

## The Effectiveness of Using Novels in Learning Process to Improve the English Language Skills: A Systematic Review

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### Abstract

In this era of technology, it helped us to easily get the other interesting learning media when the textbook become bored, especially through this pandemic of Covid 19. Most of learners want improvement of their language skills in their learning process, novel could be the interesting and powerful booster. This systematic review aims to examine the effectiveness of using novels in learning process to improve the language skills in English with showed the benefit and the weakness or problem that may encounter while using novel, and also the solution to optimize the use of novel in learning process. Previous research study about Novel in ELT published 2009 to 2021. Eleven previous studies were included and reviewed in terms: context, focus, and main findings. Result showed that mostly learner's language skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) in English are increased. Novel also can improve grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, social culture, critical thinking, personal growth, motivation and foster student- centre learning. This systematic review could help learners and teacher to consider the novel as a learning media that could be included in learning process to improve their language skills in English. For the future researcher, this systematic review could be another reference to improve the research about novel in ELT, especially the right and reliable solution to face the lack of novel when apply in ELT.

**Keywords:** Learning Effectiveness; Novels; Improvement of Language Skills.

### INTRODUCTION

In English Language Teaching, it is important to deal with learning media through learning process. Textbook has become a main source in any subject, to deliver knowledge and become the only media. In reality, there will always at least one student in a class that got bored and not interesting in the learning English. The teacher as one of important role in learning process should be creative and innovative to improve or make variety methods while teaching in the class to get the attention from the student. Like mix games and media, it could be more interesting than just a material and task from the textbook.

In ELT, we learn English as a target language. As non-native speaker and as an ELT teacher we need an authentic learning media. There is some reasons for choose novels in the language learning process. According to Alkire (2010), Gareis et al.

(2009), Hişmanoğlu (2005), Lazar (1990), Melon (1994), and Uyemura (2006), novels could be beneficial for learners, such as:

1) Motivation: Novels offers multifarious problems and situations, like what choices life could bring, life struggle, and the other general themes or conflict that the readers can feel connected with the story. The readers will get a new experience and excitement in their journey during reading novel, it will make them want to read more and the feeling will lead them to enjoy the story rather than worry than language, while reading process. When they come to the end of the story, it could make them satisfy and happy because of the process had led guide them to achieve the end of the story, that feeling only they get after reading novel. That good experience and feeling will made the readers want to read another novel or books. And that is really good to build a good habit of reading.

2) Language improvement: Through reading novels provide authentic material, huge contact with all the aspect in the novel can effectively build vocabulary (Pellicer-Sánchez & Schmitt, 2010) and it could arise reading comprehension skills (Wu, 2005). Reading novel also will guide the learners become close with any forms of linguistics, the function in communicative from native speakers. Directly, learner's writing, reading, speaking and listening skill will improve because of novel. It made learners become more competent and enrich their vocabulary and language content.

3) Cultural awareness: Novels as a bridge to the culture of the other people, it could help ESL/EFL learners to see the thought of native speakers, the way of native speakers build their communication, and the way of native speakers living their life. Novel give full of a culture in the way of each character build their interactions and actions in the story. Reading novel could enrich learners experience and knowledge about culture and find out another point of view from the characters see the life and problem. The other benefits are novels participate in learner's personal improvement, and increase critical thinking skills (Hişmanoğlu, 2005), help student-centered learning, and offers learners a new reading experience that is not same with the experience that got from textbooks (Gareis et al., 2009). In the other words, it also leads learners to become more open-minded.

4) Developing interpretative abilities of learners. When learn through read novel, learner's ability and skill to conclude and understand language will be improved. Pinar and Jover (2012) found that novels are the good media to help learners to sharpen their abilities in conclude or translate the meaning of a sentence.

The systematic review reported here will examine the effectiveness using novels in learning process to improve the language skills in English with showed the benefit and the weakness or problem that may encounter while using novel, and also the solution to optimize the use of novel in learning process.

The differences this systematic review with the other previous studies about novel in ELT are the researcher collect the findings from previous study and compile that become in a one systematic review. It include the benefit and weakness from novel, the problem that may encounter while using novel in learning process, and also provide the solution to face the problem.

## **BACKGROUND**

What is learning effectiveness? It is mean high quality learning experiences. Learning effectiveness is the holistic process by which students engage in a high-quality learning experience. A quality education includes measurable outcomes aligned to well-defined learning standards within a system that supports student development (ASCD & EI 2016).

There are some basics of using novel in learning process, especially English. Such as: Novel adding joy to learner's activity in reading. Novels offer a variety of unpredictable plots, intrigue life challenges, character development, and special language. All of that will guide learners to excitement and made them want to read the novel until the end of the story. While reading novel, the learners will feel any feeling that give by the character and by the story.

The novel had a lot of benefit especially to improve the language skills. In writing skills, novel become the model of writing, it become the sample of correct sentences or structure.

In reading, novel need to be read carefully so the learners could understand the plot, what the words are trying to explain, background or history from the story, how the character plays their role, etc. Read novel also good to create student creativity (Murat Hişmanoğlu, 2005). Read novel also improve some skills in English like vocabulary, reading comprehension, knowledge of linguistic form, and increase learners/readers understanding about some different form of communication that they not get used frequently (Tsai, 2012).

Based on (Murat Hişmanoğlu, 2005), conclude that when readers/learners read novel with using their voice or read aloud method, it also will help them to sharpen their pronunciation and listening skills at the same time. Mostly learners read aloud some sentences that they did not familiar with.

Some factors that could influenced novel are such as background of the author, the political background, and also economic. All of that will help learners to open their mind and knowing various cultures around them. It will lead them to appreciate differences of every culture and appreciate that (Tsai, 2012).

When novel is used as learning media, the learners will get used with the reading activities. And learners will realize that reading also is a fun activity, because offer some excitement experience than the other book, by the development of every character, the plot of the story, and the unexpected problem. Indirectly, the

learners will motivate to read more and making reading as their hobby. That is really good because remembering the habit of reading in some country is still low.

Read novel also improves learners critical thinking skills. The ability to think in independent way, fully responsible with the action and decision that they have made are the definition of critical thinking. In education system, critical thinking becomes the goal. (Maibodi & Branch, 2014)

While read novel, when learners translate the novel, as one of the method to learn English, indirectly they improve their skills in reading, writing, listening and speaking at the same time and also enrich their vocabulary (Ismail et al., 2017).

In the journey of reading, learner starts to activate their critical thinking ability. The point to remember is the reading activity should be doing routine in learner's daily life. By getting used to read novel, the learners will be able to get connected with the story in the novel, and build their comprehension about what is the story tells about, and construct and analyse the information within the novel. By reading novels, learners are able to receive language inputs, for example the aspect of vocabulary like word meanings, part of speech, word forms and spelling. Through reading novels, learners are also able to learn the right way of using expression or words in appropriate context. The result of reading novel will affect and help their practice in oral communication and in written. Furthermore, Nation (2001) conclude that knowledge of words could help learners to easier to identify the word when they heard that word, easier with the written form (sentences and structure, easier to relate the word with the meaning, easier to analyse the means of the word suitable with the context, easier to identify the word and the aspect that influenced the word in one context that appear in the story, easily to identify and connect the related words, could help learners to see the right usage of word in a sentence.

Chenfeld (1978: 211) shows the importance of literature, by learning using literature it will beneficial to us, we could learn about how people live their life, it describe other places and times, once in the same time during the reading process. We could learn a lot about life wisdom, from experience of the other people without a direct experience from ourselves, we learn from the character's mistake in literature, their achievement, etc. We could feel the same experience with the situation in the literature. It could include the historical and social conditions. Using literature make us understand and feel various kind of human experiences, choices, mistakes, achievement, feelings, and dreams or imaginations. All of that could enrich our wisdom in living our life. Novel offers all of that in its context.

As a learning media, novel also had weakness, one of that is a lot of vocabulary that will become a challenge to non-native speakers because they need to translate the new words that they did not understand into their mother tongue language. (Siaj & Farrah, 2018) Novel English also usually had a lot of pages that means consist of long chapters, and sometimes it will lead the learners to boredom.

The solutions that were suggested by researchers to face the weakness of novel is the teacher could prepare first at home, some glossaries that included in the chosen novel (Lazar, 1990; Lazar, 2007). So it will help the learning process at classroom when learners face some difficulties in the words that they did not familiar with. Another solution is to ask student to make summary from the novel they read by using their own words, so it could help them read the whole context not only focusing on each detail.

The other problem we may encounter when using novel as learning media, such as explain below:

1. The using of literature (novel) in the class still hindered with the traditional language teaching approaches. The achievement of better English is still hard to gain because of the old teaching methods that still be applied in the classroom. It is only using textbook as a main source. It will make the usage of novel in class become controversy. The solution of this problem is we need to show how beneficial novel in learning process to improve the language skills, both to learners also the teacher, with give a real evidence of the successful class (reach the learners goals) when we apply that in the classroom.

Duff and Maley (2007) conclude that teachers can deal with any challenges that novel bring, if they could answer this question as the preparation before apply that in the classroom, the question are:

Is this novel could take the attention from the learners?

Is the level of language appropriate with the learners?

Is the time available with the length of novel? How to manage the time to reach out the objectives or goals?

Is the novel consists of rich culture, knowledge and life lesson for the learners?

Can it help for language learning purposes?

In the other word, teacher need to make a good preparation before using novel in the classroom, a good lesson plan that included, time management that suitable with the length of novel and assignments, an interesting activities to be applies in the classroom, mixing games and the other media that show video, sounds and picture, and choosing the approaches and method to deliver that to the learners. Lazar (1993) said some kinds of approaches using literature in ELT for instance, in designing materials teacher focus on components of language in literature (novel), grammar/syntax, kinds of vocabulary/ morphology, semantic or discourse meaning and functions( this approach called language based-model). The other approach is the teacher has to adjust the genre of literature (novel) with the components of language so it could be appropriate and educative to be applied in the classroom (this approach called literature as content). And the last approach is

teacher could choose topic of literary work (novel) that suitable with some activity in the classroom (this approach called personal enrichment).

When teacher had planning to apply novel in the classroom as learning media the other thing that should be an attention is the system of assessment. Nancy Henry (2003) said it is better to teacher to design a system of assessment that have no-wrong answer, especially while using literature as a learning media. The assessment should measure the different skills of learners, such as quizzes, daily tasks, longer papers or summary. Dynamically, the assessment should help learners to become more creative and activate their critical thinking to explain something by their own words. The type of classroom should be free and student-center so the teacher position just as facilitator to help their improvement, and let the learners get the strong connection with the novel so they could absorb the target language personally with the improvement in every learners skills and abilities in English.

To optimize the using of novel in learning process, teacher should adjust with the approach that help the improvement of learners, for example direct question of facts that occurs in the novel, appreciate learner's different interpretation of the character, setting, and theme in the novel, and should activate the learner's imagination and creativity in understanding and explain the novel.

Novel only consists of words. A lot of words. It is different with the text book that consists of vocabulary list, writing activities, and pictures. So that is why novel is rarely used in the classroom. The solution of this problem is to change the mind, and trying to learn with some new challenges that could bring a lot of benefit to improvement. Remembering as a non-native speaker, we need an authentic material that full of knowledge, culture, grammar aspect, the way of how native speaker communicate, and life lesson from the native speaker.

The length in the novel is another problem for learners while reading. (Alkire, 2010; Lazar, 1990; Lazar, 2007). This could lead the learners to the boredom. The solution for this problem is divide the learners into some groups, and asking them to make summary on every chapter, so they could present their understanding in the front of the class discuss the findings in the novel and

adjust with the right understanding. It also could help them to working in the group, listening and appreciate a different perspective, to be more creative and think critically to explain and absorb the information and lesson in the novel, and sharpen their speaking, listening, reading and writing skills.

After getting in deep with how beneficial the novel in learning process, and after identify the problem that we may encounter while using novel, the solution is expect to answer the problems. When we could optimize the using of novel in learning process, we could absorb and enrich our knowledge and skills through novel.

This systematic review becomes important related the data survey from Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) that been released by Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) on 2019, Indonesia becomes country with the low level of interest in reading, Indonesia reported achieve rank 62<sup>nd</sup> of 70 country. As we know, by doing a lot of reading it could enrich people knowledge. UNESCO suggested that at least a person must read three new books in a year. By this urgency, this research wants to remind again the effectiveness of novel in learning process to improve language skills. Remembering novel offers a lot of benefits by an interesting way, in this case the plot of the story that could also entertain the reader.

## **METHOD**

Systematic review is a research method that passed structured investigation from relevant studies that selectively suitable with clear criteria to answer detail questions (Torgerson, 2003).

This systematic literature review included some steps that are determine the title, key words, inclusion & exclusion criteria that suitable or not, and databases, plan and learn the studies that relevant, included literature, books and articles, filter the references, refer the data into briefly information, summary the final report.

This systematic review aims to show the effectiveness using novels in learning process to improve the language skills in English with showed the benefit and the weakness or problem that may encounter while using novel, and also the solution to optimize the use of novel in learning process.

The researcher searched on Google Scholar between the 28<sup>th</sup> March, 2022 and the 6<sup>th</sup> April 2022 using the search keyword: “novel in ELT”, “benefit of using novel in ELT to improve language skills” and “the effectiveness of using novel in ELT”. And the researcher found around 17.400 results but only one of them talks about using novel but it only focus on improvement in one skill that is reading. There is one of them integrated the language English skills and abilities, but did not explain more about the problem that could occurs when bring novel in the classroom. Also

there is no solution for face the problem. So this systematic review is trying to explain the benefit and weakness or problem that may encounter while using novel in learning process, and also the solution to optimize the use of novel.

Inclusion criteria:

- Research that focused on novel in ELT
- Research show benefit and weakness of novel
- Academic published between 2009 - 2021

Exclusion criteria:

- studies before 2009
- studies with focus on the other literary works than novel

### ***Findings***

By some reviewed and previous studies, the findings could be concluded that novel brings some good impacts to learners. It helped learners to improve the four basic skills in English, such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills and abilities. It also could enrich their variety of vocabulary items, and grammatical structures, and also added their knowledge about linguistics. Novel could be a good motivation to learners, because the unique or interesting story that novel showed. It also make the learners could know the variety of culture in different place, it help them to appreciate and respect the differences of every culture around the world, and enrich their experience just by read the novel. The learners could know the description of setting place and time in the novel and could increase their creativity to imagine something in their mind, just by read novel. Novel also brings lesson in life that could help learners to grow in personal, by learning from mistake, dilemma, experiences in the story. By routine habit of read novel, the learners will get used with the way of native speaker communicate. It will help them in their speaking and writing skills. And novel could help them to build a good self-confidence.

By reading novel, the readers could get a lot of benefits. It will sharpen their language skills and wider their knowledge and the way of their thinking. Novel offers that benefits with an interesting way, by give unexpected story or plot, and life lesson or moral value that consist in the story in entertain way. Novel also could start the level of the interest in reading. By routinely read novel, it could make people will get used to read another books.

### ***Main Participants in Studies that Reviewed***

In total 11 reviewed studies, mostly the participants are students in college or in the other word, they who learn English as their Foreign Language (EFL class/ ESL



class). The rest participants are teacher, parents, and students in web-novel community.

### **Main Purposes of the Studies that Reviewed**

To measure the impact that brings by novel in learning activities and how big the impact could help learners to improve their skills and abilities.

### **Main Research Method Used in the Reviewed Study:**

1. Qualitative Approach
2. Data collection instrument, using focus group, semi-structured personal interviews

## **DISCUSSION**

Using novel to improve the language skills is one of the best methods. But from the findings, we could learn that it is also need to make as routine activities, in this case to optimize the good impact from novel. So it could beneficial to learners and improve their language skills in English.

The novel length and large amount of vocabulary always become the main problem we may encounter when using novel in learning activities. It needed a best managing time from the teacher to design a lesson plan, and also task and preparation to fix the problem.

However, the authentic material really suggested to ELT classes, remembering the effectiveness of learning that bring by authentic material. That could improve critical thinking, improving language skills (vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, writing, listening, speaking, and reading).

Some previous study had already guide the researcher to focus on the effectiveness of using novel in learning process to improve the language skills in English with make a difference with compile some findings from the previous study to become in one article in form of systematic review. The difference between the previous studies, in this article the researcher compile the benefit and weakness of novel while using in the learning process and also give the solution to face the problem, especially in ELT.

This article expected to help the future research to develop the research about novel in ELT with wider the scope and also show the problem and the solution in a way that close with reality nowadays.

The development of this new era such as internet and technology also could decrease the problems that occur when using novel in learning process. This new era mainly help people to provide an easier way to do anything in working.

Teacher could be creative with some application and social media, and also mixed with some media like bluetooth speaker, laptop, or tablet to apply novel in learning process at classroom. So the length and vocabulary in the novel could be deal with showing the glossary in the slide or play the new vocabulary with the Bluetooth speaker so the learners could practice their pronunciation in appropriate way. The development of this new era really could help teacher and learners to be more competent and improve their skill and creativity to use any tools that offer by this era, like application of dictionary in smartphone, or application of novel online.

This article also expected to be a reminder and solution to improve Indonesian interests in reading. By show how novel could offers a lot of benefits through interesting and entertaining way.

## CONCLUSION

The effectiveness of using novel in learning process to improve the language skills in English was proved by previous studies. But it is important to remember that novel also had the weakness, some solution already showed.

In a goal to achieve an effective learning, the learners and teacher need to consider the learning media, so it could help them to improve the language skills in English. Novel is one of the best learning media that offers a lot of benefit with the pleasing and enjoyable way.

No matter what the challenges that could bring by novel in learning process, by remembering a lot of the benefit is included in the novel, should make the teacher and learner bravely face the challenging that only lead them to be more competent and enrich their knowledge also improve their skill and abilities in English. By reading, people could be more knowledgeable, and competent in doing anything, thus everyone could contribute in every field to help the civilization of Indonesia.

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