Recreational Reading Habits of the EFL Pre-Service Teachers in an Indonesian Islamic Higher Education

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Abstract: Recreational Reading Habits of the EFL Pre-Service Teachers in an Indonesian Islamic Higher Education. Objectives: This study aims to investigate the recreational reading habits of EFL pre-service teachers at Islamic universities, with a focus on the relationship between the duration of recreational reading and academic achievement. Furthermore, this study also examines differences in reading time based on gender, age, level of study, and students' reading preferences. **Methods**: This research employed a mixed-methods approach through a cross-sectional survey design and case study, involving 56 students from three classes of the English Language Education Study Program at UIN Datokarama Palu. Data were collected through an online survey, semi-structured online interviews, and document analysis. These data were then analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, as well as thematic analysis, to explore quantitative patterns and qualitative meanings in depth.- **Findings**: The results of the study showed that involvement in recreational reading activities had a very moderate relationship with the academic achievement of the EFL preservice teachers, indicating that although recreation reading may increase their language awareness and learning motivation, its direct impact on academic achievement was still relatively limited. It was found that 50% of the respondents read for less than one hour per week, reflecting low levels of recreational reading engagement. Differences were also evident based on demographics, with female students and younger age groups tending to read more frequently and preferring digital texts and short reading materials such as online stories and motivational content. Despite limited reading time, students who regularly engage in recreational reading demonstrate better academic achievement, wider vocabulary mastery, and positive attitudes towards learning English. **Conclusion**: This study confirms the importance of recreational reading culture in supporting academic success, independent learning, and long-term intellectual development. Islamic universities are expected to foster a culture of reading for pleasure by integrating it into the curriculum, strengthening library facilities, and utilizing digital platforms.

Keywords: pre-service EFL teachers, recreational reading habits, reading for pleasure.

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◼ INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, global reading habits have undergone a major transformation due to advances in information and communication technology (Alenezi et al., 2023; Apriliyanti & Ilham, 2022; Aristovnik et al., 2020). Sahlstrom et al. (2019) and Latif et.al. (2019) mention that the advent of the internet and smart devices

(smartphones) has not only facilitated social interaction but also transformed the way students access and consume reading material. Whereas students previously needed to visit bookstores or libraries to obtain reading materials, they can now simply download books, novels, comics, and even magazines directly onto their devices (Shimray et al., 2015; Gregory & Cox, 2016; Loh & Sun, 2022). The convenience of online reading materials has encouraged the emergence of new, more practical reading patterns and expanded students' reading options (Gregory & Cox, 2016; Mizrachi et al., 2018; Kukulska-Hulme & Viberg, 2018).

Currently, recreational reading, or reading for pleasure, has been gaining increasing attention from academics. This is particularly true, as leisure reading has a strong influence on students' academic achievement (Mol & Jolles, 2014; Li et al., 2025; Le et al., 2019), due to its typical characteristic of being done voluntarily. This unique characteristic emphasizes the voluntary and personal enjoyment aspects of reading, from which students gain better social and emotional competencies (Li et al., 2025; Duran Bautista & Rendon Marulanda, 2018). Altamura et al. (2025), Torrpa et al. (2020), and Rothbauer and Cedeira Serantes (2022) in particular emphasized that recreational reading is an important learning experience, regardless of the reader's age. Similarly, Burnett and Merchant (2018) and Niland (2023) explain that reading for pleasure is a form of play that allows individuals to experience other worlds and roles in their imagination. This means that recreational reading opens up space for individuals to imagine and gain new mental experiences.

Cremin (2014) and N. Khreisat & Mugableh (2020) explained that the term "recreational reading" is often used interchangeably with "reading for enjoyment." In contemporary research, the first term is more commonly used. Recreational reading enables readers to access a diverse range of texts, including novels, comics, newspapers, magazines, and non-fiction works, in both print and electronic formats (Cremin, 2014; Mueller et al., 2017; Thums et al., 2021; Brookbank, 2023). Recreational reading is not limited by a specific time and space, but rather by individual freedom and interest (Gviniashvili, 2025).

In Indonesia, students' recreational reading habits show significant variation. The 2019 Indonesian Reader Survey (IRS) reported that approximately 67% of Indonesians read a variety of reading materials, including books, magazines, and comics. However, specific data on students' recreational reading habits is limited. Research by Iftanti (2012) on 546 students in East Java revealed that only two students (0.37%) read for pleasure for five hours or more, while the majority (122 students) did not read for pleasure on a daily basis. This fact indicates a low level of recreational reading among students. When compared with developed countries, this difference is even more pronounced. Students in Singapore (Wang et.al., 2022; Loh & Sun, 2019; Chen et.al., 2017), the United States (Huang et.al., 2016; Reilly et.al., 2019), and Finland (Torppa et al., 2018; Vasalampi et.al., 2023) have higher rates of recreational reading, which is positively correlated with academic achievement.

Furthermore, students' reading preferences now increasingly shift toward digital content. Anugrah (2019) found that students prefer reading online materials such as journals and e-books (35%), comics (17%), magazines (8%), textbooks (5%), newspapers (2%), and novels or other reading materials (33%). This aligns with observations by Milal et al. (2021) and Milal et.al. (2020), who found that female students were more likely to read e-books, while male students preferred printed reading materials.

Unfortunately, the reading interest of Indonesia's younger generation is relatively low. The Creative Economy Agency (2018) reported that only 6.77% of people aged 20–29 years old were interested in reading. Data from 2017 even

showed that only 53% of university students were interested in reading. The National Library (Wibowo, 2015; Masykuroh et al., 2023) also confirmed that only 10% of the population aged 10 years and above showed an interest in reading. This fact highlights the gap between the availability of access to reading materials and the actual reading intensity.

Besides availability, popular culture also influences students' reading choices. Many students read popular series or comics to keep up with trends among their peers (Lee, 2024). In this context, recreational reading serves not only as personal entertainment but also as a means of social interaction within the community (Merga & Moon, 2016; Brookbank, 2023).

In academia, recreational reading has important implications. Milal et al. (2021) and Milal et al. (2020) explain that female college students read more than male students, particularly online. Kurata et al. (2017) also found in the Japanese context that despite their familiarity with digital sources, they still view print reading as the *"true"* form of reading. This aligns with the view of Jeong and Gweon (2021).

At UIN Datokarama Palu, the observations on pre-service EFL teachers revealed a low level of recreational reading. Most students relied solely on the internet for assignments without conducting in-depth research. They rarely read for personal use, even visiting the library only when assigned. Students also reported a lack of intrinsic motivation to read. This limited their general knowledge, which ultimately impacted their academic performance.

Previous studies have confirmed that recreational reading is positively correlated with students' academic achievement. Gauder et al. (2007), through the program *Porch Reads* at the University of Dayton, found that *"with just a little bit of motivation and encouragement, students are willing to read for fun"*(p. 2), and this is supported by the research of Brookbank (2023). Similarly, Merga & Moon (2016), Allam

(2016), and Dalila (2018) emphasized that recreational reading contributes to the development of students' literacy, general knowledge, and academic achievement.

Referring to the dynamic nature of reading recently, three theoretical bases are employed to shed light on the current issues of recreational reading. First, the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), introduced by Ryan and Deci (1985), is an important framework for understanding students' motivation for recreational reading. Ryan and Deci (2002) explain that humans have three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Ryan & Deci (2017) emphasized that *"autonomous motivation represents the most optimal type of motivation"* (p. 12).

In the context of recreational reading, intrinsic motivation drives students to read for pleasure and personal satisfaction, not out of obligation. Conversely, extrinsic motivation leads students to read solely to fulfill external demands, such as college assignments (DeNaeghel et al., 2012; Troyer et al., 2019). Merga (2015) emphasized that *"regular recreational reading offers a wide range of benefits, and is essential for supporting ongoing literacy development"*(p. 197). Thus, students who are intrinsically motivated to read recreationally have the potential to have higher academic competence.

Meanwhile, Pierre Bourdieu's (1930–2002) theory of habitus is also relevant to understanding the habits of recreational reading. According to Bourdieu (2018), habitus is *"a system of lasting, transposable dispositions"* (p. 54). Habitus is formed through long-term socialization and results in persistent behavioral tendencies. In the context of reading, students from academic families tend to have a habitus that places reading as a significant activity. Edgerton & Roberts (2014) and Holland-Smith (2022) emphasized that individuals with an academic habitus tend to have study routines, a preference for intellectual discussions, and a

tendency toward recreational reading. Conversely, students from working-class families tend not to internalize recreational reading habits due to their focus on other activities, such as work (Scholes, 2019).

Finally, the Recreational Reading Model is worth consideration. Manning and Manning (1984) introduced four models of recreational reading: *control reading*, *sustained silent reading (SSR)*, *peer interaction reading*, and *teacher-student conference reading.* Chua (2008) and Lin et al. (2012) have proven that the SSR program can foster positive attitudes towards reading. Bigelow and King (2016) demonstrated that peer interaction reading enhances literacy, while Clawson (2018) found that although the effect of teacher-student conference reading was not statistically significant, the increase in students' independent reading levels was still evident. These models suggest that structured interventions can encourage students' recreational reading habits, particularly when intrinsic motivation has not yet been optimally developed.

These various studies indicate that, despite the significant role recreational reading plays in enhancing academic achievement, recreational reading practices in Indonesia remain relatively low. This gap is even more pronounced among prospective English teacher students (EFL pre-service teachers) at UIN Datokarama Palu and private universities in Central Sulawesi, many of whom lack intrinsic motivation to read. Therefore, this study focuses on the relationship between recreational reading habits and the academic achievement of EFL pre-service teachers. Specifically, the study aims to examine the extent to which time spent on recreational reading influences academic achievement, as well as to identify trends and differences in reading preferences based on age, gender, and English language learning experience. Furthermore, the study also aims to identify factors that act as drivers and barriers to forming and maintaining

recreational reading habits among these students. Therefore, the study is formulated in three main questions: (1) to what extent does recreational reading time influence the academic achievement of pre-service EFL teachers; (2) how do differences in reading preferences emerge based on their age, gender, and English language learning experience; and (3) what factors encourage and hinder the formation of recreational reading habits among EFL pre-service teachers.

This study aims to provide new insights into the relationship between recreational reading time and the academic achievement of EFL pre-service teachers. It examined the differences in understanding of recreational reading preferences based on age, gender, and experience. Furthermore, it seeks to identify types of reading, reading frequencies, and factors that influence their recreational reading habits. In addition, it seeks to examine the contribution of their recreational reading to improving their English skills and academic achievement.

Based on the research questions, this research is expected to contribute to two aspects. First, in the academic context, the results of the research would enrich the literature on the relationship between recreational reading and the academic achievement of EFL pre-service teachers in Indonesia and strengthen the theoretical basis by integrating SDT and Habitus theory. In a practical context, this research would serve as the basis for developing academic programs in universities that foster students' intrinsic motivation for recreational reading, thereby not only improving their English skills but also forming sustainable reading habits.

■ METHOD

This research employed a convergent mixed-method design. The choice was based on the need to integrate quantitative and qualitative data to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena being studied (Creswell et al., 2014; Creswell & Inoue, 2025).

With this approach, quantitative data is used to measure general trends and patterns of relationships between variables. In contrast, qualitative data serves to explore the experiences, motivations, and in-depth perceptions of participants.

Participants

The research population comprises all students in the English Language Education Study Program at UIN Datokarama Palu, commonly referred to as EFL pre-service teachers. The sample consisted of three cohorts: 2021, 2022, and 2023, with a total population of approximately 130 students, or approximately 50 students per cohort. This population was selected because they were currently pursuing English teaching education and were considered relevant for uncovering recreational reading habits in the context of English as a foreign language learning. From this population, 56 students participated in a survey, which served as the primary source of quantitative data for this study. Subsequently, 33 participants from this group were selected for online interviews using Google Forms. Interview participants were selected using purposive sampling, based on certain criteria such as cross-year representation, level of English language learning experience, gender differences, and socio-economic background. This strategy was intended to ensure data diversity, enrich research findings, and gain a deeper and more representative understanding of the factors influencing the recreational reading habits of prospective English language teacher students.

However, the researcher was aware that the use of online google forms has several limitations covering the difficulty in ensuring the authenticity of respondents which potentially affected the validity of the data, limited interaction which reduces the depth of qualitative answers, and internet access constraints which have the potential to cause participation bias and reduce the representativeness of the data in the context of this research.

Research Design and Procedures

This research employed a Convergent Mixed Methods design, which combines quantitative and qualitative approaches simultaneously to gain a deep and comprehensive understanding of the recreational reading habits of EFL pre-service teachers at UIN Datokarama Palu. The quantitative approach was implemented by distributing online questionnaires to 130 students across the three intakes. However, 56 students from three intakes: 2021, 2022, and 2023, returned the questionnaires. The survey instrument consisted of closed-ended questions designed to measure the frequency, duration, and type of reading chosen by students, as well as their perceptions of the relationship between recreational reading and academic achievement. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques to describe the distribution, trends, and differences in reading patterns based on demographic variables, including age, gender, and English learning experience.

Separately, a qualitative approach was employed through in-depth interviews with 33 selected participants, using a purposive sampling technique to select participants from the survey respondents. Participant selection was based on representation across grade levels, educational backgrounds, gender, and socioeconomic diversity to obtain richer and more representative data. Interviews were conducted online via *Google Forms* using open-ended questions focused on understanding, motivation, and barriers to recreational reading. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns of meaning and personal experiences among students, then integrated with quantitative results to produce a comprehensive interpretation of the phenomenon of recreational reading in the context of English language education.

This research was conducted from June to October 2024 using **a** Convergent Mixed Methods design. In the initial phase (June–July), the researchers conducted a literature review, developed and validated a questionnaire instrument, and developed interview guidelines. In August, quantitative data were collected through an online questionnaire from 130 students, while qualitative data were obtained from in-depth interviews with 33 selected participants, who were chosen using the purposive sampling technique. In September, both sets of data were analyzed separately: descriptive statistics for the survey and thematic analysis for the interviews. The results were then integrated in the mid of October through triangulation to produce comprehensive findings and relevant research recommendations. Triangulation in this study was conducted to ensure the validity and depth of the findings by comparing and verifying data from the survey results and online interviews. The survey data showed that the reading time of the EFL pre-service teachers varied, with most reading between one and two hours per day. The choice of reading materials, such as academic articles, authentic texts, and online sources, showed a positive relationship with GPA achievement, with students who read regularly and chose academic reading tending to have higher GPAs. Online interviews supported these findings, with participants explaining that exposure to authentic texts increased their reading motivation and broadened their understanding of language contexts. Through triangulation, researchers found consistent patterns between students' reading intensity, reading types, and reflections on their learning experiences, strengthening the validity of the results and generating comprehensive and contextual research recommendations.

Instruments

Research instruments in a convergent mixed methods design. This study was adapted from the model proposed by Creswell (2005), utilizing an online questionnaire via Google Forms, which was distributed to approximately 130 prospective English teacher students (EFL pre-service teachers) at UIN Datokarama Palu. This instrument consists of two main parts. The first part focuses on recreational reading habits, including demographic characteristics such as gender, level of study (semesters 1–5), age, Grade Point Average (GPA), scholarship status, and weekly recreational reading duration, both during lectures (on-campus sessions) and during breaks (vacation). The second part examines recreational reading preferences, including various types of texts, such as newspapers, magazines, comics, poetry, personal letters, emails, chat messages (*chat*), internet sites, science novels, mystery novels, biographical nonfiction books, and religious nonfiction books. Each item in the instrument uses a five-point frequency scale, as suggested by Creswell (2005), to comprehensively describe the variation in the intensity of participants' reading activities: never, rarely, sometimes, often, and very often.

The validity of this instrument is determined through content validity. The instrument was developed in consultation with experts in English language education to ensure that the items align with the constructs of reading habits and recreational reading preferences. A pilot test was conducted with 30 respondents to assess the clarity and relevance of the items. The instrument's reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a value greater than 0.80, indicating high internal consistency. Therefore, the instrument is deemed content valid and reliable for accurately measuring the EFL recreational reading habits and preferences of EFL pre-service teachers.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data obtained from the survey results were analyzed using *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* (SPSS) version 23. The analysis began with simple descriptive statistics,

including percentages, means, and frequency distributions, to describe general trends and respondent characteristics based on variables such as gender, level of study, and GPA. The Chi-Square test is used to analyze the relationship between categorical variables, such as gender and age group, and reading habits (in terms of reading hours) of EFL pre-service teachers during both campus sessions and vacations. This analysis helps determine whether differences in reading time by gender and age group are significantly related to their academic achievement (GPA). Thus, this test identifies patterns of association between demographic characteristics, reading intensity, and students' academic performance.

Meanwhile, qualitative data obtained through interviews and document reviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved the stages of data transcription, initial coding, identification of main themes, and interpretation of the meaning behind the emerging patterns. This refers to the framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which is widely used in qualitative social and educational research. According to Braun and Clarke, *thematic analysis* is a flexible method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns or themes that emerge from data.

Data validity is strengthened through triangulation techniques that combine survey results, interviews, and documents, as well as through member checking to ensure the accuracy of interpretation. With a convergent mixed-methods approach, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the recreational reading habits of EFL pre-service teachers and their impact on their academic achievement.

■ RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Statistics of the Recreational Reading Habits of the EFL Pre-service Teachers

The study of the recreational reading phenomenon among EFL pre-service teachers at UIN Datokarama Palu revealed their habits, tendencies, and implications for their pedagogical methodologies and practices. Although many have been exposed to English literature, reading patterns reveal inconsistencies and a predominance of fiction texts over academic works, indicating a need for initiatives to foster a stronger reading culture among EFL pre-service teachers. The analysis focuses on the socio-demographic background and weekly allocation of recreational reading time to explore patterns, correlations, and factors influencing these pre-service teachers' reading habits.

As presented in Table 1, Socio-Demographic Information explores the attributes of EFL pre-service teachers, including age, gender, academic year, and scholarship, which provide important context for understanding their reading preferences and engagement experiences. Weekly Time Information complements this data for Recreational Reading (Table 2), which measures recreational reading time allocation. A combined analysis of both datasets revealed no significant differences in recreational reading habits between the college session and the subsequent period. For example, during the lecture, 50% of participants reported reading less than one hour per week. Although this figure dropped to 39.3% (22 participants) after the lecture, the difference was not statistically significant. The finding that 50% of participants read less than one hour per week during lectures indicates a very low level of reading engagement. It indicates a weak culture of academic literacy among students. This condition requires pedagogical interventions that encourage reading motivation and accountability, allowing their academic literacy skills to develop sustainably. Age was also not shown to have a strong influence on reading duration for either male or female participants. Overall, the largest percentage remained in the group reading less than one hour per week. Thus, recreational reading habits are more influenced by personal experience and interest in available reading materials.

Table 1. Socio-demographic information for the participating students in the recreational reading survey (N = 56)

Category	Description	N	%
Gender	Male	8	14.3
	Female	48	85.7
Level of the Study	First Year	19	33.9
	Second Year	9	16.1
	Third Year	28	50
Age	17 – 20	27	48.2
	21 – 24	29	51.8
	2.0 – 2.5	1	1.8
GPA	2.6 – 3.0	5	8.9
	≥ 3	50	89.3
Scholarship	Awardee	12	21.4
	Non-awardee	44	78.6

Table 2. Weekly time information for recreational reading of the participating students of the survey (N = 56)

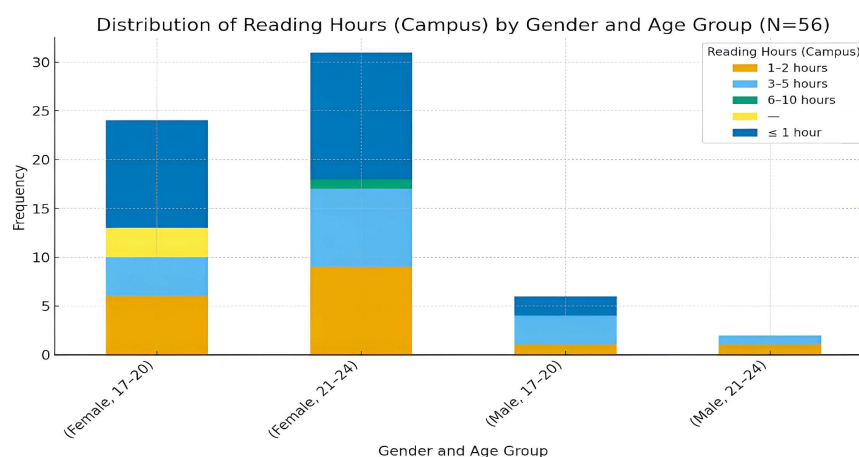| No	Recreational Reading Activities of Students	Duration	Number of Students/Readers	Percentage (%)
1	During campus hours	Less than 1 hour	28	50
		1 – 2 hours	13	23.2
		3 – 5 hours	14	25
		6 – 10 hours	1	1.8
2	During vacations	Less than 1 hour	22	39.3
		1 – 2 hours	16	28.6
		3 – 5 hours	13	23.2
		6 – 10 hours	5	8.9
3	If more time is given (unlimited)	Yes	48	85.7
		No	8	14.3

Figure 1. Distribution of reading hours (campus) by gender and age group (N=56)

The following is a stacked bar graph that shows the distribution of reading habits among EFL pre-service teachers (during campus sessions) based on gender and age group. This graph illustrates the variation in reading intensity (<1 hour, 1–2 hours, 3–5 hours, 6–10 hours) within each category, allowing for a clear visualization of the patterns of gender and age differences in reading habits.

The following figure (stacked bar chart) displays the distribution of reading hours among EFL preservice teacher students during off-campus sessions (vacation), categorized by gender and age group. The graph shows that females aged 21–24 years dominate in all categories of reading time. In contrast, the group of males has a relatively lower reading intensity and tends to be in the category of <1 hour.
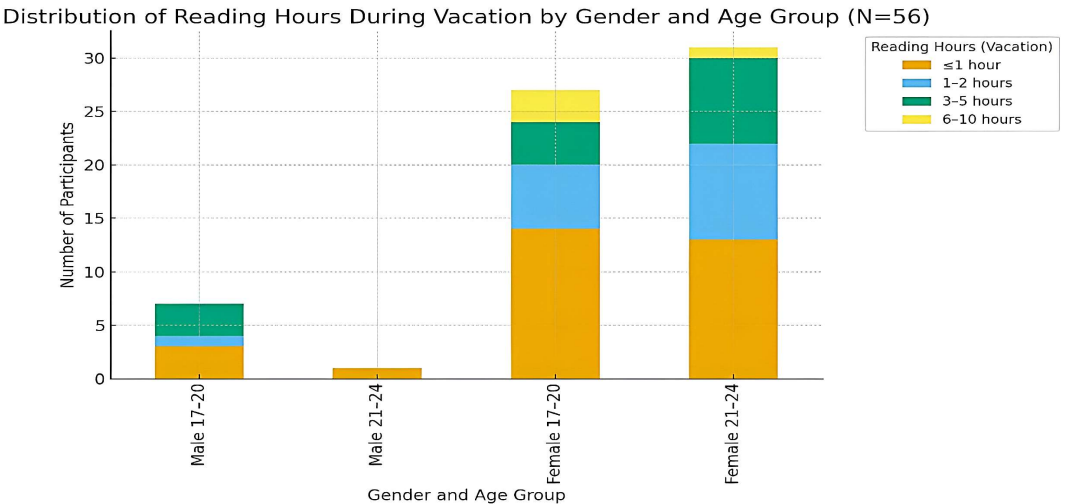

Figure 2. Distribution of reading hours (vacation) by gender and age group (N=56)
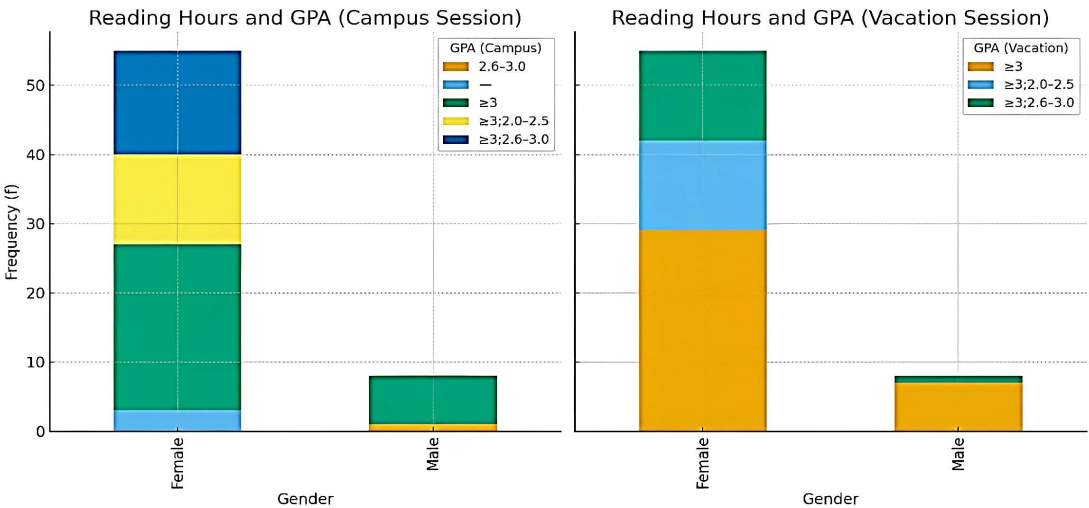

Figure 3. Distribution of reading hours (campus session and vacation) by gender (N=56)

Figure 3 shows the distribution of reading hours and GPA of the EFL pre-service teachers, both during campus sessions and vacation, based on gender. The stacked bar graph indicates that the majority of EFL pre-service teachers, both males and females, have a GPA of 3 or higher, with a similar trend observed across the two sessions.

Table 3. Statistical GPA per reading hours of the EFL pre-service teachers

Reading Hours	Count	Mean	Median	Std	Min	Max
≤ 1 hour	49	3.285	3.408	0.553	2.180	4.000
1 – 2 hours	30	3.262	3.339	0.417	2.657	4.000
3 – 5 hours	28	3.452	3.551	0.375	2.731	4.000
6 – 10 hours	5	3.383	3.144	0.352	3.119	3.828

Figure 4 below presents a box plot illustrating the distribution of GPA by reading hour category (d" 1 hour, 1-2 hours, 3-5 hours, and 6-10 hours) based on the data. The X-axis shows the reading hour category, and the Y-axis shows the GPA value. This box plot reflects the minimum value range, first quartile (Q1), median, third quartile (Q3), maximum value for each category.
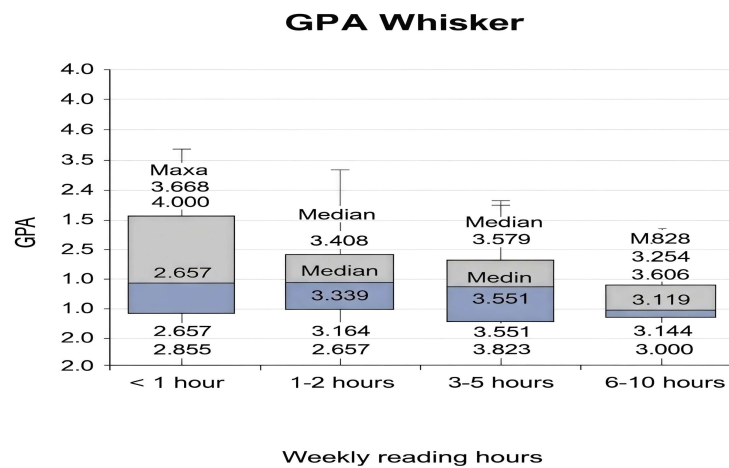

Figure 4. The distribution of GPA by reading hours category

Table 4. Chi-Square tests on gender and campus and vacation reading hours

Gender and Campus Reading Hours					
	Value	**df**	**Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)**	**Exact Sig. (2-sided)**	**Exact Sig. (1-sided)**
Pearson Chi-Square	2.682a	1	.101		
Continuity Correction[b]	1.576	1	.209		
Likelihood Ratio	2.774	1	.096		
Fisher's Exact Test				.137	.104
N of Valid Cases	56				
a. 2 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.86.					
b. Computed only for a 2x2 table					
Gender and Vacation Reading Hours					
	Value	**df**	**Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)**	**Exact Sig. (2-sided)**	**Exact Sig. (1-sided)**
Pearson Chi-Square	5.250a	1	.022		
Continuity Correction[b]	3.646	1	.056		
Likelihood Ratio	5.814	1	.016		
Fisher's Exact Test				.051	.026

N of Valid Cases	56

a. 2 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.00.
b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Based on the Chi-Square test comparing gender and reading duration on campus, it was found that there was no statistically significant relationship, as indicated by the value of $x^2 = 2.682$, $p = 0.101$. The two-sided Fisher's Exact Test yielded a p-value of 0.137, supporting the same conclusion. However, 50% of the cells in the contingency table have a value expected count of less than 5, which is a violation of the basic assumption of the Chi-Square test. This indicates that the test results should be interpreted with caution. Meanwhile, the test between gender and reading duration during vacation showed a significant relationship ($x^2 = 5.250$, $p = 0.022$), with support from the likelihood ratio ($p = 0.016$).

The one-sided Fisher's Exact Test also approached significance ($p = 0.026$). However, a violation of the assumption still occurs (50% of cells < 5), which may affect the accuracy of the results. Therefore, this analysis indicates a relationship, still requires caution in interpretation.

The test results show that gender influences reading habits during vacations, but not on campus, suggesting that informal environments offer more flexibility for individual preferences. This finding is important for the development of literacy programs for EFL pre-service teachers, as reading habituation strategies should focus on non-academic contexts to reach reading interests in a more personal and sustainable manner.

Table 5. Chi-Square tests on age group and campus, and vacation reading hours

Age Group and Campus Reading Hours					
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	56.000a	1	.000		
Continuity Correction[b]	52.067	1	.000		
Likelihood Ratio	77.561	1	.000		
Fisher's Exact Test				.000	.000
N of Valid Cases	56				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 13.02.
b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Age Group and Vacation Reading Hours					
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	52.138a	1	.000		
Continuity Correction[b]	48.347	1	.000		
Likelihood Ratio	68.933	1	.000		
Fisher's Exact Test				.000	.000
N of Valid Cases	56				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 13.50.
b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

The results of the Chi-Square test between *age group and reading duration*, both on campus ($x^2 = 56,000$, p = 0.000) and during vacation ($x^2 = 52.138$, p = 0.000), indicated a positive relationship and were highly statistically significant. All other supporting test results, including *likelihood ratio* and Fisher's Exact Test, also showed high significance (p = 0.000). It was revealed that there was no violation of the assumption because all cells had an expected count of 5 or more, which strengthens the validity of the analysis results.

Interpretatively, this shows that EFL pre-service teachers' study year level (first, second, and third year) influenced their reading habits, both in academic and non-academic contexts. Third-year students are likely to have a higher reading frequency due to the more complex academic demands and greater professional preparedness. Meanwhile, first-year students may not yet have developed a sense of literacy awareness. Therefore, literacy interventions need to be tailored to the level of study to be more targeted in building sustainable reading habits. Here, literacy interventions need to be designed based on each level of study to align with the needs, abilities, and academic load of each student. With this phased approach, first-year students can focus on developing reading interests, while third-year students are directed to strengthen critical and academic literacy.

Based on the results of the Chi-Square test, it was found that there was no significant relationship between the duration of reading on

Table 6. Chi-Square tests on campus reading hours and EFL pre-service teachers' GPA

Campus Reading Hours and GPA			
	Value	**df**	**Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)**
Pearson Chi-Square	1.255a	3	.740
Likelihood Ratio	1.260	3	.739
N of Valid Cases	56		
a. 2 cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.89.			

Vacation Reading Hours and GPA				
	Value	**df**	**Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)**	**Exact Sig. (2-sided)**	**Exact Sig. (1-sided)**
Pearson Chi-Square	1.018a	1	.313		
Continuity Correction[b]	.000	1	1.000		
Likelihood Ratio	1.404	1	.236		
Fisher's Exact Test				1.000	.500
N of Valid Cases	56				
a. 2 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .50.					
b. Computed only for a 2x2 table					

campus and students' GPA ($x^2 = 1.255$, p = 0.740), as well as between the duration of reading during vacations and their *GPA* ($x^2 = 1.018$, p = 0.313). This result is supported by the likelihood ratio and Fisher's Exact Test, which also show a significance value above 0.05. However, in the test related to reading time during the holidays, 50% of the cells had an expected value of more than 5, indicating a violation of the Chi-Square assumption and reducing the validity of the findings. In contrast, in the college reading test, only 25% of cells were problematic, still within the tolerable limits. Overall, these results suggest that reading frequency alone is insufficient to influence academic achievement (GPA). This means that the quality, purpose, and context of

reading are likely more influential than the quantity of time, hence literacy development approaches need to focus on effective reading strategies, not just duration.

Practically, developing reading habits for EFL pre-service teachers needs to emphasize quality and effective reading strategies, not just reading duration. Pedagogically, educators must integrate learning methods that encourage in-depth understanding and critical application of texts, so that academic literacy can significantly contribute to improved learning achievement.

Figure 5 below presents a mosaic plot depicting the proportion of reading frequency of various types of reading materials (reading preferences) based on the data. This plot displays the distribution of frequency categories (never, rarely, sometimes, frequently, very frequently) for each type of reading material, including newspapers, magazines, comic books, poetry, letters, email, chat, the internet, novels, and nonfiction books.

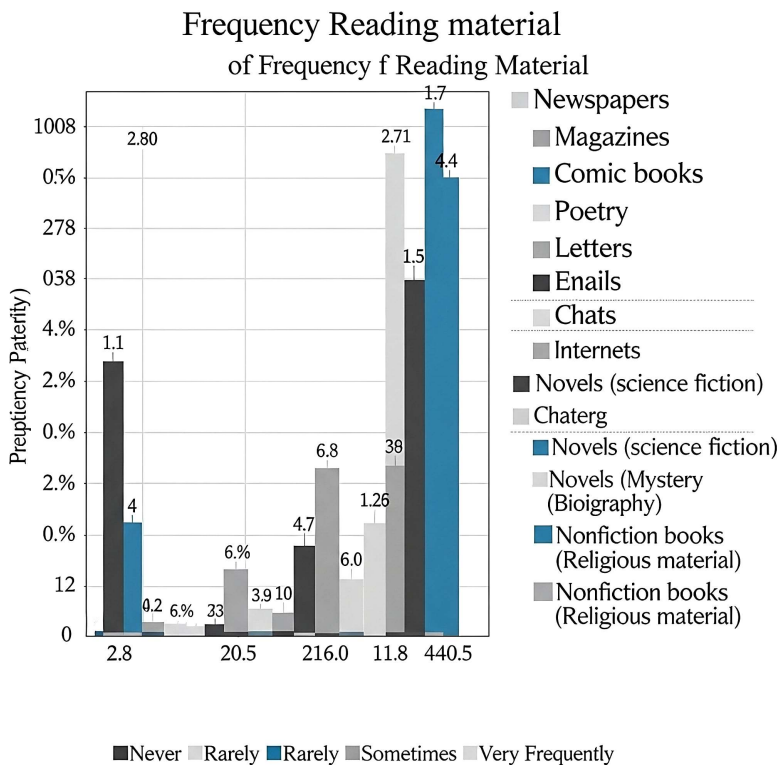The data in the table shows that EFL pre-service teachers at UIN Datokarama Palu

Frequency Reading material
of Frequency f Reading Material

Figure 5. Reading Preferences of the EFL Pre-service Teachers (N = 56)

consume more digital and light reading materials compared to academic or literary reading. Most respondents frequently or very frequently read via chat (96.4%) and the internet (85.7%), while reading materials such as *newspapers* (42.9%) and *magazines* (35.7%) are rarely or never read. Types of reading that are reflective or academic in nature, such as poetry, biographies, and religious materials, show a lower frequency. This

pattern suggests the presence of a shift in literacy habitus, as explained by Bourdieu, where reading preferences are a product of *cultural capital* and the social environment that shapes students' habits and intellectual orientation (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014; Holland-Smith, 2022).

From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), the low interest in academic reading can be explained by a lack of intrinsic

motivation and the prevalence of dominant reading activities that provide immediate pleasure, such as social media (Troyer et al., 2019). Students are more driven by the need for entertainment than the need for academic self-development, as expressed by one participant: *"I read online stories or articles when I feel bored it is relaxing, not for study"*(S18). This phenomenon aligns with the findings of Loh & Sun (2022) and Sahlström et al. (2019), who suggest that digital technology has transformed the practice of reading from a reflective activity to one of rapid and emotional consumption. Thus, the formation of an academic literacy habitus requires a recontextualization of intrinsic motivation so that reading becomes part of a *sustainable academic self-determination*.

The Views of the EFL Pre-service Teachers on Recreational Reading

While quantitative data provided new insights into the time EFL pre-service teachers spend on recreational reading and its impact on their academic performance, qualitative data from interviews enriched understanding by revealing differences in perspectives on recreational reading, time allocated, and reading preferences based on age, gender, and experience. Thus, the quantitative data, which demonstrate general patterns, were reinforced or even challenged by the voices of the students interviewed.

Recreational Reading and Academic Achievement

The results of the analysis show that there is no significant relationship between the duration of reading on campus ($x^2 = 1.255$, p = 0.740) and during vacations and the academic achievement of the EFL pre-service teachers ($x^2 = 1.018$, p = 0.313). The significance value is above 0.05, which is also supported by *the Likelihood Ratio and Fisher's Exact Test, confirming that the* frequency of reading time

alone is not enough to influence academic achievement. However, in the reading test administered during vacations, 50% of cells had an expected count below 5, indicating a violation of the Chi-Square assumption and reducing the validity of the results. In contrast, the reading test on campus was still within the tolerance limits. In general, these findings confirm that the quality, purpose, and context of reading are more important than the quantity of time spent reading. Therefore, the literacy approach must emphasize effective and reflective reading strategies.

The Importance of Recreational Reading for Academics

Although reading time tendencies differ between individuals, test results indicated that the length of reading time did not directly determine the academic achievement of the EFL pre-service teachers. This finding suggests that reading activity is not simply a matter of quantity of time, but is related to habitus literacy and motivational orientation of readers (Holland-Smith, 2022; Edgerton & Roberts, 2014). Within Bourdieu's theoretical framework, students' reading habits reflect their academic habitus, which is shaped by the social, cultural, and institutional environment. Meanwhile, according to *Self-Determination Theory* (Troyer et al., 2019), intrinsic motivation in reading—such as curiosity, enjoyment, and autonomy—plays a greater role than external coercion, which explains why reading time does not always align with academic achievement.

Qualitative findings support this interpretation. Most participants viewed recreational reading as a personal activity for enjoyment and relaxation. *Recreational reading, in my opinion, is reading for pure pleasure, without pressure or obligation*" (S22), mentioned by one of the students. In contrast, others emphasized that this activity serves to *"entertainment or exploration of personal interests"*(S24). However, many were aware of

its indirect impact on academic development: *"Recreational reading fosters a love of learning, enriches vocabulary, and improves comprehension"* (S4). Furthermore, this activity is also recognized for its ability to reduce stress, increase creativity, and support academic success, as one respondent noted: *"Recreational reading increases creativity, reduces stress, and strengthens critical thinking, which is useful for personal growth as well as academic achievement" (S30).* This finding aligns with research by Li et al. (2025) and Torppa et al. (2020), which demonstrates that reading for pleasure can enhance social-emotional competence and reading comprehension in the long term.

Paradox in Recreational Reading Practice

Although students acknowledge the importance of recreational reading, their actual practices suggest otherwise. Survey data shows that 50% of respondents (28 pre-service teachers) only read recreationally for less than one hour per week during the lecture period. Even after the lecture ended, reading interest did not increase significantly, where 39.3% of pre-service teachers continuing to read for less than one hour per week. This paradox arises when this awareness is not followed by practice. Data shows that half of the students only read recreationally for less than an hour per week during class, with a slight increase during vacations. This phenomenon reflects the tension between literacy disposition and actual practice, as explained by Bourdieu, that habitus can shape preferences without always ensuring consistent action. Furthermore, academic pressure and digital distractions also limit reading time (Sahlström et al., 2019; Apriliyanti & Ilham, 2022).

In a pedagogical context, these findings highlight the importance of learning designs that promote autonomous reading engagement through reflective literacy strategies, rather than merely increasing reading duration. Initiatives such as *free voluntary reading* (Durán Bautista & Rendón Marulanda, 2018) and the wise use of digital platforms (Kukulska-Hulme & Viberg, 2018) can strengthen intrinsic motivation and shape *reading habits*. Thus, literacy development for prospective EFL teachers should be directed toward meaningful reading that fosters autonomy, reflection, and sociocultural awareness, rather than just reading intensity.

Preferences for Reading Materials

Quantitative data on reading material preferences showed that the EFL pre-service teachers at UIN Datokarama Palu interacted more with light digital texts, such as *chat* (96.4%) and *internet* (85.7%), and temporary traditional reading materials, such as newspapers (42.9%) and magazines (35.7%), were rarely read. Reflective reading materials such as *poetry*, *biographies*, and *religious texts* also tended to have low readability. This pattern suggests that digital literacy habitus has shaped the way students interact with texts, where reading practices are influenced by social, cultural, and economic patterns that develop in everyday life (Bourdieu, 1984; Edgerton & Roberts, 2014). In other words, their reading choices reflect the form of *cultural capital* that new technology is more suited to in the digital era and fast-paced lifestyle (Apriliyanti & Ilham, 2022; Alenezi et al., 2023).

Interview results support this finding. Most respondents explained that personal interests, moods, and social contexts drive their reading choices. As expressed by S8, *"For recreational reading, the material I read varies depending on my mood and interests."*. While S11 stated, *"I like reading online articles, especially on the TikTok application… sometimes about Gen Z slang."*. This quote illustrates that the digital environment and social media have become integral to their literacy space, aligning with the findings of Sahlström et al. (2019) and Loh & Sun (2022), which suggest that technology has

shifted reading habits from reflective activities to fast information consumption that is emotional and situational.

In the context of Self-Determination theory by Deci & Ryan (2005), the reading behavior of these EFL pre-service teachers can be explained through intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Students choose reading materials that provide personal satisfaction (*intrinsic satisfaction*) or fulfill social needs such as following trends and friends' recommendations (*extrinsic regulation*), as recognized by S30, *"I usually choose my reading based on my mood… thrillers or adventure novels when I want something tense, and romance when I want something soothing."*. This suggests that their reading motivation is more affective and situational, rather than academic in nature. This finding aligns with the research of Troyer et al. (2019) and Li et al. (2025), which confirm that leisure reading can enhance social-emotional competence; however, its impact on academic achievement depends on the context and direction of motivation.

From the perspective of habitus, as defined by Bourdieu, this pattern reflects social reproduction in literacy practices, where students develop reading habits that are appropriate to their social and cultural position (Holland-Smith, 2022). The digital habitus formed through the use of social media and mobile devices creates a tendency toward instant reading, but still has the potential to become a bridge to academic literacy if properly directed (Kukulska-Hulme & Viberg, 2018; Burnett & Merchant, 2018). Therefore, the development of literacy programs in higher education needs to integrate digital reading that appeals to the younger generation while still instilling reflective and critical values. With this strategy, Digital literacy habitus can be utilized to build learning autonomy (*self-determination*) and strengthen the academic capacity of future EFL teacher candidates.

Methodologically, although the results of the Chi-Square test showed a significant relationship between *gender* and *reading duration during vacations*, as well as a very strong relationship between *age group* and *reading habits both on campus and off campus*, violation of the assumption (50% of cells with *expected count*< 5) indicated the need for cautious interpretation. This emphasizes the importance of further validation with a more proportional sample to ensure the reliability of statistical inferences and strengthen the generalizability of the findings.

The Time the EFL Pre-service Teachers Spent on Recreational Reading

Based on the findings, the recreational reading duration of EFL pre-service teachers at UIN Datokarama Palu shows a close relationship between social context, intrinsic motivation, and literacy development. A chi-square test did not reveal a significant relationship between the factors of gender and duration of reading on campus ($x^2 = 2.682$, $p = 0.101$). However, a significant relationship was found between gender and reading duration during vacations ($x^2 = 5.250$, $p = 0.022$). These results suggest that informal environments facilitate a more autonomous expression of reading preferences, particularly for students who have the freedom of time and choice of reading materials. In contrast, the test of the relationship between *age group* and *reading duration* showed high significance both on campus (*p = 0.000)* and during vacations *(p = 0.000)*, indicating that academic maturity and learning experience also strengthen students' literacy habitus.

Qualitative findings further enrich this interpretation. Several respondents reported spending 4–6 hours per week on recreational reading, depending on their interests and schedule. As S26 expressed it: *"For me, the time I can spend on casual reading in a week can reach 4–6 hours… depends on my schedule and interest."* Another respondent added: *"I read casually if I am not on vacation… about 2–3 hours. But if I have a long vacation, it*

can be up to 12 hours."(S5). This variation demonstrates that recreational reading time is influenced not only by academic schedules but also by motivation and social structures that shape reading habits.

In the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu (1990), this reading habit can be understood as a form of *literacy habitus*, a product of internalizing social and academic values that guide reading preferences and frequency. Students with strong digital literacy experiences demonstrate *reading habits* that are new, flexible, and contextual, in line with research by Sahlström et al. (2019) and Mizrachi et al. (2018), which highlights the shift from print to digital media among college students. On the other hand, the use of social media such as *WhatsApp* and *TikTok*, which 62.5% of respondents identified as their most frequent reading activity, demonstrates a form of *informal literacy* that is in accordance with the phenomenon of digitalization of education (Alenezi et al., 2023; Apriliyanti & Ilham, 2022).

From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000), student involvement in recreational reading reflects intrinsic motivation rooted in the need for autonomy and personal enjoyment. As expressed by S30, *"I usually choose my reading based on my mood… thrillers or adventure novels when I want something tense, and romance or light fiction when I want something soothing."* This intrinsic motivation strengthens the sustainability of reading habits, as emphasized by Troyer et al. (2019) and Li et al. (2025), who suggest that reading for pleasure plays a crucial role in the development of social-emotional competencies and text comprehension.

Overall, these results illustrate that the recreational reading habits of prospective EFL teachers are the result of the interaction between social structures (habitus), digital technology, and individual intrinsic motivation. Therefore, literacy programs in higher education need to be designed

to integrate reading enjoyment with digital contexts (Kukulska-Hulme & Viberg, 2018; Brookbank, 2023), allowing reading habits to be formed continuously both within and outside the academic space.

Factors Hindering the EFL Pre-service Teachers from Doing Recreational Reading

Based on the Chi-Square test results for the recreational reading duration of EFL pre-service teachers, a significant tendency was found between demographic factors (gender and age group) and reading frequency. However, some test cells showed low expected counts, indicating an imbalance in data distribution. Sociologically, this finding can be explained through the concept of *habitus* by Bourdieu, where reading habits are shaped by students' social structures and cultural experiences (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014; Holland-Smith, 2022). Students from academic families or literate environments are more likely to develop stable reading dispositions than those raised in environments with limited access to literacy.

From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), the short duration of recreational reading suggests a weakness in autonomous motivation among EFL pre-service teachers (Troyer et al., 2019; Li et al., 2025). Most students read because of academic demands (controlled motivation), not because of an intrinsic drive to enjoy reading. Quote S7 reinforces this: *"A major factor that kept me from reading was the business of doing [the reading] interests, such as duty. Especially when it comes to academic demands."* This statement highlights that academic pressure can shift intrinsic motivation into purely instrumental activity.

Additionally, environmental factors and facilities also hinder their literacy habits. S10 emphasized, *"An environment that is not conducive, such as noise or an uncomfortable place, can interfere."* At the same time, S19 mentions limited facilities: *"I think I have a good*

interest in reading, but I do not have adequate facilities... I prefer to read using books rather than using a smartphone." This condition aligns with the findings of Mizrachi et al. (2018) and Brookbank (2023), which demonstrate that a preference for print media and limited access to academic spaces negatively impact voluntary reading practices.

Furthermore, as explained by S23, *"time constraints, distractions, lack of motivation, fatigue, and limited access to materials…"*. This reinforces the conclusion that structural and psychological barriers are interrelated. When a literacy habitus is not supported by a conducive environment and high levels of learning autonomy, recreational reading practices struggle to persist. Therefore, institutional interventions that incorporate digital support and a literate academic culture are necessary (Alenezi et al., 2023; Apriliyanti & Ilham, 2022) to ensure the sustainable development of *autonomous reading habits*.

■ CONCLUSION

The results of this study reveal an interesting paradox between awareness of the importance of *recreational reading* and *its actual practice* among EFL pre-service teachers. Quantitatively, most respondents reported reading less than one hour per week, although chi-square tests revealed significant variations based on age and gender. Qualitatively, interviews revealed that students understand the benefits of recreational reading for language and academic development; however, they are hindered by a heavy study load, limited time, inadequate facilities, and digital distractions. Using Bourdieu's habitus perspective, their reading habits appear to reflect a social structure and academic culture that is less supportive of autonomous literacy. Meanwhile, from the perspective of Self-Determination Theory, low intrinsic motivation suggests that reading is viewed more as an academic obligation than a meaningful activity for personal growth and development.

The pedagogical implications are particularly relevant for Islamic-based universities offering English study programs. Institutions need to foster a recreational literacy ecosystem oriented toward the formation of literacy habits and learning autonomy, for example, through reading circles, digital book clubs, and a curriculum that balances academic and leisure reading. Furthermore, increasing access to reading resources, both print and digital, should be prioritized to encourage sustainable reading habits. In addition, the integration of SDT-based motivational strategies, such as strengthening autonomy and competence, is needed, so that students read not simply for academic reasons but for the intrinsic drive to become lifelong learners. This study has limitations because the use of mixed methods, including online surveys and interviews, can introduce response bias and limit the ability to explore the depth of meaning within recreational reading experiences. Furthermore, the online environment can impact the honesty and accuracy of participants' responses due to the lack of direct interaction between researchers and respondents.

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