

WHAT MAKES EFL STUDENTS ESTABLISH GOOD READING HABITS IN ENGLISH

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Abstract

To have an ability to cope with the demand in reading English and to develop reading habits in English is significant for EFL students because they are engaged much in reading English literature to achieve their academic success. This article aims at **exploring what makes EFL students establish good reading habits in English**. This is a multi- case study towards the EFL students who already established good habits in reading English. The results of the present study provided valuable insights that the EFL students' reading habits in English is established if they live in a good literacy environment with parents reading them aloud, have regular reading motivation and good reading habits in L1, and have access to digitalized texts and phenomenal literary works. Indeed, the establishment of the EFL students' good reading habits in English is contributed by the individual, social, cultural and technological construct factors.

Key words: factors; reading habits in English

1. Introduction

People agree that reading plays essential role as an instrument for learning. It functions not only as a source of information and a joyful activity but also as a means of extending one's knowledge of the language. Reading has positive influence on academic performance (Adetunji and Oladeji, 2007); it has an underlying role in achieving the success of being good students (Sarroub, 2002); it can support the success of learning process (Broaddus & Ivey, 2001; Renandya, 2007); and it is an access to social, economic, and civic life (Clark & Akerman, 2006).

In countries where English is learned as a foreign language, such as in Indonesia, the ability to read in English is usually considered as an important skill especially for those who are learning English as their major study. They are engaged a lot with texts or references written in English. Consequently, having good skills in reading English texts is demanding and establishing good reading habits in English is significant as well.

Many studies on EFL students' reading have been conducted in Indonesia. Still, they mainly focused on researching reading in classroom settings with the basis to see the facts of the problems arousing in teaching and learning of reading, the reasons behind those problems and the ways to solve those problems. Those studies end up with unhappy story about the EFL reading practices. For example, studies reveal that many students are likely to be reluctant EFL readers for some reading problems (Kweldju, 2000, Sutarsyah, 2000, & Firmanto, 2005). Kusumarasyati (2008) further stated that the reasons behind this lack of interest in reading included students' limited background knowledge, inability to understand the content of the text, and complicated organizational structure of the text.

There is also a lack of concern in conducting research on EFL students' English reading habits. However, Iftanti (2012) found that there are some EFL students who have good English

reading habits but it is not much known about how they established good reading habits in English. Accordingly, to bridge the gap with the previous studies, the present study focuses on revealing what contributes to the establishment of the EFL students' good reading habits in English. Besides, to know the factors that contribute to the establishment of the EFL students' good reading habits in English is significant as a reference for those who have not established good English reading habit yet. Conducting the present study is also important for widening interests of conducting research on literacy in Indonesia. Accordingly, this study is intended to investigate factors that contribute to the establishment of the EFL students' good reading habits in English.

2. Theoretical Review on Reading Habits

Reading as a form of entertainment and an essential life skill, does not just happen. It is a skill that must be established from a child's earliest years. Like other habits, the habit of reading is established in an individual during a course of time. A habit is a product of learning, whereas reading is an art of interpreting written discourse. Thus, reading becomes an experience to be cultivated and processed. Reading, as a long term habit, is a prominent gateway to the knowledge room. In this sense, reading habit is an important tool for the development of personalities and mental capacities of individuals.

Reading habits are more *permanent* than passive qualities which imply an ordering toward action showing an experience of the will; hence they are *intentional*. With repeated acts, a habit *grows*, but a habit can also be diminished with the cessation of an act (Stone & Stone, 1990). A habit is a pattern of behavior which acquires constant, regular, often unconscious inclination to perform an act through frequent repetition which is applied to any activity established during a course of time as a part of personality of an individual (Good, et al., 2008).

Since a habit of reading is established by repeating the desired behavior, reading is practiced regularly every day until it becomes the second nature to the learners. Therefore, repetition of reading activities is the key of the establishment of reading habits. Accordingly, in this study, "good reading habits in English" refers to "behaviors of reading various kinds of English reading materials which are regularly, permanently and intentionally conducted so it becomes a part of the EFL students' daily activities".

A habit of reading is not only constructed in an individual but also influenced by some external factors such as environment, education, social background, and facilities. A term "factor" in this study refers to "facts, circumstances or particular situations that actively contribute to an accomplishment, result or process". When such atmospheres are multiplied together, it yields a given product, namely a habit (Woolf, 1980; Good, et al., 2008). In other words, a reading habit is individually, socially and culturally constructed. In accordance with the previous studies, there are certain facts or circumstances which actively contribute to an accomplishment of reading habits. accessibility to electronic facilities such as internet (Akyay & Ogeyik, 2009; Karchmer, 2001; Huang, 2004) and home video influence the students' reading habits (Kaufman, 2007). Moreover, the environmental influence, parental influence, peer pressure, school curriculum, and teachers (Adetunji and Oladeji, 2007) are the other factors militating against better reading habits. In addition, Renandya and Richards (2002) state that in both L1 and L2 reading instruction situations, the social context of the students' home environment strongly influences reading development.

Indeed, the success of reading practices is supported by some factors such as students' home environment including parental influence, parental involvement, environmental influence, social class, and accessibility to reading materials. Home language learning is also viewed as a

continuation of students' language experiences which they bring into the classroom. How language mastery developed in their daily life and how it is learnt in their classroom should be interrelated.

3. Research Method

This study is conducted in response to the suggestion proposed by Iftanti's survey (2012). This is a multi case study to five EFL college students who already established good habits in reading English. It is indicated by spending about five hours every day to read various kinds of English texts on various topics regularly, having target to finish reading, selecting their own reading materials, showing great interest in reading English, feeling happy and enjoyable to read, having been able to mention some English writers they have ever read spontaneously, having preference to read English books to Indonesian ones, spending the greatest amount of their parents' allowance to buy books, having consistency of reading English, having passion to access the Internet to find new published literary works which are not available in bookstores or libraries yet, visiting libraries and bookstores to get reading materials, and keeping the joy and comfort of reading English

The data were collected by doing in-depth interview in order to describe and identify factors that are only under the knowledge and experience of the subjects. The instrument used was then interview guides. Home observation was also conducted to gather data from live situation in which some of the external factors that affect the cultivation of reading habit such as the availability of technological instruments and that of reading materials or reading books or home library, and also home literacy environment could be collected. The collected data were then analyzed descriptively to reveal factors contributing to the establishment of the EFL students' good reading habits in English.

4. Findings and Discussion

The study reveals that the EFL students' interest in English, hobbies related to the needs of improving knowledge through reading, the awareness of being a student of the English Department, the presence of figures of idols such as friends, father, or mothers who established good reading habits are motivational constructs that contribute to the establishment of their good reading habits in English. Motivation to read, for them, is the energizing force that actually causes reading to occur when these favorable states towards reading exists. This confirms previous study stating that personal characteristics of the students including age distribution, social class, and parents' occupation (Adetunji, 2007) and positive attitude towards reading (Applegate & Applegate, 2004) actively contribute to an accomplishment of reading habits. Since motivation is in an individual, such a factor is classified as an individual construction factor.

In addition, the EFL students' good reading habits in English are also developed because they live in a good literacy environment which indicates good literacy practices such as parents' role modeling on the engagement with papers and books, the availability of reading materials at home and that of library and bookstores, the habits of receiving books as presents, being closed to people who love reading, and the competitive classroom atmosphere. Such environments take great contribution to their good reading practices. Some previous studies found that public libraries can promote literacy and a love of reading (Rainie & Zickuhr, 2014), enthusiastic readers and reading habits are affected by parents (Nathanson et.al., 2008), social practices such as reading along with friends, reading in areas of shared interest, reading aloud to younger children, and discussing books (Camp, 2007), social turn (Knoester, 2010), and extrinsic reinforcement (Flora & Flora, 1999). Furthermore, the present study proves that a competitive classroom atmosphere has provided evidence attracting the EFL students to have a lot of regular reading practices for the sake of being

the best among their classmates. Indeed, the environmental factors which are constructed by home literacy environment, the accessibility of the library, and competitive classroom environment are taken into account as the social construction factors to establish good reading habits in English.

Another social construction factor which significantly contributes to establish the EFL students' good reading habits in English is parents' reading aloud. The present study found that the EFL students who established good English reading habits are the ones who have parents read them aloud as revealed by Camp (2007) and told them stories at their bed time when they were kids. Even though parents do not regularly read aloud for their kids, having shared a love of reading to kids is critical for their children's development of good reading habits. In fact, there are endless benefits of reading aloud to children. Children whose parents read aloud and told them stories from a very young age grow up with a positive interest about reading, because they enjoyed being read to when they were young. They have a natural interest in learning to read as they grow up.

It is also revealed that EFL students' good English reading habits are partly the result of their engagement in their parents' positive experience of reading books either in Indonesian or in English. Parents' attention of giving and providing them with reading books on which they can enjoy reading the books, or looking at the pictures inside, or ever making some notes on the books are also important parts of developing good reading habits. Consequently, the habit of providing children with books attracts them to see, touch, open and then read and this gradually makes them accustomed to reading practices. So, parents' reading aloud is considered as one of the pivotal construction factors of good reading habit because a child who gets used to involve in positive experience of books and papers will develop their good English reading habits. In brief, further to individual construction factor, good English reading habits are also socially constructed.

Besides, The EFL students' good English reading habits are culturally constructed by some factors namely English phenomenal literary works, box office movies, and the habits of reading L1. The result of the present study shows that phenomenal literary works, namely *Harry Potter* Series has changed the EFL students to be engaged in good reading practices. These series changed the EFL students who did not read English to love reading English. Their change behavior is resulted from the magical power of the series. The amazing story and the greatness of J.K. Rowling as the author of the series brought about the magic of the EFL students, even those who hated English to fall in love with the series. The great story of *the series* encouraged the EFL students to learn English more. These facts show that *Harry Potter* series are proved to be wonderful and phenomenal novels that attract the EFL students not only to learn English but also to establish good reading habits in English. Thus, *Harry Potter series* as one of phenomenal literary works have provided a magical solution that the series bring about a literacy hour mainly in establishing good English reading habits not only for those who have English as their native language but for the EFL students as well. The present finding appear to be consistent with Loan (2012) revealing that the most preferable subject of interest for the college students in 21st century to read is literature and Kutay (2014) highlighting that Turkish high students mostly prefer fiction for their reading practices.

Movies are the other cultural construction factors to develop the EFL students' good English reading habits. The finding of the present study shows that watching box office movies takes a contribution in the establishment of good English reading habits, especially reading literary works. The interest of watching box office movies attracted the EFL students to read movie reviews before watching them. This provides them with loves about reading. Something that they have always loved about the movies is what they have always considered to be the central core of the books. This fact shows how close the relationship of the existence of the books and movies is.

Movies and books strengthen each other. The present study noted that movies, on one hand, strengthen the readers' comprehension of books. On the other hand, the present study reveals that the curiosity of what the stories of box office movies attracts the EFL students to read books related to the movies and this contributes to the establishment of good English reading habits.

The result of the present study also shows that those who established good reading habits in English are the ones who already established good reading habits in their first language (s) (hereafter L1), Indonesian language and Javanese language- a local language of the EFL students who took part in this study. The EFL students' habit of reading L1 built their interest in reading practices of any texts other than those written in their L1. This fact reveals that the automaticity with holding reading materials and good reading practice in their L1 contributes to the establishment of good English reading habits. This indicates that this study proves that the EFL students' good English reading habits is preceded by having already established good reading habits in their L1. This means that there is a transfer of positive experience and interest from L1 to EFL. However, the result of this study insists that the EFL students' proficiency of reading did not support the formation of good reading habit in English. It is revealed from the fact that the EFL students who already nurtured good reading habit in English are not at the top rank of their English reading proficiency, although they are among the best in their class. And those who have the best English reading proficiency are not the best in their English reading habits.

The other factor that contributes to the establishment of the EFL students' good English reading habits is the Internet. The present study reveals that the accessibility of the Internet contributes to the development of the EFL students' good habits of reading English. The electronic media offer wonderful possibilities, nearly limitless access to searchable information and electronic books. The EFL students can read various types of e-texts only in one sitting, without moving from one book self to other book selves or entering to one room to other rooms just to find their favorite reading materials. Using a hypertext is perhaps more like "navigating" than "reading". Moreover, it is revealed that the Internet is a rich information source which is accessible for the EFL students to read any information they want. Hence, the result of the present study shows the positive contribution of the Internet to establish good English reading habits. This is parallel to some previous studies reflecting that Internet is an effective means of fostering reading habits (Verma, 2013), technology development changes reading habits (Igbokwe et.al., 2012), and it is useful to engage students in the books, enriches their lives (Firek, 2011) and affects their reading behavior at home (Chauhan &Lal, 2012).

The establishment of the EFL students' good English reading habits are, firstly, derived from the internal motivation composed by the joy and comfort of reading, the great willingness to reading practice, positive attitude toward books and reading practice, positive belief about reading English, the desire to learn English, the interest in English and its culture. English reading practices which lead the EFL students to some certain states such as the joy, comfort, and happiness have proved to significantly contribute to the development of their good English reading habits. This is consistent with Jamnik's (2005) study which revealed that the joy of reading is the most frequent motivation for reading. Takase (2007) also found that intrinsic motivation is the most powerful factor for motivating learners of any age to read books in both their L1 and L2. The enrichment of such a motivation is developed by the external motivation components such as the text comprehension concerning with issues related to hobbies and dreams, the figure of an inspiring idol who has good English reading habits or who is native English speaker, and the status of being students of the English Department. These facts imply that good English reading habits are individually constructed which means that if the EFL students are able to cultivate their reading

motivation as a powerful force to actualize their English reading practices, their good habits of reading in English will be well developed. They can strengthen and enhance such a motivation by means of cultivating positive attitude and belief to create the joy and the comfort of reading in English, building the desire and interest in English, setting a dream and engaging in activities required knowledge improvement through reading in English. This implies how important for either parents or teachers to assist their children or students to cultivate their reading motivation.

Secondly, motivation to read English as an individual construction factor will more importantly contribute to the development of the EFL students' good English reading habits if the EFL students are embedded in a good literacy environment. Parents' reading aloud and telling stories to children have proved to cultivate positive experience and interest in reading practices which then lead to love of reading. These provide a compelling argument that to encourage the development of the EFL students' good reading habits, English teachers together with parents need to create good home and school literacy environment through reading books for their children/students and telling them stories at young age to build positive interest and experience of reading English and giving good model of reading practices. Moreover, to provide more various updated reading texts, better facilities and easier accessibility of the library is important to attract the EFL students to spend their free time for reading in the library or borrowing books from the library.

Thirdly, the EFL students' good English reading habits are also contributed by the cultural construction factors which can be built from reading phenomenal literary works such *Harry Potter series*, box office movies, and the habits of reading in L1. These facts have some implications that if an EFL student is engaged in reading phenomenal English literary works, s/he will be eager to read other English literary works which subsequently brings about the development of good English reading habits. Watching box office movies is also triggering factor for the EFL students to read the movie reviews and further read the other related movie reading materials. Moreover, an EFL student who has good reading habits in L1 has positive experience of reading L1 which is found to be transferable to that of reading English. This reflects the importance of the establishment of good reading habits in L1 as one of the starting points to build positive interest in reading English which then can lead to the development of good English reading habits. The finding of the present study is consistent with Camiciottoli' (2001) study which found that the amount of L1 reading was found to be the one of the significant predictors of the frequency and the amount of L2 reading and of L2 reading attitude representing by the willingness to find time for L2 reading. This indicates the connection between L1 and L2 reading. Yamashita (2004) who examined EFL learners' L1 and L2 reading attitudes categorized into anxiety, comfort, and values ascribed to reading, and self-perception also found that all categories were correlated between L1 and L2.

However, the present study reveals that good English proficiency does not indicate good English reading habits. This finding is in line with the previous study carried out by Yamashita (2004) which proved that L2 proficiency would not affect the formation of reading attitude and his second study (Yamashita, 2007) which found that reading L2/FL reading proficiency does not influence the formation of FL/L2 good reading habit. This means that the transfer from L1 to L2 is not in terms of reading habits but in terms of reading attitudes from L1 to L2. Consequently, an important pedagogical implication is that English teachers should attempt to understand their students' L1 attitude, particularly their interest and experience of reading L1. If the EFL students' experience and interest are negative, English teachers together with the other teachers should attempt to cultivate positive experience and interest as much as possible.

Fourthly, people in one hand are worried about the negative effects of the vast advancement of information and technology towards reading, but the fact revealed from the present study indicates that the Internet as a technological construction factor importantly contributes to the development of the EFL students' good English reading habits if they can enrich the accessibility of the Internet for the rich resourceful reading materials in English which might not be available in libraries. This is consistent with Akarsu & Dariyemez (2014) who proved that reading habits of individuals have started to become more digitalized in accordance with the advances of technology and the Internet is the core of digital reading. It has made them possible to harvest a lot of information in a short span of time aided by powerful search engines. It is an effort which would have taken days and several visits to the library to get hold of.

This fact, therefore, has a pedagogical implication that teachers should promote effective access and help raising the awareness of the EFL students on the positive values of the Internet as a tool to access vast valuable reading resources and as helpful device to develop good English reading habits. The effective access of the Internet could actually be credited for having kept the reading habit alive and enhancing reading volumes among youth in the midst of a fast paced life (Bussiere and Gluszynski, 2004). This can also imply how English teachers make their EFL students aware and understand the positive side of the Internet, so that they become technologically literate to support their English reading practices.

5. Conclusion and Suggestion

In general, the present study has shown evidence that if the EFL students are always motivated to read English for their academic or enjoyment activities, this will lead them to the development of their good English reading habits. Reading motivation arouses when they have interest in English, desire to learn English, joy and comfort to read English. To have positive belief about reading English, to set dream and hobbies, and to have idols who already established good reading in English or those of English native have also led to have reading motivation which contributes to the development of their good English reading habits. Moreover, to be embedded in good literacy environment such as the availability and accessibility to reading materials, competitive classroom atmosphere, and parents' and teacher' modeling of reading practice is another important point which brings about the development of good English reading habits. Besides, if the EFL students are attracted to watch box-office movies and to read phenomenal literary works, this will contribute to their good English reading habits. Furthermore, the present study has also proved that if students are able to make the best use of the Internet as vast resourceful English reading materials of any kinds, they will develop their good English habits.

It could be highlighted that the contribution of the present study is two-fold. It can theoretically be reported that the development of the EFL students' good English reading habits are contributed by the individual construct factors (i.e. internal and external motivation), social construction factors (i.e. good literacy environment and parents' reading aloud), cultural construction factors (i.e. English phenomenal literary works, box office movies, and the habits of reading in L1), and technological construction factor (i.e. the Internet). Practically, the findings of this study are useful for the EFL students as the reference to cultivate and develop good reading habits, particularly a habit of reading English in order to support their academic success. For teachers, parents, and librarians, the results of the present study are also important as the reference to help EFL students in pertaining to sustained reading practices.

Finally, it is important to note that this study is qualitatively done with five selected students of the English Department focusing on finding out factors affecting the EFL students to

establish their good reading habits in English. Consequently, the study cannot reveal the degree of the correlation of the factors and it does not result in the tendency of the amount of effect of each factor but on the generalized ability of each factor in the establishment of good reading habits in English. The present study is also limited on college students who do not represent EFL students that actually cover students studying English in all levels of education namely elementary and secondary schools. Accordingly, these limitations can be taken into account as the basis to conduct further studies which focus on finding out the correlation and the tendency of each factor in the development of the EFL students' good reading habits in English. It is also necessary to conduct a further study with the more representative EFL students involving all levels of education to get more comprehensible factors contributing to the EFL students' good reading habits in English. However, the result of this study can be used as underlying inspiration for English teachers, parents, and librarians to assist the EFL students' students in establishing their good reading habits in English.

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