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## Investigating Students' Interest on Reading Journal Articles: Materials, Reasons and Strategies

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### Abstract

*This article investigates students' reading materials, reasons for reading journal articles, and strategies in handling its difficulties. The data was collected by the use of qualitative method with structured interview. A number of eight students were purposely selected as the participants of this study, each representing eight different units studying in the seventh semester at a university in Banda Aceh, Indonesia. In analyzing the data, this research employed the qualitative descriptive analysis of data organization, data examination and data explanation. The findings showed that the favorite reading materials for students are website articles and social media captions, followed by non-fiction readings and newspapers. It is also found that preparing assignment is the utmost popular reason for reading journal articles for the students. Students also said that looking up in dictionary, internet surfing, consulting friends and lecturers, more practices, predicting the meaning of the words, and partial reading were some strategies they used to tackle the problems of reading journal articles. The implication of this study can be of actual practice to the academic reading course and curriculum and material development, especially for future improvement on students' reading performance and proficiency.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

It is inevitable that one of the most important aspects in human's culture is language. [Dunn \(2011\)](#) states that children obtain language in natural way. He furthermore continuous that children have the ability to copy adults' language. First, they are knowledgeable on everyday dictionaries in English. After sometimes, they can speak, listen, write, and read in English. However, not until they reached the university, they found that academic English is far from easy.

Some argue that from all Basic English skills, reading is somewhat more demanding to grasp, especially "the prevalence of 'late-emerging reading difficulties'" ([Kieffer, 2010, p. 484](#)). Students, should thus have more stimulus to read, because strong enthusiasm and sufficient knowledge on the material will be very helpful in mastering reading. For students in Indonesia, studying English as a foreign language have been exposed to them since they were in the fourth grade of primary school up to their first years as students at the university. Hence, there is no wonder if learning English as a foreign or second language commonly brings anxiety for students ([Chang, 2008](#); [Huang, 2012](#); [Rajab et al., 2012](#)).

Generally speaking, students reading anxiety reduces student's interest, and the way to handle it is always related to their academic performance and proficiency ([Hadidi & Bargezar, 2015](#); [Lien, 2011](#)). Once students start to read, they will be knowledgeable and this will widen and broaden their point of view on specific topics and matters ([Khairuddin, 2013](#)). The relationship between reading curiosity and their vocabulary development ([Duke, 2003](#)), topic interest and comprehension ([Asher, 2017](#)), and fluency ([Jefferson et al., 2017](#)) are also noticed. Thus, reading interest and motivation are directly linked with students' success or failure in school or universities ([Guthrie & Humenick, 2004](#); [Kusumaningrum, 2016](#); [Siregar, 2017](#)). Students with resilient attentiveness in reading, will be more productive and creative compare to those who do not have enthusiasm. With regard to this article context, [Pehlivan et al. \(2010\)](#) uncover that student teachers recorded only average reading interest and attitude. [Bull \(2011\)](#) adds that understanding student teachers' reading habits and interest became even more crucial, as the student teachers will pass and connect on this reading habit to their future students and pupils upon their university graduation.

For this reason, this little but meaningful explanation above was the main driving element of this article. This present study builds upon the prior research by investigating students' interest on reading journal articles. Specifically, this article addresses what students read in their free time, reasons behind their selection to read journal articles, reasons for reading journal articles, and strategies to tackle the difficulties in reading journal articles.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many notions about reading as it has become one of the most basic language skills human need to study. [Aliponga \(2013\)](#), for example, contends that

reading is meant to understand the central notion and main parts of the reading materials, and it is intended to make learners to have deliberate thinking. In the same light, Haager et al. (2007) defines reading as an activity that can serve as a source of knowledge and a cause of delight when they do it strategically and collaboratively. Eventually, when it creates relationship between the reader and the text and when the text can bring the reader to have a sense of solidarity and commonality (Hyland, 2001).

Conferring to the opinion of Moreillon (2007), reading is the process of creating gist from print and visual substantiation. Moreillon (2007), likewise, adds that reading is a rigorous activity which involves intense practices and various skills. In other words, it is simply how a person comprehend the text. Comprehending means readers know the purpose of reading, the context, the meaning of the text, and receive information from it. Cappellini (2005) therefore, recommends that reading is the finest approach to increase English language skill.

Although, Lee-Thompson (2008) mentions that reading in the context of second/foreign language has grasped more attentions later in 1970s, it was not until the late 2000 in which most universities across the globe believed that reading is the key goal that students ought to have in order to be successful in school and in life (Liljequist & Stone, 2009), including in Indonesia in general and Aceh in particular. At Indonesian universities, students study English for some specific commitments, for example, to upgrade their mandatory TOEFL score (Mahmud, 2014), to improve their teaching professionalism (Yuwono & Harbon, 2010), to pass the exam, and to memorize and understand information (Linderholm, 2006).

Students in the English language teaching space are derived from diverse cultural surroundings (Grabe, 2004). That is why McKool (2007) understands reading interest as readings done by students outside the school, or during their free time, and this is very much related to their habit, culture and their upbringings. Furthermore, Khairuddin (2013) acknowledges that reading interest is the aggregate of times students read in a week with regard to their favorite genres and types of English reading materials, and this is yet again strongly linked to their cultural interests. Obviously, students have a number of interests in reading. Students with passionate attitudes in learning English language, will likely read English language related books. Then, indeed students with strong cultural values and religion within the family, will definitely read books or articles about religion. Those illustrations confirm that cultural setting of the students will influence their reading interest.

Schraw and Lehman (2001) classify interest specifically into latent, actualized, text-based, task-based, and knowledge-based interests. Latent interest is defined as the long-term internal curiosity of an individual to know more on a specific issue. This is mainly related to their emotion, value and belief in the learning process. Actualized interest is therefore the reason to learn particular topic, which is more specific than latent interest. The text-based interest is acknowledged by the source of the text that may triggered someone's eagerness to study. On the other hand, the task-based interests are created from the defining goals that drive them to work on the assigned activities and the knowledge-based interest is mirrored by the prior knowledge and encounters.

### **3. METHODS**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This article used a case study in qualitative research to identify students' interest, namely, materials, reasons and strategies on reading journal articles. Qualitative research is an expedient method to explore and understand a case study. [Moleong \(2013\)](#) maintains that qualitative research is hoped as a useful way to specifically understand a case, and not only look at the causality but instead, try to comprehend the studied case. [Yin \(2003\)](#) affirms that the imperative argument from case study is not by the means which is ushered, but marked by the awareness in specific cases. Therefore, in this article, as [Patton \(2002\)](#) suggests, it investigates the details to discover crucial driving aspects of reading materials, reasons and strategies used to overcome the difficulties of student reading interests.

#### **3.2 Participants**

To obtain the information and to grasp the understanding of the case study, the participants selected here were eight seventh semester students representing all eight units of the English Education Department in Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry, Banda Aceh, Indonesia. They were selected because they already passed the Academic Reading and English for Academic Purpose – I classes. According to the department, 241 active students were registered in the seventh semester from the total 291 students recorded in this academic year. In total, there were 15 students receiving “A” score for Academic Reading subject, then we purposively chose eight students from these different eight units with “A” score in the Academic Reading subject.

#### **3.3 Data Collection**

To seek answer to the purpose of this study, structured interview was used to collect data. This type of interview can be used to gather thorough evidence from the participants ([Whetzel et al., 2003](#)). Participants were asked twelve questions of student interests in reading, i.e. the kind of journal articles, their materials of learning, their reasons and strategies in dealing with the difficulties.

#### **3.4 Data Analysis Procedures**

This article used qualitative descriptive analysis. Such selection is departed from the fact that language teaching and learning is multifaceted and qualitative descriptive can provide profound examination on behaviors and experiences ([Nassaji, 2015](#)). In analyzing data, there were several steps taken by following the framework by [Huberman and Miles \(2002\)](#). First, the data preparation for analysis is provided. This step includes organizing the questions for interview, selecting cases, crafting instruments and interviewing the students' participants, transcribing the interviews, making notes, and categorizing the important data depending on the aim of this research. Second, the data analysis, in which all data were thoroughly read in order to gain a bigger picture and the general sense of the data by embracing the literature and to find the details provided in the interviews by participants. This step is aimed at

exploring the participants' opinions. The last step is making explanation of the results. Here, the results are abridged and related them to prior readings and concepts, and presented counsels for forthcoming research.

## 4. FINDINGS

### 4.1 Students' Reading Materials in Leisure Time

Students typically read the materials that may enhance their acquaintance about something, for example about their subject of study. These were reading materials that are connected to their concerns, developed their sense of language, fun, helped them preparing assignments, and satisfied their educational desires. They generally read all-purpose articles on internet. They also had some comforts of some materials, such as broad-spectrum articles, website articles, non-fiction readings, novels, and newspapers. Students inclined to read something that can advance their sense of language in entertaining readings like comics and magazines. Cappellini (2005) says that one of the preeminent ways to develop English language capability is by reading further books printed in English.

#### 4.1.1 Increase their knowledge

The students favored readings that can improve their knowledge. They read materials which would assist them to gather new information. Habitually, they used up time by reading those type of articles. In this light, Student 4 briefly described (D refers to Display of excerpts in this paper, which is presented consecutively):

D1 "I often read articles as given by the lecturers; also, journal articles, to get information".

Likewise, Student 7 shared the same opinion:

D2 "I often read reading materials that are relevant to my (thesis) proposal; to broaden my knowledge".

It is safe to say from the prior statements that this type of students often spent their time-out stint to read something that can develop their awareness. This is in line with Ritchie et al. (2015) that reading might recover the skill to filter the evidence from texts, and it can also advance the overall intellect of the readers and boosts their common familiarity of the issue *fascinating materials*. Some participants decide to read fascinating materials during their leisure time. They also liked to read reading materials, such as general articles, website articles, non-fiction, novels, and newspapers. These are explained in the next sub-sections.

#### a. General article in websites or caption in social media platforms

Internet encouraged the students to read more. Students devoted more time on internet browsing instead of dedicating their time to read printed books in the library

(Jones, 2008). If they did spend time in the library, perhaps they would be spending their time more on surfing through the internet and social media platforms, like Facebook, Instagram and internet messaging services. Students generally read something interesting from the internet, such as website articles authored about the latest topics and individual thoughts. For instance, Student 1 stated:

D3 “The English reading materials that I like to read are such as captions on Instagram. I like to read all about education, culture, and religion”.

From the student's statement above, it can be inferred that the student decided to read for pleasure. Universal evidence on website article was an exciting reading source for them. Students sometimes also read articles on education, culture, and religion to increase their level of reading interests. As Feger (2006) outlines that student's engagement in reading is very much depending on culturally relevant texts' content.

*b. Non-fiction readings*

Some students also admitted to read non-fiction reading as their thrilling choice for spending their time. For instance, Student 3 ensured:

D4 “Reading material contains with motivation to be successful, about dream, being optimistic, also about classroom management, because I like learning about classroom management. So, if there is reading about classroom management, I usually read it”.

Non-fiction is a favorite reading material for students to spend their leisure time because it empowers teaching student to think and it provides different kinds of information (Gear, 2008). As has been mentioned above, the students mostly read about inspiration to be successful, to achieve their dreams, and topics on classroom management. These are part of the reader factors, which are correlated to their life background, interest, and motivation in reading (Gopal & Mahmud, 2019).

*c. Novels and newspapers*

Fiction reading is at all times motivating for its lovers. Students chose this, such as novels to spend their free time. The student reiterated that newspaper is also attention-grabbing because they could discover many knowledge and current issues discussed in it. In this case, Student 5 argued:

D5 “I read novels because they are more interesting. I read newspapers because there are hot issues that can attract my attention, so I read them”.

From the student's statement above, it showed that students usually have stimulating materials to read such as novels, stories and newspapers in their free time. This is in line with a research piloted by Al-Nafisah (2011), it was found that students decided to read based on their interests. Bataineh and Al-Shorman (2005) also uncover that students often selected a reading by its heading, writer, style, theme, cover, characters, movie adaption, and dimension.

#### 4.1.2 *To have fun and to improve the sense of language*

Students correspondingly read for enjoyment and for refining their sense of language. As Student 2 preferred:

D6 “To have a lot of fun, I mostly read about entertainment such as comics or magazines. Because they are very helpful to get the sense of language”.

The statement above showed that the students read for fun to hone the sense of language, such as comics, cartoons and magazines. The students revealed that they can learn something not only from serious readings assigned by their lecturers, but they can also learn from other fun readings. Cappellini (2005) also proposes that one of the top ways to advance English language skill is by reading more materials in English.

#### 4.1.3 *To help prepare assignments*

Most students obviously read for preparing or completing their academic projects, assignments or course works. They must read because they should finish their tasks with dependable references. Since all participants were in the seventh semester, hence they should write research proposals for their English Language Research class, and most of their thesis-related projects obliged them to read through lots of journal articles. Here is what Student 3 understood:

D7 “... read articles which are connected to my coursework”.

Correspondingly, Student 7 shared the same view:

D8 “I often read reading materials that are connected to my proposal. According to my lecturer, I should read these materials to support my proposal”.

As explained above, the students were obliged to read for preparing writing proposals and projects. Hence, they picked out to read readings that can help them finish their research proposals, such as journal articles. Clump et al. (2004) highlight relatively small number of students are generally able accomplish their apportioned readings. They furthermore explain that most students will wait until the deadline is looming before reading the academic journal articles to finally complete the projects.

## 4.2 **Reasons to Read Journal Articles**

From the interviews, it is known that students have dissimilar drives in reading journal articles. Some students read journal articles to prepare their coursework. Some others read journal articles to write their thesis. The remaining read journal articles because they like the titles, topic, etc.

#### 4.2.1 *For assignments*

All students taking part were the last year English major students at the department. This means that they were preparing for their proposal, thesis writing, or

seminar. For example, they were assigned to write a mini thesis or proposal, to conduct a mini-research, to make journal article reviews, to paraphrase journal articles and the likes. Those assignments were regularly set by their lecturers to help them get used to run their own (independent) research. Here is what Student 2 suggested:

D9 “The main purpose is to know the structure, and to know how to create one because sometimes, our lecturers ... demanded us to write a journal article, so it is very beneficial for me if I read a lot of journal articles and I know the structure and how to write a journal article”.

Correspondingly, Student 8 uttered:

D10 “If I have a lot of assignments, I read three times in a week to help me in doing my assignments”.

Accordingly, it can be seen that one of the reasons the students read journal articles was to do their tasks. [Adamson and Fujimoto-Adamson \(2011\)](#) claim that this method is known for helping students to have their essays completed. Students read journal articles to acquire more knowledge on how to write scientific papers, or to paraphrase journal articles.

#### *4.2.2 For thesis proposal references*

The department holds a colloquium for thesis proposal presentation for every 7<sup>th</sup> semester student with four lectures in the board of examiners. One of the preconditions to schedule for this is by presenting the proposal. A thesis proposal comprises background of research, research problems, goals, method, and technical terms explanation. Students must read a lot of journal articles for their proposal's references.

D11 “I often read journal articles, especially this time, because I should finish my thesis proposal, so in a week I can read more than five journal articles”.

Equally, Student 4 informed:

D12 “So far, to write my proposal and to collect more references for my proposal”.

Student 5, Student 6, and Student 7 also discussed that their purpose of reading journal articles was to support them in preparing their thesis proposal. Well-written writings containing title, abstract, introduction, methods, results, discussions, and references requires extensive reading of prior studies ([Subramanyam, 2013](#)). This is because thesis is unlike creative writing in the literature whereby the authors do not need to read others' scholarly writings or research, instead rely more on free thoughts.

### **4.3 Students' Strategies to Overcome Difficulties in Reading Journal Articles**

There are a number of ways exercised by students to handle the complications in reading journal articles. Most of them used the dictionary and internet surfing to anticipate problems in reading. Some others questioned their friends and inquired their

lecturers to help them apprehend the journal articles. They also did more practices in reading journal articles. They also often try to predict the meaning and try to apply partial readings of the journal articles in their writing. The strategies they used are further elaborated below.

#### *4.3.1. Dictionary checking and internet surfing*

Dictionary and internet are now easily accessed by everyone. The students frequently used them to search for meaning of words. They too discover more enlightenment on the internet if they feel the dictionary does not provide what they want. Here what Student 1 shared:

D13 “So, my way to overcome the difficulties in reading journal articles is by looking for the words’ meanings in Bahasa Indonesian (i.e. Indonesian language). This is because journal articles do not use everyday language, but they use academic language. That is difficult for me because I still lack of English vocabulary...I also look for the meaning on the Internet, because some words have different meanings. If I just use dictionary, it has limited explanation about the meaning”.

In the same way, Student 8 explained:

D14 “I often find words that are difficult to understand, because sometimes the words are “high” level for me. So, I will solve it by looking for the meaning in the dictionary. Then, I will understand the context. If only I have known a word that I do not know the meaning before, then I will know the whole context after I look for the meaning in the dictionary”.

It is argued that the students used the dictionary and internet to understand the hard words and semantic uses. Languages are fairly significant for improving students’ skill in reading. [Luckner and Cooke \(2010\)](#) state that vocabulary and language are vital to communicate, to read, to think and to learn. [Wang \(2012\)](#) points out that electronic dictionary is imperious to increase reading understanding from intermediate to advanced level of readers. Dictionaries are potent tools to improve vocabulary bank whereas reading is vital to increase reading conception ([Hamilton, 2012](#)).

#### *4.3.2 Consult friends and lecturers*

For some students, they resorted to lecturers and friends once they felt that the dictionary was not helpful. They would consult friends and their lecturers to clarify the things they do not comprehend. Student 3 elaborated:

D15 “These are my ways in overcoming the difficulties in reading journal articles for the first time. The first is I will try to look for the meaning in the dictionary or Google translate, or etc. Then, if I am still struggling, I will look for the journal article which has the same or similar topic with the journal article that I read. I will comprehend it first and go back to the journal article I read. Then, if I still find it difficult, I will usually ask my friends. Finally, if I still cannot get it, I will ask my lecturer to explain the meaning.”

By the same token, Student 5 expressed:

D16 “So, in overcoming the difficulties in reading journal articles, such as the vocabulary which I do not know the meaning, usually I use a dictionary. I use the electronic dictionary. Then if there is a sentence which I have little information about its meaning, I would use Google Translate. But Google Translate sometimes does not get it 100%, sometimes the translation is confusing. So, I also ask my friends who have better understanding about the sentence’s meaning”.

Student 6 also argued that she would ask her friends to translate the difficult words if Google Translate does not make any logical connection to the texts. Therefore, it the other technique for overpowering their difficulties in reading journal articles is by consulting friends and lecturers. In fact, [Moreillon \(2007\)](#) claims that asking questions while reading may help readers to stay connected with the text.

#### *4.3.3 Read and practice more*

Students similarly said that they can develop their reading capability by keeping on reading and practicing more. Student 2 voiced:

D17 “Alright, so about the things that I did to overcome the difficulties in reading journal articles, ummm I do not think other methods work, but the thing that I believe is just that I need to practice. If you practice more, you will overcome the difficulties. But instead, if you just...you know, read once, or two times a week, it will not improve your reading ability, especially in reading journal article. So, for me, practice is an essential thing.”

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that students used reading and practicing more strategies to reduce their difficulty in reading journal articles. Rehearsing more to read will arguably develop their reading skill. In the same light, [Apsari \(2014\)](#) pinpoints that the drive to read plays a central role in reading in a new language. It can develop students’ comprehension and vocabulary acquirement while reading, and thus, the more they practice, the more they comprehend the content.

#### *4.3.4 Predict the meaning and apply partial reading*

Another strategy from students in facing their difficulties in reading journal article was by estimating the meaning and applying partial reading approach. By predicting the meaning, the students sometimes would get the overall sense of the article. In this case, Student 7 conveyed:

D18 “...sometimes I try to guess the meaning of the word by connecting the words before it to the next sentence. So, I use some of tricks actually...”.

Reading some parts of the article also helped students in overcoming their difficulties in reading journal articles. Student 4 affirmed:

D19 “...But, if I do not have time to translate it, I usually read some parts, only some parts of the journal article such as the abstract, introduction, conclusion, or summary of the journal, because I think, those parts in journal article usually will represent the whole context or the whole information that the journal wants to tell us. So, that is why I usually only read those parts. That is how I overcome the difficulties in reading journal articles.”

Another way of overcoming their difficulties in reading journal articles is by guessing the sense through close reading. They correspondingly just read some parts which they consider would clarify the content of the article in general. [Purugganan and Hewitt \(2004\)](#) mention that people can read an article quicker and understand more comprehensively by taking into account some features for idea abstraction such as the purpose of study, methodology results, and discussions.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The result of the present study revealed that students have diverse types of reading materials to spend their free time. [Nippold et al. \(2005\)](#) argue that literacy proves to be essential in language progress. By reading different types of readings like books, magazines, and newspapers, one can use it as a worthy chance to study new words and terms. Other students preferred to read something fascinating such as comics, cartoons, novels, magazines, short stories, non-fiction articles, website articles, and newspapers. Some others also repeatedly started to read more journal articles, because they are forced by condition to read a lot of journal articles to prepare for their thesis proposal. They said that they must have a lot of references to help their writing or those with certain topics related to their proposed research, such as topics on language, education, etc.

Hence, students' lack of curiosity in reading journal articles we also found during the interviews. [Hoefl \(2012\)](#) reiterates that very often students basically surrender and left their assignments when they had disappointments trying to understand the texts or reading materials. Therefore, with regard to the strategies students used to deal with difficulties in reading journal articles, the result revealed that students have dissimilar means to solve their obstacles while reading journal articles. There were at least four strategies found from the students' responses. First, most students decided to use the dictionary and internet search when facing problematic words in journal articles. Second, they went to enquire their friends especially when the dictionary cannot help them much. Third is by reading a lot and doing extra practices to increase their reading knowledge. The last is by predicting the meaning and applying partial readings to some main sections of the journal articles. Such strategies are in line to what have been studied by [Singh \(2014\)](#) in which he finds that students' strategies to handle the encounters in academic reading practice are often handled by reading the assigned texts many times and by using a dictionary. Moreover, these strategies that the students used have imply that they did have motivation to enhance their self-regulated learning mechanism ([Kolić-Vehovec et al., 2008](#)) in overcoming reading difficulties.

Nevertheless, possible limitations or weaknesses of this article can provide recommendation for future researchers on this topic. One of the first limitations here is the data collection part. There were several incomplete and incomprehensive

answers from the students as the participants. It could be driven by certain imprecise questions designed. At that point, the size of the sample is still far from perfection in which most of the inquired participants were female students. In the future, a more balanced representation of sample between male and female students can possibly disclose even more interesting findings, analysis and discussions.

Hence, the findings of this research should encourage the department management of the university under study to address and provide more practical content in the already available course to mitigate students' lack of interest in reading journal articles. By doing so, students can better realize how vital journal articles is in their last year of college before graduation, because they are required to write their thesis in their final year of study. Students, moreover, can be given some enjoyable academic readings, for instance, webtoon comics with scientific terms, e.g. *Dr. Frost* and *Sekotengs*, to increase their attention in reading journal articles. For lecturers, it is expected that they will know how to treat the detected problems and able to guide the students to read journal articles. It is also hoped that the lecturers will provide the most compatible current method and valuable advices for students in reading journal articles.

Consequently, although this article has provided a simple plain fact about students' lack of interest in reading journal articles in one specific, small but compelling samples in a university context, it is seriously lacking the assorted representation of students' reading interest in the secondary schools' contexts in Aceh. Future researchers are hoped to bail out this spot, so that the overall picture of what factors caused serious students' lack of interest inside and outside classroom settings will be more than welcomed.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The article has provided understandings in the current readings on students' interest as the main factor in improving students reading performance and proficiency, especially in the final year students at the university and higher education contexts. From this study, the students' lack of interest in reading journal articles is mainly influenced by some factors such as text or reading materials' selection, and also the text-reader factors. Furthermore, goal orientation is proved to be the decisive strategy in increasing student motivation and interest in reading. Its role and motivational components can enhance self-regulated learning mechanism within students' internal considerations. Once these issues are addressed, students can be more motivated and enthusiastic to read more academic texts. Eventually, they can have more desire to read and learn academic text or materials for their own specific purposes.

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