Reading Engagement, Reading Anxiety, and Self-Perceived Reading Success among Malaysian ESL Foundation Students: A Descriptive Study

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ABSTRACT

This descriptive quantitative study examined the levels of reading anxiety, reading engagement, and self-perceived reading performance among Malaysian ESL foundation students across three academic programmes: Science, Engineering, and Law. Underpinned by Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis and Guthrie and Wigfield's Engaged Reading Model (2000), the study aimed to describe learners' emotional and motivational experiences in academic reading contexts. A total of 155 students participated, responding to a structured questionnaire adapted from established instruments: the Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (Saito, Garza, & Horwitz, 1999), the Motivations for Reading Questionnaire (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000), and selected items from the Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (Mokhtari & Sheorey, 2002) and Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990). Descriptive analysis revealed that the overall level of reading anxiety was moderate (M = 2.95, SD = 0.99). Among the three groups, Law students reported the highest anxiety (M = 3.15, SD = 1.10), followed by Science (M = 3.01, SD = 0.89) and Engineering (M = 2.67, SD = 0.94). Reading engagement was generally high (M = 3.82, SD = 0.77), while self-perceived reading performance was moderate (M = 3.46, SD = 0.83). The findings indicate that although students are engaged readers, moderate anxiety may still influence their perceived performance. The study highlights the need for supportive instructional practices and structured strategies such as TEEEL to enhance engagement and reduce anxiety in ESL reading classrooms.

Keywords: reading anxiety, reading engagement, self-perceived reading performance, ESL foundation students, descriptive study

INTRODUCTION

Reading in a second language is a critical skill for academic success, especially in English as a Second Language (ESL) foundation programs where students are preparing for tertiary studies. Research has established that reading proficiency is essential as it helps to enhance learners' cognitive and academic development (Abid et. al, 2023). However, achieving high reading is not only a matter of decoding skills or vocabulary knowledge, as it is also influenced by affective and behavioral factors. In this context, reading engagement, reading anxiety, and self-perceived reading performance emerge as key constructs that can shape learners' reading outcomes. Reading engagement refers to the degree of interest, involvement, and attention that a student dedicates to reading activities. Highly engaged readers read frequently and strategically, driven by both motivation and cognitive focus, which often leads to better comprehension and learning outcomes (Lee et. al, 2021). According to Solati (2024), reading anxiety is the nervousness or apprehension experienced when reading in a foreign language, caused by worry over unfamiliar vocabulary, complex texts, or fear of misinterpretation. She further added that such anxiety acts as an affective "filter" that impedes comprehension and diminishes students' willingness to read. Meanwhile, self-perceived reading performance refers to students' self-assessment of their own reading ability or effectiveness. This self-perception is closely related to the concept of reading self-efficacy, where students who believe they are competent readers are more likely to tackle reading challenges confidently and persistently (Li et.al, 2025).

For ESL foundation students, these factors are particularly salient. Many foundation-level learners enter programs with limited academic reading experience in English and may struggle with motivation or confidence. A study conducted by Fitrawati et. al (2023) reported that students experienced moderate to high levels of foreign language reading anxiety. Such anxiety can discourage them from fully engaging with reading materials, avoiding reading activities that will hinder their reading performance. Conversely, students who are motivated and engaged tend to practice more, thus improving their skills, which in turn reinforces their self-confidence. Understanding the relationship of reading anxiety, reading engagement, and self-perceived reading performance in this context is, therefore, crucial for educators to design informed interventions that can foster a positive reading environment and ultimately boost reading achievement.

1.1 Problem Statement

Nearly every course at Malaysian universities requires reading in English, but many foundation students have weak reading habits and abilities. According to national surveys, Malaysians read only two books annually on average, and about 80% of undergraduates are "reluctant readers," who only read for exams (Mohammed et al., 2019). Students are deprived of the consistent exposure required to develop their vocabulary and comprehension skills because of low reading engagement.

Malaysian undergraduates' English reading proficiency is still "below-par," primarily due to poor reading habits and declining motivation (Ker-hsin & Razali, 2023). Students often find it difficult to apply their theoretical knowledge to real academic texts, even when explicit strategies like scanning, inferring, and skimming are taught in class. They report time pressure, limited vocabulary, and trouble understanding key ideas as the contributing factors to these reading problems (Edward et al., 2021). Significant affective barriers also contribute to these skill gaps. To illustrate, a recent survey of 96 Malaysian university students participating in online distance learning revealed "high" levels of reading anxiety, primarily due to uncertainty about their own English proficiency and the lack of prompt instructor support (Kamaruddin & Kaur, 2023). This type of anxiety has been shown to further undermine one's confidence, discourage practice, and drain mental energy in reading skills.

Overall, the data suggest a triple challenge that learners must overcome in their reading development, namely debilitating reading anxiety, poor reading strategy implementation, and low reading engagement. However, there has not been much empirical research done on how these elements interact in the Malaysian foundation context, where students need to become proficient in academic reading rapidly in order to advance to their degree programs. In particular, no descriptive study has profiled students' self-perceived reading success, daily engagement with English texts, and reading anxiety levels all at the same time. It is necessary that this gap be filled for two reasons. First, lecturers can use brief surveys to create reading profiles that show different patterns of anxiety, engagement, and confidence, which will help them to provide focused support. Next, reframing feedback by highlighting effort and progress, rather than only mistakes, may improve how students see themselves as readers and encourage persistence. Thus, in order to lay the foundation for pedagogical interventions, the current study aims to characterise the distributions and levels of reading anxiety, reading engagement, and self-perceived reading performance among Malaysian ESL foundation students based on the following research questions:

Research Questions

1. What is the level of reading anxiety among ESL foundation students?
2. What is the level of reading engagement among ESL foundation students?
3. What is the level of self-perceived reading performance among ESL foundation students?

LITERATURE REVIEW

2. 1 Reading Engagement in Second Language Context

Reading engagement is a reader's active involvement in reading, encompassing behavioural, cognitive, and affective dimensions. An engaged reader not only spends time reading (behavioural engagement) but also employs mental strategies to understand text (cognitive engagement) and often experiences interest or enjoyment

during reading (affective engagement). Recent research underscores the vital role of engagement in reading development. For example, Lee et al. (2021) found that students' dedication to reading is strongly linked to reading performance outcomes. This affirms that participation in reading is vital for reading performance. When learners regularly read and invest effort in understanding the texts, they tend to achieve higher comprehension and literacy growth. This aligns with earlier theoretical models, which suggested that engaged reading acts serve as a pathway where instructional practices and motivation translate into achievement (Guthrie et al., 2007).

In ESL/EFL settings, reading engagement can be a challenge as students may be less inclined to read in a second language due to the additional effort required. Merga (2020) emphasises that educators should support student motivation and provide ample reading opportunities, as these boost engagement and thereby improve reading outcomes. Indeed, creating an environment that nurtures curiosity and purpose for reading can enhance engagement even among reluctant readers. A study by Hamedi *et al.* in 2020 with Iranian EFL learners demonstrated that reading engagement significantly mediated the relationship between reading-related emotions and comprehension performance. Students with higher enthusiasm and involvement in reading were able to overcome negative emotions and achieve better understanding, emphasising engagement as a positive force in the reading process.

2.2 Reading Anxiety and Its Impact

Reading anxiety in a second language is a situation-specific form of language anxiety, which is different from general classroom anxiety. It is characterised by feelings of tension, fear, or worry when a learner is required to read text in the target language (Horwitz, 2010; Saito, Garza & Horwitz, 1999). Common sources of foreign language reading anxiety include unfamiliar vocabulary, complex grammar structures, culturally unfamiliar content, and the pressure of reading under time or evaluation constraints. Recent studies have documented the prevalence and consequences of this anxiety. Fitrawati et al. (2023), for instance, surveyed Indonesian EFL university students and found that 67% of students experienced moderate levels of reading anxiety, with a further 20% reporting high anxiety. These figures suggest that moderate anxiety is typical, and a substantial minority face serious anxiety in reading. Reading anxiety has been negatively associated with reading performance across multiple investigations. Solati et al. (2024) note that studies have shown reading anxiety can lead to decreased comprehension and motivation. When students are anxious, cognitive resources that could be used for processing text may be diverted to self-doubt and worry, resulting in impaired understanding. Moreover, anxiety often triggers avoidance behaviours. Students may procrastinate on reading assignments or choose texts below their ability level to cope with discomfort. In a correlational study, Tonka and Bakir (2020) discovered a significant negative relationship between reading anxiety and reading habits, indicating that highly anxious students read less frequently by choice. This avoidance limits their practice, which could improve their skills, potentially creating a vicious cycle. Constructively, some research has explored how alleviating anxiety can improve reading outcomes. For example, supportive instructional strategies such as teacher encouragement, strategy training, and less stressful reading environments have been found to reduce anxiety and thereby facilitate better comprehension. These findings highlight the need for educators to be aware of reading anxiety levels in their classes and to implement interventions such as teaching relaxation techniques, building vocabulary, or providing texts at appropriate difficulty to help students manage anxiety.

2.3 Self-Perceived Reading Performance (Self-Efficacy).

The concept of self-perceived reading performance refers to learners' own assessment of how well they read in the second language. It is closely linked to the idea of reading self-efficacy, which is confidence in one's reading capabilities. This self-belief can significantly influence reading behaviour. Students who perceive their reading ability as high are more likely to take on challenging texts and persist through difficulties, whereas those with low self-perception may refrain from reading tasks for fear of failure. There is evidence that what students believe about their own ability and how they actually perform often build on each other over time, creating either a positive or negative cycle (Malanchini et al., 2017). In the ESL context, learners' self-evaluation can sometimes be inconsistent with their true ability due to insecurity or previous negative experiences. Self-perceptions can sometimes misalign with actual performance. Recent literature reveals the beneficial role of strong reading self-efficacy. A study by Li et al. (2025) found that reading self-efficacy positively predicted students' reading

engagement and reading volume. This means that students who felt confident in their reading skills tended to read more frequently and with greater interest, as confidence can fuel motivation. Conversely, if a student doubts their reading ability, they may approach texts with a negative attitude or avoid reading whenever possible, limiting their progress. Generally, a positive self-view correlates with better reading outcomes. In sum, self-perception is an internal factor that can either boost or undermine a learner's engagement and achievement in reading, and thus it requires attention in second language learning.

2.4 Interrelationship among Reading Engagement, Reading Anxiety, and Self-Perceived Reading Performance.

While the above constructs independently influence ESL reading, contemporary research and theories suggest they are deeply interrelated. Engagement and anxiety often exhibit an inverse relationship. As engagement in reading increases, anxiety tends to decrease, presumably because familiarity and proficiency in reading foster comfort. On the other hand, high anxiety can stifle engagement, as anxious students are less inclined to read for pleasure or immersion. This interplay was evident in the work of Tonka & Bakir (2020), mentioned earlier, where reading anxiety was linked to poorer reading habits. Students who believe they are capable readers feel more motivated, engage more actively, and experience less anxiety. However, when they doubt their ability, their anxiety increases, leading them to avoid reading tasks. This is supported by Hamedi et al. (2020), who found that reading engagement was the mediating factor between reading emotions (enjoyment, anxiety) and comprehension. Essentially, emotional states influenced outcomes through their effect on engagement levels. Based on the previous insights, the present study considers all three factors together. By examining engagement, anxiety, and self-rated performance concurrently, instructors can better understand the profile of ESL foundation students and identify whether students who struggle in one area also struggle in others. The literature evidently indicates that to improve students' reading proficiency, one should adopt a holistic approach by fostering engagement, building confidence, and reducing anxiety at once, rather than treating each in isolation.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

This study draws on two well-known theories, Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982) and Guthrie and Wigfield's Engaged Reading Model (2000), to show how emotions and motivation shape reading in foundation-level ESL learners. Anxiety in reading often acts as a barrier that discourages students from engaging with texts and limits their practice (Taboada Barber et al., 2021; Xie & Huang, 2024). It also weakens self-belief, causing some learners to think they are poor readers even when their actual ability is stronger than they realise (Solati et al., 2024; Sümer Dodur & Ceylan, 2025). By contrast, students who stay engaged, showing persistence, interest, and effort, are more likely to perform well and feel confident about their reading ability (Van Der Sande et al., 2023; Xie & Huang, 2024). In this sense, engagement acts as a bridge that connects anxiety with performance and self-perceptions (Taboada Barber et al., 2021; Xie & Huang, 2024).

At the same time, this pattern is not fixed and can vary among learners. Motivation and self-confidence can reduce the effects of anxiety, thus helping students to keep reading even when texts feel demanding. Krashen (1982) suggested that motivated and confident learners are able to "lower the affective filter," making them more open to input. Recent studies confirm this, showing that students with stronger motivation or higher confidence are less likely to let anxiety interfere with their reading progress (Pollack et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2022; Liu, 2023; Sümer Dodur & Ceylan, 2025). Over time, these protective factors allow learners to build positive reading experiences that strengthen their sense of ability, while repeated struggles with anxiety and disengagement can gradually weaken it (van der Sande et al., 2023; Xie & Huang, 2024). Taken together, the framework shows that reading success depends not only on skills but also on how learners feel, what drives them, and how they perceive themselves as readers.
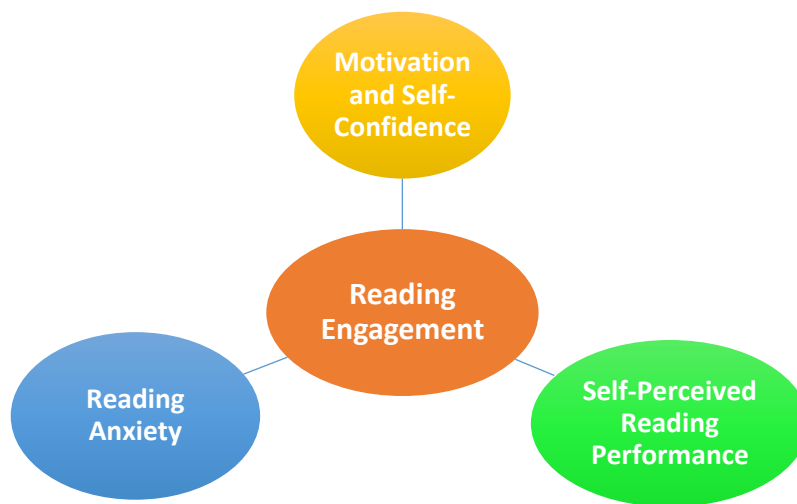
Based on Krashen's Affective Filter (1986) and Guthrie and Wingfield's Engaged Reading Model (2000)

Figure 1: The Relationship between Reading Engagement, Reading Anxiety, and Self-Perceived Reading Performance

As illustrated in the framework, reading anxiety functions as an emotional barrier that reduces learners' willingness to engage with texts, thereby lowering both actual performance and their self-perceptions as readers. Reading engagement mediates this process by changing the extent to which anxiety influences outcomes. When students disengage due to anxiety, their performance and confidence often decline. However, motivation and self-confidence play a moderating and preventive role. They delay the negative effects of anxiety on engagement and performance, and help to lower the intensity of anxiety itself. This makes learners more resilient in challenging reading situations. Together, these dynamics explain why some foundation-level ESL learners persist and thrive despite difficulties, while others withdraw and struggle.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study applied a quantitative research approach through simple random sampling to gather the information related to the research objectives. The participants of this study were 154 foundation students (88 female and 67 male students) who enrolled in the Academic Writing Course during their second semester of the foundation program. The participants' ages ranged between 18 and 19 years old. The questionnaire consisted of 4 sections and 36 Likert-scale items, and information collected from the participants included demographic information and the following constructs, namely Reading Engagement (12 items), Reading Anxiety (12 items), and Self-Reported Reading Performance (10 items). This questionnaire was adapted from established instruments: the Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (Saito, Garza, & Horwitz, 1999), the Motivations for Reading Questionnaire (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000), and selected items from the Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (Mokhtari & Sheorey, 2002) and Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990).

Table 1- Distribution of Items in Survey

SECTION	CONSTRUCT	NO. OF ITEMS
B	Reading Engagement	12
C	Reading Anxiety	12
D	Self-Reported Reading Performance	12

Participants' levels of reading engagement, reading anxiety, and self-perceived reading performance were measured by their responses to Likert-scale questions, where they were asked to choose from a scale ranging from 1 to 5. A score of 1 indicated Strong Disagreement (SD) with the statement, representing the lowest level

of anxiety recorded in this study. Conversely, a score of 5 signified Strong Agreement (SA) with the statement, indicating the highest level of anxiety reported among participants. This approach provided a detailed assessment of all three constructs, offering a thorough understanding of how reading engagement, reading anxiety, and self-reported performance varied among participants in the study.

The language instructors teaching the course distributed the questionnaire using a Google Form via WhatsApp messaging service. This approach can enhance the response rate and data collection process. The researchers coded and analysed the collected responses using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28. The items were computed to identify the mean, standard deviation, correlation, and regression values. The survey was administered in the middle of the second semester to ensure that students had enough exposure to academic reading in English to genuinely reflect on their engagement and challenges.

FINDINGS

4.1 Findings for Demographic Profile

A total of 155 ESL foundation students participated in this study: 52 from the Foundation in Science, 50 from the Foundation in Engineering, and 53 from the Foundation in Law. Most respondents were between 18 and 19 years old, which is typical for pre-university students. In terms of gender, 88 students (56.8%) were female and 67 students (43.2%) were male. Nearly all participants reported Malay (Bahasa Melayu) as their first language, indicating a fairly uniform language background in the sample. On average, students had been learning English for roughly 12 years, essentially since primary school. This reflects a long exposure to the language before entering the foundation program. Overall, this sample represents a balanced cross-section of foundation students across the three academic programs.

4.2 Findings to Answer RQ1

Students demonstrated a generally high level of reading engagement, with an overall mean score of 3.94 ± 0.58. Among the three programs, Law students showed the highest engagement (M = 4.06 ± 0.55), followed closely by Science (M = 3.91 ± 0.57) and Engineering (M = 3.85 ± 0.59). This pattern indicates that most students actively engage with reading materials, enjoy reading activities, and see reading as valuable for their academic development. Law students' higher engagement might be explained by their frequent need to interpret lengthy case studies and legal texts, which naturally encourages sustained reading habits.

Previous studies by Al-Qahtani (2022) and Pham and Lin (2021) similarly found that engagement is strongly tied to academic reading motivation. For instance, Al-Qahtani's research on EFL learners in Saudi Arabia revealed that when students find reading relevant to their studies or future goals, their engagement increases significantly. Likewise, Pham and Lin's study showed that learners who perceive reading as purposeful and beneficial are more likely to invest time and effort in it. In the current context, Law students' higher engagement may be attributed to the central role of reading in their discipline, which requires analysing statutes, case studies, and written arguments.

The high level of engagement observed across all programs also reflects the positive reading culture cultivated in Malaysian foundation courses, where reading activities are emphasized in English proficiency modules. This pattern corresponds with Guthrie and Wigfield's observation that engaged readers are not only motivated but also "strategically knowledgeable and socially interactive." These qualities are evident among these students. High engagement thus represents a promising foundation for language development, as engaged readers are more likely to comprehend deeply, persist through challenges, and build long-term reading habits.

4.3 Findings to Answer RQ2

The overall mean score for reading anxiety among ESL foundation students was 3.12 ± 0.64, indicating a moderate level of anxiety when reading English texts. When examined by program, Law students reported the

highest mean anxiety level (M = 3.27 ± 0.60), followed by science students (M = 3.09 ± 0.67) and Engineering students (M = 2.98 ± 0.65).

This suggests that Law students tend to experience slightly more tension or worry when reading in English. This could possibly be due to the heavy reading load and complex legal terminology. Meanwhile, Engineering students are comparatively more relaxed readers.

This moderate level of anxiety aligns with earlier findings by Rahayu and Fitriana (2021) and Zhao (2023), who observed that EFL learners often feel anxious when reading complex or unfamiliar texts, particularly those containing advanced vocabulary or abstract concepts. Law students' higher anxiety may be explained by their exposure to long, complex legal passages materials that are linguistically demanding and conceptually heavy. This supports Krashen's (1985) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which posits that negative emotional states such as fear and nervousness can act as psychological barriers that block input and hinder comprehension. When the affective filter is raised, the learner's ability to process new linguistic information becomes limited.

4.4 Findings to Answer RQ3

The students' self-perceived reading performance was also found to be high, with an overall mean score of 3.88 ± 0.61. Program-wise, Law students again reported the highest self-rating (M = 3.96 ± 0.59), followed by Engineering (M = 3.87 ± 0.62) and Science (M = 3.80 ± 0.63). This finding suggests that most students felt confident about their English reading ability and believed they could understand and analyse texts effectively. Law students' slightly higher scores imply greater self-assurance in reading comprehension and critical interpretation, while Science students, though still positive, expressed comparatively less confidence.

This finding aligns with Lee and Hsieh (2022), who found that students with higher self-efficacy in reading tend to demonstrate greater comprehension accuracy and persistence. The positive self-perception observed here suggests that foundation students generally possess strong self-efficacy, which, according to Bandura's (2001) Social Cognitive Theory, directly influences their academic performance. Learners who believe in their reading competence are more likely to employ effective strategies, stay motivated, and recover quickly from comprehension difficulties.

The pattern observed also supports Shuib and Abdullah (2023), who reported a positive link between Malaysian students perceived reading competence and their actual academic success. In the present study, the higher self-ratings among Law and Engineering students may reflect exposure to a greater volume of English reading materials and more frequent opportunities to apply reading skills in coursework. Although Science students' self-perception was slightly lower, their mean still indicates confidence, which may continue to grow as they gain experience handling English texts. Overall, the results suggest that self-perceived reading performance and engagement are closely related, as predicted by Guthrie and Wigfield's (2000) framework. Students who are more engaged in reading are also more confident in their abilities, which further reinforces motivation and persistence.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This study examined three key constructs among ESL foundation students which are reading anxiety, reading engagement, and self-perceived reading performance across three academic programs: Science, Engineering, and Law. The overall results indicate that the students experienced a moderate level of reading anxiety, suggesting that while they occasionally felt tense or uneasy when reading in English, their anxiety was not severe. The mean score for reading anxiety was 2.95 (SD = 0.99). Among the three programs, Law students recorded the highest level of anxiety (M = 3.15, SD = 1.10), followed by Science students (M = 3.01, SD = 0.89), while Engineering students showed the lowest anxiety (M = 2.67, SD = 0.94). This implies that Law students, whose program demands heavy reading of complex legal texts, tend to feel more pressured compared to students in Science or Engineering. The results are consistent with previous research indicating that ESL learners typically experience moderate anxiety when reading English texts, especially when they perceive the material as difficult or unfamiliar (Rahayu & Fitriana, 2021).

In contrast, the results showed that students demonstrated a high level of reading engagement, with an overall mean score of 4.04 (SD = 0.64). This finding suggests that most students are motivated and actively involved in reading activities, showing interest and persistence in understanding English texts. Among the three programs, Law students again reported the highest engagement (M = 4.23, SD = 0.67), followed closely by Engineering (M = 3.96, SD = 0.62) and Science (M = 3.94, SD = 0.62). The high level of engagement among Law students can be linked to the extensive reading required in their coursework, such as case studies and legal documents. The generally high engagement across all programs is a positive indicator of intrinsic motivation and commitment toward reading, reflecting students' willingness to invest time and effort in improving their reading skills.

The findings also revealed that students possessed a high level of self-perceived reading performance (M = 3.92, SD = 0.68). This means that students felt confident in their ability to read and understand English texts. Program-wise, Law students scored the highest (M = 4.04, SD = 0.66), followed by Engineering (M = 3.94, SD = 0.63) and Science (M = 3.81, SD = 0.72). The results suggest that most students believed they were effective readers and capable of handling academic texts in English. The combination of high engagement and strong self-perceived performance, along with moderate anxiety, paints a balanced picture: foundation students have positive reading attitudes and sufficient confidence, though some still experience emotional barriers that can hinder optimal reading comprehension.

Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

5.2.1 Theoretical and Conceptual Implications

The findings of this study support and extend two important theoretical frameworks in second language acquisition: Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1985) and Guthrie and Wigfield's Engaged Reading Model (2000). According to Krashen, affective factors such as anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence influence language acquisition. When anxiety is high, the "affective filter" rises, blocking language input and reducing comprehension. Conversely, when learners feel confident and relaxed, the filter is low, allowing input to be processed more effectively. In this study, the moderate level of reading anxiety, especially among Law students, indicates that emotional barriers still exist but are not extreme. Meanwhile, students' high self-perceived confidence suggests a low affective filter that facilitates effective language input and reading comprehension. These results reinforce Krashen's argument that lowering anxiety and strengthening confidence are crucial for improving reading performance in a second language.

The high level of engagement found among students also supports Guthrie and Wigfield's Engaged Reading Model, which emphasizes the interaction of motivation, strategy use, and social participation in promoting effective reading. Engaged readers are those who are interested in reading, use strategies to understand texts, and participate in discussions about what they read. The strong engagement shown by the foundation students reflects these qualities. They were motivated, persistent, and strategic in their reading. However, an interesting observation is that Law students, despite being the most engaged, also showed higher anxiety. This finding suggests that motivation alone does not completely eliminate anxiety; a student may be both highly interested and emotionally tense when reading. Therefore, affective and motivational factors must be addressed simultaneously. Conceptually, this study confirms that Krashen's affective factors and Guthrie and Wigfield's engagement dimensions complement each other: lowering anxiety (Affective Filter Hypothesis) while fostering motivation and strategy use (Engaged Reading Model) creates an ideal condition for reading development.

5.2.2 Pedagogical Implications

The findings provide several important insights for improving ESL reading instruction in foundation programs. Firstly, teachers should prioritize reducing reading anxiety by creating a supportive classroom environment. This involves using positive reinforcement, avoiding harsh corrections, and offering emotional reassurance during reading activities. Teachers should also minimize high-pressure tasks such as unprepared oral readings or sudden questioning, which may trigger anxiety. Instead, they can use small-group reading sessions, pair work, and

guided reading exercises that allow students to participate comfortably. Such approaches help lower students' affective filter and promote greater confidence in reading (Krashen, 1985).

Secondly, to enhance reading engagement, teachers should make reading materials relevant, varied, and student-centered. Giving students some choice in what they read, such as selecting texts related to their academic interests, can increase motivation and ownership of learning. For example, Science students may engage more with environmental articles or scientific reports, while Law students may prefer case summaries or legal commentaries. Language instructors can also make reading activities more interactive by including group discussions, reading circles, or short presentations on favourite readings. These social interactions support the engaged reading model by fostering both motivation and collaboration (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000).

Lastly, lecturers should focus on building learners' self-confidence in reading. This can be achieved through constructive feedback, recognition of progress, and opportunities for success in manageable reading tasks. Encouraging students to reflect on their reading progress, such as through journals or self-evaluation checklists, can strengthen their belief in their abilities. When learners perceive themselves as capable readers, they are more likely to approach new reading tasks with enthusiasm and persistence. Maintaining high engagement and low anxiety will therefore support long-term growth in reading proficiency and academic success.

5.2.3 Suggestions for Future Research

While this study offers valuable insights into the relationships among reading anxiety, engagement, and self-perceived performance, there are several areas that require further exploration. Future research could involve a larger and more diverse sample of ESL learners across multiple institutions or regions. Expanding the participant beyond a single foundation centre would allow for greater generalizability and more solid comparisons between programs or proficiency levels. Including students from different academic streams, such as Business, Arts, or Social Sciences, could also reveal whether program demands influence reading-related emotions and behaviours differently.

Additionally, intervention studies could also be designed to test the effectiveness of specific strategies, such as extensive reading programs, anxiety-reduction workshops, or motivational reading tasks, on students' reading behaviour and achievement. For example, introducing reading intervention that incorporates TEEEL strategies, where students learn to organise their ideas through clear topic sentences, explanations, examples, elaborations, and linkers, could significantly enhance their reading comprehension and confidence. Using TEEEL as a structured framework may help learners process texts more systematically, identify main ideas effectively, and connect information across paragraphs. Over time, this approach can reduce reading anxiety by providing students with a clear sense of direction when interpreting complex texts. Tracking such intervention throughout a semester could offer valuable evidence on how structured reading and writing strategies like TEEEL contribute to greater engagement, improved self-efficacy, and lower anxiety among ESL foundation learners.

In summary, future research should aim to capture a broader, deeper, and longer-term view of ESL reading. By expanding the sample and introducing intervention-based designs, researchers can gain a more holistic understanding of how emotional, motivational, and cognitive factors shape reading performance. Such studies will not only strengthen theoretical understanding but also help educators design more effective instructional practices that nurture confident, motivated, and successful ESL readers.

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