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EXPLORING FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO L2 WILLINGNESS TO READ AMONG INDONESIAN THEOLOGY STUDENTS

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Abstract: This study explores possible factors influencing Indonesian theology students' second/foreign language (L2) Willingness to Read (WTR). This study was the continuation of a survey study involving 41 participants. The present study employed semi-structured interviews. These interviews involved four of the survey participants in the preceding study. Through Thematic Analysis, this study found three factors that improved their L2 WTR. These factors included reading goals, teachers' supporting practices, and alignment of L2 texts with reading preference. Pedagogical implications include allowing flexibility in choosing L2 texts, integrative and interactive reading activities catering to students' diverse preferences, and providing a safe L2 reading environment focusing on constructive feedback from teachers and peers. Directions for future relevant studies include conducting empirical studies on L2 WTR in Indonesia with a broader and deeper scope, considering the scarcity of available studies on L2 WTR in the context.

Keywords: *Factors, Indonesian theology students, second/foreign language (L2), Willingness to Read (WTR)*

INTRODUCTION

Students in theology departments are often required to extensively read texts in their first language (L1) and second/foreign language (L2). This requirement makes those who sustain their reading tend to succeed in their studies. Specific to L2 reading, much focus has been given to several aspects, such as comprehension, grammar, syntax, and reading strategies. Psychological aspects of reading often receive less focus. One of these under-represented aspects is L2 willingness to read (WTR).

L2 WTR is generally defined as learners' intention to read L2 texts. It is learners' readiness to engage in L2 reading activities of their own volition or with the assistance of others, such as teachers (Abdul-Hamid et al., 2020). WTR could impact overall engagement in L2 reading activities. It is broader in scope compared to L2 reading motivation, which refers to the underlying drive making them read L2 texts (Dhanapala & Hirakawa, 2015). Hence, WTR may involve various motivational factors related to L2 reading. WTR focuses on whether someone is likely to choose to read when they have the opportunity. It predicts tendencies and intentions to engage in reading activities even if the behaviour of reading has not occurred yet. This construct is comparable to L2 Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in speaking, which is defined as willingness to engage in communication when having the opportunity (MacIntyre et al., 1998).

Compared to L2 WTC, L2 WTR has thus far obtained less attention from L2 researchers. However, there have been available studies on L2 WTR over the years (Abdul-

Hamid et al., 2020; Hassanpour et al., 2017; Huang, 2006; Khajavy & Ghonsooly, 2017; Knezevic & Halupka, 2015), indicating acknowledgment of its role for L2 learning and acquisition in general.

Though not conducted in L2 WTR, several studies suggest that proficient learners or those who perceive themselves as capable tend to be more willing to read L2 texts. For example, a study by Fariyanti and Faliyanti (2013) involving vocational high school students in Indonesia confirmed that their initial abilities were essential to sustain their L2 reading. It was because when asked to write a report from a reading activity, it would be easier for them to do it if they understood the L2 texts to a certain degree due to sufficient grammar or vocabulary knowledge. In line with that, another study also revealed that pre-taught vocabulary influenced L2 WTR (Sabet et al., 2017). As learners had been taught the necessary vocabulary to understand L2 texts, they felt more comfortable reading and discussing the reading in class activities.

An array of factors can contribute to learners' WTR. Family environment was reported to influence WTR (Jabbar et al., 2021). The authors reviewed 59 studies and reported that children whose parents encouraged early reading habits tend to be highly willing to read. In comparison, an earlier study by Cambria and Guthrie (2014) found that whilst home environment and peers could influence WTR, teachers became the main factor. They mentioned several teacher practices that could enhance learners' WTR. These are building good relationships with learners, providing learners with a choice of activities, encouraging and assuring learners' ability to read, and helping them realise their goals in reading. Previously, in a rather old yet still relevant study, Taylor et al. (2003) observed that learners showed greater improvements in reading when their teachers conducted more frequent coaching, engaged them in active reading practice, and taught phonics less frequently. At least three subsequent studies further found that teacher facilitation, such as teacher giving clear instructions and necessary support, was the aspect most frequently reported by learners as influencing their willingness to read (Huang, 2006; Rupley et al., 2009; Sarimanah, 2016).

Furthermore, as a part of WTR, reading motivation has been investigated in various studies, which then reported findings that may shed light on other possible contributing factors to L2 WTR. When learners have a goal for a reading activity, such as wanting to get good grades and broaden their knowledge, their WTR likely increases (Lake, 2014). This finding was in line with a study by McGeown et al. (2020). They found various reasons why learners read, including the perceived importance of reading, the desire to broaden knowledge, and the enjoyment of reading as a routine activity. Earlier, Karahan (2017) reported that a competitive attitude among learners significantly influenced their WTR. This finding may be related to learners' desire to excel academically. This finding conformed with an even earlier study by Kusumaningputri (2014) involving English education students. The study found that 70% of the participants read because they wanted to appear better at understanding L2 texts than their peers.

The presentation and layout of L2 texts were also reported to impact learners' willingness to read the texts. Several studies, for instance, reported that readability and content presentation were the factors that influenced whether they would continue reading (Guo et al., 2020; Yoganingrum, 2018). Bogaerds-Hazenberg et al. (2021) reported that a text structure that was clear and easy to follow made it easier for readers to understand what they were reading, and this facilitation encouraged readers to be more willing to continue reading.

However, some studies also suggested that learners' reading preferences matter when sustaining reading activities. Learners likely become more willing to continue reading when

these preferences are met. A study by Bui and Macalister (2021) revealed that when learners read online, they had more positive perceptions of L2 reading because they could select their texts freely. In comparison, a recent study by Obaner (2024) in the Philippines reported that reading physical books was perceived to be better than reading online in terms of increasing their knowledge. These seemingly contrasting findings suggest that learners have various reading preferences, and when these preferences are met, they likely have a higher WTR.

Next, WTR may also be enhanced when learners know the purposes of their reading activities. In a review study, Nystrand (2006) reviewed articles from the preceding three decades and found that class discussions in reading activities increased willingness to read because it increased a sense of pragmatic reading purpose where learners could exchange ideas during the activities and gain new knowledge. In line with that, Kusumaningputri (2014) involved students majoring in English education in Indonesia and found that questions from lecturers after reading activities increased the participants' interest in reading. Though conducted outside language learning context, a study by Heiner et al. (2014) also reported that quizzes after reading activities can increase learners' critical reading skills and a sense of reading purpose, leading to more enthusiasm in L2 reading.

The Present Study

The present qualitative study continued a previous survey study involving 41 Theology department students. The preceding study reported that students generally reported a high level of L2 WTR and that L2 WTR could significantly predict students' achievement.

The present study involved four of the 41 survey participants in the preceding study to answer the research question: What factors contribute to Indonesian theology students' L2 WTR?

This study was conducted because of several rationales. First and foremost, studies investigating L2 WTR in the Indonesian context are very scarce, if not non-existent. Hence, along with the preceding survey study, this qualitative study on L2 WTR is expected to begin further L2 WTR investigation in the Indonesian context. Next, whilst the literature on L2 reading in Indonesia has been extensive, theology students were still under-represented. This scarcity of empirical study involving theology students contrasts with the fact that these students often have to engage themselves with English texts early in their study because they are educated to be pastors or ministers who are often required to read L2 texts (Hussey, 2015) extensively. The findings of this study could inform teachers and stakeholders in theology departments. Identifying factors that could contribute to students' L2 WTR may help teachers design curricula fostering a reading-friendly environment among theology department students. As theological texts may be complex and dense, L2 WTR can be a critical element for L2 reading success, and thus investigating it becomes generally worthwhile to realise the conducive environment for it to grow.

RESEARCH METHOD

Design and Participants

This study was conducted qualitatively and employed semi-structured interviews to gather data to answer the research question. To collect the data, we involved four survey participants who indicated their willingness to be invited for possible follow-up interviews in the preceding survey study. These participants were taking English for Theology classes at a Theology department at a university in Java, Indonesia. The selection of the interviewees was based on purposive sampling, where the four students consisted of two students with a high

level of L2 WTR, and the other two were students with a moderate level of L2 WTR. Data saturation can often be achieved with as few as 4–6 participants (Guest et al., 2006), especially when the participant group is relatively homogenous like the ones in the present study who were all from theology departments and were taking English for Theology classes. The preceding study used 17 Likert-scale items, each of which had a possible score range of 1 to 4, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" responses without the "Neutral" option. With the possible range of the total score from 17 to 68, L2 WTR in the range of 35-50 was considered Moderate, whilst 51-68 was considered High. No student reported a low level of WTR, thus the absence of interview participants with low L2 WTR in the present study. Interview participants from different WTR levels were interviewed to obtain information from all background levels of L2 WTR and to obtain diverse information regarding the factors that influenced students' L2 WTR.

Ethical Consideration

This study adhered to the principles of research ethics. The first principle was confidentiality (Bos, 2020; Israel & Hay, 2006). To maintain confidentiality, we use pseudonyms to conceal the participants' identities. Second, this study also respected the participants' autonomy (Traianou & Hammersley, 2020). The four participants were contacted for interviews based on information they provided in the questionnaire in the preceding survey study stating they were willing to be interviewed. Next, before the interviews, the participants were asked to fill out a consent form detailing their rights and responsibilities once they decided to participate. The rights included their freedom to withdraw their participation at any time.

Instruments

The semi-structured interviews were conducted using fifteen main interview questions inspired by the work of Charzynska (2015), who stated that in trying to understand learners' WTR, it is important to find out what their reading interest is about, their confidence in their reading ability, and how they perceive the impacts of reading for their learning. The main questions include: "Is there anything that will make you want to read more or to read less? Why?" and "How do you rate your reading ability? Is there any impact of this self-rating on your willingness to read any L2 texts?"

Data Collection and Analysis

The interviews were conducted in Indonesian online through *Zoom* in March 2024. The use of the Indonesian language was to ensure that the participants who were still developing their English could respond to all the questions freely without any possible language barriers. Each interview lasted for 30 minutes. The results were fully transcribed and fully translated into English.

The interview data were analysed using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The following steps were taken. First, we familiarised ourselves with the interview data. It was done by reading and re-reading the interview transcripts. Next, we wrote initial codes, and from the codes, we formulated possible themes. The next step was to review all the formulated themes and revise them. This review included adding or deleting themes to ensure that the final themes could capture all the recurring data across the dataset per the research question of this study. To enhance trustworthiness of the interview results, member checking was conducted. The participants were invited to review the findings including the interpretations of their statements to confirm the accuracy or suggest corrections. For this report, the interview excerpts that could best represent each of reviewed themes are presented and analysed further.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Using online semi-structured interviews, this study found three themes regarding factors contributing to students' L2 WTR. Table 1 shows these results.

Table 1. Contributing Factors to L2 WTR

Theme 1	Reading goals improved students' L2 WTR.
Theme 2	Supporting practices by teachers improved students' L2 WTR.
Theme 3	Alignment with reading preference improved students' L2 WTR.

In the following parts, the detailed findings of each theme will be elaborated on. Interview excerpts representing the theme are presented, followed by the pseudonyms of the participants saying the statements. The pseudonyms of the interview participants are Ardi (Male (M)/High (H)-WTR), Dito (M/H-WTR), Winda (Female (F)/Moderate (Md)-WTR), and Fajar (Male/Md-WTR).

Theme 1. Reading goals improved students' L2 WTR.

All four participants reported that having reading goals made them want to read L2 texts. The following excerpts demonstrate this finding.

> "The most influential factor would be... well, it is what was mentioned earlier. Firstly, whether or not reading is necessary or urgent plays a significant role. […]" [Dito/M/H-WTR]

> "[…] the goal of gaining knowledge made me more enthusiastic" [Fajar/M/Md-WTR]

> "I am very willing to read if the English reading material increases our knowledge so that our grades, like our GPA or others, can improve. Because, as I mentioned earlier, English reading materials are beneficial and important. […]" [Ardi/M/Md-WTR]

> "[Having reading goals] can be a motivation, and it makes me enthusiastic about reading them [L2 texts] because there's a goal to achieve. But it's more like enjoying … how enjoyable the reading is. For instance, wow, I want to read this because I want to know more." [Winda/F/H-WTR]

The excerpts suggested that having purpose in the reading activity encouraged the participants to read. This finding was in line with the study Karahan (2017). The study found that students' initial motivation to read positively influenced their WTR. The excerpts show that these reading goals varied from gaining more knowledge to improving academic achievements. Regarding this particular finding, though not specifically in the field of L2 WTR, a study by Cambria and Guthrie (2014) may be relevant for comparison. They found that their student participants would be very willing to read because they thought it would get them good grades. The participants tended to be more diligent in reading complex text a few days before the exam. In contrast, they would be more relaxed and tend to read less when the

exam was still a few weeks away. In the field of reading motivation, McGeown et al. (2020) also found that the desire to gain knowledge and get good grades can motivate learners to read. The findings of the present study and those of previous studies (Cambria & Guthrie, 2014; Karahan, 2017; McGeown et al., 2020) confirmed that, generally, students tended to be more willing to read for specific reasons and goals, primarily academic factors.

The finding generally suggested the importance of having reading goals for L2 WTR to optimally develop. This is closely related to the degree of relevance of L2 reading for learners. As learners see the reading activity as relevant, they would likely be more willing to invest time in reading. This finding, furthermore, carries the message that L2 reading class should be tailored in such a way always to keep itself relevant for learners. For example, in the Theology department, activities in L2 reading class should connect L2 texts with students' theological purposes. Such activities as spiritual reflections through L2 texts may encourage students to read more in order to be able to make commentaries or give some interpretations. When there is a perceived connection between L2 texts and students' personal or professional aspirations, students likely have more willingness to read the texts.

Theme 2. Supporting practices by teachers improved students' L2 WTR.

Ardi, Dito, and Fajar reported that teachers' practices impacted their L2 WTR. They recalled some influence of their teacher at school.

> "[…] during high school, my teacher always said my language skills were good, so I should read books frequently. That influenced me, and I also started to enjoy reading in English. […]" [Ardi/M/H-WTR]

> "[…] things like encouragement from lecturers, teachers, parents, or friends do influence my willingness." [Dito/M/H-WTR]

> "[…] for instance, back in primary school, there was a strict teacher who made reading feel like a chore rather than a passion for the students. It was like reading was forced upon us, not something we enjoyed. But in high school, when the teacher was engaging and made reading fun by joking around and interestingly discussing the readings, it helped me understand the material deeper. Teacher [teaching] approach plays a big role." [Fajar/M/Md-WTR]

As can be seen from the excerpts, the participants' teachers played a role in either positively or negatively influencing their L2 WTR. Teachers who could make learning activities fun have a positive effect on students' L2 WTR. Teacher encouragement also made students more willing to read. This finding was similar to the finding reported by some rather old yet relevant studies (Huang, 2006; Taylor et al., 2003) on the major influence of teachers on aspects of students' reading. For example, Taylor et al. (2003) observed that students were more willing to read and thoroughly comprehend the text they were reading when their teachers supported them, did not put undue pressure on them, and encouraged them to ask questions instead of only doing phonics exercises. Furthermore, in the field of reading habits, Jose and Raja (2011) also reported that teachers had a major influence on developing students' reading habits by fostering a supportive environment during reading assignments in the classroom or school setting.

This finding suggests that teachers should create a comfortable learning environment without excessive pressure on grammar or syntax. By doing so, students may feel more at ease, allowing them to focus on understanding the content, which can enhance their WTR. Teachers should ensure that they provide the necessary scaffolding for students. This reading support includes discussions at the beginning of the lesson to activate students' background knowledge, guiding them on reading strategies whilst students are reading, and designing activities that allow peer collaboration to comprehend L2 texts. Generally, by allowing more positive and constructive feedback from both teachers and peers, teachers could help learners enjoy L2 reading classes more, eventually nurturing their L2 WTR.

Furthermore, whilst classmates and the household can also have an impact on a student's WTR, as suggested in Winda's statement, in this study, teachers seem to be the primary figure in a student's development of willingness to read, also in line with the finding of the study by Cambria and Guthrie (2014). Interestingly, this study's participants mentioned their teachers at school rather than their English teachers at the university. This finding could indicate the long-lasting effect of teachers' attributes towards their students' WTR. As can be seen from the findings, learners' level of L2 WTR seemed to be developed over a long period rather than during a single language course. This finding may suggest that developing learners' L2 WTR needs time, and a language teacher may not always see it within their students instantly.

Theme 3. Alignment with reading preference improved students' L2 WTR.

Three participants, Winda, Fajar, and Ardi, reported that they were likely more willing to read the texts when the L2 texts aligned with their reading preferences. Regarding this, they stated:

> "Personally, my willingness [to read] depends on the topic being discussed in the readings [whether I like it]" [Winda/F/H-WTR]

> "My willingness [to read] depends on whether the reading material is related to the course content and if I can understand the course material better by reading it. It depends on the relevance of the reading material. […] The text itself also plays a role because I prefer texts in English that are engaging and easy to understand. But sometimes, the language in the text can be too formal or stiff. That makes me less interested" [Fajar/M/Md-WTR]

> "My willingness [to read] actually depends on the material. If I'm interested in the material, then I'm happy to read it. But if I get material I'm not really into, I feel a bit lazy about it. There's a slight sense of reluctance. So, it depends on whether I like the material or not. […] where the vocabulary mostly consists of words I already know." [Ardi/F/H-WTR]

The excerpts indicate that when L2 texts aligned with students' preferences, whether it was the topic, the perceived relevance, or familiarity with the vocabulary used in the texts, their L2 WTR tended to increase. Several studies have investigated students' various reading preferences that could make them read more. For example, Zarei et al. (2019) reported in their qualitative study that the appearance and layout of a passage determined students' WTR. The topics in the reading passage were also reported to influence students' reading availability,

which is an essential thing to consider (Noviyanti, 2018). In conclusion, as students get readings that match their preferences regarding appearance, text structure, vocabulary, language use, and even genre, they will be more willing to read them.

This finding could inform teachers to diversify their class reading materials to match students' interests and academic needs. For instance, a specific topic can be delivered using different text genres, such as expository or narratives (through stories). Allowing students some flexibility to choose L2 texts within predetermined topics and in their preferred genre can help ensure they engage with the intended content while reading materials that interest them. Teachers can also design integrative reading activities where L2 texts as the primary focus are embedded within small-group discussion activities or reflective journals to cater to various preferences of students.

CONCLUSION

Important takeaways can be outlined as follows. This study found three factors that could help increase L2 WTR. These factors were reading goals, effective teaching practices, and the alignment of L2 texts with students' preferences. Based on these findings, L2 reading instruction should accommodate these three factors to enhance learning in the classroom. First, teachers should realise their students' diverse reading goals and preferences. These diverse needs should go hand-in-hand with the objective of the class, for example, topics to be discussed, reading strategies to be sharpened, and many more. Finding the balance between the two could be critical. For example, students could be allowed flexibility in choosing L2 texts within a predetermined topic to cater to their preferences and class objectives. Furthermore, L2 reading classes should also provide a psychologically safe environment, nurturing encouragement, and constructive feedback from teachers and peers rather than focusing too much on mistakes so that students are more willing to read L2 texts.

Potential future studies in L2 WTR can be suggested. Investigations of L2 WTR in the Indonesian context are still necessary because available empirical studies in this field are still limited. Such studies can be conducted in Indonesia with a broader and deeper scope. Such studies could also involve students beyond theology departments, considering the critical role of WTR on language learning and educational outcomes in general. Furthermore, considering a specific finding suggesting that teachers at the school level had such a profound impact on the L2 WTR of university students, it could be interesting to conduct a study specifically contemplating the roles of teachers at the previous education level on students' current learning behaviours.

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