

**CULTIVATING READING HABITS THROUGH FICTION
NARRATIVES: THE CASE OF EFL STUDENTS
ENGAGING IN “ALTERNATE UNIVERSE”
NARRATIVES**

THESIS

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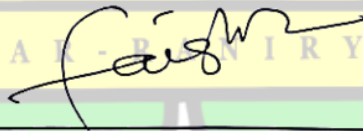
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**Cultivating Reading Habits Through Fiction Narratives: The Case of EFL
Students Engaging in “Alternate Universe” Narratives**

adalah benar-benar karya saya, kecuali semua kutipan dan referensi yang disebutkan sumbernya. Apabila terdapat kesalahan dan kekeliruan di dalamnya, maka akan sepenuhnya menjadi tanggungjawab saya. Demikianlah surat pernyataan ini saya buat dengan sesungguhnya.

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Saya yang membuat surat pernyataan,




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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to explore how Alternate Universe narratives (AU narratives) potentially influence the reading habits of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students and to understand students' perceptions of the role of AU narratives in their language learning experiences. The research employs a qualitative method with a case study design. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and follow-up interviews, involving four active students from the English Education Department at a prominent Islamic university in Aceh as participants. The findings reveal several factors that influence students' engagement with AU narratives. These include emotional connections to relatable content, the accessibility of digital formats that facilitate regular reading, and the integration of AU narratives into their daily lives. Additionally, the study highlights the role of AU narratives in promoting language and literacy growth through informal English exposure, as well as the significance of genre preferences and cognitive engagement in story selection. Moreover, participants perceive AU narratives as valuable tools for enhancing reading motivation and fostering a deeper understanding of language. The narratives not only serve as a source of entertainment but also contribute to personal growth and critical thinking skills. In conclusion, this research underscores the importance of integrating AU narratives into formal educational practices to support language learning and literacy development among EFL students, thereby bridging the gap between personal interests and academic objectives. The study provides insights into how informal reading practices can enrich the educational experience by connecting personal interests with language learning and potentially cultivate lifelong reading habits.

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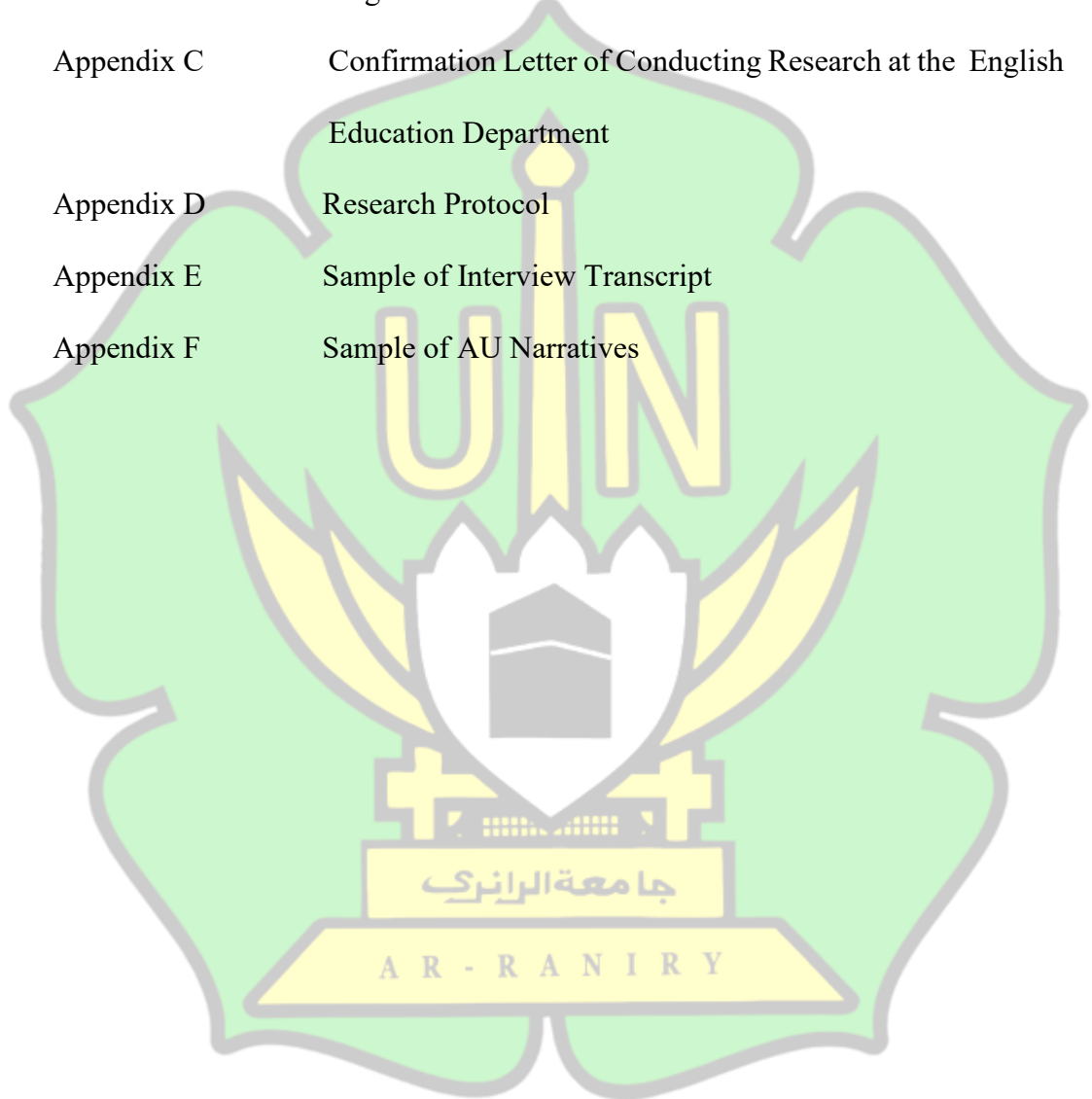
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

Reading is essential for language learners, especially in English as a Foreign Language (EFL). It is a gateway for obtaining knowledge, developing critical thinking, and enhancing linguistic proficiency (Day & Bamford, 2002). Fostering consistent reading habits among students remains a persistent challenge in educational institutions (Grabe & Stoller, 2019). Despite diverse reading materials and technological advancements providing easy access to reading content, many students struggle to develop sustainable reading habits outside the classroom. Educational researchers continue to explore many innovative methods to promote reading motivation.

An emerging trend that has attracted considerable attention from both educators and learners is the phenomenon of Alternate Universe (AU) narratives. These narratives, which originated within fanfiction communities, represent creative reinterpretations that reimagine original characters, settings, and storylines within new, non-canonical contexts. AU narratives provide innovative perspectives and imaginative scenarios that transform familiar characters, enabling writers and readers to explore alternative possibilities beyond established narratives (Tamrin, 2024). This genre resonates particularly well with younger audiences, especially within social media and fan communities, as it merges creativity with cultural relevance. Such relatability fosters engagement and active participation with texts,

thereby positioning AU narratives as a valuable resource for educators seeking to enhance students' reading experiences while promoting imagination and critical thinking (Wiratsih & Wahyuni, 2025).

The potential of AU narratives as a tool to foster EFL students' reading habits gives a unique way for exploration. English language students are often tasked with extensive reading assignments to improve their language proficiency (Hidi & Renninger, 2015). Traditional texts or academic materials may not always trigger students' enthusiasm or interest. Introducing AU narratives as an extra reading material may enhance the reading experience by aligning with students' interests and preferences, encouraging more consistent engagement with reading.

Research suggests that the relevance and relatability of reading materials significantly influence reading habits. When students perceive a connection between their interests and their reading content, they are more likely to invest their time and effort in reading activities (Curwood et al., 2013). With their engaging narratives and familiar yet reimagined characters, AU narratives may serve as a bridge between traditional academic texts and students' personal interests. This combination of academic learning and entertainment has the potential to create a more engaging reading environment that supports language development.

Fanfiction, particularly Alternate Universe (AU) narratives, fosters cognitive engagement by prompting both readers and writers to analyze character development, investigate alternative plotlines, and interact with narrative structure. This form of creative storytelling enhances critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. Furthermore, the processes of writing and analyzing fanfiction contribute

to the development of language skills, including vocabulary, syntax, and literary analysis techniques such as foreshadowing and irony. Educational research indicates that fanfiction can be intentionally integrated into curricula to achieve language and critical thinking educational objectives (Stanko & Kolegaeva, 2024).

Integrating AU narratives into reading activities may also foster a sense of community among students. Since AU narratives often begins with fan communities, they promote collaborative learning and discussion. Students can share their interpretations, recommendations, and reflections on various AU narratives, creating a dynamic learning environment (Rahimi & Hassani, 2015). The interaction facilitated by storytelling embodies the fundamental principles of narrative theory, which posits that individuals utilize stories to interpret their experiences, establish connections with others, and construct meaning (Bruner, 1991). Despite this theoretical foundation, empirical research examining the influence of AU narratives on students' reading habits and academic performance is notably scarce. This gap is particularly evident within the context of higher education institutions in Indonesia. Most existing studies focus on traditional pedagogical approaches to reading or integrating digital technologies such as ebooks and online learning platforms. A noticeable gap in the literature addresses the role of creative narratives like AU narratives in fostering reading engagement and achievement in the EFL context.

Therefore, this study aims to fill that gap by exploring how AUnarratives contribute to students' reading engagement in cultivating reading habits (Grabe & Stoller, 2019). It seeks to understand students personal experiences with

AUnarratives, focusing on how such engagement influence their reading motivation, frequency of reading activities, and perceived language development. The study also aims to offer insights into potential of integrating AU narratives into reading practices that promote sustained engagement.

While previous study studies have examined how fan fiction and AU narratives affect younger students (Wulandari, 2021), little is known about how university students in Indonesia experience this narratives. Most current research focuses on how fan fiction helps children and young people be more creative, learn languages, and become more literate. These studies often look at fan fiction broadly, emphasizing its function in non-formal learning settings where young students interact with books in ways that encourage writing, vocabulary development, and narrative understanding.

AU narratives are rarely recognized as a distinct subgenre, they are typically categorized within the broader framework of fan fiction rather than examined independently. This open an opportunity to qualitatively investigate how students personally engage with AU narratives in academic settings. Unlike traditional fan fiction, AU narratives recontextualize familiar characters and scenarios within entirely new settings. This reimagining encourages readers to engage in interpretive processes, such as analyzing, comparing, and reflecting on alternative storylines. Such engagements provide valuable insights into students' critical thinking abilities and reading experiences.

This study investigates how university students perceive and engage with AU narratives, emphasizing their reading habits and personal interpretations rather

than formal academic performance. Additionally, it explores the motivational factors that attract students to these narratives. By examining the lived experiences and perspectives of students, this research aims to provide a deeper understanding of the appeal and educational potential of AU narratives in the context of language learning. The insights gained from this study may assist educators in developing strategies that incorporate creative storytelling to enhance students' reading engagement (Alvermann & Moje, 2018). Recognizing the difficulties associated with integrating AU narratives into educational settings is crucial. Consideration should be given to selecting appropriate and culturally relevant materials, ensuring alignment with educational objectives, and reducing potential distractions. Despite these constraints, AU narratives offer a distinct opportunity to examine how creative storytelling influences reading habits and engagement in language acquisition.

This case study seeks to deepen understanding of students' lived experiences with AU narratives. The study prioritizes students' own perceptions, behaviors, and intrinsic motivations concerning AU narratives content, the study explores how these narratives are personally experienced and interpreted rather than measuring academic outcomes. This research emphasizes the meanings students consider to their engagement with AU narratives. The findings are expected to provide detailed insights into the potential of AU narratives as a new pedagogical instrument in EFL education.

Despite the importance of cultivating reading habits in EFL students, many struggle to engage with traditional reading materials. Previous studies, such as Hadi

and Karyadi (2023) and Agustina and Hidayat (2023), underscore the importance of fan fiction and digital stories in improving literacy. However, most studies concentrate on younger learners or fan fiction in general, rather than specifically on AU narratives. Although AU narratives offer a distinctive and imaginative approach to improving reading interest, there is still little research investigating the function of AU narratives in higher education, especially in Indonesia.

This study aims to fill the existing gap by investigating the relationship between engagement with AU narratives and students' reading motivation. Employing a qualitative case study approach, this research explores the lived experiences of university students to gain insights into how AU narratives may function as a means of promoting reading habits among EFL students at the university level.

B. Research Questions

1. What are EFL students' experiences and factors influencing their engagement with and interpretation of AU narratives?
2. How does, if any, such engagement contribute to the development of students' reading habits?

C. Research Aims

This present research aims to:

1. Explore the experiences and factors that influence EFL students' engagement with and interpretation of AU narratives.

2. Explore how their engagement in the AU narratives may relate to the development of their reading habits.

D. Significance of the Study

This study holds significant academic implications for students, lecturers, and researchers in the field of English language education.

1. Students

By achieving the research objectives, this research is expected to provide students with a deeper understanding of how AU narratives can increase their enthusiasm for reading. Engagement with AU narratives provides unique narratives and reinterpreted character interactions, making reading more enjoyable and comprehensible. Higher levels of engagement can result in better critical thinking, language proficiency, and general academic achievement. In addition, this research is a useful resource for English Language Education Department students who want to use unconventional reading materials-such as AU narratives in their academic endeavours. This research can also stimulate creative methods in language acquisition.

2. Educators

This research offers significant insights into how students' engagement and enthusiasm for reading are influenced by their interactions with AU narratives. Understanding the potential of these imaginative and relevant resources can help educators select lessons that will fulfill academic objectives and interest students.

A more dynamic and inclusive learning environment can be fostered by integrating AU narratives into lessons, supporting student-centered teaching strategies that align with students' interests and cultural backgrounds.

3. *Other Researchers*

For researchers, this study has contributed to existing knowledge by exploring the intersection between popular culture and language education through the lens of AU narratives. This research offers insights into how alternative reading materials may support language development and engagement and encourage reading habits. This research can provide new insights into reading and engagement in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) situations and act as a baseline reference for future research that investigates the incorporation of non-traditional reading resources in educational settings.

E. Terminologies

1. *Alternate Universe (AU)*

AU is a type of narrative where the plot is set apart from real life and the characters belong to a different genre. According to Shannon Sauro (2017), AU narratives is a fictional narrative that changes the gender, race or ethnicity, occupation, name, and social status of its characters from their original form. According to Thomas and Stornaiuolo (2016), AU narratives is a story that goes

through a ‘process of narrative transformation to better represent a diversity of perspectives and experiences’.

According to Tamrin (2024), AU narratives in fanfiction represent a narrative practice that recontextualizes well-known characters within new settings or worlds that differ from their original stories. These AU narratives permit alterations to various elements, including characterization, setting, and timeline, while preserving the fundamental identity of the AU narratives itself. This adaptability grants writers the creative freedom to explore characters in diverse environments, often resulting in narratives that are richer and more intricate than the original canon. Tamrin further emphasizes that, despite substantial modifications, it is crucial for readers and fan communities to retain the core characteristics of the characters.

In essence, AU narratives exemplifies the literary capabilities of fanfiction writers in reimagining characters and settings while maintaining their connection to the source material, thereby generating innovative and engaging narrative trajectories that merit literary analysis. Additionally, Tamrin's study illustrates how AU narratives characters can be placed in contemporary or varied contexts, such as reinterpreted family structures within more modern or multicultural settings.

2. Reading Habits

Reading habit refers to the pattern, frequency and consistency of an individual’s engagement in reading activities. It is influenced by intrinsic factors, such as personal interest and enjoyment, as well as extrinsic influences, including the availability of interesting reading materials and external expectations, such as

academic requirements. Building a consistent reading habit is essential for improving language proficiency, developing critical thinking skills and achieving academic success in language education program. Hassan et al. (2021) state that reading habits affect various aspects, including the selection of reading materials, the nature of the activities performed, the duration of reading, the reading environment, and the motivation to engage in reading.

3. English for Foreign Language (EFL) Students

In this study, EFL students indicate individuals who actively acquire English both inside and outside of academic settings, interacting with the language outside of formal classroom contexts. These students improved their English through a variety of methods, including self-directed learning, digital media and engagement in online communities. Sari et al. (2024) conducted a study on Indonesian adolescents, revealing that reading AU narratives fan fiction increased their reading interest, illustrating how such narratives can facilitate literacy development in EFL learners. Moreover, engagement with AU narratives content has been associated with improved writing proficiency, as students are motivated to explore creative writing and expand their lexicon. Engagement with AU narratives can foster greater enthusiasm for reading in English among EFL students, thus improving their overall language proficiency.

4. Language Development

Language development involves acquiring and enhancing linguistic skills, which encompass vocabulary expansion, reading comprehension, and critical

analysis abilities. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), language development is a multifaceted process that necessitates ongoing engagement with a range of texts. Reading materials, such as AU narratives, can support this development by exposing students to various linguistic structures and cultural contexts. Additionally, these narratives offer relatable content that can increase students' motivation to read, thereby fostering a deeper engagement with the language.

5. *Critical Thinking*

The process of analyzing and evaluating reimagined characters, alternative storylines, and thematic shifts is an important part of critical thinking in AU narratives. Due to the fact that AU narratives present challenges to traditional storytelling, readers are required to evaluate character motivations, compare and contrast different versions of the narrative, and investigate the relationship between cause and effect. This analytical engagement promotes deeper reading comprehension and interpretation skills in EFL learners.

6. *Fan Communities*

Fan communities are collaborative communities where fans of a specific work discuss how to properly interpret existing storylines and exchange creative content. These communities allow writers and readers to play an active role in the narrative process by offering a forum for group interaction. The collaborative character of fan communities fits in with social learning theory, which highlights the value of communication between users and collective knowledge creation in

educational contexts.

7. *Creative Storytelling*

Creative storytelling involves creating narratives that deviate from traditional structures, often incorporating imaginative plot and character development. Creative storytelling, as found in AU narratives, is used in educational settings to inspire students to think outside the box. This approach enhances the learning process by encouraging participation, creativity and a closer bond with the subject matter.

F. Scope and Limitations

The research is designed as a qualitative case study, focusing on a small sample of four university students who actively engage with AU narratives. Participants will be selected based on AU narratives experience and reading ability in English. Due to the small sample size, this study will provide rich and deep insights into students' reading behavior, but cannot be generalized to all EFL learners. The case study approach allows for an in-depth exploration of individual experiences, but does not aim to provide statistically significant conclusions about the effectiveness of AU narratives for all students. Instead, this study sought to understand how AU narratives influence personal reading habits.

This research utilizes self-reported data gathered from interviews and observations, placing a strong emphasis on the participants' subjective experiences and personal interpretations. Rather than aiming for generalizable results, this study seeks to gain an in-depth understanding of individual perspectives. Although the

findings are rooted in personal narratives, strategies such as triangulation and reflective analysis are employed to enhance the trustworthiness of the data. Considering that AU narratives are predominantly consumed within informal online communities, this study examines them as self-contained reading resources rather than as formal pedagogical tools.

Despite these limitations, this study is a good starting point for understanding how AU narratives motivate EFL students to read. This research can be expanded by using a larger and more diverse sample, a mixed methods approach that combines qualitative and quantitative findings, or exploring the long-term role of AU narratives in supporting literacy development. These areas can help future research to establish the role of AU narratives in EFL education and evaluate their potential for curriculum-based reading programs

