

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON USING WATTPAD AS MEDIA IN EXTENSIVE READING

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to investigate students' opinions on extensive reading using the Wattpad platform and its advantages in enhancing English language proficiency. The study employed descriptive qualitative writing methods and conducted in-depth interviews with two undergraduate English education majors from a North Sumatra state university. These participants were purposively selected due to their substantial engagement in Wattpad's extensive reading for over three years. Data collected from the interviews were analysed to answer the research question. The findings demonstrate that extensive reading on Wattpad positively impacts students' language proficiency and supports better language memorization. In conclusion, this study sheds light on the benefits of online platforms like Wattpad in facilitating in-depth reading experiences for language learners.

Keyword:

English Language Proficiency, Extensive Reading, Wattpad Platform

Introduction

Extensive reading plays a pivotal role in language acquisition by enhancing vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and overall communication skills. Numerous studies in the last decade (Lee & Hsu, 2015; Mermelstein, 2016; Edy, 2017) have demonstrated its positive impact on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, enabling them to acquire language features and abilities effectively. This approach offers a diverse range of authentic reading materials, including newspapers, journals, articles, books, and more, making the learning process enjoyable and applicable beyond the confines of the classroom (Harmer, 2017).

Research findings indicate that extensive reading contributes to increased reading speed and comprehension, while also promoting significant vocabulary growth and understanding of spelling among learners. Moreover, it fosters a positive attitude and motivation towards reading (Shen, 2018). According to Powell (2019), extensive reading entails consuming a large quantity of easily understandable material, typically outside the classroom in a learner's comfort zone. It empowers students to select reading materials based on their interests and comprehension levels, encouraging them to explore different texts if their initial choice does not resonate with them.

Educators have advocated for the incorporation of varied sources, such as literature books and online applications, to effectively implement the extensive reading approach. Among these applications, Wattpad has gained popularity among students due to its accessibility and user-friendly interface. Co-founded in 2006 by Canadian engineers Allen Lau and Ivan Yuen, Wattpad has evolved into an online community for writers and readers, serving as a platform for aspiring and experienced authors to publish their work, receive feedback, and connect with like-minded individuals (Ramdarshan Bold, 2018). Wattpad primarily focuses on user-generated content and has been aptly dubbed the "YouTube for

stories (without video)" (Ramdarshan Bold, 2018). It provides an extensive collection of both free and paid reading materials, catering to diverse interests and preferences.

Notably, Wattpad features stories from writers hailing from various countries, allowing them to publish content in multiple languages. While it promotes both reading and writing, users can choose their preferred language for the content. This is particularly advantageous for students, as stories published in English are widely accessible, providing ample opportunities for language exposure and practice.

Although several relevant studies have investigated Wattpad's impact, limited research explores students' perception of extensive reading using this platform, particularly in the context of North Sumatra, Indonesia. Recent studies have revealed Wattpad's positive influence on Indonesian university students' English language proficiency (Intan, et.al, 2020). The in-line comments feature of Wattpad functions akin to social networking platforms, creating a safe and conducive environment for students to use English while engaging with others (Nindia Wulansari, 2018). Additionally, a qualitative study titled "Extensive reading activities and the use of online resources during a pandemic," undertaken by Maulidia Rachmawati Nur et al. (2022), identified advantages and disadvantages of extensive online reading among Indonesian students, indicating benefits in terms of reading activities and enhancing English language skills, particularly vocabulary and grammar understanding. Rini Lindawati (2021) conducted a study titled "Student Perception Towards Extensive Reading in EFL Context," exploring students' attitudes towards extensive reading subjects, preferred reading materials, and the benefits to their English language abilities. The findings showcased students' positive opinions on extensive reading practice, revealing its contribution to enhancing English knowledge and skills across various areas.

This study seeks to investigate students' perceptions of Wattpad as an extensive reading tool and its impact on their English language improvement. Through an exploration of various research studies on student experiences with Wattpad for extensive reading, this article aims to provide valuable insights into its benefits for language learners. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of authentic language exposure and extensive reading to foster substantial improvements in reading skills and language proficiency. The research contributes significantly to the scholarly discourse and highlights the relevance of integrating innovative platforms like Wattpad in language learning settings.

Methods

The methodology employed in this qualitative study is a descriptive case study design. A descriptive case study is a focused and detailed investigation, aiming to examine a sample in-depth and detail, using a descriptive theory (Yin, 2018). The primary objective of this research is to describe the students' perceptions of utilizing Wattpad for extensive reading outside the classroom and its impact on their English skills. The study's participants were two undergraduate English major students from a University in North Sumatera, deliberately chosen for their extensive reading activities on Wattpad for over three years. The research instrument used in this study was an in-depth interview with various questions related to the research problems, developed based on the perceptual components described by Walgito (2010). Data were collected through these interviews, and the interactive model proposed by Ridder et al. (2014) was used for data analysis, which involved selecting relevant information and discarding irrelevant data.

Results and Discussion

Findings

Students' Perceptions towards extensive reading on Wattpad

Before conducting the interview, the researcher first provides perception questions in the cognitive component that refers to the knowledge, opinions, or beliefs of participants

against extensive reading . Based on the results of the answers from both participants, they were more inclined to similar answers, namely positive responses to extensive reading on Wattpad. Researchers previously asked what they knew about extensive reading, the participants answered;

"Extensive reading is reading something in an effort to improve one's literacy in order to obtain pleasure or entertainment , so usually one is free to determine what to read according to their personal desires and interests ."(Boy)

"What I know about this extensive reading is reading something that he likes because his hobby of reading , if I'm not mistaken, is usually done outside the classroom. For example, such as reading novels, comics, literature."(Girl)

Based on the responses to the first question, it was determined that both participants understood the concept of extensive reading, also known as reading for pleasure, which is done on the principle that students must select their own reading material based on their interests and level of understanding. The considerable reading activity was understood or known by both individuals.

Meanwhile, when asked about his knowledge and understanding of the Wattpad platform, he stated,

"Wattpad is an application that can be operated on a Gadget, someone can get a lot of reading with different genres." Furthermore, someone has the option of publishing their content on this site." (Boy)

" Wattpad is an online reading and writing site. In it there are many types of reading and literature such as novels, short stories and there are many choices of genres available, this site can be accessed for free and paid."(Girl)

Both participants understood that Wattpad is an online reading platform that provides a huge amount of reading material in various genres that they can choose from based on their personal interests. Thus, this makes Wattpad a potential platform for extensive reading outside the classroom.

If the affective component is examined, this will refer to feelings or emotional elements that are not mediated by thought. based on the data received from interviews. Wattpad was perceived positively by both participants as a container for prolonged reading. When researchers asked individuals about their emotional responses while they were reading on Wattpad, they revealed;

"As someone who likes to read, I feel happy with the Wattpad platform, because the dense activity sometimes feels difficult if you have to carry a conventional book that takes up space in the bag. I can also choose what I want to read and because there is such a wide selection of reading material, I can change what to read whenever I find it less interesting."(boy)

"I always try to take the time to read extensively on Wattpad because it's such a fun thing to do. In addition to reading I am also learning to write on this wattpad platform, there is a challenge when our writing can get feedback from readers."(Girl).

Both participants reported that they enjoyed doing a lot of reading on Wattpad. Extensive reading on Wattpad was an enjoyable activity for participants because it lowered tension when reading. Because Wattpad provides a large selection of reading material, pupils can easily switch between them. They can locate different reading material that is more in accordance with their interests if they do not find fascinating reading content. Extensive reading on Wattpad was also an enjoyable hobby for participant B. They enjoy the ability to

design their own library as well as the ability to read while listening to music. To be fair, researchers also raise concerns.

The action or behavior of participants in using Wattpad to read extensively is referred to in the conative component. Based on the information gleaned from the in-depth interviews, it was determined that both participants engaged in positive actions and behaviors connected to their usage of Wattpad for lengthy reading activities.

"I discovered it myself many years ago and I encouraged myself to read on the platform for my own entertainment. Later, by doing extensive reading on Wattpad, I learned that my English skills improved unconsciously. For that reason, I think it's good for me to continue doing extensive reading on the platform. Actually no one recommended me to read on Wattpad." (Boy)

"About five years ago, when I first learned about Wattpad, I used it for leisurely reading. After doing it a few times, it became clear that I really liked the activity and found myself doing it frequently. I have a strong attachment to the endeavor and the medium. Additionally, I believe that reading a lot on Wattpad has unknowingly improved my English language abilities." (Girl)

Both participants acknowledged that they had been using the platform for a while when they first started encouraging one another to read a lot on it for fun. Additionally, both participants claimed that their regular, in-depth reading on Wattpad had unconsciously improved their English.

Both participants responded that they primarily read fiction when asked what genre they would prefer to read extensively on Wattpad

"Saya kebanyakan membaca genre fiksi karena saya suka itu menarik saya yang paling. Saya suka membaca komedi romantis, detektif, misteri, dan sebagainya. Saya tidak terlalu menyukai genre non-fiksi. Saya tidak tahu mengapa. Saya kira itu bukan urusan saya." (Boy)

"Di Wattpad, saya lebih banyak membaca fiksi karena itu adalah genre favorit saya. Sebenarnya, genre favorit saya adalah romansa dan fantasi. Oh dan karena saya penggemar Harry Potter, terkadang saya membaca fiksi penggemar Harry Potter." (Boy)

Respondents to Boy (who requested anonymity) revealed that they are more interested in fiction, such as romantic comedies, detective stories, and mysteries, and do not particularly enjoy reading nonfiction. While the Girl participants (who requested that their names be kept anonymous) also preferred the fiction genre, their favorites were fantasy and romance. The girls read Wattpad fan fiction as well. The responses of the participants in this regard are consistent with earlier research by (Lindawati, 2020) and (Intan Permatasari, et al., 2020), which contends that regardless of the genre of book students read, as long as they enjoy it, it indicates that they have engaged in extensive reading practice

Analysis

Based on the interview results mentioned earlier, the information provided by the participants about their perception of extensive reading on Wattpad indicates that it unintentionally enhanced their English language skills, particularly in terms of creativity. As a result, the researchers inquired whether frequent reading on Wattpad indeed led to unintentional improvement in their English language abilities. Notably, there are several significant advantages of extensive reading on Wattpad that go beyond enhancing reading skills:

1. Improving students' writing skills: The participants reported that their writing skills improved as a result of their extensive reading on Wattpad. Engaging with a diverse

range of stories and narratives on the platform seems to have influenced their ability to express themselves effectively in writing.

2. Adding new vocabulary: Wattpad users found that their vocabulary expanded through extensive reading. Exposure to various genres and writing styles allowed them to encounter new words and phrases, contributing to a richer linguistic repertoire.
3. Enhancing students' speaking skills: Interestingly, the participants mentioned that their speaking skills also improved. Engaging with creative content on Wattpad seemingly influenced their ability to communicate more confidently and fluently in English, as observed during the interviews.

In addition to the insights gained from the interviews, the students' ability to respond fluently in English during the conversations further supports the positive impact of extensive reading on Wattpad. Their increased fluency in English serves as evidence of the benefits mentioned above.

Students exhibited a favorable response to engaging in extensive reading through the Wattpad app. The platform's feature that allows them to independently choose books based on their reading level and interests appears to boost their motivation and interest in reading. Wijaya's research (2020) suggests that offering a flexible selection of texts is crucial to maintaining students' high reading motivation and fostering a positive perception of extensive reading.

One of the significant advantages of using Wattpad lies in its accessibility and convenience, as students can read widely anywhere and anytime. This flexibility contributes to their comfort, enjoyment, and engagement in the reading activity, ultimately cultivating reading habits. The students also emphasized that the Wattpad app serves as a useful tool for incorporating extensive reading into their activities. Day and Bamford (2002) argue that providing varied reading materials is essential for projects requiring substantial reading. Therefore, using Wattpad as an alternative platform to encourage extensive reading activities proves to be a viable and beneficial option.

Permatasari et al. (2020) support the notion that Wattpad offers a vast and diverse selection of reading materials, making it easier for students to read extensively. The platform's ample resources contribute to a more engaging and enriching reading experience for students.

Overall, the interviews with the participants revealed that extensive reading on Wattpad unintentionally improved their English language skills, particularly in terms of creativity. The advantages of engaging in extensive reading on Wattpad extend beyond enhancing reading skills and encompass improvements in writing, vocabulary, and speaking abilities. Moreover, the students' positive response to the platform, along with its user-friendly features, further supports the benefits of incorporating Wattpad into extensive reading activities. As a versatile and accessible tool, Wattpad provides students with a wide array of reading materials, facilitating their engagement and enjoyment in the reading process. By promoting extensive reading through platforms like Wattpad, educators can effectively nurture students' language development and foster a love for reading in the EFL context.

Conclusion

Wattpad is a digital platform that is increasingly popular among students as a means of accessing literary works. This innovative website provides an extensive library of free books and also encourages users to write their own stories. In this article, we have explored the perspective of students in using Wattpad extensively reading. Students view Wattpad as an effective tool for practicing extensive reading because of its accessibility, diversity of literary choices, and interactive nature. The Platform allows readers to engage with different genres and styles while promoting creativity through writing challenges and User-Generated

Content. Students appreciate the ease of being able to access the material instantly and believe that it helps them develop literacy skills and learn about literature. In addition, the social aspect of Wattpad allows students to connect with other readers and writers, share feedback and suggestions, and build a community centered on reading and writing. In addition, studies have shown that using Wattpad can have better benefits in intensive reading. Overall, students find Wattpad to be an effective and engaging platform for extensive reading, offering entertainment and educational opportunities.

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