

## **Bridging the motivational gap: Indonesian university students' reading habits and interest in culturally-grounded extensive reading materials**

**ABSTRACT** - Indonesian students' persistently low performance in international literacy assessments, including the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), underscores a critical need to reevaluate pedagogical approaches to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) reading instruction. Recent scholarship advocates for the implementation of Extensive Reading (ER) programs, which enable students to read at their own level, pace, and interest, thereby gradually fostering sustainable reading habits. While conventional ER materials have predominantly been developed using Western-based narratives and cultural contexts, the integration of local stories is necessary to further enhance student engagement. This study identifies students' reading habits in both Indonesian and English as a foundation for developing ER materials, with particular emphasis on exploring student perceptions of reading materials infused with local values. Employing a survey design, the study involved 104 university students in West Kalimantan. A questionnaire was administered to examine reading frequency, types of reading materials, language preferences, as well as attitudes toward and interest in local reading materials. The findings reveal a motivational dichotomy: reading in Indonesian is driven primarily by intrinsic motives, whereas reading in English is dominated by extrinsic motives. The low frequency of English reading is further compounded by linguistic challenges, including lengthy and complex sentence structures as well as difficult vocabulary. Nevertheless, students demonstrated a notably strong interest in English reading materials based on Pontianak culture, believing that local content facilitates English comprehension. These findings affirm that the development of culturally grounded extensive reading materials constitutes a strategic, evidence-based intervention capable of bridging motivational and linguistic gaps, fostering sustainable reading habits, and enhancing long-term English competence.

**Stella Prancisca\***

Universitas Tanjungpura, Indonesia

\*Corresponding email:

[stellaguru123@untan.ac.id](mailto:stellaguru123@untan.ac.id)

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## 1. Introduction

Reading is a fundamental skill in language learning that plays a vital role in developing comprehension and knowledge. In English Language Teaching (ELT), reading is crucial for expanding vocabulary, understanding sentence structures, and providing exposure to various forms of authentic language use. Extensive reading, reading large quantities of material for general understanding, has been proven to help language learners improve both their reading skills and overall comprehension.

However, at the university level, many students still encounter difficulties when reading English texts. Based on English proficiency assessments, most students hold TOEFL scores below 400, indicating that they remain at the elementary to lower-intermediate level of English proficiency. This often results in low interest in reading English materials, particularly when the available content lacks relevance to their personal interests and cultural background.

On the other hand, reading in Indonesian remains a significant part of students' academic and daily lives. The types of materials frequently accessed—such as academic books, news articles, and social media—demonstrate that students possess diverse reading habits. However, whether these habits carry over into English reading remains a question that requires further investigation.

Furthermore, according to reports from the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), Indonesia is categorized among countries with low literacy levels compared to international peers. Based on the 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) data, Indonesia obtained an average reading literacy score of 359, a decrease from the 371 recorded in 2018 and significantly below the global average of 476. Indonesia ranked 69th out of 81 countries in reading literacy, despite an improvement from its 74th-place ranking in 2018. Additionally, only 25.46% of Indonesian students reached at least Level 2 in reading literacy, far below the OECD average of 73.75%. This data suggests that general reading habits still need improvement in both Indonesian and English. Persistently low scores indicate that traditional pedagogical approaches may be failing to foster a sustainable reading habit, potentially due to a lack of resonance between the instructional materials and the students' lived experiences.

A critical factor in this lack of engagement is the cultural distance found in many EFL materials. While most ER resources rely on Western-based narratives and backgrounds, scholars such as McKay (2004) argue that for English to be an international language, it must be used to communicate the learners' own culture and concerns to others. Culturally irrelevant content can create a "double burden" for students: they must grapple with a foreign language while simultaneously navigating unfamiliar cultural schemas. Thus, it is important to develop reading materials that are more engaging and aligned with students' cultural backgrounds. The development of an extensive reading book based on Pontianak culture, in particular, incorporating themes such as local culinary heritage, traditional medicine, and tourist attractions, emerges as a potential solution.

Prior to developing these reading materials, a rigorous needs analysis is required to understand the existing landscape of student reading behaviors and the specific barriers they

face. Specifically, this research aims to identify the comparative reading habits of students in both their first language (L1) and English language (L2) to determine if positive reading behaviors transfer across languages. Furthermore, it will analyze the specific linguistic and psychological barriers that students face when engaging with English texts. By measuring the level of student interest in culturally-themed English content, this study serves as a critical preliminary step. Ultimately, these insights will ensure that the resulting extensive reading materials are not only pedagogically sound but are also tailored to the specific needs, abilities, and cultural contexts of the students, thereby fostering a more sustainable reading culture. To guide this investigation, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the self-reported reading habits of university students in West Kalimantan in Indonesian (L1) and English (L2)?
2. What are the primary linguistic and psychological challenges students face when reading English texts?
3. To what extent are students interested in English reading materials based on local Pontianak culture, and what are the underlying reasons for this interest?

## **2. Literature review**

### *2.1. Literacy and reading habits*

Literacy is defined as the ability to understand, use, evaluate, and reflect upon information from various types of texts as a foundation for decision-making in daily life (OECD, 2018). Within the university environment, literacy becomes a crucial aspect of supporting students' academic success. One of the primary indicators of literacy is reading habits, which contribute significantly to critical thinking skills and the mastery of scientific knowledge.

Reading habits encompass reading activities performed routinely, the types of reading materials selected, and the motivations underlying these activities (Ahmadi, 2017). Studies indicate that a higher frequency of reading correlates with better academic achievement among students (Clark & Teravainen-Goff, 2020). Nevertheless, the level of reading literacy in Indonesia is still categorized as low. The results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) by the OECD (2018) demonstrate that the reading proficiency of Indonesian students remains below the average of OECD member countries. This reinforces the urgency of efforts to enhance the reading culture, particularly among university students.

While the pedagogical benefits of ER are well-documented, ranging from improved reading proficiency (Yamashita, 2013) to increased fluency in the Indonesian context (Prayuda, Ginting, & Afrilia, 2023), its successful implementation hinges entirely on the availability of "engaging" and "level-appropriate" texts. In Indonesia, students often struggle with a "linguistic threshold," where TOEFL scores below 400 make standard English ER materials feel more like "intensive" study than "extensive" enjoyment. This study posits that the current challenge of ER in many Indonesian universities is not the implementation of the method, but a content-focus: a lack of materials that are linguistically accessible while being cognitively and culturally stimulating enough to trigger intrinsic motivation.

## 2.2. *Reading in the context of English language teaching*

In ELT, reading skills serve as the primary gateway for building an understanding of language structure, vocabulary, and communicative context (Grabe, 2009; Nation, 2020). One effective approach to enhancing reading skills in EFL is Extensive Reading (ER), which involves reading large quantities of material using texts that are both easy and engaging (Day & Bamford, 1998).

The ER approach has been widely implemented in foreign language learning contexts and has consistently demonstrated positive outcomes. Yamashita (2013) emphasizes that extensive reading not only improves reading proficiency but also contributes to a positive attitude toward language learning. In Indonesia, several studies show that ER assists students in comprehending English texts more fluently and without pressure (Prayuda et al., 2023), especially in writing skills (Hardiningsih et al., 2025), as the materials used are aligned with their proficiency levels.

However, despite its promising benefits, EFL students in Indonesia generally face various challenges when reading English texts, such as limited vocabulary, complex sentence structures, and a lack of self-confidence (Cahyono & Widiati, 2006; Fauziati, 2017). Extensive reading helps overcome these hurdles by providing repeated exposure to familiar vocabulary and language structures, thereby increasing reading fluency. Furthermore, ER boosts reading motivation by granting students the freedom to select reading materials that are relevant and interesting to them (Nation, 2020).

Within the framework of higher education English instruction, reading habits developed through ER can accelerate language proficiency development. Clark and Teravainen-Goff (2020) indicate that students who engage in consistent reading activities tend to achieve higher performance in both English reading and writing skills. Therefore, understanding students' reading habits is a vital first step in designing effective and enjoyable English learning programs. Research by Prancisca et al. (2023) further demonstrates that reading genres aligned with student interests—such as drama and narrative stories—play a significant role in increasing motivation and participation in extensive reading programs.

In this study, the extensive reading approach is viewed not only as a strategy for improving reading skills but also as a preliminary step in developing English reading materials based on Pontianak's local culture. Consequently, mapping students' reading habits serves as an essential foundation to ensure that the developed book is truly appropriate for their needs and local context.

## 2.3. *The use of local culture-based reading materials*

The presentation of contextually relevant instructional materials that incorporate local culture can enhance student motivation and active participation (Suharto et al., 2024; Ratri et al., 2024). In English Language Teaching (ELT), the integration of local content can bridge the gap between students' lived experiences and foreign instructional materials. Suharto et al. (2024) emphasize that by identifying and utilizing the parallels and contrasts between their native environment and the English language, learners can enhance their linguistic grasp, lexical

growth, and communicative competence. This aligns with McKay's (2004) concept, which emphasizes the importance of cultural relevance in foreign language learning.

Recent research across Indonesia supports the efficacy of localizing content. Integrating local culture into reading materials allows students to feel more connected to the texts they engage with. For instance, Yusniawati and Lestari (2021) found that reading materials that reflect student's local environment and culture create a stronger sense of ownership and identity within the learning process. Kristiawan (2012) also confirmed that English language learning that utilizes local culture can enhance the appeal of the text and facilitate comprehension due to the presence of a familiar context.

This is echoed in regional studies across Indonesia, such as Aceh, Yogyakarta, and Papua, yielding positive results in increased student participation and learning outcomes. For instance, Kristiawan (2021) developed Extensive Reading (ER) materials based on local folklore in Banyuwangi, Indonesia. He believes that integrating local culture enriches students' linguistic resources and social practices, thereby making their language learning more meaningful. Additionally, Prancisca and Chappell (2022) evaluated a bilingual book themed around Pontianak culture used in English instruction and found that students favored the book because the topics and language level were well-suited to their abilities. This proves that local culture-based instructional materials can support comprehension and boost learning enthusiasm.

However, a critical gap remains: while folklore is a common focus, there is a lack of research into using contemporary local culture, such as Pontianak's modern culinary scene or urban tourist attractions, as a basis for ER materials. This study moves beyond traditional folklore to assess student needs in a more modern, localized context.

#### *2.4. Previous studies*

Numerous studies have highlighted the significance of reading habits in English language learning. For instance, research by Yang, Chu, and Tseng (2021) identified a positive correlation between reading habits and English reading comprehension. This effect was particularly significant for students who engaged in graded readers at below their level (i-1). Similarly, Clark and Teravainen-Goff (2020) stated that learners who read regularly achieve higher literacy performance compared to those who rarely engage in reading activities.

Research conducted by Yusniawati and Lestari (2021) as well as Ratri et al. (2024) demonstrates that integrating local culture into reading texts can enhance student interest and engagement. In particular, Yusniawati and Lestari (2020) argue that the use of locally-based Extensive Reading (ER) materials not only supports language acquisition but also strengthens the student's nationalism to resist the domination of western culture contained their mainstream ER materials.

Despite these findings, there is still limited research focusing on the reading habits of university students in West Kalimantan, specifically regarding their needs for English reading materials that are relevant to local culture. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap and contribute to the development of contextualized English instructional materials.

## 2.5. *Conceptual framework*

This research is based on the assumption that reading habits contribute significantly to English language mastery. By understanding students' reading habits in both Indonesian and English languages, as well as their preferences and challenges, appropriate and effective reading materials can be developed. The framework suggests that students' L1 reading habits provide a baseline for their "reading identity. However, when transitioning to L2 texts, linguistic barriers (vocabulary and syntax) create a motivational gap.

The theoretical foundation of this study encompasses literacy theory (OECD, 2019), EFL learning based on extensive reading (Grabe, 2009; Day & Bamford, 1998), and the importance of integrating local culture into language learning (McKay, 2004; Yusniawati & Lestari, 2021). In particular, we argue that culturally familiar content can act as a cognitive and affective scaffold, lowering these barriers, increasing intrinsic motivation (as per Self-Determination Theory), and thereby making the principles of Extensive Reading more effective. This study serves as an empirical test of the foundational assumptions of this model.

Despite the established benefits of ER and the recognized potential of local culture, no study to date has systematically investigated the specific reading habits and cultural-content references of university students in West Kalimantan as a prerequisite for developing a targeted, culturally-grounded ER intervention. This study aims to fill this gap. It provides the necessary empirical prerequisite for developing a targeted, culturally-grounded ER intervention that is not just theoretically strong, but locally resonant.

## 3. **Method**

### 3.1. *Research design*

This study employed a quantitative approach using a descriptive survey method. This method was chosen to describe the reading habits of students in Indonesian and English, the challenges they encounter, and their interest in Pontianak culture-based reading materials. Data were collected through a questionnaire designed based on aspects relevant to the study. As noted by Anderson and Lightfoot (2022), survey research provides an essential opportunity to reach a large number of respondents and is particularly valuable for gaining an initial understanding of a population, especially in areas where little prior research has been conducted.

The research design is quantitative, descriptive, and exploratory, with the goal of identifying student needs and reading habits. By adopting an exploratory approach, this study utilizes data collection tools to provide a broad overview of the area of interest, which in this case is the intersection of local culture and language proficiency.

The findings from this study will serve as a foundation for developing contextual and relevant extensive reading materials based on local Pontianak culture. Thus, this research also serves as a needs analysis for the development of teaching materials, aligning with the principle that exploratory surveys are successful in eliciting data that helps researchers understand the nature and extent of specific translingual or educational practices (Anderson & Lightfoot, 2022).

### 3.2. *Location and participants*

The research was conducted at a university in West Kalimantan, with the population comprising students currently enrolled in English language courses. The study sample consisted of 104 students drawn from three classes across two faculties: the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education (FKIP) and the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences (FISIP) at Tanjungpura University. Sampling utilized a purposive sampling technique based on several criteria: actively enrolled students taking an English course, possessing prior experience reading in English in both academic and non-academic contexts, and willingness to fully participate by completing the questionnaire.

By considering the diversity of the faculties, this research aimed to obtain a more comprehensive overview of student reading habits in Indonesian and English. FKIP students likely have a higher academic inclination toward literacy, while FISIP students may offer a different perspective on reading English texts in the context of social sciences. Thus, the results are expected to provide broader insights into student needs for Pontianak culture-based reading materials relevant to their English language learning.

### 3.3. Data collection techniques and instruments

The instrument used in this research was a questionnaire designed to measure student reading habits in Indonesian and English, the challenges they face, and their interest in Pontianak culture-based reading materials. The questionnaire is a common data collection tool in survey research for its efficiency in gathering a large amount of information (Creswell, 2014). The details of the statements queried in the questionnaire are outlined in Table 1.

**Table 1**

Research instrument specification.

No.	Variable	Indicator	Question Type	No of Items
1	Respondent Identity	Age, major, education level	Categorical	3
2	Reading Habits in Indonesian	Reading frequency, types of reading material, reading duration	Categorical	3
3	Reading Habits in English	Reading frequency, types of reading material, sources of reading material	Categorical	3
4	Challenges in Reading English Texts	Vocabulary, grammar, content comprehension, interest	5-point Likert	3
5	Interest in Pontianak Culture-Based Reading Materials	Topic preference, reading format	5-point Likert	3

To ensure the rigor of the instrument, a two-stage validation process was employed, addressing both content and internal consistency. While a formal pilot study with students was not conducted due to logistical constraints, the instrument underwent a rigorous expert validation process. Two senior lecturers specializing in Applied Linguistics and TESOL reviewed the questionnaire items to ensure theoretical alignment with the research objectives and linguistic

appropriateness for the target population's proficiency level. Suggestions regarding the phrasing of the "Linguistic Challenges" section were incorporated to minimize respondent bias and ensure face validity.

For the ordinal data sections (Parts 4 and 5), reliability was statistically verified post-hoc using Cronbach's Alpha. The analysis yielded a coefficient of  $\alpha = 0.70$  for the Reading Challenges scale and a high coefficient of  $\alpha = 0.84$  for the Cultural Interest scale. Both values meet or exceed the generally accepted threshold for reliability in social science research, confirming that the items consistently measured the intended constructs across the 104 participants. For categorical items (Parts 2 and 3), reliability was maintained through clear operational definitions and expert judgment to minimize ambiguity.

### 3.4. Data analysis

The data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively using descriptive statistics. Frequency, percentage, and mean values will be calculated to describe student reading habits, the challenges they encounter, and their interest in Pontianak culture-based reading materials. The results of this analysis will be presented in tables and graphs for ease of interpretation.

## 4. Findings

This chapter presents the results of the questionnaire data analysis from the 104 student respondents who participated in the study, followed by a discussion of the findings connected to the research objectives and prior literature review. The findings are organized to address the three primary research questions: reading habits, linguistic/psychological challenges, and cultural interest. Prior to that, however, the characteristics of the respondents are provided.

### 4.1. Description of respondent characteristics

This section presents the demographic profile of the participants, which provided the data regarding reading habits, challenges, and interest in Pontianak culture-based extensive reading.

**Table 2**

Distribution of respondents based on gender and study program.

Item	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Sex		
• Female	76	73%
• Male	28	27%
Total (n)	104	100%
Study Program		
• FKIP Social Education A1	36	35%
• FKIP Social Education A2	36	35%
• FISIP Internasional Relations	32	30%
Total (n)	104	100%

Table 2 indicates that most respondents participating in this survey are female (73%). In terms of academic field, the distribution of respondents is divided between the two classes and is dominated by the Social Sciences Education Study Program (FKIP) (70%) and the International Relations Study Program (FISIP) (30%). All respondents are registered as second-semester students. This is important because students in the early semesters generally have varying levels of exposure to English-language texts in the academic environment, beyond the demands of basic English courses.

#### 4.2. Analysis of student reading habits

After identifying the respondent profile, the analysis shifts to student reading habits, both in Indonesian (L1) and English (L2), which serves as the main foundation of this research.

**Table 3**

Reading frequency.

Item	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Frequency of Reading in Indonesian (per month)		
• Every day	12	12%
• Often (2-4 books per month)	15	14%
• Sometimes (1 book per month)	39	38%
• Rarely (less than once per month)	37	36%
• Almost never	1	0%
Total (n)	104	100%
Frequency of Reading in English (per month)		
• Every day	21	20%
• Often (2-4 books per month)	15	14%
• Sometimes (1 book per month)	5	5%
• Rarely (less than once per month)	59	57%
• Almost never	4	4%
Total (n)	104	100%

As shown in Table 3, a total of 74% of respondents read at most only 1 book in Indonesian or rarely (less than 1 book) per month. This indicates that even in the L1 context, student reading habits are still relatively low. This finding aligns with PISA literacy data, which shows that Indonesian students' reading ability is below the global average, emphasizing the general need to improve the reading culture.

This finding is also reflected in the results for reading habits in English, where the majority of respondents (76%) stated they rarely or never read. This indicates a low frequency of exposure to L2 texts. This data reinforces the research background stating that many students are still at the beginner level of English comprehension (TOEFL scores below 400), which impacts the low interest in reading L2.

**Table 4**

Reading genre and motivation.

Item	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
<b>Most Popular Reading Genres in Indonesian</b>		
• Drama/Life stories	67	64%
• Romance (love stories)	54	52%
• University textbooks/Course books	48	46%
• Science books	46	44%
• Folktales/Fairy tales	45	43%
<b>Total (n)</b>	<b>260</b>	
<b>Most Popular Reading Genres in English</b>		
• Folktales/Fairy tales	89	86%
• Drama/Life stories	44	42%
• Romance (love stories)	43	41%
• University textbooks/Course books	41	40%
• Science books	34	32%
<b>Total (n)</b>	<b>251</b>	
<b>Main Reasons for Reading in Indonesian</b>		
• For entertainment	49	47%
• To get information	30	29%
• To complete course assignments	25	
<b>Total (n)</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Main Reasons for Reading in Indonesian</b>		
• For entertainment	9	9%
• To get information	5	4%
• To complete course assignments	90	87%
<b>Total (n)</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>100%</b>

Regarding genres, Table 4 shows that entertainment genres such as Drama/Life stories (64%) and Romance (52%) are highly dominant in Indonesian reading (L1). Meanwhile, in English (L2), the Folktales/Fairy tales are very prominent (86%). This preference for folktales in L2 suggests that respondents tend to choose texts that are perceived as simpler, have a clear plot, and use easier vocabulary. This preference is suitable for readers with limited L2 proficiency, like the participants in this study.

Furthermore, in terms of reading motivation, this study found a sharp dichotomy (difference). Reading L1 is driven primarily by the goal of entertainment (47%), indicating the presence of intrinsic motivation. Conversely, reading L2 is dominated by course assignments (87%), reflecting that their reading activity is motivated by extrinsic factors. This difference confirms that L2 reading activities have not yet become a habit based on personal interest (extensive reading), but rather an activity that is compelled by academic demands.

The data above reveals a sobering reality: 74% of respondents read one or fewer books per month in their native Indonesian (L1), while 76% rarely or never engage with English (L2) texts. This suggests that the struggle with English reading is not an isolated linguistic issue, but part of a broader "literacy poverty" consistent with Indonesia's PISA 2022 ranking. The lack of a strong L1 reading habit means students lack the "reading stamina" and metacognitive strategies required to tackle L2 texts, creating a double hurdle for EFL educators in West Kalimantan.

Additionally, a sharp contrast emerged in reading intent. While L1 reading is driven by intrinsic goals like entertainment (47%), L2 reading is almost entirely a "forced" activity driven by course assignments (87%). This confirms that for these students, English reading is an extrinsic burden rather than a voluntary habit. The preference for "Folktales" in English (86%) further suggests that students are retreating to "safe," predictable narratives to cope with their limited proficiency.

#### 4.3. Analysis of challenges in reading English texts

After mapping the low reading habits, this sub-section identifies the barriers students experience when encountering L2 texts. The average scores are processed from a scale of 1 (Never experienced) to 5 (Very frequently experienced).

**Table 5**

Challenges in reading English texts.

Variable	Mean
Long and complex sentence structure	3.90
Difficult vocabulary	3.64
Difficulty understanding the plot and content of the reading material	3.17
Lack of reading motivation	3.16
Uninteresting reading topics	2.72

The two biggest challenges experienced by respondents in this study are Long and complex sentence structure (M: 3.90) and Difficult vocabulary (M: 3.64). Both of these variables are at a high level (approaching 'frequently experienced' = 4.0). This result is not surprising, as these are common linguistic problems encountered in English language learning (Cahyono & Widiati, 2006; Fauziati, 2017). Furthermore, the high scores underscore why students need to engage in an extensive reading program, as ER requires easily understandable texts where they can choose books with basic vocabulary and sentence structures to facilitate their reading fluency. However, these scores may also serve as the linguistic threshold. Until students can decode the language without cognitive overload, the "pleasure" of Extensive Reading remains out of reach.

#### 4.4. Analysis of interest in culture-based extensive reading

Considering the high linguistic challenges and low motivation, this sub-section measures the level of student interest in the proposed solution: extensive reading materials based on local Pontianak culture. The average scores are processed from a Likert Scale of 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree).

**Table 6**

Level of interest in Pontianak culture-based reading materials.

Variable	Mean
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It is easier to understand reading material if the content relates to my life/culture	4.31
I want to see more English books that discuss West Kalimantan culture	4.16
I am interested in reading English-language materials that feature Pontianak culture	4.15
Reading about local food, tourist attractions, or traditions makes me more interested in learning English	4.13
Local reading materials can help me become more motivated to read in English	3.97

Despite the low habits and high barriers, all cultural interest indicators recorded high average scores ( $M= 3.9$  to  $4.3$ ), showing a level of Agree to Strongly Agree toward the development of local culture-based materials. This finding is highly crucial. One of the reasons they agree is the belief that it is easier for students to understand reading material if the content relates to their life/culture ( $M= 4.31$ ). This supports the view that integrating local content can bridge the gap between students' life experiences and foreign teaching materials, which ultimately can increase both comprehension and motivation. This high level of interest shows that the development of extensive reading books based on Pontianak culture is an appropriate response to student needs, aligning with previous studies that demonstrated that locally-based ER materials increase student interest and engagement.

## 5. Discussion

Based on the data analysis results, this study yields two fundamental and interconnected findings that provide direct implications for the development of extensive reading materials. The first finding is the existence of a motivational dichotomy and the need for compelling content. In this study, reading in Indonesian (L1) is dominated by intrinsic motivation (for entertainment), while reading in English (L2) is still driven by extrinsic factors (course assignments). Although students have the freedom to choose books appropriate for their level and interest, this freedom was evidently not compelling enough for them to cultivate intrinsic motivation and sustained engagement, which is the core of habit formation. Moreover, the fact that 74% of students rarely read in their mother tongue suggests that the "Motivational Gap" identified in the title is not merely an EFL problem but a systemic one. Typically, literacy skills transfer from L1 to L2. However, if the L1 foundation is weak, there is no "habitual momentum" to transfer to English. This implies that ER programs in Indonesia cannot simply provide books; they must first build the basic "will to read" by providing content that is so locally resonant that it overcomes the general cultural resistance to reading.

The sharp divide between L1 (intrinsic) and L2 (extrinsic) motivation can be interpreted through Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2017). Currently, L2 reading for these students is characterized by "External Regulation", they read only to pass courses or avoid penalties. The core goal of an ER program is to move learners toward "Identified Regulation," where they read because they value the content. The high interest in Pontianak culture ( $M=4.15$ ) suggests that localizing content is the key "nudge" required. By using familiar schemas (food, traditions), we reduce the "competence" barrier of SDT, making the student feel more capable

and, therefore, more autonomously motivated to engage with English. Therefore, while the principle of choice is already implemented, the focus of future development must shift from simply having choices available to ensuring the quality of the choices: guaranteeing that the reading materials are both culturally relevant and linguistically adequate to generate a sense of "liking" and engagement, which will ultimately shift motivation toward the intrinsic.

The next crucial finding concerns the relevance of culture as a strategy for increasing engagement. Despite the low L2 reading frequency and high linguistic challenges, students demonstrated a very high level of interest (M: 4.1) in L2 reading materials that feature the context and culture of Pontianak/West Kalimantan. The highest level of interest stems from the belief that local content facilitates comprehension. The data confirms that students view local culture as a "bridge." This aligns with Schema Theory, which posits that reading is a process of mapping new information onto existing mental structures. When a student reads about "Bingke Berendam" in English, they are not learning new concepts and a new language simultaneously; they are simply mapping new labels (English) onto deeply familiar concepts (Pontianak culture). This significantly lowers the Affective Filter (Krashen, 1982) and provides a "Cognitive Scaffold" that compensates for the high linguistic challenges. This data aligns with the research by Prancisca and Chappell (2022), where students favored bilingual books themed around Pontianak culture due to the suitability of the topic and language level. Moreover, this exceptionally high interest serves as a valid foundation for material development. The development of ER books must leverage local themes (e.g., local cuisine, tourist attractions) as a strategy to bridge the motivational gap, strengthen the context that facilitates comprehension, overcome linguistic difficulties, and ultimately, enhance overall L2 reading competence.

## 6. Conclusion

In summary, while Day and Bamford's (1998) principles of Extensive Reading advocate for freedom of choice, this study argues that in the West Kalimantan context, choice alone proves insufficient. Without culturally relevant reading options that bridge the gap between students' first language (L1) identities and second language (L2) goals, learners remain confined to a cycle of extrinsic, assignment-driven reading. The significantly high statistical interest in local themes provides a clear mandate for the development of a "Pontianak ER Series" as a strategic intervention designed to foster sustainable, intrinsic reading habits. This study concludes that the development of Pontianak culture-based Extensive Reading materials constitutes a highly relevant and necessary solution for bridging the identified motivational gap and addressing linguistic hurdles. This strategy promotes intrinsic interest while facilitating the comprehension necessary for forming sustainable reading habits. The findings offer robust needs analysis data for curriculum development and advise instructors to shift pedagogical approaches toward fostering intrinsic engagement through culturally contextualized content. Several limitations must be acknowledged. The study employed a relatively small, non-generalizable sample of 104 students drawn from two faculties, alongside a descriptive design that precludes causal inference. Consequently, future research should focus on empirically testing the effectiveness of

the proposed culture-based materials, expanding sample size, and incorporating qualitative methods to capture richer, more nuanced insights into learner experiences and outcomes.

### Declaration on the use of AI

The author acknowledges the use of generative AI tools, which were employed exclusively for language refinement and to facilitate comprehension of complex conceptual material. The original manuscript draft and all data analysis procedures were conducted independently by the author.

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