

Undergraduate Students' Reading Interest and Reading Comprehension Achievement in a State Islamic University

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Abstract

This research was aimed at describing the relationship between reading interest and reading comprehension achievement of EFL students of State Islamic University of Raden Fatah Palembang in the academic year 2013-2016. Quantitative method, especially correlational study, was used. The population of the study was 466 active EFL students. By using purposive sampling technique, there were 86 students involved as participants in this research. The data were obtained by using two instruments which were reading interest questionnaire and reading comprehension test. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to analyze the data. From the result of the data analysis, it was found that there was no significant correlation between students' reading interest and their reading comprehension achievement since the p-value was (.887) greater than significance value (.887 > .005). In short, reading interest did not have any relation to reading comprehension achievement of undergraduate EFL students of State Islamic University of Raden Fatah Palembang Raden Fatah Palembang.

Keywords: reading interest, reading comprehension achievement, EFL students

Introduction

Reading skill plays an important role in learning English as a foreign language. Reading is how people discover new things. Therefore, it is considered as an important skill needed for both academic purposes and lifetime learning (Asgari, 2012; Ifanti, 2012). It is also supported by Pang, learning to read is an important educational goal (as cited in putra & Marzulina, 2015). Issa, Aliyu, Akangbe, and Adedeji (2012) assert that knowledge is transferred from generation to generation through books. It is crucial for learners not only to read but also to understand what is written (McNamara, 2009). Moreover, in this technological era, students are surrounded by much information either on-line or off-line. Reading comprehension enables them to acquire new knowledge and information so that they are able to achieve academic success.

According to Guthrie et al. (2007), one of the aims of reading is to teach students how to comprehend different text genres when students are expected to read a wide range of material to gain knowledge and literary experience. Due to English as a foreign language, reading is the process of not only acquiring information but also improving the ability of learning as stated by Essberger (as cited in Kurniawati, 2010). There are various good reasons for teaching reading. Students may need to read for their work or study, or they want to read for pleasure. In addition, the exposure to English is an important part of acquiring language.

The text themselves can act as models for writing, exercise, the study and practice of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, punctuation, and provoke conversation and discussion.

It is important for the undergraduate EFL students to read and to comprehend the text as today many test serves reading comprehension in English proficiency test to get job. Dreyer and Nel (2003) add that reading comprehension has come to be the essence of reading, essential not only to academic learning in all subject areas but also to professional success and, indeed to lifelong learning. Alshumaimeri (2011) adds reading is a crucial skill in learning and communication.

In relation to reading, reading is in fact included in one of the test parts in TOEFL test. Concerning about TOEFL test, it is known that the TOEFL score of undergraduate EFL students of UIN Raden Fatah Palembang is averagely still low. This indicates that students' proficiency in language skill which one of them is reading skill is still poor despite the fact that the students have finished their reading courses, i.e.: Reading I, Reading II, Reading III and Reading IV, since the first semester. To improve students' reading ability, the reading activities used in teaching reading must be as enjoyable as possible as Scott and Ytreberg (1993) argue that making reading as an enjoyable activity is very important. To enjoy it students have to be interested in it as what Hidayat and Aisah (2013) explain that without interest someone is impossible to do anything. It is also supported by Hidi (2001) who argues that interest has an important role in reader's text. Interest itself can be defined as the quality that something has when it attracts somebody's attention or makes them want to know more about it (Hornby, 2010).

When one is interested in the topic or the text, it will affect his/her mood and finally, she/he will engage in the reading. Hidi (2001) states that interest influences the reader's comprehension and recall positively. In line with this, Ebbers (2011) confirms that by having interest, it will enable the readers to process the text, comprehend it deeply, and recall the information longer. Those who are interested in reading will become absorbed in the reading activity and, finally, gain more comprehension.

Concerning about the importance of reading interest, UNESCO report in 2012 shows that reading interest index of Indonesia was 0.001 (Yusuf, 2013). It indicates that among 1000 people, only one is interested in reading, meaning that the reading interest of Indonesian people is still low. Referring to this phenomenon, it is necessary for government to take some steps to cope with this problem. Teachers and lecturers should also stimulate their student's interest since it promotes active engagement in learning process.

Based on the informal interview with the 25 undergraduate EFL students of UIN Raden Fatah who have taken all the reading courses, it was found that some of them were not satisfied with their reading score. Most of them prefer playing games or social media. In fact, they got bored reading books. It could happen due to some reasons. As a result, only few of them read, at least to finish one book in a day. Hence, it is critically essential to investigate the relationship between reading interest of the students and their reading comprehension achievement.

Regarding the problems above, studies have been undertaken to investigate the relationship between students' reading interest and students' reading comprehension achievement and one of them is a study conducted by Asgari (2012) who found that integrating current issues of interest with class material improved students' reading comprehension. The findings from the previous studies play an important role in designing

this research. To sum up, this study intends to investigate whether or not there is a relationship between students' reading interest and reading comprehension achievement at the undergraduate EFL students of UIN Raden Fatah Palembang.

Review of Literature

The concept of reading comprehension

Stauffer defines reading as “getting information from the printed page” (as cited in Samadi & Mohammadi, 2013, p. 101). It means that the reader tries to get knowledge on what he or she reads. Pardo (2004) states that comprehension is “a process in which readers construct meaning by interacting with text through the combination of prior knowledge and previous experience, information in the text, and the stance the reader takes in relationship to the text” (p.272). Readers decode the words in reading text, and they have to integrate the knowledge in the text and the world knowledge for a deeper comprehension. Furthermore, Suri (2007) explains that reading comprehension achievement is “the power to understand printed or written material that requires ability to recognize words accurately, to identify main ideas and supporting details through reading comprehension test” (p.21).

In this study, sub skills of reading comprehension which will be measured are: identifying main idea, decoding vocabulary, identifying cause and effect, sequencing, identifying detailed information, making inference, and identifying the writer's tone based on the passages given. Identifying main idea is the ability to find out the important points, stated or implied. In this sub skill, the readers need to choose the most important and relevant information to process the text (Schelling, Wolters, & Vermunt, 1996). Identifying cause and effects means the ability to recognize the ideas that explain the cause- effect relationship. This skill enables the readers to have both a good knowledge and technique to get deep understanding about the text (Bauman & Bergeron, as cited in Pentimont & Justice, 2010). Sequence helps the readers to understand what is happening in the text. Identifying detailed information which involves analysis refers to the ability to find out specific ideas which is stated, both explicitly and implicitly in the text. Decoding vocabulary is the ability to recognize the meaning of a word based on context of the passage (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998). Making inference refers to the ability to use two or more pieces of information from a text in order to arrive at a third piece of information that is implicit (Kispal, 2008).

The concept of reading interest

In accordance with Schraw and Lehman (2001), interest is defined as liking and willful engagement in a cognitive activity. It plays an important part in learning process since it promotes active engagement and focusing one's attention. Interest is commonly categorised as individual/personal and situational interest (Eidswick, 2010). Crow and Crow state that there are three factors which influence students' reading interest (as cited in Fadliyatis, 2014, p. 4). They are intrinsic motivation, social motive and emotion. Intrinsic motivation involves students' curiosity that generates their interest in reading. Social motive involves the activities supported by the environment. Emotion involves students' feeling when reading. Crow and Crow also mention five main indicators of reading interest (as cited in Fadliyatis,

2014, p. 7). They are attention, time use, motivation, emotion, and effort to read. The students with high interest usually read more and find it useful and enjoyable (Beale, 2004). They will spend their time by reading more than other activities, focus and absorb in it. Besides, having high motivation and attempt to read book is also indication of interest in reading. Those five indicators would be the basis measurement of reading interest.

Methodology

Research design

In this study, I used a correlational research method to find out the correlation between variables and interpret the result that may appear. I used this method to find out the correlation between students' reading interest and their reading comprehension achievement. Creswell (2005) states that correlation design is procedures in quantitative research in which investigators measure the degree of association (relationship) between two or more variables using the statistical procedure of correlation analysis. Furthermore, Fraenkel, Wallen and Hyun (2012) states that correlational studies investigate the possibility of relationships between only two variables although investigations of more than two variables are common. The first procedure was I identified the students' reading interest by using questionnaire and the second procedure was I gave the students reading comprehension test. The next step was I analyzed the data normality, the data linearity and the correlation between variables through SPSS based on the results of the questionnaire and test.

Research site, sampling, and participants

According to Richards and Schmidt (2010), population in statistics is any set of items, individuals, which share some common and observable characteristics and from which a sample can be taken. It is in line with what Frankel, Wallen and Hyun (2012) state that the population is a group where the researcher (as cited in Marzulina, 2018, p. 67). Thus, one can speak of comparing test scores across a sample of a population of students and Creswell (2012) states that population is a group of individuals who have the same characteristic.. The population of this study was all of the students of English Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education of UIN Raden Fatah, Palembang, in the 1st, 3rd, 5th and 7th semesters in the academic year 2013/2016. The total number of the population was 174. The writer chose the sample using purposive sampling (judgmental sampling). The writer took the students who have already taken Reading courses (Reading I, II, III, IV, Extensive Reading) as the sample. Therefore, the students of the fifth semester were taken as sample in this study. However, when conducting the research there were only 86 students participated. According to Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2012), a sample should be as large as the researcher can obtain with a reasonable expenditure of time and energy. Moreover most researchers mention the minimum acceptable sample size for a correlation study is considered by to be no less than 30.

Data collection

The data were collected by using a questionnaire and reading comprehension test. Oppenheim (1982) stated that the purpose of questionnaire as a whole is measurement (as cited in Marzulina, 2010, p.32). To measure the students' reading interest, there were 45 items in the reading interest questionnaire which was taken from Fadliyati (2014). The last instrument was reading comprehension test taken from Longman's TOEFL Preparation and Cliff's TOEFL Practice. The test has 50 questions in the term of multiple choice questions.

The instruments used in a research have to be valid and reliable. Korb (2013) says that an instrument in which its reliability and validity have already been proofed from the previous study can be applied to other particular studies (as cited in Marzulina et al. (2018). Since the questionnaire, Reading Interest Questionnaire was adopted, there was no need to conduct the validity test anymore. Moreover, Fadliyatis (2014), in her research, stated that the questionnaire was adequate to measure students' reading comprehension achievement. Furthermore, Fadliyatis (2014) has revealed the reliability of the questionnaire, which was 0.780. Since the coefficient should be at least 0.7, the questionnaire was reliable. Thus, the questionnaire was valid and reliable as the instrument to collect the data. Furthermore, since the reading test was taken from Longman TOEFL preparation and Cliff's TOEFL, there was no need to conduct the validity test anymore. This test just focused on 6 aspects of reading comprehension; main idea, detail, cause-effect, inference, vocabulary, and sequence.

Data analysis

The data collected from the questionnaire and the test were analyzed. Students' scores based on the reading interest questionnaire were counted and put into reading interest categories, i.e.: very high, high, moderate, low, and very low. Students' scores on reading comprehension achievement were also counted and classified into reading comprehension levels, i.e.: very good, good, average, poor, verypoor. To explain the data, percentage and descriptive statistics were found out. Then, the normality and linearity test were applied. To see the correlation between variables, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was applied.

Findings and Discussion

The result of students' reading interest and their reading comprehension achievement

First of all, the result of reading interest presented. Reading interest minimum score was 113 and the maximum score was 167. Reading interest's mean score was 137.36 and the standard deviation was 11.949. The last, reading comprehension minimum score was 16 and maximum score was 76. The mean score of reading comprehension test was 41.84 and the standard deviation was 15.421. Furthermore, students' reading interest level is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Score distribution of reading interest

Level of Reading Interest	Raw Score	Number of Students	Percent (%)
Very high	186 – 216	0	0
High	153 – 185	9	10
Moderate	120 – 152	71	83
Low	87 – 119	6	7
Very low	54 – 86	0	0
Total		86	100

Based on Table 1, the descriptive data showed that 0% students who had very high reading interest, 10% had high reading interest, 83% had moderate reading interest, 6% had low reading interest, and 0% had very low reading interest. Then, the result of reading comprehension is presented. Reading comprehension minimum score was 16 and maximum score was 76. The mean score of reading comprehension test was 41.84 and the standard deviation was 15.421. Furthermore, students' reading comprehension achievement is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Score distribution of reading comprehension achievement

Categories of Reading Comprehension	Score Interval	Number of Students	Percent (%)
Very Good	80 – 100	0	0
Good	70 – 79	6	7
Average	60 – 69	8	9
Poor	50 – 59	13	15
Very Poor	0 – 49	59	69
Total		86	100

It can be seen from the Table 2 that 0% had a very good reading comprehension achievement, 7% had good reading comprehension achievement, 9% had average reading comprehension achievement, 15% had poor reading comprehension achievement, and 69% had very poor reading comprehension achievement.

The results of normality test and linearity test

Based on the results of normality test, it was found that the significance value of reading interest was 0.301, and the significance value of reading comprehension was 0.87. Since all of the significance values are higher than 0.05, it can be concluded that the data are normally distributed. Therefore, the data could be used for further analysis. Next, the results of linearity showed that, the deviation from linearity between reading interest and reading comprehension was 0.418. To sum up all the data were linear for each correlation and regression.

Correlation between students' reading interest and their reading comprehension achievement

Based on the result of the data analysis, it showed that the correlation coefficient or the r -obtained (-.016) was lower than r -table (0.05) ($n-2=84$). Then the level of probability (p) significance (sig.2-tailed) was .466. It means that p value (.466) was higher than 0.05. Thus, it means that there was no statistically significant correlation between reading interest and reading comprehension achievement of the undergraduate of EFL students of UIN Raden Fatah Palembang. The detail result is displayed in Table 3.

Table 3. Correlation between reading nterest and reading comprehension achievement

Pearson Product Moment Correlation between Variables Measured		
		Reading Comprehension Achievement
Reading Interest	Pearson Correlation	-.016
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.466
	N	86
	Pearson Correlation	1

Discussion

There are some discussions of this study. First, in this study most of the students had moderate reading interest. It means that they liked reading even though in moderate level. They also liked their reading class, and liked being asked about their opinion after reading. However, most of them liked reading for pleasure, especially reading the type of books that they liked. They reported that they were interested only in certain books. In addition, they felt happy when they read book although sometimes they got bored in doing this activity. It could happen due to some reasons. Based on the analysis of the questionnaire, only few of them read at least one book in a day. The reason could be due to the development of technology nowadays. They are surrounded by much more interesting stuffs such as social media on internet, video games, movies, television and some others. It is in accordance with what Hritcu and Schipor (2014) state that reading has lost ground in a society dominated by mass media. It is also proved by the finding that only some of them preferred reading to playing games in their spare time. They also thought that joining extracurricular activity was more fun than reading.

Next, for reading comprehension, the data distribution shows there was the small amount of percentage of the students who were in good level as the students who were in average level of achievement. It could happen since they had already completed their reading courses, so they have enough knowledge and skills in reading comprehension questions. It also showed a big percentage was in poor and very poor reading achievement level. However, there was no one in a very good level of reading comprehension. This might happen due to some factors involved in reading comprehension. It could be caused by the fact that they did

not focus in doing the reading comprehension test because the research was done after they had taken subjects at college. Some of them were also doing the test by chatting with their friends. As stated by Lenz (2014), reading comprehension is affected by the reader's knowledge of the topic, knowledge of language structures, knowledge of text structures and genres, knowledge of cognitive and metacognitive strategies, their reasoning abilities, their motivation, and their level of engagement. It might be that the students were not engaged fully during the test, or they had low motivation to do the test.

The finding in the study is in line with the study of Brooks (1971). He found that there was no statistically significant relationship between reading interest and reading comprehension. Fieldman and Blom (1981) also could not find any relation of interest and incentive to the reading comprehension of average and below-average readers. However, this result is contrary to the finding of Asgari (2011). He revealed that integrating current issues of interest with class material improved students' reading comprehension at Islamic Azad University in Hidaj. In fact, related to reading comprehension achievement, there are some researchers that failed to prove that reading interest is the variable that give contribution to the students' reading comprehension achievement (Holliday, 1989; O'Sullivan, 1997; & Scholtz, 1975). The result of the study also supports the work of Townsend and Townsend (1990) in which reading interest was not the factor that can influence students' reading comprehension. Kirby (2010) also could not find that reading interest correlate to the reading ability. Based on the finding above, it can be said that students' reading interest did not correlate significantly to their reading comprehension achievement. Thus, it did not matter whether the reading interest of the students were high or low, even more, it did not mean anything if the students were affected by attention, time use, motivation, emotion, and effort toward their reading comprehension achievement, because the difference among their aspects of reading interest did not give any differences in their reading comprehension achievement score.

In relation to this, there might become independent variables that might give the significant influence toward the students' reading comprehension achievement. In my perspective, reading motivation is the factor that might correlate to the students' score, especially in reading, and influence it significantly. Because related to the theory, motivation is a mental strength for students to comprehend what they read in order that it will be a reading process. Motivated students are more engaged in reading, more confident, and more likely to comprehend successfully. Moreover, other factors that could have the most influential effect to students' reading comprehension achievement are their background knowledge and reading habit. Because logically it is almost impossible for the students to answer question from reading test if they cannot activate their world and literary knowledge to link what they know to what they're reading. The information they may need could be gained by reading book. But, as a matter of fact, the reading habit of Indonesian still in the low level, it also could occur in EFL students of UIN Raden Fatah Palembang that is why they show a tendency that they do not like reading book even for their course book.

Conclusion

The finding indicated that the null hypothesis was accepted while the alternative hypothesis was rejected as the correlation coefficient was .016 and the p-value was .887

which was greater than .05 (.887 > .05). It can be implied that there was no statistically significant correlation between students' reading interest and reading comprehension achievement of EFL students at UIN Raden Fatah Palembang. This result also means that the students with high interest in reading, and applying it effectively in the learning process (reading activity) will have no guarantee that they will have satisfactory reading comprehension achievement and it also could not be proved that the students whose interest in reading is low will have low score in reading comprehension achievement. There must be other factors that influence their reading comprehension, such as reading motivation, and their habitual in reading. Therefore, future studies are expected to have deeper studies on what could influence the achievement in reading comprehension especially the mentioned ones above. It is also recommended for other research to have bigger number of sample for the research and to have other supporting techniques of collecting the data such as interview or observation to get more specific description of students' interest.

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