

## **The Reading Habits of English Education Department Students in The Middle of Covid-19 Pandemic: A Case Study of Indonesian Eastern Students**

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### **Abstract**

The objective of this research is to determine if there is an increase in EFL students' reading habits before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study conducted using a descriptive quantitative design, involved 16 students of the second semester. A questionnaire about reading habits during the pandemic served as the research instrument. Results showed a rise in students' reading habits during COVID-19, with averages shifting from 60.94% before the pandemic to 80.27% during it. The researcher categorized factors influencing reading habits into interest, motivation, and environment. Interest, motivation, and environment factors all saw increases during the pandemic compared to before.

**Keywords:** *reading habits, EFL students, Covid-19 Pandemic*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Reading habits play a pivotal role in language acquisition, academic achievement, and personal growth, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education. As a fundamental language skill, reading fosters vocabulary development, comprehension abilities, and overall language proficiency (Krashen, 1989; Day & Bamford, 2002). Extensive reading has long been recognized as a valuable practice for language learners, promoting incidental vocabulary acquisition and enhancing reading fluency (Nation, 2015; Waring & Nation, 2004). However, cultivating consistent reading habits can be a challenge for EFL learners, influenced by factors such as motivation, access to materials, perceived relevance (Renandya, 2007; Ro & Chen, 2014), learning strategies (Wael et al., 2018), and gender dynamics (Akib & Patak, 2018).

The unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted various aspects of education worldwide, necessitating an exploration of its impact on students' learning habits and preferences. The sudden transition to remote learning and the implementation of social distancing measures have potentially reshaped the reading behaviors and attitudes of EFL students. With traditional classroom settings disrupted and

increased isolation, students may have experienced changes in their motivations, access to reading materials, and overall engagement with reading activities (Jeffries & Maeder, 2021; Rasiah, 2021). Gender disparities and perceptions of online learning during the pandemic may have also influenced reading habits (Ibrahim et al., 2021). Previous studies have investigated factors influencing EFL students' reading habits (Yamashita, 2013; Shen, 2006; Hagood, 2003), but there is a paucity of research examining the effects of extraordinary events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, on these habits. As the world grapples with the ongoing challenges posed by the pandemic, it is imperative to explore how this global crisis has influenced EFL students' reading habits and their perceptions of reading as an engaging activity.

Against this backdrop, the present study aimed to investigate changes in EFL students' reading habits and interests before and during the COVID-19 pandemic situation. By analyzing data from a questionnaire administered to EFL students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Sorong, Indonesia, this research sought to answer the following question: Does the COVID-19 pandemic lead to an increase or decrease in EFL students' reading habits compared to the pre-pandemic period?

## METHOD

The research design employed in this study was descriptive quantitative. The target population consisted of students enrolled in the English Education Department within the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education during the second semester at Universitas Muhammadiyah Sorong. The sampling method involved 16 students, chosen for its convenience as a research sample. The research instrument utilized was a questionnaire concerning reading habits during the COVID-19 pandemic, adapted from Maula (2015), comprising 16 items rated on a 4-point Likert scale. The questionnaire aimed to elucidate the factors influencing students' reading habits both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Subsequently, in order to assess the percentage of students' reading habits, Arikunto (2006: 230) recommended the utilization of five categories:

**Table 1.** The Interpretation Scores

Score Options	Scale
Very Good	81 - 100%
Good	61 - 80%
Fair	41 - 60%
Bad	21 - 40%
Very Bad	0 - 20%

## RESULT

The determination of students' reading habits during the COVID-19 pandemic was achieved by computing their responses to the questionnaire. Subsequently, these responses were analyzed and scored. Presented below is a table displaying student scores derived from the questionnaire:

**Table 2.** Students' Reading Habit in Both Situation

Participants	Scores	
	Before Pandemic	During Pandemic
S1	35.94	92.19
S2	71.88	92.19
S3	64.06	87.50

S4	67.19	92.19
S5	56.25	89.06
S6	73.44	82.81
S7	65.63	73.44
S8	51.56	79.69
S9	64.06	79.69
S10	70.31	73.44
S11	71.88	75.00
S12	39.06	71.88
S13	51.56	71.88
S14	70.31	73.44
S15	71.88	73.44
S16	50.00	75.00
<b>Avarage</b>	<b>60.94</b>	<b>80.27</b>

Based on the data presented in the table above, it can be concluded that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, students' scores ranged from 35.94% in the lowest category to 73.44% in the highest category, with an average of 60.94%. Conversely, in the middle the COVID-19 pandemic, students' scores ranged from 71.88% in the lowest category to 92.19% in the highest category, with an average of 80.27%. Consequently, there was an increase in the average students' reading habits from 60.94% before the COVID-19 pandemic to 80.27% during the pandemic, indicating a shift from a 'Fair' to a 'Good' level based on the score interpretation. The detailed results, the researchers divided the scores into factors influencing students' reading habits, namely:

**1. Interest Factors**

The interest factor is crucial in influencing students' reading habits. When students are genuinely interested in the topics they are reading, they are more likely to engage with the material actively. Personal preferences and the relevance of the reading material all contribute to this factor. The table 3 showed how their interest factor became significance different in both situation.

**Table 3.** Questionnaire Results of Interest Factor

Items	Pandemic Situation							
	Before				During			
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
I read English materials	2	3	10	1	5	6	5	0
I read books, magazines, newspapers, or anything else every day	0	4	10	2	5	6	5	0
I read book before the lesson started	3	5	5	3	5	4	5	2
When you're bored, I consider reading to be one of the activities that reduces it.	2	3	5	6	3	4	6	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Percentages</b>	<b>10.9%</b>	<b>23.4%</b>	<b>46.9%</b>	<b>18.8%</b>	<b>28.1%</b>	<b>31.3%</b>	<b>32.8%</b>	<b>7.8%</b>

The data presented in the table reveals the frequency of various reading habits among students. It shows before the pandemic, the majority of students reported engaging in reading activities occasionally, with 46.9% indicating they read English materials and other materials like books, magazines, or newspapers sometimes. Additionally, a significant portion reported reading often, with 23.4% engaging in daily reading activities. During the pandemic, there was a notable increase in the frequency of reading activities, with 32.8% of students indicating they read sometimes, and 31.3% reporting reading often. This increase suggests that the pandemic may have influenced students' interest to read more frequently, potentially as a means of coping with boredom or adapting to changes in their daily routines. Overall, the data indicates a positive trend towards increased reading habits among students during the pandemic period compared to before.

**2. Motivation Factors**

One of the factors plays a pivotal role in shaping students' reading habits is motivation factor. It encompasses both intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence students' willingness to read and their perseverance in reading tasks. Students who are intrinsically motivated to read often exhibit a genuine interest in the content, deriving pleasure and satisfaction from the act of reading itself. Conversely, extrinsic motivation may encourage students to read for external rewards or to fulfill academic requirements. In the following table, it explains the extension of students' reading habits in motivation aspect.

**Table 4.** Questionnaire Results of Motivation Factor

Items	Pandemic Situation							
	Before				During			
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
I think that reading books is more enjoyable than playing.	2	3	9	2	7	4	4	2
I seek out other books by authors that I like to read	0	3	9	4	5	3	5	2
When I want to read a book, I read the cover and the first page to determine the book that I want to read	6	3	4	3	12	3	1	0
When I find a reading I like, I finish to read it.	4	5	5	2	12	3	1	0
I have read several books to completion in the past year	3	2	8	3	7	4	4	1
When reading a book, I feel immersed in the story and want to finish it right away.	7	1	4	4	12	4	0	0
I feel that reading novels or non-fiction story gets I addicted	4	5	3	4	12	3	1	0

I find pleasure in reading books of any genre	7	3	4	2	11	3	2	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Percentages</b>	<b>25.8%</b>	<b>19.5%</b>	<b>35.9%</b>	<b>18.8%</b>	<b>60.9%</b>	<b>21.1%</b>	<b>14.1%</b>	<b>3.9%</b>

The data reveals a notable shift in respondents' motivation levels between the pre-pandemic and pandemic situations. Before the pandemic, the majority of respondents indicated moderate levels of motivation for reading activities being the most common response across most items. However, during the pandemic, there was a significant increase, particularly for items related to enjoying reading and feeling immersed in the story. This suggests that the challenges and disruptions brought about by the pandemic may have prompted individuals to turn to reading as a source of comfort, escape, or entertainment, leading to heightened motivation levels. Additionally, the substantial increase in "Always" responses indicates a more consistent and enthusiastic engagement with reading materials during the pandemic period. Overall, the data highlights the resilience and adaptability of individuals in maintaining and even enhancing their reading habits amidst challenging circumstances.

**3. Environment Factors**

Environmental factors also play a significant role in shaping students' reading habits. The home literacy, parental attitudes, and family reading practices, can have a profound impact on a reading development and habits. Additionally, the school environment, encompassing the accessibility of library resources, reading activities, and the modeling of reading behaviors by teachers and peers, can foster or hinder the development of positive reading habits. The table 5 showed how the environment of such situation can be determined someone’s behavior towards reading activities.

**Table 5.** Questionnaire Results of Environment Factor

Items	Pandemic Situation							
	Before				During			
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
When I come across to magazine pages, newspaper headlines or book titles, it does pique my interest in reading.	2	4	6	4	3	6	6	1
I think that reading is enjoyable.	3	1	10	2	9	3	4	0
I spend my free time reading entertaining materials.	2	6	3	5	4	8	4	0
I read English-language materials	9	0	3	4	16	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Percentages</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>17.2%</b>	<b>34.4%</b>	<b>23.4%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>26.6%</b>	<b>21.8%</b>	<b>1.6%</b>

The questionnaire results reveal before the pandemic, a moderate number of students (6 out of 16) sometimes felt their interest piqued by magazines, newspapers, or book titles, while a majority (10 out of 16) found reading enjoyable on occasion. However, during the pandemic, there was a slight

increase in students (6 out of 17) who sometimes felt drawn to such reading materials, but a decline in those who found reading enjoyable (only 4 students). Interestingly, the pandemic had a positive impact on students reading entertaining materials in their free time, with this number rising from 6 to 8 students. Conversely, none of the students reported reading English-language materials during the pandemic, whereas previously 4 students sometimes engaged with such materials and 9 did so regularly. Overall, the pandemic influenced students' reading habits in nuanced ways.

The detailed analysis of the results reveals that the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant positive impact on students' overall reading habits. The average student score increased from 60.94% (Fair level) before the pandemic to 80.27% (Good level) during the pandemic period. Overall, the pandemic influenced students' reading habits in nuanced ways, with some aspects witnessing an upswing (interest in reading materials, reading for entertainment, motivation levels) and others experiencing a downturn (perceiving reading as enjoyable, reading English-language materials).

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the reading habits of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. The data revealed a significant increase in overall reading habit scores during the pandemic period. This upward trend suggests that the unique circumstances brought about by the pandemic, such as increased free time due to lockdowns and the need for leisure activities, may have contributed to a heightened engagement with reading among EFL students (Jeffries & Maeder, 2021; Rasiah, 2021). Notably, the study identified three key factors influencing students' reading habits: interest, motivation, and environment. Across all three factors, positive changes were observed during the pandemic compared to the pre-pandemic period.

With regard to interest factors, the data indicated a notable increase in the frequency of reading activities during the pandemic, with more students reporting reading often or occasionally. This finding aligns with previous research that has linked increased leisure time with higher rates of reading engagement (Clark & Rumbold, 2006; Mol & Bus, 2011). Uncovered a significant shift in students' motivation levels for reading during the pandemic. In addition, students' motivation levels have been found to be influenced by factors such as gender dynamics (Akib & Patak, 2018) and the washback effect of reading tests (Hasanudin et al., 2023).

Interestingly, while the pandemic had a positive influence on certain aspects of reading habits, it also presented some challenges. The data revealed a decline in the perceived enjoyment of reading and a decrease in engagement with English-language materials during this period. These findings could be attributed to factors such as increased stress and anxiety levels, distractions from digital media, or disruptions in access to educational resources (Rasiah, 2021; Jeffries & Maeder, 2021). Additionally, students' perceptions of online learning during the pandemic may have impacted their reading habits, particularly concerning English-language materials (Ibrahim et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the study highlighted the role of environmental factors in shaping students' reading habits. The pandemic appeared to have a positive impact on students reading entertaining materials in their free time, potentially due to the increased availability of leisure time and the need for recreational activities. However, there was a decrease in reading English-language materials, which could be attributed to disruptions in educational settings and access to such resources during the pandemic (Rasiah, 2021). Previous research has also emphasized the importance of environmental factors, such as home literacy practices and access to reading materials, in cultivating positive reading habits (Hagood, 2003; Renandya, 2007). Overall, the study contributes to our understanding of how external events and circumstances can shape reading habits and preferences among EFL learners. While the pandemic presented unique challenges, it also offered opportunities for students to rediscover the joys of reading and leverage its

benefits as a means of coping and personal growth, aligning with the principles of extensive reading (Day & Bamford, 2002; Waring & Nation, 2004).

## CONCLUSION

This study delved into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the reading habits of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, revealing a significant increase in overall reading habit scores during the pandemic period, indicating heightened engagement with reading activities among students. The study had identified three key influencing factors: interest, motivation, and environment. While the pandemic presented opportunities for students to rediscover the joys of reading and utilize it as a coping mechanism, the research contributes to understanding how external events and circumstances can shape reading habits and preferences among EFL learners, emphasizing the importance of addressing various factors to foster positive reading habits. Future studies could explore long-term pandemic impacts, investigate strategies for sustained positive reading behaviors, examine interplay between reading habits and psychological, environmental, and technological factors, and explore effects of specific pedagogical approaches on reading comprehension and habits.

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