



INDONESIAN SCHOOL STUDENTS READING HABITS: A SOCIOCULTURAL PERSPECTIVES



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ABSTRACT

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Reading should become a habit and should be sustained throughout life. And this should also become among the basic goals in all level of education. Therefore reading is the main focus of the English program in Indonesian high schools. However, students' reading interest and achievement in Indonesian are still considered low. This article is trying to look at socio-cultural factor that contribute to the development of reading habit and achievement in Indonesia context. In doing so, the researcher tries to conduct meta-analysis on researches of the teaching reading in Indonesia. The research findings have demonstrated that the teaching techniques of reading utilized by the researchers brought positive impact on students' reading habits and achievement. However, the reading habits level and achievement at school cannot be considered satisfactorily especially compared to other South East Asian countries. The sociocultural factors are likely to contribute the undeveloped level of reading habit and achievement in Indonesia.

Contribution/ Originality: This study contributes in the existing literature of reading habits and teaching techniques of reading in a particular EFL context especially in Indonesia. In addition, this study also is trying to look at the issue from the perspectives of cultures.

1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching literacy comprises four parts; reading, writing, speaking and listening. Thus, it is evident that learning to understand the spoken language and responding to it are natural processes. Listening and speaking skills alone do not make a child literate. For a pupil, being literate means to be able to read with fluency and confidence and using the correct spelling and having access to a wide range of vocabulary to understand the meanings of written texts and to express their ideas in a clear and appropriate way.

Reading, which has been defined as “the process of the brain evaluating and making sense of signs and symbols perceived through the eyes” (Özbay, cited in Erdem (2015)) is a complex process that consists of various stages of development. Reading should become a habit and should be sustained throughout life. And this should also become among the basic objectives of education. Meanwhile, a habit is a repeated action which people do regularly, sometimes without knowing that they are doing it. Habit of reading is established by having frequent repetition of reading practices in a course of time so that it becomes the nature of the students' daily activities (Good *et al.*, 2008).

With such a good habit in reading in their school years, it will help students reading achievement significantly.

Reading plays crucial roles in English teaching in almost all curriculums in Indonesia. Many students still face several challenges especially in comprehending the text. This goes in line with [Celce-Murcia \(2002\)](#) that English Foreign Language (EFL) student has to read the text repeatedly in order to understand the general meaning. The latest survey conducted by Program International for Student Assessment (PISA) put Indonesia in the second lowest students reading habit from 65 countries surveyed. In East Asian alone, it was report that Singaporeans' reading habit is consider high among other South-East Asia Countries such as Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, and Indonesia. The low reading habit in Indonesia is also visible from the data released by Statistics Bureau in 2006. It revealed that our society has not made reading as the main activity in their leisure time. People prefer watching TV (85.86%), listening to the radio (40.26%) rather than reading the newspaper (23.46%). Economic Development Cooperation Organization (OECD) reported that reading culture of Indonesians is the lowest among the 52 countries in the region of East Asia ([Indonesia's Reading Culture is Lowest in East Asia, 2009](#)).

In regards to teachers' roles in shaping students' reading habits and achievements, it is essential to look at some researches that have been done in relation to teaching reading. The results of research on EFL readings in Indonesia provide the empirical data how the reading classes are conducted.

2. RESEARCH FINDINGS ON TEACHING READING IN INDONESIA

Several studies have been conducted to reveal various strategies utilized by secondary school teachers in order to improve the reading habits and achievement of high school students. For example, [Kweldju \(2016\)](#) in his study uses the narrow reading method to find out students' level of interest in reading. According to [Krashen \(1982\)](#) a narrow reading means focusing on a single type of text (e.g. narrative) rather than trying to read a variety of texts. A narrow passage is worth practicing because it helps ensure that the input is understandable. The reader has the advantage of the previous context to help him understand the new ones. The finding of this study demonstrated that students show their seriousness in reading books and this help the development of their vocabulary. This strategy also helps students transform themselves from shy to sharp and fast readers. Students who were initially uninterested became aware that reading was very important.

[Ferdila \(2014\)](#) research is not much different from that of [Kweldju \(2016\)](#) but in his research, he investigated the benefits of using an extensive reading. He found five benefits: building students' perspectives that reading is an interesting activity, creating a fun learning environment, helping students develop broad vocabulary, improving students' reading comprehension, and improving students' reading motivation. Most students have a positive attitude towards the extensive reading in their class. It is recommended that some aspects of this technique need to be improved; this includes the importance of giving clear instructions, and awareness to design activities.

[Sinambela et al. \(2015\)](#) found that 'KWL' (Know-Want-Learn) technique not only helps the teacher assess the students' levels of understanding but also models the learning process and activates thinking on the topic. This strategy is designed to help students develop a more pro-active approach to reading the expository material.

[Ramadhani and Harputra \(2016\)](#) investigated whether there is a significant difference between teaching reading comprehension of narrative text by using the Herringbone Technique (HT) in high school in Padang, Indonesia. They state that Herringbone Technique is a structured outlining procedure designed to help students organize and remember important information in a text. The Herringbone format can facilitate the students to obtain the important information by asking six very basic comprehension questions: Who? What? When? Where? How? and Why? ([Tierney et al., 1980](#)).

[Wulandari et al. \(2014\)](#) implemented *Read, Encode, Annotate and Ponder* (REAP) Strategy in teaching reading for high school in Palembang, Indonesia. Before this strategy was employed, the students' average reading scores was 65 below the passing grade of 75. They confirmed the successful of REAP strategies were influenced by the

appropriate material and teachers' role in guiding the student using pictures to stimulate students in the beginner level to create schemata before coming with new information in reading text.

Gani *et al.* (2016) discovered the effectiveness of *Collaborative Strategic Reading* (CSR) towards 67 students in grade seven² a senior high school of Banda Aceh, Indonesia. Before CSR was employed, students got difficulties in finding the main idea, the specific information, unfamiliar vocabulary and terminology used in the text. Students were struggle even harder when they had to work individually. After CSR, they stated the application of CSR in the classroom not only extends the reading skill but also improved their social interaction in the discussion stage. Since CSR combined reading comprehension and cooperative learning, teacher guidance is required during discussion of the text. In CSR, students were no longer afraid to read because they obtain and share new more information from their peers.

In brief, some researchers found several new and innovative reading techniques which may be able to develop the reading habits and achievement of high school students. However, the most concern was the level of reading in Indonesia is not developing satisfactorily. Several factors merit consideration. Therefore, this article is to identify several socio-cultural aspects which may critically shape the reading habits of both lower and upper high school students in Indonesia.

3. RESEARCH FINDINGS ON SOCIO CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

Socio-cultures cover customs, lifestyles and values that characterize a society or group. Cultural aspects include concepts of beauty, education, language, law and politics, religion, social organizations, technology and material culture, values and attitudes. Social factors include reference groups and family.

For many years reading has been viewed purely from cognitive perspective and a great deal of research has focused on the cognitive aspect of reading. The main criticism leveled against this view to language learning in general is that the socio cultures is overlooked to a great extent.

A research conducted by Yusof (2010) claimed that family is considered as a critical factor to sustain positive behavior, including reading habit. Facilities and reading environment which are conducive at home helps in nurturing reading habit. As Bourdieu (1977) claims that children with better reading facility will achieve higher reading ability. Therefore, the capital that a family provides for their children has an important impact in the literacy development of children (Nash, 1990; Sullivan, 2002; Notten and Becker, 2017).

Wollscheid (2014) investigates the impact of the leisure reading behavior of both parents individually and in interplay – on the reading behaviors of daughters and sons, drawing on a sample from the German Time-Use Survey 2001/2002 of 757 children aged between 10 and 19 years living in two-parent households. In general, the findings highlight two important foci that support the gender stereotype hypothesis: indicating that fathers have a stronger impact on the reading behavior of sons, and that mothers have a stronger impact on the reading behavior of daughters. Further, the reading behavior of mothers appears to have a stronger impact on younger children's reading socialization, while the reading behavior of fathers appears to be of higher importance for the reading socialization of older children.

Roman and Pinto (2015) found that pleasant family moments can be created while reading a book when each member reads a paragraph. This activity can be continued with discussions on reading materials, literary and inferential questions, as well as a conversation about the content of the story. Unfortunately, only few families organize such activities which have a positive impact on the attitude towards reading and the development of abilities for cognitive understanding and text exploration. They can also transfer information considered relevant for life and the improvement of interrelating among family members. The very low percentage of parents who state that they read for pleasure almost daily is also linked to the above-mentioned situation. We notice that few children benefit from a positive example. A significant impact on the attitude of children towards reading can be generated

by systemic appreciation and recognition of a child each time s/he decides to read something or to present information acquired through reading.

Dolatkhah and Lundh (2014) describe that during the decades after the World War II, the Swedish educational system was thoroughly reformed. In 1962, a new curriculum instituted comprehensive and compulsory public schooling, which was intended to tackle certain social issues. In addition, the curriculum provided the school system with a normative conceptualization of reading. Analytically, the institution of the new comprehensive and compulsory school system – and its curriculum – can be seen an important link between reading as an activity and broader societal circumstances.

4. SOCIO-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES OF STUDENTS READING HABITS IN INDONESIA

Reading culture in Indonesia has never been inherited from our ancestors. Early on, lots of children used to listening and learning verbally expressed by the parents or community leaders, such as stories and fairy tale. Nearly everyone tend to be told rather than reading by themselves. This culture was found in Indonesian classrooms, which teachers tend to spoon-feed material in a lecturing mode of learning rather than using cooperative techniques, which involves many reading activities. Reading habits are influenced by genetic determinism or parental inheritance. A person who likes reading is usually raised from an environment or a family who love reading. If kids do not like reading, this is because their parents usually have low reading activities. According to Chakravarthy (1997) family lifestyle, relationships between children and parents at home and family socioeconomic status will have a close relationship with the nurturing of reading habits. In line with this, Nathanson *et al.* (2008) found the evidence that parents have a powerful effect in creating enthusiastic readers.

Second, Indonesia education system has not enforced students seeking information more than what is taught. The students rely on the information obtained from the teacher. They take for a granted the information from the teacher without critical views. Basuki (2006) argues that since the goals of Indonesia education system is National examination, accordingly very little stimulation to read other books outside their subject textbooks. UNESCO (2012) reported the shocking fact that 1000 Indonesian children only one child is able to complete one book title per year. It is in a big contrast with a reading habit of European students who on average spend 25 titles of books per year; in Japan on average, one child is able to complete 15 titles of books per year.

Third, Inadequate reading and lack of school library facilities are big factors causing low student interest in reading. Schools are not always able to cultivate reading habits for their students. Even though they have school libraries, these are not used optimally. The visitors are relatively low in public libraries. Many schools in remote areas of Indonesia do not have access to the libraries. Thus, it affected the students' reading habits. Mollet (2007) said libraries play a very important role in supporting the teaching and learning processes at school. Another, the price of books are relatively unaffordable by the students. In addition, poor textbook quality, the density of the curriculum, and the methods of teaching that emphasize on memorization may contribute to low reading interest. Sarumpaet, cited in Karyono (2007) claims that schools are not considered a good place to foster students' reading interest. The congested of school activity leaves students with no time to read. Sarumpaet argues that students are too busy with the lessons and they have to do homework at home as well.

Several consequences of poor reading habits will surely affect the Nation development and bring big impact for the next generation. This situation is obviously observed in Indonesia at presents, increased reading habits and countries prosperity are two things that cannot be separated. In developed countries, the habits of reading a book can be very high. The great system must have an impact on the life and culture of the reading community, thus the level of literacy is high there. The habits of reading a book are very important as also can have an effect to revive the publishing world, the eradication of illiteracy, as well as to increase the interest of reading, whose cultivated benefits is the intelligence and progress of the nation.

Students with poor reading are more likely to face difficulty in writing an assignment. Accordingly, they may use dishonest methods such as duplicate writing or other tasks. Without the awareness of improving reading habits of the society, plagiarism may be difficult to abolish from students' habit which in the long run, it will be damaging the nation self-esteem (Anyaeibu *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, poor reading habit and achievement may also result in undeveloped students 'problem solving skills. These skills are necessary to respond to the situations promptly and this can be trained if they have good reading habits.

In line with this, Hare (1981) claims that good readers show greater control over their measures than a poor reader. Good readers have better capacity to overcome the obstacles of the mental barrier, Filsaime (2007). If a student has a high reading interest then, students' intellectual potential will likely increase and students learn how to do the discovery by going through the problem-solving process. On the other hand, student with poor reading ability will likely get poor grades in school and will easily feel irritable and frustrated. Moreover, it will fail to develop their full potential. Poor reading skills may affect children development. Rubin (2002) in his book claims that children with poor reading habits have a higher chance of anti-social behavior such as crime, school violence, intimidation, computer hacking, and even malpractice due to poor reading habits. Her classroom action research is intended to explore some symptoms and causes of reading disability. Peer teaching, collaboration, service learning, cooperative groups, presentations are used as a measuring tool to recommend scientific-based reading strategies and specific interventions to meet the needs of individuals.

As a part of the development of digital era, Kurniasih (2016) claims society's reading behavior changed. As if the world is in our hand only by having a gadget. She argues that actually, people do the readings all the time, whether reading web contents, news contents; news feed on social media, e-book, email, etc. Accessing reading materials is only a thumb away. She further asserts that considering the change of reading behavior, reading interest is not necessarily about how many books have been read, but also how many of information sources or online reading materials have been clicked, read, shared, discussed, saved or downloaded.

The assertion above had been earlier questioned by a research conducted by Iftanti (2012). She claimed in his findings that in digital era students tend to seek home video, songs, other unnecessary information from their gadget influence the students' reading habits (Iftanti, 2012). In addition, Carr (2011) highlights that the heavy use of digital media actually restructures the human brain and makes it more suited to superficial skimming and scanning than the in-depth concentrated reading associated with traditional printed books.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, to develop reading habit of Indonesian learners is not an easy job specifically in the society where reading is not inherited since childhood and the education system of the country does not introduce it. It is important to see what researchers have done in their study in attempts to develop reading habits of EFL learners. In short, to shape school students' habits should be done from two strand of foci: cognitive and socio-cultural aspect. In cognitive aspect, a great variety of studies have been conducted and those researchers claimed that their particular teaching techniques have proven effective to improve EFL Indonesian learners' enjoyment of reading which accordingly also improve their achievement in reading. However, those steps are almost impossible without considering socio-cultural aspects which may have been shaped students' reading habits before their schooling time. Therefore, further investigation of socio-cultural aspects needs to be conducted rigorously to improve the reading performances of school students.

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