



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH IN PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION & DEVELOPMENT



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ISSN: 2226-6348

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v12-i2/17280>

DOI:10.6007/IJARPED/v12-i2/17280

Received: 17 April 2023, **Revised:** 24 May 2023, **Accepted:** 13 June 2023

Published Online: 30 June 2023

In-Text Citation: (Ayub et al., 2023)

To Cite this Article: Ayub, N. S., Bakar, M. S. A., & Jaafar, F. (2023). The Roles of Wattpad towards Writers in Malaysia. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 12(2), 1682–1689.

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Vol. 12(2) 2023, Pg. 1682 - 1689

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The Roles of Wattpad towards Writers in Malaysia

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Abstract

Wattpad is one of many applications allowing users to read, write, and interact on the same application. In this modern age, writers have many options for how they want to write, whether they use traditional ways to write and publish or modern ways, using applications like Wattpad to broaden their potential to publish. Wattpad has many roles that can be useful to writers, as seen in other countries. Therefore, this paper has explored the roles of Wattpad towards writers in Malaysia by interviewing 11 informants who are users of Wattpad. Findings show Wattpad has four leading roles, which are the role as a community platform for writers and readers, the role for gathering creative writing and acting as a promoting platform, the role of helping writers write from traditional to technology-based writing, and lastly, supporting Malaysian creative writing.

Keywords: Wattpad, Roles, Writers, Malaysia

Introduction

Nowadays literature is not limited to physical books as there is also cyber literature which shows writers have evolved to adapt to this modern society. On the internet, there are many applications or websites that help a writer change their traditional way, from writing on paper to writing online. Wattpad is one of that many applications. According to Yoesoef (2020), the Z generation likes to use Wattpad and Webnovel for digital reading. Wattpad is also a platform for those to improve their writing (Jusmaya, 2019; Rokha, 2019; Adiningtyas, 2020). Wattpad's roles are more prominent in other countries than Malaysia, may it to improve writing, whether it be for students or writers. Since Wattpad is an application used globally, the main language is English, but there are also other languages in it. In Rokha (2019) research, writing skill in the English language has been observed, as Indonesia's primary language is not English. The research also shows an increase in vocabulary and grammar improvement while the student uses Wattpad as a medium for them to write in English.

Wattpad is also said to be a place for gathering creative writing. There are many genres and different types of writing, such as fan fiction, short stories, novels, poems, and scripts on Wattpad. Writers are free to experiment with their words and phrases in Wattpad. Kardiansyah (2019); Poliakova (2022) mentioned that Wattpad is a platform to gather creative writing in their papers. It can also be seen as a future library for creative writing. Korobkova and Black (2014) suggest that the Wattpad application also promotes a thorough exchange of

information pertaining to culture through cultural-themed writing in creative works. According to Coleman and Hall (2019), the variety of genres within the application helps users to recognize their aesthetic palates and opens their minds to learn something new from different perspectives. Wattpad, however, is a well-known application in other countries.

Meanwhile, in Malaysia, some writers use Wattpad to write and share, but there are few academic papers or journals about this platform. Some articles mention Wattpad and its relation to publishing but only partially research this application. This paper seeks to explore Wattpad roles towards writers in Malaysia, as many writers, especially new writers, use Wattpad to write. Mustafa and Adnan (2017) mention that Wattpad and Ilham Karangkrak have the potential to attract readers' interest which provides an opportunity to publish physical books. But based on Mustafa and Adnan (2017), it is difficult to determine what Wattpad roles for writers who use it.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the roles of Wattpad towards writers in Malaysia.

Literature Review: The Roles of Wattpad

Wattpad as Rochester (2012) mentioned, is a platform that gathers readers and writers that allows them to read, write and communicate on the same platform. Wattpad is also known as a community for readers and writers. According to Poliakova (2022), Wattpad has the role of a future library, at the same time acting as a platform for submission to publishers. Poliakova (2022) also mentioned that Wattpad does not interrupt traditional publishers because Wattpad has integrated values like those of traditional publishers.

Kardiansyah (2019) also stated that Wattpad can be seen as a field of literary production. But based on Kardiansyah, it is not achieved as a literary field according to Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework, because Wattpad is conditioned in cyberspace. Nevertheless, Kardiansyah agrees at some point Wattpad has the role as a field of literary production.

Wattpad also has some roles in a publication or for publishers. As Poliakova (2022) said, Wattpad is similar to traditional publishers because this application allows it to write and at the same time attract publishers for physical books or online books. Wattpad itself has its book publishing line, as they choose the most popular creative writing and sell it according to chapters or books.

Lifiani and Krismayani (2019) stated, Wattpad plays a role in promoting or disseminating information to self-publishing authors. Writers who use Wattpad to self-publish, are using this application as early as picking or writing the title, which then expands to the synopsis, prologue, chapter by chapter, and lastly the final product (book cover). At the same time, they promote their works and help writers sell the final product, either through the bookstore or by the writers themselves.

Wattpad also has the role of a platform for improving writing skills. A lot of teachers use Wattpad as an exercise platform for their students to improve their English writing skills. Jusmaya (2019) researched the differences in the English Department at the University before and after writing classes used Wattpad. From the research paper, it was seen that there are improvements in average scores for their writing class. Jusmaya said that Wattpad has a role in helping students improve their writing skills and English language. Adiningtyas (2020) also explore Wattpad to see whether it helps to improve the writing skill of vocational students. Of 25 students as the sample, 13 of them are enjoying Wattpad while the other 12 students are not very comfortable using Wattpad as a place for them to put their school assignments for texts count class.

Başoğul (2021) used Wattpad to get teachers' and secondary school students' perceptions of youth literature in Wattpad. It was found the teacher are conflicted by the students' involvement with Wattpad as there are many abusive, violent, and sexual content. Meanwhile, students feel comfortable using Wattpad to read and write as they feel freer to do there which shows students are more prone to write in the application than in school.

Putri (2019) has also explored the motivation of students in writing stories using Wattpad. Based on the research, the students have the motivation to write on Wattpad but some of them have no confidence or are not brave enough to write on Wattpad. But some of the students not only use Wattpad to read but also to write and let the public read their stories. In conclusion, several roles of Wattpad can be seen in the past literature. Wattpad has the roles of a community platform for writers and readers, roles for gathering creative writing as a literary field, roles as a publication – the mainstream or self-publish, roles for a promotion platform, and roles for improving writing skills and motivation to write. All the papers mentioned in this literature review are from other countries besides Malaysia. However, the data and results in this paper are solely from Malaysian writers' perspectives.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative interview method as the method of data collection. According to Creswell (2003), the decision on which method to use depends on the research problem, researchers' experience, the reporting audience, whether the researcher wants specific information or let it be arising while collecting it, and lastly, whether the data should be collected in numbers or in text. Furthermore, Creswell (1998) also stated that a small number of samples between four to ten people is commonly used when reporting in-depth cases. The requirement for informants will be halted when data saturation is achieved. A total of eleven (11) members of the public participated in the interview and the data were transcribed for further analysis. Informants in this study are writers who use Wattpad either as a place to practice and promote or as a place to learn to write and learn about the world of writing.

Findings and Discussions: The roles of Wattpad towards writers in Malaysia

The results show that five informants have had success getting their books printed through publishing houses, two informants managed to self-published their works as e-books, two informants are newbie writers that used Wattpad to familiarize themselves with the world of writing, two more informants are writers that used Wattpad for promoting and knowing the trend (by reading).

Community platform for writers and readers

According to Informant 1, several communities within Wattpad were created by the Wattpad contact network: the writers-writers, writers-readers, and readers-readers communities. Such a statement parallels the one by Informant 10, which is '... it gathers them in the same space from all over the world.', thus demonstrating the role of Wattpad as a community of writers and readers. Moreover, Informant 2 and Informant 9 said that Wattpad is a mutual language for writers and readers to speak. On the other hand, Informant 3 thinks that Wattpad can strengthen the relationship between readers and writers.

Moreover, Informant 4 also explained how Wattpad helps writers to promote their work to more readers. Informant 6 said, '... Wattpad is a community to strengthen the relationship between the reader and the writer ... the reader responds or comments to the author, of course, it will give the writer a boost to be more enthusiastic about producing creative writing

works.'. This suggests that Wattpad plays a role in strengthening the relationship between readers and writers. In addition, Wattpad connects readers and writers, and Informant 6 believes that communication can help a person complete their writing.

Informant 7 also stated that Wattpad is the primary platform for youths who want to produce their work. They can learn something new and improve their style of writing. Through Wattpad, the learning process for writing creative works can occur by reading the creative works by other authors and receiving comments from other authors and readers. Informant 8 said that Wattpad plays a positive role as a community of writers and readers. A similar opinion was offered by Informant 11, who believes that Wattpad is a place for people to gather and discuss creative writing works that capture their interest. Informant 11 further stated that Wattpad plays a relatively significant role in creating a community for writers and readers, especially in the current era that mainly focuses on developing digital technology. From the interview sessions conducted with the informants, it was found that Wattpad plays the role of a community to writers and readers.

Gathering creative writing – a place to promote

Past literature also posits the role of Wattpad as a platform for gathering and collecting creative writing works. However, Informant 1 expressed concern with the availability of offensive materials on the platform and its accessibility by all readers, including those under 13 years old. This subsequently poses adverse effects, particularly on young and underage users. Nevertheless, there are still numerous creative writings work that are beneficial, informative, and contain religious information.

Informant 2 believes that Wattpad is a perfect starting ground for one to get their hands on writing, and many creative writings work abroad have been published into physical books. A similar view towards the platform is shared by Informant 3, Informant 5, and Informant 9, where it allows new writers to hone their talent while attracting readers to read and buy their works. However, Informant 3 believes that Wattpad also has a negative effect in that plagiarism can quickly happen due to the platform's free access. A similar concern was also raised by Informant 9.

In addition, Informant 4 also said that Wattpad is useful for promotional purposes. This is based on his experience using Wattpad to promote all 10 of his works until they were published by uploading them on the platform. Such a strategy has helped Informant 4 attract the attention of both readers and buyers.

Meanwhile, Informant 7 mentioned several benefits of the Wattpad community to readers and writers. First, the platform provides readers with free access to various reading materials. Furthermore, it also offered the options of free reading as well as premium and paid per-chapter tasks, subsequently enabling writers to earn income from their works. Writers can also use the platform to store their creative writing works and practice their writing skills, with the opportunity to send their creative writing works to potential publishers.

Informant 8 also agrees that Wattpad is an excellent platform for writers to promote their creative writing works, store numerous creative writing works of varied languages from various countries, and a place for writers to gain and gather their followers. Informant 10 stated that Wattpad can produce many talented writers and is a platform for collecting creative works. Informant 11 said collecting these creative writing works would help promote the authors' names locally and globally. It also serves as an opportunity for them to gather opinions and feedback from readers around the world.

The interview sessions with the informants found that Wattpad plays a role in gathering creative writing and helping writers promote their creative writing, published books, and even the writer's name.

Transition from traditional writing to technology-based writing

Another role played by Wattpad is to shift the traditional way of writing to the utilization of technology. All informants agree to such a notion where Informant 1, Informant 2, Informant 4, Informant 5, Informant 6, Informant 7, and Informant 10 mentioned the easiness of using Wattpad via smartphone, subsequently enabling reading and writing to be done anywhere.

According to Informant 3, Wattpad manages to expand the exposure of creative writing from being limited to traditional methods. The direction of creative writing works on Wattpad can help attract publishers' attention and assist in promoting physical or virtual creative writing works. Informant 11 also shares a similar opinion where users from various countries use Wattpad to promote creative writing works, especially those written in English. Informant 11 further stated that the widespread accessibility of Wattpad has benefitted local users within a country and helps modern writers gain audiences from various countries.

Informant 8 however believes that it has both pros and cons. Although Wattpad allows writers to display and promote their creative writing works and gather their followers, copyright and plagiarism issues are severe and prominent on Wattpad due to its ease of use. Such an issue is a significant concern for Informant 8 because Wattpad does not have strict rules.

Furthermore, Informant 9 believes that Wattpad is a suitable platform for new writers, and it shall serve an excellent potential for them if they decide to learn about it. New writers can learn about Wattpad by reading other writers' works, observing the writing pattern, and even interacting with other writers and readers on Wattpad.

This posits that Wattpad has a role in transitioning from traditional to technology-based writing. Its usage only requires the internet and gadgets where such ease meets the needs of today's consumers, i.e., writers and readers.

Supporting Malaysian Creative Writing

Wattpad also plays a role in supporting the writing industry in Malaysia. According to Informant 1, the online platform allows young or new writers to develop their talents and cultivate their confidence in creative writing. Informant 5 also thinks Wattpad supports Malaysia's writing industry by producing talented writers. However, Informant 2 believes that the effect will not be visible if writers do not utilize Wattpad to the fullest and that they should use Wattpad to prepare manuscripts and submit them to prospective publication companies. Such support also refers to the competitions available on Wattpad. According to Informant 4, writers should participate in the contests organized by publishers on Wattpad as it cultivates their talents and offers the potential to publish their creative writing works with the publication house. For writers who are not well-received, Wattpad remains a supportive platform where they can promote any of their creative writing works on Wattpad and share it on Facebook. A well-known publication house in Malaysia, Kaki Novel, also allows their writers to use Wattpad for promotion and job search.

Informant 7 said that Wattpad has various roles in supporting the Malaysian writing industry, especially for established and new writers. According to Informant 10, Wattpad is beneficial, especially for writers with unique writing styles. By writing on Wattpad, these writers can cultivate the readers' interest in their writing and gather loyal and potential readers to buy their works when it is published as physical books or e-books.

Meanwhile, Informant 6 and Informant 8 stated that Wattpad has positive and negative roles in supporting the writing industry. The downside is that the provision of free reading will contribute to the decline in the purchase of physical books. On the positive side, Informant 6 said Wattpad could help in terms of promotion, especially in searching for buyers and publishers. Whereas Informant 8 suggests that Wattpad is fantastic for writers because it provides a place to write freely and polish their talents.

Informant 9 believes that Wattpad supports the local creative writing industry from various positive angles. For instance, it is used by new writers as a platform to study and explore the world of writing and a place for people with a limited budget to read books. The informants also emphasized that Wattpad is a platform for learning about writing from reading, interactions, and perceived experiences.

Conclusion

Findings show that Wattpad has four leading roles, which are the role as a community platform for writers and readers, the role for gathering creative writing and acting as a promoting platform, the role of helping writers write from traditional to technology-based writing, and lastly, supporting Malaysian creative writing.

The authors conclude that Wattpad plays several roles based on Malaysian writers' perspectives. Wattpad is an application that helps writers in terms of writing, whether to explore their skills or to help them; it acts as a community for writers, also gathering creative works from around the world, which allows writers to see the trend, and writing skills and to help them improve. It also helps Malaysian writers, in terms of writing culture, to interact and support the writers to boost their confidence and popularity. The informants believe that Wattpad is a platform or application that helps them. It can therefore be suggested that the use of Wattpad should be expanded in Malaysia.

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