



EXPLORING READING ISSUES AMONG MILLENNIALS AND GEN Z

Noor Hanim Rahmat¹ⁱ,
Sharifah Amani Syed Abdul Rahman²,
Hadayat Rahmah Hassan³

²Akademi Pengajian Bahasa
Universiti Teknologi MARA,
Pasir Gudang Campus, Johor Bahru, Malaysia

^{1,3}Akademi Pengajian Bahasa
Universiti Teknologi MARA,
Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

Abstract:

Teachers who had the opportunity of teaching reading to different generation of students will understand that not only do reading materials differ, teaching focus and method needed to vary across generations. The influx of generation Z into learning institutions has encouraged many academicians to consider the influence of many aspects when it comes to reading comprehension. This study explored the influence of reading issues, cognitive skills and critical thinking skills across different faculties among the Z generations in a public institution in Malaysia. 97 respondents were purposely chosen. Out of these 97 students, 25 students were from Mechanical Engineering, 18 were from Chemical Engineering, 29 were from Civil Engineering and 25 were from Business and Management. The instrument used was a questionnaire with four sections; Section A looked at the demographic profile. Section B looked at Issues in Reading, Section C looked at Cognitive Skills and Section D looked at Critical Thinking Skills. Analysed data reveals interesting implications for the teaching and learning of reading.

Keywords: reading, generation Z, reading issues, cognitive skills, critical thinking skills

1. Introduction

This section presents the background of study, statement of problem, objective of the study, as well as the research questions.

ⁱ Correspondence: email noorh763@salam.uitm.edu.my

1.1 Background of the Study

Instructors teaching institutions of learning today will discover that their students are a mix of millennials and generation Z. According to Johnstone (2018), millennials are those born in the early 1980's to mid-1990's or early 2000. Gen Z are those born in the mid 1990's to mid-2000. Society labelled them as youths. According to Mat Salleh, Mahbob, and Baharudin (2017), there are some dominant behaviours of both Generation Y and Generation Z and language teachers should generate classroom activities supporting their needs. Generation Y are those born from 1981-1994 and they need more social confidence and are less confident. Generation Z are those born from 1995 to 2012. They are said to have poor communication skills (Naj, 2017). They are also extensively engaged to technology (Paul, 2017) and this has also caused many of them to have a short attention span. Since they have had the internet from a young age, Generation Z tend to be knowledgeable of technology and social media. With the advent of internet and electronic gadgets, many are concerned that society (especially students of institutions of higher learning) is not reading (reading enough). By definition, reading is *"a multifaceted process involving word recognition, comprehension, fluency, and motivation."* (Leipzig, 2009) Many fear that the amount of time spent by millennials and generation Z on gadgets leave them very little time for reading.

1.2 Statement of Problem

Are millennials and Gen Z reading? The study by Soraya and Ameen (2016) explored the reading trend of youth in Pakistan. The youths were referred to as "the internet generation." The study explored the impact of digital media on the reading habits of the youths. They also found that the reading behaviour of the youths had significantly changed over the years. How have the reading habits of Malaysian youths changed?

Another study by Collins (2017), young adults prefer to read online. Although millennials are not giving up traditional books, their reading habits are trending towards internet and electronic gadgets. So, youths are reading -only the source they read from may differ from the traditional books.

1.3 Objective of the Study and Research Questions

The main objective of this study is to look at the reading behaviour of youths. Specifically, this study explores perception of youths on readings issues, cognitive strategies, and critical thinking skills. This study is done to answer the following questions;

- Is there any significant difference for issues in reading across faculties?
- Is there any significant difference for cognitive strategies across faculties?
- Is there and significant difference for critical thinking skills across faculties?
- In what ways do reading issues, cognitive strategies and critical thinking skills influence youths' reading behaviour?

2. Literature Review

This section presents to the readers details about reading benefits, theoretical framework of the study and also past studies.

2.1 Reading Benefits

Reading is an activity to get meaning from printed words or symbols and how ability is used to recognize, understand and interpret words. According to Ravinder (nd), reading is an active process of constructing meanings of words with a purpose to help the reader to direct information towards a goal and focus their attention even though the reasons for reading may vary. In fact, when a person reads, he or she will use his/her general background to generate a mental representation, the gist, of the text, which serves as an evolving framework for understanding parts of the text. In addition, reading is an interactive process between the reader and the writer. Brunan (1989) for instance defines reading as *"a two-way interaction in which information is exchanged between the reader and the author"*. Smith (1973) also shares the same attitude towards reading. This is proven by his line: *"Reading is an act of communication in which information is transferred from a transmitter to a receiver"*. Thus, from all the definitions above, it can be seen that reading is an interactive process between a reader and a text which leads to understanding the text comprehended.

The importance of reading is always highlighted in the speeches of politicians and educationalist in Malaysia. Reading days or weeks, reading competitions and mini libraries are introduced to attract interest in reading. Moreover, reading ability is often taken as a measure of a learner's maturity and intellectual development which shows the importance of reading among Millennials and Gen Z. In fact, researchers at the Yale School of Public Health found that people who read books—fiction or nonfiction, - poetry or prose—for as little as 30 minutes a day over several years were living an average of two years longer than people who didn't read anything at all. According to Specktor (2018), reading can the reader a better person as it helps him/her to be more empathy and emotional intelligence. This is because it helps them see the world from many perspectives and also lead readers to more human interaction, which in turn can lower stress levels. Furthermore, Erasmus (2018) states that reading can also help a person unplug as Generation Z reliance on technology every second of the day has been linked to depression, stress and fatigue. Hence, reading has been scientifically shown to reduce stress which is beneficial to the health. In fact, reading also makes a person smarter for longer period. The brain is a muscle and when a person read, it will stimulate the brain and helps to improve memory function. According to Dr Robert Freidland who studied on elderly patients with Alzheimer's Disease, people who regularly read or play mentally challenging games are less likely to get Alzheimer's disease hence why it is important to read no matter you are among Millennials or Gen Z category. In addition to that, Khodaie (2012) felt that reading enhances a person's critical thinking skills.

2.2 Theoretical Framework of the Study

Figure 1 below presents the theoretical framework of the study. This study looks at readers' behaviour in terms of their reading issues, use of cognitive and also critical thinking skills.

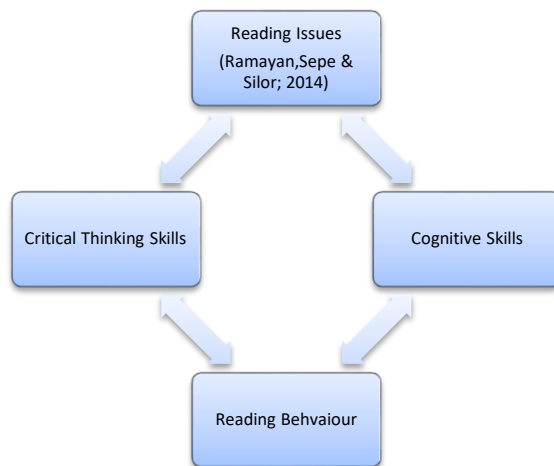


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework of the Study

2.2.1 Reading Issues

According to Garcia, Ramayan, et al. (2014), when it comes to English as a Second Language, readers are faced with some issues; mainly, with the authors, the text and also with themselves readers. Among some of the issues are; difficulty in reading, lack of focus, laziness in reading, and no aids in reading. Some readers found reading boring and some may have problems with vocabulary.

2.2.2 Cognitive Skills in Reading

Cognitive skills are skills related to gaining knowledge. Among some cognitive skills in reading are making connections, making predictions, asking questions, visualising, monitoring and clarifying, summarising and synthesizing, determining what is important and also analysing author's intention. According to Kozinsky (2017), learners for gen Zers thrive when they are given the opportunity to immerse themselves in the learning experience. They are also more comfortable learning in groups rather than alone.

2.2.3 Critical Thinking Strategies in Reading

The study by Khodaie (2012) reported several critical thinking strategies that can be taught by reading teachers. Among some of these strategies are; previewing, contextualising, questioning to understand and remember, reflecting on challenges to one's beliefs and values, outlining and summarising, evaluating arguments, and also comparing and contrasting related readings.

2.3 Past Studies

2.3.1 Past Studies on Issues in Reading among Youths

A survey was conducted with 100 middle school students in state of Aguascalientes, Mexico. In this survey, four generations categories was divided which are (1) The Baby Boomer generation (1946–1964), (2) Generation X (1965–1980), (3) Generation Y (1981–1999) and (4) Generation Z (2000–present). In this article, it stated that “old way” of schooling, namely the teacher as “*sage on the stage,*” is not effective with Gen Y (Skiba 2008). It is because the generation does not prefer traditional course content and methods of reading which may seem boring for them. It is because they prefer to multitask rather than focus on one thing at a time. In addition, Gen Y prefer peer or web video since they are more attracted to technological way of reading which may attract them more. In fact, The U.S. Department of Education recently revealed that due to the technological age that Gen Ye-rs have grown up in, they are reading and writing less (National Endowment for the Arts 2007). It is because these “screenagers” are more attracted to visual rather than textual. Hence, it is found that this generation than to be more holistic than analytic; therefore, extensive reading is likely to be more attractive for them than intensive reading.

Another study done on 2500 students from the University of Mississippi and Purdue University conducted by MNI Target Media (Media Horizons, 2018), reported interesting reading habit among generation Z. The survey found that 83% of Gen Zers turn to newspapers for trusted information and content, and 34% turn to magazines. The study also revealed that Gen Zers spent more time reading physical newspapers and magazines without interruption than they do on social media, websites, and blogs. This support another finding that showed 61% of the respondents felt this generation could benefit from unplugging more.

2.3.2 Past Studies on Critical Thinking Skills and Reading

Tulgan (2016) reported that the Gen Zers lacked critical thinking skills. Firstly, the fact that these generation depended on their device (an internet) to find answers, to seek solutions to their problems, stopped them from “*thinking on their feet*”. Their “thinking” is easily done for them through their devices. Giving these generation of learners the security of a quick answer deprived them of their own experience of thinking “deep” and thinking through the problems. This may lead to a generation who lacked experience or a generation who have “*shallow and wide*” thinking- they lacked the ability to reflect.

Schiola (2017) reported a study of over 1200 people in the U.S aged 14-59 on the mindset, preferences , and expectations of our generations of Americans (Generation Z, Millennials, Generation X and Baby Boomers) for their current and future digital experiences. The study revealed that for the Gen Zers, the digital experience is their human experience. They want their digital experience to be free, authentic and also personalised. They are not afraid to share personal experience or even make personal comments about their surroundings.

As such, educational institutions, accrediting bodies, students and employers all agree that students need to develop better critical thinking skills. This is because improving critical thinking ability has a knock-on effect in improving problem-solving ability, openness, creativity, organisation, planning and making the right choices in life. Mansoor & Maryam (2011) states that they strongly believed that *“using language and knowing the meaning don't lead the learners to be proficient. It is because the learners need to display creative and critical thinking through the language to express and support their ideas creatively and critically.”* In fact, a research has been done in English Institute in Karaj Iran. 60 intermediate students (ranged in age from 16 to 19 years) were assigned to two experimental and control groups after being homogenized through a Nelson test. They were administered to two groups and were needed to take a reading comprehension and a critical thinking appraisal pre-test. They also were needed to undergo 8 sessions of treatment debate as a classroom activity. Findings found that teaching critical thinking skills on reading comprehension has positive effect on improving reading comprehension of EFL learners as it gave significant improvement of experimental group in reading comprehension. Mansoor & Maryam (2011) found that it can be seen that critical thinking and comprehension both are cognitive abilities having cognitive skills in common so that improving the first can contribute to the improvement of the other--reading comprehension. In fact, Facione (1992) also suggests there is a significant correlation between critical thinking and reading comprehension. His quotation follows *“Improvements in one are paralleled by improvements in other.”* (p.18) which makes this finding stronger. Hence, critical thinking skills does effect reading skills and educator should implement critical thinking activities into their lesson plan.

3. Material and Methods

3.1 Research Design, Population and Sample

This quantitative study is conducted find how the reading habits of students from a population of generation Z. They were born between 1994-2012. In total, 97 respondents were purposely chosen. 25 students were from Mechanical Engineering, 18 were from Chemical Engineering, 29 were from Civil Engineering and 25 were from Business and Management.

3.2 Instrument

The instrument used for this study is a questionnaire. There are four sections; Section A looked at the demographic profile. Section B looked at Issues in Reading, Section C looked at Cognitive Skills and Section D looked at Critical Thinking Skills.

3.3. Method of Data Collection

Data is collected from the respondents at the end of one semester of studying an academic reading course. Students responded to the survey in the class. The responses are then analysed using SPSS version 23 based on their mean scores.

4. Results and Discussion

This section discusses answers to the research questions presented in this study.

4.1 Research Question 1: Is there any significant difference for issues in reading across faculties?

Table 1: Mean statistic score by faculty

	n	Mean	SD
Mechanical Engineering	25	24.46	2.31
Chemical Engineering	18	24.91	2.41
Civil Engineering	29	24.22	1.58
Business and Management	25	24.43	2.32
Total	97	24.46	2.12

A one-way ANOVA between groups was performed to explore whether there is different in difficulties in reading comprehension on students from different faculty. Students compared by four different faculties namely Mechanical Engineering, Chemical Engineering, Civil Engineering and Business and Management. The mean statistic score of students by faculty is presented in Table 1.

Table 2: One-Way ANOVA on difficulties in reading comprehension by faculty

Source	Sum of square	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	5.396	3	1.799	.392	.759
Within groups	426.953	93	4.591		
Total	432.349	96			

The one way ANOVA result in Table 2 indicates that there was no statistically significant difference at the $p < .05$ level in the mean difficulties in reading comprehension for the four faculties, $F(3, 93) = .392, p = .759$. The effect size calculated using eta squared, was 0.01. This indicates that there is small difference in mean difficulties in reading comprehension between groups. This also indicates that the null hypothesis is rejected thus showing that it does make a difference where the learners come from so that lecturers are always aware of the learners' perception on difficulties in reading comprehension.

4.2 Research Question 2: Is there any significant difference for cognitive strategies across faculties?

Table 3: Mean statistic score by faculty

	n	Mean	SD
Mechanical Engineering	25	51.43	4.62
Chemical Engineering	18	54.24	7.59
Civil Engineering	29	50.85	7.20
Business and Management	25	49.27	6.09
Total	97	51.22	6.54

A one-way ANOVA between groups was performed to explore whether there is different in difficulties in reading comprehension on students from different faculty. Students compared by four different faculty namely Mechanical Engineering, Chemical Engineering, Civil Engineering and Business and Management. The mean statistic score by students faculty composition presented in Table 3.

Table 4: One-Way ANOVA on cognitive by faculty

Source	Sum of square	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	263.886	3	87.962	2.132	.101
Within groups	3836.684	93	41.255		
Total	4100.571	96			

The one way ANOVA result in Table 4 indicates that there was no statistically significant difference at the $p < .05$ level in the mean cognitive for the four faculty , $F(3, 93) = 2.132, p = .101$. The effect size calculated using eta squared, was 0.06. The p level thus resulted in the researcher accepting null hypothesis. This means there as far as the teachers are concerned, there is a difference for cognitive skills across faculties.

4.3 Research Question 3: Is there and significant difference for critical thinking skills across faculties?

Table 5: Mean statistic score by faculty

	n	Mean	SD
Mechanical Engineering	25	20.58	2.88
Chemical Engineering	18	20.64	4.71
Civil Engineering	29	20.40	3.04
Business and Management	25	20.83	3.58
Total	97	20.60	3.45

A one-way ANOVA between groups was performed to explore whether there is different in difficulties in reading comprehension on students from different faculty. Students compared by four different faculties namely Mechanical Engineering, Chemical Engineering, Civil Engineering and Business and Management. The mean statistic score for faculty is presented in Table 5.

Table 6: One-Way ANOVA on critical thinking strategies by faculty

Source	Sum of square	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	2.460	3	.820	.067	.977
Within groups	1141.846	93	12.278		
Total	1144.306	96			

The one way ANOVA result in Table 6 indicates that there was no statistically significant difference at the $p < .05$ level in the mean critical thinking strategies for the four faculty , $F(3, 93) = .067, p = .977$. The effect size calculated using eta squared, was 0.002. This score of p level can thus allow the researcher to accept null hypothesis by

showing that it did make a difference for learners from different faculties when it comes to their perceived critical thinking skills.

4.4 Research Question 4: In what ways do reading issues, cognitive strategies and critical thinking skills influence youths' reading behaviour?

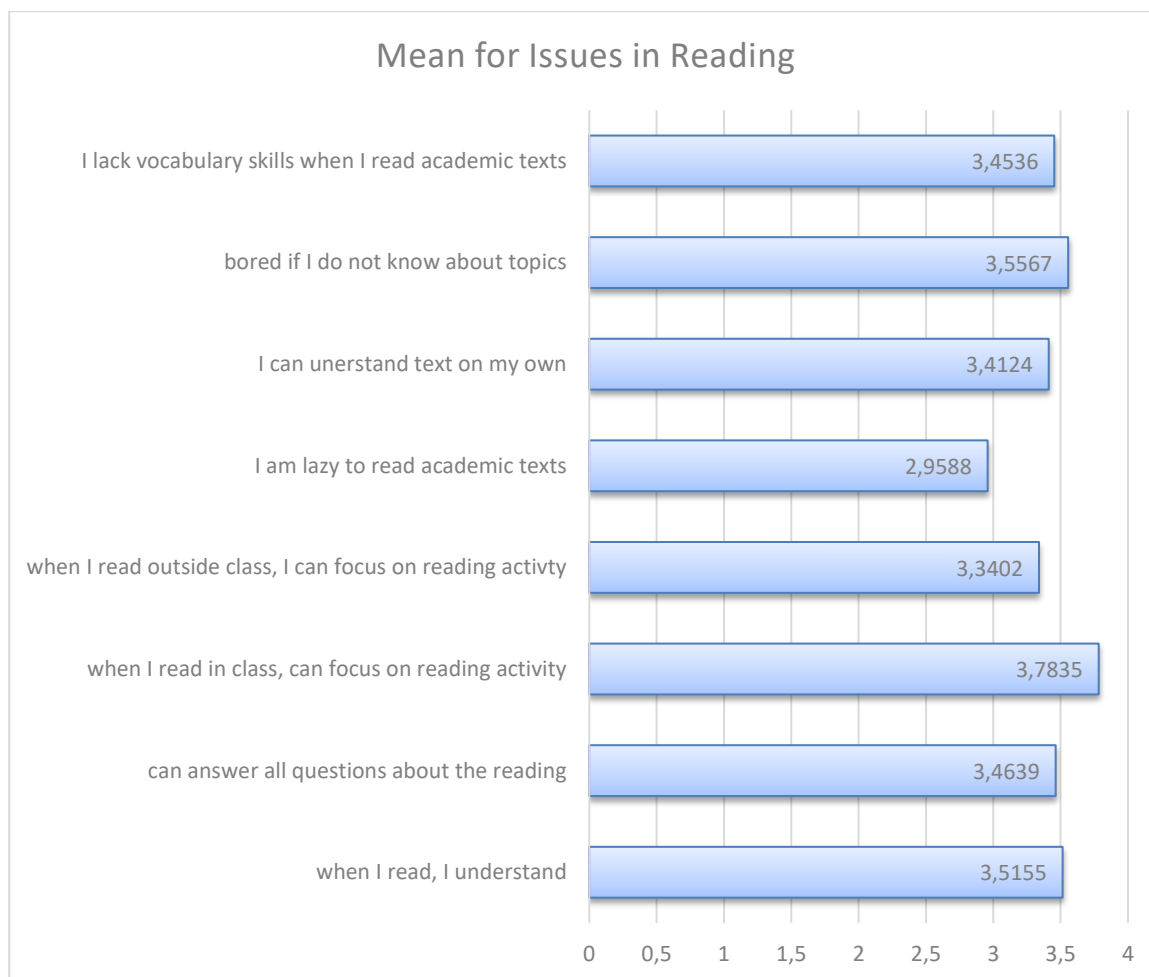


Figure 2: Issues in Reading

Figure 2 reports the mean scores for issues in reading among gen Zers. Results revealed that these learners had a higher mean (3.7835) when it comes to reading in class and focusing on the reading activity compared to reading outside class (3.3403). This finding is in accordance with the study done on students in the University of Mississippi and Purdue University conducted by MNI Target Media (Media Horizons, 2018). The study revealed that genZers were found to have high tendency to read when they want to obtain information and they were said to have read more if they were not distracted by the use of gadgets, especially in the classroom.

In addition to that, findings also revealed that these learners are *“bored if they did not know about the topic that they are reading (3.5567). This is understandable because gen Zers have short attention span”* (Paul, 2017).

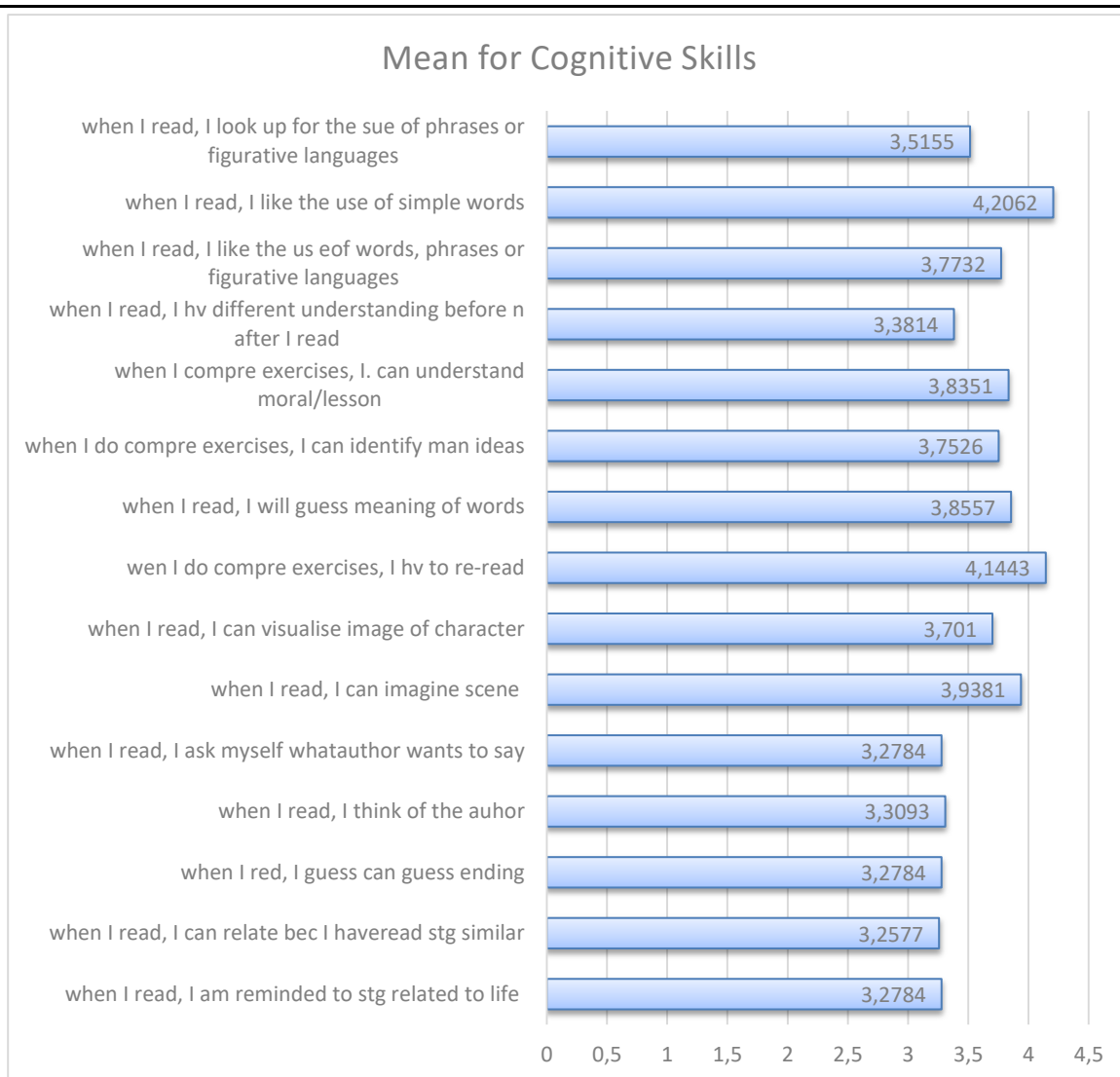


Figure 3: Mean for Cognitive Skills

Figure 4 shows the mean for cognitive skills of respondents. Findings showed that learners chose to re-e-read (4.1443) what they are reading to help them understand the contents of the article chose. . In addition to that, the use simple words (4.2062) complies with what Schiola (2017) mentioned about gen Zers wanting to be authentic and real when it comes to information.

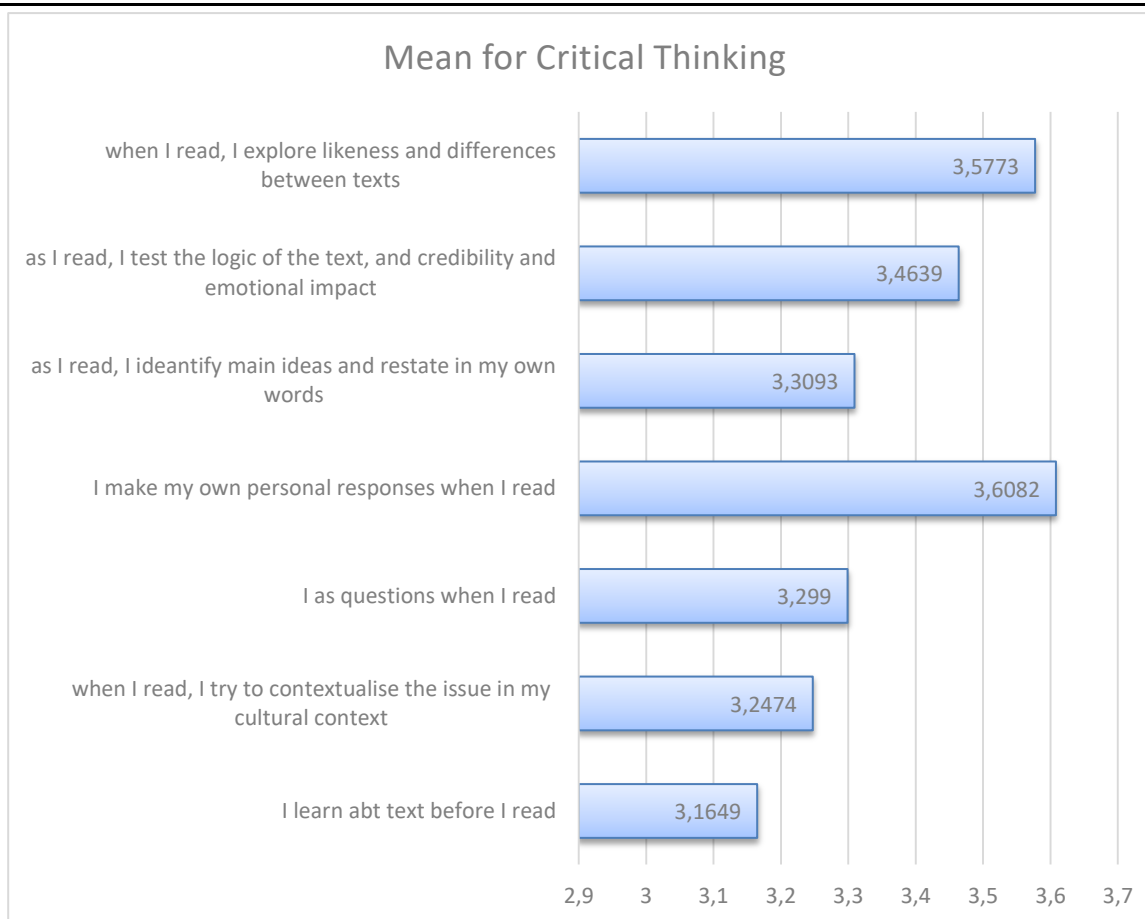


Figure 4: Mean for Critical Thinking

Figure 4 shows the mean scores for perceived critical thinking abilities. Findings revealed that the highest mean is when the learners made own personal responses when they read (3.6082). This means that these gen Zers felt comfortable making personal responses about what they had read. This is also agreed by Schiola (2017) who also found that gen Zers are not afraid to make their own personal comments about their surroundings.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Summary of Findings

In general, this study revealed interesting findings for issues in reading, cognitive skills and also critical thinking skills among gen Zers. This study reports that when it comes to issues in reading, cognitive skills and critical thinking skills, it does make a difference which faculties the learners came from. Specifically, this study found reports that learners were more focused in classroom reading compared to reading outside classroom contexts. These learners are also easily bored if they do not understand the content of the reading text. Next, as far as cognitive skills are concerned, gen Zers preferred real and authentic content. Finally, gen Zers were not afraid to reveal their personal opinions when it comes to discussing issues from the reading text.

5.2 Pedagogical Implications and Suggestion for future research

The choice of reading text used in language classroom will make a difference in learners reading motivation, as well as learners' ability to think critically. Teachers should choose reading materials according to learners' background and interest. It is hoped that future research will explore the influence of reading issues, use of cognitive skills and critical thinking skills on reading materials across gen, Y and Z. Comparison of the reading characteristics of different generations can help future reading teachers better cater for reading materials for different categories of learners.

About the Author(s)

Noor Hanim Rahmat (Phd) is an associate professor teaching ESL at Akademi Pengajian Bahasa at Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia for the past 25 years. Her research interests include academic writing, reading, language proficiency, educational psychology and teacher training.

Sharifah Amani Syed Abdul Rahman is a lecturer at Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Pasir Gudang Campus, Johor Bahru, Malaysia for more than 10 years. Her research interests include language proficiency, English for Specific Purposes, and TESL.

Hadayat Rahmah Hasan had many years of experience in lecturing and training in private institutions before she began lecturing in UiTM 10 years ago. Her interest lies in ESL teaching n learning, online learning and social n professional interaction. She has presented in conferences, written journal articles n developed online learning materials.

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