

**Factors Inhibiting Students to Read at English Language Education Department of An
Islamic Private University in Yogyakarta**

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Abstract

Reading should become a compulsory activity for students at university level as it provides many opportunities for them to access a lot of information which can finally support their academic achievement in the future. However, such situation is found to be a scarcity among students at English Language Education Department of an Islamic private university in Yogyakarta. This descriptive qualitative study aimed to investigate the factors inhibiting students to read at this university in which individual interviews were used to collect the data from three participants representing students of Year 2015, 2016, and 2017. Based on the findings, there are seven factors which inhibit students in the university to conduct reading activities. These factors are time constraints, web attraction, social life, personal concerns, different interest of reading texts, and lack of background knowledge as well as language proficiency in English.

Keywords: Reading, inhibiting factors, time constraints, web attraction, social life, personal concerns, and English books

Introduction

Reading skill is necessary in understanding written communication because people need to digest the information of the written messages. In this case, the written messages can be in the form of books which become one way for people to communicate with other people across the world indirectly. Tampubolon (1987) mentioned that “reading is one of the basic language skill besides listening, writing and speaking and also it is one of part of written communication” (p.5). In relation to this, students in university level are expected to master reading skill because it is an essential skill to support their study. Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkinson (1985) as cited in Küçüköğlu (2012) stated that reading is one of the basic skills that should be mastered by students because it plays important roles at school. In line with that, Grabe and Stoller (2001) as cited in Demiröz (2010) stated that reading becomes an inevitable aspect for independent learning, no matter whether the aim is to improve learning achievement, enrich knowledge from subject matter, or improve language abilities. Not only reading functions as a powerful weapon for students to be better in improving their achievement, but it also helps them to settle any problems in their learning (Bashir & Mattoo, 2012 as cited in Acheaw & Larson 2014).

However, based on the researchers’ experience and some information from the literature, students at university level, especially the students at the English Language Education Department of a private university in Yogyakarta are found to be reluctant in reading. They don’t have a reading habit, especially reading books and journals related to their field of study, a habit which is important to support their study. Based on the researcher’s experience, some students were reluctant to read even though they were given reading assignments from their lecturers. This condition is supported by Setyarini (2016) who found that students’ reading habit of this Islamic private university is in the average category, which means these students need to improve their

reading activity. Another study conducted in the same university by Parmiyanti (2015) revealed three major problems in learning English such as vocabulary and sentence structure, background knowledge, and inappropriate reading habit. These situations in which the university students are low motivated in reading are unacceptable because a university student is required to have a good reading habit which in the long run will affect their quality as a university graduate student. Moreover, reading becomes a very important tool for university students to be independent learners (Grabe and Stoller, 2001) as cited in Demiröz (2010). In order to find out why the students are reluctant to read and what strategy they use to overcome the problem, a study on such issue is then important to be carried out. This study is then intended to investigate the factors inhibiting students to read at the English Language Education Department in this private university.

Literature Review

Reading skill

Reading skill is one of the four basics language skills. In order to have reading skills, people need to use their linguistic intelligence as according to Adams and Collins (1985), Wagner, Schatschneider, and Phythian-Sence (2009) as cited in Alkialbi (2015) “reading is the most complex activity that involves orthographic, phonological, syntactic and semantic processing; i.e., bottom-up processing, background knowledge and top-down processing” (p. 14). In line with that, Qanwal and Karim (2014) defined the terms of “reading” into three categories; reading as an interpretative and decoding skill, interactive skill, and active, cognitive, and thinking process. In conclusion, reading is an interactive process between readers and writers’ ideas in which the reader tries to elicit the meaning where thinking process, background

knowledge, and also linguistic knowledge are used. Reading skills can empower the reader interpret the writing into meaning and gain the aims of independent comprehension.

The Importance of Reading

Reading plays an important role in the academic development, especially when students have to deal with huge amount of foreign language materials for their own specialist subjects (McDonough & Shaw, 2013). Grabe and Stoller (2001) as cited in Demiröz (2010) added that reading is the prior means for university students to be independent learners, whether the aims is to achieve better on academic tasks, learning more about subject matter, or improving language skills. In this case, students are expected to be independent learners through reading activity. Students are moving away from a passive learning of instruction-dependent learner to a more active, creative, and autonomous one by reading (Safdarian, Ghyasi, & Farsani, 2014). In this case, students are actively selecting their reading and knowing where and when they want to conduct reading activity.

The Factors Inhibiting Students to Read

In the higher education, university students are expected to read by their own initiative. Grabe (2000) as cited in Cheethman, Harper, and Ito (2017) stated that motivation is a factor which affects students to read and it is commonly dealing with self-motivation. Cambria and Guthrie (2010) has defined that “motivation are the values, beliefs, and behaviours surrounding reading for an individual” (p. 16). On the other hand, some students who have lack of reading motivation tend to have negative attitude towards reading and they push themselves away from book (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010).

The other factor which also affects students reluctant to read is insufficient linguistic competence such as new words, background knowledge, type of the text, organization, lack of illustration, tenses, linking words, and pronoun (Shehu, 2015). In addition, Lanying (2005) also stated that students who have low proficiency in language become unmotivated because they cannot enjoy reading compared to students who have high proficiency in language.

In addition, Partin and Gillespie as cited in Galgoa (2016) mentioned that students have more positive attitude toward reading if they are introduced with reading activity since they were in the early age. It means that students who never have experience reading activity or do not have reading habit since they were in the early age have less focus on their reading compared to those who who have reading habit or positive attitude towards reading. Thus, students do not like reading because they are not accustomed to reading activity since they were young.

The other inhibiting factor which also give a big influence is spending time too much in front of television and internet usage. Indeed, in this digital era, internet also plays contribution in reducing reading habit (Mokhtari, Reichard, and Gardner, 2014). Moreover, Hoeft (2012) also found some factors inhibiting students to read, “schedules that did not allow time for reading, social life that comes before reading, dislike reading of any kind, lack of interest in topic, and laziness” (p. 11).

To summarize, there are several factors which prevent students to read. These factors are lack of self-motivation and interest in topic, insufficient linguistic competence or language proficiency, lack of reading habit, reluctances, television and internet usage, time concerns, social life, and types of reading.

Methodology

A descriptive qualitative research design was used in this study to reveal some factors which inhibited students to read. In collecting the data, three participants from the students of English Language Department of academic year 2015, 2016 and 2017 were selected. In this study, an in – depth interview was used. As its name suggests, intensive individual interviews are conducted in this in – depth interview.

In analyzing the data, there were several steps employed in the study. The first steps was transcribing process, transcribing the audio result of interview into written forms. The next process was analyzing the data by using coding technique. The coding process was giving simple name or label to a piece of text which contains an information or idea. In the first steps of coding, open and analytical coding were conducted. Open coding categorized a piece of text by giving a simple name or label to give description based on criteria that are decided by the researcher (Strauss & Corbin cited in Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). The next process was analytical coding, in which some interpretation into simple descriptive codes were done, continued by axial coding, in which the subgroup of the category was combined. The last process in coding, selective coding was finally carried out by selecting the statement of the data which had similar idea and categorizing it into main category.

Findings

The findings revealed seven factors which inhibited the participants to read. These findings comprise time constraints, web attraction, social life, personal concerns, different interest of reading texts, and lack of background knowledge as well as language proficiency in English. The following paragraphs elucidate these findings into more detail.

In the first finding, it is evidence that the participants of the study were reluctant to read because of time constraints. There are some activities which make students have no time to read such as doing assignment, part time job, and doing house chores. One of the participants, Zaliha said, “right now I have a lot of assignment and I also work part time. I work part time, then I am also busy doing my assignment, automatically I lack of time to read”.

In addition to time constraints, web attraction also affected students’ preference in using their time for browsing, watching online video or YouTube, and opening social media such as: Whats App, Line, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter rather than to read. Here is the excerpt from Raditya who spent his time more on internet facilities for watching videos on Youtube whenever he had spare time, “usually, I watch a video or movie on the Youtube”. He also admitted that, “I cannot stay away from social media because when I am in a bad mood, I use [prefer] to open my smartphone” [rather than reading].

Another finding revealed that during leisure time, these participants also prefer to have social life such as hanging out and doing exercise with their friends instead of reading books or texts. Sumeye said “Reading is monotonous activity, I prefer to going out to somewhere that can entertain me”.

Moreover, these participants did not have reading habit due to their personal concerns or reasons which make the reading became the last priority. These personal concerns were related to boredom, having ME time, laziness, bad mood, having problems, and lack of motivation. Mustafa stated, “reading is boring, besides that I could not understand the content and there is something more interesting than reading. Therefore, reading is my last priority even though reading is important”.

The above situation was exacerbated by the facts that sometimes the participants felt reluctant in reading because the content was boring and out of their understanding. Raditya mentioned, “what makes me do not like reading is boring reading, which is out of my understanding, such as Philosophy”. Not only the participants were reluctant in reading due to boring readings topic, but also they felt reluctant in reading English texts which were related to research and academic topic. They felt disinterested to read any type of research or academic texts because they were doubtful about with their ability in English skills. Sumeye mentioned, “I do not want to read English text which is related to research”. Again, also added that she also did not like reading academic texts, “if I know it is scientific text or something related to academic, I decided not to read”. In addition, she said that, “In my opinion, the academic-related reading is definitely hard to understand”.

Moreover, the participants are reluctant in reading when they read English text. Even though they are students of English Language Education Department, students found difficulty because of the difference between the first language and second language, the use of high level of language and vocabulary, the use of scientific and unfamiliar words, combined words, difficulty in translating, less illustration, and lack of background knowledge. Zaliha said, “a word in English has many meanings if it is translated in Bahasa [Indonesia]”, and she added that, “then the meaning is different if it is combined with other words”. Mustafa added, “the story is not interesting and out of my understanding so that I am lazy to read”, and he said, “I can say that reading is boring because I prefer to read a text with pictures.”

Discussions

The finding of this study showed that time constraints such as doing assignment, having part time jobs, and doing house chores make students reluctant to read. The participants admitted

that due to these activities, they said they barely had time to read. As university students they have various assignments which have to be submitted on time or otherwise they will have a penalty from their lecturer. Besides, they sometimes have a part time job which can limit their time to read. This situation is highlighted by Hoeft (2012) in his study which revealed that one of the factors that makes students reluctant to read are students' schedule which did not allow them to read. Thus, instead of reading books or journals that can support their academic achievement, these participants choose not to do such activity.

In addition, the finding revealed that students' social life activities affect student reading time. These participants prefer to hang around with their peers and go to public places rather than reading. This is actually a very common tradition of Indonesian society in which they like to have '*Nongkrong*' and have a chat with neighbors. In the past, people, both young and old, did '*Nongkrong*' in small food courts or in small coffee shops. However, it now changes into a more modern life style in which people, especially young people, tend to spend their time chatting instead of reading. The phenomenon in which social life can affect students in reading corroborates the study conducted by Hoeft (2012).

The other finding which make students have less interest in reading is web attraction such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and any social media. Indeed, in this information era, university students tend to explore information and access entertainment from internet because it is more affordable, and therefore they can save money and time. This is in line with Zhou, Xia, Yin, Zhang, Zhang and Feng (2016) who stated that students spent more time in using internet for entertainment purpose. This is actually problematic for these students because students with heavy recreational use of the Internet experiences tend to decline their academic performance (Alam, Hashim, Ahmad, Wel, Nor, & Omar, 2014).

The other factors inhibiting students to read are boredom and laziness, and therefore reading activity becomes their last priority. Students who are in good mood to read tend to do something more interesting such as hanging out, having social media, or ME-time. This phenomenon is actually resulted from their lack of self-motivation. According to Kahyanto, 2005 as cited in Shehu, 2015 who stated that self-motivation is a personal factor because this factor exists inside the reader. Unfortunately, this situation is worsened by the fact that the participants admitted that their reading demotivation is caused by their little understanding on English language proficiency so that they find it difficult to read books or journals which are written in English. This finding corroborates a study by Shehu (2015) who mentioned that lack of background knowledge and illustration are problems that inhibit students to read. Moreover, he added that that new words (vocabularies), organization, tenses, linking words and pronoun are some factors which affect student foreign language students reluctant to read. The differences between their first language and the second language become a problem for them, since students need more time to construct the meaning into their target language (Mourtaga, 2005).

Conclusion

Reading habit should become a routine activity of university students in order to support their academic life. Various research have revealed that reading activity is able to provide a lot of opportunities for students, especially in the higher degree, to gain a lot of knowledge and update their information and technology. However, such ideal condition is found to be scarce among students of English language Education department of a private university of Yogyakarta. After a research is conducted, some findings related to why these students are reluctant to read are revealed.

Based on the findings, there are several factors that inhibit students in the university to read. These factors are time constraints, web attraction, social life, personal concerns, different interest of reading texts, and lack of background knowledge as well as language proficiency in English. These findings are indeed in line with some previous studies conducted by some researchers. Some recommendations are then needed to anticipate similar trends in the future.

Recommendation

Based on the result of this study, there are some recommendation or suggestion for university students as well as the teachers in the university. **For students**, it is suggested for students to invest their time reading books that they are interested in for about 15 up to 30 minutes everyday. Having these activities, it is expected that the students will get used to do reading at any time without any compulsion from others. **For teachers**, it is suggested for English teachers to apply learning models which foster students' motivation to read. Also, it is also important to consider appropriate English textbooks suitable with their level of English competence so that they will be interested in reading.

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