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The Didik Hibur Strategy in Teaching Malay Reading Skills in Tamil National-Type Schools: A Conceptual Discussion

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Abstract

Malay reading proficiency is important for pupils' language development and participation in learning across the primary curriculum. In Tamil National-Type Schools (SJKT), Malay reading instruction takes place in linguistically diverse classrooms in which pupils may differ in their exposure to Malay, vocabulary knowledge and reading proficiency. Didik Hibur, a pedagogical approach that combines learning purposes with enjoyable activities, may create opportunities for purposeful language use; however, enjoyment alone does not establish instructional value. This conceptual paper examines how Didik Hibur activities can be aligned with specific reading components and the conditions required for their meaningful use in SJKT classrooms. Drawing on the sociocultural perspective on learning and the National Reading Panel's synthesis of reading instruction, the paper proposes a Pedagogical Alignment and Feasibility Framework for Didik Hibur. The framework connects (i) the reading component targeted, (ii) the activity selected, (iii) teacher scaffolding and pupil interaction, and (iv) contextual feasibility and formative assessment. A critical synthesis of the literature on Malay reading in national-type schools and previous studies of Didik Hibur indicates that existing discussions have addressed teacher knowledge, attitudes, practices and implementation challenges, but the reviewed literature does not sufficiently articulate how particular activities should be matched to particular reading processes in the SJKT context. The proposed framework offers a structured basis for lesson planning and future empirical investigation. It is conceptual and does not claim that the proposed relationships have already been empirically established.

Keywords: Didik Hibur, Malay Reading Skills, Tamil National-Type Schools, Reading Instruction, Pedagogical Alignment, Conceptual Framework

Introduction

Malay is an important language in Malaysia's national education system. At primary level, reading in Malay supports pupils' development of language proficiency and their ability to obtain information, understand instructions and participate in learning across subject areas. In Tamil National-Type Schools (SJKT), Malay is taught in classrooms where pupils' linguistic experiences and opportunities to use the language may differ. Such variation means that reading instruction needs to attend to pupils' existing language resources, vocabulary,

reading accuracy, fluency and comprehension rather than treating a class as linguistically or academically uniform.

Reading involves more than pronouncing printed words. Pupils need to recognise words accurately, read with sufficient fluency, develop vocabulary and construct meaning from a text. The National Reading Panel (2000) identifies phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and text comprehension as important areas in reading instruction. Although the terminology and curriculum expectations differ across contexts, this synthesis reinforces a key pedagogical point: an activity should be selected according to the reading process it is intended to support.

Didik Hibur is commonly associated with the integration of enjoyable elements into learning through activities such as language games, songs, storytelling, role-play, quizzes, rhymes and group work. These activities can create opportunities for repetition, oral language use, interaction and engagement. Nevertheless, an activity may be enjoyable without supporting a clearly specified reading outcome. Its educational value depends on how the teacher connects the activity to a reading objective, provides appropriate guidance and checks what pupils have learned.

Previous studies have examined reading proficiency among pupils who are not native speakers of Malay (Nahar, 2020; Yueh Wei et al., 2020), the strategies and challenges associated with reading instruction in national-type schools (Low & Zamri Mahamod, 2024), and teachers' knowledge, attitudes, practices and challenges relating to Didik Hibur (Owing et al., 2018; Saktianayakan, 2023; Mohamad Arifin & Muhd Zulkipli, 2023). Research has also discussed the use of Didik Hibur in Malay reading instruction (Ahmad & Shamsudin Othman, 2020; Unjong & Seruji, 2022). Taken together, these studies establish the relevance of Malay reading difficulties among some pupils in national-type schools and highlight pedagogical issues surrounding the implementation of Didik Hibur. However, the relationship between specific Didik Hibur activities and particular reading components remains insufficiently articulated in the literature reviewed. This conceptual gap highlights the need to clarify how such activities can be aligned with specific reading objectives in Tamil National-Type Schools (SJKT).

Against this background, this paper examines how Didik Hibur activities can be conceptually aligned with specific reading components and identifies the pedagogical and contextual conditions needed to support this alignment in SJKT classrooms. The novelty of this paper lies in proposing a Pedagogical Alignment and Feasibility Framework that integrates reading-component alignment, teacher scaffolding and pupil interaction, and classroom feasibility within a single conceptual framework. Its contribution to the social sciences is to offer a context-sensitive perspective on how instructional practices can be understood through the interaction between learning objectives, teacher support and classroom conditions. The proposed framework is conceptual and requires further empirical examination; this paper does not test the effectiveness of Didik Hibur or claim causal effects.

Aim and guiding questions

The aim of this conceptual paper is to develop a reading-focused framework for understanding the pedagogical alignment and classroom feasibility of Didik Hibur in Malay reading instruction in SJKT. The discussion is guided by three questions:

1. What reading components can be targeted through selected Didik Hibur activities?
2. How can teacher scaffolding and pupil interaction connect these activities to purposeful reading practice?
3. What contextual conditions should be considered when selecting and implementing the activities in SJKT classrooms?

Approach to the Conceptual Discussion

This paper presents a narrative and critical synthesis of literature cited in the manuscript on Malay reading instruction, Didik Hibur and teaching in national-type schools, together with established work on reading instruction and sociocultural learning. The purpose is to connect strands that are often discussed separately and to derive a provisional conceptual framework. This is not a systematic review: no claim is made that every relevant publication has been identified, and no formal quality appraisal or meta-analysis was conducted. The framework should consequently be understood as a theoretically informed proposition that requires empirical examination.

The synthesis proceeds in three steps. First, it identifies reading components relevant to instruction. Second, it considers how common Didik Hibur activities may provide practice in those components when the task is deliberately designed. Third, it incorporates teacher guidance, pupil differences and classroom feasibility as conditions that shape the quality of the activity. This approach distinguishes the presence of an activity from the learning process the activity is intended to support.

Literature Review

Malay reading instruction in the SJKT context

Pupils in SJKT may have different levels of exposure to Malay outside formal lessons. Differences in vocabulary, familiarity with Malay sound patterns and experience with print can influence the support required during reading. Nahar (2020) reported continuing concerns about Malay reading and writing among some pupils who were not native speakers of Malay in national-type schools. Yueh Wei et al. (2020) likewise examined Malay reading proficiency among pupils who were not native speakers in Bintulu, Sarawak. These studies support the need to consider pupils' language proficiency when planning instruction; they do not, by themselves, establish that any single teaching strategy will address all reading difficulties.

Reading instruction also needs to account for variation within a class. Some pupils may require explicit support in word recognition and pronunciation, while others may need repeated oral reading, vocabulary development or support in understanding a passage. Low and Zamri Mahamod (2024), in their discussion of reading strategies and challenges among Malay language teachers in Chinese National-Type Schools, highlight the relevance of instructional choices and classroom constraints. Although their context is SJKC rather than SJKT alone, the study offers a related perspective on the interaction between teaching decisions and classroom conditions.

The implication for Didik Hibur is not that enjoyable activities are inherently more suitable for SJKT pupils. Rather, activity selection should respond to an identified learning need. A game designed around unfamiliar words, for example, may serve a different purpose from a storytelling task that asks pupils to sequence events. The linguistic context matters because it informs the choice of text, vocabulary, level of scaffolding and expected pupil response.

Didik Hibur as a purposeful pedagogical strategy

Didik Hibur integrates enjoyable participation with an educational purpose. Activities may include language games, songs, storytelling, role-play, quizzes, rhymes and collaborative tasks. Their pedagogical value should be judged by the relationship among the learning objective, the task pupils perform, the teacher's guidance and the evidence of learning collected afterwards. Enjoyment may help create a supportive atmosphere, but it is not a substitute for explicit instruction, suitable reading materials or feedback.

Studies on teachers' knowledge and attitudes towards Didik Hibur (Owing et al., 2018; Mohamad Arifin & Muhd Zulkipli, 2023) draw attention to teachers' understanding of the approach. Saktianayakan (2023) examined teachers' attitudes, practices and problems in applying Didik Hibur in SJKC and SJKT. These studies are important because they situate implementation within teachers' professional knowledge and classroom realities. However, teacher attitudes and implementation challenges do not fully explain how each activity should be connected to the component of reading being taught.

A pedagogically purposeful Didik Hibur activity should therefore specify at least four elements: the target reading component; the observable task pupils will perform; the support or feedback the teacher will provide; and the evidence that will indicate whether the intended learning has occurred. For example, singing a song may create repetition, but a reading-focused lesson should also specify whether pupils are identifying printed words, attending to pronunciation, reading lyrics accurately or explaining the meaning of selected words.

Reading components and the instructional role of activities

The National Reading Panel (2000) synthesised evidence concerning foundational reading processes, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. For the present framework, these areas are used as a practical organising structure rather than as a claim that every Didik Hibur activity has been proven effective for every component. The key analytical question is whether the activity requires pupils to practise the target process and whether that practice is supported by appropriate teaching.

Word recognition and sound–letter knowledge require pupils to attend to printed forms and the relationship between sounds and letters. A language game can support this target when pupils match printed words to pictures, identify target sound patterns or locate a word in a short text. A game that only asks pupils to identify pictures without reading print would provide a weaker basis for claiming that reading has been practised.

Fluency involves accurate, appropriately paced and expressive reading. The National Reading Panel (2000) reported support for guided repeated oral reading with feedback from teachers, peers or parents. Songs, choral reading and role-play may offer opportunities to rehearse pronunciation and expression, but they should include actual reading practice when fluency

is the target. Memorising lyrics or repeating spoken lines without attending to print should not automatically be treated as evidence of reading fluency.

Vocabulary development involves learning word meanings and encountering words in meaningful contexts. Games can ask pupils to match a word with its meaning, use a target word in a sentence or identify a word in a text. Storytelling can introduce vocabulary in context, while teacher prompts and repeated encounters can help pupils connect words with meaning. The National Reading Panel (2000) emphasises both direct and contextual vocabulary learning; a single brief encounter should not be assumed to establish durable knowledge.

Comprehension requires pupils to construct meaning rather than merely repeat text. Storytelling and role-play may support comprehension when pupils sequence events, identify characters' intentions, answer text-based questions, retell key information or justify an interpretation using the text. Cooperative tasks may create opportunities for pupils to explain their thinking, but group participation alone is not evidence that every pupil understands the passage. Teachers need to check individual understanding as well as group performance.

These distinctions suggest that the activity label is less important than its instructional design. A song, game or role-play can support different reading outcomes depending on the task embedded within it. The proposed framework therefore places alignment with a specified reading component before the selection of an enjoyable activity.

Sociocultural learning, interaction and teacher scaffolding

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural perspective emphasises the role of social interaction and guidance in learning. Applied cautiously to this discussion, the perspective helps explain why peer interaction and teacher scaffolding may be important when pupils engage with Malay reading tasks. A collaborative game or role-play can create a context for modelling, supported practice and feedback; however, the activity needs to be structured so that pupils actually work with written language and receive support appropriate to their current proficiency.

Teacher scaffolding may include modelling how to read a word or sentence, explaining unfamiliar vocabulary, prompting pupils to return to the text, guiding repeated reading, asking comprehension questions and gradually reducing assistance as pupils become more capable. The level of support should respond to pupil need rather than to the entertainment format. For pupils who struggle with word recognition, a complex role-play may impose excessive language demands unless the text and vocabulary are prepared and supported.

This perspective complements, rather than replaces, a reading-component framework. Sociocultural theory helps explain the role of guided interaction; reading research helps specify the target skills and the kinds of practice needed. Together, they provide a more direct foundation for analysing Didik Hibur as a reading pedagogy than a framework centred primarily on teachers' intention to adopt a strategy.

Classroom feasibility and the limits of implementation

A carefully aligned activity may still be difficult to implement if it requires substantial preparation time, unavailable materials, technology that cannot be accessed reliably or

classroom management demands that exceed available time. Teachers also need to consider class size, pupils' varied proficiency and whether the activity can provide meaningful participation for pupils who need additional support. Saktianayakan (2023) and Low and Zamri Mahamod (2024) make the practical context of teaching relevant to the discussion of strategy use.

Feasibility should not be treated as a substitute for pedagogical quality. An activity may be easy to organise but poorly aligned with the reading objective; conversely, an activity may have a clear instructional purpose but require adaptation to be workable. The framework proposed here treats pedagogical alignment and feasibility as related but distinct considerations. Both need to be considered before a teacher selects an activity for a particular lesson.

The Conceptual Gap and Proposed Contribution

The literature cited in this paper has addressed several relevant aspects of the problem. Research on Malay reading in national-type schools has documented concerns about pupils' proficiency and the need to consider language background (Nahar, 2020; Yueh Wei et al., 2020). Studies of Didik Hibur have considered teachers' knowledge, attitudes, practices and implementation problems (Owing et al., 2018; Saktianayakan, 2023; Mohamad Arifin & Muhd Zulkipli, 2023). Other work has discussed the use of Didik Hibur in reading instruction (Ahmad & Shamsudin Othman, 2020; Unjong & Seruji, 2022). It would therefore be inaccurate to claim that Didik Hibur or reading instruction in national-type schools has not previously been studied.

The more specific gap identified by this conceptual synthesis is that these strands, as represented in the literature reviewed here, do not yet provide a sufficiently explicit instructional map linking particular Didik Hibur activities to particular reading components, the scaffolding required to make pupils' reading practice purposeful, and the contextual conditions that affect implementation in SJKT. The gap is therefore one of conceptual articulation and alignment, not simply a lack of studies or a lack of a combined list of factors.

The proposed contribution is a Pedagogical Alignment and Feasibility Framework for Didik Hibur. It advances three connected propositions. First, an activity should be selected in response to a specified reading component, not solely because it is enjoyable or familiar. Second, the intended relationship between activity and reading outcome depends on teacher scaffolding, pupil interaction and feedback. Third, the practical value of the activity depends on its fit with pupils' proficiency and the resources and time available in the classroom. These propositions are conceptual and require empirical testing; they are not presented as established causal relationships.

This contribution can be distinguished from an adoption-focused account. Teachers' knowledge, attitudes and school support remain relevant, but they are treated as conditions that shape implementation rather than as the central explanatory outcome. The primary analytical focus is the instructional connection between the activity and reading learning.

The Pedagogical Alignment and Feasibility Framework

The proposed framework has four connected dimensions: (1) the reading component targeted; (2) the Didik Hibur activity and its embedded reading task; (3) teacher scaffolding and pupil interaction; and (4) contextual feasibility and formative assessment. The dimensions are presented as a planning and analytical sequence, not as a validated measurement model.

Dimension 1: Specify the reading component

Teachers first identify what pupils are expected to learn. The target may involve word recognition and sound–letter patterns, oral reading fluency, vocabulary knowledge or comprehension. The objective should be stated in observable terms, such as reading a set of target words accurately, reading a short passage with appropriate phrasing, explaining selected words in context or sequencing events from a passage.

Dimension 2: Match the activity to the reading task

The activity is selected only after the target has been identified. The task must require pupils to engage with the relevant reading process. The following matrix illustrates possible alignments. These are design examples derived from the synthesis, not claims that each pairing has been experimentally validated in SJKT.

Table 1
Illustrative alignment between reading components and Didik Hibur activities.

Reading component	Possible Didik Hibur activity	Embedded reading task	Evidence to check
Word recognition / sound–letter patterns	Word-matching game; word hunt	Read printed words, identify target patterns, match words with pictures	Accuracy in identifying or reading target words
Oral reading fluency	Guided song reading; choral or repeated reading; role-play from a script	Read printed lines repeatedly with modelling and feedback	Accuracy, appropriate pace and phrasing during oral reading
Vocabulary	Vocabulary quiz; word cards; story-based word game	Explain, match or use target words in the context of a text	Correct meaning or use of target words
Comprehension	Story sequencing; storytelling with text prompts; role-play based on a passage	Retell events, answer text-based questions, explain character actions using textual information	Individual responses supported by the text

Dimension 3: Provide scaffolding and purposeful interaction

The teacher models the task, explains unfamiliar words or procedures, provides guided practice and gives feedback related to the reading objective. Peer interaction can be used to rehearse reading, discuss word meanings or compare interpretations, but it should not allow confident pupils to complete all of the reading on behalf of others. The teacher should monitor who is reading, what support is needed and whether the task remains connected to the text.

Dimension 4: Check feasibility and learning evidence

Before implementation, the teacher considers time, materials, classroom organisation, accessibility and the range of pupil proficiency. After the activity, evidence should be collected against the original objective. This may involve listening to individual oral reading, checking word recognition, asking pupils to explain vocabulary or requiring a text-based response. Engagement and enjoyment can be observed as contextual information, but they should not be treated as equivalent to reading achievement.

How the framework differs from an adoption-focused model

The framework does not place teacher acceptance or intention at the centre. Instead, it begins with a reading objective and asks whether the activity provides suitable practice, whether guidance enables pupils to engage with that practice, and whether the activity is feasible in the classroom. Teacher knowledge, school support and resources remain important because they can enable or constrain the process. The framework thus shifts the central question from 'Will teachers use Didik Hibur?' to 'Under what pedagogical and contextual conditions does a Didik Hibur activity provide purposeful practice in a specified reading component?'

Propositions for future investigation

The framework suggests four propositions for future research. (1) Activities with an explicit match to a reading objective are more likely to provide observable practice in the intended component than activities selected only for enjoyment. (2) Teacher modelling and feedback are important conditions for converting participation into purposeful reading practice. (3) Pupils' proficiency and linguistic needs should moderate the suitability of a given activity. (4) Time, resources and classroom organisation influence whether an aligned activity can be implemented as intended. These propositions are researchable claims, not findings established by this conceptual paper.

Implications

Implications for classroom pedagogy

Teachers can use the framework as a short planning sequence: identify the reading need, state an observable objective, select an activity that requires the target reading process, plan the necessary scaffolding, and decide how learning will be checked. For example, if the objective is vocabulary development, a quiz should require pupils to connect printed words with meanings or use them in context. If the objective is comprehension, a storytelling activity should include questions, sequencing or retelling tasks tied to the text.

Implications for professional learning

Professional development on Didik Hibur should go beyond demonstrations of entertaining activities. Teachers can work collaboratively to redesign familiar games, songs or role-play tasks so that the printed text, target skill, support and assessment are explicit. Lesson-study or professional learning community discussions could examine pupils' actual responses and determine whether the activity produced evidence of the intended reading practice.

Implications for school support

School leaders can support purposeful implementation by providing time for collaborative planning, access to appropriate reading materials and opportunities to share adaptable

resources. Support should enable teachers to choose activities according to reading objectives rather than requiring the use of a particular format regardless of pupil need. Low-cost, low-technology versions may be important where access to devices or reliable connectivity is limited.

Implications for future research

Future studies could examine the framework through classroom observations, teacher interviews, lesson-plan analysis and pupil reading tasks. Research could compare the stated objective of an activity with the actual reading behaviour observed during implementation. Small-scale design-based or action research could refine the alignment matrix for different year levels and proficiency groups in SJKT. Studies should distinguish engagement, teacher-reported feasibility and measured reading performance, and should avoid claiming improvement unless appropriate evidence is collected.

Conclusion

This conceptual paper has reconsidered Didik Hibur as a potential strategy for Malay reading instruction in SJKT by placing the reading process, rather than teacher adoption alone, at the centre of analysis. Existing studies have addressed pupils' Malay proficiency, teachers' knowledge and attitudes, classroom practices and implementation challenges. The conceptual gap identified here concerns the need for a more explicit account of how particular activities can be matched to particular reading components, supported through teacher scaffolding and adapted to classroom conditions.

The proposed Pedagogical Alignment and Feasibility Framework connects a specified reading component with an activity containing a purposeful reading task, guided interaction, contextual feasibility and evidence of learning. Its central argument is that enjoyment is not sufficient to establish pedagogical value: an activity needs to require the reading process it is intended to support and provide an opportunity for the teacher to check learning. The framework is a conceptual proposition, not an empirically validated model. Further research in SJKT classrooms is required to examine its usefulness, refine the activity-to-skill alignments and determine under what conditions the proposed relationships hold.

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