

Students' Perception of LINE Webtoon Application and Its Impact on Their English Reading Habits and Skills

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ABSTRAK

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Reading is one of the basic English language skills that has not been mastered by all students. On the other hand, reading media determines the frequency of reading habits and the improvement of reading skills. LINE Webtoon application, one of the digital literacy platforms, allows for comfortable and enjoyable reading on computers, tablets, and mobile devices. However, unfortunately, the LINE Webtoon application as a reading medium has not been widely used in the process of teaching and learning English reading. This study investigated students' perceptions of using LINE Webtoon and how it influenced their English reading habits and skills. Six students from the English Language Education Department at a private university in Yogyakarta were involved. The qualitative design was applied with interviews for the data collection process. The interview results described students' reading experience using LINE Webtoon. The findings revealed students' interest in reading content in the app due to the attractive illustrations, the use of easy-to-understand and simple language, and the correlation of story with everyday life. The interview results also presented changes in students' reading habits as things go about reading stories on LINE Webtoon: increasing their reading routines, reading duration, vocabulary collection, and grammar knowledge. Reading English stories through the LINE Webtoon app has positive effects on enhancing students' reading habits and reading skills. This research implies that the development of English reading curriculum should involve various innovative and effective digital literacy platforms for the enhancement of English reading habit and skills.

Kata Kunci: *Reading Habit; Reading Skills, LINE Webtoon; Students' Experience*

INTRODUCTION

In learning English, reading becomes the primary skills EFL teachers teach to students. According to Shimray et al. (2015), for all second and foreign language learners, reading is a crucial academic language skill in the classroom. Reading itself can help students acquire more information and knowledge. Hence, people who enjoy reading may read books with plenty of goals and genres to satisfy their need to learn (Asmara, 2021; Dalilan, 2021).

Meanwhile, technology has become an integral aspect and a necessity in today's daily lives. In this era, it facilitates people's lives in numerous ways. Due to the influence of technology, people in the 21st century rely more on computer-based or digital resources than on paper-based resources (Bentri et al., 2021; Cimermanová, 2014; Hidayati & Ardillas, 2021). Many computer-based resources available nowadays are e-mail, online news portals, instant chat apps, and online videos. Spires et al. (2019) argued that ICT and the internet are gut information sources

increasingly, and literacy is required for succeeding information resource usage.

Nowadays, people's reading habits have been altered by digital literacy. Numerous digital literacy platforms may assist them in reading on their computers, tablets, or cell phones. Access to digital periodicals and newspapers online is simplified, and developers can more readily update the data (Shimray et al., 2015). Furthermore, many apps are created just for leisure reading, including those that specifically publish comics digitally, e.g., LINE Webtoon, Mangatoon, Kakao Page, and Tapas.

As technology integrates into daily life, it aids the students' reading habits improvement and enhances them further. Besides, many reading apps offer engaging reading topics. Reading from these apps can be more pleasant since EFL students connect to the story's themes. LINE Webtoon becomes one of the most famous digital comic platforms among students as it can be downloaded for free. This app provides daily access to thousands of comics, except for early access to get ahead of other readers by purchasing the app coins (Irwansyah & Lestari, 2020).

The comic layout of LINE Webtoon is aesthetically pleasing due to its vertical paneling. Astabrata (2019) argued that the readers view each panel in more detail by scrolling since several panels cannot be shown on a single page. Additionally, the users may be the creators for publishing their comics in the Kanvas section, which can then be easily accessed and read freely (Bentri et al., 2021).

As LINE Webtoon offers many comic choices, students' reading habits may be increased. Indah and Wibowo (2021) asserted that reading on this app becomes enjoyable activity, so it is suitable to foster students' reading proficiency. Green (as cited in Florence et al., 2017) added that strong reading habits can expand knowledge. Using LINE Webtoon may fix students' reading habits since the app contains comics with appealing plots and images. Therefore, pictures in reading texts make the reading activity engaging (Novanti & Suprayogi, 2021).

With the utilization of LINE Webtoon, students readily select reading material suitable to their preferences with this app illustration

and engaging topics assistance. Muyassaroh et al. (2019) clarified that LINE Webtoon may serve as learning media as this app provides likable storylines and themes. Students can comprehend readily due to simple sentences applied in LINE Webtoon stories. Additionally, they can pick their preferred language as this app supplies language setting. In other words, students may utilize LINE Webtoon to improve their reading skills in multiple languages.

However, several complications may appear in hooking LINE Webtoon to reading habits. As an illustration, this app's paid stories are considered a constraint as viewers cannot freely access them, which pushes them to visit illegal sites. The digital literacy required to use LINE Webtoon varies depending on whether it is used for entertainment or learning. In addition, teachers' and students' perspectives differ on the impact of LINE Webtoon on English reading habits, as do their views on this app's significance for their reading skills.

The LINE Webtoon app also attracts the attention of some EFL students in an English Language Education Department at a university in Yogyakarta to spend their time reading stories. Using their smartphones, they carry out this activity while waiting for their class, after their class, or in the relaxing areas provided by the campus. Some students read independently, while others gather with their friends as reading buddies and exchange their English story recommendations. This phenomenon indicates that this app offers uniqueness, comfort, and pleasure for those students to read digital English stories to fill their free time.

Even though LINE Webtoon app offers uniqueness and a lot of benefits to improve students' reading habit and skills, not all EFL students are aware and involved in using LINE Webtoon to improve their English reading skills. Not a few students are still learning to read in English in a conventional way. They still find reading to be tedious due to overwhelming vocabulary discouraging them from reading. While learning English, they tend to be bored due to uninteresting subject matter.

It has become a point that LINE Webtoon has been widely researched to improve students' reading comprehension (Asmara, 2021), reading interest (Putri & Lubis, 2018), reading literacy (Indah & Wibowo, 2021),

reading satisfaction (Faisal & Zulfebriges, 2022), and vocabulary bank (Novanti & Suprayogi, 2021). However, the benefits of LINE Webtoon in increasing students' reading habits and reading skills are still rarely identified in-depth yet.

Due to the importance of reading for ESL students, as well as the importance of beating reading boredom, it is important to find out the possibility to propagate LINE Webtoon app as a potential digital reading platform to improve students' reading habit and skills. Therefore, exploring students' perception and experiences in this matter needed to be conducted. This current study aimed to find out the students' perception on use of LINE Webtoon app and its impacts on their reading habits and reading skills at a private university in Yogyakarta.

METHOD

This study aimed to find out the students' perception on the use of LINE Webtoon Application and its impact to students' reading habit and skills. A qualitative approach with descriptive qualitative research design was applied in this study. Qualitative method facilitated researchers to get an in-depth picture, explanation, and understanding of the substance of an event (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Hence, this method was suitable for this current study as it enabled the researchers explore the students' perception and experiences on the use of LINE Webtoon application in depth.

Six EFL students from the English Language Education Department at a private university in Yogyakarta were selected to be the participants of this study based on several criteria. First, the students were in their sixth semester. Therefore, they were still involved in some courses that used reading as a course requirement. There was also a high possibility that they still used digital platforms for reading activities. Second, they already used the LINE Webtoon app for at least one year, actively reading the stories in English. Third, they routinely read 2-3 times a week using this app.

A small-scale survey was conducted to filter the participants who met the criteria. The researchers asked about how active they were using LINE Webtoon, the language used when reading the stories, and the purpose of reading

in this app. Six participants were pseudonymized as Intan, Rara, Afifah, Mira, Karina, and Aliyah.

Additionally, this study employed in-depth interviews with an interview guideline as the research instrument. The interviews were conducted online with participants' consent regarding the time and platform used. The researchers also obtained permission from the participants to record the interview process and conducted notetaking. After the interview finished, the data gained were analyzed using transcribing, member checking to ensure its trustworthiness, and coding.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

From the interview results, the researchers discovered similar experiences shared among the participants. These similarities include their interest in reading comics, impatience or eagerness for the next issue of their favorite story, and reading habits. The findings are described in the following sections.

Students were Interested in Reading LINE Webtoon due to Its Illustrations

During the interview, three out of six participants claimed they became interested in reading LINE Webtoon due to its appealing illustrations. Intan confirmed, "LINE Webtoon is supported by artistic illustrations, so I am not easily bored". Afifah delivered, "Usually, I am bored when reading, but using LINE Webtoon makes me enthusiastic reading because of the illustration". Similarly, Aliyah declared, "Because the illustration is artful, it is more enjoyable even though I have to read it in English". The participants shared the same experience when reading from LINE Webtoon. The illustrations trigger their interest so their reading activity can be more enjoyable.

The participants' experiences align with the findings of Hidayat et al. (2019), who explained that digital comics content is more engaging and stimulating for students than printed books. Using illustrations enhances the readability of LINE Webtoon (Putri & Lubis, 2018). This app is designed specifically to publish digital comics. Therefore, LINE Webtoon can attract students' reading interest, especially with captivating illustrations that easily attract their attention.

LINE Webtoon Uses Easy and Simple Language

Two out of six participants shared that their experiences reading stories on LINE Webtoon were easy as the words used in this app were understandable. Rara echoed, "To be honest, I can understand the words because the language is more straightforward". The statement revealed that when reading from this app, the participants found simple and easy-to-understand words. The simple language used in LINE Webtoon is one of the reasons the participants continued reading from this app.

Due to LINE Webtoon's modest language, the participants can comprehend the stories, as evidenced by their responses to the interview questions. This finding is supported by Muyassaroh et al. (2019) that LINE Webtoon uses simple sentences. They recommended this app to students as a suitable learning media due to its simple language and easily understandable stories. This study's findings also reveal that LINE Webtoon's language is simple for students to comprehend, and therefore stories in this app can be considered for use as reading material. With light reading, students will not be burdened and may handily appreciate the stories.

Stories on LINE Webtoon were Relatable

Four out of six participants expressed their experiences that the LINE Webtoon stories were relatable to their own lives. Their emotions were carried away by the stories they were reading. Intan highlighted, "Some of the stories are engaging and relatable". In addition, Aliyah implied, "If the plot is intriguing, it will increase my interest in reading". It explains how certain LINE Webtoon storylines can affect the readers' interest.

With LINE Webtoon's wide variety of genres, readers may select stories that trigger their interest. It can be considered online reading material that will interest today's students and have a long-term effect on their reading habits due to the engaging stories relevant to their lives (Djiwandono, 2018). It is due to the variety of titles and genres available on LINE Webtoon. Additionally, stories considered relatable to life may create a feeling of connection. Hence, students who relate to the stories are more motivated to read them.

LINE Webtoon Stories Create a Feeling of Impatience and Anticipation

In the previous finding, the participants experienced positive emotions because of their interest in the storyline. It increased their impatience and anticipation for the next chapter of their favorite story. Aliyah mentioned, "I am impatient if I must wait a week for the next chapter". She also pointed out, "Due to my impatience, I tend to save all the chapters first and then read them in order from beginning to end". Based on Aliyah's responses, it can be assumed that it is her habit to read from beginning to end once she can download a completed story. Besides, her response indicates that she may read for extended periods. Afifah revealed, "When I read from LINE Webtoon, I become so excited that I lose track of time". The excitement she felt while reading this app immersed her in the story. In contrast, Mira said, "I get excited every week when a new chapter is released. I cannot wait to read it". It indicates that Mira had a habit of regularly reading from LINE Webtoon, as she anticipated every new chapter.

It is evident from the participants' responses that they were interested in reading LINE Webtoon to the point where they eagerly awaited the upcoming chapters. Their excitement made them anticipate the story and desire to read it from this app. Therefore, they become more motivated and interested in reading. It is supported by Astabrata (2019), who stated that LINE Webtoon motivates students to learn and practice more, increasing their interest in reading. The students' impatience while awaiting the continuation of the story demonstrated their enthusiasm and interest in reading. This enthusiasm prevents them from becoming bored while reading in English.

Certain Approaches were Used in Reading from LINE Webtoon

In describing their LINE Webtoon reading experiences, five out of six participants shared that when they discovered new words, they needed a translation tool like Google Translate or a dictionary to understand the meaning of a sentence on this app. Intan stressed, "I need two devices, one to read from LINE Webtoon and another to access Google Translate". As for

Afifah, she underlined, "When I encounter unfamiliar words in LINE Webtoon, I will open a dictionary to check their meaning". She added, "Now I try to understand the meaning based on the illustration". Karina argued, "I sometimes use Google Translate and occasionally look up the meaning of idioms used there. I still need to use it". Therefore, the participants had different approaches when encountering new words.

When the participants encountered new and unfamiliar words, their curiosity compelled them to discover their meanings. Typically, they try to guess or use a translation tool and dictionary. It demonstrated how their reading habits were formed. Furthermore, it affects their enjoyment and comprehension of the storyline on LINE Webtoon. They would search for the meaning using various resources, such as a translation tool or a dictionary. As a result, they acquired new vocabulary or idioms. They would also read extensively. It is supported by Siregar (2017), who clarified that students gain more knowledge if they desire to read continuously and for an extended time.

The following section focuses on the reading habits of the participants. According to the researchers' findings, there were differences between when the participants had and had not used LINE Webtoon. When using this app, they experienced an increase in the frequency and duration of reading.

Reading Habits were Altered after Using LINE Webtoon

There was a difference between the participants' reading habits before and after using LINE Webtoon. Participants' reading habits began to change due to their use of this app, and this difference was observable. Intan asserted, "I quite am lazy to read before getting to know the LINE Webtoon app, but after I downloaded LINE Webtoon, there was a feeling of enthusiasm to read". Similarly, Rara also clarified her experience before using LINE Webtoon. She claimed, "Before, I used to read printed comic books, but because I had to buy them from the store, I feel lazy to read". Using this app was more flexible than purchasing printed comic books, as she could read anytime and anywhere. The participants' experiences

demonstrated how the LINE Webtoon can alter a person's desire to read.

Students' reading habits formed when they took an interest in reading through LINE Webtoon. It strengthens the claim by Yanti, who confirmed that incorporating creative media and technology into the language-learning process is intended to increase students' enthusiasm (as cited in Malik & Asnur, 2019). Additionally, the flexibility of this app that changes a person's reading habits can be observed. Comic apps such as LINE Webtoon are becoming increasingly popular due to their ease of use, free availability, and a vast selection of genres to read (Putri & Lubis, 2018). The flexibility of this app makes it simple for students to read whenever they desire. The availability of different genres on a single platform eases users to find content that matches their preferences. Due to their increased interest in reading, their reading habits change and become superior to before. Another positive aspect is that LINE Webtoon supports authors or comic creators since it is an official app.

LINE Webtoon Increased the Routine and Duration of Reading

The researchers of this study also discovered that LINE Webtoon increased the reading routine and duration of two out of six participants. Afifah declared, "I read more often since I discovered LINE Webtoon. I read almost daily". It demonstrated Afifah's increased reading routine. Then, regarding Mira, she delivered, "I felt the duration of my reading increased. I often read LINE Webtoon and discover many new stories that I enjoy, so my reading list has grown, and the duration has become longer". It means that the more stories she read, the longer she spent reading. According to their responses, the increased frequency and duration of reading form their reading habits.

Reading habits may be determined by the intensity, frequency, regularity, and continuity of reading and the amount of required reading material (Dalilan, 2021). It concludes that the participants' reading habits were formed due to their increase in routine and duration. Their increase in time length and frequency indicates a shift in their reading habits. Students develop

reading habits when they are interested in what they are reading.

The following section described the participants' views on the importance of LINE Webtoon for them as they felt their vocabulary increased and their grammar improved. The improvement of their vocabulary and grammar indirectly contributed to the development of their reading skills.

Reading from LINE Webtoon Expanded Vocabulary

Four out of six participants highlighted the importance of building their vocabulary. Intan explained, "My vocabulary increased from reading LINE Webtoon". She continued, "My reading skills improved, and I can now read faster". The expanding vocabulary enabled her to comprehend some words she had previously encountered in this app. Another participant, Rara, echoed, "The effect is that I can read the written expressions there". She began to understand some expressions that she would not usually come across. Besides, Karina shared her LINE Webtoon reading experience. She expressed, "There are many idioms in LINE Webtoon, so I was able to add my vocabulary". It gave her additional knowledge about idioms.

The improved reading skills, particularly in terms of vocabulary, are supported by Cimermanová (2014), who highlighted that comics are a suitable and effective way to foster imagination and build vocabulary. The improvement in the students' reading habits influenced their increased vocabulary. Students become more active in discovering the meaning of the new words. Moreover, the illustrations in LINE Webtoon make the idioms and expressions simple to understand.

LINE Webtoon Positively Influenced Grammar

The researchers found that one participant's improvement extended beyond vocabulary. Not only did Afifah's vocabulary expand, but so did her grammar. She implied, "Reading also influences my grammar". Her grammar growth was influenced by her constant reading habit. While reading from LINE Webtoon, she discovered a variety of sentences. Afifah mentioned, "My reading

skills developed because my grammar is better. I am not confused while reading, and I can also read faster than before". Thus, she learned grammar through the various types of sentences she encountered in LINE Webtoon, and the influence of grammar led to the improvement of her reading skills.

Koleini and Hashemian (2021) pointed out that the use of comics helps readers comprehend grammar as the illustrations and sentences there are interconnected, allowing readers to infer the use of grammatical structure from the comics. The development of an understanding of grammar when reading LINE Webtoon occurs since the participants are immersed in reading the stories. It is also in line with Sandika and Novita (2021), who revealed using digital comics influences students' ability and understanding of grammar. Therefore, continuous reading helped readers understand grammar, and due to the influence of grammar, reading skills also improved.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated EFL students' experiences using the LINE Webtoon app and its impact on their English reading habits and reading skills. According to the findings, students who read LINE Webtoon exhibited enthusiasm and motivation to read more due to the appealing illustration and relatable story. They were also impatient to wait for the story's continuation and felt rushed to read when their favorite had been released. The students felt a difference in their reading habits after they read from this app. When utilizing LINE Webtoon, they read more frequently and for long periods.

Another finding from this study is LINE Webtoon's significance to EFL students' reading skills. The students shared an increase in their vocabulary. In addition to their expanded vocabulary, they became aware of idioms and expressions they had not encountered before. The researchers discovered that this app influenced their grammar. It was believed that students' grammar improved after reading from LINE Webtoon continuously.

This current study confirmed that LINE Webtoon positively brought positive impacts to the students' reading habit and skills. It successfully accommodated EFL students in reading English stories; their reading habits and

reading skills improved. This app's features, ease of access, stories' display, and content diversity differ from conventional readings and similar apps. Therefore, EFL instructors are recommended to utilize LINE Webtoon as a digital English reading resource due to its unique characteristics. Applying LINE Webtoon promotes teachers and students to an enjoyable EFL reading activity and provides a new teaching and learning experience. This implies that in developing English reading curriculum, the involvement of various innovative and effective digital literacy platforms should be included for the enhancement of students' English reading habit and skills.

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