

Enhancing English Reading Proficiency through Student Reading Habits

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to obtain students' reading habits to strengthen their English reading skills. This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach. This research examines phenomena related to students' reading habits in terms of strengthening and improving English reading skills. The sample was 100 fifth-semester students of the English Reading Class. The sampling technique uses purposive sampling. The data collection process uses three types of data: 1) observations obtained to observe students' reading habits during learning activities and 2) questionnaires given to students to find out their habits outside the classroom according to their point of view and the situations they experience. The data analysis technique uses three stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion. The results of this research conclude that students have good reading habits in the campus environment and read a lot of books to complete their coursework. Meanwhile, reading activity at home is very low and parental support in building reading habits is also non-existent because reading activities together are not carried out at home. The results of this research also have implications for teachers' understanding of how to motivate students to have high reading habits outside the classroom and also provide authentic teaching materials so that reading activities can be done more outside the classroom.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The actual reading activity is the interaction between the reader and the text in constructing meaning. For this reason, through reading, a person will obtain information, knowledge and new experiences. Reading conveys everything, allowing the person to expand their thinking power, sharpen their views, and broaden their horizons. Thus, the habit of reading is an essential activity for students to improve their English reading skills. Moreover, English books are reading materials used in students' daily lives. Because reading not only understand the meaning of the text but also understand the phenomena of social life in society. Understanding reading content is related to how a person understands the context and has experience. Thus, reading skills allow students to understand the social context.

In addition, reading lots of books can benefit students in Class or build students' awareness and reading habits (Iftanti & Shofiya, 2018). The practice of reading has many positive impacts on students because it is not only related to increasing knowledge but can also impact other subjects. Reading habits are one of the strongest predictors of academic success. Due to advances in ICT, students' reading habits have changed (Alsaedi, Ngadiran, Kadir, & Altowayti, 2021). These study results align with what Anderson said: reading comprehension ability cannot be separated from student success in an academic context where reading is the primary means of conveying lesson content and displaying learning content (Stoller & Nguyen, 2020).

So, it can be concluded that good reading habits can provide reading comprehension skills. Students can also make this reading habit a hobby by reading various reading materials (Gabriel, 2016; Starkey, 2020). The results of this research illustrate that not all students prefer reading multiple reading materials. Reading materials in literary works can provide knowledge in reading comprehension (Rahman, 2018). The use of simplified literary texts and authentic literary texts as a substitute for general academic texts has a positive effect on EFL students' reading comprehension (Bakhshizadeh Gashti, 2018), as well as the performance of understanding the content of literary texts (Magulod, 2018).

Thus, reading habits are essential in students' reading comprehension skills. Reading habits are determined by measuring how often a person reads, how long they read, and what they read. Reading is an essential part of the learning span, especially for students. The research results show that reading habits, such as intellectual writing abilities, influence students' academic achievement (Abul Firas, H A., & Mohammed Rizvi, 2021)(Khoirunnisa & Safitri, 2018). Reading habits can also develop skills such as thinking, judgment, adaptability, and creativity in students, which can be used when facing world change (Le et al., 2019). Therefore, educators must be able to motivate students to have reading habits and attitudes (Baba & Affendi, 2020).

From the presentation of previous research, it is clear that teachers must understand the framework of students' reading habits so that reading comprehension learning activities in Class can positively impact students' academic achievement results. Therefore, this research presents a different gap from previous research because the orientation of this research examines in more depth the reading habits of students in the digital era and teaching and learning activities that involve a lot of technology after the COVID-19 pandemic. Apart from that, how can students' habits strengthen their English reading skills during this time?

Another consideration that is the reason for presenting this research gap is related to the changing conditions of the teaching and learning system during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Over two years, students experience changes in learning activities and become more independent. Learning activities rely on digital technology as a communication medium or substitute for face-to-face learning activities. In this situation, students are required to read a lot to understand the teaching material, and students can develop good reading habits. However, the results of observations during one semester in the Reading 1 course in the English study program at one of the State Islamic Universities in Mataram showed a change in students' reading habits. The reading test results in the odd 2023-2024 academic year semester. The analysis results of student reading are also only available in the literal context. Using the independent campus learning curriculum directs the achievement of critical thinking processes.

From the problem findings and previous research studies, these findings are interesting to study and analyse so that they can become material for educators to consider in mapping learning activities in the Reading 1 course. So, this research aims to obtain students' reading habits to strengthen their English reading skills. It is also hoped that the results of this research will benefit the development of English reading teaching and motivate students to develop the habit of reading as a hobby. Thus, this can also have an impact on improving their academic achievement.

2. METHODS

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach. This research examines phenomena related to students' reading habits in strengthening and improving English reading skills (Creswell &

Creswell, 2018). The sample was 100 fifth-semester students of the English Reading Class. The sample determination technique uses purposive sampling. The study was conducted from August to October 2023 at the English Department of UIN Mataram. The data collection process uses three types of data: 1) observations obtained to observe students' reading habits during learning activities and 2) questionnaires given to students to find out their habits outside of Class according to the perspectives and situations they experience.

The questionnaire referred to several aspects, namely reading attitudes, reading frequency, number of books read, time spent on academic reading, time spent on non-academic reading, motivation in the family environment, and motivation in the educational environment. Because the measurement of this questionnaire is related to students' attitudes, which refer to their reading habits, the measure of reading habits uses a Likert scale (Gaona & González, 2011). The answer choices on the questionnaire using five categories are always (A), often (O), sometimes (SS), rarely (RR), and never (N). Each answer option gave a weighted score as follows: for each statement item answered, it was consistently scored 5; if answered Often, provide a score of 4; if answered sometimes, it gave a score of 3; if answered rarely, provide a score of 2; and if answered Never, give a score of 1.

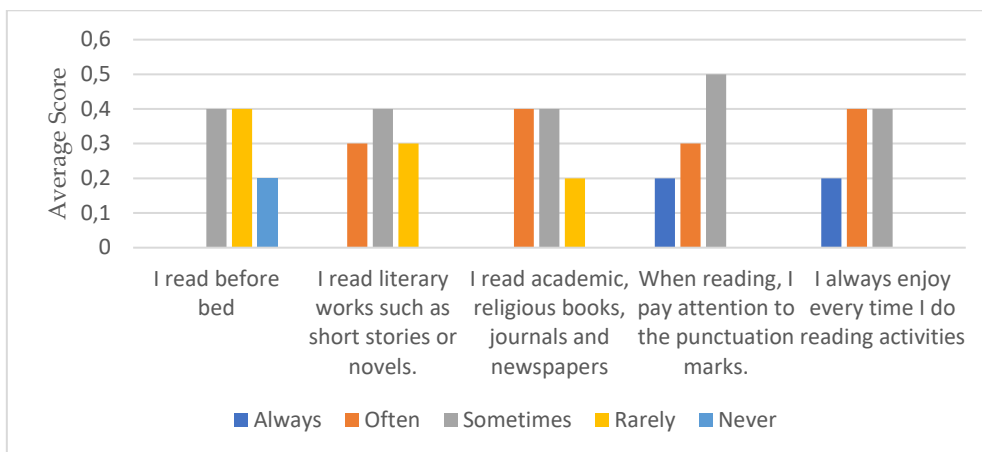
Table 1. Aspect of Habit Reading for Questionnaire

Aspects of reading habits		Answer Choice				
		A	O	SS	RR	N
1	Reading attitude					
2	Reading frequency					
3	Number of books read.					
4	Time spent on academic reading					
5	Time spent on non-academic reading					
6	Motivation in the family environment					
7	Motivation in the academic environment					

The data analysis technique uses three stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The first stage is data reduction carried out to collect data, process data selection, simplify data and transform data according to the needs of the problem focus. At this stage, researchers distributed questionnaires to students and observed reading activities in class. The second stage is data presentation, which is related to data processing and analysis. The data that has been obtained from distributing questionnaires is processed and presented in the form of percentages. Meanwhile, the results of observations of students' reading activities in class are outlined in research notes, which are used to support the analysis of questionnaire data. The third stage is drawing conclusions, which are carried out to present the findings of the problem.

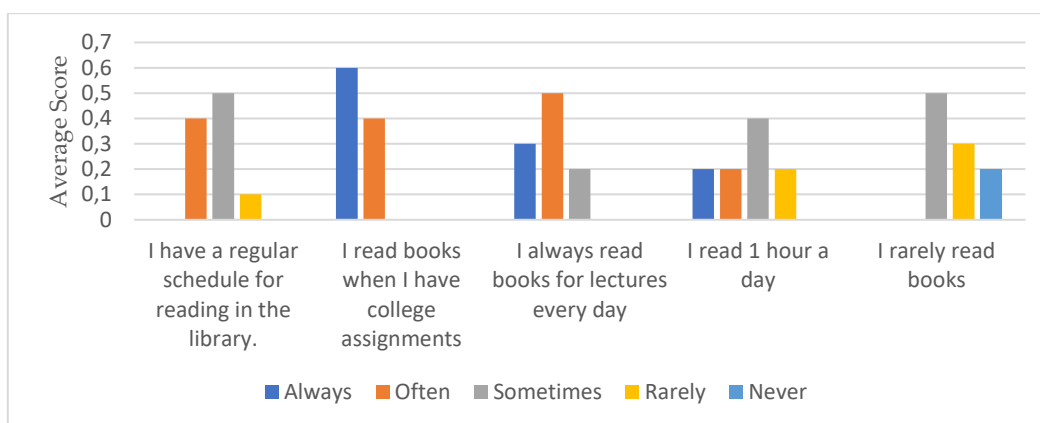
3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the questionnaire distribution data analysis to determine students' reading habits in the digital era are presented in the graph below using average.



Graph 1. Students' Reading Attitude

Graph 1 shows that students' reading attitudes are still low and have not yet made the habit of reading a daily activity or engagement activity. Of the five statements given, it shows that the level of student attitudes in reading books is still in the answer choices sometimes. Of the 100 students who have a love for reading literary works such as novels or short stories, there are 30 people and the answers are dominated by sometimes as many as 40 students.



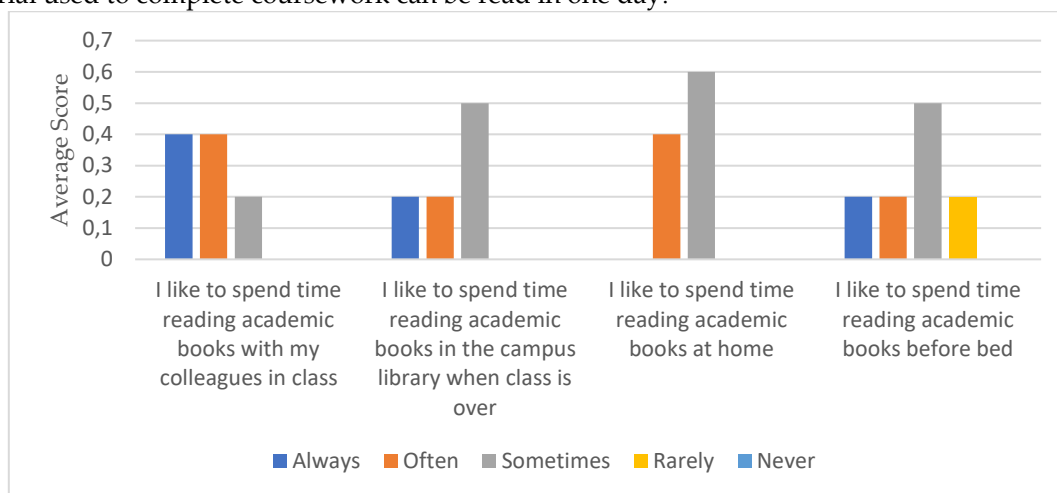
Graph 2. Students' Reading Frequency

Graph 2 shows that students have a very good frequency of reading books when they have college assignments. However, overall the average value shows that the frequency of students' good reading habits is dominated by the answer always. Although most students' reading activities are carried out because of assignments or projects from lecturers. However, there are still 50% or 0.5 of students who rarely read books.



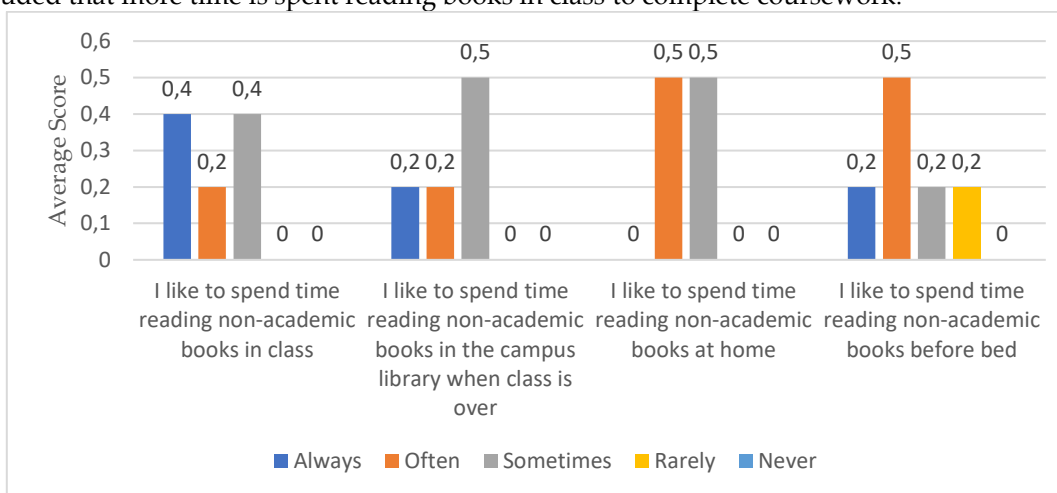
Graph 3. Number of Books Read

Graph 3 shows that the books that are widely read are 60% related to college assignments. Meanwhile, students rarely finish reading books in a short time. From the results of classroom observations, students complete their reading in no more than 3 months, except that the reading material used to complete coursework can be read in one day.



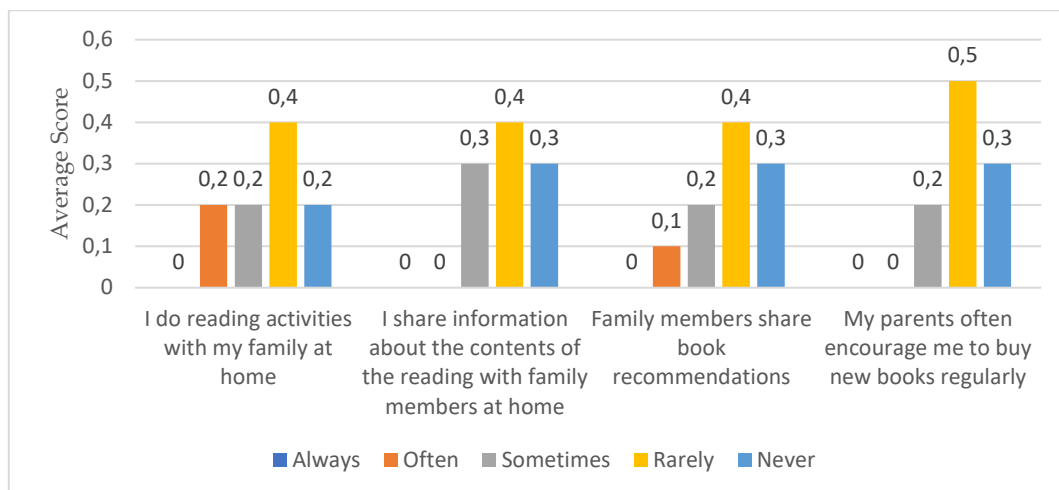
Graph 4. Time Spent on Academic Reading

Graph 4 shows that students spend more time reading academic books in class. This can be shown from the always and often percentage level, namely 40% or an average of 0.4. The graphic data also shows that students rarely spend time reading in the campus library at 0.5. Apart from that, students also rarely read academic books at home or do reading activities before going to bed. It can be concluded that more time is spent reading books in class to complete coursework.



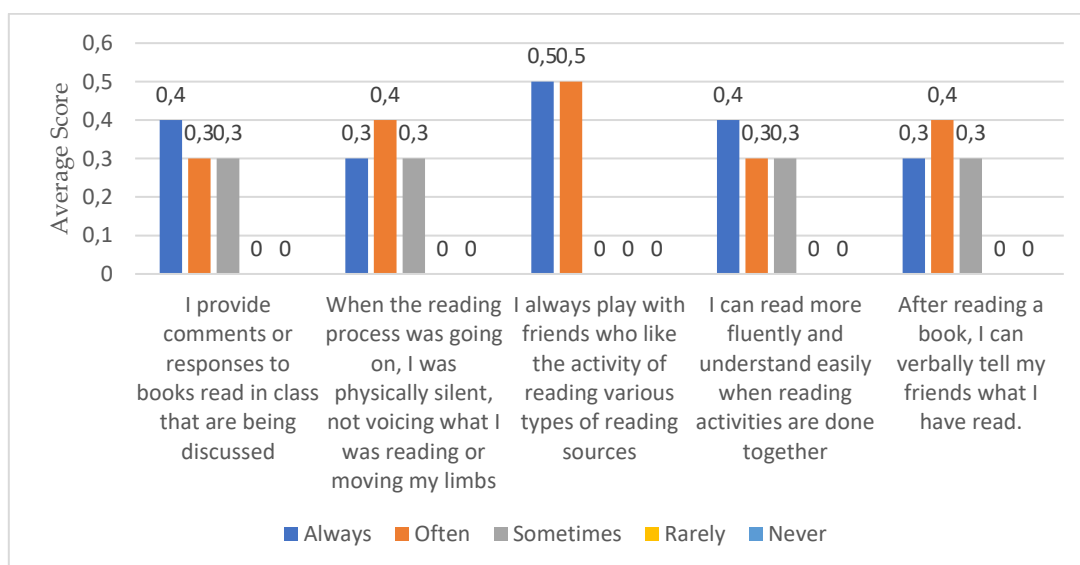
Graph 5. Time Spent on Non-Academic Reading

Graph 5 shows that there is a significant difference in academic reading habits. Of the four questions given, it shows that 40% of students often do non-academic book reading habits in class and 20% of non-academic book reading activities are done in the library and before bed. In-depth observation also shows that the non-academic books they often read are literary works or news circulating via social media. The results of previous studies also show that literary texts increase students' interest in reading, so they can be useful as reading material in class (Nurrohmah, Suparman, & Sukirlan, 2015). The activity of reading and discussing literary texts is an important component of secondary and advanced university language education (Urlaub, 2012).



Graph 6. Motivation in the Family Environment

The data displayed in Graph 6, shows that students do not have reading activities with their families. The four questions given, show that the majority of students' answers were never. 20% of students do reading activities with their families at home, and from in-depth observation, their parents focus on their children's educational goals. Meanwhile, 20% of students share information about reading books, and the activity of sharing books is carried out with younger siblings or older siblings. So, it is concluded that the family environment does not support students in having the habit of reading.



Graph 7. Motivation in the Academic Environment

Graph 7 shows that the level of student motivation for reading activities in academic environments, such as dictionaries, is quite high. This is in line with the finding that students read a lot of books when they have project assignments that must be completed. Of the five questions given, the answer choice is often. Students like reading activities in class and discussing with their colleagues. The choice of always and often, which has the largest percentage, namely 50%, is shown in the attitude of students who play with students who have the same preference for reading books.

The findings of this research show that students' reading activities or reading habits after the COVID-19 pandemic are still low and they carry out reading activities when they have college assignments. Other research at the Open University in India shows that there are differences in students' reading habits before and after the lockdown including aspects of reading frequency and reading materials, reading sources, reading styles, reasons for reading, and time spent reading (Adigun, Oyewusi, & Aramide, 2021; Vyas & Tandel, 2020). However, this study found that the level of student

habits in English classes at Mataram State University was still low and the results of in-depth observations showed that the level of motivation to read in the home environment was low. So students are more motivated to carry out reading activities on campus and students' English reading skills are also quite good as can be seen from their coursework completion activities.

Even the 100 students who filled out the questionnaire indicated that they did not do reading activities at home with their families. Thus, it can be said that parents should be able to play a bigger role in building their reading habits (Bano, Jabeen, & Qutoshi, 2018). This certainly shows that students have low motivation for reading activities outside the classroom or campus. Even though reading habits have a close relationship with reading proficiency (Br Marpaung, 2020). This means that their reading habits can build a social life outside the classroom. Thus, students can become competent readers in the 21st century. They can integrate the knowledge, skills and processes needed to develop reading skills (Alexander et al., 2012).

Reading habits form one of the most crucial foundations for a strong and developed personality. In today's rapidly evolving world, where science and technology continually bring changes to human life, there is a constant need for individuals to improve themselves in both professional and social spheres. Lifelong learning and education have become essential, especially in developing careers and adapting to change after formal education. Students, in particular, are expected to exhibit high levels of reading habits, as this is a key criterion for both individual and social development. Consequently, assessing students' reading habits is vital not only for addressing their immediate educational needs but also for fostering their personal development throughout their lives (Erdem, 2015).

A strong reading habit enhances cognitive abilities, critical thinking, and creativity, equipping students with the tools necessary to navigate complex problems and make informed decisions. Furthermore, reading exposes students to diverse perspectives and cultures, promoting empathy and global awareness. In light of these benefits, educational institutions should prioritize initiatives that encourage and support robust reading practices among students. By doing so, we can ensure that students are well-prepared for the challenges of the future, both in their careers and in their roles as informed and engaged citizens.

These findings offer valuable insights for teachers on how to boost student motivation to engage in reading activities outside the classroom. Furthermore, universities can develop policies aimed at enhancing students' reading habits. This can include providing resources and creating environments that encourage students to read more (Balan, Katenga, & Simon, 2019). Reading activities are beneficial not only for improving academic achievement (Dolmaz & Kaya, 2019), but also essential for students' daily lives and future careers.

In addition to academic success, regular reading fosters critical thinking, creativity, and a deeper understanding of the world, which are crucial skills in both personal and professional contexts. Universities should consider implementing programs that promote reading, such as book clubs, reading challenges, and access to diverse reading materials. Such initiatives can help cultivate a lifelong love of reading, which can significantly contribute to personal growth and career readiness.

Moreover, integrating reading activities into various aspects of university life, such as incorporating relevant books into the curriculum and providing dedicated reading spaces, can further support the development of strong reading habits. By prioritizing reading, educational institutions can ensure that students are well-equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary for their future endeavors, making them more adaptable and informed individuals in an ever-changing world.

4. CONCLUSION

The results of this research concluded that students have good reading habits in the campus environment and read a lot of books to complete college assignments. Meanwhile, reading activity at home is very low and parental support for building reading habits is also non-existent because reading activities together are not carried out at home. Students prefer reading in class or the library with colleagues, especially when they have to complete a project from the lecturer. So, it can be concluded

that reading habits in the classroom or on campus are still good, but reading habits at home or outside the classroom are low. So, the results of this study can be used as consideration for study programs in developing courses to increase students' interest in reading even higher, especially for reading habits outside of class.

The results of this research also have implications for teachers' understanding of how to motivate students to have strong reading habits outside the classroom and also provide authentic teaching materials so that reading activities can be carried out more outside the classroom. This research is also still limited to studying students' reading habits to improve their English reading skills. So, the next researchers can develop studies related to interest in reading or other factors that can influence their level of habit. Moreover, the habit of reading can make it easier for students to complete various other course assignments. So, the reading habit factor has a very important role for students.

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