before and after the use of picture books?

From the research questions, three null hypotheses were developed:

Ho1: There is no significant difference in reading self-perception between the control and experimental groups after the use of picture books.

Ho2: There is no significant difference in reading self-perception between males and females in the control and experimental groups before the use of picture books.

Ho3: There is no significant difference in reading self-perception between males and females in the control and experimental groups after the use of picture books.

Methodology

Research Design and Procedures

This study employed a quasi-experimental research design, with a pre-test and a post-test that involved 75 Year Two pupils. In terms of gender, the participants consisted of 37 males and 38 females. The age of all participants was homogenous as their age mean ranged between 7.5 to 8.5 years old. The whole sample group was chosen from one National-type Chinese Primary School in the Hulu Selangor district based on the number of Year Two pupils and the school's rating scale in IQ NILAM.

IQ NILAM is an abbreviation for Index Quality NILAM, which is adopted as a standard index for measuring the number of enrichment activities. It is an intensive reading programme planned for all pupils in primary schools in collaboration with the schools' libraries since 1999. The objectives of this programme are to inculcate good reading habits among the pupils, to sustain their reading interest through various activities, provide rewards/incentive for pupils who read the most books, and to enhance their mastery of

vocabulary and grammar, aside from gaining new knowledge from the books or articles they read. Version two of IQ NILAM that began in 2018 includes digital content, such as e-books and online reading materials (Rajaendram, 2017).

IQ NILAM was used as the base for selecting pupils as participants in this study due to its status as the national reading programme that has been implemented for approximately 20 years. The rating scores for the IQ NILAM programme are divided into 3 categories: i) < 1 indicates pupils who failed to meet the minimum NILAM Level; ii) 1 indicates pupils' reading level as good and meets the minimum NILAM Level; and iii) > 1 indicates pupils' reading level as good and they pass the NILAM Level. Therefore, pupils who scored < 1 in the IQ NILAM programme were selected for this study.

Picture books were used with the experimental group to investigate their effects on reading self-perception among the participants. Quasi-experimental designs are likely to occur in school-based research to measure pupils' learning skills, attitudes, and classroom behaviours (Ross & Morrison, 2004). The purpose of this design is to collect empirical data in order to identify any effect on reading self-perception among the National-type Chinese Primary School Year Two pupils in Hulu Selangor after the implementation of picture books by comparing the outcomes of the control and experimental groups. After obtaining consent from the school administration on the appropriate time to conduct activities and practice, a pre-test and a post-test were conducted using the Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) to measure participants' self-perception. Both groups were given the RSPS to answer before undergoing any treatment. The pre-test aimed to check the participants' current reading self-perception level before the chosen picture books are received.

In this study, four picture books, namely, *No David*, *Next Please*, *The Dot*, and *Swimmy* were selected and used to study their effects on the participants' reading self-perception level. Several factors were considered while choosing suitable picture books, such as colourful illustration, age appropriateness, and personal connection (Hu et al., 2016). Additional criteria for the picture books selection include pictures don't echo the text but combine with the words to create meaning (Lysaker, 2018).

The four picture books in this study are internationally renowned and have collectively received seven international picture book awards (educational purposes and creativity), such as *The Caldecott Medal*, *The Christopher Award*, and the *BolognaRagazzi Award*. These

picture books were selected in the hope that at the end of each story, participants would have learnt the lessons from the roles played by each character, apart from gaining new or additional knowledge.

The experiment was conducted in 10 weeks consisting of 15 sessions. Every session lasted for 30 minutes and the lessons were conducted two times weekly for a period of 10 weeks in the classroom. The procedures of the lessons followed a simple routine. Based on the interactive reading process, a lesson plan was drafted in the Chinese language to ask the participants to read the books first, followed by different reading activities.

The designed activities were based on Year Two reading level, which included making connections between the picture books and the participants' daily life experiences during reading. Therefore, the participants were introduced to each picture book by showing the front cover and they were encouraged to express their opinions regarding the story. The planned reading activities included reading aloud, questioning, and discussion.

During one of the lessons, the participants were required to have a discussion within their groups and write down at least three things David can do, as narrated in the book titled, *Yes David*. Questions were put forward to the participants to prompt them to reflect on their daily lives based on the story. Moral values were inculcated in a timely manner to allow the participants the time to understand the significance of the story. This would help to integrate schemata and new information from the story to produce their own understanding of the information presented (Bennett-Bogle, 2015). In *Next Please*, pupils can tell and experience the feeling of nervousness, fear, and happiness in the reading activities as they began to have a basic understanding of the story. Pupils do it individually by imitating different expressions while observing themselves in the mirror.

Kintsch and Kintsch (2005) described a situation when a person exhibits analytical problem solving; they learn how to read fluently and construct their own understanding of the information presented. The reading activities included Fun Drama Time where the pupils had to perform a role play based on the picture book. For example, based on *The Dot* and *Swimmy*, situations are developed based on the picture book and pupils are required to perform a role play which offers them a chance to construct their own knowledge understanding. Role playing is one of the methods to stimulate pupils' relation to real life situations. Pupils are able to make connections from the story to their daily lives or personal

experiences during reading.

Furthermore, in reading class, pupils have the chance to engage in classroom discussion by expressing their ideas, thoughts, and feelings while reading stories. This helps to stimulate their thinking and creativity or even to develop their own ideas. It is worth mentioning that each picture book is read in a different way. After the pupils have understood the picture book, they were asked to read it independently. Later, pupils were instructed to read aloud after completing their independent reading so that they can have a deeper understanding of the story.

A post-test was conducted after the implementation of the picture books to investigate any impact on both groups. The participants in the control group were not given any form of picture book intervention during the experiment. Resentful demoralisation may occur if the participants in the control group perceive that they received a less desirable treatment than the experimental group. However, the threat of resentful demoralisation was controlled when the same intervention procedure was provided to the control group after the experiment had concluded.

Research Instrument

The RSPS consisted of 33 items, which addressed the general capacity to read, such as word recognition, word analysis, fluency, and comprehension. The questionnaire comprised of one general item and 32 follow-up items that represented the four scales (Progress, Observational Comparison, Social Feedback, and Physiological State). The RSPS was administered to monitor the effects of picture books on the participants' level of reading self-perception. The 5-point Likert scale was used, with the option of 'strongly disagree' (SD) represented by 1 and the option of 'strongly agree' (SA) represented by 5.

Scoring for the RSPS is the cumulative sum of the scores of the four subscales. With the exception of number 1 (the general item), the scale shows the pupils' response to each item in the instrument using the numerical scoring range of SA = 5 to SD = 1. The overall score for each pupil was calculated in terms of the proportion to the maximum possible RSPS score of 160, to reflect the overall self-perception towards reading (refer to table 1).

Table 1. *Score Interpretation of Reader Self-Perception Scale*

	PR	OC	SF	PS
High	44-45	26-30	38-45	37-40
Average	35-43	17-25	28-37	26-36
Low	09-34	06-16	09-27	08-25

Note. PR = Progress; OC = Observational comparison; SF = Social feedback; PS = Physiological state.

The original RSPS was developed by Henk and Melnick (1995). To ensure the validity of the instrument, the back-translation method was applied in this study. First, the English version was translated into Chinese. The Chinese translation was then checked by two senior Chinese-major language teachers from the case school and by three university lecturers. Later, a back translation of the Chinese version into English was made by an English-major lecturer who had no knowledge of the original version.

Results

The findings of this study were based on the pre-test and post-test data using the RSPS after the intervention was conducted. Descriptive analyses, such as mean and standard deviation, as well as inferential analyses, such as independent and paired *t* tests, were used to analyse the data. The demographic data of the participants were analysed and listed in Table 2. A total of 75 participants were involved in this study, consisting of 37 males (49.33%) and 38 females (50.67%). The age of all participants was homogenous as their age mean ranged between 7.5 to 8.5 years old.

Table 2. *Demographic Data of the Participants*

Characteristics	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	37	49.33
Female	38	50.67
Age		
8 years old	75	100

Table 3 indicates a significant difference in the RSPS scores between the control group ($M = 97.34$, $SD = 20.46$) and the experimental group ($M = 108.57$, $SD = 23.12$) after the intervention was conducted: $t(73) = -2.23$, $p = .029$. It also reveals that the null hypothesis 1 is rejected as the p -value is insignificant at the .05 significance level.

Table 3. *Scores of The Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) Between the Control and Experimental Groups After Using Picture Books*

Group	N	Mean (M)	SD*	t	df	d	Sig. (2-tailed)
Control Group	38	97.34	20.46	-2.23	73	.52	.029
Experimental Group	37	108.57	23.12				

Note. *Standard deviation

Table 4 shows the results from the independent sample t test, which shows no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test results for male ($M = 95.85$, $SD = 17.95$) and female ($M = 104.05$, $SD = 19.65$) participants in the control group before the experiment: $t(36) = -1.35$, $p = 0.187$. The results in Table 4 are used to accept the null hypothesis 2 at the .05 significance level.

Table 4. *Scores of The Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) Between Male and Female Participants in The Control and Experimental Groups Before the Use of Picture Books*

Group	Gender	N	Mean (M)	SD*	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Control	Male	20	95.85	17.95	-1.35	36	.187
	Female	18	104.05	19.65			
Experimental	Male	17	91.35	22.89	-2.01	35	.053
	Female	20	103.50	13.40			

Note. $*\alpha = 0.05$

No significant difference was observed in the reading self-perception scores between male ($M = 91.35$, $SD = 22.89$) and female ($M = 103.50$, $SD = 13.40$) participants in the experimental group before the experiment: $t(35) = -2.01$, $p = 0.053$. Therefore, it was summarised that there was no significant difference in the reading self-perception scores between male and female participants in both groups before the intervention.

Table 5. *Scores of The Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) Between Male and Female Participants in The Control and Experimental Groups After the Use of Picture Books*

Group	Gender	N	Mean (M)	SD*	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Control	Male	20	96.50	20.02	-.26	36	.793
	Female	18	98.27	21.47			
Experimental	Male	17	102.88	25.78	-1.39	35	.171
	Female	20	113.40	19.98			

Note. * $\alpha = 0.05$

Table 5 shows no significant difference in the reading self-perception levels between male ($M = 96.50$, $SD = 20.02$) and female ($M = 98.27$, $SD = 21.47$) participants in the control group after the intervention: $t(36) = -0.26$, $p = 0.793$. According to Table 5, the p -value is .793, which is greater than the significance value of .05, hence, the null hypothesis 3 is accepted. No statistical difference was observed in the control group.

Similarly, no significant difference was observed in the reading self-perception scores between male ($M = 102.88$, $SD = 25.78$) and female ($M = 113.40$, $SD = 19.98$) participants in the experimental group after the intervention: $t(35) = -1.39$, $p = 0.171$. Based on these results, the null hypothesis 3 is accepted as the p -value is greater than .05. Hence, it was summarised that there was no significant difference in the reader self-perception scores between male and female participants in both groups after the intervention.

Discussion

In Malaysia, picture books have been incorporated into the Chinese language textbooks, using stories that match the pupils' age, cognitive skills, maturation level, and literacy skills. There is no differentiation between males and females in picture books reading. Constructivism theory explains that pupils will construct their own understanding based on their experiences in similar situations. Constructivists regard readers as independent learners who will integrate schemata and new information from texts to produce new understanding as the interaction between existing knowledge and new information takes place (Yussof et al., 2012). During the picture book reading sessions with the experimental group, open-ended

questions were asked. These open-ended questions encourage the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills because picture books allow pupils to convey their ideas based on their prior knowledge.

A good picture book with interesting content can help pupils to master reading. Reading picture books with moral values would help pupils to generalise and transfer the knowledge into their daily lives and inculcate good moral values (Chen, 2014). Therefore, the selection of picture books must match two dimensions, namely, the pupil's book reading level and interest. For example, *The Dot* enables readers to create their own meaning of the story and identify themselves with the character's situation. This book highlights the value of encouraging others and celebrating their achievements. As they read this picture book, readers will journey along with the main character, Vashti, who is a child with low self-esteem, as she grows into someone who is confident and encourages others to believe in themselves.

This study has shown evidence of how picture books offer learning context for reading activities. This can be seen when the participants in the experimental group scored higher in self-perception when they were learning using picture books. Additionally, this group showed significant improvement in their post-test scores. Pupils who engage in reading activities will perceive themselves as good readers as they gain self-perception and believe in their capabilities to finish the reading task (Seawright, 2017).

The results of this study are supported by Nurhasanah et al. (2019), which suggested that providing picture books as a reading material in classrooms would help inculcate moral values among pupils. Wright and Dunsmuir (2019) also claimed that reading picture books in classrooms will shape pupils' self-perception. When pupils are interested in a topic, they are willing to spend more time completing the task. Pupils' self-perception could also impact their mindset as the subject is dependent on the teacher's feedback when they are unsure of what to do. Pupils would have a positive mindset regarding reading literacy when they have positive reading experiences in the classroom.

The findings of this study also indicate no significant differences in reading self-perception levels between male and female participants in the control and experimental groups, before and after the use of picture books. Saunders (2004) also found no significant difference in reading self-perception levels between males and females. The current findings are in line

with the study by Tsao (2008), which pointed out that picture books have become part of the main literacy tools for pupils as they are able to identify their own actions, beliefs, and emotions through these books. Teachers should choose suitable picture books that reflect fairness to both genders as the researcher did find some variations in reading self-perception between females and males. However, Lee (2017) found no gender difference in picture books reading self-perceptions. Therefore, the selection of picture books should not be based on pupils' gender.

Conclusion

The findings of this study provide teachers with insights on the use of picture books to expand pupils' experiences and enrich their knowledge, to help them learn to accept themselves, and to cultivate good habits in life (Chen, 2014). Parents are recommended to develop pupils' confidence in reading at home by reading picture books. Picture books give pupils the motivation to read and allow them to talk about what they see on each page. Pupils' reading self-perception can be improved when parents encourage learning through reading.

Suggestions for future research include involving larger samples as this might consolidate the effectiveness of the targeted picture book intervention. It is also recommended that future studies consider the grouping of pupils according to their academic achievements, such as high, medium, and low reading categories to discover their reading self-perception. Lastly, future researchers could attempt to collaborate with reading specialists or school counsellors to develop potential reading book lists for pupils based on their literacy curriculum. This effort will be helpful in applying targeted picture books among pupils who require practice.

Overall, this study has brought to light the effects of using picture books in enhancing reading self-perception among young learners. The use of picture books to learn about a subject with the experimental group was significantly enhanced within the 10-week period, while the progress achieved by the control group was not statistically significant. Hence, it was concluded that the rendered intervention, namely the picture books, can be attributed to the significant gains attained by the experimental group.

Some excellent works in children's literature have been produced in the form of picture

books. Reading picture books could enrich pupils' personal development and allow them to undergo self-discovery during the learning process. Based on these findings, educators are encouraged to focus on the use of picture books in order to effectively enhance pupils' reading self-perception. Pupils with higher reading self-perception levels will have a positive perception of their reading skills, and their proficiency and achievement in reading will also be improved. In conclusion, this study encourages educators to utilise picture books in the classroom to boost pupils' engagement in class and their reading self-perception.

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