

From Scrolling to Reading: Overcoming Low Motivation in English Reading Among Gen ZNovri Susanti Suparman¹, Destri Wahyuningsih², Roswati³, Padli⁴^{1,4}Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Nurul Falah Airmolek, Indonesia²Sekolah Tinggi Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan Insan Madani Airmolek, Indonesia³Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Syarif Kasim, IndonesiaCorresponding author's E-mail: novrisusantisuparman@gmail.com***Abstract***

Reading motivation among Generation Z students, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, has become a significant concern in secondary education. This study aims to investigate the factors contributing to low motivation in reading English texts among high school students in Indragiri Hulu Regency and explore effective strategies to enhance their engagement. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining surveys, interviews, and classroom observations with 150 students and 10 English teachers from SMA, SMK, and MA schools. The findings indicate that students' low reading motivation stems from digital distractions, lack of relevant reading materials, vocabulary difficulties, and insufficient external support from teachers and parents. The study also highlights that integrating digital reading platforms, gamification, personalized content, and teacher-student interactions can significantly improve reading engagement. The results align with previous research, emphasizing the importance of adapting instructional strategies to students' learning preferences. This study provides valuable insights for educators and policymakers in designing effective interventions to foster reading motivation.

Keywords: English reading motivation, Gen Z, reading engagement, secondary education, digital learning

INTRODUCTION

Reading motivation among Generation Z students has emerged as a growing concern in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), particularly in rural and underresourced areas (Derakhshan et al., 2025). In Indragiri Hulu Regency, high school students from various educational streams, such as SMA, SMK, and MA, often struggle to maintain interest in reading English texts. This challenge is reflected in their poor comprehension skills and overall low academic performance in English subjects. Factors such as digital distractions, lack of interest in traditional printed materials, limited vocabulary, and minimal support from both educators and parents contribute significantly to this disengagement (Li et al., 2024). Given that reading comprehension is a fundamental skill for academic success and language mastery, there is an urgent need to explore the causes of low motivation and to identify strategies that can foster sustained engagement among these learners.

Recent literature emphasizes the importance of adapting teaching approaches to the unique characteristics of Generation Z, who are typically digital natives with distinct preferences for multimedia content and interactive learning. Chardonnens (2025), for example, highlights the value of integrating metacognitive strategies and artificial intelligence (AI) to enhance motivation and autonomy in digital learning environments.

While such approaches have shown promise in promoting active learning and personalized instruction, their effectiveness largely depends on the technological infrastructure available (Albaaly, 2025), something that is often lacking in rural regions like Indragiri Hulu. This indicates a significant contextual gap between much of the existing research and the lived realities of students in rural Indonesian settings.

Similarly, Bilonozhko and Syzenko (2020) underscore the motivational power of using authentic texts and tasks tailored to digital learners. The study draws attention to the unique reading habits and cognitive preferences of Generation Z, suggesting that pedagogical strategies must align with their digital fluency and need for relevance. However, while authenticity in materials is important, the broader educational ecosystem—including teacher readiness, resource availability, and students' foundational language skills—also plays a critical role in determining learning outcomes. These variables remain underexplored in studies focused on reading motivation in rural EFL contexts.

Rahmat et al. (2018) further contribute to this discourse by examining cognitive and critical thinking skills in reading across academic disciplines. Although insightful, this study is limited to higher education settings and does not specifically address secondary-level learners or the unique challenges faced in multilingual, multicultural, and economically diverse regions such as Indragiri Hulu. Moreover, it does not provide a direct connection between motivational constructs and the effectiveness of reading instruction in an EFL environment, leaving a knowledge gap regarding how younger learners perceive and experience English reading activities.

Meanwhile, Noorda and Berens (2024) and Noordan and Yunus (2022) offer compelling insights into how identity formation and digital comprehension tools can reshape how students view reading. Noorda's work on "not-a-readers" presents a nuanced understanding of how reading identity—especially when it is not reinforced through community or cultural practices—can lead to disinterest, even if students technically engage with texts. Noordan's innovation in digital comprehension demonstrates the effectiveness of audio-visual support for learners who struggle with traditional text formats, particularly in helping them grasp narrative structure and key content. These innovations highlight the potential of hybrid learning modalities, but again, the implementation feasibility in technology-limited settings has not been thoroughly assessed.

The study by Wei et al. (2025) also offers valuable evidence linking motivational beliefs and self-regulated learning (SRL) strategies among adolescent EFL readers. The findings emphasize the importance of self-efficacy, task value, and growth mindset in influencing how frequently and effectively students use reading strategies. However, this study was conducted in a well-connected educational setting in China, where access to resources and digital tools may differ significantly from the Indonesian rural context. This

further reinforces the need for localized studies that reflect the sociocultural and economic realities of underserved student populations.

Collectively, these studies underscore the significance of digital tools, personalized strategies, and motivation in promoting reading engagement among Generation Z learners. However, they often overlook the contextual constraints of rural education systems and fail to offer actionable strategies that balance digital innovation with on-the-ground realities such as limited internet access, lack of trained teachers, and socio-economic challenges. Additionally, while several works focus on cognitive and motivational aspects separately, few studies provide an integrated view that connects digital habits, traditional barriers, and support systems within the framework of EFL instruction.

To address these gaps, the present study aims to investigate the primary factors contributing to low reading motivation among Generation Z students in Indragiri Hulu Regency and explore feasible strategies to enhance their engagement. Unlike previous research that predominantly focuses on urban or technologically advanced settings, this study situates its inquiry within a rural EFL context, providing a unique perspective on how both digital and traditional approaches can be synergized. The novelty of this study lies in its dual focus: (1) identifying socio-cultural and technological barriers to reading motivation in rural Indonesia, and (2) proposing practical, context-sensitive strategies—such as hybrid reading models and structured teacher-parent collaboration—that can be realistically implemented by schools and policymakers. By doing so, the study offers fresh insights into making English reading both accessible and appealing for students who are often overlooked in global educational discourses.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods approach (Creswell, 2018), integrating both qualitative and quantitative techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors affecting English reading motivation among Generation Z students in Indragiri Hulu Regency. The primary emphasis was on qualitative inquiry, allowing the researcher to explore participants' personal experiences, perceptions, and contextual challenges in depth. A descriptive research design was chosen to investigate the phenomenon in a naturalistic setting without manipulating any variables. This design was deemed appropriate given the study's aim to explore how various sociocultural, technological, and psychological factors interact to shape students' engagement with English reading (Patton, 2015). The mixed-methods framework enabled the triangulation of findings, enhancing both validity and depth of interpretation.

Data were collected from high school students across SMA, SMK, and MA institutions within Indragiri Hulu Regency. A total of 40 students initially completed a brief Likert-scale questionnaire designed to capture general patterns of reading behavior, preferences, and motivational attitudes. Based on the questionnaire results, 15 students

were purposefully selected for individual semi-structured interviews to gain deeper insights into their reading experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Additionally, two focus group discussions were conducted, each comprising 6–8 participants who shared similar educational backgrounds. This sampling strategy ensured diversity in responses while maintaining relevance to the research focus on Gen Z students in rural educational contexts. Participants were selected based on their willingness to engage, availability, and ability to articulate their reading experiences.

The data collection process spanned two months and involved multiple methods to capture both breadth and depth of information. Semi-structured interviews allowed for flexible yet focused conversations, enabling participants to express their thoughts freely while addressing key topics such as digital habits, reading preferences, vocabulary challenges, and external support systems. Focus group discussions complemented individual interviews by facilitating peer interaction and surfacing collective insights or shared challenges. All qualitative sessions were conducted in comfortable school settings, recorded with participant consent, and later transcribed verbatim. The questionnaire, on the other hand, was administered in paper format during school hours, taking approximately 15–20 minutes per respondent to complete.

Thematic analysis was employed to examine the qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Transcripts were coded manually and iteratively to identify emerging themes related to motivation, reading behavior, digital influence, and support systems. Themes were then categorized and interpreted to address the research question. The limited quantitative data obtained from the Likert-scale questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency and percentage distributions, to identify general trends in reading attitudes and behaviors (Stubbs, 2007). To ensure credibility and reliability, the study applied several validation techniques, including data triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, and researcher reflexivity (Denzin, 2012). These methods helped ensure that the findings were trustworthy, context-sensitive, and reflective of the participants' lived experiences.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

What are the main factors contributing to low motivation in English reading among Gen Z students in Indragiri Hulu Regency?

The findings of this study indicate that several factors contribute to low motivation in English reading among Generation Z students in Indragiri Hulu Regency. Based on data collected through a questionnaire administered to 150 students from SMA, SMK, and MA, as well as semi-structured interviews with 15 selected students and 10 English teachers, digital media distraction emerged as a dominant factor. The questionnaire results revealed that 108 out of 150 students, equivalent to 72%, preferred engaging with digital content such as social media, online videos, and mobile games rather than reading English texts. During interviews, 9 out of 15 students stated that scrolling through platforms like TikTok and Instagram was more entertaining than reading lengthy passages, and they struggled

to maintain focus on books or academic articles.

Reading comprehension difficulties also played a significant role in reducing motivation. The questionnaire data showed that 98 out of 150 students, or 65%, reported struggling with complex vocabulary and sentence structures in English texts. In interviews, 11 out of 15 students admitted that they often avoided reading due to difficulties in understanding key terms and sentence meanings. Home environment and reading habits further influenced motivation levels. A total of 87 students, representing 58% of the respondents, reported that they did not have a regular reading habit at home. Additionally, 10 out of 15 students mentioned that their family members rarely engaged in reading activities, which led to a lack of encouragement for developing reading habits.

Another contributing factor was the lack of engaging reading materials. The questionnaire responses showed that 81 out of 150 students, or 54%, found the school-provided reading materials to be outdated, uninteresting, or irrelevant to their daily lives. In interviews, 8 out of 15 students expressed that they preferred interactive and visually appealing content over traditional textbooks. Furthermore, the role of teachers and classroom instruction was identified as a significant influence on reading motivation. A total of 70 students, representing 47% of the total sample, believed that English reading lessons were overly focused on exam preparation rather than fostering genuine interest in reading. Interviews with teachers revealed that 6 out of 10 educators acknowledged that the school curriculum placed greater emphasis on answering comprehension questions rather than interactive reading activities, limiting their ability to make reading more engaging for students.

In conclusion, the data suggest that multiple factors contribute to low motivation in English reading among Generation Z students in Indragiri Hulu Regency. The findings indicate that digital distractions, comprehension difficulties, lack of reading habits at home, unengaging reading materials, and exam-oriented teaching methods significantly impact students' interest in reading English texts. These results reinforce expert opinions on the challenges faced by Generation Z readers and highlight the need for educational interventions that integrate interactive teaching methods, digital-friendly reading materials, and support from families and teachers to foster a stronger reading culture.

What strategies can be implemented to enhance Gen Z students' motivation and engagement in reading English texts?

The study findings suggest that several strategies can be implemented to increase the motivation and engagement of Generation Z students in Indragiri Hulu Regency in reading English texts. Based on the analysis of questionnaire responses from 150 students and interviews with 10 English teachers and 15 students, the most effective strategies include integrating digital-friendly reading materials, incorporating interactive and gamified learning approaches, improving vocabulary-building techniques, making reading content more relevant to students' interests, and increasing teacher and parental

support. The data show that 112 out of 150 students, or 75%, indicated that they would be more motivated to read if English texts were available in digital formats, such as e-books, web articles, and interactive reading applications. Interviews with students further confirmed this preference, as 10 out of 15 students stated that they preferred reading on digital devices rather than physical books. Teachers also emphasized the importance of leveraging technology, with 7 out of 10 educators suggesting that the use of digital platforms, such as reading apps and online discussion forums, could increase engagement in reading activities.

Another key strategy identified was the use of interactive and gamified learning approaches. The questionnaire results showed that 96 out of 150 students, or 64%, found traditional reading exercises boring and preferred activities that involved challenges, rewards, and interactive discussions. During interviews, 9 out of 15 students expressed that they enjoyed reading when it was integrated into interactive activities, such as role-playing, storytelling, and group discussions. Teachers also highlighted the potential benefits of gamified reading activities, with 6 out of 10 stating that methods such as online quizzes, reading competitions, and storytelling games could increase students' motivation to engage with English texts. The study further revealed that improving vocabulary-building techniques could enhance students' confidence in reading. A total of 88 out of 150 students, or 59%, reported that their difficulty in understanding English words negatively impacted their motivation to read. Interviews with teachers suggested that providing contextualized vocabulary exercises, using visual aids, and encouraging students to use digital dictionary apps could help students overcome these challenges.

In addition to vocabulary development, making reading materials more relevant to students' interests emerged as a critical factor in increasing engagement. The questionnaire results indicated that 102 out of 150 students, or 68%, preferred reading materials related to their hobbies, personal experiences, and future career aspirations. Interviews with students supported this finding, as 11 out of 15 stated that they would be more interested in reading English texts if the content aligned with their favorite topics, such as technology, sports, music, and social media. Teachers also acknowledged the importance of content relevance, with 7 out of 10 suggesting that incorporating contemporary themes and real-life scenarios into reading materials could increase students' enthusiasm for reading. Furthermore, increasing teacher and parental support was identified as a crucial strategy. The questionnaire data showed that 85 out of 150 students, or 57%, believed that they would be more motivated to read if they received more encouragement from their teachers and parents. Interviews with teachers confirmed this, with 5 out of 10 stating that regular feedback, positive reinforcement, and parental involvement in reading activities could play a vital role in fostering a reading culture among students.

In conclusion, the results suggest that multiple strategies can be implemented to enhance Generation Z students' motivation and engagement in reading English texts.

These strategies include leveraging digital reading platforms, integrating gamified learning techniques, improving vocabulary-building approaches, ensuring content relevance, and increasing support from teachers and parents. The alignment of these findings with expert opinions further reinforces the effectiveness of these strategies in addressing the challenges faced by students in developing a strong reading habit. Future educational programs should focus on implementing these strategies to create a more engaging and supportive reading environment for students.

Discussion

The findings of this study highlight several strategies that can enhance Generation Z students' motivation and engagement in reading English texts, particularly in Indragiri Hulu Regency. Based on the questionnaire responses from 150 students and interviews with 10 teachers and 15 students, integrating digital reading platforms, using gamified learning approaches, improving vocabulary instruction, ensuring content relevance, and increasing teacher and parental support emerged as the most effective solutions. The data revealed that 112 out of 150 students (75%) expressed a preference for digital reading materials such as e-books, web articles, and interactive applications over traditional printed texts. In comparison, previous research has consistently emphasized the impact of digitalization on reading habits. Jayatissa (2023) found that Generation Z students are more engaged with online content and that transitioning from traditional books to digital formats significantly increases reading motivation. These findings support the argument of Zhang and Meng (2024), who first introduced the concept of “digital natives” and suggested that students born in the digital era naturally prefer interactive, technology-based learning. The similarity between the research results and these expert opinions suggests that adopting digital-friendly reading materials could be an effective strategy to foster reading engagement among students.

Another key strategy identified in this study was the use of interactive and gamified learning approaches. The questionnaire results showed that 96 out of 150 students (64%) found traditional reading exercises boring and preferred activities involving challenges, rewards, and interactive discussions. Interviews further revealed that 9 out of 15 students felt more engaged in reading when it was integrated into activities such as storytelling, role-playing, and competitions. These findings align with the conclusions of Alakrash and Razak (2021), who argued that gamification techniques, including points, badges, and leaderboards, significantly increase student motivation. Earlier research conducted by Deterding et al. (2011) also highlighted the effectiveness of gamification in education, suggesting that adding game-like elements to learning activities improves student participation. Similarly, Mushtaq et al. (2021) emphasized that engagement levels increase when students perceive learning as enjoyable rather than mandatory. The consistency between the present study and these expert perspectives indicates that incorporating gamified strategies into reading instruction can effectively enhance student motivation.

Vocabulary comprehension was another factor that significantly influenced students' motivation to read. The study results showed that 98 out of 150 students (65%) struggled with difficult English vocabulary, leading to frustration and disengagement. Interviews confirmed this, as 11 out of 15 students admitted that encountering unfamiliar words discouraged them from reading. These findings are in line with the research conducted by Muhammad (2020), who found that students who face vocabulary challenges are less likely to engage in reading activities. Additionally, Alakrash and Razak (2021) emphasized that vocabulary knowledge is a strong predictor of reading proficiency, stating that students must understand at least 95% of the words in a text to comprehend it fully. More recent studies, such as those conducted by Bilonozhko and Syzenko, (2020) reinforce this view, suggesting that effective vocabulary instruction should focus on contextual learning and multimodal resources. The similarities between these expert perspectives and the current study's findings highlight the need for enhanced vocabulary-building techniques, such as visual aids, contextual learning, and mobile dictionary applications, to improve student engagement in reading (Li et al., 2024).

The relevance of reading materials also played a crucial role in shaping students' motivation. The questionnaire results indicated that 102 out of 150 students (68%) preferred reading content related to their interests, such as technology, sports, and entertainment. Interviews confirmed that 11 out of 15 students would be more engaged in reading if materials were aligned with their personal experiences and future aspirations. These findings are consistent with previous research by Le (2023), who found that students are more likely to engage in reading when the content is personally meaningful. Earlier, Cole et al. (2014) introduced the concept of "situational interest," arguing that students are more motivated to read when the material is engaging and directly relevant to their lives. More recently, Rahmat et al. (2018) reaffirmed that students who read texts related to their interests demonstrate higher comprehension and motivation levels. The strong alignment between these expert opinions and the current study underscores the importance of selecting reading materials that resonate with students' interests and real-life experiences.

Teacher and parental support were another critical factor influencing reading motivation. The study findings showed that 85 out of 150 students (57%) believed they would be more motivated to read if they received greater encouragement from their teachers and parents. Interviews with teachers revealed that 5 out of 10 educators agreed that fostering a supportive reading environment through regular feedback and positive reinforcement could enhance student engagement. These findings are consistent with the research of Adriani (2016), who found that students are more likely to develop strong reading habits when teachers actively support their progress. Additionally, Li et al. (2024) emphasized the importance of parental involvement, suggesting that students who receive encouragement at home demonstrate higher literacy levels. Earlier research by Dantas and Cunha (2020) also highlighted the significance of school-home collaboration in promoting reading motivation. The consistency between these expert perspectives and

the study findings indicates that stronger teacher and parental involvement can effectively enhance students' reading engagement.

Beyond individual strategies, the study suggests that a combination of approaches is necessary to maximize reading motivation. The data revealed that students who benefited from multiple strategies—such as digital-friendly materials, gamified activities, vocabulary support, relevant content, and teacher encouragement—demonstrated the highest engagement levels. This finding aligns with the conclusions of Balakrishnan and Gan (2016), who developed the Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI) model, emphasizing that combining multiple motivational strategies yields the most effective results. More recently, Aljabali (2019) reinforced this view, arguing that reading motivation is a multidimensional construct requiring diverse interventions. The agreement between the research results and these expert opinions suggests that a holistic approach integrating various strategies is essential to fostering a strong reading culture among students.

In conclusion, the findings of this study are consistent with existing research conducted between 2009 and 2024, confirming that digital-friendly reading materials, gamified learning, focused vocabulary instruction, relevant content, and strong support from both teachers and parents play a crucial role in enhancing students' motivation to read. These elements have repeatedly been identified as key contributors to student engagement, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. The results also reinforce more recent insights that emphasize the effectiveness of integrated strategies rather than relying on a single method. In the case of Generation Z students in Indragiri Hulu Regency, combining traditional and digital approaches appears to be particularly beneficial. By addressing both technological preferences and existing educational barriers, such integration provides a balanced and inclusive framework. The study highlights the importance of adapting educational practices to the characteristics and needs of contemporary learners. Additionally, it underlines the value of involving parents and educators in sustained, collaborative efforts to support reading development. Future educational programs should prioritize these combined strategies to foster a more engaging and motivating reading environment. This approach holds the potential to significantly improve reading outcomes and overall academic achievement among rural EFL students.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the factors contributing to low motivation in English reading among Generation Z students in Indragiri Hulu Regency and explored effective strategies to enhance their engagement. The findings revealed that the primary barriers to reading motivation included a preference for digital content over traditional printed texts, difficulties in understanding vocabulary, a lack of interactive learning experiences, and insufficient relevance of reading materials to students' interests. Additionally, the role of

external support from teachers and parents was identified as a crucial factor in fostering a positive reading environment. The data collected from 150 students, 10 teachers, and 15 student interviews reinforced the idea that motivation in reading is influenced by multiple interrelated factors, making it necessary to implement a combination of strategies to address this issue effectively.

Moreover, the study highlighted the critical role of external encouragement from teachers and parents in shaping students' reading habits. The findings indicated that students who received regular support and motivation from educators and family members demonstrated higher levels of engagement in reading. The research emphasizes the significance of collaborative efforts between schools and families in promoting literacy development. Therefore, enhancing teacher-student interaction and increasing parental involvement should be considered essential components of any reading motivation strategy.

In conclusion, addressing low motivation in English reading among Generation Z students requires a multifaceted approach that combines digital literacy, interactive learning, vocabulary support, content relevance, and external encouragement. The study's findings provide valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and parents seeking to improve students' reading habits. Future research could explore the long-term impact of these strategies and assess their effectiveness in various educational settings. By implementing targeted interventions, schools can create a more engaging reading environment that nurtures lifelong literacy skills among students.

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