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X USERS' PERSPECTIVES TOWARD THE USE OF ALTERNATE UNIVERSE AS AN ONLINE PLATFORM TO IMPROVE EFL WRITING SKILL

X PERSPEKTIF PENGGUNA TERHADAP PENGGUNAAN ALTERNATE UNIVERSE SEBAGAI PLATFORM ONLINE UNTUK MENINGKATKAN KETERAMPILAN MENULIS EFL

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigates the perspectives of fanfiction readers on X to improve their daily writing skills through Alternate Universe. This study used a qualitative descriptive method with the data from interviews. The type of method is a phenomenological approach by exploring the participants' subjective perspective on the Alternate Universe phenomenon on X. The researcher interviewed five sources of X users based on criteria, such as age, how often they read, how they felt about reading Alternate Universe, and their opinion about the Alternate Universe phenomenon. Data analysis applied consists of reduction of data, display of data, and conclusion illustrating or verification. The researcher used a variety of data-gathering techniques, such as in-depth interviews, to collect data or obtain information in a more detailed manner. The results of research through in-depth interview process with various informants' backgrounds. Based on interviews, they get heartfelt every time they read AU. Also, Alternate Universe can provide them with new knowledge. Thus, they could learn something new, such as new vocabulary, and discover motivation to write neatly.

Keywords: writing skill, EFL, alternate universe, X

ABSTRAK

Tujuan dari penelitian ini untuk mengetahui perspektif pembaca fanfiction di X untuk meningkatkan keterampilan menulis sehari-hari mereka melalui Alternate Universe. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif untuk memperoleh data dari wawancara. Jenis metode yang digunakan adalah pendekatan fenomenologis dengan mengeksplorasi sudut pandang subjektif partisipan terhadap fenomena Alternate Universe di X. Peneliti mewawancarai lima narasumber pengguna X berdasarkan kriteria yang telah ditetapkan, seperti usia, seberapa sering mereka membaca, bagaimana perasaan mereka membaca Alternate Universe, dan pendapat mereka tentang fenomena Alternate Universe. Analisis data yang digunakan terdiri dari reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan atau verifikasi. Peneliti menggunakan berbagai prosedur pengumpulan data, seperti wawancara mendalam, untuk mengumpulkan data atau memperoleh informasi secara lebih rinci. Hasil penelitian melalui proses wawancara mendalam dengan berbagai latar belakang informan. Berdasarkan wawancara, mereka mendapatkan perasaan yang tulus setiap kali membaca AU. Selain itu, Alternate Universe juga dapat memberikan mereka pengetahuan baru. Dengan demikian, mereka dapat mempelajari sesuatu yang baru, seperti kosa kata baru, dan menemukan motivasi untuk menulis dengan rapi.

Kata kunci: keterampilan menulis, EFL, alternate universe, X

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INTRODUCTION

In the current global era, the growth of literacy skills is a result of the expansion of digital communication (Bippert, 2017) which potentially had an impact on EFL learning and literacy practices due to technology advancement and participatory culture (Jenkins, 1992). In many ways, globalization has facilitated by technology, such as transportation, communication, and technology in education. Escorted by a smartphone and a qualified signal, they can lead any activity easily. People can express their ideas and creations in written form which will then be enjoyed by fellow fans of other characters or celebrities in a fan community or forum. According to Dini (2014), there are nowadays many free apps and platforms available online., all you have to do is download them to access, such as Twitter. Additionally, Gen Z tends to use social media more frequently as an alternative, and they can spend up to 9 hours per day staring at their phone displays, so it is occasionally said that cell phones are more engaging than books (RNM & Rachmani, 2022)

Twitter is one of the most popular social media sites and applications among adolescent (Buffer, 2023), due to the fact that social media provides a variety of advantages, including fostering critical thinking and enhancing motivation (Baſöz, 2016). Conforming to official Twitter help page, X is a website that facilitates friends, family, and coworkers to interact through short and frequent messages in order to remain connected and communicate. People post tweets can include text, links, images, and video. These images are shared on your profile, delivered to your followers, and searchable on X (New user FAQ, n. d)

As one of the platforms often used, X is also a means for its users to create fan fiction stories with a thread called Alternate Universe or AU among users. Meanwhile, according to Tony, X is regarded as a judgment-free platform where users may discuss about a variety of topics they appreciate, including entertainment programs, music, movies, etc. (Rahmawati, 2022). X can also be acquired with cellphones and other gadgets. A typical feature that Xs has trending topics or using hashtag for particular words or topics, this feature can help users discovering what X users are talking about. Also, X threads are a series of connected tweets by one user, which is they can use as express their opinion. They can also be used to link tweets with common topic, or tweets which relate to a thought previously tweeted. As of March 2021, users can only send tweets with a maximum of 280 characters, so now users can upload tweets with a maximum of 4000 characters.

In 2010, when K-Pop was just starting to develop, fanfictions became more frequently widespread and became a trend. The evolution of social networking websites, such as X, has become popular among young adults, especially college students. X allows student share information, online discussion and communication with their friend, family even lecture. For example, facilitate collaborative learning, such as reading and writing. According to Austen, a fanfiction is basically fiction based on original works that already exist or are popular first. The stories produced by fans that combine the characters, storylines, or plots developed by the writers of the original work are referred to as fanfiction for those unfamiliar with the phrase (Steenhuyse, 2011).

Fanfiction is a type of creative imagination writing which significantly influenced by contemporary events such as the creation of fandoms and online communities, which enable users to select and curate the content they wish to display. Specifically, the group goes one step further by fostering a similar interest in their favorite writers, which is known as fanfiction. Fans write fanfiction based on ideas they have generated through their creativity and intelligence, where they imagine how the idol's private life would eventually be translated into literary form. The importance of fanfictions story ideas cannot be overstated, regardless the fact that much of the fanfiction on X is written by amateurs. However, the writer and readers have significant role in written AU fanfictions regarded as the most

influenced factor in writing since they discover new ideas, information and experiences from reading fanfiction (Simamora & Harmayanti, 2021).

This fan fiction writing has various genres, which go by name of Alternate Universe or AU. The other fanfictions genres are called crossover by Thomas, "...fanfic genre a "crossover", however, a fanfiction is only considered a crossover when the characters from one universe interact with characters from another universe." Meanwhile, Shanon Sauro (2020) in Agustine A. et al., (2022), defines AU as a fanfiction work characterized by the original aspects of the characters, including modified their gender, race, occupations, names, and social status. In other words, fanfictions have elevated literary fandom to new creative heights. Fanfiction is fundamentally similar to other fiction writing, with the author and source of the plot or characters serving as distinctions. In Agustine A. et al. (2022), Duffet claims that that fan fiction is created by fans inspired by favorite objects for a broader definition, such as their idol, artist, celebrities, influencer, etc. However, elements of AU are imaginary as written and uploaded in the form of threads on X and usually consist of synopsis, character profiles, and screenshots of fake chat apps (Caro, 2021) in Rahmawati (2022).

The overview of the popularity of AU among EFL has impacted people's writing skills, based on Abdulrahman and Cahyati's (2020) related activities involving reading and writing, improved reading comprehension and vocabulary, observing and taking part in online communities, improved interpersonal abilities, and comprehension of conversation culture. During reading process, they are required to continuously integrate new information into their mental image. They are only able to do this effectively when two requirements are met: the information that the text suggests and contains has to fit into multiple complementary schemata; and they must be able to match schema in the text with the schema of their own. Alternate Universe writers navigate the schema of the source text, their interpretive community, and genre characteristics strikes such a balance between ease of use and effort (van Steenhuyse, 2011)

This research contributes to the literature on reading interest through writing skills, especially X users, which are mostly Gen Z. Several studies attempted to demonstrate the positive effects of fanfiction on children's writing. (Jenkins, 1992, 2004), for the reason of that writing is necessary skill for success as well as being a requirement for academic accomplishment. In addition, current study mentions X application helped student to make their learning environment. As an online platform tool, it would also be required to compare X to other social networks that could improve students' writing abilities.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perspectives of fanfiction readers on X to improve their daily writing skills. However, because writing is a complex cognitive activity, it might be challenging to learn or teach, which require "careful thought, discipline and concentration" (Dhanya & Alamelu, 2019). The article also shows how such affordances might improve prospects for learning languages and literacy. Nevertheless, in order to provide the reader with background, the article is also based on a larger empirical study, which is briefly discussed in the following part.

METHODS

This study employs a descriptive-qualitative method to gather data from interviews. The type of method is phenomenological approach by exploring the participant's subjective perspective in Alternate Universe phenomenon on X. The description contains the experiences of several individuals who experience the AU phenomenon on X. To be specific, readers experience towards AU to increase writing skills in daily life. In line with Giorgi and Moustakas in (Creswell, 2014), Phenomenological research is a design of philosophical and psychological investigation in which the researcher describes a personal life experience regarding the phenomenon described by the respondent. The participant of this study will consist five participants, the person who were English active readers AU on X. The researcher sticks to Jenkins's argument, which elaborates fans create content based on, media texts and communities that surround them as they establish the texts, which has been made even more possible through the internet (Jenkins, 2013).

In this paper, the researcher examines the perspective of readers to improve writing skills by fanfictions, especially AU. In order to thoroughly study and be able to fully explain his reading and writing experiences related to the phenomena of AU reading, the informant must be a X user who actively reads AU fanfictions, according to the researcher's criteria. Five informants who met the researcher's requirements made up the study's informant population. The interview data will be conduct by interview respondents randomly on X through Zoom meeting by using qualitative method. Researcher conducted interviews on 21-24 May 2023 with an average interview of 30 minutes. The researcher processed data by considering what the participants stated when they started reading AU, their fandom name, age, how often they read, how they felt by reading AU, and their opinion about AU phenomenon.

In order to gather accurate and reliable data, the researcher employed a variety of data-gathering techniques, such as in-depth interviews, where the informant is required to devote a brief amount of time and sincerity to responding to the researcher's questions. Also, whether in searching for and obtaining information data, researchers place, journal articles, the internet and documentation in the form of videos, sound recordings and others. The researchers also deduce from each participant and determine all participants' answers. The researcher eventually assesses whether reading AU fanfiction as part of their everyday routine enhances their writing ability.

Data analysis applied by using the theory from Miles & Huberman (1984) in Creswell (2014), which is the reduction of data, display of data, and conclusion. The researcher acquires data before doing the reduction of data, and the processes of the collection cannot be separated from each other because they are simultaneous and interconnected (Sugiyono, 2016, h.247). The data in this qualitative research were obtained from various sources, so that the data techniques used were not in a clear pattern, making it difficult to use qualitative data analysis techniques, and can be interpreted as a process of systematically searching and compiling. Researchers are looking for data that is truly valid in accordance with the topics and problems studied. At the data presentation stage, the researcher clarifies the results of the data to make it easier to read and draw conclusions. Furthermore, in the conclusion verification stage, the researcher interprets the existing data to test the truth.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter the researcher discusses the results of the research through an in-depth interview process with various informants' backgrounds.

RESULTS

There were five informants from various backgrounds and different fandoms. An overview of informants is provided below:

No	Name	Age	Fandom	Roles
1	@zilinza	22	Genshin Impact	Reader
2	@wifejungkookiie	22	Army (BTS)	Reader and Writer
3	@chheonsah	21	Nctzen (NCT)	Reader
4	@taehryunn	12	TXT (MOA)	Reader
5	@hatsuka_azumi	13	Nctzen (NCT)	Reader

Table. 1 Background of five informants

The researcher interviewed five source users on X based on criteria that have been settled, such as age, how often they read, how they felt about reading AU, and their opinion about the phenomenon.

Informant 1 (@zilinza)

Zilinza is a university student major in English Education and in the past years during pandemic loves reading AU. Firstly, she is into game Genshin Impact that she played during pandemic then she is looking something new and end up find interesting AU under the Genshin Impact character. She reads AU almost every day at 10-12 in the morning and before going to bed with the completed AU. According to her, reading AU can stimulate the imagination of the game characters she likes. She also added that reading AU can lead to reading habits and can indirectly imitate the language style of the author AU that she reads, therefore choosing a reading or author in AU's reading is very important.

"I know that one of the words Assert Dominant means that the character in the AU reading is the dominant character over the other characters."

Zilinza likes AU's story because AU uses clear, and neat language to understand so plots can be visualized to respondents. In addition, the character played is a well-known character among Genshin Impact, thus influencing Zilinza as a X user and online game player. The researcher also asked about Zilinza's opinion about this phenomenon, she stated that this hype provides good benefits, especially for readers who have high imagination, thus their imagination can be channeled through Alternate Universe fanfiction.

Informant 2 (@wifejungkookiie)

The second informant is *wifejungkookiie*. She is a 22 years-old University student in Jakarta. *Wifejungkookiie* become an active K-pop fan since junior high school. She admitted that she reads complete AU more often than wrote AU. According to her, she gets recommended from his peers who also like K-pop as BTS fans and also like to reads idol's fanfictions so they share information about AU's fanfictions. In addition, she also created a few one-shot AUs on X that received some positive feedback, but she eventually quit writing because so many readers were careless or failed to give her stories proper credit.

Wifejungkookiie states reading AU can fill his free time during lunch and add new vocabulary in terms of English vocabulary, such as Butterfly Effect (a term to describe a small change that has a big long-term impact on an event) and some new standard English words she knows the first time from reading AU.

She also mentions:

"The AU offers numerous images, providing a distinct impression with additional train chat displays. In order to make it simple to visualize the plot, reference photographs are used to describe the characters. So, the literacy abilities will improve, especially in terms of basic writing."

The researcher also inquired about Wifejungkookiie's thoughts on this phenomenon, which has gained much attention on social media. The popularity of it is a result of the positive influence that numerous fans have had by sharing positive reviews of AU fanfictions they have read with other fans to ensure they can share their own experiences reading AU by their favorite authors.

Informant 3 (@chheonsah)

The third informant is *chheonsah*. She is NCTzen, which is a fan of NCT, to be specific is NCT Dream. She prefers to read than write a story and spends two to three hours reading AU at night. *Chheonsah* started reading AU in the last year when she was in her 6th semester. Until now, she still likes to read AU from various aspects, not just her favorite idols as long as the plot is fine.

"...whoever the cast is, it doesn't have to be NCT, as long as the storyline is interesting."

Chheonsah stated that reading AU improves writing, for example, the use of punctuation marks to encourage a willingness to write neatly. Strengthen imitative writing abilities as a fundamental skill and basic letter writing task (Khoirunisa, 2019). Also, the researchers asked respondents' opinions about the AU phenomenon on X. As a X user from 2016, she found X for an alternative source of entertainment when she is bored and searches for various AU stories with exciting plots and visuals.

Informant 4 (@ taehryunn)

The fourth informant is *taehryunn*. The owner of the *taehryunn* account is a middle school student and she is a MOA, who is a fan of TXT boy group. She loves read AUs with characters from TXT members, his bias is Beomgyu, thus makes her like reading AUs.

Taehryunn interested in reading AU so she is able to spend 2 hours straight reading AU and continues it during the day, also at night before bed. She stated the type of this story really light to understand because whether the cast and the plot, also the typing really trendy. The moment *taehryunn* became a fan of AU reader is 2021 when she is discovering the media of promotion of Alternate Universe on other platform social media.

"...If the plot is light and easy to read, I'll read until the end."

She is well aware that she gets daily writing skills from reading AU, for instance, in social life with his peers online. Nevertheless, academically, the vocabulary she found at AU was mostly not suitable as a reference. However, by reading AU she became accustomed to and motivated to write more neatly and structured. Meanwhile, *taehryunn* really supports AU authors out there to produces more AUs, especially those of his favorite bias and she hopes that this AU genre can develop by presenting videos of the characters so that the visualization provided is intense.

Informant 5 (@hatsuka_azumi)

The fourth informant is *hatsuka_azumi*. She is a middle school student and also a fan of AU NCT Dream as she is NCTZen. She is 13 years old and read AU at the beginning of the 7th grade semester even though she hasn't read AU for a long time, but she reads the AU genre every day, such as after night study.

The reason given regarding his hobby of reading AU is because the typing is neat and easy to understand, "if the typing is bad, I'll skip it, but if the typing is adorable. I'll read it."

The language used in Alternate Universe is accessible to all communities and provide off a pleasant sensation. "The language in AU is quite easy to read and won't bother you."

Besides, the owner of this account stated that the light visuals made her feel touched when reading AU. In terms of academic abilities, AU also significantly aids her in understanding and recognizing current vocabulary and slang. 'My pleasure', which is another word for 'you are welcome,' was one of the words she discovered. In line with Dede, which mention intensive writing as most assessment that students more aware with focus form and produce new vocabulary, idiom and proper grammar at the sentence level. The researcher also asked about hatsuka_azumi's thoughts on this phenomenon. She is amazed by the authors of this genre, particularly the way AU authors market their work to attract new readers. However, it depends on how the author markets the story.

DISCUSSION

This study apparently took a close look at how GEN Z, especially EFL students were motivated read fanfiction. They have relatively good at English skills, mostly reading skills when reading fanfiction. However, they all feel that reading, in particular way, improves their language skills. Both reading and writing gives them so much experience. Additionally, it stimulate literacy and writing skill, motivate them to improve their storytelling and literary skill (Zhai et al., 2021). However, readers approach AU fanfiction with wealth background about the work that fanfiction based on. They used this background to analyze the characterization, plot, and logic to determine whether it is consistent with the standard. Three out of five informants in this study said fanfiction helped them gain motivated by visualize in AU, such as their favorite idol to read text or literature in English language. Even one of informant said AU has improve his writing skill such the use of punctuation and a willingness to write neatly.

According to the research conducted by Toivakka in (2018), language skills improved through fanfiction by played a significant role, making it motably more straightforward for individuoals engaged in English studies within formal educational settings. Various fanfiction-related were found to contribute distict skills. Specifically, engaging in reading and writing fanfiction led to improvements in reading comprehension and vocabulary. Meanwhile, participating in online fanfiction communities, such X, including observation and active contributions, had a positive impact on communication skills and a deeper understanding of conversational norms and culture. Also, in line with Thurairaj (2012) that student do improve in their language as well as their writing skills and confirmed that they learn new vocabulary when they check their fellow friends' activities or updates. In addition, emotional depth in AU fanfiction resonates with them and help them from negative complex feeling. Furthermore, fanfiction communities typically offer a safe space for exploring identity, sexuality, and relationships, promoting diversity and acceptance. Eventually, AU fanfiction not only entertains but also inspires them to explore creative pursuits beyond the fanfiction realm, meaningful and transformative during this pivotal stage of life.

In this case, AU fanfiction opens a gateway to a real endless possibility within our favorite idol. Therefore, AU fanfiction is about reshaping their destinies, exploring 'what if' scenarios, and challenging the very foundations of the original narratives. The author managed to build a character to become more alive and realistic because the language used is light and serves photos to visualize the story, however, there is a common (slang) word or sentence in English. Based on the result of interviews, readers tend to prefer writing that uses informal language in order to give light read and easy to understand. Moreover, AU fanfiction encourages a sense of community and social connection, allowing EFL student to communicate with comparable peers, share ideas and collaborate creatively. It also provides an escape from real-world stressor, by offering solace in the immersive world of fiction.

Another factor AU popular among EFL, especially GEN Z as X users, is the plot. The interviews said that the plot or storyline interesting and has trendy and unique language. So, it is more exciting and varied and cannot be guessed easily. The usual popular characters are K-pop idol as appointed by the author with username @micimocies, @chxiaus, @intofairytare on X. Study in 2019, revealed that favorite stories by the author made the author have many followers or readers (Carvallo & Parra, 2019). In fact, the author profile is the first to influence the number of readers. It goes the same thought as two informants that said it depends on how author promotes the story, therefore choose author in AU reading really important.

Alternate Universe (AU) fanfiction has a vocabulary that rarely found in textbooks. So, this is used a medium to increase vocabulary by the interesting ones because reading AU fanfiction provides the readers not only pleasure but some benefits that indirectly they do not realize to have increased their vocabulary abilities. Moreover, informant most likely discovered new vocabulary and slang during AU reading. Two of them are student in junior high school. They are mentions read AU fanfiction helps them in added vocabulary in English. It helps them in daily life, whether in academic literacy or social life that informant experience. Although, when they find a word, they still need the dictionary in reading.

Based on the interview, the community's sense of satisfaction when reading Alternate Universe fanfiction, it motivates them to repeatedly engage in this activity, creating a high sense of interest in reading fanfiction. According to Azizah (2014), the sense of satisfaction that arises from reading AU

fanfiction is defined as authors delving deeper into the characters or idols' they interduce into the story, crafting plots that provide fresh perspectives, settings and enhances literary value. This approach increases the likelihood of readers returning to seek solace and leisure when they are fatigued or stressed. Many AU readers find fulfillment in satisfying their fantasies, especially when it comes to resolving their unhappiness with the climaxes of movies, books, or the realities surrounding their idols. Therefore, this phenomenon Alternate Universe fanfiction only revolves around fans or their market, such as K-pop, Anime and Western fans.

CONCLUSION

X as the most used platform in the world plays a big role for young adults of this generation, especially generation Z with experience of English as a foreign language, making X a comfortable place to share complaints and be creative without having to worry about their real identity while increasing their insight into information about what is happening. Readers and writers of Alternate Universe genre fanfiction create and develop new imaginations of characters as references, most of whom are their idols. The experience provided by reading AU in the digital era provides literacy to provide new ideas so they can be shared with a wider community.

Fanfiction, especially Alternate Universe brings the feel to their idol, which is fans created space to their desires and make a character by their imagination. Also, AU has language style, which uses everyday language, so it can satisfy readers. Based on the interviews, they get heartfelt every time they read AU. So, it is in line to previous studied that mention unique language could attract people hearts. Furthermore, other study also discussed that respondents entertained by AU's fanfiction because they can charge in their spare time. Also, the AU can provide them with new knowledge. Thus, they could learn something new, such as new vocabulary, and discover motivation to write neatly.

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