

# Indonesian English Department Students' Reading Habits and Attitude Toward Literature in English

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## Abstract

This study reports the results of a survey on the reading habits of English Department Students at Universitas Negeri Padang, Indonesia, and their attitude towards literature in English. Reading Habit questionnaire developed by Pandian (1997) and an adaptation of Students' Attitude and Perception towards literature in English questionnaire developed by Tina Abdullah (2007) were employed. Both instruments were translated to Indonesian before being distributed to the respondents. The total number of respondents involved in this study was 125 comprising of 79 third year students and 46 fourth year students. These students were chosen as respondents because they had taken more than two compulsory literature subjects. First year students and second year students were not included because the former had not taken any compulsory literature subjects, while the latter had not completed their first compulsory literature subjects yet. A demography survey was also conducted to see their perception on their English proficiency and motivation to choose English as their major. Results showed that (i) the majority of the students believed that their English falls under the category of good and very good; (ii) students enrolled to English Department to learn English and/or to learn more about the English language; (iii) they have poor reading habits; (iv) they enjoy other technology related activities more compared to reading; (v) they believed that literature subjects are instrumental in improving their English; (vi) half of the respondents have negative attitude towards poetry in English; (vii) attitude towards longer literature work like novel and drama varied. Finally, pedagogical implications related to the instructional model to teach literature in English is discussed.

**Keywords:** *reading habits, reading attitude, literature in English, literature in language class, instructional model*

## Introduction

It is generally postulated that one of the most valuable skills a university students must have is reading ability. Reading is generally defined as the process of interpreting printed and written words (Annamalai & Muniandy, 2013; Noor, 2011; Mart, 2012). It is often linked to academic success (Noor, 2011; Saiful, Jabu, & Atmowardoyo, 2019; Arslanoglu and Mor, 2018; Iftanti, 2012) and social success (Yilmaz, 1995). For English language learners, reading is also key to improved performance in other language skills. In this case, reading ability is instrumental in improving students' writing (Attiyat, 2019; Kirin, 2010; Habibi, Salleh, & Singh, 2015; Krashen, 2004; Amer, 2012), speaking (Novita, 2016; Mart, 2012), and listening (Loppies, 2019; Al-Nafisah, 2019). Some studies also reveal that it helps students to learn the majority of vocabulary needed to read academic texts (Krashen, 2011; Nation, 2013; Krashen, 2004). Moreover, reading can also help students to widen their grammatical knowledge which will eventually become a supporting factor in their writing (Khansir & Dehghani, 2015; Akbari, 2014; Krashen, 2004).

Those with good reading skill are believed to have positive reading habits (Annamalai & Muniandy, 2013; Deita, 2013; Iftanti, 2013). Several indications of good reading habits include repetition (Iftanti, 2012), voluntary (Tella, 2007), and automaticity (Morris, Bloodgood, Lomax and Perney, 2006). On the other hand, according to Iftanti (2013), "passive reading, purposeless reading and regressing" are the characteristics of poor reading habits.

Another factor which counts for students' success in the academic setting is their attitude towards learning. According Shajahan and Shajahan (2007) attitude is a "learned predisposition to respond favorably or unfavorably to a given object." Accordingly, students' attitude toward literature in English can be defined as how they feel about that it. In language learning, attaining the right attitude is necessary for the students to be successful learners (Oroujlou & Vahedi, 2011; Chalak & Kassaian, 2010; Al-Tamimi & Shuib, 2009).

To say that reading is an important skill for English majors is an understatement. In fact, reading is an integral part of their life as student because reading activities are the core of many of their compulsory subjects. This is also true for students of English Department at Universitas Negeri Padang. Throughout their time at this department, they are obliged to take literature courses despite the fact that some of them will eventually specialize in linguistics or language studies. In this case, students are to take courses named under three generic genres of literary work: Basic Poetry, Basic Prose and Basic Drama. In these courses, students are introduced to various important literary works written in English by writers from various literary periods and national backgrounds. These three courses share two common learning objectives: students are able to identify the literary elements of the assigned texts; and students are able to analyze the work studied. To be able to achieve these learning goals, students must have a sufficient reading skill and possess the right reading habits.

It is also safe to say that key to their survival in this course is good reading skill and good reading habits. However, Deita (2013) and Saiful, Baso Jabu and Haryanto Atmowardoyo (2019) claim that EFL English majors have low reading ability. Moreover, numerous studies have found that English majors have poor reading habits (Iftanti, 2010; Deita, 2013). Moreover, it is also necessary for students to express positive attitude towards literature in order to be successful in their literary courses. Previous studies which can be referred to about this topic are Alfauzan & Hussain, (2017) and Tevdovska (2016). However, in Indonesian context, studies which look to these two variables are still far between. Therefore, this study aims at investigating Indonesian English Department students' reading habits and attitude towards literature in English.

## Method

The respondents participated in this survey study were 125 students who have completed at least two compulsory literature courses. They comprise of 79 third year students and 46 fourth year students. To gather data about students' reading habits, Reading Habit questionnaire developed by Pandian (1997) was adapted. An adaptation of Students' Attitude and Perception towards literature in English questionnaire developed by Tina Abdullah (2007) was administered to measure students' attitude towards literature in English. Both instruments were translated to Indonesian before being distributed to the respondents. The data were collected during the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> week of the odd semester (July-December, 2019). To investigate students' perception about their perceived English language proficiency and motivation to choose English as their major, a demography survey was also conducted. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data

## Results and Discussion

The results for students' perception of their English proficiency shows that the majority of the students believed that they have a sufficient English proficiency. Table 1 gives information that their perceived English proficiency falls under the category of fair and good (54, 8% and 39,7 %, respectively). Despite there was a small fracture of students believing that their proficiency was poor (3.2%) and very poor (0.8%), it can be concluded that students were quite confident with their ability.

Table1. Students' Perception of Their English Proficiency

Statement	%
Excellent	0.8%
Good	39.7%
Fair	54.8%
Poor	3.2%
Very Poor	0.8%

On students' motivation to choose English as their major, ten reasons were identified. In this case, they can be divided into three broad categories, namely: language learning; content and culture learning; and the feasibility of international career and travelling. Table 2 indicates that statements which garnered the highest percentage are statements under the category of language learning. 83% students chose to be English majors because they wanted to learn the English language. Statements under the category of content and culture learning come second. Interestingly, students were more motivated to learn the culture from English speaking countries (81%) than to study literature in English (71%). Furthermore, the percentage of those whose motivation was to go abroad to study and/or to work were 53% and 40 %, respectively.

**Table 2. Students' Motivation to Choose English as Their Major**

No	Statements	%
1	To learn the English language	83
2	To study literature in English	71
3	To study the culture of English speaking countries	81
4	To study the underlying meaning of a literary work	36
5	To learn critical thinking	50
6	To enrich knowledge about the English Language	44
7	To work in foreign-owned company	40
8	To study abroad	53
9	To work abroad	44
10	To learn how to write creatively in English	14

Table 3 shows the hours spent by student to read. In general, it can be seen that, they did not spend much time to read. In other words, they did not develop a good reading habits. In this regard, those who spent more than 4 hours to read every day only accounts for about 15 % of the students. Moreover, only less than one third of the student spent 3 to 4 hours to read every day. 26% students read for 2 to 3 hours per day.

**Table 3. Hours Spent Reading**

Hour	%
Less than one hour.	3%
1 to 2 hour	16%
2 to 3 hour.	26%
3 to 4 hour.	28%
> 4 hour	15%

Because this study found that students did not have good reading habits, it is also necessary to investigate what they do in their spare time. The results from Table 4 show that the almost all students spent their spare time to do internet-based activities (92%). Other activities which were done by the majority of students are movie and music related activities (84% and 82%, respectively). Those playing game in their spare time were well below 50%. Even though more than a half of the students (60%) read in their spare time, results in Table 4 indicates that it is a less preferable activity to do. In other words, they prefer doing other technology and internet based activities compared to reading.

**Table 4. Students Activities in Their Spare time**

Activities	%
Reading	60%
Internet	92%
Music	82%
Film	84%
Game	49%
Others	9%

Table 5 presented the results for students' attitude toward literature. Overall, this study found that students showed a positive attitude towards literature. In this case, almost all students (99%) believed that by studying literature, they can improve their language ability. Then, the majority of students also claimed that learning literature in English is necessary (94%) and enjoyable (92%). Moreover, 83% of them showed keen interest in studying literature in the English language (83%).

Other results shown in Table 5 is students' attitude toward certain genre of literature. In this case, students showed positive attitude towards short stories (94%). However, more than half of the respondents (54%) had negative attitude toward poetry. It is also important to note that students' attitude towards longer work like English literature book remained positive despite the fact that it had lower percentage.

Another interesting findings which can be derived from Table 5 is students' preferred language to study literature. First, 96 % students had positive attitude toward literary texts using simple language. About three quarter of the respondents preferred their teacher to explain the content to the literary text taught to them in Bahasa Indonesia. The majority of the respondents (85%) also showed no reservation about using Bahasa Indonesia to explain what they understand about the literary text they read in class.

Table 5. Students' Attitudes towards Literature in English

Statement	%
I like reading English literature books.	79%
I think it is necessary to learn literature in English.	94%
I think literature lessons are enjoyable.	92%
I am interested in learning literature in the English language.	83%
I think that teachers can use some Bahasa Indonesia in explaining literary content.	71%
I think teacher should allow students to use some Bahasa Indonesia to explain their understanding of the literary text read.	85%
I think I can improve my proficiency in the English language through literature lessons.	99%
I like to read literary text that use simple English language.	96%
I like to read poetry.	54%
I like to read short stories.	94%

In this study, students' reading habits is measured based on its frequency. Subsequently, this study found that the respondents have poor reading habits. In this case, they do not spend much time to read in their daily life. This result is relevant with Iftanti (2012) and Deita (2013). One factor which can be attributed to students' poor reading habits is the advancement of disruptive technology. In the past, reading is an activity which students normally do in their spare time. These days, with the development of technology, students might spend more time with their gadgets or computers making making reading less appealing to them. In this regards, this study also found that students enjoy doing other activities in their spare time, especially those related with technology more than reading. Other studies which are in agreement with this finding are Annamalai and Muniandy (2013); Kasuma & Tan (2019); Loan (2011); Lieury, Lorant, Trosseille, Champault, & Vourc'h (2014).

The second objective of this result is to investigate students' attitude towards literature. The results of this study show that students have positive attitude toward literature in English. They believe that it can improve the language ability. This result supports other studies like Muhammed (2013); Nair, Setia, Ghazali, Sabapathy, Mohammad, Ali, Muniandy, Theethappan, Hassan, Hassan (2012); Hismanoglu (2005). According Hall (2015), literature is a potential resource for students to learn the language and communicate their feelings and thoughts. Similarly, Choudhary (2016) contends that students can learn about the "practical use" of the language through literature.

In spite of their like of literature, the majority of students show reservation toward poetry. Other studies such as that of Danesh & Shirkhani (2015); Tevdovska (2016); Khatib (2011); Nobles and Azano (2016); Utami (2012) also show a similar results. Interestingly, this specific genre is not only dreaded by students but also by teachers. Delvi Wahyuni and Witri Oktavia (2018) reports that Indonesian high school teachers are grappled with dilemma about how to teach poetry in English. Their dilemma stems from their anxiety over instructional approaches they can use to teach poetry in English and their insecurity over their own knowledge about the genre. Third, students show varied attitude toward longer literary work such as literature books novels. In this case, their most preferred genre is short story. Students also prefer shorter work with simple language. These results can be linked to students' poor reading habits. As English majors, they are supposed to read a lot and be prepared to read difficult or longer work. However, available literature like Deita (2013) and Saiful, Baso Jabu and Haryanto Atmowardoyo (2019) found that EFL English majors have low reading ability. Accordingly, a link can be made between students' reading habits and their attitude towards certain genre of literature.

## Conclusions

This study has revealed that Indonesian English Department Students' reading habits are poor. This result should alarm educators in this field because for English majors reading is the core activity in many of their courses. Despite the fact that this study major finding shows that students have poor reading habits, the data gathered are limited to traditional reading resources like printed books or printed magazines. Therefore, precautions are taken to generalize the results of this study to other modes of readings. With the advent of the internet, information starts to be available in the form of electronic resources like e-books and e-magazines. Tsai (2016) contends that digital reading begins with the invention of personal computer make it not a so new phenomena. In light of this development, Sheng (2006) found the shift of students' reading habits from "paper-based to internet-based." Moreover, a similar result is also reported by Akarsu and Dariyemez (2014). In this regards, one thing that educators cannot overlook is the fact that students might have developed online

reading habits. Therefore, one thing that educators can do is to re-design their teaching model to include activities which can nurture good reading habits regardless the reading modes the students prefer. Moreover, educators should also include activities which students can do by using their mobile phones or computers in their lesson plan.

Another finding of this research is students having a positive attitude toward literature in English. However, students show a negative attitude toward a certain literary genre, namely poetry. On the contrary, students' top pick is shorter literary works like short story. They are also more inclined to read work with simple language. What can be concluded from these results is there is a strong correlation between their reading ability, reading habits and attitude toward literature. In this case, it is very likely that students face problems with reading (low reading ability) and do not have a good reading habits. As a result, they do not show positive attitude towards the literary genre which demands good reading skill such as poetry. Therefore, it is best for educators to use a teaching model which includes activities that address students' language problems before coming to the content of the literary work.

### Acknowledgments

This research was funded by LP2M, Universitas Negeri Padang in 2019.

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