

EFL STUDENTS' CHALLENGES TO READ ONLINE

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Abstract

Reading is one of the most effective skills that develop language learner skill. In this digital era, where most of life activities has transformed to an ease and fast, Reading become daily routine. This routine means that reader interact with many texts online daily. The technology provided many aids for English Language Learner to read. However, this paper aimed to unfold the challenges faced by the English language learner to read in online environment. Therefore, the 30 English Education students of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training of IAIN Pontianak are told to carry out Extensive Reading in online environment. The qualitative study drawn the real and factual challenges faced by the students. The challenges to read in online environment are (1) Difficult to choose interesting material or text to read, (2) Health Issues related to online reading, (3) Unsupportive Facilities, and (4) Difficulty in maintaining focus to the text..

Keywords: EFL; Reading Online ; Extensive Reading

Abstrak

Membaca adalah salah satu keterampilan paling efektif dalam mengembangkan keterampilan berbahasa bagi pembelajar bahasa. Di era digital ini, dimana sebagian besar aktivitas kehidupan telah berubah menjadi mudah dan cepat, membaca menjadi rutinitas sehari-hari. Rutinitas ini berarti bahwa membaca berinteraksi dengan banyak teks di online platform setiap hari. Teknologi tersebut memberikan banyak bantuan bagi Pembelajar Bahasa Inggris untuk membaca. Namun, tulisan ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap tantangan yang dihadapi oleh pembelajar bahasa Inggris untuk membaca di platform online. Oleh karena itu, 30 mahasiswa Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris Tarbiyah dan Keguruan IAIN Pontianak diminta untuk melakukan Extensive Reading di platform online. Studi kualitatif menggambarkan tantangan nyata dan faktual yang dihadapi siswa. Tantangan membaca dalam lingkungan online adalah (1) Sulitnya memilih bahan atau teks yang menarik untuk dibaca, (2) Masalah kesehatan yang berkaitan dengan membaca online, (3) Fasilitas yang tidak mendukung, dan (4) Kesulitan dalam memusatkan perhatian pada teks.

Kata Kunci: EFL; Membaca Online; Membaca Ekstensif

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INTRODUCTION

In the amidst of Covid-19 outbreaks. The technology become a vital need. The teaching and learning process were dragged from classroom into virtual room. The printed text is shifted to the digital text that spread in many digital platforms. Although the migration process is slow, the achievements are unlocked. It can be seen from the fact that many educators who are not tech savvy have finally arrived and can attend the virtual classroom. This whole process drives educators and learners to moving forward to get along with the advancement of technology. Additionally, these activities drive people to become an e-reader. Despite of reading in online environment, people are getting immersed and get in touch to many English text online and read in online environment.

For learner of English as Foreign Language (EFL), this is one of beneficial chance for student to boost their skill in English Language especially reading. Higher Education students are loaded with many academic and non-academic task. To finish all the tasks, these students are required to read many

tutorials and manuals online. The technology 2.0 or defined as social networks are a great medium as they provide them many digital texts. The text are defined as hypertext which varies with additional videos, pictures, or music. Thus, it makes the reading activity become more attractive. As example, one of the most popular social media is Instagram. The application allows users to post a picture and to write a caption underneath the posted picture. Therefore, the possibility of EFL learner encounter English text is greater as many natives who are celebrities and idols join the application and write caption in their native language, English.

Additionally, Reading in L1 is different with reading in L2. It requires a lot of process, skills, and strategies. Hence, the best approach to acquire the skill is important. Currently, there are tons of methodologies to teach and to learn reading in foreign language. One of the most popular method is Extensive reading. Extensive reading allows students to choose the text by themselves (Day & Bamford, 2002). Inherently, they decide the purpose of their reading activities, whether it is only for pleasure, or to gain information. Extensive reading has been popular since its birth in 1980. The benefit of extensive reading is proofed by many researchers. Along with the benefits, there come difficulties faced by the readers. As, the extensive reading become the hot topic to discuss, the factors that hindered the implementation of the approach being neglected.

Therefore, the current study is an effort to underscore the difficulties that hinder EFL learners as e-readers to read in online environment. Hence the 30 students of IAIN Pontianak are asked to practice Extensive Reading in online environment. The major research on Extensive Reading focuses on how it benefits and the difficulties on how the reading sources is limited. The status quo is limited to the fact that Extensive Reading is commonly being done with printed material. Now, as the technology advances, it is important to pinpoint the proliferation of technology in aiding the learning. The Extensive Reading needs to be upgraded by maximalising the proliferation of technologies. Hence, the study aimed to answer the following questions: What are the factors that interfere the reading activity?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Reading in Foreign Language

There are many definitions about reading. However, in general reading is seen as an activity that requires one to interact with a text and then a reader will construct a meaning (Sweet and Snow, 2003) or making an interpretation to get information (Grabe and Stoller, 2002). The process of constructing and interpreting requires more process before the activity resulting a solid information. Goodman (1967) stated that a reading activity in different language is a “psycholinguistic guessing game” in which each interaction to a text pushes readers to work well in matching the possible fact or existing information in their brain to the text. However, Grabe (2009) define reading as development that to some extent a reader implements a universal way to read in different languages. So, in processing the

English text, the reader may do guessing or apply their L1 reading strategy. However, the activity of reading is aimed to understand a text. Therefore, comprehend a text is the goal.

Reading comprehension is an effort to construct a meaning from a text and understand the text (Klingner, et al, 2007). Despite of the number of its' success, learning to read in foreign language is challenging for many. Researchers that focus on acquisition of EFL reading skill believe that there are four main aspects of readers to gain comprehension: symbol decoding, vocabulary, comprehension, and reflection (Harris & Sipay, 1985). Further, Davoudi and Yousefi (2015) mentioned that the difficulties faced by the L2 readers to comprehend the text are that in the lack of vocabulary storage and background knowledge. The more numbers of unknown word, the more difficult the text to be read (Schmitt, Jiang, & Grabe, 2011). Moreover, the lack of knowledge makes student hard to guess and construct the meaning of the text. Therefore, Extensive reading become a star in enhancing students input of new knowledge and new vocabularies.

However, Shiotsu and Weir (2007) emphasize the fact that background knowledge is more beneficial in contrast to vocabulary knowledge to gain comprehension of a text. Additionally, according to Lerner (2000), learners with good background knowledge tend to read more that impact positively toward their proficiency. Background plays important role as in the process of reading the readers use their knowledge to fill the missing links in order to understand a text. Further, Hudson (2007) mentioned that the absence of background knowledge in reading a text will make a reader take a long time to comprehend a text as the reader need to read many times. These statements emphasizes the fact that vocabularies is not all that matters in reading activity. Prior knowledge may holds important role in assisting reader to comprehend a text.

On the other hand, Koda (2005) mentioned the fact that grammatical knowledge is also important to help a reader understand the expression written by the author. Studies shows that grammar knowledge does have a role in helping reader to comprehend a text. Therefore, EFL reader's grammar knowledge is important. However, Bernhardt (2000) pinpoints the fact that the need of grammatical knowledge is "relatively important".

Extensive Reading in the Context

Schmidt & Richards (2010) define the extensive reading as the booster for students to like reading more than before in which the reader can choose the reading text, the time to read and the place to read without fear of being assessed. There are many studies that proves the effectiveness of extensive reading as the best approach to promotes reading. Virgiyanti (2020) conducted qualitative study of students in University of Darussalam Gontor and conclude that extensive reading does increase students' reading ability. Further, Day and Bamford (2002) mentioned that by implementing extensive reading, EFL can get benefits as their vocabulary enriches, speaking skill increases, so does the writing

skill. The benefits attracts the researcher to carry out the similar activities of extensive reading done by these experts. Hence, the current study adopt ten principles of Extensive Reading mentioned by Day and Bamford (2002) which are: the easy material, various genre and types of the texts, the self-selected text, the big amount of reading, the speed of reading is quick, the purpose is for pleasure, the reading is private and silent, reading as reward, guided, and has been directed by teacher.

Reading in Online Environment

There are many studies that unfold the fact that online environment can help reader to read better. As the technology advances the printed media has been transformed into digital media that can be accessed online. The easy access allows reader to interact to various texts at any time. Looi et al., (2009) mentioned the importance of the accessibility which can help learner to engage better to the learning environment. Additionally, Teeler and Gray (2000) explain that hypertext is perfect as it includes pictures. There are many studies that elaborated the importance of the picture and how it benefited to increase comprehension in reading. The option to read is not only limited to read in screen as hypertext can be printed out.

However, Ojala (2000) mentioned that the online text is different with the printed text as it shown in circular position that linear. Therefore, as the differences exist, the reading in online environment may create a new challenge for reader. Britt and Gabrys (2001) mentioned three difficulties faced by e-readers as; first is the traditional coherence in which shown in printed text is different in the hypertext in online environment; second the text in online environment is a combination of blocks and this may impact negatively on readers cognitive; third, the high number of sources might confuse readers as the context provided in different views and portrays inconsistency. On the other hand, Troffer (2001) argue that there is also a problem raises caused by the gadget screen. The computers or other gadget may decrease the engagement in reading.

METHOD

The current study aimed to see students' difficulties when performing reading in online environment. Therefore, the current study adopted a qualitative method to dig into the real interference that occur during their process of reading L2. The participants of the present study are 30 students who enrolled the Reading for Beginner in IAIN Pontianak Tarbiyah and Teacher Education Faculty. Qualitative study is the suitable methodology as it draws a natural and origin thoughts in examining phenomenon (Sandelowski, 2000). The research took place at Institut Agama Islam, Pontianak. Data in this study were obtained from the questionnaire. The questions are open-ended aimed to ask the difficulties during the process of reading in online environment. The data collection is gathered about a week. The aim of these items was to investigate students challenges to read in online environment. In general, the aspects to focus on are materials, purposes, speed, and amount. The questionnaire is

written in both English and Indonesian for each item to minimize the language confusion that will become an interference to the data. The questionnaire is in web-based format using Google Form application to ease the respondent in writing the answer of the open-ended question. The thematic analysis is being implemented to analyse the data obtained from questionnaire. There are six steps in analysing the data using thematic analysis, the steps are consecutively; reading data, generating codes, looking for themes, reviewing the themes found, defining the theme, and writing up the interpretation about.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section discussed four key themes related to the challenges encountered during reading activity in online environment. In the discussion of each theme, the most representative perception from the subjects' responses is displayed. The subject is labelled as S and the number of submission line as from S1 to S30.

Difficult to choose interesting material or text to read

It is true that the current era boost students' accessibility to many English resources written by the native of the target Language. The students can find the most interesting text for them to read as a means to practice their skill. However, in regards to find the materials, the students agreed that they faced some difficulties.

S22 it is difficult to choose interesting material or text to read...

Most of students find it difficult to choose the text to read. The students difficult to find out whether the text is written in academic English or for general purposes. Additionally, they encounter many less interesting text to read.

S30 It is difficult to find the text to read, and I personally chose the text that easy to read but It will be difficult if the information is different from the previous text I once read...

One text to another text might also contain contradictory information that confused reader. This becomes a challenge especially for students who read by guessing the meaning using their background knowledge. At the end, giving them a freedom to choose the text without any direction will hinder the reading activity as it does not easy to find the fun and correct materials.

Health Issues related to reading online

In the health field, there are maximum time for certain age during at certain time to stare the gadget screen. However, the current extensive reading give the students flexibility to access the material of the text and to read at any time.

S3 I felt like the heat in my eyes is keep increasing when I read English text....

Students 3 stated that they got eyesore during the reading activity. This is likely to happen if the students do the reading activity without considering the recommendation from experts.

S25 I felt sleepy when I read long text....

Additionally, the hypertexts are usually displayed in small font. This is one of the difficulties. The small fonts affect the eye to work harder that causes the students feel tired easily when they read a long text. Hence, the freedom of time may become hinderance in carrying out the activity.

Unsupportive Facilities

For students who live in rural areas, internet coverage is still a problem that has not been solved yet until today.

S17 First challenge is the signal problem which probably because I am in my hometown..

However, most of students find that the unstable internet connection is the major challenges. Despite of the location, the internet connection as the challenges pops up more that 80% in the students answer. The unstable internet connection is not caused only by the location, but also the emergence of rain and natural disaster. Some students stated that the unstable connection lower their motivation to read. Additionally, the unstable signal causes many students' quota runs out fast. Even though the government has facilitated the students with free quota, the students believe that they still need to do top up. The unstable connection causes failure in downloading and make these students need to do re-download.

S12 It is unloaded and error when download so I need to do downloading many times...

Another unsupportive facility is the fact that the students are coming from poor family. This not only causes the students lack in internet quota but some of them were urged to share gadgets to other family members who are also working on their assignments from school-from-home regulation. Therefore, reading in online environment become more challenging as the time for these students to access the online materials is short.

Difficulty to maintain focus on the text

In online environment, hypertexts come with pictures, animation and even advertisements. This causes students to get distracted while reading.

S17 Distraction to opening other sites or apps and being not able to focus on the text....

The advertisement that aimed to attract online users successfully attract the reader. Hence, maintaining focus is one of the challenges faced by the reader of online environment. On the other hand, the gadgets that used to be a main source of enjoyment now turned out to be a source to read. Therefore, there is a shift from using certain joyful application to reading tools.

S16 It is difficult not to open other apps like Instagram or game application in the handphone

The feeling of boredom comes easily as the students just started the extensive reading approach. With the combination of the challenges mentioned above, the desire to open another fun apps is increases as it is as easy as one-click access. The less control in using the super-gadget will interrupt the implementation of Extensive Reading.

CONCLUSION

Based on the finding and the discussion, it can be concluded that the students did face some problems when read in an online environment. The problems mentioned in regard to the materials, purposes, speed, and amount to read online are (1) difficulty in choosing the material or text to read, (2) health issues related to reading online, (3) unsupportive facilities, and (4) difficulty to maintain focus on the text. This study contributes directly to the development of theory and practice especially in the field of teaching and learning English as Foreign Language. These problems are real and need to be evaluated deeper. The evaluation will be valuable in order to reach the maximum benefit of the advancement of technology in aiding the EFL reading activity. Therefore, further research around this topic is demanded.

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