

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background

Reading is widely acknowledged as a fundamental academic activity that plays a crucial role in students' intellectual, cognitive, and personal development (OECD, 2021; Snow & Matthews, 2022). Through reading, students gain access to knowledge, expand their perspectives, improve critical thinking skills, and enhance language proficiency. In higher education, reading is not only a means of acquiring information but also a core academic habit that supports independent learning, research competence, and lifelong learning skills. Universities, as centers of knowledge production and dissemination, place reading at the heart of academic culture. Therefore, understanding students' reading interest becomes an essential concern in evaluating the quality of learning and academic engagement in higher education.

Despite the recognized importance of reading, many universities today face challenges related to students' declining reading interest (OECD, 2021; Liu, Wang, & Lim, 2022). The rapid development of digital technology, the dominance of social media, and the availability of instant information have significantly changed students' reading behaviors. Many students tend to prefer short, visual, and fast-consumed content rather than engaging in deep and sustained reading activities. This condition raises concerns among educators and academics, as limited reading interest may negatively affect students' academic performance, critical literacy skills, and overall learning outcomes. Consequently, investigating students' reading interest is not only relevant but also urgent in the context of contemporary higher education.

University libraries play a strategic role in fostering students' reading interest (IFLA, 2022; Ameen & Gorman, 2021). Traditionally, libraries have functioned as academic spaces that provide access to books, journals, and other scholarly resources. Beyond being a physical repository of information, modern university libraries are expected to become learning hubs that encourage reading, research,

and intellectual interaction. Comfortable reading spaces, diverse collections, supportive services, and an academic atmosphere are factors that can stimulate students' motivation to read. Therefore, the library is an appropriate and significant setting for examining students' reading interest, as it reflects how institutional support interacts with students' reading behaviors.

However, the existence of a library does not automatically guarantee high reading interest among students (Applegate, 2021; Kwanya, Stilwell, & Underwood, 2022). In many cases, libraries are underutilized, and students visit them mainly for non-reading purposes such as group discussions, completing assignments, or accessing the internet. This phenomenon indicates a possible gap between the availability of library resources and students' actual reading practices. Understanding students' reading interest in the library context is necessary to identify whether libraries have effectively fulfilled their educational role or whether improvements are needed to better support students' academic needs. Students' reading interest is a complex construct influenced by various internal and external factors (Guthrie & Klauda, 2020; Schiefele et al., 2021). Internal factors include motivation, attitudes toward reading, academic goals, and personal reading habits. External factors may involve the availability of reading materials, library facilities, learning demands, technological distractions, and social influences. In the university context, these factors interact dynamically and shape students' decisions to engage in reading activities. By examining students' reading interest in the library, this study seeks to capture a comprehensive picture of how these factors operate within an academic environment.

The importance of studying students' reading interest is also closely related to academic success (Toste, Didion, Peng, Filderman, & McClelland, 2020; Kim & Quinn, 2021). Numerous studies have shown that students who possess a high level of reading interest tend to demonstrate better comprehension skills, stronger academic performance, and higher levels of engagement in learning activities. Reading interest encourages students to explore knowledge beyond classroom instruction and to become autonomous learners. Therefore, investigating reading

interest is not merely about measuring students' preferences but also about understanding a key determinant of academic achievement and intellectual growth.

In addition, reading interest is closely connected to the development of critical thinking and analytical skills (OECD, 2021; Halpern, 2022). University education emphasizes the ability to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information from various sources. These skills are largely developed through consistent and meaningful reading practices. When students have low reading interest, their exposure to complex texts and academic discourse becomes limited, which may hinder their ability to engage critically with knowledge. Thus, exploring students' reading interest in the library context is essential for assessing how well universities support the development of these higher-order thinking skills.

From an institutional perspective, understanding students' reading interest provides valuable insights for library management and academic policymakers (IFLA, 2022; Corral, 2021). Findings from studies on reading interest can inform decisions related to library collection development, facility improvement, and service innovation. Libraries that are responsive to students' needs and preferences are more likely to attract students and encourage active reading habits. Therefore, research on students' reading interest contributes not only to academic discourse but also to practical improvements in educational infrastructure.

Moreover, the topic of students' reading interest remains relevant in the era of digital transformation (Baron, 2021; Singer & Alexander, 2022). While digital resources offer convenience and accessibility, they also pose challenges in sustaining students' attention and deep reading engagement. University libraries are increasingly integrating digital and printed resources, creating hybrid reading environments. Investigating students' reading interest in the library allows researchers to examine how students navigate these environments and how libraries can balance traditional and digital reading practices to support academic learning.

This study focuses on students' reading interest in the university library as a means to understand current reading behaviors within an academic setting (Creswell & Poth, 2021). By examining students' perceptions, habits, and engagement with library resources, this research aims to provide a detailed

description of the level of reading interest among university students. Such an investigation is expected to reveal patterns that reflect broader trends in academic reading culture and to identify areas that require attention and improvement.

The selection of this topic is also motivated by the need to strengthen reading culture in higher education (UNESCO, 2021; OECD, 2021). A strong reading culture is a foundation for academic excellence and intellectual maturity. Universities are responsible for creating environments that encourage students to read not only for academic obligations but also for personal enrichment and lifelong learning. By exploring students' reading interest in the library, this study seeks to contribute to efforts aimed at revitalizing reading culture within the university context.

In conclusion, students' reading interest in the library is a significant and compelling topic for academic research (IFLA, 2022; UNESCO, 2021). It addresses critical issues related to learning quality, academic engagement, and the role of institutional support in higher education. Given the changing landscape of reading practices and the strategic position of university libraries, this study is both timely and relevant. The findings of this research are expected to provide meaningful insights for students, educators, librarians, and academic institutions in their efforts to promote reading interest and enhance the overall quality of higher education.

Based on the discussion presented in the Introduction, it is evident that students' reading interest plays a vital role in supporting academic success and fostering a strong reading culture in higher education. To achieve these purposes, the study is guided by the following research questions and objectives.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the level of students' reading interest in the university library?
2. How do students perceive the role of the university library in supporting their reading interest?

### **1.3 Aims of the Study**

Based on the research questions above, this study aims:

1. To identify the level of students' reading interest in the university library.
2. To examine students' perceptions of the role of the university library in supporting their reading interest.

### **1.4. Implications of the Study**

This study implies that students' reading interest is a crucial indicator of academic engagement and reading culture in higher education. Previous studies have demonstrated that students' reading interest is influenced not only by internal motivation but also by external factors such as library facilities, availability of reading materials, and institutional academic support (Rahman & Suryadi, 2023; Aisyah, 2022). The findings of this study reinforce the view that university libraries play a strategic role in fostering students' reading habits and academic literacy, and therefore require continuous evaluation and development to remain relevant to students' needs (IFLA, 2022). Furthermore, research has shown that higher reading interest is positively associated with improved reading comprehension, learning engagement, and academic achievement, indicating that efforts to strengthen reading interest have broader implications for students' academic development and learning outcomes (Safitri & Nugroho, 2021). Consequently, this study highlights the need for higher education institutions to integrate reading promotion and effective library utilization into their academic policies and literacy programs.

#### **1.4.1. Application of the Study**

The findings of this study can be applied to improve university library services and learning strategies. Libraries may use the results to enhance collections, facilities, and reading programs, while lecturers can design reading-based learning activities that encourage students to make greater use of library resources.