

An Exploratory Study on Students' Reading Interest Development through Independent Reading-Retelling Activity

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Abstract

Reading interest, in addition to reading skills, is crucial for students if they want to be successful readers. The condition of low reading interest among students has been a major issue that needs a creative follow-up from scholars, teachers and practitioners. This study aims to explore the development of students' reading interest in relation to their participation in independent reading-retelling activity as part of independent learning activity in a particular course they took. Seventy-five students from Faculty and Teacher Training Education of Universitas Lambung Mangkurat, Indonesia, were involved as the participants in this study. The students took part in independent reading-retelling activity which requires them to read novels and short stories and retell it to as well as do sharing session to discuss the stories with their partners. This activity was done out of course schedule and complemented with a journal entry to track the students' progress. Without the purpose of assessing the students, the activity was intended to give students meaningful reading experience and to grow their reading interest. The encouragement of the lecturer was regularly given to the students to keep up their reading and retelling. A questionnaire was used to collect data on their reading interest and their perception on the influence they feel from the activity. This study showed that the students' reading interest was at medium level with several positive reading behaviors. From the students' perception, the activity has given them positive influence on their vocabulary growth, reading comprehension, self-quality development, and reading interest.

Keywords: independent reading, reading, reading interest, retelling activity

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Introduction

Reading as a means of collecting and analyzing information is predominant for people's career improvement in the era of 21st century. For learners particularly, reading might be their primary need to achieve academic success. It is generally assumed that reading will take place meaningfully if it is preceded by interest to read. Cambria and Guthrie (2010) state that in addition to reading skills, students should have will to read in order to benefit from reading and to be a reader. Will itself, according to Cambria and Guthrie (2010, p. 16), "describes children's enjoyments, their wants, and their behaviors surrounding reading". This means that will includes reading interest. Reading interest is defined as the extent to which an individual feel excited to engage in reading written materials and delighted to find new information (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010; Thomas, 2001). Reading activity will be more meaningful and beneficial if the reading interest which precedes the reading rooted in one's intrinsic motivation, not in the force of other parties or extrinsic rewards (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010).

Reading interest has been investigated by a number of scholars and it is found to be beneficial for reading success. Hidi (2001) made a review on the empirical findings related to interest and reading and noted that all types of interest gives positive contribution and enhancement on reader's comprehension. In the same vein, Squires (2014) in his study reveals positive significant relationship between reading interest and reading comprehension. Miranda et al. (2011) further explain that high reading interest is usually reflected in positive reading attitudes, such as having willingness to comprehend words and ideas in the reading passages and perceiving reading as pleasant activity. At this point, Cambria and Guthrie (2010) state that the pleasant feeling that students feel in reading can help them to provide more time, effort and concentration in reading. This will help them to enrich their knowledge and eventually influence their academic achievement. Students with high reading interest are also likely to share what they read to others. Thus, it can be stated that these positive reading attitudes derived from reading interest help students to improve their reading comprehension more effectively.

Many scholars and practitioners conduct research to investigate the real overview of students' reading interest. Pehlivan, Serin and Serin (2010) studied reading interest and reading habit of students from education faculties in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and found that the students' reading interest was at medium level and their reading habit was very low. Issa, Aliyu, Akangbe, and Adedeji (2012) conducted similar study to federal polytechnic students and found that the students mostly read notebooks and textbooks and it is closely related to the finding of students' reason to read, namely to pass examination. The similar finding of reading to pass examination is also shown by Owusu-Acheaw (2014) and Rasiyah, Kaur & Nagaratnam (2011), while textbook as the mostly-read materials is also revealed by Akanda, Hoq, and Hasan (2013). Issa et al. (2012) note that the findings indicate less positive reading habit orientation since reading for examinations is considered forced reading and it is not likely to promote readers' awareness of recreational use of reading. This trend, according to Rasiyah et al. (2011), suggests that the students generally read only for scores, not for the love of reading itself. Furthermore, Akanda et al. (2013) demonstrated that the majority of the undergraduate students in Bangladesh context in their study pointed up watching television as their favorite pastime and only 26.9% like reading for their

favorite pastime, while Owusu-Acheaw (2014) showed that visiting social media is the activity that the students mostly do for their leisure time. Although students show their agreement on the importance of reading (Issa et al., 2012; Akanda et al., 2013; Owusu-Acheaw, 2014), these previous studies mainly highlight students' low interest to read voluntarily which should have been supposed to be rooted from their own intrinsic motivation.

In Indonesian context, Wahyuni, Listyasari and Rangkuti (2017) found that the majority of the students at Indonesian acronym for institute of teachers' education (LPTK or *Lembaga Pendidikan Tenaga Kependidikan*) have low reading interest. Similarly, Hardianto (2011) investigated reading interest of undergraduate students in State University of Yogyakarta and found that the students' reading interest is also low. This is indicated by the students' responses which opted "sometimes" for having willingness to read. The low reading interest is also reflected by the lack of students' willingness to access books and book advancement. Moreover, the low reading interest is also demonstrated by the study of Widodo and Harnanik (2015) involving students in Economic Faculty of State University of Semarang, yet the reading interest issue can be facilitated and positively influenced by the library service and social environment at the college.

In addition to reading interest, factors which made students unwilling to read are also disclosed by previous studies, yet the results vary. For instance, Issa et al. (2012) found that home environment as the most dominant hindrance factor of reading, while Akanda et al. (2013) demonstrate lack of interesting reading materials as the most dominant factor. Owusu-Acheaw (2014) even reveals internal factor from the students themselves as the hindrance to reading, namely mere laziness. Students' laziness to read might be caused by their perception on reading as boring activity, not as pleasurable activity (Issa et al., 2012; Akanda et al., 2013; Owusu-Acheaw, 2014). These various factors are necessary to ponder if teachers and educational practitioners attempt to help their students to build and nurture their reading interest.

Some effort has been made to solve the problem of low reading interest, such as the empowerment of library service, advancement of book availability, use of innovative reading techniques and strategies in classrooms, and sustainable reading program. The effort made is adjusted to the problematic background of the low reading interest. This study has been underpinned by the previous studies' findings that reading is mostly considered as boring activity by students and that laziness becomes one of the internal factors which block the willingness to read. To trigger students' reading interest, reading activity should be designed in a favorable way, not in the sense of utilitarian reading for examination or score, so the love of reading can be instilled gradually. This study aims to explore the development of undergraduate students' reading interest through independent reading-retelling activity. Independent reading, very much like extensive reading, is reading for pleasure done outside of school or course schedule. In this type of reading, students care given encouragement to read pleurably on their own, as many reading materials as possible, without being anxious of testing or marks. Independent reading is affirmed beneficial for students' enrichment of vocabulary, improvement of reading comprehension, verbal fluency, academic success, as well as understanding and appreciation of students' own life, environment and society (Krashen, 1993; Whitten, Labby & Sullivan, 2016; Renandya, 2007).

As pointed up by Du Toit's (2001) survey results that readership promotion is highly necessary at school and at home, independent reading-retelling activity is regarded as part of readership promotion among students. Literature in the form of short story and novel is chosen in this activity since it is aimed at adding the pleasure for reading itself, so students will not find it as a technical or boring reading like what they experience in reading for examination. Moreover, retelling is included as part of this activity to integrate collaborative talk, so students can share what they have read and discuss it with their peers. This activity, quite similar to literature discussion, has been proved affirmative to add the enjoyment of reading, contribute positively to students' learning, reading interest and reading comprehension, especially those who are struggling readers (Pittman & Honchell, 2014). The independent reading-retelling activity is expected to be able to develop students' reading interest and help them to avoid being reluctant readers, so they can engage in meaningful reading for their own intellectual, psychological and social development and value reading.

Method

Participants

The participants of this study were 75 undergraduate students of Teacher Training and Education Faculty at Lambung Mangkurat University, a leading university in South Kalimantan Province, Indonesia. The students were at the second year of their study and were taking the course of Reading Instruction and Theory.

Independent Reading-Retelling Activity

Independent reading-retelling activity was designed as a complementary part of Reading Instruction and Theory course. After the students received the instruction on reading approaches, methods, and techniques, the students were told to do independent reading-retelling activity outside the course schedule. The activity used literature in the form of novel and short story. After the independent reading was finished, the students were asked to pair up and retell the gist of the story they have read to their partner including retelling the characters, setting, and plot. In addition to the retelling activity, the students and their partner were asked to do sharing session about the story by talking about some points adapted from Pittman and Honchell's (2014) literature discussion group: the students' favorite parts and not favorite parts and the reasons, new words they find from the story; and what lesson they learn from the story as well as how the students connect with and reflect on the lesson learned. Renandya (2007, p. 145) suggests that "regular monitoring is recommended especially when working with reluctant readers". Thus, regular monitoring is needed in this kind of reading especially to keep track of students' progress, yet the purpose of the monitoring is to motivate the students, not for assessment. Thus, to keep the students on the track, a journal entry is provided to be filled by the students to write the results of their sharing session. This activity was conducted for three months, with the required amount of literature was minimum three novels and ten short stories. The schedule of the retelling and sharing session was determined by the students in a balanced way, so it was well-distributed during the three-month period. In the meeting of classroom schedule once a week during the period, the lecturer made time to ask the students' feeling about the activity and encourage them to keep up

their work. After the whole activity was finished, the students were asked to submit their journal entry to the lecturer to get feedback and encouragement from the lecturer.

Instrument

The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire to explore students' reading interest designed based on the theories of reading interest and the expert assistance in the field of reading. The questionnaire consisted of 14 items which had five options using Likert-Scale, namely always (4), often (3), sometimes (2) and never (1). The items covered the willingness to read, indication of reading habit, reading with pleasure, reading compared to other activities, benefits of reading, engagement in reading, repetition in reading when dealing with reading difficulty, frequency of reading, theme or topic of reading materials, the willingness to make time for reading, note-taking of important ideas from reading to broaden knowledge, and library visit. The questionnaire also consisted of five open-ended questions to investigate students' perception about the impact of the activity on the enjoyment of the reading, their reading comprehension, vocabulary, self-quality development and reading interest. The instrument was administered after the three-month independent reading-retelling activity was finished.

Results

This study demonstrated that the students' reading interest can be generally categorized at medium level. This finding is based on the students' responses which are mostly at the options 'always' and 'often' for each questionnaire item. At item 1 on having willingness to read, there were 30.67% of the students who selected 'always' and other 50.67% who selected 'often'. The favorable indication of reading interest from item 1 is supported by the students' responses for item 2 in which the accumulation 74.67% of the students do reading task with pleasure. However, not all the students do reading activity in college and at home as indicated by the similar percentages of students' responses for options 'often' and 'sometimes' for item 3. Moreover, half of the students preferred reading to other activities, such as watching TV or playing, in their free time as indicated by item 4.

Table 1. Students' Responses (%) for Each Questionnaire Items

No	Items	Students' Responses			
		Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
1.	Do you have willingness and motivation to read?	30.67%	50.67%	18.66%	0%
2.	If you get reading task, do you do it with pleasure?	38.67%	36%	25.33%	0%
3.	Are you accustomed to reading books in college and at home?	4%	49.33%	46.67%	0%
4.	If you have the options between reading or other activities (such as watching TV or playing), will you choose reading?	14.67%	35.33%	47.33%	2.67%
5.	Do you feel the benefits of reading?	70.67%	29.33%	0%	0%

6.	Do you think the books/reading materials you read have influence on your behavior and attitude?	25.33%	48%	26.67%	0%
7.	When reading, do you try to get the gist or the ideas in the reading material?	64%	36%	0%	0%
8.	When you find difficulty in comprehending the reading materials, do you repeat the reading?	38.67%	37.33%	24%	0%
9.	Do you do reading activity every day?	18.67%	24%	57.33%	0%
10.	Do you make time to read articles or short stories on the wall magazine of your campus?	6.67%	18.66%	72%	2.67%
11.	Do you make special time for reading?	14.67%	50.66%	32%	2.67%
12.	Do you try to read wherever you are?	6.67%	28%	65.33%	0%
13.	Do you take note important points from the materials you read to broaden your knowledge?	17.33%	64%	12%	6.67%
14.	Do you visit library to access books or other reading materials?	4%	80%	10.67%	5.33%

Questionnaire items 5 and 6 aimed to picture the students' perception on the benefits of reading. The significant 70.67% of the students admitted that they always feel the benefits of reading, and the majority of the students admitted the influence that books and materials have on their behavior and attitude. In the aspect of engagement in reading, it is affirmative that all the students try to get the gist or the ideas in the reading material and most of them try to refine their understanding of the material by repeating the reading (items 7 and 8).

Items 9, 10, 11 and 12 elicited students' effort in making time to read. In terms of reading frequency, the majority of the students stated that they do not read every day, as indicated by the highest percentage on option 'sometimes' and the same option for making time to read articles or short stories on the wall magazine at their campus. In spite of the fact that they do not read every day, a bit more positive indication of reading interest is shown by the students' responses on making special time to read. Place and condition for reading might be a determining factor for reading to take place since the students mostly chose 'sometimes' to indicate their effort to read wherever they were. This is likely due to some typical places and condition the students prefer to do reading activities.

The last two items were related to activities that facilitate the students' reading activity. The majority of the students demonstrated that they did note-taking while reading to expand their knowledge and visited library to access books and reading materials. Library visit might be important for the students to find books and materials for their courses and for the independent reading-retelling activity.

The results of open-ended items were quite interesting. From the first item, it was deduced that all of the students regarded the independent reading-retelling activity enjoyable due to the content of the stories and the collaborative activity. Some students implied the reading activity as recreational activity since they felt their imagination took part while doing the activity and they felt the joy of reading. A student even mentioned that instead of being stressful due to the activity, the activity made him perceive that reading is intrinsically rewarding because of the inspiring stories he read. Most of the students also like the idea of retelling and sharing session since they feel that collaboration makes the activity more interesting. With their partners, they admitted that they gladly shared ideas and tried to understand their partners' point of view on the content of novels or short stories.

The second item elicited the students' perception on the influence of the independent reading-retelling activity on their comprehension. All of the students' responses were affirmative for this item. They viewed the activity as beneficial activity to improve their reading comprehension. One of the students mentioned, *"The more I read, the more familiar I am with the organization pattern of the stories. I feel more accustomed to finding main ideas of the stories. Gradually, I can understand the next short stories easier little by little."* This finding can also be seen from the student's response *"What improves my reading comprehension in the reading activity is that the process that I experience. I have to read the reading materials, understand the content, and retell it to my friends. This process helps me to practice to get the gist of the reading effectively and efficiently, so I can retell it well to my friends"*

From the second open-ended item, the students agreed that the independent reading-retelling activity they have done help them to enhance their vocabulary knowledge. They perceived that they got several new vocabulary items from the reading activity. Furthermore, the students' responses for item 4 revealed whether they perceive benefit of independent reading-retelling activity toward their self-quality development. All of the students provided positive responses. They considered the activity has been useful to expand their knowledge. According to the data, some students mentioned the knowledge they got from the reading is mostly about how to deal with oneself and people. Some of them also mentioned that they obtained meaningful moral lesson from the stories and can reflect on them.

The last open-ended item was about students' perception on the influence of the activity toward their reading interest. All of students' positive responses on this item were underpinned by the enjoyment of the reading and retelling activities, the feeling of being accustomed to read gradually, and the awareness of the importance of reading. For example, one of the students commented *"At the beginning, I am engaged in reading the novels due to the requirement of this course. Yet, when I feel accustomed to it, I feel that I enjoy the reading more and I voluntarily read other novels and I think it's going to be my habit now."* The other student wrote, *"We are required to read and retell the stories to our friends. The retelling activity is interesting and it somehow affects me to read more stories, novels, and other reading materials and share the contents to my friends."*

Discussion

This study has revealed a bit more satisfying picture of students' reading interest compared to the previous studies conducted in Indonesian context. This study showed that the students already had have the willingness and motivation to read, and the important thing is that they show their willingness to read with pleasure. The fact that they do not always read at home and college every day is due to several factors. It can be the existence of more interesting distraction, such as TV (Akanda et al., 2013) and social media (Owusu-Acheaw, 2014).

The finding on the students' perception on the importance of reading is in line with Issa et al. (2012), Akanda et al. (2013), and Owusu-Acheaw (2014). The nurturing and maintaining effort of students' reading interest do not simply depend on the students themselves. As has been demonstrated by the study of Widodo and Harnanik (2015), library service and social environment play roles in nourishing students' reading interest. Faculties and Universities should create conducive atmosphere in the library, update the books regularly based on the book advancement in the field, and improve the quality of the library service. Moreover, enhancing the role of social environment to build students' reading interest can be done by designing independent reading activity which involves collaboration with students' peers. As suggested by this study, the students feel motivated to read because they have partners to share about what they read. Conducive social environment can contribute to the building of good reading culture.

This study also confirms the study by Pittman and Honchell (2014) that retelling and sharing session, which are also similar to literature discussion, can add enjoyment of reading in the students' point of view. The enjoyment itself, according to this study, is resulted from the intrinsic features of the stories the students read and the collaborative feature of the activity. It can be concluded that to help students to value reading and to view reading as pleasurable activity, teachers or other practitioners should allow students to read and share with their peers, not assigning them to do reading alone without any collaboration.

This study also suggests that improving students' reading comprehension does not have to be through technical or intensive reading all the time where the goal is mostly for assessment. Encouraging students to do independent or extensive reading and monitor their progress are more recommended. More importantly, students who do independent reading have the opportunity to broaden their mind, so that they can understand themselves, other people and their surroundings better. Furthermore, this study revealed that the students perceived the increase of their reading interest after they participated in the independent reading-retelling activity. From the students' responses, it can be deduced that if teachers want their students to have high reading interest, teachers need to take part in it and do not let the students to make the effort alone. Most of them admitted that although the independent reading-retelling activity seemed to be the requirement of the course, they gradually found the enjoyment and pleasure experience from it, and automatically they are more motivated to read. They also acknowledged the role of the the lecturer in encouraging them to keep the reading activity. Moreover, the students implicitly mentioned the curiosity of stories that drive them to do more reading activity.

Conclusion

Helping students to build and nurture their reading interest is one of big challenges teachers should deal with. Many ways and strategies have been proposed by scholars that can be used by teachers to scaffold their students in developing students' reading interest. The results of this study attempted to contribute one alternative to motivate students to read and value reading. The independent reading-retelling activity with sharing session as part of it can be applied and modified to adjust the need of students from various school backgrounds. This study suggest that teachers' role in promoting readership is pivotal for students' development of reading interest. Once a program or activity is conducted as the effort to develop students' reading interest, it should be kept in mind that the program or the activity is not for assessing the students. Monitoring is also one important component in such effort to keep students' progress on the track. Further research is needed to quantitatively and statistically examine the effect of independent reading-retelling activity on students' reading interest and reading comprehension.

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