

INVESTIGATING STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF WATTPAD APPLICATION USAGE IN ENHANCING READING COMPREHENSION AT MTS SABILUL CHALIM LEUWIMUNDING

Revi Mariska

Institut Prima Bangsa
dederevii8@gmail.com

Utami Rosalina

Institut Prima Bangsa
utami.rosaline@gmail.com

Virga Putra Darma

Institut Prima Bangsa
virgaputradarma@gmail.com

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Abstract: This study investigates students' perceptions of using the Wattpad application as a digital reading platform to enhance English reading comprehension at MTs Sabilul Chalim Leuwimunding. The study aims to examine how Wattpad influences students' motivation, vocabulary development, and comprehension of narrative texts. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed, involving classroom observation, interviews with ten students, documentation, and reading comprehension activities using Wattpad stories. The findings indicate that students perceive Wattpad positively due to its engaging narratives, ease of use, and accessibility, which encourage more active reading. Students demonstrated improvement in identifying main ideas, understanding vocabulary in context, and summarizing texts. However, several challenges were identified, including distracting advertisements, inconsistent content quality, and occasional internet connectivity issues. Overall, the study concludes that Wattpad can function as an effective and innovative digital medium for supporting reading comprehension in English learning. These findings provide useful insights for teachers and curriculum developers in integrating digital reading platforms into classroom instruction.

Keywords: Digital Learning, Literacy App, Reading Comprehension, Students' Perception, Wattpad.

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is a core component of English language learning, as it enables learners to understand meaning, interpret ideas, and construct knowledge from texts. This skill supports vocabulary acquisition, grammatical awareness, critical thinking, and writing development (Rabang et al., 2021; Nikou & Aavakare, 2021). However, many EFL students continue to experience difficulties in reading comprehension due to limited vocabulary, low engagement, and teaching practices that rely heavily on textbook-centered instruction (Tomas et al., 2021; Torres, 2021).

In the Indonesian junior high school context, several studies report that students often perceive English reading tasks as challenging and uninteresting, which leads to low reading motivation and minimal engagement (Putri & Nasrullah, 2023; Rahman, 2024). This perception is influenced by monotonous learning materials, limited exposure to authentic texts, and a lack of media that align with students' interests. As motivation plays a crucial role in reading achievement (Barber & Klauda, 2020), these conditions highlight the need for alternative instructional approaches that can foster both engagement and comprehension.

The integration of digital technology has been widely recognized as a promising solution to address these challenges. Digital reading platforms provide flexible access to diverse texts and allow learners to select materials that match their preferences, thereby increasing reading engagement (Nikou & Aavakare, 2021). One platform that has gained popularity among young learners is Wattpad, a free online application that enables users to read and write stories across various genres. Wattpad offers interactive features, accessibility, and reader autonomy, which potentially transform reading from a compulsory task into an enjoyable activity (Zafar et al., 2024).

Previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of Wattpad in improving students' reading comprehension. Research by Safitri (2021) and Ramadhanti et al. (2021) showed that students who used Wattpad achieved higher comprehension scores in narrative texts compared to those using conventional materials. Similarly, Musyayyadah (2023) reported significant improvement in students' post-test results after Wattpad-based instruction. These findings suggest that Wattpad can function as an effective digital medium for enhancing reading skills.

Other studies have emphasized motivational aspects. Putri and Nasrullah (2023) found that Wattpad increased students' reading motivation by offering enjoyable and self-selected reading experiences, while Rahman (2024) reported that students preferred digital narratives

over textbooks due to their accessibility and relevance. Additionally, studies focusing on perception revealed that EFL learners viewed Wattpad as user-friendly and engaging, although challenges such as advertisements and content inconsistency were also noted (Samosir et al., 2024; Astiantih et al., 2024).

Although existing studies provide valuable insights, most of them rely on quantitative or experimental designs that emphasize test score improvement. As a result, students' subjective experiences, such as their perceptions, motivation, and challenges when using Wattpad remain underexplored, particularly at the junior high school level in Indonesia. This gap indicates the need for qualitative research that captures learners' voices and explains how and why Wattpad supports reading comprehension from students' perspectives.

To address this gap, the present study focuses on exploring students' perceptions of Wattpad application usage in enhancing reading comprehension at MTs Sabilul Chalim Leuwimunding. Unlike previous studies that primarily measured learning outcomes, this research emphasizes learners' experiences, engagement, and perceived benefits and challenges when using Wattpad as a reading medium.

Accordingly, this study is guided by the following research questions: (1) What are students' perceptions of using the Wattpad application to enhance their reading comprehension? (2) How does the use of Wattpad support students' development of reading comprehension skills.

The purpose of this study is to investigate students' perceptions of Wattpad application usage in enhancing reading comprehension at MTs Sabilul Chalim Leuwimunding. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to the literature on digital literacy and EFL reading instruction, as well as practically to teachers and curriculum developers seeking effective ways to integrate digital reading platforms into classroom learning

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore students' perceptions of using the Wattpad application in enhancing reading comprehension. This design was

selected because it enables an in-depth description of participants' experiences and viewpoints within a natural classroom context without statistical generalization.

Participants

The participants of this study were 30 seventh-grade students of MTs Sabilul Chalim Leuwimunding who were actively involved in English reading activities using Wattpad. From this group, 10 students were purposively selected for interviews to obtain deeper and more detailed insights. The selection was based on students' activeness, willingness to participate, and ability to express their opinions. The number of interviewees was considered sufficient as the data had reached saturation, where no new significant information emerged.

Instruments

Several instruments were used to collect the data, including:

- a. Observation sheets to record students' engagement, interaction, and reading behavior during Wattpad-based activities.
- b. Interview guidelines consisting of semi-structured questions focusing on students' motivation, perceived benefits, and challenges in using Wattpad.
- c. Reading comprehension tests designed to assess students' understanding of narrative texts, including vocabulary recognition, identifying main ideas, and drawing inferences.
- d. Documentation to support observational and interview data.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through four main procedures. First, classroom observations were conducted during reading sessions to examine students' participation, interest, and responses toward Wattpad-based reading activities. Second, reading comprehension tests were administered after the reading sessions to identify students' comprehension development. Third, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten selected students to explore their perceptions and experiences in greater depth. Finally, documentation was gathered as supporting evidence for the research findings.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, relevant information from observations, interviews, tests, and documentation was selected and categorized. The data display stage involved organizing the findings into descriptive narratives and tables to identify emerging patterns. Finally, conclusions were drawn and verified by comparing data from different sources. To ensure credibility, methodological

triangulation was applied by cross-checking observation, interview, test, and documentation data

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

This section presents the findings of the study obtained from classroom observations, documentation, reading comprehension tests, and student interviews. The results are organized to reflect students' engagement, reading comprehension development, and perceptions of using the Wattpad application.

Observation Findings

Classroom observations revealed that students showed high engagement during Wattpad-based reading activities. Compared to conventional textbook reading sessions, students appeared more enthusiastic, actively participated in discussions, and demonstrated greater interest in the reading tasks. Most students independently selected stories based on their preferences and interacted with peers to discuss story content.

Table 1:

Observation Results of Students' Reading Activities Using Wattpad

Indicators of Student Activity	Description of Behavior	Frequency
Responding to teacher's stimulus	Students reacted positively to images and story prompts	High
Asking or answering questions	Several students actively raised questions such as "What is the main idea of the story?"	Moderate
Identifying main ideas	Students were able to underline and retell the central theme of stories	High
Vocabulary recognition	Learners attempted to guess meanings from context	Moderate
Collaboration in discussion	Small groups shared opinions on plot and characters	High

Note. Observation was conducted during Wattpad reading sessions in English class.

The observation results indicate that Wattpad facilitated interactive reading activities and encouraged students to engage more actively in the learning process. Students' ability to identify main ideas and participate in discussions suggests that the platform supported both individual and collaborative comprehension processes.

Documentation Findings

Documentation data supported the observation findings. Screenshots and photographs showed students navigating Wattpad stories, highlighting unfamiliar vocabulary, and engaging in group discussions. These visual records confirmed that students were not only passively reading but also interacting with the texts and their peers. The documentation demonstrates that Wattpad created a learning environment that promoted active participation and collaborative meaning-making.

Reading Comprehension Test Findings

To examine students' reading comprehension development, a reading test was administered after the Wattpad-based reading sessions. The results showed improvement across several reading skill indicators, particularly vocabulary acquisition and identifying main ideas.

Table 2:
Summary of Reading Test Results

Reading Skill Indicator	Achievement Level	Description
Vocabulary acquisition	Improved	Students learned new words in context
Identifying main ideas	Improved	Most could summarize story plots accurately
Drawing inferences	Moderate	Some students needed guidance in critical interpretation
Overall reading comprehension	Positive trend	Increased interest and better test outcomes

Note. The test focused on narrative texts read through the Wattpad application.

The results indicate that Wattpad-supported reading activities contributed to students' comprehension development, particularly at the literal and inferential levels. Although some students still needed support in deeper interpretation, the overall trend suggests positive progress in reading comprehension.

Interview Findings

Interview data provided direct evidence of students' perceptions of using Wattpad in reading activities. Most participants expressed positive attitudes toward the application, highlighting its engaging stories and ease of use. One student stated:

"I like reading on Wattpad because the stories are interesting and not boring like the textbook." (student 3)

Another participant mentioned:

"I can understand the story better because I can learn new vocabulary from the context." (student 7)

These responses indicate that Wattpad helped increase students' motivation and supported vocabulary development during reading.

However, students also reported several challenges. Some participants mentioned technical issues such as internet connectivity and advertisements. As one student explained:

"Sometimes the internet is slow, so I cannot continue reading the story."

(Student 5)

Despite these challenges, the majority of students agreed that Wattpad made reading activities more enjoyable and encouraged them to read more frequently. The interview findings confirm that students perceived Wattpad as a beneficial digital medium that supported their reading comprehension while also presenting manageable limitations.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that the use of Wattpad contributed to increased student engagement and reading comprehension by transforming reading activities into more interest-driven experiences. Rather than merely completing assigned texts, students actively selected stories aligned with their personal preferences, which encouraged sustained attention and deeper interaction with the content. This finding supports prior research highlighting Wattpad's potential to enhance comprehension of narrative texts (Safitri, 2021; Ramadhanti et al., 2021), yet the present study extends these results by emphasizing students' autonomy and emotional involvement as central factors in comprehension development. From a constructivist perspective, this suggests that comprehension improvement occurred not only

because of digital access, but also because learners actively constructed meaning through personally meaningful texts (Schunk, 2020).

Despite the overall positive perceptions, several limitations emerged, particularly related to unstable internet connections and the presence of advertisements within the application. These challenges occasionally disrupted students' reading focus and continuity, indicating that digital platforms may simultaneously support and constrain learning. Similar concerns were reported by Samosir et al. (2024), who noted that while Wattpad enhances motivation, its commercial features can reduce instructional effectiveness if not carefully managed. Therefore, the effectiveness of Wattpad as a learning medium depends not only on the platform itself, but also on teachers' ability to provide structured guidance, such as directing students toward appropriate content and integrating focused comprehension tasks to minimize distractions.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the Wattpad application functions as a supportive digital medium for enhancing English reading comprehension in an EFL junior high school context. Rather than merely improving discrete reading skills, Wattpad facilitated a shift toward more autonomous and interest-driven reading practices, which supported students' engagement with narrative texts. From a pedagogical perspective, the findings suggest that students' perceived comprehension development was closely related to their ability to interact with texts that were personally meaningful and accessible in a digital format.

Overall, the study demonstrates that Wattpad has pedagogical value when integrated as a supplementary reading platform that aligns students' digital reading habits with instructional goals. However, its effectiveness is not inherent to the application itself but depends on how it is guided and structured within classroom instruction.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research involved a relatively small number of interview participants from a single school, which limits the generalizability of the findings to broader educational contexts. Second, the study focused primarily on students' perceptions and short-term reading activities, rather than long-term comprehension development. Third, technical issues such as internet connectivity and in-application advertisements may have influenced students' reading experiences and engagement during the data collection process.

Based on the findings, teachers are encouraged to integrate Wattpad as a guided supplementary reading tool rather than a stand-alone learning medium. Structured reading tasks, teacher-selected story recommendations, and focused discussion activities are recommended to minimize distractions and enhance comprehension outcomes. Schools should also consider improving internet accessibility to ensure smoother implementation of digital reading platforms in classroom settings.

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