

## THE CONSTRUCTION OF READING HABIT BY AN OVERSEAS STUDENT: THE STORY FROM CZECH TO INDONESIA

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**Abstract:** Current research in Indonesia about reading habits tends to discuss the topic quantitatively instead of exploring the process of how reading habits were developed. Whereas it is necessary to see reading habits as a process of development. Through seeing it as a process, reading habit can be seen as not just a measurable component but more into a sustained lifetime literacy. To fill this void, this research aimed to investigate the development of an adult learner's reading habits as their lifetime literacy. In conducting this study, the researcher used-narrative inquiry as the method of the research. The data were collected through twice in-depth interviews with the participant. The data were analysed by using narrative three-dimensional aspects by Clandinin et.al (2013). In terms of temporality, the participant has experienced a reading habit since she was in Czech elementary school. Because her family maintains the habit, the reading habit remains until today. In terms of sociality, the role models of the reading habit are the participants' schoolmates and her father. In terms of spatiality, Czech has shaped the experience of the participants' reading habit. When she went back to Indonesia, the reading habit in Indonesian school was less exposed. This indicated that reading habits can be developed through the interaction of two key people. The first was the schoolteachers and the second was parents. The reading habits activity should be sustainable at school and at home.

**Keywords:** *EFL learners, reading environment, reading habits, role models.*

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### INTRODUCTION

The complexity to integrate prior experiences or knowledge to understand a text in reading a foreign language is considered challenging by some language learners. To have an interest in reading in a foreign language, Kusumarasdyati (2008) and Kurnia (2021) suggested that learners should have been exposed with a relevant text to their background knowledge that contains familiar vocabularies and understandable organisational structure of the text. Without having these accommodations, the learners are prone to be unhappy about EFL reading practices (Kweldju, 2000, & Firmanto, 2005).

In the EFL context, some studies have reported that the reading interest of Malaysian students is significantly low (Kaur & Thivagarajah, 1999). They prefer watching television and video as a form of leisure and information. Thus, EFL students must have a key role to play; it requires more information through reading for them to succeed academically. This condition remained the same for a decade (Mohammed, et.al, 2019). To pinpoint this issue, the studies that surveyed Malaysian students' reading habit focused solely on the activity of reading books. The other reading materials were considered as the potential objects for further research.

In Indonesia, the report on adult EFL learners' reading habit is also placed in the mid to low level. Furthermore, a recent study found that Indonesian higher education students have a mid-level of vocabulary (Siregar, 2020). In addition, Mustafa (2012) argued that a low reading habit was influenced by Indonesian tradition of spoken culture. Likewise, with the mastery of reading material, the students can only absorb 30% of the content presented in the reading material.

As one of the countries which uses English as foreign language, another factor that causes the mid to low level of reading habit is the lack of autonomous learning (Sakhiyya and Hapsari, 2021). Reading habits in Indonesia are endorsed solely at schools (Parlindungan, 2017), yet rarely sustained at home. Moreover, reading materials in English are believed to have challenging vocabulary to understand for most Indonesian readers (Maharsi, et.al., 2019).

As previously mentioned, current research found that Indonesian high school students (Maharsi, et.al., 2019), university students (Siregar, 2020), and adult EFL learners (Mustafa, 2012) are proven to have low reading habits especially when the content is written in English. Hence, Narangoda (2020) & Pandian (2000) emphasised that reading can serve as a foundation of education where an educated individual can continue learning and seeking new knowledge through reading materials regardless of the unpredictable changes that might happen. Thus, by having a reading habit, an individual is thought to have more thorough preparation to overcome the disruptive information.

Hassan, et.al. (2012) and Husna (2019) described reading habits as intensity, quantity, and the quality of what the students read. Reading habits can help individuals to acquire more information and more vocabularies in both L1 and L2 which can lead them to have better English proficiency. Adetunji and Oladeji (2007) and Scales and Rhee (2001) suggested that the students who love to read on every occasion will have fewer difficulties in understanding the lesson than those who do not. This explains that reading habits generate a positive influence not only on students' academic performance, but also on their psychological aspect.

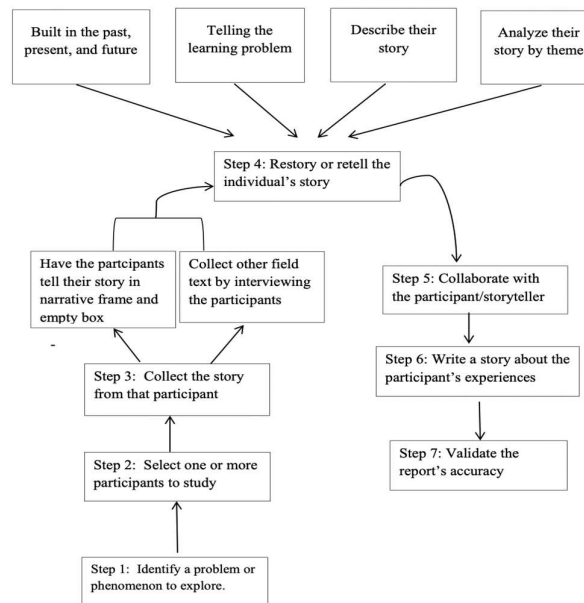
Most previous studies used a quantitative approach to obtain the data (Iftanti, 2012, Maharsi, et.al, 2019; Mustafa, 2012; Noor, 2011; Siregar, 2020) which informs the level of reading habits in Indonesia. However, the experiences that enable an individual to have sustainable reading habits since s/he was a child until s/he grows up remains rare. Current practices of reading habits as means to support literacy were merely conducted at formal education institutions (Parlindungan, 2019; Parlindungan & Rifai, 2022; Pradita, 2020). Whereas it is necessary to enliven the process of an individual experiencing reading activities that construct his/her reading habit, not only at schools but also at home. Based on the empirical gap above, this research aims to investigate the development of an overseas student's reading habits as her lifetime literacy.

## METHODOLOGY

This research used narrative inquiry as the design. Narrative inquiry was used in this research as it is a common qualitative research method that helps to write narratives through human experience (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Since a person is seen to have experiences and phenomena, narrative inquiry serves as one research design that applies life as it is experienced. (Krampe, 2003). This design was selected as this research aims to document and to narrate an individual's lifetime story in the construction of reading habits. By doing narrative inquiry, the rich data on the participants' lifetime experiences was collected from when she was a primary student until she is currently a postgraduate student. The first step done was to listen to participant's stories. Hence, the interaction with the participant was also performed as the part of engagement.

### Design and Procedures

Ollerenshaw's and Creswell's (2002) narrative design and procedures was used as the reference. They identify seven procedures in conducting narrative inquiry (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Those are (1) identify a problem or phenomenon to explore, (2) select one or more participants to study, (3) collect the story from that participant, (4) re-story or retell the individual's story, (5) collaborate with the participants, (6) write a story about the participants experiences, (7) validate the report's accuracy. Below is the figure to show the process of the procedures:



(Taken from Creswell, 2012:154)

Figure 1. The procedures of narrative inquiry.

To identify a problem, the issue about the low level of reading habit was highlighted. Thus, the empirical discussion on reading habits by narrating an overseas EFL learners' reading habits construction was conducted. After that, a participant that represented a sustained reading habit throughout her life was selected. The participant

in this research was Vanilla. She currently lives in Semarang as a higher post graduate student. She confirmed that she has loved to read since she was young. Her most favourite reading activity is when she has an hour of free time a day to read. To add up, she usually reads books or articles online. She affirmed that she has tried to commit to reading whenever she has free time. She mentioned that she was seven years old when she first started reading a book and her father was her role model. He read her fictional stories every day, making her fascinated. It let her to explore more books, especially non-fictional ones. The reasons for selecting Vanilla as the participant in this research are not only because she has a lot of experiences in reading but also, she has an outstanding academic reading competence accredited by the IELTS with C2 CEFR level.

The data were collected by listening to her story and the two interview transcriptions done through zoom meetings. The interview was conducted as casually as possible to make her comfortable telling her story without feeling like she was being interrogated. After carefully rereading the interview transcription, the second interview was administered to get some clarifications (Clandinin & Caine, 2008). We retold Vanilla's life experiences about reading habits and we asked her availability to read the story.

### Data Collection and Data Analysis

The technique of data collection used a semi structured interview. There were eleven questions, in which the participants' story served as the narratives. Narrative inquiry as suggested by Clandinin and Caine (2008) emphasised that the researcher should explore the story of the participant with three dimensional aspects which are temporality, sociality, spatiality. In short, narrative inquiry deals with when, who, and whereas the factors that develop an individual's life story. Below is the illustration of the three-dimensional meanings that build a story:

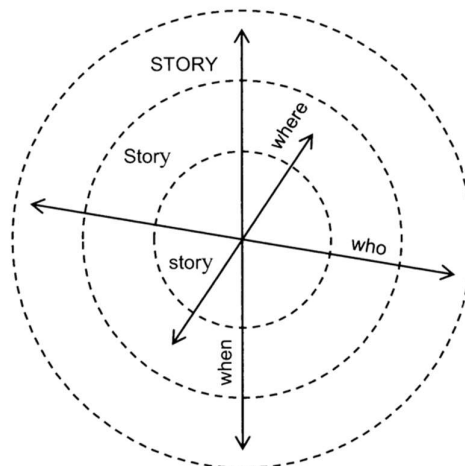


Figure 2. Three-dimensional meaning that builds a story.

This can be used to allow researchers to collect data from participants who re-narrated their story life experiences based on time to time (Clandinin and Cane, 2008). In terms of temporality, the participant was invited to tell specific experiences reading habits from the past until now, recounting her life experience starting from the location to where they used to live. In terms of sociality, she also informed her reading role

model that helped her construct the reading habit at school and at home from time to time. Hence, in spatiality, it deals with the place or situation the participants live in. At last, the Atkinson's (2007) approach on narrative inquiry was applied to retell the participant's experience in a form of narrative story.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Findings**

The literacy Vanilla has been formed by the privilege of living abroad she had when she was a kid. She was also surrounded by reliable facilities to help her generate the reading habit naturally. When she was living in Prague, Czech Republic, she spent her elementary school in a school that supported the students with several reading activities such as book discussions, book reports, and book presentations by using finger puppets. Therefore, these good memories have helped her in building her interest in reading. Thus, she also mentioned that her primary teacher back in Czech was the first person that helped her develop her reading habit.

“Since I was a primary school student in Prague, Czech Republic, I got an English subject. I got a project from the teacher to have a weekly reading project. The project required me to read the first until the third chapters of each book in a week. After reading the book, I need to present the book in the class”

Although she had to go back to Indonesia, the habit then became more of an assessment than an activity. However, she got support from her parents to keep establishing her reading interest. Her father became the main supporter at home followed by her mother. As the time goes by, but not with her reading habit. It stays with her as she believes that reading will broaden her mind and will help her have better communication with people.

### **The Story from Vanilla: “*I have to read a lot so that I can have broader view in the future*”**

Vanilla was born in Jakarta, Indonesia. Her father is an influential politician and a professor in a Public University in Indonesia. He started his career as a journalist and an art curator before working as an Indonesian ambassador in Czech Republic. Vanilla's mother was working as a nurse before deciding to follow her husband to Czech Republic to become a housewife. Vanilla and her parents lived in Czech from 2007-2012. She spent her childhood following her father's job abroad and went to a primary school in Prague which prompted her reading interest. The reading activity that she remembered the most is when she was assigned to read a book for a week from the first to third chapter before presenting its content in front of her peers. After she finished her elementary school education, Vanilla went back to her hometown in Jakarta, Indonesia and continued her junior high school there. Sadly, the school did not provide her the same reading activities as she experienced in Czech Republic. Hence, she became more aware to read independently without being asked by the teachers at school. She was also lucky to have supportive parents that kept on supporting her to read as her father does not want her to lose her reading habits. Realising that having a reading habit is important, when she enrolled in a military high school in Magelang, Central Java, she always brought a book from home and read the book in between the study nights as the school did not have the same education system

as the one, she was exposed to in Czech Republic. Vanilla experienced a culture shock the first time she was back to Indonesia. When she was abroad, the teacher guided the student to read the books while most teachers in her previous secondary schools in Indonesia did not. For example, during elementary to junior high school activities, she found that the library was divided into sections for classes to read, then the teacher gave a section for reading books according to what students are interested in. However, having to explore bookshelves during her junior high school period to borrow the books she did not have at home from the library made her a regular there. Yet, she borrowed less books when she was at military high school as there was not much time to visit the library during the lesson time. After she graduated from the military high school, Vanilla studied at a university in Semarang. To complete her university assignments, she often reads books in her spare time. She also read other forms of writing such as for novels, magazines, or articles on the internet and even the news on Instagram in the caption section. Other times, Vanilla liked to watch movies and found information on the internet about things she did not understand from the movie. As a result, she found experiences about reading habits at home and her role model reading habits by her parents, especially her father. At first, she was not much of a reader, and she was lazy at home to read just of her daily routine. However, her father was reading at his desk every day; she started to develop curiosity on why her father could read for so long. Her father always said to Vanilla that when “we read the book it would broaden our knowledge”. Eventually she got used to reading the book, in the first way her father gave her money to finish 1 book, and it had to be summarised and then the summary was given to her father for checking. When she reads a book, she is given ten thousand then over time, if she can finish the next one, she is only allowed to buy a new book. Vanilla admitted that getting a new book made her enthusiastic because having a new book made her happy. Usually when she reads a book she will finish 1 book in 1 month, a maximum of 2 months depending on the thickness of the book as well. The books she usually reads are English books because her father rarely allows her to read books in Indonesian. The reason is that Vanilla is fluent in speaking and understanding in English. What her father did also applies to her brother and sister. Her father proved that from the past until now, reading has proven to make people smart. Since then, her father has often been a guest lecturer, invited on TV to be asked for his opinion; it is all because he often reads. Vanilla also wants to be like father and that encourages her to keep reading. When it comes to education, her father most often reminds her to study seriously. It is because he is also an academic person who used to have difficulty getting knowledge, and her father really appreciates knowledge and wants his family to have a lot of knowledge so that people do not lose competitiveness with other people. Finally, Vanilla’s mother always contributes when she wants to buy a new book. Vanilla's mother forbids her to finish the unfinished book first.

### **Discussion**

From the story, it was found that there are two generated themes. Those are (1) How the reading habit was developed in the Czech elementary school, and (2) How the reading habit was developed by the parents at home. Elaborated discussions are presented in the following sections.

### **How the Reading Habits Was Developed in The Czech Elementary School**

According to Sanacore (1992), reading habits were firstly formed in schools, and in schoolteachers formed strategies to develop literacy in reading in every child into reading habits. Such as, (a) clutter up the classroom that is the teacher can choose the selected material for his students, and provides books in the form of newspapers, magazines, and newspapers and gives students the opportunity to choose some of these sources, (b) provide time for reading that is the teacher frees students to choose books that match their students' interests, it will make students not feel forced to read books, and (c) encourage students to read all throughout the school year that is the teacher provides a books talk strategy as promoting it to students so, that students are able to have an opportunity in much reading during the school year at school.

In this study, it was found that Vanilla experiences a reading habits program as manifested in the curriculum of Czech Republic, especially for the elementary school as mentioned in the data, that Vanilla need to read a book and do summarise a book every lesson until at the end of semesters. Each student should present it in front of their friends. It is when the teacher could play a significant role in developing the reading habit as part of their curriculum. However, the main key person that established the curriculum is the teacher. In this case, Vanilla also said that her teacher affects and helps a lot to develop her reading habits. For example: the teacher gives free time to read and asks their students to read books as students like. Another example is when the teacher gives a reading section to browse other books in the library so that students are given the opportunity to borrow books to be read at home.

It means that the Czech Republic has really implemented the reading habits program from an early age at school and there is no element of compulsion that makes students feel pressured when reading. The school gives an invitation to their students who are not interested in books, but they want students to build reading habits. School literacy will invite them to start something that is too heavy to read anything with an interesting story because reading in a book requires a higher cognitive load.

Compared to the previous studies, this research has similar findings with Gambrell (2015). In her study, Gambrell (2015) found that the teacher's role in reading habits in their students in class is very important in schools because the teacher is the main star who can act as a second person to his parents. She also found that to promote reading habits for teachers, first the teacher always gives instructions, and provides fun material in class before students read in each book. Second, the teacher gives assignments in real activity such as writing a summary of a book that was read and a discussion section with a friend or teacher, either individually or in groups. Third, the teacher provides additional reading textbooks to assist students in doing difficult assignments. These strategies are like those that were practised by the teacher in Czech Republic. This means that when Vanilla studied abroad, the reading program in school became a good culture to instil reading habits from an early age. Evidence of the reading habits were carried out until she came back to her hometown in Indonesia.

Sanacore (1992) suggested that the role of teacher did take a place as a key person to the main one. It means that regardless of the curriculum, the terms about the rules and suggestions to develop reading habits yet if the teacher did not apply it then reading habits will be just an ink word in the paper. In this study, the result is similar as the suggestion by Gambrell (2015), it is when the teacher plays a significant role in developing the reading habit.

### **How the Reading Habits Was Developed by Parents at Home**

According to Ahmad et.al., (2020), the parents are the most important key person at home in developing reading habits for children from an early age. The parents can be used as role models in more learning activities to reading habits, for increased their knowledge in the academic field. The role of each key person is that both are behavioural to give role modelling to support their children for reading habits. Fathers play a role in the development of communication such as discussions, their children making summaries in each book. Mothers play a role in the development of academics for their children.

In this study, it was found that Vanilla had experienced the reading habits manifested by her parents since she was a child. As mentioned in the data, Vanilla saw her father reading every day at his desk; she was interested to find out why his father read books for so long. Her father can provide a book that Vanilla can always read at home. However, providing books is not enough if parents are not interested in their children's reading habits. Then the first step was to grow interest in reading habits by her father giving her a reward like money if she had finished a book and then summarised it for review what she had learned. Furthermore, her father allowed Vanilla to buy the book when it was finished. Another step for children interested in reading habits by Vanilla's mothers is to always contribute when she wants to buy a new book. For example, Vanilla's mother communicates that if she is unfinished reading a book then can't buy a new book.

In this case, Vanilla also said that the reading habits have always existed until now because of the importance of parents at home.

It means that the parents who increase their children's interest in reading growth from an early age will make it easier for their children to have reading habits until now. The key role of parents is carried out as a close relationship with their children. Parents are the determinants of children's reading behaviour at home. The parents must create parental involvement in the development of communication and be involved in the development of academics, so that children's reading interest can be formed.

Related to children's need for developing reading habits in parental involvement, this study supports evidence from a study conducted by Hill and Tyson (2009). In his study, Hill and Tyson (2009) found that the types for parents' involvement in children's reading activities in middle schools. Academic socialisation was among the most effective types for parental involvement, as it leads to a better understanding of the study objectives and improves children's academic outcomes.

In line with the result of previous research, Dehass, et al., (2005) related that there is significant evidence from reviews that parental involvement has a positive effect on the students' academic performance, mostly from elementary through high school. Furthermore, when students identify their parents as the primary source of educational activities at home, both school and home environments become equally important in achieving optimal academic achievement.

### **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

Based on the data analysis, it can be concluded that the development of an adult EFL learner's high reading habit is influenced by spatial, temporal, and social factors. Vanilla, who has a privilege to experience reading habits with various facilities, is proven to have high reading habits. In terms of spatiality, Czech Republic played an important role in shaping her interest in reading. With many interesting reading



activities at school, Vanilla's reading habits eventually shaped. This development was maintained and sustained by her committed parents. Thus, in terms of sociality, there were key persons that accommodated Vanilla's high reading habits. Each key person has responsibility for reading habits at home and then at school. The parents were the main source at home and the teachers were the main source of education at schools that support the reading habits program in Czech Republic. Since there was a limitation about reading habits in Indonesia, the parents kept committed to continuing Czech school's reading habits for Vanilla. This is to stimulate Vanilla's intellectual growth and development. Thus, until today, Vanilla perceives reading habits as a regular activity instead of an obligation. In terms of temporality, Vanilla did not have downgrading reading habits. Instead, it grows more, and she loves reading. This study was limited to reading habits as performed by an Indonesian EFL learner. Thus, it is suggested that further research to elaborate more experiences of students' narrative of developing reading habits as with more diverse family and education background.

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