A SURVEY STUDY: THE MEASUREMENT OF
EFL STUDENTS' READING ENGAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Reading engagement combines motivation, interests, attitudes, emotions, self-regulation, and gaining a flow state while reading. The study's objective is to analyze the reading engagement level of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students at one of the private universities in Yogyakarta. This survey study was taken place by distributing a questionnaire to collect the data. A questionnaire comprising three constructs indicating reading engagement, namely construct of task value, anxiety, and flow, was distributed to 149 students online to measure the reading engagement level. After the data were gained and analyzed, it was known that their engagement level in reading was moderate, and the factor with the highest mean score was task value. The results implied that students' enjoyment of reading English texts is not disappointing but still needs improvement. Thus, strategies should be applied to make students more in the zone of reading, leading to excellent academic achievement.

Keywords: EFL students, Engagement, Reading, Reading engagement, Survey study

A. INTRODUCTION

Reading is considered one of the essential skills to complete mastery of a foreign language, making teachers attempt to push students to read. Linguistically, reading is significant because it helps students gain vocabulary and how it is used in the proper context. Besides that, they also obtain grammatical rules of English that may be much different from the grammar in their first language. Both vocabulary and grammar from their reading will help them practice the language productively. Not only can reading enhance language ability, but it can also support students in gaining knowledge. That notion aligns with the statement from Kearns et al. (2020), which highlights that reading is a bridge to acquiring world and word knowledge. World means general information and wisdom, while word knowledge is linguistic competence.

The importance of reading for students' academic development varies on their interest and motivation. Unluckily, students do not realize the critical roles of reading, so some take the activity for granted. The students refrain from books in particular fields, such as history, science, and math, which provide educational content (Guthrie, 2001). They would read because their teacher asked them to, and they read because the learning material was in the textbook. Since they feel responsible for reading, they need more enthusiasm and joy when doing the activity, leading them to disengagement. Disengaged students were reported to feel

anxious, bored, or frustrated (Skinner et al., 2009). This type of feeling could hinder students' accomplishment in their academic life. Otherwise, students need to be engaged in reading to help them achieve satisfactory academic achievement.

Students more engaged in their learning demonstrate greater attainment in their reading skills than less engaged students. The information would be more straightforward for students. That notion parallels Guthrie (2001), who stated that engagement in reading is significantly needed to develop comprehension and achievement. Different academics have emphasized the significance of reading motivation. First, research by Vongkrachang and Chinwonno (2015) aimed to discuss the influence of explicit reading instruction employing Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction or CORI on engagement owned by students in a setting of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). A Reading Engagement Index questionnaire identified a significant improvement in the student's reading comprehension and engagement after receiving the treatment. Second, Oscar et al. (2016) analyzed Chilean students' achievement, focusing on exploring roles that reading engagement could play. This study revealed that reading engagement and attitudes would offer a more precise fit for predicting outcomes.

Based on the description above, it can be concluded that engagement is crucial to gain to help students reach complete comprehension of reading. It is defined as the level of a student's attachment to or involvement with the educational endeavor, comprising the participants, activities, objectives, and environment. Additionally, the tendency is to view involvement as behavior, emotion, and cognitive aspects of motivation. (Skinner et al., 2009). For example, direct engagement in a series of behaviors, such as good manners, perseverance and effort, and involvement in extracurricular activities, is referred to as behavioral engagement. On the other hand, Guthrie (2001) also posited that when students are emotionally engaged in what they are doing, they frequently exhibit both excellent and adverse affective reactions to activities and the people they engage with, including interest, boredom, worry, and irritation. Meanwhile, cognitive engagement refers to a student's drive to learn, involving being purposeful, planned, and ready to exert the required energy to comprehend intricate concepts or excel in demanding abilities. In addition, the idea of engagement itself parallels a constructivist belief that education is ultimately about students actively constructing their knowledge.

In addition, engagement is also viewed as an act of involving oneself in an activity. Wigfield et al. (2008) stated that reading engagement combines motivational and cognitive factors while absorbing knowledge or the content of texts. In addition, Whitaker (2009) also stated that reading engagement is characterized as a function of motivation, interests, attitudes, emotions, self-regulation, and the capacity to induce a flow state while reading. These factors result in readers who seek, possess, and can engage fully with a book. The factors that can affect students' engagement in reading are task value, anxiety, and flow.

According to Varasteh et al. (2016), task value in reading refers to the views on the significance and value of a task. They also considered that task value is a positive and substantial predictor of deep learning, indicating that when students realize the significance and worth of their work, they will engage in it enthusiastically and attempt to select relevant learning strategies. In reading activities, task value by Whitaker (2009), examining students' personal beliefs and attitudes, Akey (2006) said that students' levels of engagement and the emotional factors that either help or impede their capacity to succeed academically have been closely correlated with how they perceive their competence and expectations for success in an

academic setting. The second factor of reading engagement is anxiety. Brown, as cited in Jafarigohar & Behrooznia (2012), stated that humans who experience anxiety have feelings of dread, apprehension, anger, and impatience. The level of anxiety that students possess can influence their performance. Miao and Vibulphol (2021) mentioned that reading anxiety is manifested in students' actions, such as hesitance in reading aloud, uncertainty about doing reading tests, the stress in doing reading assignments, and worry in answering questions related to reading texts.

The third factor is the flow that relates to personal beliefs and attitudes that are put into practice. A student who became so involved in reading a text that they lost track of time and awareness of their surroundings while reading it is an example of flow. Reading engagement definitions include flow in terms of mental presence, immersion, and contemplation. Students who can follow the reading flow have a positive reading attitude and feel compelled to do the activity. In addition, Thissen et al., (2018) defined the flow state as the best feeling of being completely involved in an activity and has been utilized as a theoretical foundation for intrinsic fulfillment throughout positive psychology. That positive feeling can be defined as enjoyment which students throughout reading books that meet their interests. In addition, students who are genuinely involved in reading can enjoy experiences in the activity. A study by Egbert (2003) showed that a task-based language classroom could be an excellent alternative to grow students' flow in reading since sequential tasks provided by the teachers can be an instrument to identify if they enjoy the activity and experience states of flow.

In this sense, Indonesia is identified as a country with an unsatisfactory reading interest predicate. The study by Iftanti (2017) explained that the EFL students' attitudes toward reading English were favorable. However, most of them have poor English reading habits. Therefore, if individuals have little interest in reading, they are less likely to be captivated by what they read. To prevent the issue above, some educators strive to increase students' reading interest through their instructional methods.

In a particular setting, an English department of a university in Indonesia, the teachers attempt to involve students in reading activities. During the first semester, teachers introduced a free-reading technique in which students were permitted to select English novels to read. In one of the classes where the strategy was implemented, the teachers assigned students activities after reading the chosen books, such as poster making, comic strip making, videotaping book recommendations, and other amusing activities. One of the teachers addressed that the strategy was objected to cultivating the students' reading motivation. In effect, they would be prepared to enroll in courses requiring students to read academic literature such as journal articles and textbooks in the following semesters. An initial discussion with students who enrolled in the course found that their response toward the teachers' strategies was positive. The students loved the majority of the post-reading activities. However, spontaneous discussion results need to be sufficiently strong to justify the students' enjoyment of the reading. Therefore, statistical analysis of quantitative data gives a general view of the condition. This empirical research was conducted exclusively to measure the reading engagement of first-semester students with self-selected English books. In order to focus the investigation, the question is formulated: How is the reading engagement of EFL students in an English department in Indonesia?

B. METHOD

Aiming to gather the data for this research, the quantitative methodology was applied to determine the highest component of student reading engagement. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), quantitative research involves the researcher's endeavor to describe patterns by presenting subjects with concise and specific inquiries, aiming to gather measurable information on variables through an instrument to calculate those variables. The data are then statistically analyzed. Thus, given the study's objectives, quantitative research was a suitable design. In addition, the quantitative research strategy used in this study was survey design. According to Creswell & Creswell (2018), a survey design is used in quantitative research to look at a sample or significant population to acquire opinions, attitudes, or characteristics by distributing a questionnaire. Therefore, the survey approach was suitable for this study since it enabled the researcher to evaluate the students' motivation for reading.

The setting of a place of this research was an English department of a private university in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. This department was selected because most of the courses in the said department provide reading activities using English books. Another consideration was that some students needed to gain knowledge regarding engagement in reading activities based on the researchers' observation. By involving 150 English Language Education Department students, total target sampling was utilized in this study, meaning that the entire population served as the study's sample. The sample for this study, however, consisted of only 149 students because only 149 questionnaires were returned by the participants. The survey was produced with Google Forms and disseminated over WhatsApp group chats. The researcher then double-checked the questionnaire, made a list of students who still needed to complete it, and personally shared the link with the respondents. Unfortunately, only 149 students completed the questionnaire, despite the researcher contacting the participants. This research used Whitaker's Reading Engagement Survey (RES) questionnaire (2009) to investigate students' reading engagement. The questionnaire provided forty items with three aspects of reading engagement: task value, anxiety, and flow. The researcher modified the four-point measures used in the questionnaires—Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. This questionnaire has forty questions that cover facets of students' reading engagement. For ease of comprehension and response, the questionnaire was translated into the respondents' native language of Indonesia. It was distributed after an expert evaluation by asking three professors of the English language to verify the translated language. The result showed that the total Pearson correlation score (N=40) was 0.877, categorized as 'high validity' since the score was more than 0.8. Meanwhile, The outcome indicated that the Cronbach alpha coefficient, calculated based on a sample size of 40, was 0.787 or 'reliable'.

This study carried out three procedures in collecting the data using a questionnaire. First, the researcher contacted each class's representative to distribute a link to Google Forms to access the questionnaire. He/she shared the questionnaire with all students in her/his class. After a week, the researchers got 149 students filling the questionnaire. Furthermore, in analyzing the data, the researchers used a statistical program for descriptive statistical analysis.

C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The result indicated the mean score of questionnaire items divided into three categories showing students' reading engagement level data: task value, anxiety, and flow. The results of reading engagement's level are presented below:

Table 1. Result of the Descriptive Statistical

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Dev
Total	149	92	118	99.56	4.516
Valid N			149		

The result demonstrated that the mean score of questionnaires filled by 149 students was 99.56. Hence, the mean score was categorized as' moderate' based on the Reading Engagement Survey categories. However, the score indicated that EFL students' reading engagement could be higher and higher. Moreover, the maximum score of the reading engagement survey was 118, while the minimum score was 92. Therefore, both scores were categorized as 'moderate' with a class interval between 80.1-120.

The EFL students' reading engagement level was answered by the finding that showed a 'moderate' level, which indicates students' reading engagement level is not insufficient but still needs improvement. Based on the finding, the students will most likely be engaged in reading activities if they are involved with what they read, which aligns with Douglas et al. (2016), who considered students' eyes as one of the predictors of their reading engagement. If the students move their eyes line by line attentively, they are then positively engaged with the book. Next, if they can discuss the content with their friends, their engagement goes up to the next level.

Moreover, the first-year students at college primarily engaged in their reading because of their belief to succeed in reading a text only if they found value in their reading material. This statement is supported by Guthrie (2001). When students can identify the knowledge in their reading materials, they believe they can enjoy what they read. That is supported by Protacio's (2017) research which showed that low interest in reading was due to irrelevant or challenging books. Likewise, Boakye (2015) posited that relevant books cause a high level of students' reading efficacy. Whitaker (2009) defined it as students' beliefs or initiation to complete the task, which is equal to the perception of the task value aspect of reading engagement.

In addition, three data categories show the aspects chosen by students in EFL regarding their reading activity, namely task value, anxiety, and flow. The following mean scores of each category were obtained by calculating the result of the questionnaire using SPSS software version 25. The results for the sequence of reading engagement aspects are presented below:

Table 2. The Sequence of Reading Engagement Factors

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Task-value	149	70	93	77.17	3.842
Flow	149	17	27	22.39	1.38384
Anxiety	149	7	21	12.75	1.98612
Valid N	149				

The result of the questionnaire items presented the mean scores for each aspect, from the highest mean score to the lowest one. Based on the table, students chose "task-value" (M=77.17), followed by "flow" (M=22.39), and "anxiety" (M=12.75). The table implied that most students chose "task value" as the highest aspect of their reading engagement, followed by flow and anxiety as the reading engagement aspect chosen least by students.

According to the finding, task value became the highest aspect of students' reading engagement compared to other aspects (M=77.17). The number indicated that the students agreed on task-value aspects to engage in reading English book activities. Whitaker (2009) stated that one of the essential elements of engaging in reading material for students is realizing the importance of reading. Furthermore, task value was suggested to mediate between students' motions and achievement Bong, cited in Whitaker (2009). Moreover, task value is the belief that specific reading tasks have inherent value. Task value in reading was conducted in the study that examined students' personal beliefs and attitudes. A belief commonly refers to understanding, premises, prepositions, and psychological aspects regarding something that feels true. Most students agreed that task value was the highest aspect of reading engagement because they found reading activity exciting and valuable. According to Boakye (2015), students' beliefs are about their ability and expectations to do tasks successfully. Self-efficacy in reading is defined as the beliefs students possess about reading successfully. Meanwhile, attitude in the reading context can be defined as students' responses to their reading activity. As stated by Murtiningsih (2020), attitude influences behavior, which refers to reading engagement and frequency.

From the gathered data, 'flow' came after 'task-value' as the aspect of reading engagement. 'Flow' could be defined as a cognitive state while reading that examines one's enjoyment and involvement. According to Dadandi (2022), reading enjoyment refers to the pleasure of a particular reading text. Student involvement means students enjoy their experiences in reading certain kinds of literature and informational text. 'Flow' took place on the middle-scoring aspect of reading engagement with the mean score of M=22.39; this indicated that the students agreed on 'flow' as the way to engage in reading English books activities following 'task-value' (see Table 8). This result is in line with a study by Guthrie et al. (2012) that showed the time spent by students reading for pleasure is known as reading engagement. Furthermore, Thissen et al. (2018) also defined a positive association between the state of 'flow' and an individual's specific activity preferences and self-efficacy.

On the other hand, the result showed 'anxiety' as the lowest aspect of reading engagement. Anxiety is fear, anxiety, and worry related to reading homework, reading out loud, and performance on reading tests. 'Anxiety' got the lowest mean score among the aspects (M=12.75) of engagement in reading English books activities. Based on the result, Whitaker (2009) showed a more standardized test indicating older students possess more reading anxiety. Furthermore, students also feel anxious about reading, where they get nervous before reading out loud and fail to address the actual triggers of their anxiety. Most students feel worried about reading aloud or taking a test which is in line with the study by Jafarigohar & Behrooznia (2012), showing that students fear being laughed at by their friends; thus, they experience increased anxiety levels when faced with an examination or when called upon to respond to a question in a classroom setting. According to Naghadeh et al. (2014), students experiencing anxiety tend to suppress their curiosity, leading to a decline in cognitive abilities and skills such as logical reasoning, observation, and critical questioning.

D. CONCLUSION

Students need to be engaged in their reading to avoid reading failure, and the engagement can be seen in their reading flow, task value, and anxiety. This study focused on discussing students' engagement in reading English texts. Besides measuring the level of it, this research also tried to identify the main factor that should be paid attention to make the students love reading. The result gives information that based on the questionnaire of 40 items taken from

149 participants, the level of EFL students' reading engagement was categorized as 'moderate' with a mean score of 99.56. Further, task value has the highest mean score among the three factors of reading engagement, followed by flow and anxiety. This research result implies that students enjoy reading their texts or books immensely. Nevertheless, it is necessary to employ strategies from educators, educational institutions, and students themselves to elevate student engagement to a higher level. Therefore, task value, reading flow, and anxiety should be considered when deciding or creating strategies to engage students.

This research recommends to some parties, including students, teachers, the institution, and other researchers. Concerning the moderate level of students' reading engagement, even though the level is not disappointing for first-year students who, in the majority, never read English books before, they are suggested to be more familiar with reading English texts. To be more engaged in reading, they should find friends to discuss the book or search for more recommended books. In addition, since they are required to read more complex English texts in the following semesters, they should be accustomed to reading educational books related to their major. In order to increase students' engagement, they cannot do it alone, so teachers' support is ultimately significant. Teachers should find exciting activities, tasks, and assignments encouraging students to love reading. Moreover, in designing or choosing teaching instruments and follow-up activities, teachers should consider task values that focus on making students realize the importance of accomplishing their work by lowering students' anxiety with reading English texts to shape a positive attitude toward reading. For the institution, supporting facilities such as books with various genres and topics, comfortable rooms to read, and policies that encourage literacy movement is most expected.

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