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## EXPLORING THE EFL STUDENTS' INTEREST ON ACADEMIC READING

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### Abstract

Many scholars believe that EFL students' reading interest in academic reading is closely connected to their academic success. Nevertheless, numerous students aren't reading as much as necessary for their future academic accomplishments. For this reason, the present study aims to explore the level of reading interest that EFL students hold toward academic reading and to gain insights into the factors influencing their inclinations towards either enjoying or disliking this activity. The design employed a descriptive qualitative approach. The data were obtained from twenty-four students in the third semester of the English Education study program at Qomaruddin University. The data for this study were collected through questionnaires and interviews. The results of this study showed that most students don't find academic reading very enjoyable. Despite knowing that academic reading is important, they're not really motivated to do it. Some find it time-consuming and face difficulties with English vocabulary. Several factors were found to influence their reading interest in academic reading. The most significant ones were self-awareness, motivation, and environment.

**Keyword:** EFL students, reading interest, academic reading

### Abstrak

Banyak ilmuwan percaya bahwa minat baca mahasiswa EFL erat kaitannya dengan keberhasilan akademis. Namun demikian, banyak mahasiswa yang tidak membaca sebanyak yang diperlukan untuk pencapaian akademis demi masa depan mereka. Oleh karena itu, studi ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi tingkat minat baca mahasiswa EFL dalam membaca akademis dan mendapatkan wawasan tentang faktor-faktor yang memengaruhi kecenderungan mereka untuk menyukai atau tidak menyukai aktivitas ini. Desain yang digunakan adalah pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif. Data diperoleh dari dua puluh empat mahasiswa semester tiga program studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris di Universitas Qomaruddin. Data untuk studi ini dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner dan wawancara. Hasil studi ini menunjukkan bahwa sebagian besar mahasiswa tidak menikmati aktivitas membaca akademis. Meskipun tahu bahwa membaca akademis penting, mereka tidak benar-benar termotivasi untuk melakukannya. Beberapa di antaranya merasa membaca akademis membuang waktu dan beberapa mahasiswa lainnya menghadapi kesulitan dengan kosakata bahasa Inggris. Ada beberapa faktor yang memengaruhi minat baca mereka dalam membaca akademis. Faktor yang paling signifikan adalah kesadaran diri, motivasi, dan lingkungan.

**Kata kunci:** Mahasiswa EFL, minat baca, membaca akademis

### Introduction

EFL students often encounter various difficulties in learning English, especially in reading. These challenges may arise due to various problems including limited vocabulary that makes it difficult for them to comprehend unfamiliar words in written texts. Therefore, the teaching of reading for EFL students in Indonesia is commonly included in the teaching of reading comprehension as its purpose is to develop the reading ability of the students, who are already proficient in reading their first language and in EFL (Cahyono & Widiati, 2006).

Despite some difficulties faced by EFL students, reading should be the main activity in academic communities. Reading is one of the most efficient

methods to acquire knowledge (Maulidar, 2018:01). In order to gain more knowledge EFL students are expected to engage themselves in reading as much as possible. It is supported by Satriani (2018) who stated that reading functions as the window of knowledge where students can get much information they need. Thus, reading should be included as the primary activity for EFL students from basic level until university level.

In addition, reading interest is the fundamental pillar of reading literacy (Simanová & Babiaková, 2022). Thus, reading interest is very crucial, especially for EFL students in Indonesia. They should be encouraged to read and have reading habits. By having reading habits and a positive reading culture, they are expected to build their own interest in reading. As stated by Atkinson and Hilgard (2003:92), interest is a continual inclination in a person to be intrigued and to appreciate enjoying specific items. Interest is a sense of desire and a sense of awareness in an item or activity, without anybody informing (Slameto, 2010). When students are interested in learning activities, they will show appropriate behavior such as more attention, more active, engagement in activities that support the learning (Alhamdu, 2016). Therefore, the students' interest must be captured to establish the reading habit (Renuga & Kanchana, 2015). In addition, Dewi et al (2020) define reading interest as a high tendency towards reading activity or a high willingness in reading activity, or can be identified with the love for reading. In this case, it is essential to spark the EFL students' interest in reading and inspire them to adore books.

Additionally, some educators argued that the level of students' interest in reading directly correlates with students' academic achievement. Students who consistently maintain focus and concentration while reading tend to display higher levels of creativity and productivity compared to their less engaged peers (Akmal et.al, 2020). Therefore, the types of books or written texts that the EFL students usually read may influence their academic achievement. However, many students are still not reading at the levels required for future academic and career success (Barber and Klauda, 2020). For this reason, it is very significant to explore EFL students' interest in reading, especially in academic reading.

Interest in academic reading is also very essential for the students of the English Education Study Program FKIP University of Qomaruddin. Considering the fact that they are the EFL students at the university level, they are expected to possess an interest in academic reading to enhance their academic grades and skills. For EFL students in university, academic reading presents a greater

challenge to students as they often perceive academic reading as a stressful and time-consuming task. Academic reading demands deeper and critical analytical skills to engage with a wide range of texts (Sohail, 2015). Therefore, reading academic texts requires complex skills that involve the engagement of the reader's contextual knowledge and comprehension of printed language (Anwar and Sailuddin, 2022).

Overall, the EFL students with interest in academic reading are expected to obtain more benefits including knowledge, communicative skill, and critical thinking abilities. Thus, the researchers wanted to discover the issue related to EFL students' interest in academic reading at the English Education Study Program FKIP University of Qomaruddin. It is expected that by exploring the students' interest in academic reading, the results can be used as a reference for lecturers to develop the teaching methods that can increase students' interest in reading.

## **Research Methods**

The present study employed descriptive qualitative. Moeleong (2017:16) states that qualitative research aims at understanding phenomena about what is experienced by research subjects such as behavior, perception, action, motivation, etc. Two instruments were employed to collect the data about students' interest in academic reading. The first instrument utilized in this study was a questionnaire designed to investigate students' attitudes towards academic reading, their preferences, the frequency of their reading habits, and their viewpoints on potential methods to boost their engagement with academic reading. Meanwhile, the second instrument was an interview. Interview was also considered significant as they complemented the findings from the questionnaire by providing further insights into the factors influencing students' interest in academic reading.

## **Results and Discussion**

The figures and table presented below provide descriptions related to the result of the present study.

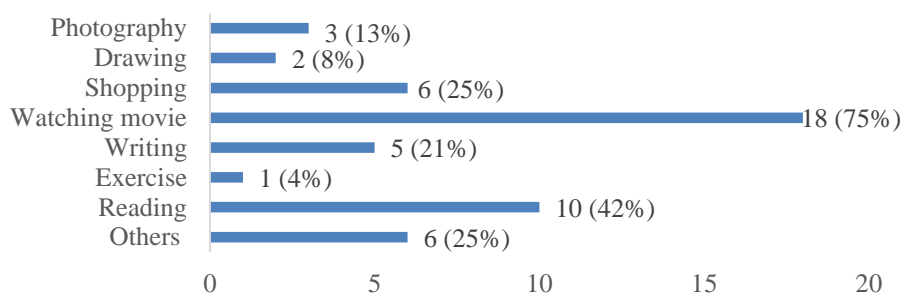


Figure 1. The students' hobbies

Based on Figure 1, it is clear that watching movies was the most preferred activity among the students, with more than half or 75% of students choosing television over reading as a hobby. In the second place, reading was preferred by only 10 or 42% of students. Shopping was the third most popular choice, with 6 or 25% of students enjoying it as a hobby. Additionally, 6 students chose various other activities as their hobbies. Writing captured the interest of 5 or 21% of students, while photography was chosen by only 3 or 13% of students. Drawing attracted 2 or 8% of students as a hobby. Lastly, exercising was the least popular option, with only 1 or 4% of students engaging in it as a hobby. In summary, some students who completed the questionnaires were not interested in engaging in reading activities during their leisure time. These students preferred other activities to reading as their hobbies. Their responses indicated that reading was not considered their favorite hobby.

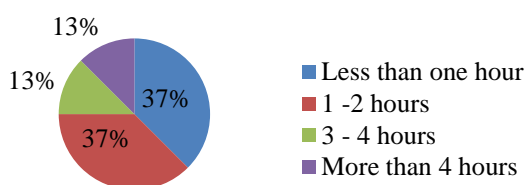


Figure 2. The frequency students read in a day

From figure 2, considerable numbers of students have poor reading habits. Out of the 24 students, 9 or 37% reported spending less than an hour per day on reading. Additionally, another 37% of students indicated that they dedicated 1-2 hours to reading daily. This suggests that the majority of students do not allocate much time for reading. Considering the fact that they are

university students who are expected to read a lot as reading plays a crucial role in completing assignments, this finding is concerning.

However, the data also revealed a positive aspect. Three students or 12.5% of students demonstrated a strong reading habit by spending more than 4 hours per day on reading. Additionally, 3 students reported dedicating 3-4 hours daily to reading. This indicates that there are indeed students who prioritize and value reading. Overall, while a significant portion of students have poor reading habits, there is a smaller group of individuals who genuinely care about reading and invest substantial time in it.

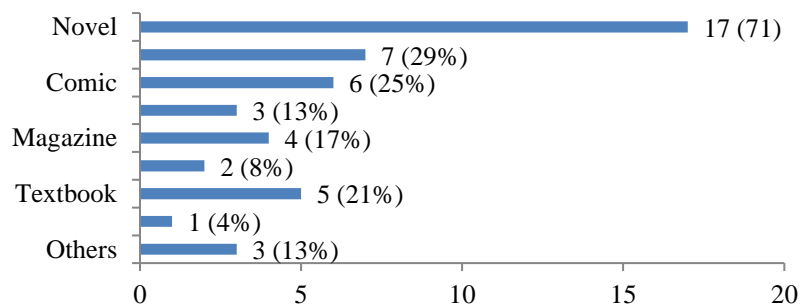


Figure 3. Books students usually read

The data presented in Figure 3 indicates a significant lack of interest among students when it comes to reading academic books. The statistics clearly demonstrate that the majority of students (71%) favor novels, while only a mere 21% show any inclination towards textbooks. Additionally, out of the eight different types of books, magazines were favored by only 4 students (17%), newspaper by 2 students (8%), and encyclopedias by 3 students (13%) as regularly read options. These findings underscore a concerning lack of motivation and awareness regarding the benefits of reading journals, textbooks, encyclopedias, and newspapers. It is worth noting that short stories have gained a lot of fans with 7 students (29.2%) frequently engaging with this genre, closely followed by comics, which appealed to 6 students (25%). These results indicate a prevailing preference for reading purely for entertainment purposes, indicating a marked disinterest among students when it comes to engaging with academic texts.

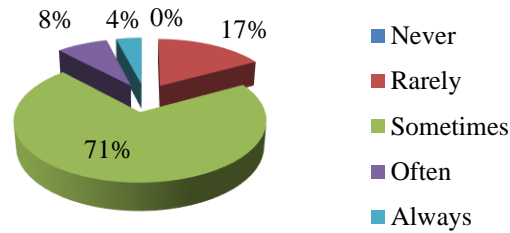


Figure 4. Students' habits in reading learning materials before attending classes.

According to the findings depicted in Figure 4, a significant majority of students, specifically 17 out of 24 (70.8%), admitted to occasionally reading prior to attending their classroom sessions. Interestingly, only one student (4.2%) claimed to consistently study the material beforehand, while a small proportion of two students (8.3%) indicated a frequent habit of reading before class. Furthermore, a mere 16.7% of students reported rarely engaging in pre-class reading activities. Notably, none of the students acknowledged a complete absence of pre-class reading. These results strongly suggest a general lack of interest in reading among the students, as the prevalence of the term "sometimes" signifies a prevailing inclination towards a lack of desire to engage with the material.

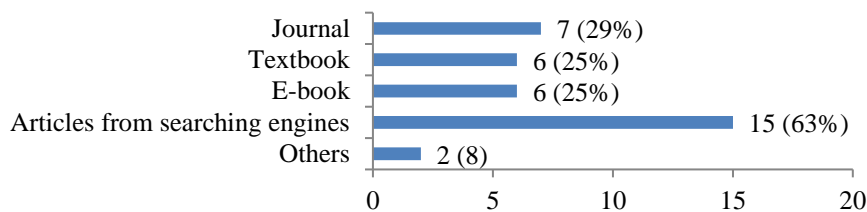


Figure 5. Sources in doing assignments

Based on the data presented in Figure 5, a majority of the students, precisely 15 out of 24 (63%), relied on instant articles they found from searching engines for their academic needs. Additionally, 7 students (29%) opted for journals as sources to fulfill their assignment requirements. Moreover, 6 students (25%) turned to textbooks for their assignments while the other 25% of students utilized downloaded ebooks as supplementary references. It is rather unfortunate that despite being expected to possess a strong interest in reading, particularly for task completion, many students still chose to rely on quick and easily accessible sources.

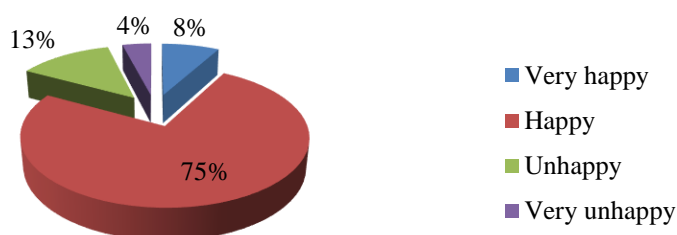


Figure 6. Students' reaction towards reading academic texts assignments

Based on the findings presented in Figure 6, a significant majority of students, specifically 18 out of 24 (75%), expressed happiness when assigned tasks to read academic texts by their lecturers. Conversely, 3 or 12.5% students reported feeling dissatisfied with such assignments. Furthermore, 2 students (8.3%) expressed a high level of happiness when assigned tasks to read academic texts, while only 1 student (4.2%) indicated a strong feeling of dissatisfaction towards reading assignments. These results highlight that the majority of students find joy in being given reading assignments, indicating a positive attitude towards engaging with the materials.

**Table 1.** Students' opinion on how to increase their interests in academic reading

No	Opinion
1	Lecturers should force them to read through assignments
2	Lecturers should motivate them to read by giving stimulus
3	Lecturers should show them the advantages of reading academic texts
4	Students should create group discussions to share about certain topics in academic reading
5	Lecturers should assign the students to read more academic texts or set a goal for each student to read a specific number of academic texts in a semester.
6	Students should surround themselves with individuals who share similar interest in academic reading
7	Students should develop a habit of reading academic articles
8	Lecturers should include academic reading activities into every assignment
9	Lecturers should encourage the students to read more academic texts
10	Lecturers should assign the students regular academic reading tasks
11	Lecturers should create an app of informative books and academic texts accessible through smartphones
12	Lecturers should create captivating academic reading materials such as online book with text-to-speech functionality
13	Lecturers should encourage students to read academic texts based on their preferred titles or topics of interest
14	Students should poster themselves in a reading-friendly environment
15	Lecturers should provide them with academic reading materials based on their interest
16	Lecturers should guide the students to read academic texts regularly



17	I have no idea. I'm one of the students who have low interest in reading
18	Students should communicate with lecturers to find alternative ways in stimulating their interest in reading
19	Students should find by themselves the best ways to build their interest in academic reading
20	I'm uncertain about how to get involved in academic reading. It's very difficult.
21	Students should regularly visit the library to read academic texts.
22	Students should make more efforts to engage in academic reading.
23	Students should develop their reading habit by reading academic texts regularly.
24	Students should become accustomed in academic reading activities.

Based on the table 1 above, it was found that 50% of students expected their lecturers to provide assistance in increasing their interest in academic reading. However, both lecturers and students can explore various strategies to enhance students' interest in academic reading. The lecturer can employ the following solutions: assigning academic reading texts for students to read, utilizing engaging methods, recommending books or academic texts to students, and encouraging students to regularly engage in academic reading activities. On the other hand, students can also contribute to this effort by increasing their motivation, developing a conscious interest in academic reading, understanding the benefits of academic reading, initiating regular reading habits, and changing their perspective towards reading.

Additionally, as part of data validation and to gather additional supporting details, interviews were conducted with 24 students. The interview questions were related to statements and data from the questionnaire. From the interview section, the following data were obtained. Based on the students' answers, it appears that the majority of students still maintain a mild interest in academic reading. Their level of interest seems to depend on various factors such as the topic they enjoy, their reading environment, and the language they are reading in (English, in this case). However, some students express a lack of enthusiasm for academic reading due to their limited vocabulary, which makes it a challenging task for them. On the other hand, there are students who remain interested in reading because it has been their hobby since childhood.

Moreover, students view books as windows of knowledge and insight. They see them as valuable resources for gaining information and as a medium for learning. Additionally, students also mentioned that books serve as a source of entertainment during their leisure time, indicating that they recognize the recreational value of reading. Overall, it is evident that the students unanimously agree on the importance of books as sources of knowledge.

In addition, all students acknowledged the importance of reading interest. They recognized that having an interest in reading is crucial to fostering a consistent reading habit. The students seem to understand that interest serves

as the foundation for enjoying and engaging in academic reading activities regularly. This awareness can motivate them to actively seek out academic reading materials that align with their interests, making the reading experience more fulfilling and enjoyable.

Furthermore, the interview session unveiled significant findings regarding the factors that influence students' interest in academic reading. Those factors could come from both the inside and outside of students. Some students admitted that their environments support their interest in academic reading. Some of their parents regularly purchased books for them to read. Therefore, they still have reading habits to support their interest in academic reading. Meanwhile, their lecturers often assign students to read journals. Thus, their environment is one of the factors that influence their interest in academic reading. It is aligned with Ay & Bartan (2012) who stated that the students' reading interest can be influenced by the environment, which plays a role in shaping their personality and mindset. Moreover, the cultural setting in which students are immersed plays a significant role in influencing their reading interest (Akmal et.al, 2020).

Overall, based on the results gained through questionnaires and interviews, it can be concluded that students' interest in academic reading remains low, despite their recognition of its significance in expanding their knowledge and enhancing academic achievements. To foster their interest in academic reading, students require self-motivation and support from their environment. Their awareness in academic reading can help them grow and enhance their knowledge. Therefore, they need enthusiasm in reading. Moreover, in order to acquire more insight and valuable experiences, it is essential to foster a sense of motivation towards students' reading interest (Dewi et al., 2020). Besides, the majority of students expressed a strong desire for lecturers to encourage their engagement in academic reading activities, primarily through assignments, as this was deemed the most effective method to increase their interest in this area.

The results of the present study also support some prior studies that have been conducted to investigate EFL students' interest in reading. Maulidar (2018) found out that the reading interest of the students at UIN Ar-Raniry Aceh was very low. The students stated that they read books sometimes. The word "sometimes" has the implication that the students do not have interest in reading. Several factors that impact their interest in reading include awareness, motivation, and family environment.

Lastly, in accordance with factors that influenced students' interest in academic reading, Akmal et.al. (2020) found out that the students' lack of interest in reading journal articles can be primarily influenced by factors such as the selection of text or reading materials and the interaction between the text and the reader. It is in line with the students' explanations in the interview

session regarding language and writing style that had a notable influence on their reading interest. Some students argued that if the writing style was unorganized and confusing for them, they would find it difficult to engage and might even skip reading altogether. Conversely, others expressed that if the writing style resonated with them, they would be more inclined to read it. Furthermore, a student mentioned a dislike for challenging readings with complex vocabulary. However, there were also circumstances where students would willingly read academic texts if they found the topics enjoyable. Therefore, it is important to highlight that language and writing style held considerable influence over their level of interest in academic reading.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this present study reveals a notable lack of reading interest among English Department students at University of Qomaruddin. In general, 68% of students responded that they would occasionally read which was further evident in their preference for activities other than reading, such as watching television. Despite being aware of the importance and significant benefits of reading, students displayed a certain degree of reluctance towards it. Several reasons were stated regarding this matter. Students expressed concerns about the time-consuming nature of reading and their perceived insufficiency in English vocabulary. They resorted to reading only in their spare time and tended to rely on instant articles obtained through searching engines such as google when assigned tasks.

Furthermore, there were various factors identified as influencing their interest in academic reading. The factors such as awareness, motivation, as well as environment were found to be the most influential. Additionally, language, content, and writing style were identified as other contributing factors. In response to these findings, the students proposed several solutions to enhance their interest in academic reading. These included raising awareness about the importance of reading, fostering motivation, altering perceptions about reading, setting aside dedicated time for reading, utilizing leisure time productively (such as engaging in academic reading activities), recommending academic reading materials, facilitating discussions, assigning academic reading tasks, and emphasizing the significance of academic reading.

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