

Leveraging Situational Interest to Enhance Motivation and Engagement in Indonesian Primary EFL Classrooms

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Abstract—Understanding factors that sustain students' interest is crucial for effective teaching strategies in student-centered learning. This study explores situational interest among Indonesian primary English language learners (ELLs) and its impact on motivation and engagement. Using mixed methods, data from 101 fifth-grade students (aged 10–11) were collected through classroom observations and reflective journals. Thematic analysis with NVIVO identified three key factors: interactive teaching methods, contextual material relevance, and supportive teacher-student relationships. A scoring rubric and narrative analysis deepened the understanding of students' learning experience, reflecting their interest, motivation, and engagement. Activities like games, group collaborative learning, discussions, multimedia-enhanced engagement, and real-life connections increased participation. Though gender did not determine overarching factors, preferences varied. Teachers played a vital role in fostering a positive learning environment. Findings emphasise the need for dynamic and innovative teaching strategies aligned with learners' interests to enhance engagement while meeting curriculum goals.

Index Terms—situational interest, primary ELLs, interactive teaching, teacher-student relationships, contextual learning

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I. INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, English is widely regarded as an essential foreign language, and it was introduced in primary schools to develop foundational skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Early exposure to English aligns with the Critical Period Hypothesis, which suggests that young learners are more receptive to language acquisition (Abutalebi & Clahsen, 2018). Research highlights early instruction fosters communication skills, cultural awareness, and positive attitudes toward language learning (Pinter, 2017).

EFL education in Indonesia has undergone significant changes, with the reintroduction of English in primary schools under the Kurikulum Merdeka (Emancipated Curriculum) in 2024 (Darmawati et al., 2024). This initiative aims to enhance national English proficiency by addressing previous gaps caused by its removal in 2013. The implementation phase, expected to be nationwide by 2027/2028, is supported by teacher training programs. This evolving landscape presents an opportunity to explore factors sustaining young learners' interest in EFL, as interest plays a crucial role in motivation and engagement (Marzuki et al., 2021).

Despite these renewed efforts, research gaps persist in understanding how to sustain situational interest in Indonesian primary-level EFL classrooms. While motivation is widely recognised as a key factor in language acquisition (Lamb, 2017), little research has been conducted on practical strategies to maintain interest. Intrinsic motivation, driven by curiosity and enjoyment, is critical for young learners (Wahyuni, 2022a), yet further investigation is needed on how classroom experiences foster meaningful engagement.

Interactive teaching strategies such as role-playing, storytelling, and authentic materials (Enever & Driscoll, 2019) enhance student interest. However, Indonesian schools often rely on standardised textbooks and have limited access to engaging resources (Wahyuni, 2022a, b). While interactive methods can increase engagement (Tin, 2016), their effectiveness in sustaining situational interest remains underexplored in Indonesia.

Classroom interactions and collaborative activities also influence interest and motivation (Ibrahim et al., 2015), yet research on their application in Indonesian settings is limited. Given the minimal exposure to English outside the school (Wahyuni & Bee Tin, 2024), practical classroom strategies are crucial for long-term interest. Additionally, teacher attitudes play a significant role in student engagement. Supportive teacher-student relationships enhance affective engagement (Copland et al., 2014), but large class sizes and limited training opportunities still pose challenges (Musthafa, 2013; Zein, 2017). This study addresses these gaps by examining factors influencing situational interest among Indonesian primary EFL learners and their impact on motivation and engagement. The following questions guide the research:

1. What factors influence students' situational interest in English lessons?
2. How do these factors impact students' situational interests?
3. How do these factors contribute to students' motivation and engagement?

The following sections review key literature on interest, motivation, and engagement in young ELLs, particularly within the Indonesian primary school context.

A. *Interest and Motivation in Second Language Learning (SLL) and Acquisition (SLA)*

Motivation and interest are essential in second language learning (SLL) and acquisition (SLA), significantly influencing proficiency. Motivation, defined as a drive to learn a language (Dörnyei, 2009), and interest, linked to engagement and curiosity, are central to this study. Key theories include Dörnyei's (2009) L2 motivational self system, Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory (SDT) (2008), and Renninger and Hidi's (2016) interest development model.

Dörnyei's model comprises three dimensions: 1) Ideal L2 self, reflecting aspirations; 2) Ought-to L2 self, shaped by external pressures; and 3) L2 learning experience, influenced by teachers, materials, and peers. This framework highlights motivation's dynamic nature, integrating identity and future goals, with research validating the Ideal L2 self's role in sustained engagement (Taguchi et al., 2009).

SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2008) differentiates intrinsic motivation (learning for personal satisfaction) from extrinsic motivation (influenced by external rewards). Intrinsic motivation fosters persistence and self-regulation (Noels et al., 2003), supporting self-directed learning and higher proficiency (Ushioda, 2020). SDT also identifies autonomy, competence, and relatedness as fundamental psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Autonomy-supportive teaching enhances engagement (Benson, 2013), and while intrinsic motivation is key, extrinsic motivation can also sustain learning if aligned with personal values.

Interest, another critical SLA factor, is explored through Renninger and Hidi's (2016) framework, distinguishing between situational interest (stimulated by external factors) and individual interest (an enduring predisposition). Through meaningful interactions, situational interest can evolve into long-term motivation (Hidi & Renninger, 2006). Their four-phase model traces interest development from triggered situational to well-developed individual interest. Exposure to engaging content, autonomy support, and competence-building facilitate this transition. Teachers can enhance situational interest using authentic materials like films and real-life contexts (Krapp et al., 2014; Rotgans & Schmidt, 2011a, 2011b), though sustaining it while fostering intrinsic motivation remains challenging.

In summary, motivation and interest are pivotal in SLA, with Dörnyei's, Deci and Ryan's, and Renninger and Hidi's models offering insights. While intrinsic motivation is crucial for long-term success, extrinsic motivation and situational

interest can initiate and sustain engagement. Understanding these frameworks enables educators to design effective strategies for language acquisition.

B. The Interplay Between Interest, Motivation, and Engagement

Classroom engagement includes behavioural, emotional, and cognitive dimensions, fostering dynamic learning (Fredricks et al., 2004). Behavioural engagement involves participation, emotional engagement reflects curiosity, and cognitive engagement enables deep processing (Brown et al., 2014; Senior et al., 2018). Theories of motivation, including Dörnyei's L2 motivational self system, Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory (SDT), and Hidi and Renninger's interest development model, provide insights into L2 learning engagement. These frameworks highlight the cognitive, emotional, and social factors influencing motivation (Fredricks et al., 2004).

Dörnyei's theory emphasises how an Ideal L2 self drives motivation, with learners engaging more when they view L2 proficiency as essential to their future. SDT explains how autonomy, competence, and relatedness transform external motivators into intrinsic goals, fostering engagement (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Hidi and Renninger's four-phase interest model—from triggered situational interest to well-developed individual interest—further clarifies engagement's progression (Hidi & Renninger, 2006). Meaningful tasks, interactive activities, and culturally relevant materials sustain engagement by fulfilling psychological needs (Renninger & Hidi, 2016).

Integrating these theories offers a holistic view of L2 engagement. While Dörnyei focuses on future self-guides, SDT emphasises intrinsic motivation, and Hidi and Renninger outline interest development. Engagement theory unites these perspectives, showing how supportive environments enhance participation and long-term commitment (Fredricks et al., 2004). Educators can foster engagement by designing project-based learning and authentic tasks that promote autonomy, motivation, and meaningful interactions, enhancing immediate and sustained academic success.

C. Teaching English to Young Learners in Indonesia: Current Practices and Challenges

Teaching English to young learners (TEYL) in Indonesia has gained prominence due to English's role as a global lingua franca (Kirkpatrick, 2012). Recognising its importance, the Indonesian government mandates English in secondary schools and offers it as an elective in primary schools. The Ministry of Education and Culture (*Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology*, 2020) supports this initiative by integrating English as a local content subject, emphasising communicative competence (Lie, 2007).

Standard teaching methods include Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) (Aeni et al., 2024), which engage students through role plays, storytelling, and games (Rahmatillah & Madani, 2019). However, traditional rote memorisation and grammar-based instruction persist in some schools, limiting students' practical language skills (Musthafa, 2013). Other challenges remain, particularly regarding teacher qualifications. Many educators lack English proficiency and TEYL training, affecting their instructional quality (Renandya et al., 2018; Zein, 2017). Resource disparities also hinder progress, with rural schools facing shortages of textbooks and teaching aids (Hamied, 2012; Sudrajat, 2024). While teacher training programs have expanded, their effectiveness varies (Zein, 2017).

Cultural attitudes toward English further shape TEYL implementation. Some communities prioritise local languages, affecting students' motivation and parental support (Lauder, 2008). Integrating cultural content into English education can enhance engagement and personal connection (Min & Orosco, 2024). Despite these challenges, continued curriculum development, teacher training, and resource allocation efforts can improve TEYL outcomes in Indonesia.

II. METHODOLOGY

Through reflective journals and classroom observations, this study examined factors influencing situational lesson interest among Indonesian primary ELLs. Using NVIVO, thematic and narrative analyses identified key interest factors, while journal stories were analysed narratively. A scoring rubric assessed classroom interest, motivation, and engagement.

A. Participant

This study took place in English classrooms at an Indonesian primary school, where English was a compulsory subject and a medium of instruction alongside Bahasa Indonesia. The 101 fifth-grade participants (53 girls, 48 boys, aged 10–11) were divided into two girls' classes (A = 26, B = 27) and two boys' classes (C = 23, D = 25). Consent was obtained from the school, teachers, students, and parents. Pseudonyms and coding ensured participant anonymity.

B. Data Collection and Analysis

(a). Observation

Over one semester, four 70-minute English lessons were observed in each class, totalling 1,120 minutes (18.67 hours). Table 1 presents observation rubrics assessing situational interest, motivation, and engagement based on theories from Hidi and Renninger (2006), Deci and Ryan (2008), Dörnyei (2009), and Fredricks et al. (2004), along with Skinner and Pitzer's (2012) study on classroom engagement.

TABLE 1
RUBRIC FOR CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT ON INTEREST, MOTIVATION, AND ENGAGEMENT

Aspect	Criteria	Indicator	Rating Scale
Situational interest	Curiosity	Display curiosity or ask questions about the tasks' contents	1 = Rarely, and exhibited by a smaller number of students ($\leq 25\%$)
	Enthusiasm (Excitement)	Demonstrate enthusiasm or excitement during classroom activities	
Motivation	Consistent engagement	Actively participate in (consistently engage with) novel or interactive tasks	2 = Sometimes, and exhibited by a moderate number of students (26% - 50%)
	Intrinsic interest	Express a desire to learn English and engage in activities	
	Effort, persistence, and independence	Demonstrate effort to complete tasks consistently and independently	
Engagement	Positive response to instruction and guidance	Respond positively to instruction, feedback or guidance	3 = Often and exhibited by a considerable number of students (51% - 75%)
	Active participation (<i>Behavioural</i>)	Volunteer answers, ask questions, and contribute to class discussions.	
	Enjoyment and emotional investment (<i>Emotional</i>)	Demonstrate enjoyment and emotional connection to tasks	
	Applies critical thinking or problem-solving to tasks (<i>Cognitive</i>)	Consistently use higher-order thinking to approach tasks	
			4 = Always, and exhibited by the greatest number of students ($> 75\%$)

The rubric above guided four observations per class (A, B, C, and D), totalling 16 sessions. A 1-to-4 scale assessed interest, motivation, and engagement, averaged per class. Notes captured teaching strategies, content, and teacher-student dynamics.

(b). *Reflective Journals*

After each lesson, 101 students answered five prompting questions in English or Bahasa Indonesia, with teacher assistance as needed. The questions assessed students' interest, influencing factors, and reactions to instructional methods, materials, and teaching strategies, as they are: 1) *Are you interested in your English lesson today?* 2) *What made today's lesson enjoyable?* 3) *How did you feel about the tasks?* 4) *Did you enjoy the topic and content? Why?* and 5) *What did you think about the teacher? What did you like, and how can they help you learn?* Responses were analysed using thematic analysis (TA) to identify patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and narrative analysis (NA) to examine the engagement and motivation (Riessman, 2008), with NVIVO aiding coding. TA and the scoring rubric revealed general trends, while NA provided deeper insights, offering a holistic view of ELLs' interests, motivation, and engagement.

III. RESULTS

A. *Observation: Interest, Motivation, and Engagement*

The course book used was Cambridge *Global English Learners Book* – level 5. Table 2 below summarises the topical discussion and learning activities of the four lessons observed.

TABLE 2
THE LESSONS OBSERVED IN THE CLASSROOM

Lesson	Topic and Activities
1	Topic: <i>Staying Healthy – Food and Health</i> Activities: Learning <i>should</i> and <i>shouldn't</i> , expressing agreement/disagreement, and food group vocabulary (grains, protein, nutrients, dairy, etc.). Speaking: Paired discussions on healthy vs. unhealthy food (girls' classes) and doctor-patient role plays on healthy lifestyles (boys' classes). Listening: Evaluating a presentation on healthy eating. Writing: Completing notes from the listening activity. TBL: Making sandwiches in groups with pre-prepared ingredients (for all classes).
2	Topic: <i>Where We Live – Places and Their Characters</i> Activities: Learning adjectives (comparatives/superlatives) and vocabulary on towns and countries. Speaking: Describing and comparing places using flashcards. Writing: Small group descriptions of places shown in multimedia flashcards. PBL: Individual home projects on a meaningful place (e.g., birthplace, holiday spot), covering its history, landmarks, sightseeing, food, festivals, and customs, and presented in class.
3	Topic: <i>Favourite Fictional Places – Movies & Fictional Worlds</i> Activities: Listening: Watching videos on movie settings (<i>Cars</i> for boys, <i>Frozen</i> for girls). Word study: Descriptive adjectives (scary-looking, huge, fascinating, mysterious, etc.). Speaking: Paired discussions on favourite movies and their fictional worlds. Grammar: Conditional sentences (<i>if</i> + present tense). Writing: Short descriptive essays on favourite imaginary places. TBL: Group presentations on a chosen favourite movie.
4	Topic: <i>A Festival Day – The Rio Carnival</i> Activities: Reading about the Rio Carnival in Brazil, learning defining relative clauses (<i>who, that, which</i>), and watching videos on its customs. Vocabulary: Carnival, feasts, lanterns, symbols, etc. Writing: Worksheets and sentence practices. TBL: Festival decorations—girls made lanterns, boys made fancy hats, and selected students presented their creations.

Below are the observation results based on the rubric (see Table 1 for the rubric) covering students' interests, motivation, and engagement.

TABLE 3
RESULTS OF CLASSROOM OBSERVATION ON INTEREST, MOTIVATION, AND ENGAGEMENT

Aspect	Class (n students)	L1	L2	L3	L4	Average scale (μ)
Situational Interest	Criteria 1: Curiosity					
	Class A – Girls (26)	4	3	4	3	3.5
	Class B – Girls (27)	4	3	3	2	3
	Class C – Boys (23)	3	4	4	2	3.25
	Class D – Boys (25)	2	3	4	2	2.75
	Average scale (μ)	3.25	3.25	3.75	2.25	
	Criteria 2: Enthusiasm (excitement)					
	Class A – Girls (26)	4	3	4	3	3.5
	Class B – Girls (27)	4	4	4	2	3.5
	Class C – Boys (23)	2	4	3	3	3.0
	Class D – Boys (25)	2	3	4	2	2.75
	Average scale (μ)	3.0	3.5	3.75	2.5	
	Criteria 3: Consistent engagement					
	Class A – Girls (26)	4	3	4	3	3.5
	Class B – Girls (27)	4	2	4	3	3.25
Class C – Boys (23)	2	4	3	3	3.0	
Class D – Boys (25)	2	4	4	3	3.25	
Average scale (μ)	3.0	3.25	3.75	3.0		
Motivation	Criteria 1: Intrinsic interest					
	Class A – Girls (26)	4	3	4	3	3.25
	Class B – Girls (27)	4	3	4	2	3.0
	Class C – Boys (23)	2	4	4	3	2.75
	Class D – Boys (25)	2	3	3	2	2.5
	Average scale (μ)	3.0	3.25	3.75	2.5	
	Criteria 2: Effort, persistence, and independence					
	Class A – Girls (26)	4	3	4	3	3.5
	Class B – Girls (27)	4	3	4	3	3.5
	Class C – Boys (23)	2	4	4	3	3.25
	Class D – Boys (25)	2	3	4	3	3.0
	Average scale (μ)	3.0	3.25	4.0	3.0	
	Criteria 3: Positive response to instruction and guidance					
	Class A – Girls (26)	4	3	4	3	3.5
	Class B – Girls (27)	3	3	3	3	3.25
Class C – Boys (23)	3	4	4	3	3.5	
Class D – Boys (25)	3	4	3	3	3.25	
Average scale (μ)	3.25	3.5	3.5	3.0		
Engagement	Criteria 1: Active participation (behavioral)					
	Class A – Girls (26)	4	3	4	3	3.5
	Class B – Girls (27)	4	3	4	3	3.5
	Class C – Boys (23)	3	4	4	3	3.25
	Class D – Boys (25)	3	4	4	3	3.25
	Average scale (μ)	3.5	3.5	4.0	3.0	
	Criteria 2: Enjoyment and or emotional investment (Emotional)					
	Class A – Girls (26)	4	3	4	3	3.5
	Class B – Girls (27)	3	3	4	2	3.0
	Class C – Boys (23)	2	4	4	3	3.25
	Class D – Boys (25)	2	4	4	2	3.0
	Average scale (μ)	2.75	3.5	4.0	2.5	
	Criteria 3: Applies critical thinking or problem-solving to tasks (Cognitive)					
	Class A – Girls (26)	4	3	4	3	3.5
	Class B – Girls (27)	4	3	4	3	3.5
Class C – Boys (23)	3	4	4	3	3.5	
Class D – Boys (25)	3	4	4	3	3.5	
Average scale (μ)	3.5	3.5	4.0	3.0		

Table 3 analyses classroom observations based on nine criteria, revealing gender-based engagement differences, classroom dynamics, and intrinsic motivation's role in learning.

Girls (A and B) showed higher curiosity and enthusiasm than boys (Classes C and D). Class A's curiosity score (3.5) exceeded Class D's (2.75), suggesting girls thrived in structured environments (Brophy, 2004). However, boys scored higher in emotional investment ($\mu = 4.0$), indicating enjoyment despite lower initial enthusiasm. This suggests boys may engage differently but still find learning rewarding.

Classroom dynamics also influenced engagement—class A outperformed Class B in curiosity, indicating that instructional methods and classroom climate play a role. Meanwhile, Class B sustained enthusiasm despite lower curiosity, likely due to peer influence (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Class D had the lowest engagement among boys, suggesting a mismatch between teaching strategies and student interests (Keller, 1987).

Intrinsic motivation significantly impacted engagement. Girls' classes had higher intrinsic motivation scores (3.25 and 3.0), fostering deeper investment in learning (Schunk et al., 2008). Class D boys scored lower (2.5), indicating reduced motivation, though they showed more remarkable persistence, possibly due to teacher expectations (Zimmerman, 2002).

Cognitive engagement, measured through critical thinking and problem-solving, remained consistently high (3.5–4.0) across all classes, indicating intellectual stimulation (Fredricks et al., 2004). This suggests that despite variations in interest or enthusiasm, the curriculum effectively supports higher-order thinking. Observational notes further highlight key instructional factors and the impact of strong teacher-student relationships.

B. Observation: Interactive Teaching Methods

All four English teachers used interactive methods to engage students, encourage collaboration, and sustain motivation. In bilingual schools, the Direct Method immerses students in English. Boys preferred physically engaging activities, so teachers incorporated Total Physical Response (TPR) strategies like games, role-plays, and hands-on projects. Girls excelled in discussion-based and creative task-based learning (TBL), such as making sandwiches (Lesson 1) and lanterns (Lesson 4).

Lessons began with warm-ups suited to student preferences. Boys' classes (C and D) started with Brain Gym, a vocabulary-based wordplay game with TPR elements, while girls' classes (A and B) opened with individual presentations to build confidence. After warm-ups, structured lessons included coursebooks, discussions, and worksheets supplemented by multimedia resources. Small group activities like Think-Pair-Share (Lesson 1, Classes A and B) encouraged participation and confidence-building. Role-playing, such as doctor-patient dialogues (boys' classes, Lesson 1), reinforced vocabulary in real-life contexts. Interactive storytelling kept students engaged, fostering prediction skills and vocabulary mastery.

Students actively participated, showing enthusiasm for varied activities. Collaboration enhanced the learning environment, though some hesitated in role-playing, and TPR activities occasionally caused distractions. Despite challenges, lessons remained engaging and supported language development.

C. Observation: Instructional Materials

The Cambridge Global English—Learner's Book (Boylan et al., 2021) was the primary resource for fifth graders, supplemented by online articles, videos, and visual aids. The book's nine thematic units developed listening, reading, writing, and speaking skills, supported by a workbook and audio CDs. Teachers incorporated diverse instructional materials, including visual aids, flashcards, multimedia, and culturally relevant content—familiar examples, such as local foods and traditions, enhanced engagement. In the Think-Pair-Share activity (Lesson 1—Girls Classes A and B), students discussed healthy and unhealthy foods, linking the topic to family meals and regional traditions, which enriched discussions.

Total Physical Response (TPR) activities reinforced vocabulary through culturally relevant actions like dancing, food offerings, and/or greeting someone. At the same time, role-playing helped students apply language skills in real-life contexts, such as doctor-patient scenarios. Interactive videos and storytelling introduced familiar characters and traditions, fostering more profound connections.

However, cultural unfamiliarity with topics like The Rio Carnival (Lesson 4) led to disengagement, though hands-on activities like making lanterns helped re-engage students. TPR activities, such as Brain Gym, occasionally posed classroom management challenges. Integrating culturally relevant materials sustained student interest, motivation, and participation, making lessons more interactive and meaningful.

D. Observation: Supportive Teacher-Student Relationships

The observation showed that teachers prioritised building supportive relationships with students. They greeted students warmly, used their names, and engaged in light conversations about their families and weekends, fostering a welcoming atmosphere and inclusivity. This personalised interaction set a positive tone and made students feel valued and comfortable. Active encouragement and positive reinforcement were key strategies. Teachers praised students' efforts, not just correct answers, using affirmations like "Well done!" and "Great try!" along with supportive gestures such as smiles and thumbs-ups, making students feel valued.

Teachers also provided individualised support, moving around the classroom to assist struggling students while challenging advanced learners. Group activities, like pair and small-group discussions, encouraged collaboration, allowing less confident students to participate in a low-pressure setting. Classroom management was handled empathetically, with teachers using gentle redirection and humour instead of harsh reprimands. This approach maintained a positive learning environment, fostering mutual respect and motivation. These supportive interactions boosted students' confidence and enhanced their language development.

E. Reflective Journals

A total of 404 responses were collected from four lessons across four classes (4 × 101 students). Key themes were extracted from the responses, identifying factors influencing students' interest in English lessons, as listed in Table 4 below.

TABLE 4
FACTORIAL THEMES ASSOCIATED WITH THE STUDENTS' LESSON INTEREST

Themes	Interactive teaching methods	Contextual materials relevance	Supportive teacher-student relationships
Sub-themes	Games and gamification	Cultural relevance	Emotional support and encouragement
	Role plays	Personal value relevance	Effective communication and active listening
	Project-based learning (PBL)	Real-world connection	Creating a positive and inclusive classroom climate
	Collaborative learning (CL)	Familiarity and prior knowledge	Providing autonomy and student choice
	Task-based learning (TBL)	Age-appropriate and trend-based content	One-on-one support and scaffolding
	Technology-based learning (TcBL)		

The table summarises three key themes influencing students' interest in English lessons: interactive teaching methods, contextual relevance of the materials, and supportive teacher-student relationships.

Further analysis revealed sub-themes. Interactive methods included gamification, role-plays, project-based learning (PBL), collaborative learning (CL), task-based learning (TBL), and technology-based learning (TcBL). Relevant instructional materials are aligned with local culture, personal value, real-world connection, familiarity, age-appropriateness, and trend-based content (Mulyanah et al., 2024). Supportive teacher-student relationships were reflected in emotional support and encouragement, effective communication and active listening, inclusive classroom climate, student autonomy, and individualised scaffolding. Students' interests crucially influenced motivation and engagement in primary EFL classrooms. Understanding their perspectives helps educators enhance teaching strategies for a more meaningful learning experience. Below are highlighted student narratives related to the identified themes.

(a). *Interactive Teaching Methods: Fostering Engagement Through Activity-Based Learning*

Students consistently expressed enthusiasm for interactive and hands-on activities that made learning enjoyable. Gamification fostered excitement and friendly competition, keeping students engaged. One student shared, "We have a lot of fun activities today, the Brain Gym, and we compete in groups" (PB065). This interactive approach enhanced motivation and created an energetic classroom atmosphere.

Role-playing made language learning more meaningful, allowing students to embody real-life characters. A student who played a doctor in an activity found it relatable: "I played a doctor, and my friend was my patient. My parents are nurses, so it was easy for me" (PB087). By assuming familiar roles, students connected learning to their aspirations and home environments.

Project-based learning (PBL) encouraged ownership, integrating research and presentation skills. One student reflected, "Our home project and discussion helped me practice communication skills while presenting my hometown's history" (PG023). Collaborative learning (CL) also fostered peer interaction: "Today's lesson was interesting because we practised speaking in pairs about healthy and unhealthy food" (PG011).

Beyond traditional methods, task-based learning (TBL) made lessons practical. "I liked making sandwiches with friends. We brought ingredients, made them, ate them, and shared them" (PB067). Similarly, technology-based learning (TcBL) introduced cultural awareness through videos on global traditions.

(b). *Contextual Relevance of Materials: Enhancing Meaningful Learning Experiences*

Students showed greater interest in English lessons when content related to their experiences and cultural backgrounds. Lessons on historical cities deepened their understanding of national heritage. One student shared, "Learning about historical cities helped me understand famous places in my country" (PB099). Connecting past and present events fostered pride and curiosity about their roots.

When topics aligned with personal values, engagement increased. A lesson on healthy lifestyles sparked meaningful conversations: "We discussed our health habits in class today. It was valuable sharing personal experiences, and I learned more about how to live and eat healthily" (PG033). Real-world connections also sustained interest. A lesson on cultural festivals prompted comparisons: "I liked learning about Rio Carnival and comparing it to festivals in our country" (PB085).

Familiarity with topics reinforced engagement. A student whose hometown was featured in a historical lesson felt connected to the material: "We studied my city, once a famous kingdom. My parents and I were born here, so I knew some history" (PB065). Age-appropriate, trend-based content also made learning enjoyable. One student, excited about a movie lesson, remarked, "I loved today's lesson on movies, especially Frozen. The teacher showed us the filming locations" (PG057). These personalised experiences made learning relevant beyond the classroom.

(c). *Supportive Teacher-Student Relationships: Building Confidence and Encouragement*

The teacher's role in fostering a supportive learning environment boosted students' confidence and motivation. The encouragement helped them overcome language barriers. One student, who initially lacked confidence in speaking English, shared, "My teacher says I can be good at English if I practice speaking in class" (PG09). This emotional support reassured students that mistakes were part of learning.

Effective teacher communication also contributed to a welcoming atmosphere. A student appreciated their teacher's patience: "Ms. Nin is patient, always listens, and answers our questions" (PB077). Creating an inclusive environment where students felt comfortable expressing themselves made a difference. Another student shared, "Our teacher asks us to share family stories, likes, dislikes, and holidays. It is fun and relaxing" (PG041).

Providing students with autonomy empowers their learning. One student enjoyed reading materials: "We choose the book we like for reading. The most popular one is read in class" (PB082). A scaffolding approach also built reading skills: "The teacher first reads the story, then we read in groups, and finally alone with teacher support" (PB076).

These findings highlight how interactive teaching methods, relevant materials, and supportive teacher-student relationships enhance motivation. Meaningful, encouraging learning experiences help students build confidence and appreciation for language learning.

IV. DISCUSSION

This study explored factors influencing situational interest in Indonesian primary EFL classrooms, emphasising their impact on motivation and engagement. Findings highlight three key themes: interactive teaching methods, contextual material relevance, and supportive teacher-student relationships. These align with established theories, including Hidi & Renninger's (2006) interest development model, Dörnyei's (2009) L2 motivational self system, Deci and Ryan's (2008) self-determination theory (SDT), and engagement theory (Fredricks et al., 2004).

Interactive methods such as gamification, role-playing, project-based learning (PBL), cooperative learning (CL), task-based learning (TBL), and technology-based learning (TcBL) significantly enhanced situational interest (see Table 4). In line with Hidi and Renninger (2006), engaging activities stimulated curiosity and enthusiasm. Role-playing and storytelling fostered active participation, supporting Rotgans and Schmidt's (2011b) claim that interactive tasks increase initial interest.

Gamification boosted engagement, particularly among boys, while discussion-based and creative tasks, like making lanterns, were more effective for girls. These findings align with SDT, emphasising autonomy, competence, and relatedness as key motivators (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Consistent with Deterding et al. (2011) and Dörnyei (2001), gamified elements increased participation and engagement.

Cooperative learning promoted collaboration and communication (Ibrahim et al., 2015), while multimedia instruction accommodated diverse learning styles, improving comprehension (Haleem et al., 2022). Krapp et al. (2014) suggest that repeated engagement with intrinsically motivating activities fosters sustained interest, aligning with this study's findings. Students exhibited enthusiasm for collaborative, problem-solving tasks, reinforcing the potential for long-term language learning commitment. These results highlight the necessity of adaptable, student-centred teaching strategies, as advocated by Brookfield (2017).

The second theme, contextual materials, highlights the impact of cultural relevance, personal value, real-world connections, familiarity, and age-appropriate content on students' situational interest, motivation, and engagement (see Table 4). Lessons incorporating local history, culinary practices, and festivals fostered motivation and identity (Sakti et al., 2024). Culturally relevant materials prevented English from feeling foreign, reinforcing its role in global communication while preserving local heritage. Hidi and Renninger (2016) argue that personal meaning sustains interest, aligning with Dörnyei's (2009) Ideal L2 self, where students engaged more when English was linked to their identity and aspirations.

Storytelling based on cultural experiences enhanced enthusiasm, confirming Norton's (2013) findings that relatable narratives strengthen emotional connections and language skills (Lenhart et al., 2020). Incorporating local stories increased engagement, making English more meaningful in students' contexts. Materials aligned with students' values and experiences further increased investment in learning, supporting SDT's intrinsic motivation concept and emphasising engagement when learning connects with personal interests (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Trend-based content, such as movies (e.g., *Frozen*, *Cars*), reinforced engagement due to familiarity and emotional significance, aligning with Gee's (2007) findings on media and pop culture as practical learning tools.

The third theme, supportive teacher-student relationships, encompassed five sub-themes: emotional support, effective communication, positive classroom climate, autonomy, and one-on-one support, which helped improve and maintain students' situational interest, motivation, and engagement. Teachers played a crucial role in fostering interest by creating a supportive environment, offering constructive feedback, and building rapport. A positive classroom environment promotes engagement and reduces anxiety, which is critical for young learners (Lamb et al., 2020). Students who described their teachers as encouraging and approachable reported higher interest and engagement, supporting the engagement theory (Fredricks et al., 2004) and emphasising emotional engagement through teacher support.

Teachers providing constructive feedback, peer collaboration, and autonomy effectively maintained situational interest. According to Dörnyei's (2009) Ought-to L2 self, external expectations (e.g., encouragement from teachers and

peers) strengthen persistence and engagement. Emotional support and personalised attention also increased interest, reinforcing findings that teacher-student relationships are key to EFL motivation (Copland et al., 2014). Strong teacher-student relationships are correlated with improved academic outcomes and motivation (Pianta et al., 2012), as discovered in this study.

These themes highlight the role of situational interest in motivation and engagement. Students whose interest was stimulated exhibited higher intrinsic motivation. SDT suggests that learners who enjoy and find relevance in their studies persist in learning (Noels et al., 2003; Ushioda, 2020). The study supports this, as students who found lessons enjoyable actively participated, completed tasks, and took ownership of their learning.

Dörnyei's (2009) L2 learning experience posits that positive classroom experiences impact willingness to engage with the language. In this study, students associating English lessons with fun, relevance, and encouragement demonstrated increased motivation, reinforcing the connection between situational interest and long-term engagement.

Students displaying situational interest also exhibited higher behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement. Engagement theory (Fredricks et al., 2004) states that engaged learners actively participate, show emotional investment, and apply critical thinking. Behavioural engagement was seen in voluntary participation and group collaboration, emotional engagement in enthusiasm and personal connections, and cognitive engagement in problem-solving and creative expression. These findings confirm consistent situational interest fosters sustained engagement and language learning success (Renninger & Hidi, 2016).

Notable gender differences were observed. Boys engaged more in competitive, high-energy activities (e.g., gamification, group competitions), while girls responded better to collaborative and discussion-based tasks. The findings aligned with studies that discovered boys are motivated by competition and dynamic activities (Gurian & Stevens, 2005). In contrast, girls thrive in cooperative, discussion-driven environments (Pajares & Valiante, 2001). These differences underscore the need for gender-responsive EFL strategies, balancing structured competition-based activities for boys with discussion-driven, collaborative exercises for girls to optimise engagement.

This study highlights the importance of interactive teaching methods, contextual materials, and supportive teacher-student relationships in fostering situational interest. These factors, with their respective sub-factors discovered in classroom learning, significantly impacted motivation and engagement, reinforcing existing theoretical frameworks and offering insights for effective EFL instruction in Indonesian primary classrooms.

V. CONCLUSION

This study found that interactive teaching methods, contextualised materials, and strong teacher-student relationships significantly foster situational interest among Indonesian primary EFL learners. Gender differences also influenced engagement, emphasising the need for gender-responsive lesson design. When these factors were present, students exhibited greater intrinsic motivation and engagement, reinforcing key motivation and interest development theories.

Observations highlight the need for adaptable and innovative teaching strategies that cater to diverse learner needs. Integrating independent and active learning approaches and differentiated instruction can enhance engagement by addressing cognitive and emotional differences. Future research should explore how teaching strategies, classroom environments, and peer interactions influence student motivation and performance.

Teaching English to young learners (TEYL) in Indonesia offers opportunities and challenges. While evolving methodologies have improved instruction, barriers such as resource limitations, teacher competency gaps, and sociocultural factors remain. Addressing these requires collaboration among policymakers, educators, and communities. Culturally relevant instruction and comprehensive TEYL teacher training, including mentorship and collaborative learning, can bridge competency gaps and enhance engagement.

With the reintroduction of English under Kurikulum Merdeka, prioritising teacher training and curriculum support is crucial. Student-centred strategies such as gamification, cooperative learning, role-plays, and project-based learning enhance engagement. However, resource constraints must be addressed for equitable access. Future research should explore scalable solutions, including teacher training and digital resources, to maximise learning outcomes. While this study was limited to one school, broader research can examine long-term impacts on language proficiency, contributing to effective TEYL strategies.

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