The Effect of Using Wattpad on Students' Reading Habits: Negative and Positive

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ABSTRACT

In this digital era, the existence of digital reading applications has changed the reading habit from printed books to digital books. One of the most popular platforms among teenagers is Wattpad. Wattpad is a social media that provides thousands of e-books (electronic book) from various genres. As well as other social media, Wattpad also has positive and negative effects for the users. Therefore, this study aims to find out those effects among teenagers. A qualitative method with a phenomenological approach has used in this study. Participants are the teenager Wattpad active users from a group of readers and writers on the Whatsapp application. The results of this study indicate that there are positive and negative effects that affect their reading habits during using Wattpad.

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INTRODUCTION

Reading is one of the four language skills that should be mastered by students. This due reading the most important activities conducted by humans (Güneş, 1997:2; Sert, 2010:13; Ateş, 2008:16). Harmer (2007: 99) states that reading is useful for language acquisition. It is the ability to understand words contained in a document and make use of the knowledge for personal growth and development (Dadzie, 2008). Bahadır (2012) claims that in today’s societies, reading has considered as indispensable for a life of high quality. By reading, students will gain new understanding, new ideas, and also new knowledge that can expand their views later. Unfortunately, in Indonesia, students’ reading interest is still low. Most of them assume that reading is not an interesting activity, so there is no desire to read. This opinion creates an influence that in terms of literacy level, most Indonesian students have low reading motivation whereas this skill is a key to the development of a human resource that all countries need to be able to compete globally. Hence, is not surprisingly if Indonesia ranks 74th out of 79 participant countries, in the reading skills category according to the results of a PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) survey which conducted by the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development). Instead of reading, they prefer to spend their time using social media, because indeed, in this digital era, the existence of social media cannot be separated in our daily life.

Nowadays, the good news, there are numerous applications that are able to use for reading. The existence of these platforms is more expected to be able to emerge students’ reading interest. One of those platforms is Wattpad. As Reid (2016) states that Wattpad is an application developed for online reading and writing. It was founded in 2006 by Allen Lau and Ivan Yuen in Toronto, Canada. Wattpad is one of the social media that provides thousands of books from various genres written by famous writers, professionals, and even amateur writers. It was available in over 50 languages, which most of the contents are written in English.

The existence of Wattpad has changed reading and writing habits. Along with scientific and technological developments in the twenty-first century, people have changed from paper-based reading and writing to digital reading and writing (Hossain & Aydin, 2011). For some reason, since social media becomes familiar among students, some researchers are interested to use it as a research subject, especially in the education field. Jones (2015: 93) states that social media technology is no longer used to spend time. It means that, nowadays, Wattpad as one of the social media is not only used for leisure, but also it can be used as a teaching media.

Numerous research about students’ reading habits has conducted. Most of those studies state that students’ reading habits are limited to in-school activities (e.g. Can, Türkyılmaz, & Karadeniz, 2015; Karahan, 2016; Mete, 2012; Yılmaz & Çalışkan, 2017; Zorbaz & Habeş, 2015). It means that, usually, most of the students do not spend time
willingly for out-of-school reading. Therefore, Wattpad as a social media platform in which students can read out-of-school hours expected to be able to emerge their reading interest. Thus, students’ reading habits have not limited during school hours.

The previous study that has been conducted by Rahayu (2019) has found that Wattpad can encourage students’ reading interest. She states that the students admitted that they like to read fiction stories through Wattpad, and they read more often than before they knew Wattpad. Another research that has been conducted by Purnama Sari (2012) also found that the students who were taught by using short story through Wattpad showed better achievement in reading comprehension. Based on this information, it shows that Wattpad has positive impacts not only can encourage students’ interest in reading but also can improve their reading skills. Nevertheless, it cannot deny that Wattpad also has negative impacts on the users. For example, the study that was conducted by Aytan (2017). He found some negative impacts of using Wattpad, such as low concentration, distractibility, and many more.

Although Wattpad might not appropriate as a learning medium, however, seeing that many positive impacts can be obtained when using it, teachers or educators are able to use this platform to encourage their students’ reading interest to make them get used to reading. Considering the negative and positive effect that can be caused by using Wattpad, this research aims to investigate those effect on students’ reading habits. Based on the previous background, the research questions are formulated as follow: “What are the negative and positive effects that can arise from the use of Wattpad on students’ reading habits?”

**METODOLOGY**

This research method used a descriptive qualitative. A qualitative method with a phenomenological approach has used in this study. Participants are the teenager Wattpad active users from a group of readers and writers on the Whatsapp application. The instruments are equipped with interview which is supported by the distribution of questionnaires through Google form. After students completed the assignment, the researcher grouped students’ answers based on some question related to the students’ perception of reading interest, such as why they have to read, to what extent they interest to read, how often they read per week, and what medium that they used to read. Voice recordings using mobile phones during interviews were made so that no information by students was missed. The tasks given to the research subjects are as follows.

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

**Result**

As mentioned before that this research used unstructure interview which is supported by the distribution of questionnaires through Google form. In the first section collecting the data, the writer gives some question related to the students’ perception of reading interest, such as why they have to read, to what extent they interest to read, how often they read per week, and what medium that they used to read.
Based on Figure 1, shows the students’ reason why they have to read. 61.9% of participants stated that they read to spend their free time, 14.3% of participants read to gain new knowledge, others 14.3% of participants said that their reason are both, 4.8% of participants added their reason as teachers’ requirement, and even for fangirling (4.8%).

Based on Figure 2 shows that 57.1% of participants have interested to read, 19.0% very interested, and 23.8% stated that they neutral. Based on the data above, in fact, students have the interest to read, might be the lack of motivation that makes them reluctant to read.
Figure 3. Percentage of the reading that they have in a week

Based on Figure 3 shows how often they have read per week. 9.5% of participants stated that they read less than 1 time per week. It means that they even did not read even once, 23.8% of participants said that they read 1-3 times per week, and 66.7% of participants have read more than 3 times per week.

Figure 4. Percentage of the preferred medium for reading

This Figure 4.2.4 indicates that most of the participants preferred to read through digital book (42.9%) than printed book (57.1%). Printed books are still a favourite, but slowly, they are turning to read through digital books.

In the next section, the participants were given the questions related to the use of Wattpad. There are 11 questions that they should answer based on their experience during using this application. Here are the questions:

1) Question 1 : “Do you an active Wattpad user?”
   Answer:
   P1 - P21 : “Yes”

2) Question 2 : “How long have you been using Wattpad?”
   Answer :
a. P4, P9, P15, P16 : “<1 year”
b. P1, P2, P3, P7, P12, P13, P19, P21 : “1-3 years”
c. P5, P6, P8, P10, P11, P14, P17, P18, P20 : “>3 years”

From the data above, 4 participants are the new users. They use Wattpad for less than 1 year, while 8 participants have been used Wattpad for 1 – 3 years, and 9 participants have been used Wattpad for more than 3 years.

3) Question 3 : “How many times have you accessed Wattpad in a week?”

Answer :
   b. P17, P20 : “1-3 times”
   c. P21 : “<1 day”

From data above, 18 participants stated that they used Wattpad everyday, 2 participants used Wattpad 1-3 times, and 1 participant used Wattpad for less 1 day. It means that there is one participant who did not always to access Wattpad in a week. She only accesses that application when she wants.

4) Question 4 : “How often do you read after using Wattpad?”

Answer :
   a. P21 : “Rarely”
   b. P3, P9, P17, P19, P20 : “Occasionally”
   c. P1, P2, P4 – P8, P10 – P16, P18 : “Frequently”

From the data above, it can conclude that even though almost all of the participants access Wattpad for almost every day, in fact, not all of them have to read. Based on the information when conducting the interview, some of the participants said that they access Wattpad not only for reading, but they also learn to write their stories themselves. Considering that the group in which the writer conducted the interview is a group for readers and writer, it is not surprising that not all participant used Wattpad for reading.

5) Question 5 : “What device do you usually use to access Wattpad?”

Answer :
   b. P9 : “Smartphone and Laptop”

From the data above, almost all participants (20 participants) using their smartphone to access Wattpad application. There is only one participant that used both smartphone and laptop.

6) Question 6 : “Why you choose Wattpad as a medium for reading?”

Answer :
   a. P1 – P10, P12, P13, P15 : “It’s interesting, provides various genres, practical (can read anywhere and anytime)”
   b. P11, P14, P17, P19 : “easy to use, can read a lot of stories in one platform”
   c. P16, P18, P20, P21 : “practical (can read anywhere and anytime), easily to choose the preferred reading, can interact with other users directly”

From the data above, it can be seen the various answer from the participants. However, their answer has similarities. Most of them agreed that Wattpad is interesting,
it also practical to use, so they can read wherever and whenever they want. Besides, Wattpad provides a lot of stories from different genres, and it makes them easy to choose appropriate stories or the most interesting one to read.

7) **Question 7:** “Did you feel that using Wattpad can make you read more often than before?”
   
   **Answer:**
   
   a. P1, P5, P7, P13, P15, P18, P20, P21: “Yes”
   
   b. P6, P14, P16: “Maybe”
   
   c. P17, P19: “No”

   From the data above, 16 participants agreed that they read more after using Wattpad. Three participants said “maybe”. It means that the use of Wattpad did not give a significant impact to their reading activity. They will read a lot only if they found an interesting story. Two participants who said “no” feel that there are no changes to their reading habits, either before nor after they using Wattpad.

8) **Question 8:** “What genre did you read the most in Wattpad? (You may write more than one answer, e.g. fanfiction, fantasy, poetry, non-fiction, etc.)”

   **Answer:**
   
   a. P1, P5, P7, P8, P10, P14, P17: “Fanfiction”
   
   b. P6: “Fantasy, Horror, Historical”
   
   c. P9: “Fanfiction, Supranatural, Romance”
   
   d. P15: “Non-Fiction”
   
   e. P16: “Romance”
   
   f. P18: “Fanfiction, Non-Fiction, General Fiction”
   
   g. P19: “Fanfiction, Romance”
   
   h. P20: “Fanfiction, Romance, Fantasy, Historical, General Fiction”
   
   i. P21: “Fanfiction, Poetry”

   From the data above, the participants gave a variety of answers. However, overall, most of them stated that fanfiction as the genre they read the most when they read on Wattpad.

9) **Question 9:** “Can you mention the positive effect did you feel during the reading stories on Wattpad?”

   **Answer:**
   
   a. P1, P2, P4, P7, P10, P13, P15, P17, P18: “Getting many new friends”
   
   b. P3, P5, P11, P19, P21: “Can learn how to make good writing and sharing experience with other users”
   
   c. P6, P8, P9, P12, P14, P16, P20: “Gaining new insight and information”

   Actually, the participants have a different answer for question number 9, but overall, their answered are similar. Therefore, the writer divided their answer into 3 categories that most mentioned. For some participants, using Wattpad can make them get many new friends. It is like the group where the writer conducts interviews. This group started with a number of writers and readers who often shared comments in a story then they decide to created a chatting group outside of Wattpad.
As mentioned before that Wattpad not only provides various reading but also the feature to make the stories themselves. There are many stories from the professional or amateur writer that can be used as references. They also can ask for some advice from the other users to add their insight directly. The other participants, even stated that during reading in Wattpad, they gain new knowledge and information that might not get when they learn in the school.

10) Question 10: “Can you mention the negative effect did you feel during the reading stories on Wattpad?”

Answer:

a. P1, P2, P6, P7 – P10, P16, P19, P20: “Addictive, causing eye fatigue/eye strain”
b. P3 – P5, P13, P15: “Adult content that can be accessed freely”
c. P11, P12, P14, P17, P18, P21: “Imagine too much”

Similar to question number 9, the writer categorizing their answer based on the most answered mentioned. Most of the participants stated that reading in Wattpad can make them addicted, especially when they found interesting stories. They will read, again and again, even sometimes neglecting others thing that should they do. Some participants mentioned that in Wattpad, they often found adult content that not appropriate for the teenager that can be accessed freely, and it disturbing enough. The other users said that sometimes, what they reading can make them imagine a lot that they experienced themselves. It seems like they have a hallucination.

11) Question 11: “How do you resolve those negative effects?”

Answer:

a. P1, P2, P6, P7 – P10, P16, P19, P20: “Tried to make time management and reading schedule”
b. P3 – P5, P13, P15: “Tried to ignore it and choose the stories that suitable for the teenager”
c. P11, P12, P14, P17, P18, P21: “Tried to think that it is only a story”

From the data above, there are several things that can be done to resolve the negative effect that might arise from using Wattpad.

Discussion

The research question in this research is “What are the negative and positive effects that can arise from the use of Wattpad on students' reading habits?”, and it was answered from the result of interview and questionnaire. Based on their experience, some positive effects that can be perceived by the participants during using Wattpad. They stated that by reading on Wattpad, they can get many new friends, can learn to write, sharing experiences related to reading and writing with others, and also gain new knowledge that might not be obtained when they learn in the school. Oakley & Jay (2008) state that an electronic books allow students opportunities for choice, control and active participation, which are factors that have been found to increase student motivation and engagement.

Besides, some participants also mentioned that reading on Wattpad can encourage them to read more, even more, is due in Wattpad readers can choose
themselves the genre they are interested in. As Bold (2018) states that genre classification in Wattpad easily the readers to choose stories that appropriate with their interest or their need. Due to people should interest first, then they will have a desire to read. Without interest, someone is impossible to do anything (Hidayat and Aisah, 2013). It means, if the reading that they read is not interesting, then there is no interest in reading.

However, Wattpad does not always have positive effects, at least, there are some negative effects that they felt during using Wattpad. Based on their experienced, reading on Wattpad can make them addicted, especially when they find interesting stories. Curiosity makes them want to continue to read all the time. This factor can lead to postponing their time and neglecting other things that should they do, besides they will have eye fatigue if staring at the screen for too long. In addition, the lack of features to filter adult content also gives a negative effect. The users can access that content freely no matter what their age, and for some users, it is disturbing enough.

Some participants also said that reading stories on Wattpad, sometimes, make them have exaggerated imagination. They get their feelings emotionally excessively and think that they are in that situation, especially when they read fanfiction, where the main character of the story is their idol. This attitude is understandable, as Raviv, Bar-Tal, Raviv, and Ben-Horin (1995) stated that the phenomenon of idolizing an idol is characteristic of teenagers. Considering that in the teenagers' phase, they tend to look for someone who can be imitated, both from the character, attitude, and behaviour. However, it must remember that excessive idolizing can give a negative effect, due they will tend to be irrational.

**CONCLUSION**

Wattpad is one of the social media that provides thousands of books from various genres. Due to practicality, its existence has changed the reading habits among teenagers. They could find interesting stories in one platform easily. Besides, they can read whenever and wherever they want. Recognized it or not, Wattpad can encourage teenagers to be more reading. Their reading habits on Wattpad, unfortunately, either give positive effects nor negative ones. Therefore, self-control is needed to avoid the negative effects of using Wattpad. Choosing the type or genre of reading also should be considered. Thus, it will give more knowledge or information that might not get in their school. The more often they read, the more they will get used to it, and also the more knowledge they can get. Due, reading is no longer just a matter for leisure, but a necessity.

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