DIGITAL READING ENGAGEMENT OF JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS DURING THE ONLINE LEARNING

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A B S T R A C T S

The pandemic of COVID-19 has forced the teachers and students to hold the teaching and learning remotely. All the process of learning was conducted online via various mobile applications. Students widely use smartphones as a medium to receive learning materials, join online classes, and study. However, it was questioned whether students are engaged with their reading materials when they have to read the texts on screen or digitally and learn from them. It is expected that the use of digital devices has influenced students' reading engagement, especially when the reading is to learn. This study aims to find out about the students' engagement in reading digital texts during online learning. The study collects the data from self-report questionnaires, interviews, and observation. The result shows that students do not experience behavioral and affective engagement as well as a negative response while they are reading the texts onscreen during online learning.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching and learning have been changed on its trend as technology and information developed. Traditional teaching and learning mainly focus on classical and face-to-face meetings. However, nowadays, teaching and learning can be done remotely with the advanced development of technology. Technology has gone beyond the function of teaching aids but the media to help the teaching and learning process remotely, such as flipped learning, hybrid learning, and even online learning (McShane, 2004; Redmond, 2011).

The trend of online learning has been started since it has become more accessible. However, since the Covid-19 pandemic, online learning has been the foremost preference of almost all schools and institutions. Teachers should do the teaching from their place as well as the students. They need to study on their own at home. All materials like reading sources and assignments are mostly provided in digital files that students need to download or copy every day. This concept seems easy since it looks like the teachers only need to change the medium, but the teaching and learning remain the same.

However, some studies mentioned that the situation has an impact on students in many ways, such as unsustainable internet access, the ownership of electronic devices, or even the inability to cope with the teaching and learning process, which suddenly turned online from traditional teaching and learning (Agung & Surtikanti, 2020). The situations would, directly and indirectly, influence the students learning performance. They have to cope with the situations on their own. Even though they can always contact their teacher or friends, it is not as efficient as in non-online situations. Besides, Sharpe, Rhona & Benfield (2005) also discovered in their study that online learning also influences the students more emotionally, such as their concern about time spending and time management. Especially for the students in lower education level, such as Junior High School. They are not yet independent learners who are responsible for their doing. They still need guidance and reminder from the teachers. Meanwhile, not all parents are always available by their side during school hours at home.

Learning online cannot be separated from the reading activity online, which previously every text at schools was given on paper; the sudden changes influence the students. Even though the young generation nowadays has gotten used to and advanced in operating their smartphones to access a bunch of information online, it definitely cannot be generalized that they are also digital learners. Digital learning uses advanced technology devices and is a tool to acquire learning activities and materials in the teaching and learning process (Hockly, 2012). This statement has concerned how learners can engage with the online setting teaching and learning process, especially their reading activities digitally.

In addition, if the reading text is in a foreign language (Heppt et al., 2015). It is more cognitively challenging and usually requires language in which contextual cues for meaning are reduced (Chamot & O'Malley, 1996). Many learners read the text in their native language and in a foreign language, such as English, as many sources of knowledge are also written in different languages. Learners not only deal with the knowledge they want to get but also have to be concerned with language ability. It means that the reading activity is more purposeful and situated (Jetton & Alexander, 2000).

On the other hand, there are also some issues related to digital reading. Delgado & Salmerón (2021) found that reading on screen is not as effective as paper-based reading since it is more inattentive, especially when readers have to be faced with the task in a limited amount of time, so they tend to fail the whole text, which influences their information process. Fortunati & Vincent (2014) also stated that digital reading is not as exclusive as paper-based reading because digital interaction is mutual and does not involve a stronger emotional and sensorial experience. This makes reading on a digital platform not as comprehensible compared to paper-based reading (Halamish & Elbaz, 2020; Liu & Ko, 2019; Şimşek & Işıkoğlu Erdoğan, 2020).

Even though some studies also found that more comprehension and engagement in digital reading appears when students are well skilled and have a better experience (Burin et al., 2020; Delgado & Salmerón, 2021; Minguela et al., 2015). Learners who have been trained to read onscreen frequently navigate their online reading better. More skilled readers are more flexible in approaching texts, which influences their deep reading comprehension. However, the unexpected current situation of online learning has shown that the preparation for students is less or possibly none.

Based on the previous study, digital reading has been explored a lot, especially how to improve their reading competence at a younger level of education (Halamish & Elbaz, 2020; Liu & Ko, 2019; Turner et al., 2020; Zhang, 2013). However, not yet much discus about the students' reading engagement on digital texts, which previously mentioned that there are issues related to it. Therefore, this study aims to explore more on the students' reading engagement on digital reading texts during online learning.

RESEARCH METHOD
Research Design

This study is qualitative research because it looks for deep comprehension and detailed descriptions about subjects as well as using multiple data collection techniques (Ary et al., 2010). The research will be conducted to find out the digital reading engagement by EFL learners in reading digital academic text during online learning. Qualitative research was used in this research to emphasize the complex constituents of reading engagement. The research aims to explore EFL students' reading engagement.

Population and Sample

The participants of this study were a class of 32 students of Islamic Junior High School in Indonesia. They are first-grade students, and all of them are females. They have been doing online learning because of the pandemic since they started becoming Junior High School students. They were observed during having reading classroom online and were asked to do self-report questionnaires. The interview was conducted only on four students who agreed to be interviewed.

Instruments

To collect the data for this study, the researcher observes classroom interaction through video meetings and group chats. During the online learning via video meeting, the students will be asked to read texts given by the teacher in the group chat. They read and understood the text during the online classes conducted in four meetings for two weeks. Then, an unstructured self-report questionnaire was given to the students after the learning process had over. The self-report questionnaire was given to the students to determine their engagement toward the reading (Chapman, 2003). To get deeper information about the students' engagement as well as the students' perception during digital reading texts, some students who wanted to give their statements were interviewed. There were only four students who agreed to be interviewed which most of them have better English abilities than their classmates. The interview was conducted in Indonesian.

Data Analysis

The data, which has been collected verbally and non-verbally from the students through the result of the observation, self-report questionnaire, and the interview, was organized, coded and reduced, and interpreted with the related theories.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
Research Findings

Based on the data collected, the finding of the students reading engagement which are their behavioral and affective engagement were gathered from the result of the questionnaire and observation. Several questions were pointed out in the questionnaire related to behavioral engagement and affective engagement. The behavioral engagement questions were related to their response during the online class via video meeting when the teacher asked them to read a text in the link given. The questions related to the learners' emotional reactions and their attention to the reading, such as their preferred activities, their desire about the knowledge given, their feeling and excitement about the process of reading on the screen to learn.

Table 1
The Result of Students' Self-report Questionnaire

Engagement	Aspects	Students' self-report result
Behavioral engagement	Learner conduct during reading in the online class	False expectation (reading online is not similar to reading on papers)
		Technical problems
		Less advance devices
	Students interest in the tasks	Rarely asking questions related to the reading tasks.
		Less interactive participation during
		Ask the teacher to solve the problem related to the task instead of themselves.
Affective engagement	Learners feelings during the online reading activity in the online class	Less interested due to the technical problems
		Anxious when the teacher asked questions
		Confused while reading onscreen
	Learners value during the reading activity in the online class	Feeling less important because the teacher mostly focused on the active students
		Feeling unsuccessful related to the task completion.

Based on the result of the students' self-report questionnaire, it was discovered that on the behavior engagement, students fulfilled the aspect of conduct during the lesson and their interest toward the task even though from the statement in the report, they did not show lots of positive results. In the aspect of learners' conduct during the reading activity in the online class, they experienced false expectations that they thought reading was the same whether online or on paper. In fact, it is more problematic as the next aspect they also experienced was the technical problems, such as internet connection and digital distractions. In addition, less advanced use of devices also influenced their reading engagement. Not all students have more than one devices to support their learning. Most of them used their smartphones to join the online class as well as read the materials. They did not get used to using multiple sites for their learning since their previous learning was mostly conducted asynchronously through What's App group chat. Therefore, it is not convenient for them to read and join the class on one narrow device. Only two students used laptops for the online class, which provides them better reading and learning experience.

Students' interest in the text also shows that they were less enthusiastic toward the reading lesson during the online class. Whether they have understood or they were actually had no idea what is going on is unclear. They participated less during the lesson and mostly listened to the teacher of the outstanding students. They tended to rely on the teacher's explanation and wait for her to give them further understanding. It shows that they depended on the teacher to solve their problem instead of finding out by themselves or collaborating with their friends. They mentioned that they could not work together with their friends. In the classroom, they would likely discuss with their friends about the reading as simple as asking the meaning of the words, but when they are reading on the screen there is little chance to have an interactive experience.

The next result of the questionnaire on their affective engagement also showed negative results. There were two aspects noted from the self-report questionnaire; those are learners' feelings and values during the reading lesson online. Learners' felt less interested since they experienced technical problems, they also felt anxious when the teacher asked them questions since they did not understand the text well. They mentioned that they do not get what they read. It is confusing to read on a narrow screen, and they just go up and down the screen. When the teacher asked them questions, they skimmed the text to get the answer rather than understand the texts, making them read shallowly.

The result of the self-report questionnaire in Table 1 also shows that the students mostly appear to accept the onscreen reading process negatively. The observation result also supports the same way especially focusing on the behavioral engagement and affective is not observable superficially. Based on the result of the observation, the students were expected to show their behavioral engagement through their activeness in the discussion, such as asking questions, giving comments, or responding teacher's questions. However, this study found that the students did not show their activeness during the reading, especially at the first meeting. They looked confused and kept scrolling up and down their screens on the screen. Some students also did not read enough because they needed to wait for the page to load.

In further data collection, which is the interview, it was found that the students just read the text thoroughly. They did not aim to understand the whole text but to answer the teacher's questions and to complete the assignments. When they faced problems such as does not understand the contexts, they did not bother to ask for friends, clarify to the teacher or browse online by themselves. When they met new vocabularies too, they skipped it and ignored it, especially if they felt it was unimportant. However, one student also copied the text to Google Translate because she wanted to know what she read.

In addition, students also could not value their reading and their learning because, during the reading activity, the teacher mostly focused on the active students, which were the outstanding students. The other students were noted to be present without fully making sure that they were engaged with the reading lesson. When they failed to finish or solve the tasks given by the teacher, they felt unsuccessful. They felt that they could not make better changes in their learning because they did not get enough during the lesson.

In sum, the result of the observation, questionnaire, and interview is that the students lacked belonging while reading on screen, could not make conceptual the thinking process, had less sharing experience in their reading, and did not perform preference to customize their personalization. They also fail to tackle the problem or apply certain strategies to improve their engagement with the texts they read.

Discussion

The learners' behavioral engagement cannot be portrayed in their involvement, responses, and reaction toward the reading activity in the online classroom. Most of the students did not show their activeness during reading in the online classroom by asking questions, giving comments, or feedback to their friends. Chapman (2003) mentioned that asking relevant questions during the teaching and learning process shows students' behavioral engagement in their learning which failed to prove in this study. Even though positive actions also appeared, only on some students who have better English competence than their other classmates. The use of technology in reading issues disengagement in the teaching and learning process, but it can increase engagement as it is used effectively (Heflin et al., 2017). The students also face distraction during the implementation, which is mostly related to technology use, which affects their excitement in learning. It is supported by Heflin et al., (2017) that the mobile device is associated with the students' positive response to learning even though it does not always support their critical thinking on their writing significantly, which is relevant to the current study. One gadget is used by the students to join the video meeting, group chat, and read the materials is multimedia, which made the students be able to multitask. As a result, they cannot fully focus on their reading compared to books that do not have such features.

Regarding effective engagement, the students show less enthusiasm during the reading on screen and when the teacher asks them about their reading. Chapman (2003) mentioned that affective engagement could be seen through learners' positive attitudes and intense interest in the learning process. They mentioned in the interview that they are mainly not

confident in their English ability and do not know much English vocabulary. Therefore, they used online translation or just simply ignored the difficult words until being explained. Moreover, they only attach to the words near the pictures. They also tend to avoid reading long paragraphs. It means that while providing students reading on screen, interesting activities should be involved to make them engage with their reading and understand the reading content better, which is the responsibility of the teacher. In her study, Cho & Castañeda (2019) also mentioned that fun activities using their mobile phone, which is less serious and more game-like activity, can enhance learners' effective engagement. Another way is suggested by Hamsia et al. (2020) that cognitive, contextual, and motivational factors during online learning can also be developed through practicing self-regulated learning, which promotes their independence learning on their own.

Even though negative affective appeared at the beginning of the implementation, such as self-doubting about their ability, less enthusiasm, and the lack of advance of their devices as the teacher and the classmates does not discourage them about the problem, the students have stopped worrying about it and getting used with the technical problems as the time goes by. Baumeister et al. (2001)also mentioned that it is not a quick process to change the negative affective because it has been created in their mind from the very beginning, but it does not mean that it could not be changed in the process.

The finding confirmed that the use of digital texts to teach reading during distance learning could influence learners' enthusiasm, excitement, and engagement in their reading as well as their learning (Hutchison, 2019; Litterio, 2018; Mina, 2019). The finding indicates that students perceived a negative impact on their learning such as being less motivated, less passionate, less curious, and less active to do the tasks. Therefore, the teachers need direction on how to read digital texts, such as by applying certain digital reading strategies. Even though the habituation made the obstacles at ease, guidance and practices from the teacher about how to read texts digitally should be given. They need to be introduced to the features of digital texts that paper-based texts do not have, such as hyperlinks, search/find buttons, and instant word translation. Even though teachers and students are separated during online learning, teachers' value and assistance are needed as important as normal classroom situations, especially when they are not yet ready for sudden learning changes (Situmorang et al., 2020). By the consistent process and assistance from the teachers in applying reading texts on screen, it is believed that the negative impact and reduce gradually.

CONCLUSION

The unexpected changes in teaching and learning online can influence learners' engagement in reading digitally. Reading engagement can be improved by guiding learners to apply specific digital reading strategies to help them with their reading understanding and encouraging students' reading involvement during the reading class. It has been proven in the current study that it promotes students' behavioral and affective engagement. Even though negative response appears dominantly in this study towards students' digital reading engagement, this study also has shown that innovative media and involvement used during online reading class can help learners build engagement in their reading as well as build better collaboration with their classmates. Students should be supported more during distance learning as they face more than just external distractions, influencing their digital reading motivation and excitement. Those will affect their learning engagement in the classroom, which can lead to difficulties in achieving learning success.

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