# THE CORRELATION BETWEEN EFL READING MOTIVATION AND READING COMPREHENSION ABILITY

Elvina Hartono [3]

**Abstract**

This study examined to describe the correlation between EFL students' reading motivation and their reading comprehension ability. The six dimensions from the Motivation for Reading Questionnaire were used to examine students' motivation. The modified Questionnaire and a reading comprehension test were distributed to forty five grade twelve students in a private school in Surabaya. The Pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis were conducted to answer the research question. The correlation between students; reading motivations and their reading comprehension ability was 0.321. Thus the correlation between students' reading comprehension was positive but low.

**Key words**: EFL reading motivation, reading comprehension ability.

## Introduction

Motivation has long been known as one of the major contributors influencing students' learning. There are many theories attributed to describe components of motivation in order to examine the effect of motivation to students' learning. Achievement theory proposes positive and negative influences as the approaches affecting someone's motivation. Positive influence consists of the likelihood and the value of success perceived by someone, while negative influence consists of the avoidance of failure (Dornyei, 2001).

Another theory, social-cognitive theory, proposes self-efficacy as the main component of motivation. Individual's judgment on his or her own capability in accomplishing a certain task will influence the effort given as well as his or her persistency (Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 2008). On the other hand, goal theory places mastery goal which is the desire to improve, and performance goal which is the desire to win or outperform others, as the components which influence someone's motivation. These ideas are similar to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation suggested by self-determination theory. Someone may be motivated either by their own satisfaction in doing a particular task or by other factors apart from themselves such as to receive a reward (Dornyei, 2001).

Derived from those theories, empirical studies on reading motivation have been conducted. In terms of reading, both skills and

---

[3] Elvina Hartono adalah Mahasiswa S2 MPBI Universitas Katolik Widya Mandala Surabaya.

willingness in reading actually play a significant role in creating a mature and effective reader (Gambrell, 1996). Thus, research attempts to define the components of motivational constructs in order to examine their effect on students' learning. One attempt was conducted by Wigfield, Guthrie, and McGough (1996). Based on interview to a small group of children and literature on motivational research, they proposed eleven components, or 'dimensions' as they named it, which explained students' motivation to read. They were reading efficacy, reading challenge, reading curiosity, aesthetic enjoyment, importance of reading, reading recognition, reading for grades, social reasons, reading competition, compliance, and reading work. The eleven dimensions were translated into an instrument namely Motivation for Reading Questionnaire (MRQ) (Wigfield, Guthrie, & McGough, 1996).

Those dimensions proposed are not without some limitations. Eventhough other studies confirmed the multidimensional nature of reading motivation (Mori, 2002; Watkins & Coffey, 2004), the eleven dimensions were not consistently appeared in other studies. Moreover, the reliability test conducted by Wigfield and Guthrie (1995) also found there were only six out of eleven dimensions which were reliable. However, the MRQ has been widely used to measure reading motivation, and it has so far become one major instrument with some empirical studies conducted to test its construct (Watkins & Coffey, 2004)

On the other hand, L2 motivational research "has followed quite a different path, and very little of it addresses reading comprehension" (Grabe, 2009:187). The work of Robert Gardner and his associates seems to dominate research on second language acquisition before 1990's (Brown, 2007). However, there were some critical perspectives discussed in examining the idea of instrumental and integrative orientation. Brown (2007) mentions that both orientation actually reflects individual's purpose of learning a language instead of motivation. Moreover, they both seem to represent the idea of extrinsic motivation and none of them represents intrinsic motivation someone may have toward language learning. Integrative orientation which has been regarded as intrinsic motivation actually belongs to extrinsic motivation since intrinsic motivation underlines individual's enjoyment over an activity as its major idea (Noels, 2001 in Grabe, 2009).

Another critical views on both orientation came from an empirical study which showed there was a positive correlation between instrumental and integrative orientation. It might reveal that both orientation actually reflects the same dimension (Gardner, Smythe, & Lalonde, 1994 in Brown & Gonzo, 1995). Those critical views seem to convince researchers that motivation to learn a second or foreign language is actually more sophisticated and cannot be described solely by the idea of integrative and instrumental orientations. More research in L2 reading motivation is needed to develop its theories (Grabe, 2009).

One attempt in developing L2 reading motivation construct was conducted by Mori (2002). She utilized the MRQ developed by Wigfield, Guthrie, and McGough (1996) and added some questions to represent integrative orientation idea suggested by Gardner. Through a factor analysis, she found there were four components which described EFL reading motivation. They were Intrinsic Value of Reading, Extrinsic Utility Value of Reading, Importance of reading in English, and Reading efficacy (Mori, 2002). It confirmed the idea that L2 reading motivation is multidimensional in nature.

On the other hand, research to examine the effect of L2 reading motivation are still limited. Correlational study is necessary in order to figure out whether relationship exists between L2 reading motivation and various attributes of students' reading performance, such as students' reading comprehension ability, strategy use in reading, reading skills, etc. The result may serve as the starting point in determining which components of motivation as well as which aspect of reading should be examined further.

In Indonesian context, students' motivation to read in English as a foreign language seems to become an important issue with limited research on it. One survey found external motivation such as parents' support and school assignments as what motivated EFL students in Indonesia to read in English (Iftanti, 2012). In fact, it was intrinsic motivation which was found to give positive influence on students' reading based on L1 motivational research. Thus, further study is needed in order to examine students' motivation for EFL reading and its effects on students' reading.

Based on the review above, this study aimed to examine students' motivation to read in English as a foreign language in Indonesian context. Moreover, this study also attempted to examine the correlation between students' motivation to read in English as a foreign language and their reading comprehension ability. It also attempted to determine the dimension of reading motivation which had the strongest correlation with students' reading comprehension ability.

The work of Wigfield, Guthrie, and McGough (1996) related to the dimensions of L1 reading motivation was applied in this study to examine students' reading motivation. However, only six dimensions which they found to be reliable were used in this study. They were Reading Challenge, Curiosity, Enjoyment, Social Reasons for Reading, Competition, and Compliance in Reading. Meanwhile, Barrett Taxonomy of Reading Comprehension were used as the theoretical basis in determining the questions to measure students' reading comprehension ability. The reading test was to represent literal, reorganization, inferential, evaluation and appreciation questions as stated in the Barett Taxonomy. Thus, the questions guiding this investigation were as follows:

1. What are high school students' motivations to read in English as a foreign language?
2. What is the correlation between high school students' reading motivation dimensions (challenge in reading, curiosity in reading, reading enjoyment, social reasons for reading, competition in reading, and reading compliance) and their reading comprehension ability?
3. Which dimension of EFL students' reading motivation correlates the strongest with their reading comprehension ability?

**Method**

   Both descriptive and correlational research design were employed in this study. Descriptive design was employed to describe high school students' motivation to read in English as a foreign language. Correlational design was employed to determine the correlation between the dimensions of motivation of high school students to read in English and their reading comprehension ability, as well as to determine which dimension had the strongest correlation with the students' reading comprehension ability.

   The study was conducted in one private high school in Surabaya. Forty five grade 12 students were chosen as the participants. A questionnaire named Motivation for Reading Questionnaire (MRQ), created by Wigfield and Guthrie (1997) and a reading comprehension test were used as the isntruments.

   Originally, the Motivation for Reading Questionnaire consisted of eleven reading motivation dimensions. However, there were only six dimensions found to be reliable through an internal consistency reliabilities done by Wigfield and Guthrie (1995). Those six dimensions are: (1) reading challenge, (2) reading curiosity, (3) aesthetic enjoyment of reading/involvement, (4) compliance, (5) social reasons for reading, and (6) reading competition, which altogether contained thirty five items. Thus, in this study, only those six reliable dimensions were chosen to describe students'motivation for reading in English.

   Some adjustments were made since the questionnaire was originally created to measure primary students' motivation to read in L1. Two items from the dimension of social reasons for reading, such as the frequency if visiting library with family, and to read to participants' parents were omitted since they were considered as irrelevant for high school students. Moreover, the word "English" was used instead of reading in general. For instance, the item "I like hard, challenging books" in the original version of MRQ was modified into "I like hard, challenging English books". Each item was assessed through Likert scale, with the scale 1 to 4: 1= very different from me; 2= a little different from me; 3= a little like me; and 4=a lot like me. To ensure the reliability level of the questionnaire, the researcher calculated the Cronbach's α (Alpha) and the coefficient found was 0.844. Thus it can be concluded that the questionnaire used in this study had a high reliability level.

Meanwhile, the reading comprehension test consisted of 25 multiple choice questions. The item facility indexes ranged from 0.15 and 0.85, and item discrimination indexes ranged from 0.2 and 1.

## Findings

### Students' Motivation to Read in English as a Foreign Language

The descriptive statistics of the dimensions of reading motivation were reported. The table is as follows:

**Table 1**
**High School Students' Motivation for Reading in English as a Foreign Language**

| Dimensions | Number of items | Mean | Mean per item | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Challenge | 5 | 14,16 | 2,83 | 2,70 |
| Curiosity | 6 | 17,80 | 2,96 | 2,90 |
| Enjoyment | 6 | 15,80 | 2,63 | 3,44 |
| Compliance | 5 | 13,42 | 2,68 | 2,01 |
| Social reasons | 5 | 10,44 | 2,08 | 3,35 |
| Competition | 6 | 17,29 | 2,88 | 4,15 |
| **All dimensions** | **33** | **88,91** | **2,69** | **11,55** |

The students' average score for each item in the Motivation for Reading Questionnaire was 2.69 (scale 1 to 4). The score 1 indicated a very low motivation, while the score 4 indicated a very high motivation for reading in English. Thus, it can be concluded that overall the students' motivation was average. The mean for students' total score in the Motivation for Reading Questionnaire was 88.91 (scale 33 to 132), with a standard deviation of 11.55. It is indicative that the total scores obtained are spread across the spectrum.

Meanwhile, the students' mean score for an item in each dimension of reading motivation varied slightly. The *curiosity* dimension obtained the highest mean score which is 2.86. It indicated that students' read English materials primarily due to a desire to learn a topic of their interest. For instance, they like to read English materials related to their hobbies and people in different country.

The other dimension which obtained a high mean score was *competition* (2.88). It indicates that students' desire to outperform their peers in English reading subject motivated them to read in English as a foreign language. For high school students, it is important for them to be the best at English reading or to be better than their peers in English reading. The presence of competition can encourage the students to be more motivated to read English materials.

The third motivation with a high mean score (2.83) was obtained by *challenge in reading* dimension. Students' desire to overcome the

challenge they find in English reading motivated them to read more. Moreover, the students also read English materials as they meet more challenges in the project given by the teacher or as they want to comprehend something difficult.

On the other hand, the dimension of *social reasons for reading* obtained the lowest mean score. It signaled that these high school students did not enjoy to share what they read to their family or peers. It indicated that they did not consider reading as a social activity.

**The Correlation between EFL Students' Reading Motivation and their Reading Comprehension Ability**

The table below summarizes the result of students' reading comprehension score:

**Table 2**
**Descriptive Statistics of Students' Reading Comprehension Test Scores**

|  | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Reading test | 45 | 8.0 | 92.0 | 70.93 | 12.4 |

The average score for the twenty five multiple choice questions of the reading test was 70.93 (scale 0-100). This score can be considered as average since 70 was used to be the minimum score set by the school. Thus, it can be concluded that the participants' reading comprehension ability was on average level.

**Table 3**
**Summary of the Pearson correlation result**

| Dimension | Coefficient (r) of Pearson correlation | p-value | Strength of the correlation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Challenge | 0.225 | 0.138 | Weak |
| Curiosity | 0.267 | 0.076 | Weak |
| Enjoyment | 0.321 | 0.031* | Weak |
| Compliance | 0.245 | 0.105 | Weak |
| Social reasons | 0.007 | 0.962 | Indifferent |
| Competition | -0.015 | 0.922 | Indifferent |

The result of Pearson correlation between the six reading motivation dimensions and students' reading comprehension ability is summarized in the table above. It was found that most of the dimensions of reading motivation had a positive and weak correlation with students' reading comprehension ability. Positive correlation implies that the increase in score of the dimension evaluated corresponds to the increase in students' reading comprehension ability.

There was only one dimension, namely *competition*, which had negative correlation with students' reading comprehension. However, it was also revealed that the p-value of the correlation mostly above the acceptable level of 0.05. Thus, it can be concluded that *Ho* was rejected and the correlation between most of the reading motivation dimensions and students' reading comprehension ability were not significant. Only the *enjoyment in reading* dimension which was found to have a significant correlation with students' reading comprehension ability with p-value of 0.031. The *r* of 0.321 revealed a linear correlation between both. It indicates that as the students perceived more enjoyment in EFL reading, their reading comprehension ability increased. The low coefficient reveals that the correlation between *enjoyment in reading* dimension and students' reading comprehension ability was weak.

**Table 4**
**Summary of the Multiple Regression Analysis Result**

| Variables | Standardized Coefficients Beta | p-value | Significance |
|---|---|---|---|
| Challenge | .096 | .638 | Not significant |
| Curiosity | .117 | .502 | Not significant |
| Enjoyment | .332 | .056 | Can be considered (significant) |
| Compliance | .277 | .106 | Not significant |
| Social | -.104 | .553 | Not significant |
| Competition | -.243 | .189 | Not significant |

Table 4 summarized the result of Multiple Regression Analysis which were conducted to confirm the result of Pearson correlation. In the multiple regression analysis, all six dimensions were calculated together at the same time in terms of their relationship with students' reading comprehension ability. Consistent with the result of Pearson correlation, the standardized coeffcient beta revealed that most of the correlation were positive and weak. However, the dimension of *social reasons for reading* was found to have a negative correlation in addition to *competition* dimension.

The calculated p-value for all dimensions were also higher than 0.05. Thus, it can be concluded that the dimensions did not have a significant correlation with students' reading comprehension ability. However, the p-value of *enjoyment in reading* dimension was close to the cutoff (0.056) and thus, provided a reason for concluding that the dimension still gave conisderable effect to students' reading comprehension ability.

**The Reading Motivation Dimension which Correlates the Strongest with Reading Comprehension Ability**

Both Pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis revealed that *enjoyment in reading* was the only dimension with a significant correlation to students' reading comprehension ability. The correlation between *enjoyment in reading* dimension and students' reading comprehension ability was also found to be the strongest when it was compared with the correlation of the other dimensions.

**Discussion**

Curiosity over a topic of interest, outperforming other, and overcoming challenges in English reading materials were found to be the students' motivations for EFL reading. The variability of students' answers which obtained high mean scores seems to confirm the notion that reading motivation is multidimensional and the development of an instrument to measure students' reading motivation should refer to many motivational theories. Students' curiosity represents an intrinsic motivation as a component from self-determination theory. Meanwhile, students' desire to outperform their classmates reflects a performance goal as a concept from goal theory. Finally, students' desire to overcome challenges in reading reflects their self-efficacy, as the major component from social-cognitive theory (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1995).

The dimension with the lowest mean score was *social reasons for reading* (X= 2.08). The participants in this study did not seem to be interested in sharing what they read to their family or friends. It was different from Wigfield and Guthrie's idea that reading is a social activity. Thus, they added *social reasons for reading* as one dimension of reading motivation in the Motivation for Reading Questionnaire (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1995). This difference might be due to the difference in participants' age, since they chose primary students as their participants. Young learners might regard reading as a social activity since they tend to share what they read to others.

In terms of correlation between reading motivation dimensions and students' reading comprehension ability, this study reveals that there was no significant correlation between most of the reading motivation dimensions and students' reading comprehension ability. Only one dimension namely *enjoyment in reading*, was found to have a significant positive correlation with students' reading. This result is different from the previous study conducted by Blay, Mercado, and Villacorta (2009). They found that out of five dimensions examined, *challenge in reading* and *competition in reading* were the dimensions which had significant correlation with reading comprehension. However, it should be noted that there were only three items used by them to measure the dimension. Thus, it was not considered to be representative.

Meanwhile, the students' motivations for EFL reading, namely *curiosity*, *competition*, and c*halleng*e were found to have an insignificant correlation with students' reading comprehension ability. It indicates that the three dimensions may influence the effort students spend on English reading to some extent, but they do not give a significant contribution in predicting students' reading comprehension ability. The result indicates that *enjoyment in reading* which represents intrinsic motivation from self-determination theory outperforms other motivations in predicting students' reading comprehension ability. As the students find enjoyment in reading different kinds of literary texts in English, active involvement with the reading text may take place. Students may have greater intention to comprehend the text by using textual information as well as cognitive processes (Blay,Mercado,and Villacorta, 2009).

The absence of significant correlation between the other dimensions and reading comprehension ability does not eliminate the possibility of the other factors influencing someone's motivation to encourage positive behavior toward English reading. The other factors which are represented by the other dimensions are outside infuences, personal goals, and individual's belief on his or her ability. As the L1 motivational research reveals, the motivation dimensions examined may give significant contribution to the other aspects of students' reading, such as the amount and breadth of students' reading (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). This may finally lead to a better reading comprehension ability. However, there is no clue which indicates that the other five dimensions of reading motivations (*curiosity, challenge, compliance, competition* and *social reasons*) have a direct relationship with students' reading comprehension ability. Thus, it seems that more empirical studies on EFL reading motivation are necessary before concluding that students' motivation for EFL reading gives significant contribution in their reading comprehension ability.

On the other hand, the findings also reveal a problem in EFL classrooms. It was found that students' mean score was low for the items in *enjoyment in reading* dimension. It indicates that the students had low enjoyment in English reading. In fact, *enjoyment in reading* was found to be the only reading motivation dimension with a significant positive correlation to students' reading comprehension ability. Thus, it seems to be an important issue for English teachers to develop teaching strategies which encourage the students to be more engaged in English reading. There is a possibility that as the students' enjoyment in English reading increases, their reading comprehension ability will be improved.

**Conclusion**

This study found that high school students who became the participants scored high in the *curiosity* and *competition* dimensions. It revealed that students' curiosity over a topic of their interest as well as their desire to outperform other in English reading class motivated them

to read in English as a foreign language. Using interesting topics for reading comprehension exercises and giving a recognition to students who perform better than other are suggested to motivate the students for English reading.

There was no significant correlation found between the dimension of *curiosity*, *competition*, *challenge, compliance*, and *social reasons for reading* and students' reading comprehension ability. It was only *enjoyment in reading* dimension which had a significant correlation to students' reading. However, it was also found that the students' score for *enjoyment in reading* dimension was low, revealing their lack of enjoyment in English reading. The result suggested English teacher to encourage their students to find enjoyment in experiencing different kinds of literary text. Providing students with many different literary texts in English reading class, as well as group work or activities to explore the texts is suggested.

For future researchers who wish to conduct similar motivational research especially related to students' motivation for EFL reading, there are some suggestions proposed. Firstly, qualitative study shall be conducted to examine how reading enjoyment affect students' reading comprehension since a significant correlation was found between both. Secondly, additional instrument to measure students' reading motivation may be used as an addition to the Motivation for Reading Questionnaire if someone attempts to examine students' reading motivation. Interview or observation may be conducted in order to confirm and examine students' motivation and how it affects students' reading comprehension. Thirdly, experimental study may also be conducted in order to examine how motivation develop or change over time since it is not stable and may fluctuate over time. And lastly, a study examining the impact of students' reading motivation to other aspects of reading, such as their reading amount and breadth, is recommended.

## References

Blay, R., Mercado, K. A., & Villacorta, J. 2009. The Relationship between motivation and second language reading comprehension among fourth grade Filipino students. *Philippine ESL Journal, 2*, 5-30. Retrieved from http://www.philippine-esl-journal.com/images/pdf/Vol-2.pdf

Brown, H. D. 2007. *Principles of language learning and teaching.* New York: Pearson Education, Inc.

Brown, H. D., & Gonzo, S. 1995. *Readings on second language acquisition.* New Jersey: Prentice Hall Regents.

Dornyei, Z. 2001. *Motivational strategies in the language classroom.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gambrell, L. B. 1996, September. Creating classroom cultures that foster reading motivation. *The Reading Teacher, 50*(1), pp. 14-25. Retrieved from http://pdf-release.net/925050/Creating-classroom-cultures-that-foster-reading-motivation

Grabe, W. 2009. Teaching and testing reading. In M. H. Long, & C. J. Doughty (Eds.), *The Handbook of Language Teaching* (p. 447). Chichester: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Iftanti, E. 2012, July. A survey of the English reading habits of EFL students in Indonesia. *TEFLIN Journal, 23*(2), 149-164. Retrieved from http://journal.teflin.org/index.php/teflin/article/viewFile/298/244

Mori, S. 2002. Redefining motivation to read in a foreign language. *Reading in A Foreign Language, 14*, 91-110. Retrieved from http://nflrc.hawaii.edu/rfl/October2002/mori/mori.html

Schunk, D. H., Pintrich, P. R., & Meece, J. L. 2008. *Motivation in education: Theory, research, and applications.* New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc.

Watkins, M. W., & Coffey, D. Y. 2004. Reading Motivation: Multidimensional and Indeterminate. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 96*(1), 110-118. Retrieved from http://edpsychassociates.com/Papers/ReadMotivation(2004).pdf

Wigfield, A., & Guthrie, J. T. 1995. Dimensions of children's motivations for reading: An initial study. reading research report no. 34. *National Reading Research Center.* Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED384010.pdf

Wigfield, A., & Guthrie, J. T. 1997. Relations of children's motivation for reading to the amount and breadth of their reading. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 89*(3), 420-432. Retrieved from http://www.cori.umd.edu/research-publications/1997-wigfield-guthrie.pdf

Wigfield, A., Guthrie, J., & McGough, K. 1996. A questionnaire measure of children's motivations for reading (Instructional Resource no.22). *National Reading Research Center*. Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED394137.pdf