

## A SURVEY OF THE ENGLISH READING HABITS OF EFL STUDENTS IN INDONESIA

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**Abstract:** This article investigated the English reading habits of Indonesian students of EFL. The data were collected through a questionnaire survey and interview validation. The questionnaires were distributed to 546 EFL college students in East Java. Based on the statistical analysis of the data, it is concluded that although the students have read English since elementary school, they do not indicate to have good English reading habits. Only few of them are identified to have good English reading habits as suggested by their eagerness to regularly spend time reading various types of English texts and their high motivation to read English for pleasure. The EFL students read English for some purposes, i.e. for school assignments, for pleasure, and for knowledge and English skills improvement. Their positive belief about reading does not motivate them to read English for pleasure; rather, it is school assignments that appear to be their biggest motivation.

**Key words:** EFL students, English reading habits

People naturally learn at least one language to communicate with others, but they do not automatically learn how to read. Reading has to be learned and taught intentionally because people will not be able to read if they do not learn how to read. Teaching to read is, hence, significant to be carried out as early as possible. Some previous studies have proven that reading is essential. It can enhance people's social skills, improve hand-eye coordination, and provide people with endless hours of fun and entertainment. It is an access to social,

economic, and civic life (Clark & Akerman, 2006) and an underlying means of supporting the success of learning process (Broaddus & Ivey, 2001; Renandya, 2007). It also has positive influence on academic performance (Adetunji and Oladeji, 2007). Without the ability to read, therefore, the opportunities for academic and occupational success are limited.

Regarding the importance of reading, it is essential that students who learn English as their foreign language (hereafter, EFL students) establish good English reading habits because they are very much involved in and greatly benefit from English reading practices. In the context of Indonesian education, the skill of reading English as part of English subject is taught integratedly with other English skills since the students study in Elementary school for 6 years. Some pre Elementary schools have also included English subject in their curriculum. English subject is then continuously taught in the secondary (Junior and Senior High) schools for 6 years and tertiary education for two semesters / one year on the average. This means that EFL students in Indonesia generally learn English and are engaged in reading English texts for at least 13 years. How does such teaching and learning English bring about the establishment of English reading habits?

Reading as one of the indicators of being literate is an art of interpreting a written discourse. Meanwhile, a habit is a repeated action which people do often and regularly, sometimes without knowing that they are doing it. It is a pattern of behavior which acquires constant, regular, often unconscious inclination to perform an act through frequent repetition which is applied to any activity established during a course of time as a part of personality of an individual (Good, et al., 2008). Thus, a habit of reading is established by having frequent repetition of reading practices in a course of time so that it becomes the second nature of the EFL students' daily activities.

Since a habit of reading is nurtured by repeating the desired reading behavior every day until it becomes the second nature to the learners, repetition is the key. Accordingly, good reading habits in English of the EFL students are defined as a repeated desired reading behavior that becomes the second nature of the EFL students. A good reading habit is indicated by fluency, automaticity (Morris et.al, 2006), accuracy (Schwanenflugel et al., 2004), highly enjoyable reading practices, vast amount of reading, good proficiency in English (Akyay & Ogeyik, 2009; Renandya, 2007), positive attitude toward reading, conscious and avid reading, having a teacher who shared a love of reading (Park, 2006), self-selection of books, motivation to read, eagerness to receive a book as a

present (Jamnik, 2005), and regular reading after school hours (Adetunji & Oladeji, 2007). On the other hand, poor reading habits can be classified as poor mental habits identified as passive reading, purposeless reading, and regressing.

Based on the previous studies, there are certain factors which are found to actively contribute to the development of reading habits. Personal characteristics of the students including age distribution, social class, and parents' occupation (Adetunji, 2007); accessibility to electronic facilities such as internet (Akyay & Ogeyik, 2009; Karchmer, 2001; Huang, 2004) and home video influence the students' reading habits (Kaufman, 2007). Moreover, the environmental influence, parental influence, peer pressure, school curriculum, and teachers (Adetunji and Oladeji, 2007) are the other factors which can either support or militate against better reading habits. In line with this, Nathanson, Pruslow, and Levitt (2008) found the evidence that parents have a powerful effect in creating enthusiastic readers.

This article discusses a study intended to investigate the English reading habits of Indonesian students of EFL. It also seeks to find out the EFL students' purposes of reading English texts, their motivation to read English, their beliefs about reading English, and the indicators of the EFL students who have good English reading habits.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a questionnaire survey distributed to 546 students of English Department from 5 (five) state universities in East Java and interview validation. The questionnaire was developed by the researcher and validated by experts. It was also tried out. The questionnaire consists of 2 closed-ended sections- multiple choice questions and Likert Scale- and one open ended question asking about the respondents' opinion on the readers they have read and additional information on their habits of reading English that might not be covered in the three previous sections. The categories of the questionnaire include the amount of reading practice, the length of time of having reading habit, the types of texts to read, the number of books to be read, the published writings, the purposes of reading English texts, motivation to read English, belief about reading English and claim about their reading habits in English. The interview validation was carried out with the respondents who demonstrate the potential to have good English reading habits, their teachers,

and their classmates in order to select the EFL students who established good English reading habits. Hence, the indicators of the EFL students' good reading habits can be revealed.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings

The findings of the study show the EFL students' English reading habits, the purposes of their reading English texts, the motivation of their reading English and the indicators of the EFL students' good English reading habits.

#### *EFL Students' English Reading Habits*

The data on the EFL students' English reading habits are reflected in the amount of reading practice, the length of reading habits, the types of texts read, the number of books read, the number of published writings, and their own claim on their reading habits.

**Table 1. The Amount of Reading Practice**

<b>The Amount of Reading Practice</b>			
<b>No</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Frequency ( <math>\Sigma</math> )</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
1	I read more than five hours every day	8	1.47%
2	I read about five hours every day	2	0.37%
3	I read about four hours every day	11	2.01%
4	I read about three hours every day	56	10.26%
5	I read about two hours every day	95	17.40%
6	I read about one hour every day	117	21.43%
7	I read less than one hour every day	96	17.58%
8	I do not always read every day	122	22.34%
9	I seldom read	39	7.14%

Table 1 shows that the biggest percentage of the respondents (22.34%) does not always read every day and the second biggest percentage (21.43%) read about one hour every day. Since the amount of reading practice is considered the most obvious indicator of reading habits, the statistical data imply that the respondents' reading habits are not good/poor. Still, there are about 3.85 % respondents who read four hours or more every day. To spend about four until more than five hours every day reflects their interest in reading practice. This indicates, however, that only few out of the many EFL students have good reading habits.

In relation to the length of time the EFL students have the reading habits (see table 2), the statistical data show that among 546 respondents, there are 3 respondents (0.55%) who have read English before entering playgroup and most of them (57.33%) have read English since they were in Elementary School. This is logically acceptable since English is formally introduced to the students in Elementary School. This means that the respondents should have learned English for at least 10 years at the time of participating in this study. If it is correlated with their daily reading practices, still, the length of their learning English did not seem to be able to nurture their good English reading habits. The other important point to note is that none of the respondents read English when his/her parents accompany him/her to read. This indicates the absence of parents' involvement in their children reading English.

**Table 2. The Length of Time of Having Reading Habits**

<b>The Length of Time of Having Reading Habit</b>			
<b>No.</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Frequency (<math>\Sigma</math>)</b>	<b>Per- centage (%)</b>
1	I have read English before entering play group.	3	0.55%
2	I have read English soon after I was able to read.	22	4.03%
3	I have read English since I was in play group.	7	1.28%
4	I have read English since I was in kindergarten	48	8.79%
5	I have read English since I was in elementary school.	313	57.33%

*Table continued*

6	I have read English since I was in junior high school.	102	18.68%
7	I have read English since I was in senior high school.	25	4.58%
8	I have read English since I was in university/college.	14	2.56%
9	I read only when it is assigned by my teachers/lecturers.	8	1.47%
10	I read English when my parents accompany me to read.	0	0.00%
11	I rarely read English.	4	0.73%

With regard to the types of texts read, the statistical data (see Table 3) show that most of the respondents (57.69%) read various kinds of texts. Yet, only 3.85% of the respondents read e-text for their daily reading practices. This suggests that only few EFL students make use of the Internet to support their English reading practices.

**Table 3. The Types of Text Read**

<b>The Types of Text Read</b>			
<b>No.</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Frequency (<math>\Sigma</math>)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
1	I read various kinds of reading texts.	315	57.69%
2	I only read fiction texts such as drama, short story, novel, comic strips, legend, fairy tales, and poem.	111	20.33%
3	I only read nonfiction texts such as newspaper, magazines, leaflet, menu, letters, diaries, textbooks on various topics, travel brochures, and advertisements.	99	18.13%
4	I read e-text a lot in my daily reading practices.	21	3.85%

Concerning the number of books read (see table 4), most of the respondents, 503 (92.12%), read less than five books every week. If normally an EFL student read one book every day, there should be about 7 books read in a week. So, the EFL students should read more than 5 books every week. However, it is found that among 546 respondents, there are only 22 respondents (4.03%) who read five books every week and 21 respondents (3.85%) who read more than five books every week.

**Table 4. The Number of Books Read**

<b>The Number of Books Read</b>			
<b>No.</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Frequency (<math>\Sigma</math>)</b>	<b>Percentage ( % )</b>
1	I read five books every week.	22	4.03%
2	I read less than five books every week.	503	92.12%
3	I read more than five books every week.	21	3.85%

Moreover, because a habit of writing is assumed to correlate with reading habit, the number of published writing can also indicate the respondents' reading habits. The survey (see table 5) shows that most of the respondents (68.68%) do not have any published writings such as blog, wallpaper, or articles and only 1.65% who have a lot of published writing. This means that most of the respondents are assumed not to read a lot.

**Table 5. The Number of Published Writings**

<b>The Published Writings (articles, books, literary works)</b>			
<b>No.</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Frequency (<math>\Sigma</math>)</b>	<b>Percentage ( % )</b>
1	I do not have any published writings	375	68.68%
2	I have some published writings	157	28.75%
3	I have a lot of published writings	9	1.65%
4	I am active to write articles because I read a lot	5	0.92%

Concerning the respondents' claims on their English reading habits, Table 6 shows that 31.31 % respondents claim to have good English reading habits, but after the researcher carefully confirms their claim based on the findings of all criteria of the EFL students' reading habits and carries out validation by interviewing them, most of their claims are not confirmed. For example, they do not always read every day and cannot recall the English readers they have read. Still, according to the analysis of the statistical data, it can be assumed that there are 21 respondents (3.85%) who can be considered potential to have good English reading habits while most of the EFL students do not indicate to have good English reading habits.

**Table 6. The Respondents' Claim on their English Reading Habits**

<b>Reading Habits in English</b>	<b>Frequency (<math>\Sigma</math>)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
I have good reading habits in English	171	31.31
I have poor reading habits in English	64	11.72

***The Purposes of the EFL Students of Reading English Texts***

Concerning the second question of this study, what are the purposes of the EFL students to read English, the statistical data (see table 7) show that most of the respondents (65.56%) read English for pleasure. They enjoy and are interested in reading English texts.

**Table 7. The EFL Students' Purposes of Reading English Texts**

<b>The EFL Students' Purposes of Reading English Texts</b>	<b>Frequency (<math>\Sigma</math>)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
I read English for pleasure.	358	65.56
I read English for doing assignments.	328	60.07
I read English for improving my knowledge.	485	88.83
I read English because my parents support me to read.	170	31.15
I read English to improve my English skills.	494	90.47
I read English to spend my spare time.	219	40.11



The finding also tells that most of the respondents, 60.07%, read English for the sake of assignments. This means that they might not read English if there is no reading assignment. 88.83% respondents read English to improve their knowledge. This can mean that they read English because they are aware of the need to improve their knowledge by means of reading English. 90.47 % respondents read English to improve their English skills. This indicates that their interest of improving their English skills, which might result from the awareness as being a student of English Department, contribute to their English reading practices. In conclusion, the EFL students read for various purposes, namely, for pleasure, for assignments, and for their knowledge and English skills improvement.

***Motivation of the EFL Students to Read English Texts***

The findings of the study (table 8) show that most of the respondents (60.62%) keep reading English although their parents do not provide them with English books. This reflects their internal motivation to read English. Yet, it was also revealed that they read English because of their parents’ support. This shows that parents actually support their children to read English but the support is not always in the form of providing them with the English books. In other words, the EFL students are motivated to read English and their motivation is partly because of the support from their parents.

**Table 8. The Motivation of the EFL Students to Read English**

<b>The Motivation of the EFL Students to Read English</b>	<b>Frequency (<math>\Sigma</math>)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
I read English although my parents do not provide me with English books.	331	60.62
I read English because my parents provide me with a lot of English books.	120	21.97
I read English because my parents also read English.	38	6.96
I read English because my parents support me to read.	239	43.78

*Table continued*

I have no motivation to read English because English is difficult.	33	6.04
I read English although it is difficult.	351	64.28
I read English because my teachers/lecturers support me to read.	374	68.50
Reading is my pastime activity.	47	8.61

Most of the respondents (64.28%) state that they remain motivated to read English texts although English is difficult. They keep reading English for the sake of doing school assignments and getting academic success. Furthermore, the finding shows that the EFL students' motivation to read English is mainly because of their teachers' / lecturers' support (68.50%). 8.61% respondents say they make use of their pastime reading. This to a certain extent indicates good English reading habits.

To sum up, the findings show that the EFL students are motivated to read because of their teachers' support, school assignments / their status of being students of the English Department, and their internal motivation. Most of the EFL students do not mention reading as their pastime activity. This means that the EFL students are not motivated to read English for their pleasure.

***Beliefs of the EFL Students about Reading English***

Concerning the belief of the EFL students about reading English, table 9 shows that most of the respondents have positive belief that reading English texts can improve their English skills (95.24% respondents) and knowledge (93.23% respondents). They also believe that reading English can support their future career (83.70% respondents) and academic success (89.19% respondents). Those who have good reading habit in English usually have positive beliefs about reading English, but those who have positive beliefs about reading English do not always have good reading habit in English. However, the positive beliefs about reading English can support the existence of internal motivation to read English.

**Table 9. The Beliefs of the EFL Students about Reading English**

<b>Beliefs about Reading English</b>	<b>Frequency (<math>\Sigma</math>)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
I believe that reading English can improve my English skills.	520	95.24
I believe that reading English can improve my knowledge.	509	93.23
I do not believe that reading English can improve my English skills.	11	2.01
I do not believe that reading English can improve my knowledge.	4	0.73
I believe that reading English can support my future career.	457	83.70
I do not believe that reading English can support my future career.	27	4.95
I believe that reading English can support my academic success.	487	89.19
I do not believe that reading English can support my success of study.	31	5.69

#### ***Indicators of the EFL Students' Good English Reading Habits***

To investigate the EFL students who have good English reading habits, the researcher interviews the 21 respondents who are considered potential to develop good English reading habits, their friends / classmates, and their teachers / lecturers. It is found that there are 5 EFL students who established good English reading habits. The results of the study show that the indicators of their good English reading habits are 1) they are eager to read English; 2) they spend most of their time reading English texts; 3) they have strong interest to read English regularly, 4) they keep motivated to read English despite the difficulties; 5) they are strategic readers; 6) they have strong willingness to go to libraries and bookstores to find their own reading materials; 7) they consider books as valuable properties so that they always want to possess their own reading texts; 8) they have positive beliefs about reading English; 9) they make

use of the Internet as vast resourceful information of any kinds; and 10) they claim themselves to have good English reading habits.

### **Discussion and Implication**

The results of the analysis aiming to answer the research questions can be summarized into three points. First, although the EFL students have positive beliefs that reading English can improve their English skills and knowledge and can support their future career and academic success, most of them are indicated not to have good English reading habits. This is proved by the fact that they do not always read English everyday which means that reading English practices is not their habitual activity. The reasons for not having regular English reading practices are that they do not understand the content of the text in English and encounter a lot of unfamiliar words that obstruct reading comprehension. Similarly, Kusumarasdyati's (2008) study implicitly found that the EFL students have a lack of interest in reading which is due to similar reasons. Still, there are few EFL students who have developed good English reading habits. This implies that the teaching and learning of English which starts from primary to tertiary level of education or at least 9 years does not guarantee much the establishment of the EFL students' good English reading habits. Hence, it is necessary to consider other schemes of teaching reading, such as, Morning Reading Session (MRS) as a part of Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading (USSR), to cultivate good reading habits. As reported in Yaang's (2007) study that students find morning reading session as fruitful reading during school time, because it allows them to cultivate a reading habit, and they can find time to do leisure reading when they grow older. Another notable example is parents and teachers' active involvement in nurturing their children's reading habits. Even the busiest parents should find the time to keep communication open with their children and their children's teachers. This present study is also in line with Park's (2006) study which proved that the EFL students have positive beliefs that reading can promote their language proficiency.

Second, this study has proved that although most of the EFL students are motivated to read various kinds of English texts, their reading practices are mostly because of doing reading assignments, and improving their knowledge and their English skills. The most popular literary work read was *Harry Potter* series. Still, only few of them read English for pleasure which can be assumed as an indicator of good English reading habits. The EFL students' motivation to

read English for doing school assignments can actually be a starting point for them to develop good English reading habits if their teachers can act as a good model who established good English reading habits. Park (2006) found that the EFL students who establish a good reading habit have a teacher who shares a love of reading. This is in line with Dornyei's (2001) statement that "motivation" is responsible for why people decide to do something; how long they are willing to sustain the activity; and how hard they are going to pursue it by modeling the personal characteristics of closely related person. In this sense, modeled behavior of teachers' and parents' good reading habits can set to tone for developing reading as not only as an acquired taste but also as pleasurable activity. As a result, the EFL students' motivation will be a powerful basis to develop good English reading habits. Takase (2007) found that intrinsic motivation is the most powerful factor for motivating learners of any age to read books in both their L1 and L2. As revealed in this study that intrinsic motivation to read English plays significant role for the EFL students to read English although the motivation is only to fulfill the requirements of school reading assignments.

Finally, this study confirms that the EFL students who develop good English reading habits are the ones who are eager to spend most of their time to read English texts regularly. In line with Akyay's & Ogeyik's (2009) and Renandya's (2007) studies, these students are interested and experience joy and happiness when they are reading. They indicate that the EFL students who have good reading habits have highly entertaining reading practices, have vast amount of reading, and have good proficiency in English. This implies that the involvement of teachers and parents is essential to set up a scheme for reading as one of the ways for the EFL students to promote good reading habits. Another indicator of good English reading habits is that they stay motivated to read English and have strong willingness to go to libraries and bookstores to find their own reading materials. In line with this, Jamnik's (2005) study also revealed that the students who have good reading habits enjoy reading and they are able to choose the books themselves which is not the case with reading assignments. They are also motivated to read and are happy to receive a book as a present. They consider books as good properties so that they always want to possess their own reading texts. Moreover, the present study also proves that the EFL students who have good English reading habits have positive belief about reading English, which supports Park's (2006) study. This implies the importance of providing the students with English reading practices which can

cultivate positive beliefs about reading. The last indicator is that the students make use of the Internet as vast resourceful information of any kind. This means that the Internet which provides a bounder less world of various reading materials can serve as an essential tool for the EFL students to cultivate and establish good English reading habits if they can take the most from it. Concerning the negative effects of the Internet such as game online addiction and pornography, parents and teachers need to actively participate in guiding the students to use the Internet as an important resource of reading materials.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

It can be concluded that most of the EFL students do not indicate to have good English reading habits although they have formally learned English from Elementary school to university. The length of time to learn English does not guarantee the cultivation of good English reading habits. Since the present study is descriptive and does not involve application of any classroom teaching techniques, it is suggested that there are further studies on English teaching technique which can promote good English reading habits. In addition, since a reading habit is a product of repeated reading practice which is developed within home and school framework, it is necessary for parents and teachers to build good literacy atmosphere which can promote the EFL students' good reading habits. It is also found that even though the students have positive beliefs about reading English, their motivation to read mostly comes from school assignments. Accordingly, it is important to carry out further studies on what factors contribute to the development of good English reading habits of the EFL students and enhance their intrinsic motivation to read not only for the sake of doing assignments.

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