



Exploring EFL Students' Interest in Using Digital Novels for Learning Reading

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi minat mahasiswa dalam menggunakan novel digital untuk pembelajaran membaca dalam konteks bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing (EFL). Membaca merupakan salah satu keterampilan penting dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris; namun, banyak pembelajar EFL masih menghadapi berbagai tantangan seperti rendahnya motivasi dan keterbatasan keterlibatan terhadap bahan bacaan. Seiring dengan perkembangan teknologi digital, novel digital muncul sebagai alternatif sumber bacaan yang berpotensi meningkatkan minat dan motivasi siswa. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain penelitian kualitatif deskriptif. Partisipan dalam penelitian ini adalah 12 mahasiswa semester tiga Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris di Universitas Qomaruddin yang dipilih menggunakan teknik purposive sampling. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner yang terdiri dari 20 item berdasarkan empat kriteria, yaitu minat membaca, pengalaman membaca digital, penggunaan novel digital dalam pembelajaran membaca, serta keterlibatan dan motivasi belajar. Data dianalisis secara deskriptif untuk mengidentifikasi pola respons mahasiswa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa secara umum mahasiswa memiliki minat membaca yang positif serta persepsi yang baik terhadap bahan bacaan digital. Novel digital dipandang menarik, praktis, dan membantu meningkatkan pemahaman serta motivasi membaca, meskipun tidak semua mahasiswa menunjukkan keterlibatan atau kebiasaan membaca yang konsisten. Oleh karena itu, novel digital memiliki potensi sebagai alternatif sumber pembelajaran untuk mendukung minat dan motivasi membaca mahasiswa apabila diintegrasikan secara efektif dalam pembelajaran membaca berbasis EFL.

Kata Kunci: *Novel Digital, Mahasiswa EFL, Minat Membaca, Motivasi Membaca*

Abstract

This study explores students' interest in using digital novels for reading instruction in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. Reading is a crucial skill in English learning; however, many EFL learners face challenges such as low motivation and limited engagement with reading materials. With the increasing use of digital technology, digital novels have emerged as an alternative reading resource that may enhance students' interest and motivation. This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design. The participants were 12 third-semester students of the English Education Department at Universitas Qomaruddin, selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using a 20-item questionnaire based on four criteria: reading interest, digital reading experience, use of digital novels in learning to read, and learning engagement and motivation. The data were analyzed descriptively to identify patterns in students' responses. The findings indicate that students generally have a positive interest in reading and favorable perceptions of digital reading

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materials. Digital novels were perceived as engaging, practical, and helpful in supporting reading comprehension and motivation, although not all students showed consistent engagement or reading habits. In conclusion, digital novels have potential as an alternative reading resource to support students' reading interest and motivation when integrated effectively into EFL reading instruction.

Keywords: *Digital Novels, EFL Students, Reading Interest, Reading Motivation.*

INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, English is regarded as the primary foreign language and is mainly used in classrooms rather than in daily conversation (Hamra & Syatriana, 2010). Nevertheless, English continues to play an important role, as reflected in its use in the education system, where it is taught as a foreign language from elementary school through higher education (Rahmah & Qamariah, 2023). This situation reflects the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), where English is learned as a foreign language and is not widely used in daily life. In this context, the roles of teachers and instructional materials become particularly important, as they are the main sources of English exposure for most learners.

Reading is one of the most essential skills in English learning, as it plays a fundamental role and should be consistently integrated into classroom instruction (Arianda et al., 2023). Moreover, reading is a process of obtaining information from written text, in which meaning is constructed through interpreting linguistic symbols based on the reader's prior experiences, language background, cultural knowledge, and reading purpose (Mufidah et al., 2022). Therefore, reading is not merely recognizing words but a complex meaning-making process that requires active engagement, background knowledge, and a clear reading purpose. In addition, reading functions as a key pathway to language development, as learners who engage in extensive reading tend to enhance their vocabulary, grammar, and overall language proficiency (H. Li et al., 2021).

Reading plays a crucial role in English language development in EFL contexts, as it is an accessible and cost-effective way for learners to improve their English skills (Azwar et al., 2024). As technology advances, students are increasingly shifting from printed texts to digital platforms, leading to a variety of digital reading materials, including e-books, web novels, and digital novels. Studies on Indonesian EFL students have confirmed this trend, showing that most learners prefer reading English texts through digital platforms, with smartphones as the most commonly used device (Pardede et al., 2023). Digital novels, in particular, offer broader insights and deeper knowledge by exposing learners to diverse content and contexts, enabling them to develop a deeper understanding of various topics (Alkautsar, 2025). Therefore, digital novels can be considered a relevant and engaging reading alternative that aligns with

students' evolving reading habits in the digital era and has the potential to support their reading development and engagement.

Although reading is recognized as a crucial skill in English language learning, many EFL learners still face challenges in developing this ability. They often struggle with reading due to limited vocabulary, low motivation, and excessively long texts, all of which make the reading process difficult and frustrating (Alimin et al., 2023; Holandyah et al., 2024). In this regard, both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation play significant roles in shaping reading behavior among EFL learners. Intrinsic motivation, such as reading for pleasure or curiosity, promotes deeper comprehension, while extrinsic motivation, including teacher feedback and academic rewards, supports achievement-oriented reading (Indrayadi, 2021). Learners with higher motivation also tend to participate more actively in learning activities and demonstrate greater persistence when facing learning difficulties (Nofridayani & Handayani, 2026). In addition to these general reading difficulties, learners face challenges interacting with digital texts, particularly in navigating various browser elements and maintaining focus while reading on-screen (Rahayu, 2024). Furthermore, many learners are unfamiliar with digital novels as a learning tool, partly due to barriers such as limited access to technology and difficulty understanding digital formats (Alkautsar, 2025). Therefore, these challenges highlight the need to explore the potential of digital novels as an alternative reading resource to support learners' reading development and increase their engagement in reading activities.

To address these challenges, it is crucial to provide students with engaging and accessible reading materials that motivate them to read more frequently. In this regard, integrating digital reading resources has become increasingly relevant, as digital reading offers easier, faster, and more convenient access to a variety of materials through online platforms, aligning with the needs of today's digitally oriented learners (Rahayu, 2024). In Indonesia, the implementation of extensive digital reading through platforms such as Wattpad, Xreading, and other online media has been widely reported, with findings consistently showing that these tools effectively support EFL students' reading activities and overall language development (Janah et al., 2022). Among these resources, digital novels represent a promising option because they combine engaging narratives with modern digital features such as appealing layouts, easy navigation, and chapter-based structures that make reading more practical and more effective for delivering educational messages (Hikmi et al., 2023). Moreover, digital reading platforms that allow learners to choose texts based on their interests and reading level can help increase motivation and foster a more positive attitude toward reading (Permatasari et al., 2020). The use of interactive and varied learning media may also help create more engaging and meaningful learning experiences for students (Siki & Amrulloh, 2026). Therefore, this strategy involves integrating digital novels into reading lessons through guided reading activities, vocabulary support,

interactive tasks, and reflection, enabling deeper engagement and better comprehension by leveraging digital features.

In conclusion, the transition from printed texts to digital reading materials, along with the persistent reading challenges faced by EFL learners, underscores the importance of providing engaging, accessible learning resources that align with students' digital habits. Digital novels offer potential benefits in supporting reading motivation and comprehension through their interactive features and flexible formats. However, since the effectiveness of digital novels largely depends on learners' perceptions and interest, this study focuses on exploring the interest of third-semester students of the English Education Department at Universitas Qomaruddin in using digital novels for learning to read. By examining students' responses to digital novels as a reading medium, this research seeks to provide insights into their suitability as an alternative reading resource in EFL classroom contexts.

Several previous studies have examined the role of reading in EFL learning contexts. Lustyantje & Aprilia (2014) found that reading interest and achievement motivation directly affect EFL learners' reading comprehension, thereby contributing to improved learning outcomes and highlighting the importance of effective reading instruction. Other studies have focused on digital reading materials, with Noori (2025) reporting that tools such as e-books and Google Classroom enhance students' reading comprehension, vocabulary, and cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement through features like instant definitions and multimedia support, despite technical challenges. Similarly, Klimova (2021) highlighted that online reading tools are effective in improving reading comprehension among secondary school students, suggesting that the benefits of digital reading tools extend across different educational levels and contexts. In addition, research on narrative-based digital texts has shown that digital novels increase student engagement by integrating visual and audio elements and encouraging deeper understanding of texts (Benway, 2011). However, most existing studies primarily emphasize reading comprehension and learning outcomes, while paying limited attention to students' interest in using digital novels, particularly at the university level. This study aims to explore the interest of third-semester students of the English Education Department at Universitas Qomaruddin in using digital novels for learning to read.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a descriptive quantitative design to explore students' interest in using digital novels for learning to read. The descriptive quantitative method was chosen because the study focused on describing and interpreting students' responses, collected as numerical data expressed as percentages. The study

aimed to investigate third-semester students' interest, perceptions, and engagement in using digital novels to support reading activities.

The participants of this study were third-semester students of the English Education Department at Universitas Qomaruddin. Purposive sampling was used, with the criterion that participants were active third-semester students. The instrument used in this study was a 20-item questionnaire. The items were developed based on theories of reading interest and digital learning (Lustyantie & Aprilia, 2014; Noori, 2025; Benway, 2011). A four-point Likert scale was applied to measure students' responses, consisting of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD) (Kusmaryono, 2022). The questionnaire items were divided into four sections: reading interest, digital reading experience, use of digital novels for reading instruction, and engagement and learning motivation (Y. Li & Arumugam, 2026). These sections were intended to identify students' perceptions and interest in using digital novels as a learning resource for reading activities.

The data were collected online through Google Forms because the platform is accessible, practical, and efficient for distributing questionnaires and collecting responses. Participants completed the questionnaire based on their personal experiences and opinions regarding the use of digital novels in reading activities. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, expressed as percentages. The results were then interpreted descriptively to identify patterns in students' responses regarding their interest in using digital novels for learning to read.

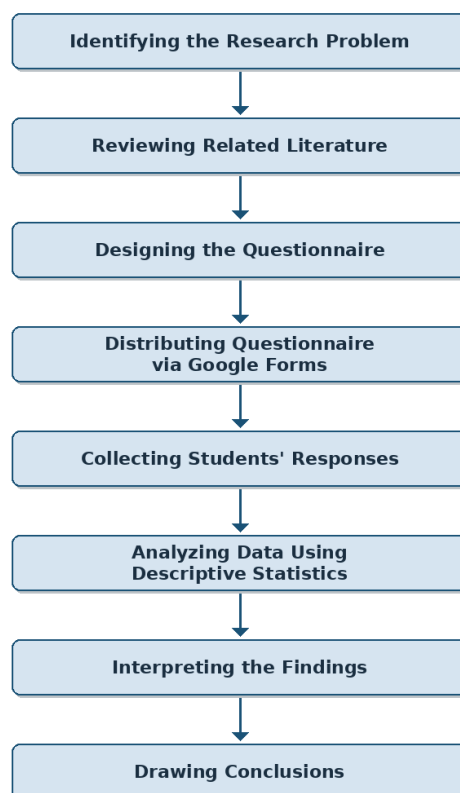


Figure 1. Research Flowchart

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings and discussion of students' responses regarding the use of digital novels for learning to read. The findings are discussed based on four criteria, namely students' interest in reading, students' experience with digital reading, students' perceptions of digital novels in reading instruction, and students' engagement and learning motivation.

Students' Interest in Reading

The first criterion focuses on students' general interest in reading. This criterion is based on the theory of reading interest and learning motivation proposed by Lustyantie & Aprilia (2014), which emphasizes enjoyment, motivation, and willingness to engage in reading activities as key indicators of reading interest. The results show that most students expressed positive attitudes toward reading English texts, as reflected in their responses to Items 1-5.

Table 1. Students' Responses to Reading Interest

Item	Response			
	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
I enjoy reading English texts as part of the learning process.	25.0	58.3	16.7	0.0
I am interested in improving my English reading skills.	41.7	50.0	8.3	0.0
I feel motivated to read English texts when the material is interesting.	50.0	33.3	16.7	0.0
Reading English texts helps improve my overall English language skills.	50.0	41.7	8.3	0.0
I am willing to spend more time reading English texts outside of class.	8.3	75.0	16.7	0.0

The table shows that the majority of students have a positive interest in reading English texts. Across Items 1-4, more than 80% of respondents selected Agree or Strongly Agree. This indicates that students generally enjoy reading English texts, feel motivated when the material is interesting, and believe that reading improves their overall English proficiency.

However, Item 5 shows a slightly lower level of agreement. Although most students (75.0%) agreed that they were willing to spend more time reading English texts outside the classroom, a small percentage (16.7%) disagreed. This suggests that, while students demonstrate positive attitudes toward reading, not all consistently engage in reading activities beyond formal learning contexts. These findings suggest that students' reading interest is evident but may still require supportive learning strategies to foster more independent reading habits.

Students' Experience with Digital Reading

This section presents students' responses to Items 6-10, which focus on their experiences with digital reading materials. This criterion is based on digital learning theories proposed by Noori (2025), which emphasize accessibility, convenience, and students' engagement in digital learning environments. The findings provide insights into how students perceive digital reading within their learning experience.

Table 2. Students' Responses to Digital Reading Experience

Item	Response			
	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
Reading English texts in digital form is more practical than reading them in print.	25.0	66.7	8.3	0.0
Digital reading materials are easily accessible anytime and anywhere.	41.7	58.3	0.0	0.0
Reading digitally helps me understand English texts faster.	25.0	58.3	16.7	0.0
I feel comfortable reading English texts through digital devices (phone, tablet, or laptop).	25.0	66.7	8.3	0.0
Digital reading platforms help me stay focused while reading.	16.7	75.0	8.3	0.0

Findings from Items 6 to 10 indicate that students generally had positive experiences with digital reading materials. Most respondents agreed that reading English texts in digital format was more practical than reading printed books and that digital materials were easily accessible anytime, anywhere. This indicates that students viewed digital reading as a convenient and flexible learning option, which aligns with the principles of digital-based learning that emphasize accessibility and practicality (Noori, 2025).

Furthermore, most students felt comfortable reading English texts on digital devices and believed that digital reading helped them comprehend texts more efficiently. Although a small number of students reported difficulty maintaining focus, overall responses indicated that digital reading platforms supported student engagement and learning experiences. These results indicate that students were generally familiar with and receptive to digital reading, providing a strong foundation for using more specific digital materials, such as digital novels, in reading instruction.

Students' Interest in Using Digital Novels for Learning Reading

This criterion focuses on students' perceptions of using digital novels for reading instruction, grounded in Benway's (2011) concepts of digital narrative texts and digital novels. Digital novels combine narrative elements with digital features that can increase reader engagement and support comprehension. The results for Items 11-15

indicate that most students responded positively to the use of digital novels in reading activities.

Table 3. Students' Interest in Using Digital Novels

Item	Response			
	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
Digital novels make reading English texts more interesting.	25.0	66.7	8.3	0.0
Stories in digital novels make me more interested in reading.	33.3	58.3	8.3	0.0
Digital novels help me understand the reading content more easily.	16.7	66.7	16.7	0.0
The chapter division in digital novels makes reading more structured.	33.3	66.7	0.0	0.0
Digital novels encourage me to read English texts more often.	25.0	33.3	41.7	0.0

The findings show that a large proportion of students agreed or strongly agreed that digital novels make reading English texts more interesting and that the stories increase their interest in reading. Students also perceived that digital novels helped them understand the content more easily and organize the reading process through clear chapter divisions. However, Item 15 reveals a more varied response, as a notable number of students disagreed that digital novels encourage them to read more frequently. This suggests that while digital novels are engaging and supportive during reading activities, they do not automatically lead all students to develop regular reading habits. Overall, the results indicate that digital novels are positively perceived as a reading medium, but additional instructional support may be needed to foster sustained reading engagement.

Students' Engagement and Learning Motivation in Using Digital Novels

This criterion focuses on students' engagement and motivation during reading activities with digital novels. It is based on the concept of student engagement in digital learning environments, which emphasizes active involvement, motivation, and sustained attention during learning activities (Noori, 2025). Items 16 to 20 explore how digital novels influence students' participation and motivation in learning to read.

Table 4. Students' Engagement and Motivation Using Digital Novels

Item	Response			
	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
I am more actively engaged when reading lessons that use digital novels.	8.3	50.0	41.7	0.0

Using digital novels increases my motivation to learn to read.	25.0	58.3	8.3	8.3
Reading lessons with digital novels feels more enjoyable.	16.7	50.0	25.0	8.3
Digital novels help me stay focused during reading activities.	0.0	66.7	25.0	8.3
I am interested in using digital novels in future reading lessons.	8.3	50.0	33.3	8.3

This criterion examines students' engagement and motivation in reading activities that use digital novels. Based on the questionnaire results, students showed mixed but generally positive responses to the use of digital novels in reading instruction. For Item 16, more than half of the students (58.3%) agreed or strongly agreed that they were more actively engaged when digital novels were used, although a considerable proportion (41.7%) disagreed. This indicates that while digital novels can enhance engagement for many students, not all students experience the same level of involvement.

In terms of motivation and enjoyment, the findings suggest a positive tendency. Most students agreed or strongly agreed that digital novels increased their motivation to learn to read (83.3%) and made reading lessons more enjoyable (66.7%). Additionally, a majority of students (66.7%) felt that digital novels helped them stay focused during reading activities. However, students' interest in using digital novels in future reading lessons showed more varied responses, with some students still expressing hesitation. These results suggest that digital novels can support engagement and motivation in reading. Still, their effectiveness may depend on students' individual preferences and how digital novels are implemented in the learning process.

CONCLUSION

Based on this study's findings, students generally show a positive interest in reading English texts and respond favorably to the use of digital novels in reading instruction. The results indicate that students enjoy reading, feel motivated by interesting materials, and perceive digital reading as practical and accessible. Digital novels can enhance the reading experience by increasing students' motivation, enjoyment, and understanding of the content. However, not all students demonstrate strong engagement or consistent reading habits outside the classroom. Overall, digital novels have potential as an alternative learning resource to support students' reading interest and motivation, particularly when effectively integrated into reading instruction.

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