The Role of Dee Lestari's Novel " *Rapijali*: Seeking, Becoming, Returning" in Increasing Reading Skills in the Digital Era

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Abstract

In the era of rapid technological development, maintaining interest in reading traditional literary works such as novels has become increasingly challenging. Despite the abundance of research on reading habits, studies examining how contemporary novels can sustain and enhance reading interest in the digital era remain limited. This research aims to explore the role of novels in fostering reading interest in the digital era, focusing on how literary elements can engage modern readers. This study employs a literature review method with a pragmatic approach, which examines literary works as tools for conveying specific messages or intentions to readers. The object of this research is Rapijali: Seeking, Becoming, Returning by Dee Lestari, a novel with the potential to stimulate reading interest across various age groups. Data were collected through intensive reading and note-taking techniques, followed by qualitative analysis to identify key themes and messages. The findings reveal that Rapijali conveys moral values such as hard work, mutual respect, and humility, subtly influencing readers' perspectives. Additionally, the novel's accessible language, engaging storyline, and serialized format contribute to its appeal, making it an effective medium for promoting reading habits in the digital age. These results imply that well-crafted literary works can still play a significant role in cultivating a culture of reading, even amid technological distractions.

INTRODUCTION

Has the phrase "Reading is the Window of the World" been increasingly forgotten by the public? Reading habits in Indonesia are currently unsatisfactory, as reported by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which states that the reading interest of the Indonesian people is no more than 0.001% (Pitri & Sofia, 2022). This means that, out of 1,000 people, only one person has an interest in reading. Supporting this concerning data, a study conducted by Miller and McKenna (2016) also revealed that Indonesia was ranked 60th out of 61 countries

worldwide in terms of literacy. Similarly, the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey in 2022 placed Indonesia in the 71st position out of 81 countries in reading competence (OECD, 2023). These results imply that Indonesia is faced with a serious literacy problem, which requires comprehensive efforts to improve reading habits across society. Without immediate intervention, this low reading culture may further hinder the country's educational development and global competitiveness.

Grabe and Yamashita (2022) define reading as an active and complex cognitive process that involves decoding symbols, constructing meaning, and integrating lower-level skills like word recognition with higher-level comprehension processes. This implies that reading is not merely a mechanical act of vocalizing written text; rather, it is a cognitively demanding activity that requires the simultaneous engagement of multiple processes, including critical thinking, visual perception, and metacognition. Unlike adults, who treat reading as an automatic and unconscious process stored in implicit memory, children experience a more demanding and deliberate learning phase where each step such as recognizing letters, decoding words, and constructing meaning requires conscious effort and repeated practice before fluency is achieved (Wolfe, 2001). This distinction implies that learning to read, especially for children, must be approached as a gradual, scaffolded, and consistent process.

Educators can encourage positive reading habits to improve the student's comprehension skills and reinforce the automaticity needed for effective reading in the future. Reading habits can be built by engaging with daily texts commonly met, for example, newspapers, magazines, journals, storybooks, letters, and novels. Novels are complex and immersive works of fiction that offer rich narratives, deep character development, and intricate plot structures (Hawthorn, 1997). They often explore a wide range of themes, from personal experiences to societal issues, making them a valuable resource for learning. Keraf (2005) emphasizes that language style is a characteristic of a writer in expressing their feelings through language, which is important in narrating a story and directing emotional drives. Exposing students to various literary works such as novels and short stories can sharpen their linguistic competence. Rosdiana (2024) highlights that modern short stories use practical, contemporary diction that aligns with the general understanding of readers, helping to develop children's imagination and language knowledge while avoiding less common or archaic terms. Viany et al. (2023) identified various linguistic styles in a novel, including comparison (such as simile, personification, symbolism, and depersonalization), contrast (such as sarcasm and cynicism), repetition (such as epanalepsis and epistrophe), and eponymous connections, providing a deeper understanding of language use and writing style in the work.

Furthermore, reading novels encourages internalized positive character development. Faizah et al. (2024) emphasize that novels can be integrated into 5.0-era learning, utilizing digital literacy to teach valuable didactic values, such as discipline, creativity, and social responsibility. Fajar (2023) found that reading novels positively influences students' motivation by strengthening friendships, increasing enthusiasm for learning and worship, encouraging the pursuit of dreams, and fostering a stronger attachment to the environment. Arosida and Septiyani (2024) noted that cultural aspects, such as coffee-drinking traditions, mutual assistance, and care for others, are often depicted in novels. Ikhwan (2021) revealed that readers of novels learn moral lessons about family care, political life, and the consequences of betrayal driven by greed. Rusydi (2022) highlighted that reading novels served practical benefits, such as satisfying intellectual demands, enhancing intrapersonal intelligence, reducing stress, and stimulating imagination, while also fostering a greater interest in further knowledge and improving logical-mathematical intelligence. Key factors driving reading interest

include access to diverse, engaging reading materials, a strong curiosity about facts and theories, and a comfortable reading environment. In conclusion, novels not only provide entertainment but also offer numerous cognitive, social, and emotional benefits, making them an essential tool in both education and personal growth.

One of the most popular novel writers is Dewi Lestari, better known by the pen name Dee Lestari. She is a Bandung-born singer, songwriter, and novelist who first entered the entertainment world in 1995. Dee Lestari joined the music group Trio Rida Sita Dewi at the beginning of her career. Because he had a talent for writing since elementary school, he tried his luck in other fields by releasing his first novel, Supernova: Knights, Princesses, and Falling Stars, in 2001. This release attracted the attention of the general public. Seven thousand books were sold out in just two weeks after its release. Since then, Dee Lestari has been better known as a novelist who often writes unique and interesting hit novels. Many titles of Dee Lestari novels are of interest to the public, such as Supernova, Paper Boat, Rectoverso story collection, Coffee Philosophy Prose and Poetry Collection, Aroma Karsa, and many more. Some have even been made into films, namely Paper Boat and Coffee Philosophy.

Each novelist has its characteristics and attractions. Dee is no exception. One of his characteristics is that several novels he wrote were released in sequels or sequels to previous books. For example, the Supernova sequel, which until 2016 has consisted of 6 books. In addition to the Supernova sequel, another example of a sequel novel by Dee Lestari is *Rapijali*, which consists of 3 books, each titled Menseek, Become, and Kembali, released in 2021. This sequel tells the story of a young girl named Ping who lives in Batu Karas Beach and has a unique musical talent. Ping tries to develop his potential by pitting Fate against the city, even though he has to sacrifice the calm, peace, and even friends in Batu Karas that he has had all along. Eventually, Ping realized that he didn't want any of this. He decided to return to Batu Karas. However, when he returned, it turned out that everything was no longer the same.

In brief, previous research has emphasized the numerous benefits of exposing students to novel reading. However, the challenge of fostering reading interest in the digital age, where digital media often takes precedence over traditional reading, remains largely unexplored. There is a noticeable gap in understanding how novels, as traditional literary forms, continue to captivate modern readers, particularly younger generations who are accustomed to constant screen time and technological engagement. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by examining the role of the novel "*Rapijali*: Searching, Becoming, Returning" by Dewi Lestari in stimulating reading interest, with a focus on how and what role the novel has in increasing reading interest for readers in the midst of the onslaught of digital-based reading media development. The findings of this research hold significant implications for enhancing the relevance of literature in educational contexts and on digital platforms, offering valuable insights into how novels can be used to rekindle enthusiasm for reading in today's society.

RESEARCH METHOD

The type of approach used in this study is a pragmatic approach. The definition of the pragmatic approach, according to Gillespie et al. (2024), is a model approach that focuses on the role of readers as welcome and appreciators of literary works. Another definition is also conveyed by Wahyudi (2008), who argues that the pragmatic approach is a literary study that discusses concretely the role

of readers in receiving, understanding, and appreciating literary works that are present in front of readers will have the communication power caused by the content conveyed through language. Through this paper, the author wants to emphasize observations on aspects of authorship, such as writing style, language or word style, choice of words or diction, and so on. So, the object of this study is the novel itself. The author wants to know the extent to which the above aspects can affect a person's interest in reading, especially for readers who have finished reading this *Rapijali* sequel.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Synopsis of the Novel "*Rapijali*: Seeking, Becoming, Returning"

The first book of this sequel is "*Rapijali*: Searching," which tells the story of the peaceful life of a girl on Batu Karas Beach named Ping. Ping lives with his grandfather in a house on the banks of the Cijulang River, which is filled with musical instruments. Ping does have a special musical talent. He spent his childhood until adolescence with a friend, Oding. Ping is also surrounded by people who love him, like family. However, deep down, Ping harbors anxiety about his future. His special musical talent has no container. Ping didn't dare to aspire. He convinced himself that there was no more peaceful and quiet life than the life he was currently living in Batu Karas. It turns out that the thought is wrong. Ping's life was upside down when he had to move to Jakarta and live with the family of the gubernatorial candidate. Ping has to face new schools, new friends, and new challenges. After some time adapting to a new environment, he finally realized that his life was not as simple as he thought.

The story of Ping starting his new life in the metropolis continues in the second book, "*Rapijali*: Becoming." For Ping, Jakarta is no longer like a prison. Ping began to get an idea of the life he wanted. He has new friends, new dreams, and new love. The similarity of hobbies made Ping and his friends at Sekolah Pradipa Bangsa intend to form a band called *Rapijali*. New challenges also came. The Indonesian Idol Band competition they participated in required Ping to work hard to create songs. The *Rapijali* Band, which is the source of Ping's happiness, has created various conflicts that are out of his control. The popularity they have achieved today is a double-edged sword. Various hidden feelings among the *Rapijali* personnel also overshadowed their journey throughout the competition. Meanwhile, the secrets of the past that are slowly starting to unfold bring the family of the governor candidate to a critical point. Ping has never felt so uneasy. Many conflicts came to him, one after another. Will Ping be able to weather the storm for himself and *Rapijali*?

Ping's life, which began to be colored by various conflicts that he had never expected before, is told in more detail in the third book, "*Rapijali*: Return." Eight years after he first set foot in Jakarta, Ping succeeded in becoming a singer who dominated the Indonesian music scene. At the height of his career, a dark shadow lurked over Ping's success and haunted him from within. At its lowest point,

there is a glimmer of longing for his old life in Batu Karas, including the feeling of longing for his old friend, Oding. Meanwhile, the Grand Reunion of the Pradipa School of the nation reunited the *Rapijali* band that had been scattered. A stage invitation forced them to regroup. Unexpectedly, the process they had to go through to prepare for the stage was far from simple. The conflict they used to face was repeated as if it did not allow them to get back together. Ping, with his determination, tried to stay and continue the life he was currently living. He is determined to live life to the best of his ability. Even if he decides to return to Batu Karas, Ping realizes that everything is no longer the same.

The Urgency of Selecting the Novel "*Rapijali*: Seeking, Becoming, Returning"

The main reason for choosing one of Dee Lestari's novels as research material is because the author has a penchant for reading, especially the type of novel literary works. Once at the laziest point to read, the author seemed to rediscover his old spirit when he was rewarded with a set of the latest trilogy novels by Dee Lestari entitled *Rapijali*. The novel "*Rapijali*: Seeking, Becoming, Returning" is the first trilogy novel that the author has graduated from since his hiatus from reading novels in 2020-2022. Although, according to some people, reading novels is boring and does not produce anything, the author thinks the opposite. Reading novels is fun and not dull. In fact, for writers, reading novels is also a form of entertaining themselves when they are tired of work.

Writing Style

The novel "*Rapijali*: Seeking, Becoming, Returning" by Dee Lestari is a novel with a narrative writing style. Texts written using a narrative style usually present a story with an orderly sequence of time and events. The events told can happen or are just the author's work. The purpose of using narrative style in a text is to attract the reader's attention and provide an aesthetic experience, adding knowledge, insight, and information to the reader. The entire storyline, characters, and conflicts in the novel "*Rapijali*: Seeking, Becoming, Returning" are purely the work of the author, Dee Lestari, except for the setting where Batu Karas Beach and the Cijulang River are located in Pangandaran Regency, West Java.

Examined from the side of the storyline, Dee Lestari uses a progressive plot or a forward plot. This type of plot is used in events or stories that are told sequentially from start to finish. The flow used does look ordinary and nothing special. However, for the reader of the novel, this is very helpful in understanding every event that occurs. Usually, each section or chapter in a novel is interconnected and is a continuation of the previous chapter or book. Dee Lestari uses a progressive storyline by dividing her story into three books with three different titles: 1) Seeking, 2) Becoming, and 3) Returning. Another example can be found in the first book "*Rapijali*: Searching" in chapter 2, titled "Ping," at the end of the plot, tells the figure of Toto, a member of a legendary band of Pangandaran, D'Brehoh, who is spending the night at the restaurant owned by the Oding family. Toto's story continues in chapter 3 with the title "The Strongest Man," which begins with a description of Toto's figure who turns out to be dizzy after consuming five sips of beer before he finally leaves Oding's restaurant. Novels that use this type of plot are also classified as light novels because the reader does not need high concentration to understand the storyline being read.

Language Style or Words

Language style is how an author chooses and uses diction, which makes a literary work more interesting and beautiful to feel. Simply put, the function of words is to embellish a meaning and

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message in a sentence. Words are divided into several types, such as simile words, comparative words, personified words, satirical words, hyperbolic words, and irony words. The use of words in the novel *Rapijali* can be found in the second book, "*Rapijali*: Becoming," in chapter 1 with the title "Bakti Sancaya" on page 7. The sentence reads, "The woman's fingers are firmly and sharply like a rain of knives on the keys." The words used in the sentence are words that are similar. The parable of the "rain of knives" describes the woman's confidence in playing the piano. Another type of words that Dee Lestari uses in her story, namely the metaphorical words can also be found in chapter 7 with the title "Managing Secrets" on page 74 of the second book "*Rapijali*: Becoming. The sentence reads, "Ardi was sucked into a cloudy vortex that made the child feel like he was being loved by dark clouds wherever he went." The phrase "loved by dark clouds" can be interpreted as someone who is being overshadowed by something dark and can cause anxiety.

The use of several words in this novel is unaware of its presence by the readers. The reader will continue reading without examining the words used in each sentence one by one. However, indirectly, the reader accepts a new type of unfamiliar vocabulary that is still acceptable for its uniqueness. Readers also seem to be able to absorb, connect, and understand the storyline conveyed even though some of the words displayed are replaced with slightly different language styles. Words use words that humans do not commonly use in daily communication. For some readers, the existence of words inserted in a reading is its own attraction because of its uniqueness.

Word Selection or Diction

The Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language defines diction as the right choice of words and is in line with the purpose so that readers can understand the text being read. Keraf argues that diction is the meaning of words used to convey an idea that is in accordance with the situation. Another opinion was conveyed by Enre, who stated that diction is the ability to use words appropriately to represent thoughts and treatments to be conveyed which are composed in certain sentence patterns. Based on some of the definitions above, diction is the choice of words to express the content of the author's thoughts or ideas so that there are no errors in interpreting the text read. The choice of words or diction is important because it can adjust sentences and express the author's sentences. Choosing the right diction can help readers build their imagination while the reader is reading a novel or other type of reading.

The use of diction that can bring the reader into the atmosphere of Dee Lestari's novel can be found in the third book "*Rapijali*: Return" in chapter 27 with the title "The Unspeakable" page 325, which reads "Ping held his phone tightly as if he was unwilling to separate. After two days of restraint, Ping finally couldn't stand it anymore. He must speak to someone". Based on this sentence, Dee Lestari wants to give the idea that Ping is determined to say something that he has been hiding for the past few days. Dee Lestari uses diction that is easy to digest and is often heard by humans even though it is one of the standard words that is rarely used, such as the word grasp. Another diction selection can also be found in the same book in chapter 30 under the title "Emergency Appearance" on page 348. "The green door is connected to the reception area as well as the rest area, visible from the sofa, table, drinking water dispenser, and a small pantry where eating and drinking utensils are stored".

There are foreign words that are rarely used by the general public to communicate, such as breaks and tiny pantries. Although it is rarely heard, readers can still understand the meaning of the word used, rest means rest, and the tiny pantry is likened to a minimalist kitchen for drinks and snacks. The reader's understanding of foreign words that are not commonly used is supported by improving

the sentences that follow them. The word "rest" and a small pantry followed by several types of household furniture such as sofas, tables, drinking water dispensers, and cutlery are enough to give the reader a picture that what is meant in the sentence above is a restroom in which a minimalist kitchen is also available.

The choice of diction in the few sentences above not only helps the reader understand the storyline, but the selection of good and appropriate diction can also convince the reader that apart from the aesthetic aspect, the author also tries to use effective and efficient language in conveying the meaning of the story written. The reader is taken into the setting of the place where the story is described. In other words, beautiful diction can be a means for writers to bring readers to participate in being part of the story. The use of diction that is rarely applied in daily life also adds to the reader's insight into vocabulary. Usually, the more unfamiliar a vocabulary is, the more it attracts the reader's attention.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The existence of novels amid the onslaught of digital reading media development shows that there is still high public interest in one of these types of literary works. Dee Lestari, one of the writers whose works are in great demand by novel lovers, tries to continue providing the best for the literary world. "*Rapijali*: Seeking, Becoming, Returning" is one of Dee Lestari's many works that have its own charm. Not only because it consists of 3 separate books whose stories are interconnected, but also because of the presentation of the plot, the choice of language style, and light diction, so that it is easy to digest and understand by the reader. No wonder this novel is considered to increase reading interest in the digital era, especially for someone who has a love of reading.

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