

THE WATTPAD EFFECT: DEVELOPING READING HABITS THROUGH ONLINE ENGLISH STORIES

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the factors influencing the development of reading habits through online English stories on Wattpad and explores the platform's associated benefits. Employing a descriptive-qualitative research method, data were collected through in-depth interviews with three active Wattpad users. Purposive and snowball sampling were utilized to select respondents. Data analysis followed Miles, Huberman, and Saldana's (2014) interactive model. Findings indicate that reading frequency, accessibility, diverse genres, and a strong interest to enhance English language proficiency significantly contribute to the formation of reading habits. Participants reported spending 3.5-6 hours weekly on Wattpad, reading 1-3 times per week. Key benefits of using Wattpad include improved language skills, expanded vocabulary, enhanced grammar comprehension, and overall reading proficiency. This study concludes that Wattpad's accessibility, diverse content, and interactive features effectively facilitate the creation and maintenance of English reading habits.

KEYWORDS: *Online English Stories, Reading Habits, Wattpad.*

INTRODUCTION

In the current era of information technology, many people spend a significant amount of time engaging in online activities. Indonesia is one of the largest internet users in the world (Sari & Rahmadhani, 2020). The Indonesia Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) survey from 2022-2023 confirms that 215.63 million, or 78.19%, of Indonesia's total population use the internet (Sadya, 2023). However, even though internet users are very high, interest in reading is still very low (Sarina & Awaru, 2019). The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) reported that Indonesia's interest in reading ranked second from the bottom in 2016 (Safitri et al., 2021). Since many interested users do not use reading for beneficial purposes, including developing reading habits, this lack of interest in reading is extremely concerning. (Chettri & Roud, 2013) Reading habits is an activity that is done repeatedly. This implies that one must consistently practice reading habits to acquire boundless knowledge.



Many digital platforms and applications, like Wattpad, surround humans in this technological era and support the development of reading habits. Wattpad is a well-known reader application platform and online community site that helps people write online (Saputri, 2019). One of the most popular online platforms for users to write, read, and share fiction and non-fiction stories. Wattpad makes it simple to provide interactive and enjoyable experiences for various types of stories that attract readers, such as romance, fantasy, mystery, and many more. According to Syamsiah (2020), Wattpad is not just a media site for reading; it also allows the reader to publish a story. Additionally, it has become a popular platform for authors to share their work online, making it accessible to readers. Readers can interact with authors by providing comments and engaging in discussions through the message feature.

Several previous studies have explored how the use of online English stories on Wattpad fosters reading habits. Sari and Nurjati (2023) describe that Wattpad is a platform that helps students improve their English reading skills. It also adds that Wattpad is useful for students to learn more vocabulary. Furthermore, Ganie et al. (2021) show that Wattpad plays an important role in building students' vocabulary and their overall reading skills. Finally, Gunadi (2022) underscores the numerous advantages of reading English on Wattpad, highlighting its potential as a substitute medium for reading exercises.

Drawing from the description provided above, this study aims to investigate the following research question: What are the factors that foster reading habits through online English stories? What are the benefits that Wattpad offers through its online English stories? The study aimed to find out the factors that create reading habits through online English stories and to figure out the benefits of online English stories provided by Wattpad.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading is a crucial skill in learning that facilitates communication and idea-sharing through written mediums (Sabrina et al., 2020). Sagirli (2016) describes it as an active process that involves identifying important ideas for comparison. Reading involves interacting with written language (Sariakin & Rizka, 2020). Several previous studies have discussed the essential parts of reading. Mermelstein (2014) showed that the treatment group achieved higher reading levels. It also showed that the use of reading can be a successful alternative to improving Asian students' reading skills. Furthermore, Delfi et al. (2018) emphasize that personal reading, which includes the role of parents, students' positive attitudes, appropriate reading material, activities for reading, and the

development of critical thinking, plays an important role in developing students' interest in reading. Furthermore, Salikin et al., (2017) emphasized the importance of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in encouraging students to read English stories.

Online English stories refer to reading stories in English through platforms or the internet. It involves accessing and engaging with English stories, be they traditional stories, modern literature, or educational content, through online resources such as websites, e-books, audiobooks, and digital storytelling platforms (Hustarna et al., 2021). According to Yuliani and Hartanto (2021), digital stories have a positive effect on English learning through the internet, improving language skills, digital literacy, cultural awareness, and student engagement in the learning process. The study by Dania (2020) shows that participants realize how important it is to build reading habits to improve their understanding online, which encourages them to read more. Gretter et al. (2017) suggested that students realized that building a reading habit was important to improving their reading comprehension after reading short stories online.

Reading habits are well-structured learning that helps students understand academic subjects and pass exams (Gunadi, 2022). These habits encompass reading frequency, duration, and the variety of materials consumed (Syamsiah, 2020). Several previous studies discussed the essential parts of reading habits. Hatimurah (2021) concludes that reading habits and vocabulary mastery simultaneously influence students' ability to read English procedural texts. Magsalin (2023) shows that reading frequency and reading duration are inconsistent, which means that reading more often and longer does not necessarily mean better reading comprehension. Wulandari (2023) highlights that there is a significant correlation between reading habits and reading comprehension ability in the adequate category.

Wattpad is a popular online platform that allows users to write and share tales, including online reading stories, greatly influencing the public's reading habits (Furotun et al., 2021). Wattpad is a website that allows account holders to upload work regularly (Syamsiah, 2020). According to Syaharani and Mahadian (2017), Wattpad reported 45 million monthly users and 15 billion minutes of user time in 2016. Numerous studies have explored this topic. Fadillah and Amin (2022) show that Wattpad can help students expand their vocabulary and remember ideas and language points in the texts they read. Permatasari et al., (2020) show that students have a positive perception of extensive reading on Wattpad, which is divided into three components: cognitive, affective, and conative. Safitri et al., (2021) found that the Wattpad application contributed to increasing students' ability to read text stories.



RESEARCH METHODS

This research employed a qualitative research method to investigate how online English stories on Wattpad can create reading habits. The research adopted a constructive perspective, building knowledge from individual experiences and social value (Creswell, 2013). The data collection techniques utilized triangulation, including interviews to obtain direct information from the research subject and documentation to gather relevant supporting data (Sugiyono, 2017). The main instrument in this study was an interview guide, which included preliminary and core questions adapted from Gunadi (2022). The questions were designed to collect information on reading frequency, language proficiency improvement, platform preferences, and perceived benefits of Wattpad for reading in English.

Primary data sources were collected through in-depth interviews with active Wattpad users. This research process used a combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques. The purposive sampling criteria include: having a Wattpad account, being active on Wattpad, actively reading English stories, having experience reading English at least three English stories regularly 1-3 times per week, and being in their 20s. The selection of age criteria refers to a study (Syamsiah, 2020), which states that the age of 20 is a period of efficient reading interest development. Snowball sampling is applied to expand data sources when the samples obtained are not sufficient. According to Sugiyono (2017), snowball sampling is a data source sampling technique that begins with a small sample size and gradually expands to a larger one. The snowball sampling process on this study included identifying and recruiting initial informants who met the sampling criteria, contacting predetermined individuals and inviting them to participate, and repeating the process until the desired sample size was achieved. The combination of these two techniques resulted in three informants—informant 1, informant 2, and informant 3, who met the criteria and could provide in-depth insights into the reading habits of English stories on Wattpad.

Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) proposed an interactive model for data analysis that encompasses several stages, including data condensation, selecting relevant interview informants, focusing on key themes related to reading habits, and transforming raw data into structured summaries. Data display involves systematically organizing findings and categorizing responses thematically. Continuous analysis of emerging patterns and cross-verification with raw data led to the conclusion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Following the interviews with three female informants aged 20-24 who actively use Wattpad for reading English stories, this study revealed two main findings: factors that create reading habits through online English stories and the benefits that Wattpad provides for English language development:

FACTORS INFLUENCING READING HABITS THROUGH ONLINE ENGLISH STORIES

1) Frequency of reading on Wattpad per week

The informants demonstrated consistent reading patterns, spending considerable time reading English stories.

"Every week, I dedicate approximately six hours for reading. I read Wattpad with English stories once or three times a week." (In 1)

"I think about 3.5 hours per week. Usually, two or three times per week." (In 2)

"The time I spend four hours per week. I access Wattpad three times a week to read." (In 3)

The results of the above interview reveal that the informant has a strong reading habit and a sufficient time commitment for reading activities, spending an average of three and a half to six hours per week reading English stories on Wattpad, with a frequency of 1-3 times per week. Chettri and Rout's (2013) research aligns with this, highlighting the significant impact of regular reading engagement on the development of robust reading habits. The more frequently an individual engages in reading activities, the more likely they are to integrate this habit into their daily routine.

2) Reason to choose Wattpad

The reasons for choosing the Wattpad platform as a source for reading stories in English provide an overview of the factors that attract interest and encourage reading habits among informants.

"Because it is easy to access and can also be read offline, it is a digital reading platform that was first recommended by my friend when I was in high school." (In 1)

"Wattpad's accessibility and ability to read without internet access are its key features. Indeed, Wattpad allows for internet-free reading, clear writing, and direct interaction with the author." (In 2)

"I chose Wattpad because it offers a large select of free stories in various genres" (In 3)

The data results showed that the reasons expressed by informants include ease of access, the ability to read offline, friend recommendations, clarity of writing, the ability to interact directly with writers, and the availability of a large selection of free stories in various genres. Furotun et al. (2021) also reveal that people choose Wattpad for reading

for a variety of reasons, including the availability of diverse genres, interesting and easy-to-understand stories, and the opportunity to read stories directly.

3) Interest in reading English stories

One is more likely to engage in these activities regularly and consistently when their interest is higher.

"Yes, because I felt like I was in the story with every detail of the story I read. Interesting, because I have to find out one or two words, also if there are sentences that I don't understand." (In 1)

"Yes, because reading can add new insights. I like it because reading English stories can increase vocabulary." (In 2)

"Yes, I like it because it increases my insight and knowledge. Yes, because it helps me continue to hone my English skills." (In 3)

The interview results showed that the informants have a high interest in reading English stories because it can improve their knowledge and skills in English, such as enriching vocabulary and understanding sentence structure. This is in line with research conducted by Delfi, et al. (2018), which states that a person's interest in reading is influenced by factors such as the role of parents, positive attitudes, the availability of appropriate reading materials, and activities carried out for reading. A strong interest in reading activities is the main driver for forming reading habits.

4) The length of time using Wattpad to read English stories

The time informants spend using Wattpad to read English stories can indicate how long it took them to develop the habits.

"I have started reading stories in English for one year. Usually when the atmosphere is calm and I have free time, such as at night before going to bed." (In 1)

"I have been using Wattpad for approximately four years. In my free time." (In 2)

"I have been using Wattpad for six years. I read in free or relaxing time, and on holidays." (In 3)

According to the interview data, informants have used Wattpad for 1–6 years to read stories in English. Informants also choose their free time to enjoy reading stories on Wattpad, such as at night before bed, on a holiday, or when relaxing. This is in line with research by Permatasari et al., (2020) showing that flexible reading time according to individual preferences helps strengthen reading habits.

5) Genre of stories

The genres of stories that informants are interested in can give an idea of their reading preferences and tastes, which can affect their overall reading interest and habits.

"Romance and Action Genres." (In 1)

"Romance and Action." (In 2)

"Romance and Mystical." (In 3)

The data analysis above concluded that genres preferred by informants can indicate taste in reading, thereby influencing overall interest and reading habits. Informants are known to be interested in genres such as romance, action, and mysticity. Gunadi's (2020) research aligns with Wattpad's success in fostering an environment where readers can discover stories that align with their interests, thereby promoting more active and consistent reading habits. This finding also conforms those in the study by Hermida (2021) that reading favorite books increase reading habits.

BENEFITS THAT WATTPAD PROVIDES THROUGH ONLINE ENGLISH STORIES

1) Improving English language skills

Reading can be an effective way to improve overall English skills. The informants reported significant language development through regular reading.

"Yes, of course I'm sure, because every time I read, I definitely find a new word that I don't know, which of course adds to my English skills. I would recommend it to my close friends because it can help improve my skill or add a little knowledge in English." (In 1)

"I think yes, it can improve because reading frequently can also introduce new vocabulary." (In 2)

"Yes, I'm sure that reading can improve English skills because I know more new vocabulary and understand grammar. Of course, it is a recommended activity, because it's very good for improving English reading skills through interesting stories." (In 3)

The analysis revealed that regularly reading English stories can enhance overall English language skills, including vocabulary enrichment, grammatical understanding, and improved reading skills. According to a previous study, digital storytelling is very beneficial for improving students' English skills, especially in four main aspects: reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Yuliani & Hartanto, 2021). These four digital storytelling skills can expand vocabulary, improve understanding of sentence structure, and significantly improve English proficiency.

2) Improving English reading habits

Using Wattpad as a medium to access various reading materials can encourage readers to read English stories regularly, so that it can improve readers' reading habits.

"I think so, because I enjoy reading stories in English." (In 1)

"Yes, because it is to practice English pronunciation even better." (In 2)

"Wattpad really helped me develop a reading habit, because it was easy to access new stories, which motivated me to keep reading." (In 3)

The informants stated that Wattpad facilitates the development of reading habits through its interesting content, the ability to practice language pronunciation and the motivation to continue reading new stories. Previous research states that regular reading of online stories encourages readers to read more and realizes the importance of building reading habits to improve comprehension (Dania, 2020). This highlights Wattpad's important role in improving reading habits in English in the modern era.

3) The ease of using Wattpad

One of its advantages is the ability to access various genres and start reading anywhere without having to carry a physical book. Several informants in this study expressed their opinions about the advantages of Wattpad over books.

"On Wattpad, there are various genres and easy browsing access." (In 1)

"Wattpad can be read anywhere without carrying a book." (In 2)

"Easy to read anywhere using a handphone without need to carry a book." (In 3)

Research findings show that Wattpad's main advantages compared to books are its wide selection of genres, ease of access, and the ability to read anywhere without having to carry a physical book. This is in accordance with the statement of Furotun et al. (2021), which states that Wattpad can be an effective tool for reading short stories and providing direct comments on the paragraphs read.

4) Improving reading frequency

Increasing reading fluency is an important step in developing reading skills. This section explores the informants' perceptions about whether Wattpad can improve their reading fluency in English.

"Yes, there is an improvement compared to before." (In 1)

"Yes, it has increased because if there is difficult vocabulary, it is always repeated." (In 2)

"Yes, because by getting used to reading English stories on Wattpad, I felt that my reading fluency is increasing." (In 3)

The informants said that their reading fluency improved after reading English stories regularly on Wattpad. They attributed increased regular engagement with English texts to better understanding of flow and content, as well as repetition of difficult words. Another study by Safitri et al. (2021) found that Wattpad increased reading fluency through exposure to in-depth and meaningful English stories. This demonstrates the use of Wattpad as a tool to enhance reading fluency through interaction with English stories.

5) Improving stories comprehension ability

Improving the ability to understand stories is an important aspect of the language learning process, especially when it comes to enriching vocabulary and understanding story structure.

"Yes, of course it has improved because I read various stories in English, so my understanding has increased." (In 1)

"Yes, reading various kinds of stories frequently allows me to add new vocabulary, which in turn enhances my understanding." (In 2)

"Yes, I feel that the more often I read stories in English, the more my ability to understand the plot and content." (In 3)

Based on the analysis results, it appears that consistency with language and narrative structure helps informants enrich their vocabulary and understand the storyline and story content. Wulandari et al. (2023) conducted research that revealed the influence of reading habits and linguistic skills on an individual's comprehension of specific texts. Reading regularly and developing language skills can help improve text comprehension.

CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that Wattpad effectively fosters English reading habits through its accessibility and diverse content. Several factors, including regular reading frequency, accessibility, a variety of genres, and a high interest in improving English language skills, demonstrate this. Wattpad users spend an average of 3.5–6 hours per week for reading, with a frequency of 1-3 times a week, indicating a fairly high level of engagement in reading activities. Furthermore, Wattpad provides various benefits to its users, especially in language skill development, vocabulary enhancement, grammar comprehension, and overall reading ability. The advantages of Wattpad over physical books lie in its accessibility, diversity of content, and ability to read anywhere. These findings suggest that digital reading platforms like Wattpad can serve as valuable tools for English language learning and reading habit development.

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