

## More than Somebody's Pleasure: the Analysis of Reading for Pleasure in Education using Cognitive Psychology Perspective

Ayu Ulivia<sup>1</sup>, Faiz Fatihul 'Alwan<sup>2</sup>, Tina Hayati Dahlan<sup>3</sup>

Educational Psychology, School of Postgraduate, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia

**Corresponding Author:** Faiz Fatihul Alwan [faizfatihulalwan@gmail.com](mailto:faizfatihulalwan@gmail.com)

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### ABSTRACT

Reading for pleasure is a reading activity that provides the reader with flexibility in terms of the type of reading materials and the time to read it. There are various advantages offered from reading for pleasure compared to other reading activities, not only having a good impact on children, it also provides enormous benefits to adults. This study aims to reveal the cognitive processes that occur during reading for pleasure activities based on empirical findings. The discussion in this study will also involve a comparison of cognitive processes with other types of reading activities. A qualitative approach was used in this study for both the data collection and analysis. The results of this study indicate that reading for pleasure is a reading activity which has many benefits. Analysis from the perspective of cognitive psychology shows that positive impacts such as the ability to focus the attention, adaptation to distraction, and the ability to relate the content with prior knowledge can be obtained through this reading activity. Regarding its implications in the context of education, reading for pleasure can be a solution to foster reading habits and affect students' cognitive abilities in a positive way.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Reading is one of the main language skills possessed by humans besides the ability to listen, speak and write. By reading, there are many things that an individual can learn. There are many benefits from reading activities, especially in an educational context. Study conducted by Mendelsohn et al. (2018) found that reading activities in children had a positive impact on socio-emotional development. Apart from that, reading activities also influence the development of children's language skills (Acosta-Tello, 2019; Barone et al., 2020; Klein et al., 2014) and development of cognitive abilities (Weisleder et al., 2018).

Reading for pleasure is one type of reading activity that is frequently brought up in discourse. Individual has the opportunity to select their own reading material and reading time with this activity. Previous research has demonstrated that this kind of reading activity has a number of benefits over other reading activities. Not only does it have a good impact on children, reading for pleasure has also been found to provide many benefits to adults. (Sullivan, 2015).

Reading for pleasure can be a solution to foster a reading habit. This is relevant to the finding that this reading activities are related to positive attitudes and readers' self-confidence (Clark & Rumbold, 2006). With a positive attitude towards reading activities, reading achievement can be achieved more easily (Retali et al., 2018). In the broader context of life, reading for pleasure also has a positive impact on aspects of individual well-being (Collins et al., 2022). In the learning context, this reading activity has been proven to help students improve their ability to understand the essence of reading (comprehension skill) (Gotchu, 2016; Kazemi, 2021). Apart from having an impact on literacy skills, reading for pleasure has even been found to be beneficial for mathematical abilities (Sullivan & Brown, 2015).

This study aims to reveal the cognitive processes that occur during reading for pleasure activities based on empirical findings. The discussion in this study will also involve a comparison of cognitive processes with other types of reading activities. With data collection and analysis techniques using a qualitative approach, it is hoped that this study can provide a more realistic picture of the psychological processes that occur during reading activities and can provide recommendations based on their implications for the educational context.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Reading for Pleasure Concept*

Reading for pleasure is a reading activity carried out based on interest, pleasure or self-satisfaction (Clark & Rumbold, 2006). In other words, reading for pleasure is not based on obligations or external pressure. Reading for pleasure has many benefits that can be significantly felt by individuals and society. In terms of language proficiency, this reading activity offer positive impact such as improving reading ability, writing skills, the ability to understand certain texts, mastering vocabulary. Not only that, reading for pleasure also positively influence the attitudes and even self-confidence of the readers. The aspects related to reading for pleasure activities refer to motivation, the reading process, and the results of the reading itself.

Several previous studies such as those conducted by Sullivan & Brown (Sullivan & Brown, 2015) found that reading for pleasure had a significant positive effect on cognitive scores, especially in the areas of mathematics and vocabulary. This research also found that reading for pleasure can reduce the negative impact of socioeconomic background on cognitive scores. Meanwhile, in Indonesia the Ministry of Education and Culture (2021) conducted literacy research and found that the basic literacy skills of students in Indonesia could be categorized as low because they were below the OECD average, although there was an increase from previous years. The Ministry of Education and Culture (2021) study also found that students' sense of enjoyment is one aspect that has a positive influence on literacy skills, which is part of reading for pleasure.

In this research, the theory of reading for pleasure that will be used is a study of Clark & Rumbold (2006). This theory is used because of the relevance of the study to the conditions or characteristics of the subjects in this research.

### *Basic Concepts of Memory and Memory Models*

Memory is the brain's ability to store, process and retrieve information that has been obtained from an individual's experience or learning process. Memory has a role in various aspects, especially in the cognitive domain, such as: perception, language, problem solving, decision making, and creativity (Eysenck, 2020).

In general, several types of memory can be distinguished based on duration, capacity and processing (Gigerenzer, 2009). In this case, it is known that the types of memory include: 1) Sensory memory, the memory that is closely related to receiving information through the human senses. This type of memory has a fairly large capacity but with a very short duration. 2) Short-term memory, type of memory that stores information that is currently in active processing. This type of memory has a very limited capacity with a short duration. 3) Long-term memory, the memory that stores information that has been processed and integrated with previously held knowledge. This type of memory has unlimited capacity and permanent duration.

Apart from the basic concepts of memory, this research will also use studies and concepts of memory models such as the connectionist model (Langston & Trabasso, 2009) which presents the process of information being

stored and processed in the human brain. This model constructs the assumption that memory is composed of many units or neurons that are interconnected in a network. Information is stored in the form of neuron activation patterns which are strongly influenced by the connection load between these neurons. This model can also specifically explain the complex and dynamic learning experienced by humans, as well as other memory phenomena such as generalization, interference, and forgetting. Apart from that, there is also a memory-based model of discourse comprehension (O'Brien & Cook, 2015), which carries the concept of understanding that text information that is processed depends on the reading subject's working memory and long-term memory. This model assumes that a text reader continuously builds a representation of the text being read by integrating information from the text with previous knowledge (taken from long-term memory). This model also highlights the role of monitoring and recovery in ensuring the coherence and consistency of the representation of the text one reads. In addition, this model can comprehensively explain the process by which readers can use clues (contextual, structural, and pragmatic) to select and relate appropriate information.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research uses a qualitative research approach both in terms of data collection and processing. The methodology is a simple interpretive study which aims to interpret the meaning of the experiences or perspectives experienced by the research subjects (Ary et al., 2010). Data was collected from 5 subjects who were master's students in the educational psychology study program. The age range for each individual is between 25-35 years. Sample selection was adjusted to the age diversity of the subjects to see the diversity of findings from each subject. Apart from that, the subject's background which has knowledge of psychology is an advantage in itself which can help the subject to describe the thought processes they experience on a better basis in psychological science.

Data was collected in the form of a journal written by the subject regarding reading activities carried out on two types of reading activities. The first reading activity is Reading for Pleasure where the subject were asked to read the preferable reading sources, without being limited to the topic and type of reading. In the second reading activity, participants were asked to read reading sources, namely textbooks or scientific reading. After carrying out a simulation of each reading activity, the subject wrote down the thought process he experienced.

The data analysis process was carried out through several stages. The data obtained was initially processed by coding into several keywords. Then, each keyword was processed into several themes which then be discussed in more depth using cognitive psychology theory. In its implementation, the analysis stages were carried out repeatedly with the aim of clarifying the information obtained from the subject (Creswell, 2012). The probing process was also carried out to confirm some information that was felt to be unclear to the subjects of this research. To maintain the research code of ethics, research

subjects had previously filled out informed consent. In addition, the subject's name will not be mentioned in the writing of this study.

## RESEARCH RESULT

There are several findings from the coding process carried out on this research data. These findings represent psychological aspects that occur during the process of reading activities. These aspects include the processes of attention, remembering, understanding, distraction, engagement, excitement, motivation and reflection. First, it was found that in the two types of reading activities, subjects experienced different attention processes. When reading for pleasure, subjects reported that "attention can be completely directed to the favorite reading". On the other hand, in the textbook reading activity, there are two different attention process tendencies. First, the subject still remains focused on reading, but the subject also reports that it takes a lot of effort to focus his attention on reading.

Second finding is related to recall activities during the reading process. This process was found to occur only in reading for pleasure activities. This process is related to the subject's ability to "associate the stimulus received (reading) with previous experiences". Apart from that, there is also a process of "reflecting with yourself". This recall process was found to coincide with the subject's abilities of attention which tended to be easy to focus their attention on the reading source.

The third finding relates to aspects of understanding that the subject obtains from reading sources. In these two reading activities, there are three different levels of understanding. In the reading for pleasure activity, the subject reported that there was "meaning to the writing that was read". Apart from that, there is also "comprehension of the reading\is at the highest level". On the other hand, textbook reading activities show the opposite results. The subject was found to have difficulty understanding the content of the reading because "many words were not understood" and "the reading material could not be understood well".

The next aspect found to be related to reading activities is the subject's ability to adapt to distractions. In reading for pleasure activities, there are two tendencies in adapting to distraction, namely the possibility of not being distracted at all or the subject being distracted but able to refocus his attention easily. The opposite finding was found in textbook reading activities. Subjects tend to be easily distracted and find it difficult to adapt to refocus their attention on the reading. Along with the subject's tendency to not be easily distracted, there is an attention ability that is easier to focus on reading.

Furthermore, when carrying out reading for pleasure activities, there is an involvement aspect of the subject's engagement or attachment to the reading. This is indicated by the subject's statement which states that "curiosity and interest encourage people to get more into reading". Along with these findings, the subjects reported that the attention abilities were in a condition where it was easy to focus attention on the reading. This finding of the ability to get into was not found in the activity of reading textbooks.

Apart from the forms of engagement, there are also findings related to aspects of the subject's motivation and excitement during reading activities. Uniquely, discussion of this aspect is only found in subject reports regarding textbook reading activities. Subjects reported that "reading motivation began to decline" and felt they were "less enthusiastic" about the reading material in textbooks. Simultaneously with the decrease in the level of motivation and excitement, the subject also reported that there was an effort to focus more attention on reading.

The final aspect found from the subject's report during reading activities was the ability to reflect on the content of the reading. This aspect is only found in reading for pleasure activities. Along with the findings of this aspect, the subject also reported that his attention ability was in a condition where it was easy to refocus on the reading. Apart from that, subjects also reported that this reflection ability also occurred simultaneously with the recall ability.

Several aspects of the findings described above were then extracted into several themes which will be further discussed with explanations from a cognitive psychology perspective in education.

## DISCUSSION

### *Attention: Motivation and Excitement are What Need to be Preserved*

From the findings, it is known that basically the attention process that makes individuals focus on reading can occur in two types of reading activities, reading for pleasure and textbook reading. However, what differentiates the attention process between the two is the output of understanding obtained by the individual. This is related to whether the individual enjoys the reading process or not. If reading activities cannot be enjoyed even in a focused condition, there is a chance that motivation and excitement will decline, which will make it more difficult for the individual to regain focus when there is a distraction. This is relevant to the study Anderson (2016) that motivation can influence the attention selection process which results in a process of prioritizing stimuli that are considered rewarding. This process has been found to continue even after the motivating stimuli is absent (Anderson et al., 2013).

### *Prior Knowledge is the Key to Understanding*

The learning process requires interaction between new information and information that has been stored in long-term memory (prior knowledge). According to the connectionist model (Langston & Trabasso, 2009), individuals understand reading through several thought processes which include connecting ideas, connecting information with meaning, and the process of storing information in the memory. Furthermore, the main way to link reading content with meaning is through causal reasoning. This process requires the ability to make conclusions that can be related to the content of the reading.

From the theoretical perspective of Memory-based model of discourse comprehension (O'Brien & Cook, 2015), to be able to understand the content of reading, individuals do not actively connect the content of reading with knowledge stored in long-term memory because an activation process is

required. Memories stored in long-term memory will be active if they are familiar with the content of the reading.

In this regard, research findings show that reading that you like has a greater chance of the recall process. Based on this model, the more frequently the recall occurs, the more understanding of the essence of the reading you will gain. Reading for pleasure activities provide individuals with the opportunity to choose reading materials that are familiar to the knowledge they already have. Therefore, this reading activity allows individuals to gain more understanding.

*Distraction is inevitable, but the ability to adapt is what matters.*

Certain types of reading activities do not guarantee that individuals are immune to distraction. Whether the reading you read is reading you like or reading you don't like, distractions will still interfere with the reading process. What makes the difference is the individual's ability to adapt to refocus attention on reading. In this case, the activity of reading for pleasure has advantages because in terms of the attention aspect, individuals tend to more easily refocus their attention on reading even though it was previously hampered by distractions. In the connectionist model perspective, the reading process involves cooperative interactions between several units in the brain. Each unit has its own task, there are units that encode visual written forms, verbal forms, and the meaning of writing that is input to the brain. (Plaut, 2005). It will be challenging to complete an in-depth reading process if there are distractions because it includes a complex process. In this case, the activity of reading for pleasure does not have the potential to make individuals distracted, but it is found that individuals tend to easily adapt to these distractions so they can focus their attention more quickly.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Reading for pleasure is a reading activity that has many benefits. Analysis based on empirical data from the cognitive psychology perspective shows that positive impacts such as the ability to focus attention, adaptation to distractions, and the ability to relate reading to prior knowledge are advantages that can be obtained through this reading activity. Regarding its implications in the educational context, reading for pleasure can be a solution to foster interest in reading and train students' cognitive abilities.

This research was carried out using a qualitative approach to examine empirical findings. However, further studies are still needed that can examine this topic of discussion with a quantitative approach to strengthen the evidence of the findings in this study and so that the results of this research can be generalized in the context of a wider population.

## ADVANCED RESEARCH

This research is limited to selected books and textbooks owned by research participants. The selection of participants was limited to postgraduate students. As for the discussion, this research is limited to memory studies using qualitative methods. For future research, similar research can be carried out by adding certain book criteria, as well as more relevant and diverse participant selection.

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