

Exploring Reading Preferences in University Students at Universitas Teuku Umar

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Abstract. *This research study delves into the reading preferences of university students, aiming to uncover the factors that influence their choices in reading materials. The study employs a qualitative approach, combining observation and interviews in collecting data involving 12 students at Universitas Teuku Umar involved as the respondents. The findings reveal the significant impact of individual interests, academic requirements, and technological advancements on reading preferences. First, the connection between individual preferences and reading choices underscores the importance of personalized and self-directed learning. Besides, people are more likely to engage with reading materials that align with their personal passions and interests. Second, regarding academic requirement, the impact of academic requirements on reading preferences reflects the influence of formal education on what individuals choose to read. This finding underscores the importance of a well-rounded education that exposes students to a variety of topics and genres. Last, Embracing technological advancements in reading can facilitate continuous learning and access to a wealth of knowledge. By acknowledging these factors, individuals can make informed choices about their reading preferences, thus contributing to their ongoing development. In summary, the finding that the three factors significantly impact reading preferences underscores the dynamic nature of reading choices. These insights provide valuable guidance for educators, content creators, and individuals seeking to expand their reading horizon.*

Keywords: *reading preferences, reading habit, higher education students, reading skills, and lifelong learning*

1. Introduction

Understanding the diverse reading preferences among university students is a crucial endeavor in academia (Rasli, 2020), shaping educational strategies and fostering a love for literature (Doiron, 2002). This research aims to delve into the intricate realm of reading preferences among students at Universitas Teuku Umar (UTU), recognizing the significance of this exploration in tailoring educational approaches to suit the dynamic needs of students in their literary engagements. Universitas Teuku Umar, situated in Indonesia, stands as a vibrant hub of academic pursuit, attracting a diverse student body with varying cultural, social, and academic backgrounds. Within this dynamic environment, investigating reading preferences serves as a pivotal step toward enhancing the educational experience and promoting a culture of reading among university students (Zahara, 2023).

The context of Universitas Teuku Umar further underscores the significance of this research. UTU, characterized by its diverse student body hailing from various regions, cultures, and academic disciplines, presents a unique setting for exploring reading preferences. The cultural diversity within the university offers a rich tapestry of perspectives, potentially influencing students' choices and inclinations toward different literary genres, formats, and thematic content (Clark & Rumbold, 2006). Moreover, the

academic programs and pedagogical approaches at UTU might shape students' reading habits and preferences, highlighting the need to understand how these factors intersect in influencing their literary engagements (Susanti et al., 2022). Central to this research is the exploration of various factors that impact reading preferences among university students. Factors such as individual interests, academic requirements, socio-cultural influences, technological advancements, and accessibility to diverse reading materials stand as key elements in shaping the choices students make in their reading habits (Pujiharto & Sudibyo, 2016). Delving into these factors not only illuminates the intricate dynamics of reading preferences but also presents opportunities to identify challenges and opportunities in promoting a culture of reading within the university community.

The unique engagement of Universitas Teuku Umar (UTU) students in activities related to fish farming and marine endeavors undoubtedly intertwines with their reading habits and preferences. The demanding nature of working in fish farms and marine environments presents a distinctive context that potentially influences how students engage with reading materials. Initially, the direct involvement in fish farming and marine work may significantly impact students' leisure time and energy levels. The demanding nature of these activities could result in limited free time for recreational reading. Students might prioritize rest or engage in other forms of relaxation after long hours of physical work, potentially affecting the amount of time available for reading. Consequently, their reading habits may revolve around shorter, more accessible formats or reading materials that offer quick gratification and relaxation. Moreover, the nature of their practical involvement in fish farming and marine activities might also influence their reading preferences. Students immersed in these fields may develop a heightened interest in related topics such as marine biology, aquaculture techniques, sustainability practices, or ecological conservation. Their direct experiences and exposure to these areas could spark a deeper curiosity and inclination toward reading materials that align with their professional interests, seeking out informative texts or research articles relevant to their field of work (Ibourk & El Aynaoui, 2023). Simultaneously, their exposure to the practical aspects of these industries may instill a preference for practical, hands-on learning materials (Tabatabaei & Bagheri, 2013). Texts offering actionable insights, guides, or case studies that relate directly to their experiences in fish farming and marine work could capture their interest and resonate more deeply than purely theoretical or abstract literature.

In its significance, this research endeavors to shed light on the multifaceted landscape of reading preferences among university students at Universitas Teuku Umar. By exploring the factors influencing their choices and engagements with reading materials, this study aims to contribute to the enhancement of educational approaches and the promotion of a vibrant culture of reading within the university community. Moreover, the findings of this research may serve as a basis for further scholarly inquiry and the development of strategies aimed at fostering a lifelong love for literature and learning among university students.

The novelty offered in this research lies in recognizing the pivotal role that reading plays in academic success, personal development, and lifelong learning. Within the academic landscape, reading serves as a cornerstone for knowledge acquisition, critical thinking, and intellectual growth. Understanding the intricacies of reading preferences among university students unveils valuable insights that can aid educators, curriculum developers, and educational policymakers in tailoring content and strategies to cultivate a more engaging and effective learning environment. Moreover, beyond the academic

realm, nurturing a habit of reading among students fosters a lifelong appreciation for literature and contributes to their holistic development as informed, empathetic, and culturally aware individuals.

Thus, the research question formulated is as below:

"What are the primary factors influencing the reading preferences and reading habits of Universitas Teuku Umar students, considering their diverse cultural backgrounds, academic pursuits, and potential engagement in fish farming and marine activities?"

2. Method

This research is qualitative in nature. Qualitative research methods form a cornerstone of social science inquiry, focusing on understanding human behavior, experiences, and perceptions in depth. Unlike quantitative methods that rely on numerical data and statistical analysis, qualitative research aims to uncover the underlying meanings, contexts, and nuances of phenomena through non-numeric data sources. At its essence, qualitative research involves a diverse set of techniques for data collection, such as interviews, observations, focus groups, and textual analysis. These methods facilitate an exploration of the complexities inherent in social interactions, cultural dynamics, and individual perspectives. Rather than aiming for generalizability, qualitative research seeks to capture the richness and diversity of human experiences within specific contexts. Central to qualitative methodology is the concept of reflexivity. Researchers actively engage with participants, acknowledging their own role in shaping the research process and interpreting data. This approach often employs an inductive method, allowing theories and insights to emerge organically from the data, rather than imposing preconceived hypotheses. Qualitative research offers numerous strengths, such as its capacity to provide rich, detailed insights into human behavior and social phenomena. It allows for a comprehensive exploration of diverse perspectives, facilitating a nuanced understanding of complex issues. Moreover, qualitative methods enable flexibility in adapting to emergent findings and unexpected insights during the research process.

This study specifically carried out case study design. Case study design represents a qualitative research approach that focuses on in-depth exploration and analysis of a specific instance, situation, or individual, providing a comprehensive understanding of complex phenomena within their real-life contexts. This methodology involves an intensive investigation into a bounded system or case, aiming to capture the intricacies and multifaceted nature of the subject under scrutiny. One of the defining features of a case study is its emphasis on context. Researchers delve deep into the context surrounding the case, considering historical, social, cultural, and environmental factors that influence the phenomenon being studied. This contextual understanding allows for a holistic exploration and interpretation of the complexities inherent in the case. This study contextualized the theme on reading habit and reading preferences among university students in the west coast of Aceh.

The study included students Teuku Umar University. The participants involved are students who have completed at least four semesters of their academic programme; as it is at this period that they begin their preparations for graduation. The equipment used for data collection includes an observation sheet and in-depth interviews with the subjects. The observational sheet was derived from questionnaire items established by Wijayanti (2020) and Erdem (2015). Subsequently, the participants underwent interviews utilizing the identical items from the observational sheet to corroborate the data obtained during the observation.

3. Results and Discussions

In the following are shown several excerpts on the observation and interview data as the result obtained in this study.

Exerpt 1:

Saya membaca kalau ada tugas aja, Ms. 'I only read when there is an assignment, Ms.'

When someone declares, "I only read when there is an assignment," it suggests that their reading behaviour is mostly influenced by external factors rather than personal interest or desire. This behaviour indicates a responsive attitude to reading, in which the person's involvement with reading materials is prompted by particular external requirements, such as scholastic assignments or responsibilities (Mohammed, 2018). Such a reading habit frequently centres on achieving specific criteria or fulfilling standards, rather than being motivated by real curiosity, enthusiasm, or a proactive desire for personal growth. This pattern suggests that the person may not have much experience with reading for pleasure or leisure, which could affect their overall knowledge, understanding, and the establishment of a regular reading habit outside of required situations (Erdem, 2015).

Exerpt 2:

(Saya) lebih suka ngopi bareng teman kalau sore daripada membaca. Gak suka membaca. 'I prefer hanging out at the coffee shop with friends. I don't like reading'.

The statement above highlights a clear inclination towards social interaction rather than engaging in solitary literary activities. It indicates a lack of or very limited reading habit, with the person showing a strong preference for activities that promote social interaction and companionship. The inclination to frequent a coffee shop in the company of friends signifies a yearning for instant social interaction, lively discussions, and communal encounters. The vibrant atmosphere, along with interpersonal connections, can create a feeling of inclusion, pleasure, and immediate satisfaction that reading, typically seen as a solitary and contemplative pursuit, may lack. This inclination does not intrinsically diminish the significance of reading, but rather emphasises the individual's prioritisation of social contacts. It could also indicate that the individual has not yet found or developed an understanding of the various joys and advantages that reading can provide. Their reading behaviour seems to be shaped by a predilection for participatory and quick social encounters, rather than the slower and more reflective character of reading (Clark & Rumbold, 2006). It is worth noting that reading preferences can change over time, and an individual's current propensity may not remain constant. This allows for the possibility of exploring and developing new reading interests in the future (Saville-Troike, 2012).

Exerpt 3:

Sayaga sempat membaca, Ms. Sibuk bantu orang tua kerja. 'I "I don't have time to read, I always have to help my parents working'.

As mentioned by one of the participants, the phrase shows that an individual's leisure time is significantly limited due to domestic commitments. This scenario suggests that the individual's reading habit may be impeded by external obligations and commitments (Wang et al., 2022). The individual's inclination to aid their parents with tasks rather than partake in recreational pursuits, such as reading, underscores their commitment to familial obligations and assistance (Wichmann et al., 2019). Their limited

reading time does not necessarily indicate a lack of interest in reading, but rather highlights the scarcity of leisure time owing to familial obligations. Their reading habit seems to be influenced by a scarcity of opportunities rather than a lack of interest (Johnsson-Smaragdi & Jönsson, 2006). The user's commitment to supporting their parents' employment demonstrates a praiseworthy devotion to family, prioritising familial responsibilities over leisure pursuits, such as reading. This circumstance could impede their capacity to partake in personal endeavours such as reading, potentially affecting their access to books and the establishment of a regular reading routine. This situation exemplifies the impact of external variables, such as familial obligations, on an individual's recreational pursuits and reading preferences. The individual prioritises satisfying familial responsibilities over participating in personal recreational pursuits such as reading, highlighting the importance of their family roles in their everyday existence (Sanford, 2015).

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, understanding the complex interplay between reading preferences and various influencing factors sheds light on the nuanced dynamics of our literary choices. The profound impact of three key factors - individual preferences, content diversity, and accessibility-which unveils a multifaceted tapestry that shapes our reading habits. Firstly, individual preferences, shaped by personal interests, experiences, and cognitive inclinations, play a pivotal role in dictating what captures our attention in the vast sea of literature. These preferences are as diverse as the individuals themselves, ranging from genre affinities to narrative styles and thematic elements. Acknowledging these unique inclinations is crucial in tailoring reading materials to resonate with different audiences. Secondly, the richness and variety in content significantly impact readers' choices. A diverse array of themes, perspectives, and genres not only widens the scope of available material but also facilitates inclusivity and representation. By offering a wide range of content, from classical literature to contemporary works, and encompassing various cultural, social, and ideological perspectives, readers are exposed to a broader spectrum of human experiences. Lastly, accessibility stands as a crucial pillar in fostering reading habits. The ease with which individuals can access literature, whether through physical books, e-books, audiobooks, libraries, or digital platforms, greatly influences their reading preferences. Improving accessibility ensures that a wider audience can engage with literary works, breaking barriers and democratizing the reading experience. In essence, these three factors intricately weave the fabric of our reading choices, guiding educators, creators, and individuals toward a more inclusive, diverse, and enriching literary landscape.

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