FOSTER JELT
Journal of English Language Teaching

Copyright © The Author(s)
Vol. 7, No. 4, October 2026
***e*-ISSN: 2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN: 2776-8880**

STUDENT'S READING INTEREST IN THE USE OF ENGLISH AU FANFICTION AT TADULAKO UNIVERSITY

Aulia Aprina Poma[1*], Afrillia Anggreni[2], Mafulah[3]
[1] Universitas Tadulako, Palu, Indonesia

auliapoma@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The increasing popularity of digital reading platforms has transformed how EFL learners engage with English texts beyond formal classroom settings. Among various forms of digital reading, English Alternate Universe (AU) fanfiction has emerged as a popular literacy practice among university students, offering opportunities for voluntary reading and authentic language exposure. This study aimed to explore EFL university students' reading interest in the use of English AU fanfiction. Employing a qualitative case study design, the study involved five undergraduate students from the English Education Study Program at Tadulako University who actively read English AU fanfiction. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed five interconnected themes: reading habits and engagement, reading motivation, positive attitudes toward English reading, enjoyment of reading activities, and willingness to read. The participants reported engaging regularly with English AU fanfiction through various digital platforms, including X (formerly Twitter), Webtoon, TikTok, and Instagram. Their reading practices were primarily driven by personal interest, curiosity, and emotional attachment to stories and characters. The findings further indicated that engagement with English AU fanfiction contributed to increased confidence in reading English texts, greater enjoyment of reading activities, and stronger willingness to engage with English reading beyond academic requirements. In addition, English AU fanfiction functioned as a form of Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE), providing learners with meaningful opportunities for self-directed language exposure and literacy development. This study highlights the potential of interest-driven digital reading materials to foster reading interest and sustained engagement with English among EFL university students.

Keywords: Alternate Universe Fanfiction, Digital Learning, Digital Reading, Reading Interest, University EFL Students

INTRODUCTION

Reading plays a central role in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning because it provides learners with access to linguistic input, academic knowledge, and opportunities for language development. Through reading, learners are exposed to vocabulary, grammatical structures, discourse patterns, and cultural information that contribute to language acquisition and academic achievement. Previous studies have consistently demonstrated that students who engage in reading activities more frequently tend to achieve better

FOSTER JELT
Journal of English Language Teaching

Copyright © The Author(s)
Vol. 7, No. 4, October 2026
***e*-ISSN**: **2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN**: **2776-8880**

language proficiency and academic performance than those with limited reading exposure (Guthrie et al., 2013; Schiefele et al., 2012). In higher education contexts, reading is particularly important because university students are expected to independently access, evaluate, and comprehend various forms of academic and non-academic texts. However, the effectiveness of reading activities is not solely determined by cognitive abilities but is also influenced by affective factors, particularly reading interest and motivation.

Reading interest has long been recognized as a significant predictor of reading engagement and reading achievement. According to Guthrie and Wigfield (2000), students who possess a strong interest in reading are more likely to engage voluntarily in reading activities, spend more time reading, and demonstrate greater persistence when encountering challenging texts. Similarly, Ryan and Deci (2020) argue that intrinsically motivated learners tend to participate in learning activities because of personal enjoyment and satisfaction rather than external pressure. In EFL contexts, reading interest is closely associated with learners' attitudes toward English texts, willingness to read, and frequency of reading engagement (Indrayadi, 2021; Damayanti & Sadikin, 2023). Conversely, students with low reading interest often perceive English reading as difficult, monotonous, and disconnected from their personal experiences, leading to reduced engagement and limited language development.

The rapid development of digital technology has transformed the ways students access and interact with reading materials. University students increasingly engage with digital texts through smartphones, social media platforms, online forums, and digital reading applications. This shift has generated new forms of reading practices that extend beyond traditional academic materials. Research on digital reading behavior indicates that contemporary learners frequently access online texts based on personal interests, convenience, and entertainment value (Pardede et al., 2023; Nurfaizah et al., 2024; Wulansari, 2025). Digital environments allow learners to engage with authentic language input while exercising greater autonomy in selecting reading materials. Such flexibility supports self-directed learning and encourages learners to participate in reading activities outside formal educational settings.

The growing prevalence of digital reading is closely related to the emergence of Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE), which refers to self-directed English learning activities conducted through digital technologies beyond classroom environments. IDLE enables learners to develop language skills through authentic interactions with digital content that aligns with their personal interests and daily experiences. A growing body of research has demonstrated that IDLE contributes positively to learners' motivation, language exposure, and willingness to communicate in English (Lee & Drajati, 2019; Soyoof et al., 2023). Unlike formal instructional settings, IDLE allows learners to engage with English voluntarily, creating a low-anxiety environment that facilitates meaningful language acquisition. Consequently, understanding students' digital reading practices has become increasingly important in explaining how language learning occurs beyond institutional contexts.

One form of digital reading that has attracted considerable attention among young people is fanfiction. Fanfiction refers to stories created by fans who adapt existing fictional

FOSTER JELT
Journal of English Language Teaching

Copyright © The Author(s)
Vol. 7, No. 4, October 2026
***e*-ISSN: 2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN: 2776-8880**

characters, settings, or story worlds into new narratives. As part of participatory culture, fanfiction enables readers not only to consume texts but also to engage actively with communities that share similar interests (Jenkins et al., 2016). Fanfiction communities provide opportunities for readers to interact, exchange ideas, and participate in collaborative meaning-making processes. Black (2006, 2008) further argues that fanfiction environments support literacy development by creating authentic spaces where readers and writers engage with language for meaningful purposes. Through these practices, fanfiction becomes more than entertainment; it functions as a literacy activity embedded within digital culture.

Among various fanfiction genres, Alternate Universe (AU) fanfiction has become particularly popular among university students. AU fanfiction reimagines familiar fictional characters in alternative settings, occupations, or social contexts that differ from the original storyline. This genre often incorporates themes and situations that are relatable to contemporary readers, increasing emotional engagement and personal connection with the text. Because readers are already familiar with the characters, they can focus more on understanding narratives and enjoying the reading experience. Such characteristics align with Krashen's concept of voluntary reading, which emphasizes that language acquisition is facilitated when learners engage with interesting and self-selected reading materials. In addition, AU fanfiction is commonly distributed through digital platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Wattpad, TikTok, and online fan communities, making it highly accessible to university students.

Previous studies have reported positive educational outcomes associated with fanfiction reading and other forms of interest-driven digital reading. Research has shown that fanfiction can support vocabulary development, literacy practices, reading engagement, and motivation among EFL learners (Zhai et al., 2021; Austin & Santoso, 2023). Similarly, studies on Wattpad-based extensive reading have demonstrated that students perceive digital fiction platforms as enjoyable, accessible, and beneficial for improving English skills (Permatasari et al., 2020a, 2020b; Aini et al., 2024). Extensive reading practices are particularly valuable because they encourage learners to read large amounts of meaningful and self-selected texts, which can enhance reading fluency, language exposure, and motivation (McLean & Rouault, 2017; Permatasari & Wienanda, 2023). Beyond language development, fan-based affinity spaces have been found to foster readers' motivation, identity construction, and active participation in literacy practices (Curwood et al., 2013; Black, 2006, 2008). Research on participatory culture further suggests that online fan communities provide authentic environments where learners interact with texts, share interpretations, and collaboratively construct knowledge through digital engagement (Jenkins et al., 2016; Thomas, 2007). Furthermore, recent studies have indicated that students perceive AU fanfiction as a valuable source of language exposure and vocabulary enrichment because it combines entertainment, familiarity with characters, and opportunities to encounter authentic English expressions (Yuniasih et al., 2025). These findings collectively suggest that digital fanfiction environments may function not only as recreational spaces but also as meaningful contexts for literacy development and language learning.

FOSTER JELT
Journal of English Language Teaching

Copyright © The Author(s)
Vol. 7, No. 4, October 2026
***e*-ISSN**: **2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN**: **2776-8880**

Despite the growing body of literature on digital reading, fanfiction, and language learning, several important gaps remain. First, existing studies have predominantly focused on language outcomes such as vocabulary acquisition, literacy skills, writing development, and reading comprehension (Zhai et al., 2021; Austin & Santoso, 2023; Yuniasih et al., 2025), while relatively limited attention has been given to reading interest as an affective construct that influences sustained engagement with reading activities. Second, research on digital reading behavior has generally examined broad patterns of online reading and digital literacy among EFL learners (Leu et al., 2013; Pardede et al., 2023; Nurfaizah et al., 2024), with little attention to specific forms of interest-based reading materials such as English AU fanfiction. Third, although studies on Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE) have highlighted the role of self-directed digital activities in promoting motivation and language development (Lee & Drajati, 2019; Soyoof et al., 2023), the potential contribution of AU fanfiction as an IDLE resource remains underexplored. Finally, empirical evidence regarding how Indonesian EFL university students experience, perceive, and engage with English AU fanfiction is still scarce. Most existing studies have focused on secondary school students, general digital reading practices, or fanfiction platforms without specifically examining the relationship between English AU fanfiction and students' reading interest in higher education contexts. Consequently, there is limited understanding of how motivation, enjoyment, attitudes, and willingness to read are shaped through engagement with English AU fanfiction among EFL university students.

To address these gaps, this study explores university students' reading interest in relation to the use of English AU fanfiction at Tadulako University. Drawing upon the concept of reading interest proposed by Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) and perspectives on intrinsic motivation and digital literacy, this study investigates how students engage with English AU fanfiction and how such engagement relates to their motivation, attitudes, enjoyment, and willingness to read English texts. The findings are expected to contribute to the growing literature on digital reading practices, fanfiction literacy, and EFL learning by providing insights into the potential of interest-based digital reading materials to support students' reading engagement in higher education contexts.

METHODS

This research adopted a qualitative case study approach to investigate how English AU (Alternate Universe) fanfiction influenced students' reading interest in an EFL context. The study focused on understanding participants' experiences, perceptions, and personal engagement with English AU fanfiction rather than measuring predetermined variables. A case study design was selected because it enabled an in-depth exploration of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life educational setting.

The study was conducted at the English Education Study Program of Tadulako University. Five undergraduate students participated in the research. Participants were selected purposively based on their familiarity and regular engagement with English AU fanfiction. To be included in the study, students had to meet three requirements: they regularly read English AU fanfiction, had been involved in this activity for at least six months, and were willing to share their experiences during the interview sessions. These criteria

FOSTER JELT
Journal of English Language Teaching

Copyright © The Author(s)
Vol. 7, No. 4, October 2026
***e*-ISSN: 2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN: 2776-8880**

ensured that the participants possessed adequate experience to provide meaningful insights into the phenomenon under investigation. To maintain confidentiality, participants' identities were anonymized through the use of pseudonyms.

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews as the primary instrument of the study. This method allowed the researchers to obtain detailed accounts of participants' reading experiences while providing opportunities to explore unexpected issues that emerged during the conversations. The interview protocol was developed around key aspects of reading interest, including motivation to read, emotional responses toward English reading materials, enjoyment of reading activities, and willingness to engage in further reading. Additional probing questions were employed whenever clarification or elaboration was required.

Each participant was interviewed individually. The interviews lasted between 20 and 30 minutes and were conducted in Indonesian to facilitate more natural and comprehensive responses. All interview sessions were recorded with participants' permission and subsequently transcribed verbatim. The transcripts constituted the primary source of data for analysis.

The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analytical process began with repeated reading of the transcripts to develop familiarity with the dataset. Subsequently, significant statements related to students' experiences of reading English AU fanfiction were identified and coded. Similar codes were then grouped into broader categories, which were further examined to identify recurring patterns across participants. Through an iterative process of reviewing, refining, and interpreting the data, four overarching themes were generated: reading motivation, positive attitudes toward English reading, enjoyment of reading activities, and willingness to read.

To ensure the credibility of the findings, the researchers carefully reviewed the transcripts throughout the analysis process and compared responses across participants to identify convergent and divergent perspectives. Representative quotations were selected to illustrate each theme and to provide direct evidence supporting the interpretations presented in the findings section.

The thematic analysis generated five interconnected themes that explain students' reading interest in English Alternate Universe (AU) fanfiction: reading habits and engagement, reading motivation, positive attitudes toward English reading, enjoyment of reading activities, and willingness to read. Together, these themes illustrate how English AU fanfiction functions as a meaningful digital reading practice among EFL university students.

Reading Habits and Engagement with English AU Fanfiction

The findings revealed that all participants regularly engaged with English AU fanfiction as part of their daily digital reading activities. Their reading frequency ranged from several times per week to daily engagement, with reading sessions lasting between 45 minutes and four hours. Participants accessed AU fanfiction through various digital platforms, including X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, Instagram, Webtoon, and Google Play Books.

Participant 1 explained:

FOSTER JELT
Journal of English Language Teaching

Copyright © The Author(s)
Vol. 7, No. 4, October 2026
***e*-ISSN: 2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN: 2776-8880**

"I usually read AU fanfiction around two or three times a week. If I have free time, I can spend about 45 minutes reading."

Similarly, Participant 2 stated:

"I read almost every day, usually for one or two hours. Twitter and Webtoon are practical because I can access them anywhere."

Participant 5 also reported:

"I read almost every day, especially before sleeping or during breaks. Sometimes I can spend up to four hours reading if the story is really interesting."

The participants' responses indicate that English AU fanfiction has become a regular component of their literacy practices rather than an occasional leisure activity. The relatively high frequency and duration of reading suggest that participants willingly devote substantial time to engaging with English texts when the content aligns with their interests. This pattern differs from traditional academic reading, which is often driven by coursework and assessment requirements. Instead, participants integrated reading into their everyday routines and accessed English texts through platforms that were already part of their digital lives.

Another important finding concerns the flexibility of digital reading. Participants emphasized that AU fanfiction could be accessed anytime and anywhere through smartphones and social media applications. This convenience appears to facilitate continuous interaction with English texts and encourages students to read more frequently. Furthermore, participants were not merely passive readers. Many followed specific authors, searched for new stories, and monitored updates from their favorite fandoms, indicating sustained engagement with English reading materials over time.

Reading Motivation

The interviews revealed that participants were primarily motivated by personal interest and curiosity rather than academic obligations. Their motivation emerged from the desire to follow story developments, explore alternative narratives, and engage with characters they already knew and admired.

Participant 2 stated:

"I read AU because I am curious about what will happen next. Sometimes I cannot stop reading until I finish the story."

Similarly, Participant 3 explained:

"The stories are interesting because they imagine different situations for the characters. That makes me want to continue reading."

Participant 4 also noted:

"Reading AU helps me relax after studying. I read because I enjoy it, not because someone asks me to."

FOSTER JELT
Journal of English Language Teaching

Copyright © The Author(s)
Vol. 7, No. 4, October 2026
***e*-ISSN**: **2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN**: **2776-8880**

These responses suggest that participants' motivation was largely intrinsic in nature. Reading was driven by enjoyment, curiosity, and personal relevance rather than external rewards or academic requirements. Participants frequently described emotional connections with storylines and characters, which appeared to strengthen their desire to continue reading despite occasional linguistic challenges.

The findings further indicate that participants viewed AU fanfiction as a form of entertainment that simultaneously exposed them to English. As a result, language learning occurred incidentally while participants pursued activities that they genuinely enjoyed. This combination of personal interest and authentic language exposure appears to contribute to sustained reading engagement over time.

Positive Attitudes toward English Reading

The interviews demonstrated that participants generally developed positive attitudes toward English reading through their experiences with AU fanfiction. Several participants reported that reading AU stories helped reduce feelings of anxiety and difficulty that they previously associated with English texts.

Participant 1 explained:

> "At first, I often translated many words. But after reading more AU stories, I became more confident and could understand the stories more easily."

Participant 3 similarly stated:

> "Before reading AU, I thought English texts were difficult. Now I feel more comfortable reading in English."

Another participant noted:

> "I realized that reading in English is not as scary as I thought. It can actually be enjoyable."

These responses suggest a gradual shift in participants' perceptions of English reading. Initial concerns regarding vocabulary limitations and comprehension difficulties appeared to diminish as participants accumulated more reading experience. Repeated exposure to English texts allowed participants to develop familiarity with language patterns and become more comfortable engaging with English content.

The findings also indicate that positive attitudes were closely related to participants' sense of achievement. Successfully understanding stories, recognizing vocabulary, and following complex narratives appeared to increase confidence and reinforce favorable perceptions of English reading. Consequently, English reading was no longer viewed solely as an academic requirement but also as an enjoyable personal activity.

Enjoyment of Reading Activities

Enjoyment emerged as one of the strongest themes across all interviews. Participants consistently described English AU fanfiction as entertaining, exciting, and emotionally engaging. The creative nature of AU stories and their connection to familiar fandoms appeared to enhance participants' enjoyment during reading.

Participant 4 stated:

FOSTER JELT
Journal of English Language Teaching

Copyright © The Author(s)
Vol. 7, No. 4, October 2026
***e*-ISSN: 2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN: 2776-8880**

"Sometimes I read for hours because the story is very exciting. I do not realize how much time has passed."

Participant 5 similarly reported:

"I enjoy reading AU because the stories are unique and different. There are always new ideas and surprises."

Another participant explained:

"Reading AU is fun because I already know the characters, but the story is completely different."

These responses demonstrate that enjoyment was not limited to the content itself but was also influenced by the interactive and imaginative nature of AU fanfiction. Participants appreciated the opportunity to explore alternative versions of familiar characters and situations, which created a sense of anticipation and emotional involvement throughout the reading process.

The findings further suggest that enjoyment contributed to prolonged engagement with English texts. Participants frequently reported spending extended periods reading because they became immersed in the stories. Such immersion indicates that reading was experienced as a pleasurable activity rather than a demanding academic task. Consequently, enjoyment appears to function as an important factor sustaining participants' reading practices.

Willingness to Read

The final theme concerns participants' willingness to engage in future reading activities. The interviews revealed that exposure to English AU fanfiction encouraged participants to read more frequently and to seek additional English-language content beyond classroom requirements.

Participant 2 stated:

"After finishing one story, I usually look for another story from the same fandom."

Participant 3 explained:

"I read English more often now because there are many interesting stories online."

Participant 5 also noted:

"Reading AU makes me want to read other English content, including novels and online stories."

These responses suggest that engagement with AU fanfiction influenced participants' long-term reading behaviors. Rather than limiting their reading activities to a single platform or genre, several participants expanded their reading experiences by exploring other forms of English digital content. This finding indicates that AU fanfiction may function as a gateway to broader English reading practices.

Moreover, participants demonstrated a willingness to continue reading English texts in the future despite encountering unfamiliar vocabulary or challenging expressions. Their persistence reflects a growing confidence in their reading abilities and a stronger commitment to engaging with English-language materials. Such willingness is particularly important because sustained

FOSTER JELT
Journal of English Language Teaching

Copyright © The Author(s)
Vol. 7, No. 4, October 2026
***e*-ISSN: 2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN: 2776-8880**

reading behavior contributes to continuous language exposure and literacy development beyond formal educational contexts.

Summary of Findings

Overall, the findings indicate that English AU fanfiction plays a significant role in shaping students' reading interest. Participants engaged regularly with English AU fanfiction through digital platforms, were motivated by personal interest and curiosity, developed more positive attitudes toward English reading, experienced considerable enjoyment during reading activities, and demonstrated a stronger willingness to continue reading English texts. Together, these findings suggest that English AU fanfiction serves as an accessible and interest-driven digital reading resource that encourages sustained engagement with English beyond the classroom.

DISCUSSION

English AU Fanfiction as an Interest-Driven Digital Reading Practice

The findings demonstrate that English AU fanfiction has become an integral part of participants' digital reading practices. The participants reported reading English AU stories regularly through various online platforms, including X (formerly Twitter), Webtoon, TikTok, Instagram, and digital reading applications. Their reading activities were characterized by frequent engagement, flexible access, and self-selected reading materials. These findings support previous studies indicating that contemporary EFL learners increasingly engage with digital texts through online platforms that are embedded in their daily lives (Pardede et al., 2023; Nurfaizah et al., 2024; Wulansari, 2025). Rather than relying exclusively on traditional academic materials, students actively seek reading resources that align with their personal interests and digital habits.

The participants' experiences also reflect the changing nature of literacy in the digital era. According to Leu et al. (2013), digital literacy extends beyond the ability to decode written texts and includes the capacity to navigate, evaluate, and interact with information across digital environments. In the present study, participants demonstrated these practices by searching for stories, following authors, monitoring updates, and accessing multiple platforms to obtain reading materials. Their engagement illustrates how reading has become increasingly integrated into digital ecosystems where literacy practices are intertwined with social media participation and online communication.

Furthermore, the findings align with research on digital reading behavior suggesting that accessibility and convenience significantly influence students' reading habits (Clinton, 2019; Delgado et al., 2018). The participants consistently highlighted the ease of accessing AU fanfiction through smartphones and online platforms, enabling them to engage with English texts at their own pace and according to their personal schedules. Such flexibility appears to encourage more frequent exposure to English input and may contribute to the development of sustainable reading habits. Consequently, English AU fanfiction can be understood as a form of interest-driven digital reading that combines accessibility, personal relevance, and authentic language exposure.

AU Fanfiction and Intrinsic Reading Motivation

A prominent finding of this study is the role of English AU fanfiction in fostering students' intrinsic motivation to read. Participants repeatedly emphasized that they read AU stories because

FOSTER JELT
Journal of English Language Teaching

Copyright © The Author(s)
Vol. 7, No. 4, October 2026
***e*-ISSN: 2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN: 2776-8880**

they enjoyed the narratives, were emotionally connected to the characters, and were curious about story developments. Their engagement was not driven by grades, assignments, or external rewards, but by genuine personal interest.

This finding is consistent with Self-Determination Theory, which posits that intrinsically motivated individuals engage in activities because they find them enjoyable, meaningful, and personally satisfying (Ryan & Deci, 2020). The participants' descriptions of reading for pleasure, curiosity, and emotional engagement reflect key characteristics of intrinsic motivation. Unlike traditional academic reading tasks that may be perceived as obligatory, AU fanfiction created opportunities for voluntary reading, allowing participants to engage with English texts in ways that were personally meaningful.

The findings also support previous studies linking reading motivation to reading engagement and achievement (Schiefele et al., 2012; Guthrie et al., 2013; Wigfield et al., 2018). These scholars argue that students who possess stronger reading motivation are more likely to engage in frequent reading activities and demonstrate persistence when encountering challenging texts. Similarly, the participants in this study reported continuing to read despite unfamiliar vocabulary because their interest in the stories motivated them to persist. This suggests that motivation derived from personally relevant content may help learners overcome linguistic difficulties that might otherwise discourage reading.

In addition, the findings resonate with Indrayadi's (2021) study, which highlighted the importance of motivation in shaping Indonesian EFL learners' reading behavior. The current study extends this perspective by demonstrating that English AU fanfiction can function as a motivational resource that encourages students to engage voluntarily with English texts. Thus, reading motivation in this context appears to emerge from the interaction between students' personal interests, emotional involvement, and the accessibility of digital reading platforms.

English AU Fanfiction as Informal Digital Learning of English

Another important finding concerns the role of English AU fanfiction as a form of Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE). Although participants primarily engaged with AU fanfiction for entertainment purposes, their experiences indicate that meaningful language learning occurred simultaneously. Participants reported increased familiarity with English vocabulary, greater confidence in reading English texts, and more frequent exposure to authentic language use through their engagement with fanfiction.

These findings correspond with the concept of IDLE proposed by Lee and Drajati (2019) and further synthesized by Soyoof et al. (2023), who describe IDLE as self-directed English learning that occurs outside formal educational settings through digital technologies. Unlike classroom-based instruction, IDLE activities are typically voluntary, interest-driven, and embedded in learners' everyday digital practices. The participants' experiences reflect these characteristics, as they independently selected reading materials, determined their reading schedules, and engaged with English content without direct teacher supervision.

The findings further suggest that AU fanfiction provides authentic opportunities for language exposure. Previous research has shown that extensive engagement with meaningful texts can contribute to language development by increasing learners' exposure to vocabulary, grammatical structures, and discourse patterns (McLean & Rouault, 2017). Similarly, participants in the present study described becoming more comfortable with English reading through repeated encounters

FOSTER JELT
Journal of English Language Teaching

Copyright © The Author(s)
Vol. 7, No. 4, October 2026
***e*-ISSN**: **2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN**: **2776-8880**

with language embedded in engaging narratives. Because learning occurred incidentally while participants pursued personal interests, AU fanfiction may offer a low-anxiety environment that facilitates language acquisition.

Moreover, these findings support research on extensive reading through digital platforms. Studies involving Wattpad have demonstrated that students perceive online fiction as enjoyable and beneficial for developing English proficiency (Permatasari et al., 2020a, 2020b; Aini et al., 2024; Permatasari & Wienanda, 2023). The current study contributes additional evidence by showing that English AU fanfiction may serve a similar function, providing learners with sustained opportunities to interact with English beyond formal classroom contexts.

Participatory Literacy and Sustained Reading Engagement

The findings also reveal that students' engagement with English AU fanfiction extends beyond individual reading activities. Participants described following authors, searching for new stories, monitoring updates, and interacting with content across multiple digital platforms. These practices indicate that reading AU fanfiction is situated within broader participatory and social literacy environments.

This finding is closely aligned with Jenkins et al.'s (2016) concept of participatory culture, which emphasizes active involvement in communities where individuals consume, share, and create content collaboratively. Rather than functioning as passive readers, participants in the present study engaged with fan communities and continuously interacted with fan-produced content. Such participation transforms reading into a social activity that is reinforced through community engagement and shared interests.

Similarly, Black (2006, 2008) argues that online fanfiction communities constitute meaningful literacy spaces where language learning occurs through authentic participation. The participants' experiences support this argument, as their engagement with AU fanfiction involved not only reading stories but also interacting with digital content, fandom culture, and online communities. These literacy practices provide learners with opportunities to encounter English in authentic and personally relevant contexts.

The findings also correspond with Curwood et al. (2013), who found that fan-based affinity spaces contribute to readers' motivation and sustained literacy engagement. In the present study, participants frequently reported reading for extended periods and actively seeking new reading materials. Such behaviors suggest that fanfiction communities may encourage long-term engagement with reading by creating environments that combine entertainment, social interaction, and personal relevance.

Overall, the findings indicate that English AU fanfiction serves not only as a reading resource but also as a participatory literacy practice that promotes sustained engagement with English texts. Through their involvement in digital fan communities, students are able to access meaningful reading experiences that support both literacy development and language learning.

Contribution of the Study

The present study contributes to the growing literature on digital reading, fanfiction literacy, and EFL learning by demonstrating that English AU fanfiction functions as an interest-driven digital reading practice that supports reading motivation, positive reading attitudes, enjoyment, and willingness to read among EFL university students. While previous studies have primarily

FOSTER JELT
Journal of English Language Teaching

Copyright © The Author(s)
Vol. 7, No. 4, October 2026
***e*-ISSN: 2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN: 2776-8880**

focused on vocabulary development, literacy skills, or extensive reading through digital fiction platforms (Zhai et al., 2021; Permatasari et al., 2020a, 2020b; Austin & Santoso, 2023), this study highlights the affective dimension of reading by illustrating how English AU fanfiction shapes students' reading interest in higher education contexts. The findings further suggest that fanfiction-based digital reading can serve as a meaningful form of IDLE and participatory literacy, offering valuable opportunities for language exposure beyond formal instructional environments.

CONCLUSION

This study explored EFL university students' reading interest in relation to the use of English Alternate Universe (AU) fanfiction. The findings revealed that English AU fanfiction plays a meaningful role in shaping students' engagement with English reading. Participants reported reading AU fanfiction regularly through various digital platforms and demonstrated sustained engagement with English texts beyond formal classroom requirements. The study identified five interconnected dimensions of reading interest, namely reading habits and engagement, reading motivation, positive attitudes toward English reading, enjoyment of reading activities, and willingness to read. These dimensions collectively illustrate how English AU fanfiction functions as an accessible and interest-driven reading resource for EFL learners.

The findings further suggest that students' engagement with English AU fanfiction is primarily driven by intrinsic motivation, personal interests, and emotional connections to stories and characters. Such engagement encourages voluntary reading, increases exposure to English language input, and fosters more positive perceptions of English reading. In addition, the study highlights the role of English AU fanfiction as a form of Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE), where language learning occurs naturally through self-directed interactions with authentic digital content. The integration of reading, entertainment, and participation in online fan communities also demonstrates the potential of fanfiction to serve as a participatory literacy practice that supports sustained reading engagement.

This study contributes to the growing literature on digital reading, fanfiction literacy, and EFL learning by extending previous research beyond language outcomes such as vocabulary acquisition and literacy skills. Specifically, it provides empirical evidence regarding the affective dimension of reading by demonstrating how English AU fanfiction influences university students' reading interest in an Indonesian EFL context. The findings suggest that educators should consider incorporating students' digital reading preferences and interest-based reading materials into language learning environments to encourage greater engagement with English texts.

Despite these contributions, this study was limited by its small number of participants and its focus on a single institutional context. Future studies may involve larger and more diverse participant groups, employ mixed-methods approaches, or investigate the relationship between engagement with English AU fanfiction and specific language outcomes such as vocabulary growth, reading comprehension, and academic literacy development. Such research would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the educational potential of fanfiction-based digital reading in EFL contexts.

FOSTER JELT
Journal of English Language Teaching

Copyright © The Author(s)
Vol. 7, No. 4, October 2026
***e*-ISSN: 2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN: 2776-8880**

REFERENCES

Aini, N., Pambudi, L. A., & Nisa, A. (2024). The use of Wattpad application for reading skill in EFL classroom. *Batara Didi: English Language Journal, 3*(1), 22–33. https://doi.org/10.56209/badi.v3i1.76

Austin, F. C., & Santoso, W. (2023). Exploring the use of fanfiction as authentic materials in English language teaching: A perspective from a reading class. *Prologue: Journal on Language and Literature, 9*(2), 286–299.

Baron, N. S. (2021). *How we read now: Strategic choices for print, screen, and audio*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190084097.001.0001

Black, R. W. (2006). Language, culture, and identity in online fanfiction. *E-Learning and Digital Media, 3*(2), 170–184. https://doi.org/10.2304/elea.2006.3.2.170

Black, R. W. (2008). *Adolescents and online fan fiction*. Peter Lang.

Clinton, V. (2019). Reading from paper compared to screens: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Research in Reading, 42*(2), 288–325. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9817.12269

Curwood, J. S., Magnifico, A. M., & Lammers, J. C. (2013). Writing in the wild: Writers' motivation in fan-based affinity spaces. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 56*(8), 677–685.

Damayanti, M., & Sadikin, I. S. (2023). Factors influencing students' interest towards learning English as a foreign language. *ELTIN Journal: Journal of English Language Teaching in Indonesia, 11*(2), 193–211.

Delgado, P., Vargas, C., Ackerman, R., & Salmerón, L. (2018). Don't throw away your printed books: A meta-analysis on the effects of reading media on reading comprehension. *Educational Research Review, 25*, 23–38. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2018.09.003

Guthrie, J. T., Klauda, S. L., & Ho, A. N. (2013). Modeling the relationships among reading instruction, motivation, engagement, and achievement for adolescents. *Reading Research Quarterly, 48*(1), 9–26. https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.035

Halum, Y., & Guna, S. (2024). EFL students' reading habits: A study towards the use of digital tools trends. In *Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Education, Humanities, Health and Agriculture 2023*. https://doi.org/10.4108/eai.15-12-2023.2345642

Indrayadi, T. (2021). Indonesian EFL learners' reading motivation. *Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics, 5*(2), 335–349. https://doi.org/10.21093/ijeltal.v5i2.745

Jenkins, H., & Scott, S. (2012). *Textual poachers: Television fans and participatory culture* (Updated ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203114339

FOSTER JELT
Journal of English Language Teaching

Copyright © The Author(s)
Vol. 7, No. 4, October 2026
***e*-ISSN: 2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN: 2776-8880**

Jenkins, H., Ito, M., & Boyd, d. (2016). *Participatory culture in a networked era: A conversation on youth, learning, commerce, and politics*. Polity Press.

Lee, J. S., & Drajati, N. A. (2019). Affective variables and informal digital learning of English: Keys to willingness to communicate in a second language. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology, 35*(5), 168–182. https://doi.org/10.14742/ajet.5177

Leu, D. J., Forzani, E., Burlingame, C., Kulikowich, J., Sedransk, N., Coiro, J., & Kennedy, C. (2013). The new literacies of online research and comprehension: Assessing and preparing students for the 21st century with Common Core State Standards. In D. E. Alvermann, N. J. Unrau, & R. B. Ruddell (Eds.), *Quality reading instruction in the age of Common Core State Standards* (pp. 219–236). International Reading Association. https://doi.org/10.1598/0496.16

McLean, S., & Rouault, G. (2017). The effectiveness and efficiency of extensive reading at developing reading rates. *System, 70*, 92–106. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2017.09.003

Nafilatul Janah, K. E., Latief, M. A., & Andreani, S. (2021). Exploring EFL students' English reading habits: Reading beyond classroom practice. *JET Adi Buana, 6*(1), 17–31. https://doi.org/10.36456/jet.v6.n01.2021.2967

Ng, W. (2012). Can we teach digital natives digital literacy? *Computers & Education, 59*(3), 1065–1078. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2012.04.016

Nurfaizah, D., Erniyati, Y., & Pranata, O. D. (2024). EFL students' reading habits in the digital era. *English Education: Jurnal Tadris Bahasa Inggris, 17*(2), 215–232. https://doi.org/10.24042/ee-jtbi.v17i2.22564

Pardede, P., Rafli, Z., & Iskandar, I. (2023). Exploring Indonesian EFL learners' digital reading habits. *Journal of English Education and Teaching, 7*(3), 459–479. https://doi.org/10.33369/jeet.7.3.459-479

Permatasari, A. N., & Wienanda, W. K. (2023). Extensive reading in improving reading motivation: A students' perspective. *Eralingua: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Asing dan Sastra, 7*(2), 220–232. https://doi.org/10.26858/eralingua.v7i2.45638

Permatasari, I., Wijayanto, A., & Kristina, D. (2020a). Extensive reading on Wattpad and its benefits to students' English skills: Students' perceptions. *ELS Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities, 3*(4), 518–530. https://doi.org/10.34050/elsjish.v3i4.11714

Permatasari, I., Wijayanto, A., & Kristina, D. (2020b). The strengths and weaknesses of extensive reading using Wattpad: Students' perceptions. *Indonesian Journal of EFL and Linguistics, 5*(2), 373–389. https://doi.org/10.21462/ijefl.v5i2.292

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2020). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from a self-determination theory perspective: Definitions, theory, practices, and future directions. *Contemporary*

FOSTER JELT
Journal of English Language Teaching

Copyright © The Author(s)
Vol. 7, No. 4, October 2026
***e*-ISSN: 2723-4126**
***p*-ISSN: 2776-8880**

Educational Psychology, 61, Article 101860. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2020.101860

Rumainah. (2018). Undergraduate students' reading interest and reading comprehension achievement in a state Islamic university. *Ta'dib, 23*(1), 54–64. https://doi.org/10.19109/td.v23i1.2080

Schiefele, U., Schaffner, E., Möller, J., Wigfield, A., Nolen, S. B., & Baker, L. (2012). Dimensions of reading motivation and their relation to reading behavior and competence. *Reading Research Quarterly, 47*(4), 427–463. https://doi.org/10.1002/RRQ.030

Singer, L. M., & Alexander, P. A. (2017). Reading across mediums: Effects of reading digital and print texts on comprehension and calibration. *The Journal of Experimental Education, 85*(1), 155–172. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220973.2016.1143794

Soyoof, A., Reynolds, B. L., Vazquez-Calvo, B., & McLay, K. (2023). Informal digital learning of English (IDLE): A scoping review of what has been done and a look towards what is to come. *Computer Assisted Language Learning, 36*(4), 608–640. https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2021.1936562

Spante, M., Hashemi, S. S., Lundin, M., & Algers, A. (2018). Digital competence and digital literacy in higher education research: Systematic review of concept use. *Cogent Education, 5*(1), 1519143. https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2018.1519143

Tang, C. M., & Chaw, L. Y. (2016). Digital literacy: A prerequisite for effective learning in a blended learning environment? *The Electronic Journal of e-Learning, 14*(1), 54–65.

Thomas, A. (Ed.). (2007). *Youth online: Identity and literacy in the digital age*. Peter Lang.

Wigfield, A., Gladstone, J. R., & Turci, L. (2018). Beyond cognition: Reading motivation and reading comprehension. *Child Development Perspectives, 12*(3), 190–195. https://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12268

Wulansari, M. (2025). An analysis of EFL students' online reading habits. *Journal of Educational Innovations and Technologies, 1*(1), 64–74.

Yuniasih, W. S., Waluyo, P. S., & Arochman, T. (2025). Students' perception of reading alternate universe to develop English vocabulary. *JET (Journal of English Teaching), 11*(1), 79–91. https://doi.org/10.33541/jet.v11i1.5939

Zhai, X., Liu, C., & Razali, A. B. (2021). Utilization of online fan-fiction to improve English literacy skills among EFL undergraduate students. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development, 10*(4), 139–146. https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarped/v10-i4/11678