

Indonesian Students' Reading Literacy

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Abstract— Reading is supposed to be an activity frequently performed by university students. However, not all students are fond of reading, particularly in the digital era. This study aims to identify students' reading literacy both in their family and their campus and determine whether campus library maximally utilized. Performing as the subjects of this study were 307 students at Atma Jaya Catholic University in Jakarta, Indonesia. The data were collected through google docs, in-depth interviews, and observation. The collected qualitative and quantitative data were then descriptively analyzed. This study found that the students were rarely or even never told stories by their parents in their childhood. Reading literacy stimulates when they went to school and joined competitions concerning reading literacy. At university, the students read for one to two hours a day. Some of them tend to be lazy (38%) and not motivated to read (33%). When they do, they merely read one book for the last two months (43%). They spend more time with the gadget (61%) and go to the library, not for reading (3%), but learning and discussion (70%). This study concluded that Indonesian university students' reading literacy is still unsatisfactory.

Keywords— *reading habit, literacy, higher education, culture, storytelling*

I. INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, literacy is the ability to read and write [1]. UNESCO defines literacy as “the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, compute, and use printed and written materials associated with varying contexts” [2]. Until now, reading literacy is a global issue in need of serious attention. The results of a program of International Students Assessment [3] and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study [4] indicated there are several countries with the low level of reading literacy; some of them reveal no significant improvement in periodic evaluation. It is a necessary and vital literacy to filter and analyze knowledge and information spreading out rapidly. Also, reading literacy is a crucial factor influencing intellectual and emotional development [5]. Therefore, reading literacy is need of serious attention for the sake of better quality of future human resources. Reading activities in higher education is different from those in a secondary school; however, reading habit and interest in secondary education influences that in higher education. Academic activities in higher education involve reading and writing tasks. The more one reads, the better they become in academic achievements, in class discussion, and

understanding their reading as well as their writing [6]. Reading a lot of literature is such a demand for higher education students to be able to create scientific works with good quality.

In the digital era, the sources of reading are not only printed but also digital. The data from We Are Social prove that global internet users have increased as much as 9.1% (367 million people) ranging from January 2018 to January 2019. In Indonesia, the number of internet users has increased by 13% since last year [7]. The rapid growth of technology has distracted students' attention; they are reading less than they should be [8]. A study showed that reading habit decreases as technology advances [5]. Social media, for instance, have been widely used more for interaction and communication with their peers instead of academic tasks [9].

Issues on reading have been studied theoretically and empirically [10], [11]. Previous studies had incorporated the relation between reading and motivation [12], [13]; the roles of teachers in motivating their students [14]; the relationship between reading and second language learning success [14], [12], even the relation between reading and gender [15], [11]. In higher education level, studies have analyzed using participants either from homogeneous yet heterogeneous majors [6], [16], [12], [17]. It has been reported that “today's college students do not read” [8]; “Many college students today are not strong readers; they regularly report that they do not like to read” [17]. Total 56% of 1,200 respondents read less than an hour a day, and 13% even admitted that they never read at all [18]. Another study revealed that as many as 1,138 respondents spend their time reading books, newspapers, and magazines for entertainment during 4.3 hours a week, while they spend 31.18 hours a week for going to the theater, listening to radio, music, and watching television [8]. National Library in 1982 reported that Malaysians read two books a year (2005). In the meantime, it has been proven that 42% of 142 subjects in Hampton University read textbooks every day [17] and 82% of 1,200 students in three universities in Sweden read textbooks only when there is an assignment [16]. This study aims to reveal the reading culture shaped by family and secondary education and identify whether campus library maximally utilized. This study includes both academic and non-academic reading.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

This study is descriptive qualitative and quantitative research. In this study, the participants were 307 students (58.3% female and 41.7% male), which selected randomly. The study was conducted in Indonesian Language and Scientific Writing classes on the even semester academic year of 2018/2019 for students in the 2014 year to 2018 year generation coming from four different majors: pharmacy (8%), engineering (15%), economics and business (28%), and biotechnology (49%) at Atma Jaya Catholic University of Indonesia. Meanwhile, the object of the study is reading literacy. Data were collected through a closed questionnaire distributed through google docs, direct observation of students' campus activities, and in-depth interviews with ten students randomly selected, majoring economics and pharmacy. The questionnaire distributed consisted of the habit of storytelling in the family, reading literacy at elementary, junior, and senior high schools, the habit of spending leisure time in college, reading frequency, purposes of reading, and the use of the library. The google docs was completed by semi-structured interviews recorded using a tape recorder. The questionnaire data were analyzed quantitatively in frequency and percentage tabulation. The interview results were transcribed so that the verbal data were analyzed thematically and qualitatively.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Reading Habit in the Family and Schools Before

The participants of the study classified into generation Z who are bare, if never, in touch with storytelling or bedtime stories in their childhood. At home, they do not have a model of the excellent reader; there is only a dad keep mentioning as a person who reads newspapers daily and big brothers or sisters who read textbooks. The participants admit that sometimes they go to the bookstore to have a look or buy books. In junior and high schools, they joined reading literacy competitions when their teachers instructed them to participate as some respondents stated, "*Ikut lomba spelling bee waktu SD, menulis karya tulis waktu SMP, SMA*" (I joined a spelling bee competition in elementary school and writing competition in junior and senior high schools) (J, female); "*Menulis bersambung di SD, lomba-lomba literasi karya tulis bahasa Inggris tentang narkoba di SMA, juga esai bahasa Inggris*" (Writing competition in primary school, English writing on drugs and English free essay in senior high school) (S, female); "*Ikut story telling di kelas 5 SD, puisi, balas pantun SMP apa SMA*" (I joined storytelling competition in fifth grade, and poetry and unrequited rhyme competitions in junior and senior high school) (Sh, female).

The fact inferred that reading habit within the family is not well established. Parents' busy activities give them little time to tell stories to their children at early ages. One of the subjects stated, "*Pernah tapi gak sering jadi kapan-kapan juga waktu mau tidur yang dongeng pembantu seingat saya*" (As long as I remember, but not even, it was my nanny who gave me bedtime stories) (G, male). The subjects of the study have a lack of stimulation from their family so that their reading habit and interest are not well shaped. When the children go to elementary school, their parents put their

full trust of education to the school; in fact, parents are the first teachers who matter the most to their children [2]. Fortunately, at school, reading literacy is introduced and developed. It has been proven from the interview results that some of the literacy competitions they joined are upon their own will, and some based on their teachers' instruction.

B. Reading Habits on Campus

Television used to be the only source of both information and entertainment; however, nowadays, gadgets are replacing television position. The presence of ICT in the forms of such gadgets as handphones, computers, tablets, and laptops bring an impact to college students. These devices turn into the source of information accessible everywhere and every time. It is no surprise that gadgets are primary needs to the subjects of this study as some of them said, "*Dari SMA udah gak pernah nonton TV karena semua ada di laptop, komputer, internet. Acara TV lagian kurang menarik udah banyak iklan*" (I have stopped waiting for TV since high school because everything is in the laptop, computer, and the internet. TV shows are somehow not interesting cause they have a lot of advertisements) (FR, male); "*Pernah (nonton TV), tapi sekarang-sekarang jarang, nontonnya Youtube dari HP*" (Honestly, I watched TV once in a while, but I watch from Youtube by my handphone) (A, female).

It can be identified that college students read news, articles, and any other information through their gadgets to be able to chat with their peers and family, watch films from Youtube, read the latest news, play games, looking for information or tutorials, watch vlogs, download novels and e-books, search for academic resources, and check on social media. It has been reported that the subjects' frequency on the use of handphone is two hours or more a day: "*Tiap hari bisa dua jam atau lebih, dari siang buka film, video-video doang, game, informasi, tips*" (I can use my handphone for two hours or more a day to watch films, videos, games, information, tips, and tricks) (F, female). Gadgets are not only used for academic purposes but also entertainment. The time average of the use of gadget of the subjects in this study range from five two fourteen hours a day. These findings in line with a report that Indonesian people access the internet for eight hours 36 minutes a day on average. Most of them check on their social media for three hours 26 minutes a day, watch videos for two hours 52 minutes a day, and listen to live streaming musics for one hour 22 minutes. Based on the devices used to access the internet, most of them use smartphones (60%), followed by computers (22%), and tablets (8%) [7].

As the subjects interact a lot using their gadgets, their reading intensity (of printed books) decreases. This study has found that the reading intensity of the subjects is one to two hours a day (32.69%) and two to three hours a day (27.07%) for textbooks. However, for non-textbooks, they can spend more hours as one of the subjects said, "*Saya bisa sampai 6-8 jam gak bisa berhenti karena seru terus karena suka sama bukunya jadi asyik*" (I spend six to eight hours to read, and it's tough to stop cause it's exciting) (S, female). These findings are same with 32.69 respondents in University of Kashmir that higher students education spend one to two hours for reading [11] or no more than two hours (for reading) a day [19]. Another study indicates the same

results that either for academic or non-academic purpose, reading is not a habit; students tend to passive activities such as watching Youtube, listening to music, chatting and talking to their friends (called personal relationship) [17]. On the weekend, their frequency of using gadget are vary: some have it increased as one said, “*Karena banyak waktu untuk main games dan komputer*” (Because I have more time to play games on my computer) (G, male) and some have it decreased as one said, “*Ada kegiatan di tempat lain, keagamaan atau keluarga, gak sempat buka*” (Cause I have other activities such as going to the church and family gathering, so I don’t have time to check on my handphone) (O, female).

When they need to find particular books (textbooks or other references), 16% of the subjects prefer e-books rather than printed ones due to their price as one of the subjects said, “*Kalau e-book gak beli karena buku sulit ditemukan, harga lumayan berasa kalau beli semua buku, yang penting disimpan di USB, kan kayak buku*” (It’s more efficient to have e-books. Printed books are expensive. And I mean, it’s the same, okay? I have it in my storage (USB)) (FR, male). However, when their lecturers ask them to buy a textbook, most of them will do it no matter the price it (64%), access to internet (16%), borrow the books from their friends (11%), and from the library (8%) (Fig. 1). These findings indicate that with the presence of the internet, the library is the last option. These findings are same with a previous study that there are a bunch of options to access books such as from personal collection (49.11%), the library (29.29%) as a place to borrow a book, the internet (13.76%), and also borrowing from their friends and seniors [10].

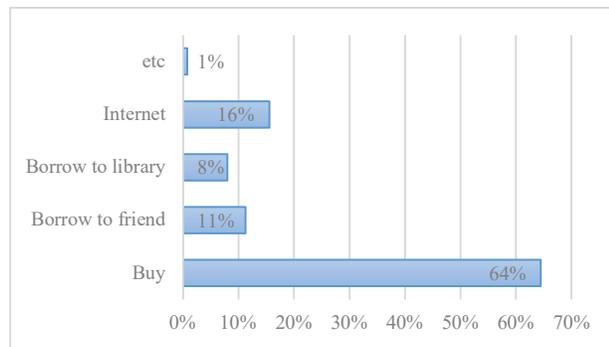


Fig. 1. How to access books

To motivate the students to read, lecturer usually require their students to buy a textbook as stated, “*Buku statistik, matematika, disuruh untuk UTS/UAS jadi harus beli*” (Statistics and mathematics books required for the mid and final exams, so we must buy them) (F, male). However, this motivation is limited to having the book without deeply understanding what is inside so that the students feel they must buy it out of their fear of bad grades. Littlewood (1999), quoted from [12], states that Asian students adhere to reactive autonomy, i.e., students learn because of initiated by “authoritative figures such as their teacher.” When observed on the break and leisure time, students spend their time more on having to chat with their friends, eating the campus canteen or classes, and even sleeping in the classroom before their lecturers come in. Rarely do they finish their assignments in their leisure time on the campus

study corners, as one said, “*Jeda kuliah, ya untuk makan, istirahat, ngobrol dengan teman sekelas di kelas, ke kantin*” (Break time, I use it for eating, having an actual break, chatting with my classmates, and also going to the canteen) (O, female). Another one said, “*Makan, ngobrol, selesaikan tugas yang belum selesai, tidur di kelas dulu*” (Eating, chatting, finishing the task, and sleeping in the class) (Sh, female). The other one said, “*Saya ke kantin, makan, atau gak, saya aktif di UKM bantu-bantu*” (I use to spare time to eat or not, help anything in the student club that I join) (G, male). It can be inferred from that interview that most of the students spend their break time to socialize and interact with their peers.

Students’ lack of reading interest also showed up before the writer come into the class. Based on the result of the observation, the students watch a Korean film together in the classroom using the computer available. Some of them watch from their handphones, and none of them open any books preparing for the lesson. In the meantime, some other students from another class are busy checking on their handphones and chatting with their friends in the hallway. This finding is relevant to that of a previous study stating that students spend their time on non-academic activities such as chatting and browsing the internet on non-academic stuff [6], [17]. Besides, their relationships with their friends also take part in interfering their reading activities [17]. Even though the respondents agree that reading is useful for their learning, vocabulary adding (for foreign languages), pleasure, knowledge development, raise motivation, and brain work quality improvement, they agree that the most challenging obstacle on reading is themselves. Some of which is laziness (38%) and lack of motivation (33%) (Fig. 2). Motivation can be stimulated by their environment: families, friends, and lecturers. But there are not many lecturers who continuously motivate students to read as a subject said, “*Cuma dosen yang suruh ke perpustakaan untuk baca cuma 1-2 orang*” (Only one or two lecturers who made us read) (F, female).

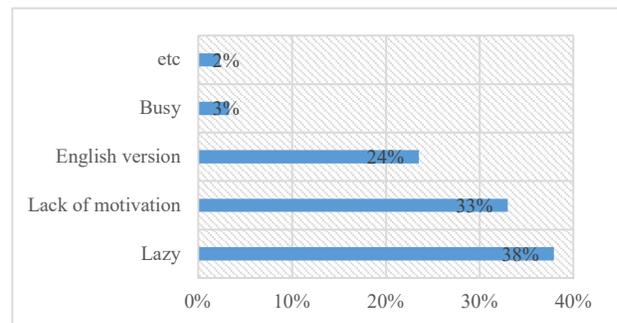


Fig. 2. Reading constraints

In addition to internal factors coming from themselves, there are also external factors influencing their lack of reading interest such as the complicated language (24%), hectic extracurricular activities (3%), and the book appearance (2%) as shown by Fig. 2. It has been proven that students’ hectic extracurricular activities have an impact on their lack of time to read. The physical appearance of the books also does not attract the students’ interest to read since their font size is sometimes look too

small, the language is too difficult to understand, and the diction is too complicated. One said, “*Kalau buku bahasanya ada yang berat terus tulisannya kecil banget, malas bacanya kedempetan atau gimana gitu kurang menarik*” (Textbooks are usually difficult to understand, and the font size is also too small. So, it’s not interesting to read) (Feb, female). Another said, “*Yah, kadang juga susah dimengerti bahasanya*” (Yeah, sometimes it’s really hard to understand that language) (F, female). Another agrees that “*Ada kata-kata baru yang kita gak paham*” (There are some words that I don’t know) (A, female). And the other one proves that entertainment books are more interesting as said, “*Saya tuh kalau saya baca buku, saya kurang tertarik. Mungkin capek liat hurufnya. Komik saya suka saya baca Doraemon*” (When I read textbooks, I get bored quickly. I think I’m tired of seeing the little fonts. It’s different from reading comic books. I like Doraemon, by the way) (F, male). The results of the interview implied that students are not interested in reading textbooks since they are not reader-friendly: having limited illustration and summary, having too much strange vocabulary, too few simple sentences, unclear organization, and less exciting layout [12].

C. The Role of Campus Library

The library is an essential facility at the university. From the librarian information, the library collection until 2019 is 99,258 books including 0.3% of fiction books, 2% of e-books, 7% of references, 15% of textbooks, and 76% of general books. The decoration of the campus library is quite artistic, and the situation is quite in order and quiet. Despite the subjects’ agreement that the library comes with a lot of benefits, they admit that they rarely come there. One of them said that she comes to the library twice a week (S, female), one of them stated that she seldom comes there (O, female), and one said that he goes to the library once in two weeks (F, male). The subjects of this study, who are mostly the generation of 2018, go to the library for multiple purposes such as learning, finishing their tasks, and discussion (70%), reading (16%), borrowing books (12%), and other purposes such as finding quiet place, sleeping, charging their handphones, and killing the time (2%) (Fig. 3).

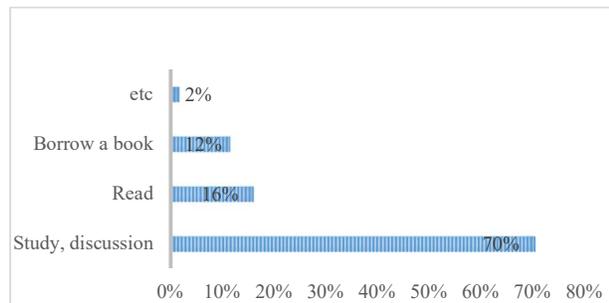


Fig. 3. Purposes of going to the library

These findings support the previous study that only 16% (25 people) of the postgraduate students in five universities in Nigeria use the library for reading [20]. The subjects of this study do not use the library for reading and borrowing books since they have various purposes for going there. One said, “*Kalau ada tugas, kalau mau cari buku, kalau*

perlu, kalau butuh ke perpustakaan” (If there is an assignment if I want to search for a particular book, and if I have to feel like, then I’ll go to the library) (F, female). Another one said, “*Kadang bikin tugas perlu konsentrasi baru ke perpustakaan. Kalau biasa-biasa aja, di mana aja. Takut berisik*” (If I need to concentrate for finishing my task, then I’ll go to the library, but if I don’t, I can do it everywhere cause afraid of noise) (Feb, female). Another one agrees with this by saying, “*Bikin tugas, mau cari ketenangan di perpustakaan*” (The library is suitable for finishing a task in a quiet place) (A, female). Meanwhile, a male student said, “*Perpustakaan untuk tugas kelompok, pinjam buku, belajar untuk ujian akhir, ngadem*” (A library is a place for working task together, borrowing books, and learning for the final exam, looking of cooling off) (FR, male) and the other male student even said that he goes to the library to sleep (F, male).

A free wifi facility available in the campus gives the students easy access to search references online, so they do not have to go to the library. That is one of the main reasons why the students’ reluctance to go to the library for book searching or borrowing. It has also been revealed that another reason for their reluctance to there is the lack of fiction books available as one said, “*Perpustakaan isinya buku teks doang*” (The library only has textbooks) (S, female). Thus, as proven by the previous study, it is found that the reading interest of the intellectual is relatively unsatisfied [21]. Libraries are supposed to be a place to read. However, the respondents of this study choose their homes as the place to read (91%), followed by the classroom (4%), the library (3%), and open space such the hallway (2%) (Fig. 4).

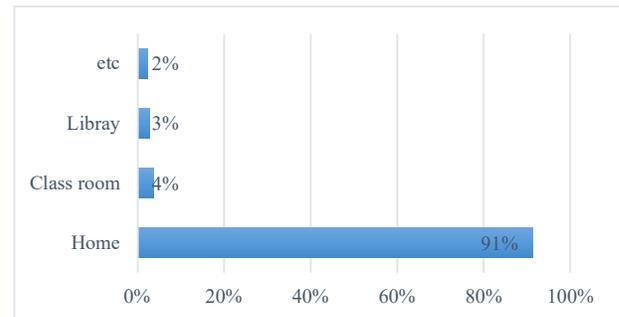


Fig. 4. Places to read

When asked about the number of books they have read for the past two months (October and November 2018), the subjects answer that they have read one book (43%), none at all (27%), two books (21%), and more than two books (9%) as shown by Fig. 5. The percentage indicates that there are only a few numbers of the book the subjects read at the end of 2018.

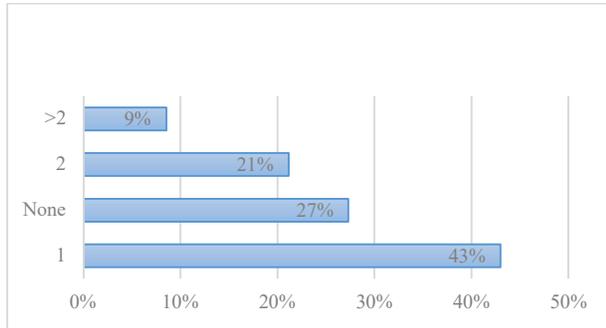


Fig. 5. Number of books read in the last two months

This study also found out that students read more books when the exam or the due date for an assignment is coming (20%), when they want to kill time (61%), and when they look for information (3%) (Fig. 6). These findings indicate that students fill their leisure time by reading information nor related to their academic tasks; they chat using their social media instead.

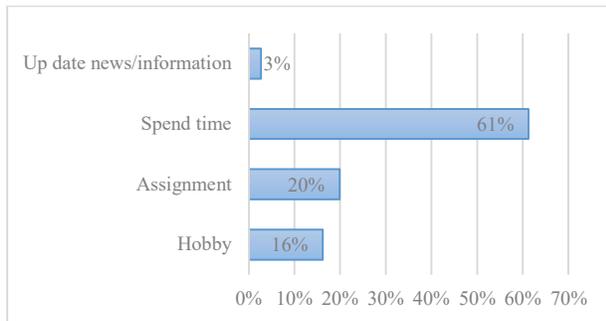


Fig. 6. Purposes of reading

Figure 6 shows that the time the subjects spend on accessing the internet for information not related to academic tasks has a large percentage (61%). It leads to the students addicted to their gadgets and lack of interest in academic reading (20%). These findings are the same with a previous study which found that students read books only when there is an exam or an assignment [6].

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study has revealed that the reading interest and habit of university students are unsatisfied. When preschool, their parents are not used to telling a story to their children. They started to develop their reading interest and habit in their schools before triggered by such activity as reading literacy competition motivated by their teachers. Most of the university students in this study use their leisure time by interacting with their peers to maintain a personal relationship and use social media. Also, they still use the library as a place to study and discuss, not to read and borrow books. Students need motivation and model by the lecturers that reading and discussion habits are important factors. Besides, reading literacy enhancing the atmosphere in need of enhancement. Now, there has been information on the announcement boards and standing banners on book facilities through a particular website or such activities like seminar, workshop, recruitment, academic knowledge, but also need to be additional information of literacy activities such as student literacy competition and book review

periodically. The librarian should support all the literary activities. Besides, the literacy atmosphere can be created by having literacy corners at open space consisting of entertaining books. Despite the findings, the results of this study cannot be generalized for students in other universities. Since this study does not focus on reading textbooks, future study is suggested to focus on reading literacy of academic books. The fact that most subjects of this study are students at beginning of the year (2018), for the next study, could be focus on university students who are writing theses.

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