



IMPLEMENTING READING FOR PLEASURE AS A PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGY FOR EFL STUDENTS AT DATOKARAMA STATE ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY PALU

Afifah

English Tadris Department, Tarbiyah and Teacher Training Faculty, Datokarama State Islamic University, Palu, Indonesia
e-mail: afifah@uindatokarama.ac.id

Diterima: 07/04/2026; Direvisi: 20/04/2026; Diterbitkan: 24/04/2026

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis kesenangan membaca bahasa Inggris pada mahasiswa serta mengidentifikasi jenis bacaan, akses, dan kebiasaan membaca yang berkontribusi terhadap peningkatan kemampuan bahasa. Studi ini dilatarbelakangi oleh terbatasnya kajian yang mengintegrasikan aspek kesenangan membaca dengan kebiasaan membaca dan dampaknya terhadap keterampilan bahasa pada mahasiswa EFL. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus terhadap 42 mahasiswa semester dua Program Studi Bahasa Inggris di Universitas Islam Negeri Datokarama Palu. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi dan wawancara, kemudian dianalisis secara tematik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa bacaan fiksi digital seperti cerita pendek daring menjadi sumber utama kesenangan membaca, sementara bacaan nonfiksi seperti artikel dan biografi mendukung pengembangan pengetahuan. Akses membaca didominasi oleh platform digital seperti e-book, media sosial, dan situs web. Kebiasaan membaca cenderung dilakukan pada waktu senggang, terutama malam hari. Kesenangan membaca terbukti berkontribusi terhadap peningkatan kosakata, pelafalan, dan kepercayaan diri dalam berbahasa Inggris. Temuan ini menegaskan pentingnya integrasi strategi pembelajaran berbasis minat membaca dalam meningkatkan kompetensi bahasa mahasiswa.

Kata Kunci: *kesenangan membaca, membaca bahasa Inggris, kebiasaan membaca, mahasiswa EFL*

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze students' pleasure in reading English and to identify reading materials, access, and habits contributing to language development. This research addresses the limited studies integrating reading pleasure, reading habits, and their impact on EFL students' language skills. A qualitative case study design was employed involving 42 second-semester English major students at Datokarama State Islamic University Palu. Data were collected through observation and interviews and analyzed thematically. The findings reveal that digital fiction, such as online short stories, serves as the primary source of reading enjoyment, while non-fiction materials, including articles and biographies, support knowledge development. Reading access is predominantly facilitated through digital platforms such as e-books, social media, and websites. Students tend to read during leisure time, particularly in the evening. Reading pleasure contributes to vocabulary enrichment, improved pronunciation, and increased confidence in English communication. These findings highlight the importance of integrating interest-based reading strategies in enhancing students' language competence.

Keywords: *reading pleasure, reading English, reading habits, EFL students*



INTRODUCTION

Reading is widely recognized as a fundamental component in language acquisition, particularly in learning English as a foreign language (EFL). It is not merely a process of decoding written symbols, but also involves constructing meaning, interpreting context, and integrating new information with prior knowledge. In language learning, reading contributes significantly to the development of vocabulary, grammatical awareness, and discourse comprehension, which ultimately support productive skills such as speaking and writing (Harmer, 2013; Saville-Troike, 2012). Furthermore, reading serves as a primary medium for accessing academic knowledge, enabling students to engage with various sources of information and develop critical thinking skills. Therefore, reading is not only an academic requirement but also an essential tool for intellectual and linguistic growth.

Despite its importance, reading activities in higher education are often perceived as obligatory rather than enjoyable. Students tend to associate reading with academic tasks such as completing assignments, preparing for examinations, and writing scientific papers. This condition may gradually reduce their intrinsic motivation to read, leading to a perception that reading is burdensome. In contrast, reading for pleasure has been shown to foster positive emotional engagement and sustain long-term reading habits. Studies indicate that individuals who engage in reading for pleasure demonstrate better cognitive development, emotional well-being, and learning outcomes (Mak & Fancourt, 2020; Sun et al., 2024). This suggests that integrating enjoyment into reading practices is crucial for enhancing students' overall learning experiences.

Recent global studies highlight changing patterns in reading behavior, particularly in relation to reading for pleasure. Longitudinal research reveals a decline in recreational reading engagement over time, even though the duration of reading activities may slightly increase (Bone et al., 2025). Similarly, critical analyses emphasize that educational systems often prioritize academic literacy while overlooking the importance of voluntary reading, which may reduce students' intrinsic interest in reading (Cremin & Scholes, 2024; Cremin, 2020). A broader review of current research also confirms that reading for pleasure remains a complex and multifaceted issue influenced by social, educational, and technological factors (Vogrinčič Čepič et al., 2024). These findings indicate that reading interest continues to be a global concern that requires further investigation in different contexts.

In the EFL context, reading for pleasure plays a vital role in enhancing language acquisition and learner engagement. Students who participate in voluntary reading activities are more likely to develop richer vocabulary and better comprehension skills. The advancement of digital technology has further transformed reading practices, enabling students to access various reading materials through online platforms such as e-books, websites, and social media. Research shows that students' preferences may vary between printed and digital texts depending on accessibility and convenience (Amirtharaj et al., 2023). Additionally, the integration of digital tools in language learning environments, including blended learning approaches, provides opportunities to promote reading engagement through innovative strategies (Alam et al., 2022; Alam, 2023). These developments indicate that reading is no longer limited to traditional formats but has evolved into a more flexible and accessible activity.

Several empirical studies have examined students' reading habits and preferences, particularly in digital environments. For example, research on Indonesian university students reveals that online reading platforms such as Wattpad and Webtoon are commonly used for reading fiction, which provides enjoyment and motivates sustained engagement (Sari et al.,



2023). Other studies also indicate that students maintain reading habits with varying frequencies, influenced by factors such as time availability, academic workload, and personal interest (Fatimah & Yulianto, 2025). Moreover, reading for pleasure has been found to contribute to improved comprehension and learning outcomes, especially when supported by multimedia tools such as digital videos (Chireac et al., 2022). These findings highlight that reading behavior is shaped by both internal motivation and external learning environments.

However, despite the growing body of research, previous studies tend to focus on specific aspects of reading, such as reading habits, digital reading practices, or motivational factors, without comprehensively examining their interrelationship. There is still limited research that integrates reading pleasure, types of reading materials, access to reading resources, reading habits, and perceived benefits within a single framework, particularly in the Indonesian EFL context. In addition, early-stage university students, who are in the transition phase from secondary to higher education, have not been extensively studied. This indicates a clear research gap that needs to be addressed to obtain a more holistic understanding of students' reading experiences.

In the Indonesian context, reading interest remains an important issue, especially among university students who are required to engage intensively with academic texts. For students majoring in English, reading becomes an integral part of their academic activities, as they are continuously exposed to English-language materials. However, it is still unclear whether this exposure leads to genuine reading interest or merely fulfills academic requirements. Understanding students' perspectives on reading for pleasure is essential for designing effective pedagogical strategies that enhance both motivation and language competence.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to explore reading for pleasure among second-semester students of the English Tadris Department at Universitas Islam Negeri Datokarama Palu. This study employs a qualitative case study design to capture students' experiences and perspectives in depth (Creswell, 2012; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The participants represent early-stage university students who have not yet formally taken specialized reading courses but have been exposed to various English reading materials. This condition provides a valuable opportunity to examine their initial reading patterns and preferences. Data analysis is conducted using thematic analysis to identify patterns and meanings within the data (Christou, 2022).

Accordingly, this research seeks to answer the following questions: (1) What types of English reading materials are preferred by students? (2) How do students access these materials? (3) How frequently do students engage in reading activities? and (4) What benefits do students perceive from reading English? The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the development of more effective reading strategies and to enrich the literature on reading for pleasure in EFL contexts.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore students' reading preferences, access to reading materials, reading habits, and perceived benefits of reading English. The participants were 42 second-semester students of the English Tadris Department at Datokarama State Islamic University Palu. All students in two classes were involved using total sampling. The participants were aged between 19 and 22 years, consisting of 14 males and 28 females.



Data were collected through classroom observation and semi-structured interviews. The observation was conducted by asking students to read their preferred English materials for approximately 15–30 minutes in the classroom to identify their reading behavior and material preferences. The interviews were conducted in the following session using eight open-ended questions covering students’ reading interests, types of materials, access to reading resources, reading frequency, and perceived benefits.

To ensure data validity, triangulation was applied by comparing the results obtained from observation and interviews. All participants were informed about the research procedures prior to data collection. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The data from interviews were transcribed and coded, then grouped into categories based on recurring patterns. These categories were further developed into themes to interpret students’ reading experiences and perspectives.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Students’ Preferred Reading Materials

The findings show that students engage with various types of reading materials, with a strong preference for fiction. Most students reported that short stories and fairytales were the most enjoyable materials, particularly those accessed through online platforms. These texts were considered engaging and capable of maintaining students’ attention for longer periods. In addition to fiction, some students also read non-fiction materials such as biographies, articles, and academic texts. A smaller proportion of students preferred simple forms of reading, including motivational quotes and social media captions.

Table 1. Types of Preferred Reading Materials

Category	Types of Materials	Tendency
Fiction	Short stories, fairytales	Dominant
Non-fiction	Biographies, articles, journals	Moderate
Simple texts	Quotes, captions, subtitles	Supporting

Table 1 indicates that fiction materials dominate students’ reading preferences, suggesting that enjoyment plays a significant role in shaping their reading choices. Non-fiction materials are still relevant, particularly for knowledge development, while simple texts function as supplementary reading that is easily accessible in daily digital interactions.

Access to Reading Materials

The results reveal that students primarily access reading materials through digital platforms. Social media, websites, and mobile applications are the most frequently used sources due to their convenience and availability. Platforms such as social media applications provide a variety of reading content, ranging from short narratives to informational texts. However, a limited number of students still prefer printed materials, accessing them through libraries or personal collections.

Table 2. Reading Access Platforms

Platform Type	Examples	Usage Level
Digital media	Social media, e-books, websites	High



Platform Type Examples		Usage Level
Applications	Language learning apps	Moderate
Printed sources	Books, library materials	Low

Table 2 shows that digital media dominate students' access to reading materials, indicating a shift from traditional printed texts to technology-based resources. Although printed materials are still used, their role is relatively limited compared to digital platforms.

Reading Habits (Frequency and Time)

Students demonstrate varying reading habits in terms of frequency and duration. Most students reported engaging in reading for pleasure two to three times per week. When they encountered topics of interest, they tended to spend one to two hours continuously reading. In contrast, reading for academic purposes occurred more frequently, with students engaging in reading activities almost every day to complete assignments and academic tasks. In terms of reading time, the majority of students preferred reading in the evening. This period was considered more conducive as students had completed their daily responsibilities and were able to focus more effectively.

Reading Strategies During Activity

Observation data indicate that students apply different strategies while reading. Many students relied on digital tools to understand unfamiliar vocabulary, including translation applications and online dictionaries. Some students practiced reading aloud as a way to improve pronunciation, while others preferred silent reading for better concentration. Interaction with peers also occurred when students encountered difficulties in understanding certain parts of the text.

Perceived Benefits of Reading English

The findings also reveal that students perceive reading English as highly beneficial for their language development and academic performance. Reading activities contribute to vocabulary enrichment, which supports students in expressing ideas more effectively. In addition, reading aloud helps improve pronunciation, while repeated exposure to texts enhances students' awareness of grammatical structures.

Furthermore, reading broadens students' knowledge by exposing them to various ideas, perspectives, and cultural contexts. This process not only strengthens their academic performance but also increases their confidence in using English for communication. Students also perceive reading as a meaningful activity that supports both academic and personal development.

Table 3. Perceived Benefits of Reading

Aspect	Description
Vocabulary	Enriching word knowledge
Pronunciation	Improving speaking accuracy
Grammar	Developing structural awareness
Knowledge	Expanding insights and perspectives
Academic performance	Supporting learning and communication skills



Table 3 highlights that the benefits of reading are multidimensional, encompassing linguistic, cognitive, and academic aspects. These findings suggest that reading not only functions as a learning tool but also as a medium for developing students' overall competence in English.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that students' engagement in reading for pleasure reflects the characteristics of extensive reading, in which learners independently select materials based on their interests and language proficiency. This autonomy plays a crucial role in fostering intrinsic motivation and sustained reading engagement. Rather than functioning merely as a supplementary classroom activity, reading for pleasure can be positioned as a strategic approach to enhance language input, particularly in developing vocabulary and comprehension. This aligns with the view that receptive skills provide a foundational basis for language production, where sufficient input precedes effective output in second language acquisition (Harmer, 2013; Saville-Troike, 2012). However, the observed reluctance of some students to retell texts suggests that input alone does not automatically translate into output, indicating the need for pedagogical strategies that bridge comprehension and active language use.

The tendency of students to maintain reading interest since childhood highlights the long-term impact of early reading experiences on later academic and personal development. Early engagement with reading for pleasure appears to contribute not only to cognitive growth but also to emotional well-being. Empirical evidence supports this interpretation, showing that early reading habits are associated with better cognitive performance and reduced mental health problems in adolescence (Sun et al., 2024). Similarly, reading practices have been linked to the development of healthy behaviors and positive lifestyle patterns over time (Mak & Fancourt, 2020). These findings suggest that reading for pleasure should not be viewed solely as an academic activity but also as a developmental process that supports students' psychological and social well-being.

Another important aspect revealed in this study is the strong preference for fictional texts, particularly short stories and fairytales. This preference can be interpreted as an indication that emotional engagement plays a central role in reading motivation. Story-based reading enables readers to immerse themselves in narratives, which can enhance empathy, imagination, and emotional regulation. Research in positive psychology further confirms that story reading contributes to increased well-being, including higher levels of happiness and optimism, while reducing negative emotional states such as anxiety and stress (Arslan et al., 2022). In the context of university students who often experience academic pressure, fiction reading may function as a form of psychological coping mechanism, allowing them to balance academic demands with personal well-being.

The dominance of digital platforms as the primary source of reading materials reflects a significant shift in reading practices in the digital era. Students' preference for online content indicates that accessibility and convenience are key factors influencing reading behavior. This finding is consistent with previous studies showing that digital environments facilitate reading engagement by providing diverse and easily accessible materials (Sari et al., 2023). In addition, the integration of technology in language learning, including blended learning approaches, has been shown to support flexible and student-centered learning experiences (Alam et al., 2022; Alam, 2023). However, this trend contrasts with findings from other contexts where students



still demonstrate a preference for printed materials due to their perceived benefits in concentration and cognitive processing (Amirtharaj et al., 2023). This contrast suggests that reading preferences are context-dependent and influenced by technological exposure, learning culture, and individual habits.

Furthermore, the role of digital tools in supporting reading comprehension, such as translation applications and online dictionaries, indicates that students actively employ strategies to overcome linguistic challenges. This reflects a shift from traditional passive reading to more interactive and assisted reading practices. The use of multimedia elements in reading, as suggested in previous research, can further enhance comprehension and engagement by integrating visual and auditory support (Chireac et al., 2022). Such practices demonstrate that reading in the modern context is no longer a solitary activity but is increasingly mediated by technology.

Despite these positive developments, the findings also need to be interpreted within the broader context of declining reading interest globally. Studies have reported a gradual decrease in reading for pleasure over time, particularly among younger generations (Bone et al., 2025). Educational practices that prioritize academic achievement over reading enjoyment may contribute to this trend (Cremin & Scholes, 2024; Cremin, 2020). A comprehensive review also emphasizes that reading for pleasure is influenced by multiple factors, including institutional support, access to materials, and individual motivation (Vogrinčič Čepič et al., 2024). Therefore, the relatively positive reading engagement observed in this study should be seen as context-specific and requires continuous support to be sustained.

In relation to previous studies, this research provides a more integrated perspective by simultaneously examining reading materials, access, habits, and perceived benefits. While earlier studies often focus on single aspects such as reading habits (Fatimah & Yulianto, 2025) or digital reading practices (Sari et al., 2023), this study highlights the interconnected nature of these variables in shaping students' reading experiences. This integrated approach offers a more comprehensive understanding of reading for pleasure in the EFL context, particularly among early-stage university students.

Finally, the implications of this study suggest that reading for pleasure should be systematically incorporated into language learning practices. Educators need to design learning environments that not only emphasize academic reading but also promote enjoyable and meaningful reading experiences. By integrating students' interests, utilizing digital platforms, and encouraging flexible reading practices, it is possible to enhance both language competence and student engagement. In this regard, reading for pleasure can serve as a bridge between formal learning and personal development, contributing to more holistic educational outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that reading for pleasure plays a significant role in supporting EFL students' language development and learning engagement. Students' preference for enjoyable and accessible reading materials, particularly through digital platforms, indicates that interest-driven reading can foster consistent reading habits and meaningful learning experiences. Beyond linguistic benefits, reading for pleasure also contributes to students' confidence, motivation, and broader knowledge construction.

The findings imply that reading for pleasure should be integrated into language learning practices as a complementary strategy to formal instruction. Lecturers are encouraged to provide flexible reading opportunities, incorporate students' interests, and utilize digital



resources to enhance engagement and language exposure. Future research is recommended to examine the relationship between reading for pleasure and other aspects of learning, such as learning resilience and long-term academic performance, using broader samples and mixed-method approaches.

REFERENCES

- Alam, S. (2023). Pedagogical Implications in EFL Classrooms: A Reflective Praxis of Vocabulary Strategies and Techniques. *Journal of Language Teaching & Research*, 14(5). <https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.1405.31>
- Alam, S., Albozeidi, H. F., Al-Hawamdeh, B. O. S., & Ahmad, F. (2022). Practice and principle of blended learning in ESL/EFL pedagogy: Strategies, techniques and challenges. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning (iJET)*, 17(11), 225-241. <https://www.learntechlib.org/p/223129/>
- Amirtharaj, A. D., Raghavan, D., & Arulappan, J. (2023). Preferences for printed books versus e-books among university students in a Middle Eastern country. *Heliyon*, 9(6), e16776. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e16776>
- Arslan, G., Yıldırım, M., Zangeneh, M., & Ak, İ. (2022). Benefits of positive psychology-based story reading on adolescent mental health and well-being. *Child Indicators Research*, 15(3), 781–793. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12187-021-09891-4>
- Bone, J. K., Bu, F., Sonke, J. K., & Fancourt, D. (2025). The decline in reading for pleasure over 20 years of the American Time Use Survey. *iScience*, 28(9), 113288. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.isci.2025.113288>
- Chireac, S.-M., Olivares, E. M., & Arbona, A. D. (2022). The impact of reading for pleasure: Examining the role of videos as a tool for improving reading comprehension. *TEM Journal*, 11(1), 225–233. <https://doi.org/10.18421/TEM111-28>
- Christou, P. A. (2022). How to use thematic analysis in qualitative research. *Journal of Qualitative Research in Tourism*, 3(2), 79–95. <https://doi.org/10.4337/jqrt.2023.0006>
- Cremin, T. (2020). Reading for pleasure: Challenges and opportunities. *Debates in English teaching*, 92-102. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429506871-7>
- Cremin, T., & Scholes, L. (2024). Reading for pleasure: Scrutinising the evidence base—Benefits, tensions and recommendations. *Language and Education*, 38(4), 537–559. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2024.2324948>
- Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4th ed.). Pearson.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). Sage.
- Fatimah, I. S., & Yulianto, S. W. (2025). Third-year university students' reading habits and perceptions of reading for pleasure: A descriptive study. *Biormatika: Jurnal Ilmiah Fakultas Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan*, 11(1), 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.35569/biormatika.v11i1.1908>
- Harmer, J. (2013). *The practice of English language teaching* (4th ed.). Pearson Longman.
- Mackey, A., & Gass, S. M. (2005). *Second language research: Methodology and design*. Routledge.



- Mak, H. W., & Fancourt, D. (2020). Reading for pleasure in childhood and adolescent healthy behaviours: Longitudinal associations using the Millennium Cohort Study. *Preventive Medicine*, *130*, 105889. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed.2019.105889>
- Sari, W. S., Faruk, F., & Hurley, U. (2023). Reading stories for pleasure: An insight into Indonesian university students' practice in online reading platforms. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, *13*(2), 430–442. <https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v13i2.63076>
- Saville-Troike, M. (2012). *Introducing second language acquisition*. Cambridge University Press.
- Singh, Y. K. (2006). *Fundamental of research methodology and statistics*. New Age International.
- Sun, Y.-J., Sahakian, B. J., Langley, C., Yang, A., Jiang, Y., Kang, J., Zhao, X., Li, C., Cheng, W., & Feng, J. (2024). Early-initiated childhood reading for pleasure: Associations with better cognitive performance, mental well-being and brain structure in young adolescence. *Psychological Medicine*, *54*(2), 359–373. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291723001381>
- Vogrinčič Čepič, A., Mascia, T., & Aerila, J. A. (2024). Reading for pleasure: A review of current research. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, *59*(1), 49-71. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40841-024-00313-x>