

STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN DEVELOPING VOCABULARY THROUGH WATTPAD APPLICATION: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY STUDY

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Abstract

Developing vocabulary is crucial for mastering a foreign language, impacting pronunciation, writing, spelling, and the accurate application of grammatical patterns. Many alternatives to developing vocabulary include reading stories extensively through the Wattpad application. Therefore, this research aims to find students' experiences in developing vocabulary mastery through the Wattpad application. This research used a qualitative method with a narrative inquiry design to describe the data. The data were collected through interviews. The research involved three students from the English Education Department at UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung who had completed their Extensive Reading course in the fourth semester. The findings indicated that the Wattpad application is a comfortable and enjoyable platform for students to develop their vocabulary mastery. In addition, the researcher found that the students employed various strategies to comprehend new vocabulary, especially guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words, noting unfamiliar words, and using translation resources like Google Translate. The study revealed that the students had positive experiences developing vocabulary through the Wattpad application, which also helped them reduce stress and overcome boredom.

Keywords: Vocabulary Development, Extensive Reading, Wattpad, Narrative Inquiry

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is crucial in learning a foreign or second language, serving as the foundation for speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. (Richards & Renandya, 2002). In other words, mastering vocabulary is essential for achieving fluency in English as a foreign language. (Endarto & Subekti, 2020). However, several students struggle with pronunciation, spelling, and accurately applying grammatical patterns. Students often struggle to reach their full potential without a broad vocabulary and effective strategies to expand it. They may even feel discouraged from engaging in essential language activities such as listening to the radio, conversing with native speakers, reading, or watching television. (Richards & Renandya, 2002). Consequently, their ability to develop strong writing and oral communication skills is hindered, and those who struggle with reading typically have a limited vocabulary.

Expanding an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learner's vocabulary is essential, as it directly influences all other language skills (Al-Dersi, 2013). Learning a word is not an instantaneous process; it requires repeated exposure and practice. According to Palmer's natural language learning method, this process involves four stages: perception, recognition, imitation, and reproduction (Frisby, 1970). Although practice can shorten this process, a word must still be encountered multiple times—initially soon after learning it and then at consistent

intervals—to become a lasting part of a learner's vocabulary (Frisby, 1970: 98). When selecting words to learn, two factors should be considered: their validity (usefulness for communication) and frequency (how commonly they appear in the language). Frisby (1970: 99) argues that both aspects are important in language learning. To enhance vocabulary mastery, students must adapt their learning styles, approaches, and the media they use (Wahyudin & Rido, 2020).

One widely accepted method for vocabulary acquisition is through stories. Research has shown that short stories, in particular, play a significant role in enriching EFL learners' vocabulary. (Al-Dersi, 2013). Many scholars in English Language Teaching (ELT) support the idea that using stories can help students expand their vocabulary (Wright et al., 1984). By incorporating stories into learning, teachers can create interactive environments where students are encouraged to communicate, share knowledge, and express their ideas.

With advancements in digital technology, students no longer rely solely on traditional books for reading materials. Instead, various digital platforms provide access to a vast collection of stories, one of the most popular being Wattpad. Wattpad is an application that allows users to read and write literary content across multiple genres, including fantasy, romance, thriller, and teen fiction (Ahmadi, 2018). The accessibility of Wattpad enables students to engage with stories anytime and anywhere, making it a valuable tool for language learning. According to Rahman & Iwan (2019), Wattpad can be effectively integrated into the learning process, providing engaging digital content without requiring students to read lengthy books. Through Wattpad, students not only develop their vocabulary but also improve their reading, writing, grammar, and speaking skills.

Wattpad also supports extensive reading, which is recognized as an effective method for vocabulary acquisition. Extensive reading allows learners to explore a diverse range of materials, including newspapers, articles, novels, magazines, and online content (Harmer, 2007). It is often associated with leisure reading, making it an enjoyable and engaging learning experience. Research has shown that extensive reading enhances reading speed, comprehension, and spelling accuracy while also fostering a positive attitude toward reading (Shen, 2008).

Several studies have examined the role of Wattpad in vocabulary learning. Bal (2018), conducted semi-structured interviews and diary analyses to explore middle school students' reading and writing experiences in the digital era. Similarly, Anggitasari et al. (2020) investigated EFL college students' enjoyment of reading short stories on Wattpad and their perceptions of the platform. Last, Adiningtyas (2020) focused on how Wattpad contributes to developing students' writing skills, specifically in writing recount texts.

Unlike previous research, which primarily examined strategies, techniques, and media for vocabulary learning through Wattpad, this study focuses on students' experiences. A qualitative research approach was employed to explore how students develop their vocabulary mastery using the Wattpad application.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using the narrative inquiry method to explore students' experiences in developing their vocabulary mastery through the Wattpad application. According to Creswell (2012), qualitative research is a way of investigating a problem and understanding a crucial occurrence. Narrative inquiry was chosen to examine students' individual reading experiences on Wattpad, which are inherently subjective, social, and unique. As Clandinin (2006) explains, narrative inquiry involves understanding an individual's experiences through listening, observing, engaging with their written reflections, and interpreting their stories. This approach allowed the researcher to uncover participants' perspectives on how Wattpad contributed to their vocabulary development.

The research was conducted at UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung with three 6th-semester students of the English Education Department. The participants were selected based on their active involvement in weekly reading progress activities using Wattpad. The study relied on primary data to capture the participants' real experiences to ensure an accurate representation of their learning process.

To collect deeper insights, the researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with each participant, creating an enjoyable and personal discussion circumstance. The interviews, conducted in person, included open-ended questions to elicit extensive responses. Open-ended questions allow respondents to provide detailed information in their own words, rather than being limited by answer choices. This makes them important tools for survey researchers Tourangeau et al. (2000). The data was then organized into narrative threads or plotlines that expressed the participants' opinions and experiences. All interviews were recorded, examined, and methodically analyzed to ensure an extensive understanding of students' vocabulary development through the *Wattpad application*.

Table 2.1 List of Interview Questions

No	Question	Theory
1.	Do you think that learning vocabulary is difficult, and if so, why?	Students' Difficulties in Learning Vocabularies (Salam & Nurnisa, 2021)
2.	Do you think that reading can assist you in developing your vocabulary?	EFL Learners' Responses to Extensive Reading: Survey and Pedagogical Application (Shen, 2008)
3.	Does extensive reading lead you to increase/ develop vocabulary knowledge, in terms of spelling, meaning and grammatical behaviour of words? Explain!	Extensive Reading Activities for Teaching Language (Bamford & Day, 2004)
4.	Would you mind telling me about your <i>Wattpad</i> reading experience and how you felt when you read a story on <i>Wattpad</i> ?	Extensive Reading on Wattpad and Its Benefits to Students' English Skills: Students' Perceptions (Permatasari et al., 2020)
5.	What specific genres do you enjoy exploring the most on <i>Wattpad</i> ? Explain!	Blending Wattpad Platform and English Prose Course in Industrial Revolution Era 4.0 (Rahman & Dharma, 2019)
6.	How much time do you spend reading stories on <i>Wattpad</i> ?	The Use of Wattpad as an English Reading Medium to Enrich Students' Vocabulary: A Case Study (Sari & Nurjati, 2023)
7.	Do you think <i>Wattpad</i> can help you to improve your vocabulary?	
8.	What strategies do you use in reading <i>Wattpad</i> to determine the meaning of words when they are first encountered?	Vocabulary in Language Teaching (Schmitt, 2000)
9.	What strategies do you use in reading <i>Wattpad</i> for remembering words that you have previously encountered?	

FINDING AND DISCUSSIONS

Finding

1. Experience from Participant 1

Participant 1 struggles with learning vocabulary due to the vast number of words and limited information sources. She found it difficult to understand English stories due to

encountering many unfamiliar words. To improve her vocabulary, she used Wattpad application to read various genres, particularly action and horror. Spending one to two hours per day on Wattpad application, she can read up to three books in a week. This consistently helps her reduce the number of complex and unfamiliar words she encounters, indicating that reading is a valuable tool for vocabulary development.

Participant 1 used a strategy to decipher unfamiliar words while reading on the Wattpad application. She read the entire sentence, paying close attention to context, and marked new words for later reference. She then used Google Translate to translate the unfamiliar words into her native language. This strategy helped her improve her English language skills by exposing her to new words and phrases. She also remembered words she had encountered by writing them down in a notebook and using them to create new sentences. Participant 1 enjoyed using the Wattpad application because it made reading stories more exciting and freer, although she sometimes had to wait several days for the latest chapter. The result is supported by Sari and Nurjati (2023) stated that Wattpad application might be considered an English reading platform to help students improve their vocabulary.

2. Experience from Participant 2

Participant 2 struggled with vocabulary learning, often struggling to recall unfamiliar words. To improve her vocabulary, Participant 2 used the Wattpad application, particularly for romance novels. She spends two to three hours daily reading on the Wattpad application, encountering complex and unfamiliar words. As she reads more extensively, she notices a decrease in these words, allowing her to read more quickly and easily.

To develop her vocabulary, Participant 2 used Wattpad and supplemented it with strategies like contextual memorization, Google Translate, and a personal notebook. This consistent practice boosted her confidence with complex texts.

However, she felt that extensive reading did not directly contribute to her grammatical behaviour. Despite this, she enjoyed the platform's engaging stories and the platform's immersive storytelling experience. She acknowledged that while her extensive reading may have developed her vocabulary, it did not directly enhance her grammatical skills.

3. Experience from Participant 3

Participant 3 found Wattpad an enjoyable tool that significantly developed her vocabulary. Through daily reading of teen fiction and transmigration stories, her encounter with unfamiliar words dropped dramatically, proving the method's effectiveness.

Participant 3 used a strategy to determine the meaning of words when they were first encountered, interpreting all sentences she read and using Google Translate to interpret unfamiliar words. She also wrote the words in a notebook to remember them. Participant 3 had used the Wattpad application since middle school and found it to be a good tool for reading. The Wattpad application features made it more accessible and provided notifications to keep track of updates. Participant 3 found the Wattpad application enjoyable, helping her overcome boredom and use her free time more productively. Despite concerns about the immersive reading experience, she found the overall experience positive and rewarding.

Discussion

The participants had a good experience developing vocabulary mastery through *the Wattpad application*. All Participants reported that they started to know and read *Wattpad* in middle school. Participants 1, 2, and 3 feel that *Wattpad* is a good and comfortable reading application. Furthermore, participant 1 expressed that apart from developing their vocabulary, they believed reading on *Wattpad application* could be beneficial for reducing stress. Participants 2 and Participant 3 also discussed how reading on the *Wattpad application* helped them overcome boredom and use their leisure time better. It is consistent with Permatasari et al. (2020), who discovered that reading on *Wattpad* is a pleasurable pastime that makes reading less stressful. The experience of all participants is included in the type of feeling experience.

According to Buccini & Padovani (2007), feeling experience is linked to the emotional reactions caused by using something. Feelings are mental representations of emotions, such as past feelings or recollections.

Moreover, all participants also had cognitive experiences. Buccini and Padovani (2007) stated that cognitive experience is associated with a conscious or unconscious process that includes intellectual effort such as thinking, reasoning, or memorizing. Participant 1 and 3 indicated that reading extensively on *Wattpad* helped them develop their vocabulary. Participants typically spend approximately 1-2 hours reading extensively on the *Wattpad application*. Initially, participants encountered approximately 20-30 foreign terms while reading. However, after constantly reading on the *Wattpad application*, the number of such words was reduced to only 18-20. This demonstrates how reading extensively on the *Wattpad application* can help participants learn new words and phrases. The result is supported by Sari & Nurjati (2023), who stated that *Wattpad* might be considered an English reading platform to help students improve their vocabulary.

Besides, some participants explained that reading extensively on *Wattpad application* can improve their vocabulary knowledge regarding grammatical behaviour. The result is supported by Bamford and Day (2004), who state that extensive reading not only improves reading skills but also improves learners' general language proficiency (e.g., spelling, grammar, vocabulary, and writing).

Based on students' experiences with the *Wattpad application*, the *Wattpad application* is a very comfortable reading application that can assist students in developing vocabulary knowledge. The platform offers a variety of story genres, such as romance, teen fiction, and action. The *Wattpad application*, on the other hand, can help students enhance their vocabulary and grammatical behaviour. The *Wattpad application* also helps participants reduce stress by overcoming boredom and using their free time better. According to Reborra and Pianzola (2018), an innovation in language learning *Wattpad* offers many exciting possibilities.

CONCLUSION

The study highlights the positive impact of the *Wattpad* application on students' vocabulary development. Participants found the platform engaging due to its accessibility, diverse genres, and immersive storytelling. They reported spending significant time reading on *Wattpad*, initially encountering unfamiliar words but gradually improving their vocabulary retention and comprehension. The experience of all participants is included in the type of feeling experience. According to Buccini and Padovani (2007), feeling experience is linked to the emotional reactions caused by using something. Feelings are mental representations of emotions, such as past feelings or recollections.

Furthermore, this study discovered that students used a variety of strategies to develop new vocabulary, including context clues, noting unfamiliar words, using translation tools, and practicing sentence formation. These strategies demonstrate their versatility in language learning. Overall, *Wattpad* is a useful and enjoyable tool for vocabulary development, with active involvement and deliberate learning playing important roles.

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