

Using Online Short Stories to Promote Students' Reading Habit

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Abstract

Online short story is one of English reading materials that can be obtained widely to promote students' reading habit. This research aimed to observe the use of online short stories in promoting reading habit for EFL students. A classroom action research was conducted in a Reading Comprehension course for one semester. The participants of this research were 24 freshmen who majored in English Education department enrolled at a university in West Sumatera, Indonesia. The data were collected from classroom observations, interviews, and students' comprehension test. During the observation, the participants were asked to keep a reading journal and share with the researcher in the interviews. In addition, a reading comprehension test with some open-ended questions was also administered to the participants to obtain supplemental data. The data from classroom observations and interviews show that the participants realized the importance of building a reading habit to improve their reading comprehension. Furthermore, the result from the data collection also shows that reading online short story promoted their reading habit and motivated them to read more.

Keywords: reading, reading habit, Reading comprehension, short story

Introduction

Students' problem in reading is not only about processing text and understanding meaning of what we read, but also about the motivation to read various reading materials. When a student starts his/her experience to learn in tertiary level, they should read more, not only for their academic life, but also for their life in general. As cited in Edeole & Adejoke (2016), reading is absolutely crucial in order to be a successful person. In their academic life, students need to read some books, articles, and other reading materials to fulfill their academic assignment and gain some knowledge. Meanwhile, as young adult, college students have a tight schedule regarding their classes, students' association, or simply, social interaction. This is why building reading habit can become a challenge.

Building reading habit is important but it is not a piece of cake. Students have to work on their motivation, schedule, and the variety of reading materials to accomplish good reading habit (Kalita, 2016; Mustafa, 2018; Nur & Ahmad, 2017). This phenomenon will be even more difficult for foreign language learners, because they need to deal with new vocabularies as well as their motivation to form their reading habit. Reading dominates the theories they should understand and gather information from every English textbook. Therefore, it is essential to find appropriate reading materials in a target language.

In this industrial revolution era, finding reading materials to read would be easier for students since they only need to search it on the internet. There are tons of reading materials on the internet, for every topic they need to know, every kind of reading and every level of reading skill. The only thing students should do is only to find the right reading material according to their interest in order to build good reading habit. This is in line with Herawan, Yufrizal, & Sukirian (2013; see also Pardede, 2011; Zahra & Farrah, 2016) who said that students' interest in reading materials is important in decreasing problem of students' comprehension.

One of the reading materials available on the internet is short stories. Internet provides many kinds of short stories, such as classic short stories and modern short stories. There are many websites present short stories, for example americanliterature.com. In this web, students could search for various classic short stories according to their topic interest and their reading skill level. Hopefully, plenty provided short stories could enhance students' motivation to read more or at least make them get used to reading. Thus, this study is conducted to observe the use of online short stories in promoting students' reading habit.

Method

In fulfilling the purpose of the research, this research employed classroom action research to observe the use of online short story as reading materials in improving students' reading habit. Classroom action research is an effective research design in improving students' achievement in learning English (Nur & Ahmad, 2017). This research used classroom action research designed by Kemmis and McTaggart, which stated that classroom action research consist of some phases, namely planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. The detail

information about the phase of classroom action research in this research will be explained in the later paragraph.

This research was conducted at a private university in Padang, West Sumatra, Indonesia. The population of this study was the students of English Department in Faculty of Teacher Training and Education. The sample of this study was the students in second semester who took Reading Comprehension II course. In this course, the students are expected to have decent understanding about reading English for pleasure and reading for general purposes. There were 24 students who took the course, so these students were the total sample of the research.

In the first phase of classroom action research, planning, the teacher or the researcher prepare the instruction that will be used in the classroom based on the purpose of the study. So, in this research, the researcher designed lesson plan for Reading Comprehension course and prepared some classroom activities as the activities for conducting the research. For example, in the first meeting, the researcher explained to the students that the course consist of two reading activities, the first one is classroom reading activity and the second one is reading short story from americanliterature.com. Students could choose some titles to read for the entire semester according to their preferences, their interest, and their vocabulary mastery or their reading level. In this meeting, the researcher also explained that the students should keep their reading journal or reading log to show their reading progress and write their reading summary.

Then, in the second phase, action, the researcher taught the course based on the aforementioned lesson plan. Nur & Ahmad (2017) stated that the researcher could start to implement the lesson plan after having good understanding about the lesson plan and the scenario of the research. This phase is the right time to try the strategy to improve the problem of the classroom, or in this case, to use short story to promote students' reading habit. For example, in the second meeting, the researcher would explain about the element of the short story, and assign students to determine the element of the short story they chose from the first meeting.

In the third phase, observation, the researcher could start the process of collecting the data to find out the effectiveness of using a strategy to improve problems in the classroom. In this research, the researcher checked students reading log every week to check their reading progress. Further, the researcher also asked some students to present their reading log in front of the classroom, to show their classmates about their chosen short story and explained their understanding to the class.

In the last phase, reflection, the researcher analyzed the data to find out the effectiveness of the chosen strategy. In this research, the researcher finds out the effectiveness of using short story to promote students' reading habit by analyzing the data from observation, interview, and students' reading comprehension test.

Results and Discussion

After observing the use of online short stories to promote students' reading habit, there are several results that can be stated about this research. First, the result of the observation from four phases of classroom action research showed that using online short stories can build students' reading habit and encourage them to read more. In the first meeting, the researcher as the lecturer explained about the lesson plan of combining reading comprehension course activity with reading online short story to build students' reading habit. It means that reading short story is not the main part of reading comprehension course. The main part of reading comprehension course is usual reading activity with some reading strategies provided by the textbook such as scanning, skimming, making preferences, etc. Meanwhile, reading short story is the side activity which was intended to build students' reading habit in reading English texts and English reading materials. So, after spending half of the course for the main activity, every other half meeting was used to discuss online short stories.

For the first step of using online short stories in the first meeting, the researcher showed the web of americanliterature.com in front of the classroom and explained some kinds of short stories provided in the aforementioned web, such as children stories, stories for students, or short story of the day. This explanation prepared students to choose some short stories that they would read for the entire semester, based on their interest and their reading level. In this step, the researcher observed that almost all of 24 students wanted to choose short stories from children stories because the stories are short. When the researcher made a list of the length of the story chosen by students, the list showed that 9 students chose very short stories which contain less than 500 words. Then, 9 students chose short stories that have less than 1000 words and 7 students chose short stories that have less than 1500 words. Only 3 students chose short stories contain of more than 2000 words. The chart below showed the length of the first short stories chosen by students and number of students who chose them.

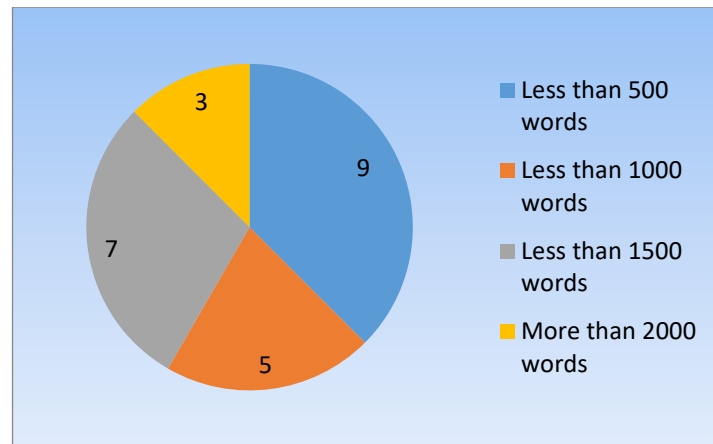


Figure 1. Length of the 1st story

Then, in the second meeting, the students brought their chosen stories to the classroom. Every student had different title because they are asked to. In this meeting, the researcher chose a story, entitled *The Little Match Girl* written by Hans Christian Andersen, to be a model story in explaining the elements of the short story. The students showed their interest in understanding the elements of the short story because the researcher used mind-map in discussing the elements and also because they never read the story before. Later on, the students were asked to write elements of the short stories they read in their reading journal. This student' journal consisted of the elements of the short story; setting, characterization, plot, theme, and point of view, and new vocabularies found in the story.

In the next several meetings, the students wrote the elements of every short story they read in the reading journal, and some of them presented the journal in front of the classroom. In this article, these several meeting are divided into two cycles, the first and second cycle. The researcher observed this learning situation and collected the data in the observation sheet consisted of four points as follows:

1. Students understanding in presenting reading journal.
In every meeting, three to four students presented their reading journal in front of the classroom. In the beginning, students only present the elements of the short story in a brief way, but in the end of the semester, some of them can add their presentation with the reason why they chose the story, the part that they like the most from the story, the character they adore, and the lesson they got from reading the story. It means that students could enjoy their reading so that they could read between the lines and gather explicit and implicit lesson from the story.
2. Students' enthusiast in listening to their classmates' presentation.
In the first cycle, the researcher had to choose some students and asked them to give question to the presenter because no one raised their hands to ask questions. However, in the second cycle, students could come up with their own motivation to raise their hand and asked question to their classmate who presented the reading journal. It means that students showed that they were not only interested in the story they chose, but they were also interested in their friends' chosen story.
3. Students questions regarding the story being presented.
In the first cycle, students only asked questions that could easily answered by the presenter without deep understanding such as who is the most character that you like and the reason. However, in the end, students asked some critical questions that need deep understanding such as what you think the author purpose was in writing the story.
4. Students interest in reading the same title.
After each presentation, the researcher asked the classroom whether or not they would read the same title at home. In the beginning, less than 5 students raised their hands when the researcher asked this question. Meanwhile, in the end, more than 15 students raised their hands and initiated that they will read the same title at home. It means that students' interest to read more short stories are getting better.
5. Students interest in choosing the length of the story.
As presented in Figure 1, in the beginning of the semester, students still tend to choose the length of the stories they wanted to read. They tend to choose stories that contained less than 1000 words. Later when the semester went by, students did not really think about the length of the story anymore. They were more focus on the title and the story itself, rather than the length of the story. It means that students read the story not only because they were being asked to, but also because they did like the activity of reading online short stories as well as enjoyed the time they spent to read.

Then, the result from the interviews also showed that using online short stories in promoting students' reading habit is good because students' enjoyed the reading activity. The data from the interviews were collected by using these guided questions:

1. How many times do you spend to read in a week?
2. How many short stories do you read in a week?
3. How much do you enjoy reading online short stories?
4. How was reading short stories motivating you to read more English reading materials?

The interviews were done in the last cycle, in the end of the semester, after all of the students had presented their reading journals. The result from the interviews showed that in the first cycle, 19 students spent less than 2 hours to read online short stories in a week, and only 5 students spent more than 2 hours to read in a week. Then, in the second cycle, 11 students read online short stories in less than 5 hours per week, and 13 students read more than 5 hours per week. Regarding the number of online short stories students' read in a week, in the first cycle, 21 students just read a short story to fulfill their assignment to read a story and write the elements of the story in their reading journal. Only 3 students read more than one short story in a week in this cycle. However, in the second cycle, the number of students who read only a story was decreased because 8 students read more than one short story in a week. It means that students' motivation to read more is getting better from the first cycle to the second cycle.

In the interviews, the researcher also asked about the enjoyment students felt when they read online short stories from *americanliterature.com*. From the result, it can be concluded that 6 students enjoyed their reading activity in the first cycle. This number grew in the second cycle, as 14 students enjoy reading online short story. Moreover, the researcher also questioned about students' motivation to read more, after being forced to read a short story in a week for one semester. The students answered that in the first cycle, 21 of them did not have motivation to read another English reading materials after they read the short story. On the other hand, 12 students claimed that they have good motivation to read other English reading materials in the end of second cycle. This is happened because the students enjoy their reading activity and knew how to deal with new vocabularies they found in the text.

Table 1. Interview results

		Cycle 1		Cycle 2	
		Less than 2 hours	More than 2 hours	Less than 5 hours	More than 5 hours
How many times do you spend to read in a week?		19 Students	5 Students	11 Students	13 Students
How many short stories do you read in a week?	One short story	One short story	More than one short story	One short story	More than one short story
		21 Students	3 Students	16 Students	8 Students
How much do you enjoy reading online short stories?	Sometimes	Sometimes	Very much	Sometimes	Very much
		18 Students	6 Students	10 Students	14 Students
How was reading short stories motivating you to read more English reading materials?	Sometimes	Sometimes	Very much	Sometimes	Very much
		21 Students	3 Students	12 Students	12 Students

Besides the result from the main guided questions above, the interviews also revealed that some students had already tried to read other English reading materials that have more words than a short story. For example, 2 students claimed they have already started to read novels in English. A student chose to read English classic and another one chose to read teen English novel written by Indonesian author. It means that these students had built their reading habit very well and already have good motivation to read more English reading materials. Further, 4 students claimed that in the end of the second cycle, they were not only reading online short stories but also read other articles based on their own interests in the internet. It can be concluded that these students spent more time to read English reading materials after being asked to read online short stories. It also means that students' motivation to read more English reading materials have increased. The other students who did not read novels and other English reading materials also showed some improvement in their reading habit. The students told the

researcher in the interviews that after being asked to read a short story in a week, they now found that they do not scared and worried to read English textbook as they used to.

The last one, the result from reading comprehension test showed that using online short stories help students' to understand the elements of short story and learn valuable lesson about human and culture from the story. This finding was concluded after checking the result of the reading comprehension course test. In the test, the students were asked to read a short story, which has never been chosen by any students before. The title of the story is Jack and the Beanstalk. Then, in the test, they had to write the elements of the story, answered some questions related to the story and chose true or false statements in less than 90 minutes. The result of the test showed that 17 students could perform well in the test. These students not only could determine the elements of the short story, but also could write the lesson they learned from the story.

Conclusions

Based on the research result and discussion, it can be concluded that the use of online short stories could build students' reading habit. It can be seen from the observation of this classroom action research that students' interest and enthusiast in reading online short stories improved from the second meeting to the last meeting. The observation also showed that students' understanding of the element of the story and the lesson learned from the story became better. Moreover, the interviews showed that using online short stories not only improved students' reading time but also improved students' motivation to read other English reading materials.

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