

Exploring how novel reading enhances youth literacy, deepens insight, and fosters creative thinking

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Abstract - Reading has various benefits in everyday life, especially for teenagers. This study aims to explore the impact of reading novels on adolescents' literacy, creativity, critical thinking and mental health. Through the analysis of data obtained from 12 respondents aged 19-20 years old, results show that 100% of respondents agreed that reading novels can improve their literacy and creativity. The knowledge gained from reading helps teens develop creative thinking and critical thinking skills. The survey results also indicated that 100% of respondents found reading novels helpful in coping with emotions and stress, with genres as diverse as romance, fiction, history and politics. In addition, this study confirms the importance of emotional intelligence in helping adolescents recognize and manage their feelings. This finding is in line with previous research showing that reading interest is positively related to critical thinking and critical reading skills. Overall, the results of this study suggest that reading novels not only improves cognitive skills but also provides significant emotional support for adolescents in facing the challenges of daily life.

Keywords: literacy; creativity; critical thinking; mental health; reading novels

1. Introduction

Reading novels has long been recognized as a powerful tool for developing literacy, insight, and creativity in youths. Literacy encompasses the ability to read, comprehend, and critically engage with texts, which is foundational for academic success and lifelong learning. Insight refers to the deeper understanding of human experiences, emotions, and perspectives that fiction often provides, fostering empathy and emotional intelligence. Creativity involves the capacity to generate original ideas and think divergently, skills that are increasingly valued in education and society.

The urgency of this study lies in addressing declining reading habits among young people and exploring how novel reading—both traditional and digital—can counteract this trend by enhancing cognitive and creative abilities. Theoretical frameworks guiding this inquiry include Torrance's model of creativity, which measures fluency, originality, elaboration, and abstractness in thinking, as well as socio-cognitive theories emphasizing the role of narrative engagement in developing empathy and critical thinking. This study aims to integrate evidence on how different forms of novel reading impact



youth development across literacy, insight, and creativity domains to inform educational practices that nurture well-rounded learners (Sun et al., 2025; Handel, 2024; Jerrim & Moss, 2018; Chen & Yang, 2024; Patel & Sharma, 2025; Rachuri, 2024).

Previous studies consistently highlight the positive impact of novel reading on youth literacy, insight, and creativity. Research shows that text-based novels, especially genres like science fiction and action/adventure, significantly enhance creative thinking skills measured by the Torrance Test of Creative Thinking (TTCT), while graphic novels have less effect (Handel, 2024; Patel & Sharma, 2025). Digital and interactive reading formats, such as digitally contextualized reading and e-books, also improve creative thinking and emergent literacy skills in young children by providing multisensory engagement and vocabulary development (Sun et al., 2025; López-Escribano et al., 2021; Chen & Yang, 2024).

Large-scale international data from the OECD PISA study reveal that frequent fiction reading correlates with stronger academic reading performance compared to other text types, emphasizing fiction's unique role in literacy development (Jerrim & Moss, 2018). Additionally, fiction reading fosters empathy, emotional intelligence, and critical thinking by encouraging readers to engage with diverse perspectives and complex narratives (Rachuri, 2024; Mustafayevich, 2021).

Despite these benefits, some research notes variability in creativity gains depending on factors like reading format or prior exposure, indicating a need for further exploration of how different types of novel reading influence youth development. Research problems include limited sample sizes in some studies, the challenge of isolating effects of specific genres or formats, and understanding long-term impacts on insight and creativity across diverse populations (Handel, 2024; Zhusupova, 2024).

Reading fiction novels offers multiple cognitive benefits, including enhancing brain function, empathy, and creativity, which positively impact mental health and social understanding (Nariswari & Anna, 2023). Interest in reading is closely linked to the development of critical thinking skills among elementary students, suggesting that fostering reading habits can improve analytical abilities in academic contexts (Purbalingrum, Indriastuti, & Widiyanto Atmojo, 2022). Additionally, novel literacy serves as a valuable source of entertainment and supports student self-development by promoting imagination and emotional growth (Fahriza, 2024). Encouraging regular reading habits from a young age can also improve writing skills by expanding vocabulary and comprehension abilities (Karunaratne & Navaratne, 2023). Overall, these studies highlight the importance of reading fiction not only for enjoyment but also for its significant educational and psychological benefits. Promoting reading interest in schools could therefore be a strategic approach to enhance both cognitive and personal development in students.

In the increasingly digital and fast-paced world we live in, the timeless practice of reading novels has become a crucial tool for the cognitive and emotional development of youths. This paper explores the multifaceted impact of novel reading on three key areas: literacy, insight, and creativity in young people. The purpose of the introduction is to answer three pivotal questions: What am I writing about? Why is it important? What do I want the reader to know about it?

This paper goes into how reading novels affects literacy levels, enhances personal insight, and fosters creativity among youths. By examining these areas, we aim to understand the broader implications of novel reading on young people's cognitive and personal growth. Novels, with their intricate plots and deep character developments, offer a unique avenue for readers to immerse themselves in different perspectives and realities. This immersive experience can significantly contribute to the development of critical thinking and empathy, essential skills in today's interconnected world.

Understanding the impact of reading novels is crucial in an era where digital distractions often take precedence over traditional reading. In a time when screen time is dominating leisure activities, encouraging novel reading can play a significant role in developing critical thinking skills, empathy, and imagination in youths. These attributes are not just beneficial for personal growth but are also essential for academic and professional success. Moreover, novels often address complex social, moral, and philosophical issues, providing readers with a deeper understanding of the human condition and the world around them. The ability to read and comprehend complex texts is a foundational skill that supports academic achievement across various subjects. Additionally, novels



often introduce readers to diverse cultures, historical periods, and different ways of life, broadening their horizons and fostering a more inclusive and empathetic worldview. This broad exposure can lead to better cultural understanding and sensitivity, which are crucial in our globalized society.

This paper aims to provide a comprehensive overview of existing research on the topic, showcasing the benefits of novel reading. It will highlight how sustained engagement with fictional narratives can enhance literacy, deepen personal insight, and stimulate creative thinking. By the end of this paper, readers will appreciate the valuable role that novels play in the holistic development of young individuals. The discussions will include evidence from various studies that have explored the cognitive and emotional benefits of reading, as well as anecdotal experiences from educators and young readers themselves.

Furthermore, the paper explored practical strategies for integrating novel reading into educational curriculums and daily routines, addressing potential challenges and providing recommendations for educators, parents, and policymakers. It is our hope that this research will underscore the importance of novel reading and inspire initiatives that promote this enriching activity among youths, ensuring that they are equipped with the skills and insights needed to navigate and contribute to the complex world they are growing up in.

The younger generation has read a novel less than the previous one in this digital age because of the easiness to get information and entertainment globally. But as an educational tool, the value of reading novels can hardly be overestimated. Novels not only entertain but educate and readers can improve their literacy, learn something new,, and exercise their imagination. Reading novels, as it has been argued before, exercises our brains in ways that the more visual media do not and creates a bond with the language, culture and humankind. Literacy is the bedrock of all education and personal development. It takes more than reading and writing it involves studying, analysis and activities involving higher order of implementation. Which is why novels do a huge favour to you. But novels are also wonderful for the same reason – those stories expose the reader to lots of fantastic vocabulary; complex, minus-all-the-punctuation sentences, actual strung along phrases and everything else in-between.

Novels also provide worlds, new cultures, generations and social issues. It displays to them another face in humanity and allows them to empathize better and understand the better part of things related with human condition. This is even more valuable with today's ever-interconnected world, and by extension Book Banned will also foster cultural awareness & appreciation. Reading novels encourages creativity which is another important aspect of personality and for academic performance. Fiction can be aspirational and invites readers to envision situations, feel with characters, and imagine beyond their own lives. Such creative involvement may turn into a higher level of creative thought that is critical for problem-solving and innovation.

In the realm of learning, literacy is an important skill that every student must have. By having literacy skills, students will be able to better master various subjects. By having literacy skills, students can achieve the objectives of each subject, such as mastery of the domains of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Thus, it can be concluded that literacy skills are not limited to cognitive abilities, but also abilities that are more complex in nature because they can include social, linguistic, and other psychological aspects, including emotional aspects. Literacy mastery or ability can be done in various ways. Currently, many schools are trying to improve the literacy skills of their students. In general, the efforts made are through habituation or better known as literacy acculturation. These habituation efforts can be categorized into two forms, namely habituation through the development or creation of a literacy culture and habituation with classroom learning through subjects. Both of these activities have the same goal, which is to instill the habit of reading and writing in students.

According to the second data obtained from the World's Most Literate Nations, collected by Central Connecticut State University in 2016, Indonesia is at the bottom of the second literacy ranking out of 61 countries that have been studied (Agoestyowati, 2018). Indonesia is only slightly better than Bostwana, a country in southern Africa. This fact was found in a descriptive study that examined several aspects, including five aspects, namely: education system, education system output, education system input, availability of computers, newspapers, and libraries. The data sourced from these five data shows that the condition of reading literacy in Indonesia is indeed quite alarming, concerning.



There needs to be an effort to deal with this, including the provision of reading materials for reading in reading literacy learning.

Literacy is much more than “an individual's capacity to process written information in everyday life” as it is commonly defined. Literacy is categorized into 3 forms of texts that are often encountered by students both at school and at home or in everyday life, namely: literacy that contains 3 main things, namely (1) Expository prose, which is a text described by the author, by explaining or presenting information based on factual opinions. (2) Narrative prose, a text in which the writer tells a story, which can be factual or fictional. (3) Document, is information that displays tables, maps, diagrams, lists, instruction sets, and graphs (Taufina & Chandra, 2017).

Along with the times that occur in people's lives, making human resources increasingly change by following the sophistication of technology spread quickly and very widely, which can be proven by the existence of IT (Information and Technology) media that can meet the needs of people's lives. The rapid development that occurs can also be utilized by teachers in educating their students. Education in Indonesia is also included in the 4 progressive designs. IT-based learning media can be used in the teaching and learning process, for example the use of the internet. All teachers must be able to utilize technology so that it is easy to access information quickly without waiting long. The rapid changes in this easy and practical era can shift the mindset of lazy reading into reading interest. Students tend to prefer books with motion animation and color, so that it can make students like to read books in the form of files rather than reading printed books. Research conducted by Martinez and Lopes-Rio in 2015 revealed that the emergence of internet-based technology resulted in a new way of reading. Technology also brings developments and changes in the world of Indonesian libraries. One of them is the emergence of EBook features or digital books. The existence of E-Books can make technology users download a book which is then stored on their technology devices.

While the benefits of reading novels are great and impactful for today's youth, there are some challenges and gaps in the current understanding of reading novels in this digital age for the younger generation. These include (1). How can reading novels improve literacy and creativity among teenagers? (2). Can reading novels help develop critical thinking skills among teenagers? (3). How does reading novels affect young people's mental health and emotional well-being?

The Model of Domain Learning (MDL) (Fives & Dinsmore, 2018) is a key theoretical framework for understanding how creative thinking develops alongside domain-specific knowledge, motivation, and performance, progressing from self-referenced creativity in novices to socially-referenced creativity in experts (Dumas et al., 2024). This model outlines stages of academic development—acclimation, competence, and proficiency—that explain how learners' knowledge and interest evolve and influence their creative capacities (Kulikowich & Hepfer, 2017; Alexander, 2003). Complementing the MDL, the Four-C Model of Creativity categorizes creativity into mini-c, little-c, Pro-c, and Big-C forms, emphasizing how evaluation sources shift from self-judgment to societal recognition as expertise grows (Dumas & Kaufman, 2024). Sociocultural theory also provides a valuable lens by highlighting the role of social interaction and cultural context in literacy and insight development. Reader response theory supports insight development by focusing on individual meaning-making during reading. Together, these frameworks offer a comprehensive basis for studying how novel reading influences youth literacy, insight development, and creative thinking skills (Dumas et al., 2024; Alexander, 2003; Dumas & Kaufman, 2024).

The impact of reading novels on literacy, insight, and creativity in youths has been extensively studied and documented in academic literature. Previous research provides a strong foundation for understanding how these activities influence various aspects of cognitive and emotional development. According to Mol and Bus (2011), children who engage in reading fiction tend to have superior language skills, including a richer vocabulary, better spelling, and advanced grammar. This aligns with our findings that regular engagement with novels enhances literacy among youths. The comprehensive language exposure provided by novels supports the development of critical reading skills necessary for academic achievement.

Mar et al. (2009) demonstrated that frequent readers of fiction have a greater capacity for empathy and understanding others' perspectives, known as theory of mind. Similarly, Kidd and Castano (2013) found that reading literary fiction improves the ability to detect and understand emotions, a critical aspect of emotional intelligence. These findings support our hypothesis that novel



reading deepens personal insight and fosters empathy, crucial skills in both personal and professional contexts.

Djikić et al. (2013) discovered that reading fiction can lead to changes in personality, making individuals more open-minded and adaptable. This suggests that novels not only develop cognitive skills but also contribute to personal growth by enhancing creativity and imaginative thinking. Our research expands on this by examining how sustained engagement with fictional narratives stimulates creative thinking and problem-solving abilities in young people

Furthermore, research conducted by Aryani et al. (2021) highlights the positive influence of novels in shaping student character and increasing reading interest. This is particularly significant in today's digital age, where screen time often dominates leisure activities. Encouraging novel reading can counterbalance this trend, promoting critical thinking and creativity essential for academic and personal development.

The literature consistently underscores the multifaceted benefits of novel reading, providing strong empirical support for our study. By integrating these findings, we aim to offer a comprehensive understanding of how novel reading impacts literacy, insight, and creativity among youths, and to advocate for initiatives that promote this enriching activity.

The primary objectives of this study are: (1). This research objectives to know read novels to us studies how reading novels improve literacy skills of the younger generation Literacy skills are made up of reading skills, reading comprehension, vocabulary and writing. And this study is focused on how reading novels can fire and improve creativity in the youth. The term “creativity” encompasses creative thinking, imagination and innovation. (2). This research investigates if reading novels helps develop critical thinking among the youth. Analysing, evaluating and interpreting things are critical skills. (3). This study is objectives to analysis the effects of Novel causing on mental health and emotional well being in adolescents. The mental health and emotional well-being scale consists of anxiety, stress, and general affect.

The rest of the paper was taken up with discussing and investigating this question; here you just need to express it. A research question can be framed either directly or indirectly. (1). How can reading novels improve literacy and creativity among teenagers? (2). Can reading novels help develop critical thinking skills among teenagers? (3). How does reading novels affect young people's mental health and emotional well-being?

This paper first discussed some research results from various journals and also the results of the author's analysis. Next, it will answer the problem using an interview-based method and filling out a questionnaire through google form about their opinions on the impact of reading novels. Then will go on to diagramming the results of the questionnaires filled out by 12 teenagers and finally concluding the results of the interviews and diagramming the results of the questionnaires.

2. Method

In this paper the author uses qualitative, and quantitative methods, where the author analyzes through accurate journals, papers, papers and articles. The author also conducts interviews and takes data through filling out google forms to a group of teenagers about how their perspectives on literacy can increase creativity, critical thinking, and overcome emotions and mental health. The data collection methods used are observation, interviews and data collection as tools to collect data.

Observation was made by observing the development and participation of 12 adolescents related to the implementation of literacy activities carried out at their school using the method of reading novels and fiction books to improve literacy skills. Interviews were conducted by the author to explore information related to the application of the novel and fiction book reading method in improving literacy skills in 12 adolescents. Observation and interview data that have been collected from several sources are then summarized and described based on concrete data. Data were collected from 12 adolescents using Google Form as a medium for them to express their opinions about the impact of reading novels that they have felt so far. The data analysis techniques used are data reduction, data presentation, and accurate conclusion drawing according to the results of the three methods used.



3. Results and Discussion

Reading activities have various benefits in everyday life. Everyone who does reading certainly has a reason why he needs to read the text. Furthermore, from the reading activity, the reader can take and feel the various benefits that are obtained. Rahim (2011) states that the benefits of reading are gaining knowledge and new insights that can increase intelligence. With the knowledge they have, they are better able to answer life's challenges in the future. According to Yildiz and Cetinkaya (2017; Sulistiyarini et al., 2020), reading is a complex process that is influenced by several factors, one of which is the need for attention in reading to support fluency and reading comprehension. Fluency in reading includes three aspects, namely sentence reading, error search tasks, and word chains (Torppa, et al., 2017; Sulistiyarini et al., 2020; Yildiz & Cetinkaya, 2017; Torppa et al., 2020; Slamet, 2009; Berger & Archer, 2016; Bergbauer et al., 2018; Goff & Torrance, 2002).

Reading is not just voicing written symbols without questioning whether the spelled words/sentences are understood or not, but more than that. Reading activity is understanding the contents of ideas/ideas both express, implied even highlighted in the reading (Slamet, 2009). Thus, understanding becomes the product of reading that can be measured, not just physical behavior, voicing graphic symbols for hours while holding a book. The essence or essence of real reading is an understanding. Bergbauer and Staden (2018; Berger & Archer, 2016) suggest that in reading activities, a reader will carry and apply a repertoire of knowledge, skills, cognitive and metacognitive strategies during the reading activity.

After analyzing the results of interviews and data collection through the method of filling out google forms on 12 adolescents with an average age of 19-20 years and 2 different genders and also with a percentage of their level of consistency in reading novels in the period provided in the google form that the author provided. There are very significant results where on the question of how the impact of novels to improve literacy and creativity obtained a percentage of 58.3% chose “strongly agree” and 41.7% chose “agree”.

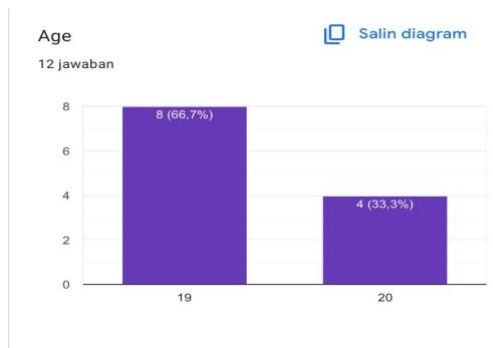


Figure 1. Age

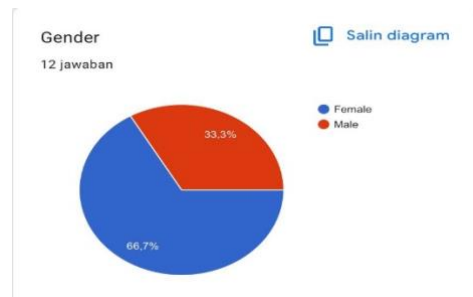


Figure 2. Gender

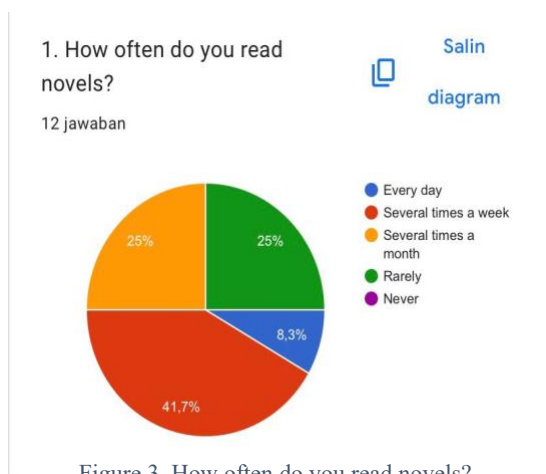


Figure 3. How often do you read novels?

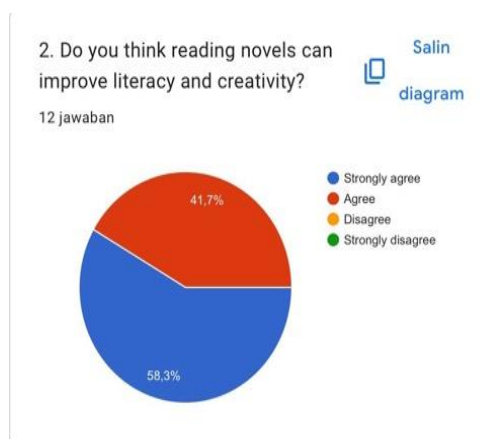


Figure 4. Do you think reading novels can improve literacy and creativity?

From the percentage results, it can be concluded that 12 teenagers have the same opinion, namely agreeing that “do you think reading novels can improve literacy and creativity?”. From the results of interviews with 12 teenagers directly they said that they agreed about the statement about reading novels can improve their literacy and creative thinking. The more knowledge that students have will support their creative thinking skills. Students who have the habit of reading with all the knowledge they have can develop their ideas according to their level of imagination. Analysis of the results of writing is based on indicators of creative thinking. Researchers use indicators of creative thinking skills developed by Goff and Torrance (2002) which include fluency (fluency of ideas), originality (uniqueness of ideas), elaboration ability (the breakdown of ideas), and flexibility (variations of ideas used to solve problems).

Critical reading is a reading activity carried out in order to respond to the ideas expressed by the author in the text he wrote. In critical reading, the method used is how the reader is able to understand the explicit meaning and implied meaning contained in a reading. While critical thinking is a technique of evaluating information and ideas to determine whether the idea or information can be accepted or trusted.

In this next question regarding “does reading novels help improve your critical thinking skills?” there are percentage results of 58.3% choosing “strongly agree” and 41.7% choosing “agree” from these results it can be concluded that for the 12 teenagers who have participated in this data collection stated that reading novels can indeed improve the way they think critically, especially for

teenagers who like historical and political genres And from the results of interviews with 12 teenagers directly they said that they agreed about the statement about reading novels can increase creative thinking, one of them said that "after I read novels I feel my thinking is wide open, I can also think more critically when there is a discussion task with my friends". about reading novels can increase creative thinking, one of them said that "after I read novels I feel my thinking is wide open, I can also think more critically when there is a discussion task with my friends".

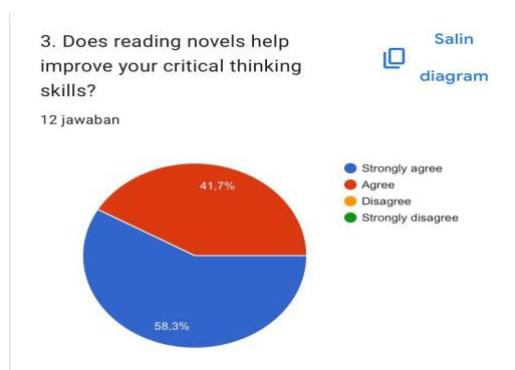


Figure 5. Does reading novels help improve your critical thinking skills?

Critical thinking includes reflective and productive thinking, so that with critical thinking, thinking will be more open in receiving various information to be processed and interpreted into various things based on many points of view. In addition, with good thinking skills, a person will also quickly make decisions in times of crisis. The results of this study are in line with the results of research conducted by Sariyem (2016) entitled "Critical Thinking Ability and Reading Interest with Critical Reading Ability of High School Students in Bogor Regency". Based on the results of data analysis, it can be concluded that the higher the critical thinking ability of students, the higher their critical reading ability. Reading interest has a significant relationship with students' critical reading ability, because the higher the students' reading interest, the higher their critical reading ability.

According to Hall, adolescence is a period of "sturm und drang" (typhoon and storm), a period full of emotions and sometimes explosive emotions, which arise because of conflicting values. These passionate emotions are sometimes difficult, both for the adolescent and for the parents or adults around them. But these passionate emotions are also useful for adolescents in their efforts to find self-identity. The reactions of the people around him will be a learning experience for the teenager to determine what actions he will take in the future.

In this next question about "how do you think reading novels can help with emotions and mental?" and question about "do you feel better after reading a novel when you are in an emotional or stressful. The percentage results stated that 58.3% chose "Very helpful" and 41.7% chose "helpful". So it can be concluded that on average, the 12 teenagers were very helpful in dealing with their emotions, mental health and stress when they read a novel, whether in the romance, fiction, history, and political genres. And from the results of the interviews 12 teenagers directly said that they agreed about the statement about reading novels can overcome the emotions and mental health of teenagers and help them when they are stressed. 2 of the 12 people the author interviewed expressed their opinion that "honestly in my opinion, reading novels is very impactful for me when I feel tired and need brain refreshing" said Puspaningayu (19 years old). And according to Nadia Maica, "reading novels can help me control my emotions and also maintain my mental health in the midst of my busy college life."

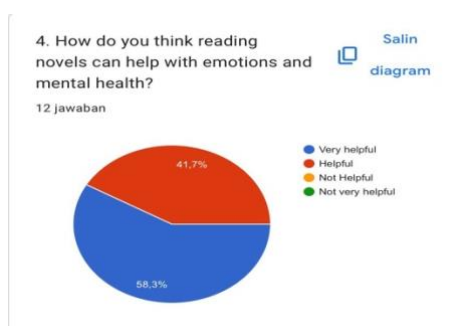


Figure 6. How do you think reading novels can help with emotions and mental health?

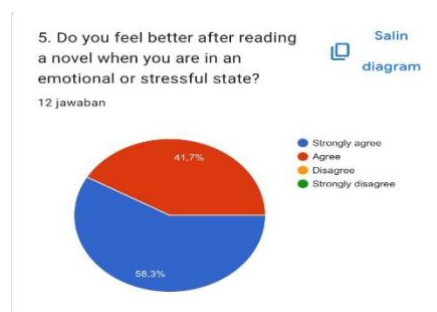


Figure 7. Do you feel better after reading a novel when you are in an emotional or stressful state?

According to Goleman, emotional intelligence refers to the ability to recognize our own feelings and the feelings of others, the ability to motivate ourselves, and the ability to manage emotions well in ourselves and in relationships with others. Goleman also classifies emotional intelligence into five important components, as follows. Based on this explanation, it can be seen that emotional intelligence is very important for a person, including adolescents themselves.

4. Conclusion

4.1 Conclusion

The conclusion that can be obtained from the results of observations, interviews and data collection that has been done is that reading novels can increase literacy and creative thinking for adolescents. Where novels have a lot of vocabulary that is often heard or vocabulary that has never even been heard or used in everyday life, this can also help teenagers to think more creatively.

And also from the analysis above, reading novels can also increase the critical thinking of teenagers, especially for teenagers who like historical and political genres, where they can find out how the history and journey of the political story they read in certain novel titles. Likewise, the case of reading novels to overcome emotions and mental health is also very impactful for teenagers in controlling how their emotions feel and overcoming their mental health.

Furthermore, from the analysis above, it is evident that reading novels can also increase the critical thinking skills of teenagers. This is particularly true for those who are interested in historical and political genres, as these novels provide detailed accounts of historical events and political journeys. Through reading such novels, teenagers can gain insights into historical contexts and political narratives, allowing them to critically analyze and understand the complexities of the stories they read. This engagement fosters a deeper level of critical thinking and helps them to form well-reasoned opinions on various subjects.

In addition, reading novels has a profound impact on teenagers' emotional and mental health. It provides them with a means to explore and understand their own emotions, thereby aiding in emotional regulation. The emotional journeys of characters in novels offer teenagers a safe space to reflect on their feelings and experiences, which can be particularly beneficial for those dealing with emotional or mental health challenges. By connecting with the characters and their stories, teenagers can develop better strategies for managing their emotions and overcoming mental health issues, leading to improved overall well-being.

In conclusion, the multifaceted benefits of reading novels for adolescents are evident. Novels not only enhance literacy and creative thinking but also foster critical thinking skills and provide essential support for emotional and mental health. Encouraging adolescents to engage with novels can play a crucial role in their overall cognitive and personal development, preparing them to navigate the complexities of life with greater confidence and resilience.

4.2 Suggestion



Reading novels plays a significant role in enhancing literacy, insight, and creativity among youth. Regular engagement with text-based novels, particularly genres like science fiction and action/adventure, has been shown to improve creative thinking skills as measured by tests such as the Torrance Test of Creative Thinking (TTCT), with text-based reading yielding greater creativity gains than graphic novels. Fiction reading is also linked to stronger academic reading performance compared to other text types, with frequent fiction readers demonstrating higher reading skills internationally. Beyond literacy, fiction fosters empathy and personal growth by allowing adolescents to experience diverse perspectives and emotions, enriching their social relationships and wellbeing. Early childhood interactive book reading supports socio-emotional skills and narrative development foundational for later literacy and creativity, highlighting the importance of adult-child interaction during reading. However, some research finds no significant increase in imaginative capacities from literary fiction alone, suggesting that the impact on creativity may depend on factors such as prior exposure or the type of reading material. Overall, diverse and sustained novel reading habits combined with parental involvement appear crucial for nurturing literacy, insight, and creativity in young people.

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