CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

This chapter explains the background of the study, formulation of the problem, operational definitions, aim of the study, and significance of the study.

A. Background of the Study

Reading has long been recognized as essential for academic success, critical thinking development, and language acquisition. Research demonstrates that reading skills directly influence students' ability to analyze information, evaluate arguments, and construct knowledge (Afflerbach, 2022; Wang and Henderson, 2014). In language education specifically, reading serves multiple purposes: it builds vocabulary, exposes learners to grammatical structures, and develops comprehension strategies necessary for academic work (Mohseni et al., 2020). For English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, reading proficiency becomes even more critical because it affects overall language development and academic performance (Al Roomy, 2022). As literacy practices evolve with technology, understanding how students engage with different reading formats becomes crucial for supporting effective learning. This duality raises a critical question: *What drives student preferences in an era where digital and paper resources coexist?*

In Tasikmalaya, fifth-semester students in the English Education Department face particular challenges regarding reading materials. While digital resources have become increasingly available through university databases and open-access platforms, many students report difficulties accessing stable internet connections and suitable devices for extended reading sessions. At the same time, printed academic materials, especially recent international journals and specialized textbooks, remain expensive and difficult to obtain through local libraries. This creates a tension where students must navigate between the practical convenience of digital texts and the physical comfort and reliability of print materials. Previous informal observations at Siliwangi University suggest that students often make pragmatic choices about reading formats based on immediate circumstances rather

than clear preferences, yet little systematic research has explored these decision-making processes or the factors that shape them.

Recent international research reveals complex patterns in students' reading format preferences. Mizrachi et al. (2018) conducted a large-scale survey of 10,293 university students across multiple countries and found that the majority preferred print materials for academic reading, reporting better focus and information retention with physical texts. This preference held regardless of students' digital literacy levels or cultural backgrounds. Similarly, Almadhi and Alanazi (2024) studied EFL learners in Saudi Arabia and found that while e-books offered convenience and accessibility advantages, students still perceived printed materials as more effective for deep comprehension tasks. Their mixed-methods study revealed that reading medium affects not only comprehension outcomes but also students' attitudes toward reading itself. More recently, Larasati et al. (2023) investigated EFL students' reading preferences in Indonesia and found that students preferred digital texts primarily for practical reasons—portability, cost savings, and searchability—rather than for learning effectiveness.

These studies are relevant to the current research because they establish that format preferences involve multiple factors beyond simple convenience. However, they differ from the present study in important ways. Most existing research uses large-scale surveys that cannot capture the nuanced reasoning behind individual students' choices, and few studies focus specifically on Indonesian EFL contexts where infrastructural and economic constraints differ from Western settings. Additionally, previous research tends to treat "preference" as a fixed individual characteristic rather than exploring how students adaptively select formats based on different reading purposes, task demands, and situational constraints.

Despite growing research on reading format preferences, significant gaps remain. First, most studies focus on quantitative comparisons of format effectiveness rather than exploring the decision-making processes students actually use when choosing between print and digital texts. Second, limited research

examines EFL learners in Indonesian higher education contexts, where unique combinations of technological access, economic factors, and language learning demands create distinctive challenges. Third, few studies investigate how theoretical frameworks like Self-Determination Theory and Cognitive Load Theory can explain the practical reading choices of advanced EFL students who must balance multiple competing needs: academic requirements, personal comfort, financial constraints, and learning effectiveness.

This study addresses these gaps by investigating the reading preferences of fifth-semester English Education students at Siliwangi University in Tasikmalaya through in-depth interviews that explore not just what students prefer but why they make specific choices in specific situations. By applying Self-Determination Theory to understand motivational factors and Cognitive Load Theory to examine cognitive demands, this research contributes both theoretical insights and practical implications. The findings can help educators design more effective hybrid learning environments that leverage the distinct advantages of each format, guide university libraries in resource allocation decisions, and inform students themselves about strategic format selection for different learning tasks.

B. Formulation of the Problem

The research question of this study is "What are the factors influencing on students' preference for online reading or printed reading resources in the English Education Department?"

C. Operational Definitions

To avoid misunderstanding in this study, the researcher provides an operational definition of each keyword:

1. Students' Reading Preference

Reading preference in this study refers to fifth-semester English Education students' tendencies to select either online or printed formats when

engaging with academic materials. This preference is not treated as a fixed personal trait but as a decision-making process influenced by multiple factors including accessibility, cost, task requirements, physical comfort, and learning effectiveness. The study examines how students navigate these factors when choosing formats for different purposes—such as quick reference searches, deep reading for assignments, leisure reading, or preparing presentations. Data on preferences were collected through semi-structured interviews exploring students' actual practices and reasoning in their academic contexts at Siliwangi University.

2. Online Reading Resources

Online reading resources refer to digital texts accessed through electronic devices (smartphones, laptops, tablets) with or without internet connection. In this study's context, these include: (1) e-books in PDF or EPUB format accessed through applications like Google Books or dedicated e-readers, (2) academic journal articles downloaded from databases like Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, or institutional repositories, (3) digital course materials provided by lecturers through learning management systems, and (4) online novels or recreational texts accessed through websites or applications. These resources are characterized by features such as search functions, adjustable font sizes, electronic highlighting, and portability on single devices. Students at Siliwangi University typically access these materials through personal smartphones or shared computer facilities.

3. Offline/Printed Reading Resources

Printed reading resources refer to physical texts that students interact with directly without requiring electronic devices. In this study's context, these include: (1) printed textbooks purchased or borrowed from libraries, (2) photocopied journal articles or book chapters obtained through campus photocopy services, (3) printed handouts or materials distributed by lecturers, and (4) physical novels or books for recreational reading. These resources are

characterized by tangible qualities such as paper texture, the ability to physically annotate margins, fixed layouts, and the need for physical storage and transportation. At Siliwangi University, students access printed materials through the campus library, local bookstores, or campus photocopy centers.

D. Aim of the Study

This study aims to identify and analyze the main factors that influence fifth-semester students' preferences for online reading sources compared from printed reading sources in the English Education Department. By exploring these various aspects, such as accessibility, learning habits, sensory experiences, and academic demands, this study seeks to provide actionable insights for educators and policymakers to optimize resource allocation, improve curriculum design, and align pedagogical strategies with the evolving needs of students.

E. Significances of the Study

1. Theoretical Significance

This study offers methodological and contextual contributions to this field. Using a qualitative case study approach, this study identifies complex factors, such as cultural attitudes toward technology or satisfaction with the feel of printed books, that are often overlooked by quantitative surveys.

2. Practical Significance

The findings of this study have direct implications for teachers, students, and institutions. For teachers, understanding student preferences can inform the design of hybrid learning materials that balance digital affordances with the cognitive benefits of print media. For example, teachers can prioritize print text assignments for deep literary analysis while incorporating online tools for collaborative activities. For students, awareness of their preferences can improve learning habits, such as choosing formats that can improve focus or retention. In addition, universities can use these insights to optimize library

budgets, invest in accessible digital platforms, or advocate for policies that address infrastructure barriers. Ultimately, aligning the provision of resources with the needs of students can encourage engagement and academic success.

3. Empirical Significance

It can enhance the quality of learning, whether by reading online books or printed books, to achieve a better balance. It helps in making better decisions about how and where to spend time studying more efficiently towards academic goals. It also allows for easier adaptation to changes in reading methods, whether with printed books or online resources.