INVESTIGATING ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION STUDENTS' READING PREFERENCES

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Abstract: This study aimed to determine students' preferences for their reading materials and dig out the benefits of their reading preferences. A descriptive research design was applied in this study. Two instruments were employed to obtain the data, namely a questionnaire and an interview guide. The subjects of this study were 35 third semester students of the English Language Education Department. These participants were selected by using a simple random sampling technique. In the data collection procedure, the participants filled in the questionnaire. Then, three of the participants were selected further to be interviewed. The data were then analyzed by calculating each item in the survey to obtain the final result in the form of a percentage, transcribing, and examining the interview result. The findings found that most of the students preferred novels as their reading material with 54,2%. Furthermore, as many as 31,4% preferred the genre of fiction. Several benefits from having their own preference in reading constitute (1) the students were able to comprehend the content of the reading material easily, (2) the students got more interested in reading, (3) the students gained broader knowledge, and (4) the students got attached to and focused on the text. Overall, this study implies that English language education students preferred novels as their reading material and fiction as their favored genre. These findings also signified that the students could gain many benefits from their preferences.

Keywords: *reading preferences; reading materials; English language education students.*

INTRODUCTION

Students' reading skills can be sharpened and improved, along with the desire or motivation to read. By reading, students can obtain, devote, and process the ideas; it can later be implemented into their social life (Zare and Othman, 2013). It can only be possible to increase the student's love of reading by identifying the interests and needs of these students and guiding them towards those needs and interests (Blau & Baker, 2006). It enables learners to pursue their preferences when deciding what to read by strengthening their motivation for reading (Aydın and Ayrancı, 2018). Preference for reading lets students fulfill their personal needs, improve maturity levels, and ensure freedom of opinion formation & reflection (Hussain and Munshi, 2011).

There are various methods and strategies to develop and improve students' reading interest, one of which is knowing the student's reading preference. Regarding the development of reading skills, the priority of reading preferences should be given to make reading more attractive as well as improving the quality of reading itself (Aydın and Ayrancı, 2018).

Among young kids and adolescents, different intentions stimulate reading and reading habits (Mart, 2015). Their interests and context may be regarded as the fundamental motives that urge them to acquire information and comprehension (Arthi & Srinivasan, 2018). The need to obtain

data and understanding causes them to read books, magazines, novels, articles and study papers, etc. Also, Hussain and Munshi (2011) state that reading preferences of all individuals may be dissimilar according to their precise age group(s) and need(s) of information.

Considering the students' preference in the process of reading selection is as essential as investigating students' requirements (Bouchamma, Poulin, Basque, & Ruel, 2013). Discovering materials that students are likely to be interested in is the first stage to do to find out their reading preference because regardless of how hard or simple a text might be, if it is not exciting to the students, it would be boring or hard to read (Celik, 2017) .

Students may hesitate to read unless they find materials that draw their interests. Adolescents prefer to choose light, pleasant reading, and generally enjoy reading books for pleasure and education through fun (Jacobs, 2014). If they begin to read with their own will and with the text of reading they preferred, without any coercion from any hand, then their enthusiasm and motivation to read will continue.

It is wisely appropriate for readers who plan to choose reading materials to spend sufficient time to analyze the essential aspects (Alshammari, 2015). Several significant factors in the reading selection process are students' levels, preferences, interests, needs, and background knowledge. Meanwhile, the text itself is associated with other factors, such as content, relevance, and authenticity (Arias, 2007) .

There are various kinds of reading materials that can be read, ranging from newspapers, magazines, novels, short stories, textbooks, and others. From those reading materials, students can communicate in the form of written language. Students can read in different ways for specific purposes, pleasure, and understanding or even for scientific analysis.

They read to look for ideas, find solutions, explore knowledge, or even entertain themselves in their spare time. Two approaches can be used in expanding reading skills, namely extensive and intensive reading (Erfanpour, 2013); they are believed to be a method that is very helpful in improving students' reading comprehension skills.

Previous studies have examined students' reading preferences in all levels of education (Hussain and Munshi, 2011; Bouchamma et al., 2013; Shonfeld & Meishar-Tal, 2016; Aharony & Bar-llan, 2018; Lestari, 2018; Eutsler & Trotter,

2020). However, none of them have been investigating students' reading preferences at the tertiary level of English education department students, especially the third semester as the intermediate level. Thus, to bridge the gap, this study is conducted to identify the reading materials preferred by the students at the intermediate level of English Language Education Department. Thus, this study focuses on finding out the students' preferred reading materials that are not merely to help their score and achievement, but for their comprehension throughout the reading process that reflects their level of intermediate students.

METHOD

The study was carried out in one of a private university in Malang, East Java. The study selected thirty-five students out of approximately two hundred third-semester students of the English Language Education Department as participants to obtain the data. The age of the participants ranged between eighteen and twenty years old. The participants were randomly chosen to avoid bias in one particular class as every student had the same opportunity to be the subject of this research. There were two instruments used in this study to obtain the data, questionnaire, and interview guide.

To collect the data, the researcher developed a questionnaire consisting of a list of questions related to the students' preference for reading and created the interview guidelines comprised of questions to complete or add the data and information obtained from the questionnaire.

Later, the questionnaire was distributed to the third-semester students. To strengthen the data, the researcher selected three students as representatives to be interviewed. The questions were about the types of reading materials or their preference on reading, which they were interested in. Then, To validate the answers, a respondent validation is used. This technique involves the results from both questionnaires and interviews to see if they still have in-tune answers.

Each student's answers were sorted out and classified based on the question items. The data were processed by calculating each item of the questionnaire to obtain the final result in the form of a percentage.

Lastly, after the final percentage results were obtained, the results were interpreted in the form of a description. The conclusions were drawn based on data that has been analyzed to get the

concrete final results to later be presented as the finding.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Reading materials preferred by the third semester students
At this point, the researcher addressed the findings that refer to the first question about students' preferred materials. The results are explained as follows:

Novels as the most preferred reading materials by students
From the results of the questionnaire, it is found that novels are chosen by more than half of the respondents (19 students) or 54.2% as their preferred reading material. Those findings provide a clear view of the final results expected from this study. Students use the textbook suggested by the lecturer as their reading material during the learning process, and it turns out that they do not like it. They preferred novels as reading material provided in class.

Besides, to strengthen the results of the questionnaire above, the researcher also added data taken from the interview as additional information. Out of the five interview questions list, one of them is question number 1, which asked about their opinions on the reading preferred by students at the tertiary level who are considered as teenagers. Students showed consistent answers stating that teenagers at age 18-20 mostly favor reading literature such as novels or short stories that depend on what genres they interested in, comics, the articles on the website, and the applications which are very famous among teenagers, *namely, Wattpad* and *webtoon.*

These findings imply that learners now have a wide range of reading materials to choose from because they have access to a wide range of reading materials, either in printed or digital form.

Fiction as the most preferred genre of reading by students
The researcher also delves deeper into the genre of reading that students preferred. When the students were asked about what type of reading that they favored, it is found that the fiction genre is in the first place with 31.4% and chosen by 11 students. The results obtained indicate that the fiction genre of reading is the most popular among the students. Children indeed much favor fiction at their age as many of them have selected novels as their preferred reading material.

In the second place is the real-life genre chosen by ten students with 28.5%. In this case, they are allowed to choose more than one genre. It is aimed not to limit their choices to something they like. Every student's tastes and preferences are different. That is why they are allowed to choose more than one genre of reading. It also offers broader and more varied insights into the preferred genres of students.

The third most preferred is occupied by fantasy and adventure, which have the same percentage 25,7%. The difference is those who choose fantasy are female students, and those who choose adventure are male students. In short, the respondents favored reading materials such as novels and fiction readings. They seemed to be firm and clear in describing their tastes and their characters as readers at a young age. This type of leisure reading is an indication of reading achievement and can be seen as a motivating factor in increasing their passion for books and reading.

Journals and newspapers as the least preferred reading materials by students
The results obtained show that journals are not chosen by even one student so that it gets 0% as well as for newspapers. Based on students' opinions from interview results, this is because students have the impression that journals are very challenging. Students do not want to use academic journals as reading material as learning and interpreting existing vocabulary would take a long time. If they are at an advanced level and ready to write an essay, they probably would like to read a journal.

In the case of newspapers, students do not accept that newspapers are current reading relative to magazines or articles. Not the least of their perception of a newspaper is that it featured hard-to-understand aspects of politics that do not suit their level or age.

Non-fiction as the least preferred genre of reading by students
In this category, the least preferred genre of reading is non-fiction. This category is chosen only by two students, with a percentage of 5.7%. It is the reverse of fiction reading as the most favored genre among the students. Further, the students articulated that many topics in the non-fiction reading genre, such as literature, history, or research, are not too common for students to become their daily reading. Also, some of these readings are considered burdensome and tedious.

The second position of the least preferred genre is science, which is chosen by three

students and has a percentage of 8.5%. These results are in accordance with the results of the least preferred reading, journals. From the perspective of students as readers, academic science readings are considered too complicated as they discuss scientific matters with unfamiliar terms for the students.

The benefits of students' reading preferences

At this point the researcher discussed the results that refer to the second question in the research problem about the benefits of reading by students' preference for their reading comprehension. The results found are described as follows:

Students are able to comprehend the reading easily

When the students were asked how they read with their preferences, 22 students answered that they understood the contents of the reading more easily when they read with their chosen preferences. It could be seen that more than half of the respondents answered that they would be able to quickly understand the content of reading while reading with their own preferences.

The researcher asked students' opinions about whether reading with their preference of materials makes them comprehend the contents better. Student A asserts that "*I can understand the content well and get to know new vocabulary and knowledge according to the type of reading that I like. It also makes me want to read more and want to explore another book.*"

Having a particular book or reading based on one's interest means that there is an intention or desire to read. It makes the student focus on knowing the overall contents of the reading. Also, the students can enjoy the whole reading process and have better comprehension as well.

The students become more excited to read

Another benefit is that they become excited more to read. It will foster their motivation and enthusiasm in reading. In the interview section, Student B says that "*for me, it is important to choose a reading that not makes me bored. A reading that we are interested in makes us feel passionate about reading and enjoying the whole text.*"

It makes the students want to read more and want to explore another book. When someone has started to read more, they will be more familiar with vocabulary from each reading. Therefore, reading with students' preferences could be a wise alternative because the students usually feel bored with previous reading material that is too monotonous. This problem can gradually weaken their motivation to read so that they will find it harder to understand the content of reading in the future.

Students have broader knowledge

Continuing the results of the questions raised in the interview, Student C mentions that "*in my opinion, reading with our own preferences means that we are free to choose the topics and themes we want, which will broaden our knowledge and insights about many diverse things.*"

Giving students the freedom to choose reading according to their preferences will increase their knowledge and help them obtain more diverse information. Moreover, the more they read different readings, the more vocabulary they learn. It will be very beneficial for students to develop their reading skills further.

Students are able to get attached and focused to the reading

When the students were asked how they grew the bond between themselves and reading, Student D answered that "*I feel passionate and excited to read a book that I favored. It makes me more confident and gets hooked into the text so that the text's sense can be inferred. Besides, I also able to read it with pleasure, more relaxed, and enjoy the reading process itself.*"

All the details of the above results show how readings with our own preferences provide a great deal of help and advantages in interpreting the reading material. Students claim that reading with the text they prefer will make it easier to understand the content and enjoy the entire reading process. This research intends to find out the reading materials preferred by the students and the benefits of reading by students' preference for their reading comprehension.

The first findings from the questionnaire reveal that novels are the most favored reading material by students. Related to that, they also preferred the genre of fiction, which they think are more exciting and entertaining. It is in line with Arias (2007), who states that learning using literacy such as novels can provide edutainment for students that is able to motivate them to read more.

The interview outcome also shows similar results where novels are chosen as fond reading materials for students. The alignment of answers between the questionnaire and the interview can be seen here as students like novels as reading material. The data can be ascertained the validity

of seeing how the students' responses are very consistent.

The findings indicate that students are more motivated and enthusiastic about reading material. Furthermore, based on Arias (2007), reading literary materials fosters the development of language for students and is supposed to be a channel for learning about other cultures.

Using novels or fictions as reading materials may help readers in many ways. Tsai (2012) claims that when students read fiction or other similar types, they can learn about different environments or times, enhance their imagination, gain insight into human existence, pursue their particular hobbies or desires, and act as a way out of unpleasant realities.

The second findings show what benefits are obtained by reading using our own preference. It turns out to be interesting findings where they can easily understand the content, capture the meaning, interpret the entire reading content well, and enjoy the reading process itself even more. As Gilakjani (2017) states, comprehension is a very significant skill because understanding what we read, all kinds of topics, information, knowledge, and messages from the text will reach us well. Reading will be a useless activity if we do not understand the information contained therein, cannot capture the knowledge that we will later apply to our real life.

Furthermore, Zare and Othman (2013) postulate comprehension as acquiring and creating written texts in context. It includes active techniques that contribute to understanding. The purpose of reading itself is to find the information contained therein, creating new meanings that can be applied to our real lives. Therefore, the readers need to draw conclusions and interpret the new meaning of a reading so they can be categorized as good readers.

From the findings presented, it can be seen that students are able to enjoy and concentrate more on the whole reading phase if it focuses on their preferences. Related to the statement of Arias (2007), who mentions that students' preferences in reading determine their interests and motivations, it will have an impact on their ability to interpret the content of the reading.

Reading by their preferences plays such an essential role in increasing students' reading comprehension. Their interest in such reading materials boosts their enthusiasm to read, build their confidence, and make them more attached to the reading to build a good focus in the reading process.

CONCLUSION

Overall, students have expressed their opinions and preferences in reading. It can be captured that they like fictional reading material in which the majority of them chose novels. They enjoyed the light and pleasant reading which minimizes their level of boredom and increases their motivation. Reading novels as material unconsciously helps students be more sensitive to their surroundings, more creative and more imaginative.

Furthermore, the students claim that reading by their preferences allows them to easily construct the meaning of the contents and enjoy the whole process of reading. So, when students can grasp the information, they have become successful in reading.

There are some obstacles and difficulties faced by the students in reading. The students are given difficult readings, and they are concerned about what if they cannot catch the meaning or understand the content of the written text. The students mentioned interesting readings are strongly anticipated in the future. Students preferred light readings about daily life, hobbies, novels, or reading with pictures, and dialogues.

This study focused only on students' reading preferences and its benefits to their comprehension skills. There will be the possibility of other answers as one's choices might change over time in the future. From this study, novel is most preferred reading material by the students, but no one knows what they will choose and like for the next few years to come.

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