



A Needs Analysis of Code-Mixed "Slice-of-Life" Fiction as Authentic Reading Materials for EFL Adolescents

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Abstract

Reading comprehension is a critical competency for high school students, yet conventional textbooks often trigger learning boredom and anxiety due to their rigid structures and formal language. This qualitative descriptive study investigates how the integration of pop culture media and bilingual texts affects students' reading comprehension and engagement. Through purposive sampling, twelve 12th-grade students participated in asynchronous semi-structured interviews via WhatsApp Voice Notes. The findings reveal four key integration strategies: (1) utilizing visually appealing slice-of-life digital fiction to eliminate boredom; (2) leveraging code-mixing as a psychological comfort zone to reduce reading anxiety; (3) employing bilingual contextual clues for autonomous vocabulary acquisition; and (4) boosting intrinsic motivation for real-world English application. Furthermore, this study highlights that the flexible and contextually relevant nature of digital narratives aligns with the objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum. The study concludes that pop-culture-based bilingual materials bridge the gap between formal education and students' daily linguistic realities, fostering a more natural and engaging environment for language acquisition. These results suggest a necessary shift from monolithic textbook approaches to more dynamic, multimodal reading materials to better accommodate the sociolinguistic realities of Generation Z learners.

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is a fundamental competency mandated by the Indonesian government to ensure students achieve functional literacy in English. According to the Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen Pendidikan (2024), the learning process in the Merdeka Curriculum must be flexible and contextually relevant to students' lives. However, many high school students still face significant learning boredom and anxiety when presented with conventional, full-English reading materials that feel rigid and disconnected from their social reality. To bridge this gap, educators are increasingly transitioning toward the use of authentic materials in English Language Teaching (ELT). Unlike traditional textbooks that often present artificial language structures, authentic materials—such as digital narratives and pop culture media—provide learners with exposure to real-world language use, offering a richer linguistic context that enhances both vocabulary acquisition and engagement (Fitria, 2022; Treve, 2023).

A prominent trend in the utilization of authentic materials today is the integration of pop culture media and bilingual texts, particularly those featuring code-mixing. Digital platforms like Webtoon, Wattpad, and Alternate Universes (AUs) on X have gained massive popularity among high school students because they depict everyday relatable experiences (Cesarianti, 2025). The primary advantage of these materials lies in their linguistic authenticity. The strategic use of Indonesian-English code-mixing acts as a psychological comfort zone that lowers students' reading anxiety and provides native-language contextual clues for deciphering complex foreign vocabulary (Indah & Rachmawati, 2025; Tustiawati et al., 2022). Furthermore, engaging with such familiar pop culture narratives significantly boosts students' intrinsic motivation and self-confidence (Sharma, 2022). Nevertheless, implementing these materials is not without its drawbacks. A notable challenge is the necessity for careful adaptation and frequency management by



teachers to ensure the informal, code-mixed language aligns with formal pedagogical goals without reinforcing grammatical inaccuracies (Orooq & Razeq, 2021).

Given the distinct advantages and the sociolinguistic realities of Generation Z, it is crucial to explore how these digital narratives impact learning. Therefore, this study aims to answer the following research question: how does the integration of pop culture media and bilingual texts (code-mixing) affect students' reading comprehension and engagement? To address this issue, this research employed a qualitative descriptive method involving 12th-grade students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected asynchronously via WhatsApp Voice Notes utilizing semi-structured interviews and subsequently analyzed using the interactive model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) to capture genuine student perspectives. The novelty of this study lies in its specific focus on 'slice-of-life' code-mixed narratives as a psychological comfort zone for EFL adolescents. This provides a unique perspective on how pop culture media acts as a strategic bridge between formal education and the daily linguistic habits of Indonesian students, which has been under-explored in previous authentic material studies.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design to thoroughly capture the genuine experiences and perspectives of high school students regarding their reading habits. The research was conducted at a public senior high school in Indonesia, involving twelve 12th-grade students. The participants were selected through purposive sampling, focusing on individuals who are active consumers of digital pop culture platforms such as Webtoon, Wattpad, and X (Twitter). This criterion ensures that the subjects possess relevant and direct experience with bilingual narratives. To maintain ethical standards, all participants are referred to using pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview protocol formulated to gauge students' reading habits, their perception of code-mixing, the role of linguistic context in their comprehension, and their overall engagement. To minimize participants' anxiety and encourage open responses, the interviews were conducted asynchronously via the WhatsApp instant messaging application using the Voice Note feature. This approach provided a comfortable and informal environment, allowing participants to answer at their own pace while seamlessly capturing their authentic voices.

All collected voice notes were transcribed verbatim to ensure the accuracy of the data. The data were then analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which involves three concurrent flows: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The transcripts were simplified to identify recurring themes related to learning boredom and potential integration strategies. These themes were categorized and displayed to visualize patterns in student perceptions before drawing and verifying conclusions against the original data to provide valid answers to the research question.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Our thematic analysis of interviews brought four major integration strategies to light. These strategies highlight how the use of code-mixed pop culture fiction can effectively address the pedagogical challenges faced by Phase F students.

1. *Escaping Learning Boredom through Multimodal Digital Media*

An immediate and prominent contrast emerged between digital reading platforms and standard English textbooks. The participants openly admitted that traditional textbooks often induce sleepiness and mental fatigue due to their rigid, overly formal structures and apparent detachment from the students' daily

lives. Conversely, digital fiction presents a visually appealing and highly entertaining alternative that captures their sustained attention. Platforms like Webtoon or Wattpad foster a relaxed, low-pressure atmosphere that effectively removes the overwhelming burden of formal studying. As Participant 3 articulated:

"Buku teks bahasa Inggris di sekolah umumnya membosankan dan membuat mengantuk. Sebaliknya, platform seperti ini tidak membuat mengantuk karena lebih menghibur, lebih menyenangkan, dan tidak terasa seperti sedang belajar." (English textbooks in school are generally boring and tedious. This platform, on the other hand, is less tedious because it's more amusing, more engaging, and doesn't feel like a lesson.)

This sentiment closely mirrors the findings of Cesarianti (2025), who observed that interactive digital narratives successfully capture Generation Z's attention by transforming reading from a burdensome chore into a highly engaging leisure activity. Furthermore, the integration of multimodal elements and familiar character tropes—such as those commonly found in fanfiction—creates a safe reading space that builds students' confidence without the pressure of formal assessments (Austin & Santoso, 2023). When students are not purely relying on dense blocks of text, their stamina for reading in a foreign language increases significantly, highlighting the urgent need to shift from monolithic textbook approaches to more dynamic materials (Sudiran, 2020; Treve, 2023).

2. Code-Mixing as a Psychological Comfort Zone and Identity Bridge

The linguistic structure of these digital texts also plays a crucial, perhaps paramount, role in their effectiveness. Integrating Indonesian alongside English is not perceived by the students as a grammatical flaw; rather, it functions as a vital psychological safety net. Code-mixed narratives feel remarkably authentic to Phase F students because the text accurately mirrors their actual communication habits and stylistic identity in the digital era. By bypassing the strict, often intimidating conventions of formal academic English, these stories effectively lower the students' affective filter, thereby making the reading process significantly less daunting. Participant 3 clearly explained this psychological effect:

"Menurut pendapat saya, percampuran bahasa Indonesia dengan bahasa Inggris membuat dialog atau cerita menjadi lebih mudah dipahami, lebih ringan, serta terkadang lebih realistis dengan kehidupan sehari-hari." (In my opinion, mixing Indonesian with English makes the dialogue or story easier to understand, lighter, and often more realistic to everyday life.)

This phenomenon aligns strongly with the research conducted by Rahmawati (2022) and Indah & Rachmawati (2025), confirming that code-mixing in pop culture serves as a linguistic comfort zone. Interestingly, this bilingual stylistic choice is not isolated to digital reading platforms; it is heavily reflected in contemporary popular Indonesian novels, where authors intentionally use code-mixing to construct modern, relatable social contexts for their characters (Filadelfia, Manurung, & Riadi, 2023; Pertiwi, 2023; Raffles & Agustin, 2023; Sentana, 2022). For teenagers, language is deeply tied to identity. Seeing their bilingual reality validated across multiple media formats encourages them to engage with the English language without the paralyzing fear of misunderstanding complex syntax (Gunnarsdóttir, 2023).

3. The Power of Contextual Clues in Autonomous Vocabulary Acquisition

While traditional pedagogical views might assume that bilingual texts confuse language learners or hinder full immersion, the actual outcome in this study proved entirely different. These code-mixed narratives emerged as highly effective, autonomous instruments for organic vocabulary acquisition. When encountering unfamiliar English vocabulary within a Wattpad story or an AU, the students rarely panicked or interrupted their reading flow to consult a dictionary. Instead, they actively and intuitively utilized the

surrounding Indonesian sentences as contextual clues to decipher the meaning of the unknown words. Participant 2 emphasized the practicality and efficiency of this approach:

"Sejujurnya iya, karena apabila saya menemukan kosakata baru, saya dapat dengan mudah menebak maknanya melalui konteks kalimat bahasa Indonesia. Oleh karena itu, saya tidak perlu membuka kamus, dan hal tersebut sangat membantu saya." (To be honest, it does, because when I come up with a new vocabulary term, I can easily guess its meaning through the context of an Indonesian sentence. Therefore, I don't need to open a dictionary, and it really helps me.)

This real-world strategy perfectly illustrates the concept proposed by Tustiawati et al. (2022) and Soy, Maisarah, & Sovann (2023), demonstrating how native language context acts as a powerful facilitator for understanding foreign vocabulary without formal intervention. This practice promotes a high degree of learner autonomy. Students become active problem-solvers rather than passive recipients of information, which is exactly the type of critical thinking and adaptability envisioned by the Merdeka Curriculum (Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen Pendidikan, 2024).

4. *Boosting Intrinsic Motivation and Confidence for Real-World Application*

Finally, the engagement with relatable pop culture provided a notable and transformative boost to the students' self-confidence. Reading media that resonates with their personal lives not only improves passive language comprehension but also ignites a genuine intrinsic motivation to learn and participate. Because the narratives are captivating and the characters are relatable, the act of reading transitions from an obligatory school task into an activity the students actively seek out in their free time. Furthermore, observing casual, conversational English usage empowers them to practice the language in their own daily lives. Participant 1 proudly shared this behavioral development:

"Ya, saya menjadi lebih percaya diri dan langsung mempraktikkan kosakata bahasa Inggris tersebut ketika berbincang dengan teman maupun kakak saya." (Indeed, I became more confident and started applying the English vocabulary immediately when communicating with my friends and siblings.)

This outcome is a testament to the power of authentic materials, supporting the sociolinguistic benefits discussed by Ridhawati, Firdhani, and Assyddyq (2025). This growing confidence is further reinforced when students are exposed to bilingual interactions in broader entertainment media, such as western movies and popular Indonesian series, which normalize English usage in casual settings and inspire learners to mimic authentic expressions (Hendriani, Wahab, & Putraidi, 2025; Warahmah, 2024; Zahra, 2025). When students realize that English is a living tool for entertainment and socialization, their disposition toward the language changes, paving the way for continuous skill development (Sharma, 2022; Fitria, 2022).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that integrating slice-of-life digital fiction—such as Alternate Universes (AUs), Webtoons, and Wattpad—offers highly effective strategies for enhancing English reading comprehension among high school students. The potential integration strategies primarily involve substituting rigid conventional textbooks with visually appealing and relatable narratives to successfully eliminate learning boredom. Furthermore, utilizing code-mixed formats acts as a psychological bridge that lowers students' reading anxiety, creating a comfortable and natural linguistic environment. Within this environment, students effectively leverage bilingual contextual clues to independently infer meanings, which organically expands their vocabulary without the constant reliance on dictionaries. Ultimately, incorporating these digital pop culture materials not only facilitates passive reading comprehension but juga sparks intrinsic

motivation, empowering students with the confidence to actively apply their newly acquired English skills in real-world communication.

Generally, this research moves the body of scientific knowledge forward by demonstrating how pop culture-based materials can bridge the gap between formal education and students' daily linguistic realities. However, this study has several limitations. The findings are based on a small sample size from a single school, and the asynchronous nature of the data collection may not fully capture the dynamic complexity of real-time classroom interactions. Therefore, it is suggested that future studies involve a larger and more diverse group of participants. Additionally, researchers are encouraged to explore quantitative measures to evaluate the long-term impact of these materials on standardized English proficiency tests.

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