

A GLIMPSE INTO READING PREFERENCES: A CASE STUDY OF JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

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Abstract

This qualitative case study examines the reading habits and preferences of students at Muhammadiyah 13 Junior High School in Surabaya, East Java. Data were gathered using semi-structured interviews with two students and one English instructor to obtain insights into students' preferred reading materials, learning challenges, and effective learning practices. The research revealed that students exhibit a greater interest in reading captivating novels that have sympathetic characters and tackle contemporary societal concerns, as such texts facilitate personal connections with the material. Participants were queried about their favored reading subjects during the interview. The result indicated an interest in leisure and lifestyle, education, profession, and fashion. The teacher indicated tastes for fashion, art, and history. These replies underscore the range of themes that resonate with both students and teachers, emphasizing the necessity of providing broad reading materials to cater to varying interests. Students have considerable obstacles in cultivating robust reading habits, chiefly attributable to inadequate literacy abilities and insufficient motivation. These problems are frequently associated with uninspired and repetitive pedagogical approaches. To augment reading engagement, both the student and teacher highlighted the necessity for interactive learning tactics, including hands-on activities and group projects, which promote cooperation, involvement, and enhanced comprehension.

Keywords: *Education, Reading materials, Reading preferences*

I INTRODUCTION

Students' reading abilities can be honed, and they can make strides with the craving or inspiration for study. By reading, students can get, commit, and prepare their thoughts; afterward, they can execute them in their social activities (Zare & Othman, 2013). As it were, it can extend students' adoration of reading by recognizing the interface and needs of these students and directing them toward them. It increases students' motivation to read, allowing them to follow their interests while choosing what to read. (Aydın and Ayrancı, 2018).

An inclination to read lets students fulfil their individual needs and progress development levels, and it guarantees opportunities for supposition, arrangement, and reflection (Hussain & Munshi, 2011). There are different strategies and techniques to create and move forward students' reading intrigued, among which is being aware of the pupil's reading inclination.

Concerning improving reading aptitudes, the need for reading inclinations ought to be given to make reading more alluring and make diverse goals encourage reading and reading habits in children and teenagers. (Mart, 2015). Their interface conjointly setting may be regarded as the elemental thought processes that enable them to secure data (Arthi & Srinivasan, 2018). They ought to get information, and comprehension leads them to examine books, magazines, and journal articles, and consider papers. Moreover, Hussain and Munshi (2011) state that by pursuing inclinations, all people may be divergent in concurring on their exact age group(s) and needs. of data.

When choosing books for students, it is just as important to consider their preferences as to look into their needs. (Bouchamma, Poulin, Basque, & Ruel, 2013). Materials that students are probably going to be curious about are the primary organizers to discover their reading preference because, notwithstanding how challenging or straightforward the content may be, if it is not energizing to the students, It would get monotonous or challenging to examine (Celik, 2017)

Students may postpone their studies unless they find resources that engage their interest. Young people prefer light and enjoyable reading, often choosing books that provide pleasure and education (Jacobs, 2014). When they can choose what they read and explore topics that interest them, they are more likely to stay motivated and enthusiastic about their learning. This autonomy in selecting reading material can significantly enhance their eagerness to study.

Readers need to take the time to consider key aspects when selecting reading materials (Alshammari, 2015). Critical factors influence students' choices, including their reading levels, preferences, interests, needs, and prior knowledge. Additionally, the content is connected to other important elements, such as its substance, relevance, and authenticity (Arias, 2007). Various materials, including newspapers, magazines, books, short stories, and textbooks, are suitable for readers. Through

these reading materials, students can engage with the text meaningfully. They can read for different purposes, such as enjoyment, comprehension, or analytical study.

Students are examined to explore thoughts, discover arrangements, investigate information, or engage in their spare time. Two approaches can be utilized in extending reading abilities, specifically broad and in-depth reading (Erfanpour, 2013); they are considered an extremely beneficial strategy for raising pupils' reading comprehension abilities. Previous Studies at all educational levels have examined students' reading preferences. (Hussain and Munshi, 2011; Bouchamma et al., 2013; Shonfeld & Meishar-Tal, 2016; Aharony & Bar-Ilan, 2018; Lestari, 2018; Eutsler & Trotter, 2020).

Examining junior high school students' choices is difficult due to the quickly evolving social dynamics and technological developments. Even while previous studies have shed light on several facets of teenage behavior and preferences (Hussain & Munshi, 2011; Bouchamma et al., 2013; Shonfeld & Meishar-Tal, 2016; Aharony & Bar-Ilan, 2018; Lestari, 2018; Eutsler & Trotter, 2020), there is still a great deal to learn about the unique preferences and choices of this age group, particularly in educational contexts. Research has frequently concentrated on more general educational goals or psychological growth, focusing less on subtle preferences for learning aids, extracurricular activities, peer relationships, and curriculum design. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the students' interests and preferences in reading materials. This method would allow for a predictive grasp of new trends and preferences among junior high school kids and offer a more accurate portrayal of current preferences.

II MATERIALS AND METHOD

A case study is an in-depth exploration of a bounded system based on extensive data collection (Creswell, 2012). The qualitative case study method is especially suitable for understanding and assessing social phenomena within natural settings by exploring human analysis and observations' deep, complex, and multi-dimensional features. students' reading behaviors and inclination within a practical context. The case study approach allows the researcher to obtain rich, detailed qualitative data regarding the unique experiences, motivations, and challenges encountered by a specific student and teacher at Muhammadiyah 13 Junior High School, which would be unattainable through extensive quantitative methods.

In this research, semi-structured interviews were employed as the primary data collection technique, and detailed information from participants was collected through open questions. As a result, this approach has allowed for an elaborate review of the respondents' opinions, experiences, beliefs, and attitudes about the subject of the investigation.

The case study method is integrated into the research design to deepen the understanding of interactions between students and teachers, particularly within Muhammadiyah 13 junior high school in Surabaya, East Java. A case study focusing on a particular educational context, such as that of an eighth-grade classroom, provides complex, vivid representations of the dynamics between students and their English teachers.

Research participants included four students and one English teacher. With the teacher's assistance, random sampling was utilized in the selection process to gain variation within differences of opinion. Diversity bolsters the accuracy and clarity of the research findings. The researcher prepared interview questions to capture thoughts and feelings of experiences linked to the main area of study. These were triangulated with the teacher to ensure the validity of the results.

Data from interviews was transcribed to have participants' responses documented in writing. Thematic analysis is therefore employed after transcription in a systematic exploration of the qualitative data. It involved categorizing and scrutinizing the responses to expose patterns, repeating themes, and leading insights. Thematic analysis uncovers underlying meanings and places such findings into the broader context of student-teacher interactions. This case study research enables the researcher to describe a narrative amalgamating primary themes and profound understandings derived from participant responses. This insight provides an all-rounded understanding of the research subject from different perspectives, bringing out the nuances that might be lost in studies with broader coverage.

III RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 RESULTS

This study aims to comprehend and evaluate students' preferences towards reading text. Knowledge of students' reading preferences is significant in constructing effective learning strategies to influence their engagement and academic performance. Reading is considered one of the core building

blocks of education because it opens an avenue to knowledge, critical thinking, and lifelong learning processes. However, the level of motivation and interest of the students will depend significantly on the materials and topics chosen. In modern learning environments, using and allowing students' interests and matching educational content with their preferences promote interactivity and interest in reading. In this regard, it is essential to identify subject matters and materials that would strike a chord in the students to close the gap between educational goals and student response. Based on interviews conducted with the English teacher and students from grade 7 and grade 8, several important conclusions can be drawn regarding the topic of reading, covering students' interests, challenges faced, preferred learning methods, time constraints, and the need for varied reading materials.

Interest in Reading Materials: Students show a high interest in reading materials related to entertainment, such as articles about K-pop and children's novels. They express a preference for texts that are engaging and relevant to their daily lives. However, they also acknowledge that English reading materials, especially those related to Islamic stories, are still rare. This indicates an opportunity to introduce more reading materials that are not only interesting but also educational, so students can better connect with the content they read. By providing relevant texts, it is expected that students can improve their vocabulary and understanding of English.

Students reveal difficulties in understanding grammar and tenses while reading. They feel that although they can construct sentences, grammar often becomes a barrier to fully comprehending texts. For example, students mention forgetting tenses and struggling to apply correct grammar when reading. This highlights the need for a more focused approach to teaching grammar within the context of reading. By providing deeper explanations and relevant practice, students can better understand how grammar functions in the texts they read, thereby improving their reading skills. Topic preferences indicate that students are already engaged in affinity spaces beyond the classroom, which can serve as effective entry points for creating contextualized and meaningful reading activities.

Students prefer learning methods that involve direct practice, such as discussions and writing, rather than passively reading texts. They state that they better understand material when taught in interactive ways, such as through videos or games. For instance, students mention enjoying learning through videos and engaging in activities like quizzes and group games. This shows that integrating technology and more active learning methods can enhance students' engagement with reading. Creating a dynamic and enjoyable learning environment will motivate students to read and comprehend texts more effectively.

Interviews with the teacher reveal that the available teaching time is very limited, only 40 minutes per session. This can affect the effectiveness of reading instruction, as the short time may not be sufficient to thoroughly cover reading materials. The teacher explains that they often have to rush through the material, which can reduce students' comprehension. Therefore, it is important to consider extending lesson time or developing more efficient teaching modules so that students have enough time to understand and absorb reading content.

Students express a desire for more variety in the types of texts taught, including fables, legends, and biographies. They say they are more interested and engaged when reading diverse texts. This suggests that developing teaching modules that include a variety of reading materials can help increase students' interest and understanding in reading. By providing varied texts, students can explore different themes and writing styles, enriching their learning experience.

Results show that students identify entertainment, lifestyle, career, fashion, and technology as the main themes that benefit them from improving their reading skills. On these bases, the present research brings into view several teaching and learning implications regarding aligning learning content to meet the changing interests of the learner in a world characterized by rapid change. After interviewing the participants, students said they liked some learning materials that they could use as topics to improve their reading skills, such as entertainment, lifestyle, career, fashion, and technology, as reflected in the following excerpt.

I like reading, but I want to work individually because I can manage my time personally. I enjoy reading about entertainment news. For me, it is informative. I like fashion as well. (E-1)

Except 1 above indicates that entertainment news benefits the students. Entertainment could provide important information that is important and up-to-date. Students will get some of the latest trends in their favourite news. Furthermore, some other students like to have a text about fashion, but cannot find it in their textbooks. The interview indicated that students want to improve their speaking, and reading is one of the ways to promote their ideas. They like to learn from movies and songs to get new vocabulary. They believe they can learn new words by listening to their favourite music. On the

other hand, the students also mentioned some materials they did not like to hone their reading skills, such as history, online games, and sports.

Reading is sometimes difficult for them because they do not know the content, as reflected in the following excerpt.

Reading is sometimes tricky for me. I asked my teacher if I didn't understand the content. I like watching movies and listening to the latest songs. I underline the new words I don't understand, and that's how I developed new vocabulary. (E-2)

Excerpt 2 describes that when reading texts, students are more inclined to interact with them when they comprehend and find them relevant. Students may become disengaged and detached if the vocabulary is too complicated or the subject matter is unrelated to their lives. This situation may result in a preference for reading things that are easier to understand or more aligned with their interests and past knowledge.

Educators must comprehend these inclinations. Teachers and curriculum developers can create reading materials that are more suited to their students' interests and developmental stages by acknowledging the critical roles that language and content familiarity play in reading engagement. Increasing the number of topics pertinent to the context and progressively introducing sophisticated language within frameworks that reinforce students' prior knowledge could be two ways to do this, as reflected in excerpt 3.

I like Korean artists and their lifestyles. I also like technology. I love Korean songs and read about Korean artists. (E-3)

Excerpt 3 describes the students' interest in Korean musicians, their lifestyle, technology, and Korean songs, indicating a penchant for reading information that is both culturally stimulating and relevant to their interests. This desire reflects a broader trend among Indonesian readers, particularly younger people, who are increasingly interested in global pop culture and technical subjects.

The passage and comments of the teacher reveal the complex interaction between institutional, educational techniques, societal settings, and personal preferences. The student's desire for Korean pop culture, including musicians, songs, and lifestyle, reflects personal taste and the worldwide distribution of cultural capital. Pierre Bourdieu (1986) claims that exposure to socially valued information and behaviours helps pupils to amass cultural capital. In this situation, consuming Korean cultural products, such as K-pop, Korean dramas, and technology trends, offers symbolic capital among peers, hence supporting identity development and a feeling of belonging within a worldwide young culture, as reflected in the following excerpt.

P1&2: I like films, music, and books.

P1: I sometimes read novels.

P2: Children's novels like Disney or Harry Potter. (E-4)

Excerpt 4 indicated that readers interact with a text not alone to obtain knowledge but also to connect it to their personal experiences. This substantiates the notion that students understand and appreciate books more profoundly when the material corresponds with their identities and interests. The student's appreciation for novels such as Harry Potter indicates exposure to prevalent global literature, which can improve language ability, stimulate imagination, and increase familiarity with Western narrative frameworks. This embodied cultural capital (internalized knowledge and taste) serves as a resource in English language acquisition. The students' reading selections also embody their habit. Their deeply rooted habits and dispositions are influenced by social background and educational environment. The selection of readily available, engaging literature (e.g., Disney or fantasy novels) indicates a habitus consistent with popular culture consumption rather than classical literature, implying a working-class or lower-middle-class inclination where reading serves for pleasure rather than elite distinction.

From a sociocultural standpoint, especially Vygotsky's (1978) view of learning as a mediated social process, students' interaction with texts is greatly influenced by their cultural background and social contacts. The student's tendency to read about Korean artists and technology implies that their literacy habits are ingrained in informal learning environments—spaces usually separate from the conventional school curriculum. Though rich and significant, these out-of-school literacy practices are

often ignored in formal education, limiting the connection between students' knowledge stocks and school-based reading objectives.

The teacher's worry that students would grow quickly bored with long and tedious reading materials and their desire for group activities and videos underscores the conflict between multimodal, experiential learning preferences and the uniform literacy standards still in use in classrooms. Although music and video-based education might not immediately improve conventional literacy measures, they can act as scaffolds (Bruner, 1983) that inspire student engagement and close the gap between their world and academic material.

At last, one could see the problem of poor grammar and literacy not only as a lack but also as a mismatch between the kids' language inventories and the normative standards of school literacies. Instead of viewing students' choices as barriers, teachers can view them as chances for culturally relevant teaching. Including culturally relevant themes and progressive language patterns, as recommended, can help children transition from familiar discourse toward more academic literacy practices by creating zones of proximal growth (Vygotsky, 1978).

I prefer writing, reading, and listening. Speaking is difficult. Grammar makes me hesitate to speak because I'm afraid of making mistakes and sounding awkward (E-6)

Excerpt 6 indicated that the significant issues in students' reading development include insufficient grammar understanding and a preference to learn via the kinaesthetic-based teaching method. The teacher underlined that they are more active during learning if the group activity and video-based teaching methods are applied, including films and songs, which, although pleasant for them, may not contribute much to bettering their literacy skills. Perhaps one of the significant factors in their literacy problems is that they become bored relatively quickly, mainly when there are nondescript instructions, long reading assignments, or even repetitive material. A lack of sustained engagement underlines the need for innovative and stimulating approaches to improve reading proficiency.

The tendency towards direct practice learning methods is also one of the obstacles in honing students' reading skills; students tend to like it when teachers practice directly the material being explained, and students also like when doing learning outside the classroom or practice out of class, as long as they are not just silent continuously. The other findings indicate that during the interview, the teacher explained that the teacher assesses students' abilities and daily development, such as character, behaviour, and the ability to understand something. The instructor explained that he assesses students by considering their academic and daily development since their grades will suffer if he focuses solely on their educational progress. Therefore, choosing reading materials that are suitable for the students is essential.

3.2 DISCUSSION

A range of factors, both internal and external, can influence individuals' reading habits and preferences. One significant external factor is the Internet revolution, which has dramatically impacted traditional reading practices. However, with the advent of cell phones and other technological devices, there is now a wide range of digital reading content, including electronic books, available to everyone (Sridhar, 2022). This means that individuals can read at any time and from any location, regardless of the source of their reading material.

The findings suggest the importance of aligning reading materials with students' interests to enhance engagement and motivation. Incorporating topics such as entertainment, lifestyle, and technology into reading materials may help stimulate students' interest and improve their reading skills. However, balancing these preferences with exposure to diverse topics is essential to broaden students' knowledge and understanding. If the school acknowledges the reading of Disney narratives or Harry Potter as genuine, these preferences may evolve into institutionalized cultural capital, resulting in enhanced performance or recognition within educational environments. Nonetheless, if these books are perceived solely as entertainment, students may not receive formal acknowledgment for their reading practices, despite the cognitive advantages. This result aligns with the previous study, which states that students might not develop into proficient readers and hope for passing grades (Hussain & Munshi, 2011). Students who read less or inadequately may do worse in school and receive poorer grades. It was corroborated by a Nielsen (2005) study, which confirmed that teens' subpar performance is partly attributed to their low reading comprehension.

The identified challenges highlight the need for differentiated instruction to cater to students' varying learning styles and preferences. Reading culture is evolving to accommodate current information technology. Teachers should employ various teaching strategies, such as group games, video-based learning, and interactive activities, to accommodate kinaesthetic learners and prevent

boredom (Karim et al., 2023). Additionally, integrating technology into the learning process, including online tools like quizzes and Kahoot, can make learning more interactive and engaging for students. In Indonesia, K-pop and Korean culture have significantly impacted reading habits. Younger readers frequently want content that entertains and helps them dig deeper into their favourite artists and cultural phenomena. This fascination often leads to reading internet articles, fan fiction, and social media posts about Korean celebrities, music, and dramas. Furthermore, her interest in technology is consistent with a global trend in which consumers seek information that continues.

Young and adolescent students often choose stories based on the authors they like, according to Burgess (1985). These readers are significantly impacted by the book's appearance, including the cover and title page, artwork, the first page's content, and its overall length. Wilson (1985), however, connected these elements to kids who performed less academically and said they favoured romantic, inventive, bold, humorous, daring, and adventurous personalities. The book's subject matter, cover page, and synopsis all seem to have a significant influence on what they choose to read.

Studies on the gendered reading tastes and habits of men and women have shown that they are significantly different from one another. Men read fewer books than women, they read different novels than women, and they read differently, according to research on men's and women's reading preferences and habits. Previous research on reading preferences suggests that women read more fiction for pleasure than men do and that men read more non-fiction. When examining how age affects reading habits, it is essential to remember that teenage reading habits must be understood in the context of adolescence, as research has shown that reading comprehension decreases as age increases (Loh et al., 2020). It is important to note that age- and gender-related

A range of factors, both internal and external, can influence individuals' reading habits and preferences. One significant external factor is the Internet revolution, which has dramatically impacted traditional reading practices. However, with the advent of cell phones and other technological devices, there is now a wide range of digital reading content, including electronic books, available to everyone. This means that individuals can read at any time and from any location, regardless of the source of their reading material. Permitting students to select from a variety of relevant topics (e.g., fashion, art, entertainment) satisfies the standards for engagement-oriented learning. Their stated preferences indicate that when reading materials resonate with their lived experiences and interests, they are more inclined to be motivated, persistent, and effective readers. This corresponds with the notion of "reading for authentic purposes," which improves both fluency and comprehension.

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IV CONCLUSION

Students exhibited a predilection for accessible and individually pertinent information, encompassing popular fiction such as Harry Potter, entertainment articles on K-pop, and items pertaining to fashion, art, and profession. These preferences signify not only their interests but also their social identities and informal literacy practices. From the standpoint of reading theory, students' preference for such subjects reinforces and highlights the significance of readings.

Furthermore, their preference for reading over speaking—attributable to grammatical anxiety—underscores how reading functions as a psychologically secure environment for language acquisition. This further substantiates Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis and emphasizes the necessity for customized training that commences with students' strengths and interests. This study confirms that aligning students' reading materials with their living experiences, interests, and cultural settings greatly enhances their engagement and understanding.

Future research could focus on longitudinal studies to track the development of reading skills over time, considering the evolving interests of students as they progress through their education. Investigating the role of peer influence and social interactions in shaping reading preferences could also provide deeper insights into how to foster a reading culture among students.

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