



Investigating Students' Emotional Engagement in Learning Reading Comprehension through Project-Based Learning

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026 - 06- 01 Revised: 2026 06-18 Accepted: 2026 06-30	<i>Although Project-Based Learning (PBL) has been widely implemented to enhance student engagement, limited studies have specifically explored students' emotional engagement in reading comprehension learning. This study aimed to investigate students' emotional engagement in learning reading comprehension through Project-Based Learning. A qualitative case study was conducted with eleventh-grade students at a senior high school in Karawang, Indonesia. Data were collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed four forms of emotional engagement: interest, enjoyment, enthusiasm, and positive attitudes. These emotional responses emerged through collaborative discussions, project activities, and interactive learning experiences that encouraged active participation. This study contributes by providing a deeper understanding of emotional engagement as a specific dimension of student engagement in reading comprehension through Project-Based Learning. The findings also offer practical insights for English teachers in designing more engaging reading instruction that promotes positive emotional experiences.</i>
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1. Introduction

Reading comprehension plays an essential role in English language learning as it allows students to interpret, understand, and derive meaning from written texts. At the senior high school level, students are expected not only to identify explicit information but also to analyze, evaluate, and interpret various types of texts critically. Such expectations require students to actively process information and connect it with their existing knowledge. According to Carrell, Devine, and

Eskey (1988), reading comprehension involves interactive processes between readers' prior knowledge and textual information. Furthermore, Dewitz and Graves (2021) explained that reading comprehension involves the process of constructing and deriving meaning through an active interaction between readers and texts. These perspectives highlight the complexity of reading comprehension and the skills required to achieve successful understanding of a text.

Despite its importance, many students continue to face challenges in reading comprehension, often resulting from low motivation, limited interest, and minimal classroom participation. Previous studies have reported that students often encounter challenges in understanding English texts, identifying main ideas, and maintaining engagement during reading activities (Fitria et al., 2024). In addition, reading lessons are often conducted through conventional instructional methods that provide limited opportunities for interaction and active involvement, causing students to become bored and less motivated to engage with reading materials (Adora et al., 2024). As a result, students may struggle to maintain their attention and interest throughout the learning process.

The challenges encountered in reading comprehension are not solely related to students' language abilities but are also influenced by affective factors. Previous studies have shown that students' emotions play a significant role in shaping their learning experiences and academic performance. Heilporn et al. (2024) found that emotional engagement contributes to students' participation and positive learning experiences.

Similarly, Wang (2025) reported that student engagement is closely related to students' motivation and learning success. These findings indicate that students' emotional responses toward learning activities may influence their level of participation and involvement in the learning process. Therefore, emotional engagement has become an important aspect of learning that deserves further attention, particularly in reading comprehension classrooms where students are required to interact actively with texts and learning activities.

Student engagement is considered one of the key elements contributing to effective learning and academic achievement. Fredricks et al. (2004) conceptualized student engagement as a multidimensional construct consisting of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement. Among these dimensions, emotional engagement refers to students' affective reactions toward learning activities, including interest, enjoyment, enthusiasm, and positive attitudes toward learning.

Students who demonstrate strong emotional engagement tend to show greater interest and motivation in learning activities, whereas low emotional engagement is often characterized by boredom, lack of interest, and negative attitudes toward learning (Fredricks et al., 2004). As one of the key dimensions of student engagement, emotional engagement influences how students perceive, experience, and respond to classroom activities.

In addition to engagement studies, numerous researchers have investigated the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in various educational contexts. Evenddy et al. (2023) found that PBL enhances students' motivation, critical thinking, and participation through active involvement in project activities. Gabuardi (2021) further argued that PBL promotes meaningful and contextual learning experiences that encourage students to become more actively engaged in the learning process.

Taken together, these studies suggest that Project-Based Learning creates collaborative and meaningful learning environments that support students' active participation. In reading comprehension learning, such learning environments provide opportunities for students to discuss texts, exchange ideas, solve problems, and present their understanding through project activities, which may foster positive emotional engagement. However, these studies mainly highlight the general benefits of Project-Based Learning and provide limited insight into how students' emotional engagement develops during reading comprehension learning.

Several studies have also examined the relationship between Project-Based Learning and student engagement. Existing research generally indicates that Project-Based Learning encourages students to participate more actively through collaborative learning activities. However, most of these studies have examined engagement as a multidimensional construct or focused on the overall effects of Project-Based Learning on learning outcomes. As a result, the specific role of emotional engagement during Project-Based Learning in reading comprehension remains underexplored, particularly in Indonesian senior high school EFL classrooms.

Although previous studies have highlighted the benefits of Project-Based Learning and the importance of student engagement, limited research has specifically explored students' emotional engagement in reading comprehension learning through Project-Based Learning. In particular, little is known about how students experience emotional engagement in terms of interest, enjoyment, enthusiasm, and positive attitudes throughout Project-Based Learning activities. Therefore, further research is needed to explore how emotional engagement emerges during the implementation of Project-Based Learning in reading comprehension classrooms.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate how emotional engagement emerges during reading comprehension learning through the implementation of Project-Based Learning among eleventh-grade students at a senior high school in Indonesia. Specifically, the study explores students' emotional engagement in terms of interest, enjoyment, enthusiasm, and positive attitudes throughout Project-Based Learning activities. The research addresses the following question: How does emotional engagement emerge in learning reading comprehension through Project-Based Learning? Previous studies have examined the relationship between Project-Based Learning and student engagement. However, most of these studies have

investigated student engagement as a multidimensional construct. This study extends previous research by focusing specifically on emotional engagement and exploring how it emerges during reading comprehension learning through Project-Based Learning in Indonesian EFL classrooms.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative case study design to investigate students' emotional engagement in learning reading comprehension through Project-Based Learning (PBL). A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to explore students' experiences, feelings, and responses during the learning process in depth. The case study design enabled the researcher to examine the phenomenon within its real-life classroom context and gain a comprehensive understanding of how emotional engagement emerged during the implementation of Project-Based Learning.

The study was conducted in one eleventh-grade class at a private senior high school in Karawang, West Java, Indonesia. The participants consisted of approximately 30 students who participated in reading comprehension learning through Project-Based Learning. All students were involved in the classroom observation process. In addition, six students were purposively selected for interviews based on their observed levels of emotional engagement during the implementation of Project-Based Learning. The selected participants represented high, moderate, and low levels of emotional engagement to obtain varied data regarding students' emotional experiences during the learning process.

Data were collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. Classroom observations were conducted throughout the implementation of Project-Based Learning to identify students' emotional engagement during reading comprehension activities. The observation focused on indicators of emotional engagement, including students' interest, enthusiasm, enjoyment, and positive attitudes toward learning activities. The observation was guided by an observation checklist developed based on the indicators of emotional engagement proposed by Fredricks et al. (2004), including students' interest, enjoyment, enthusiasm, and positive attitudes during Project-Based Learning activities. Field notes were used to record students' behaviors and emotional responses observed during the learning process.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted after the completion of the project activities to obtain deeper insights into students' feelings, perceptions, and experiences. The interview protocol was adapted from the interview guideline developed by Apriliani (2025) and further developed based on the indicators of emotional engagement proposed by Fredricks et al. (2004). Prior to data collection, the interview protocol was reviewed by the research supervisors to ensure the clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the interview questions for the objectives of the study.

Prior to the study, permission was obtained from the school. Participants and their parents provided informed consent before data collection. Participation was voluntary, and participants' identities were kept confidential by using participant codes throughout the study. The collected data were analyzed qualitatively using thematic analysis following the data analysis procedures proposed by Creswell and Creswell (2017). First, all interview recordings were transcribed, and the observation notes were organized systematically.

The researcher then read the data repeatedly to gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences. Next, the data were coded and categorized into themes based on the indicators of emotional engagement proposed by Fredricks et al. (2004), including interest, enjoyment, enthusiasm, and positive attitudes toward learning activities.

Finally, the themes were interpreted to explain how emotional engagement emerged during reading comprehension learning through Project-Based Learning. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, data triangulation was applied by comparing data obtained from classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. In addition, member checking was conducted to confirm the accuracy of the interview data with the participants.

3. Result

The data obtained from classroom observations and semi-structured interviews revealed four forms of students' emotional engagement during the implementation of Project-Based Learning in reading comprehension learning. The findings showed that emotional engagement emerged through students' interest, enjoyment, enthusiasm, and positive attitudes toward the learning activities. These themes were consistently identified from both classroom observations and interview data, indicating that Project-Based Learning created learning experiences that supported students' positive emotional responses throughout the learning process.

Students' Interest during Project-Based Learning

The findings indicate that interest emerged as a dominant form of student emotional engagement during the implementation of Project-Based Learning. Classroom observations and interview data consistently showed that students became interested when they were actively involved in collaborative discussions and project activities. The opportunity to interact with peers and express their ideas encouraged students to participate more actively in reading comprehension learning.

Based on classroom observations, students paid attention to the learning activities and actively participated in project-related discussions. Students appeared interested in the tasks because they were given opportunities to interact with their peers and express their ideas during the learning process. The interview

data also indicated that students perceived the learning activities as engaging. Student 2 stated:

“Honestly, I feel like it's fun and exciting. Because everyone can express themselves in the material being discussed. Because it's organized in groups, everyone can interact with each other and learn without getting bored.” (S2)

The student's response suggests that collaborative learning and opportunities for interaction contributed to students' interest during Project-Based Learning. Similar patterns were also observed during classroom activities, where students actively participated in discussions and demonstrated curiosity toward the reading tasks. These findings indicate that Project-Based Learning encouraged students' interest by creating interactive learning experiences that promoted participation and collaboration.

Students' Enjoyment during Collaborative Learning Activities

The findings demonstrate that enjoyment emerged throughout the implementation of Project-Based Learning. Observation and interview data consistently indicated that students enjoyed participating in collaborative learning activities because they could work together, exchange ideas, and support one another in completing project tasks. Classroom observations showed that students appeared comfortable while working with their group members. They actively discussed ideas, helped one another solve learning difficulties, and shared responsibilities during project completion. The classroom atmosphere reflected positive interactions, with students participating enthusiastically in collaborative activities. This finding was supported by Student 3, who stated:

“It feels exciting, happy, because we are not alone in a group, so if we don't understand, we can ask each other, we can complement each other.” (S3)

Similarly, Student 1 explained:

“I feel very happy because I can also help friends who don't understand yet.” (S1)

These responses indicate that students experienced enjoyment because collaborative learning created a supportive and comfortable learning environment. Observation data also confirmed that students interacted positively with their peers throughout the project activities. Therefore, Project-Based Learning contributed to students' enjoyment by encouraging cooperation and meaningful social interaction during reading comprehension learning.

Students' Enthusiasm during Project Activities

The findings revealed that students demonstrated enthusiasm throughout the implementation of Project-Based Learning. Both classroom observations and interview data showed that students willingly participated in project activities, contributed ideas during discussions, and remained actively involved throughout the learning process. Classroom observations showed that students actively participated in discussions, contributed ideas, and completed project tasks with their group members. Students remained engaged throughout the learning activities and were willing to participate in the completion of the project. The teacher also reported that students showed enthusiasm during the learning process:

“The students' responses in project-based learning in reading comprehension mostly showed positive responses, because they were enthusiastic so they became more interactive.” (Teacher)

The observation and interview findings consistently indicate that students' enthusiasm emerged through meaningful project activities and collaborative learning experiences. These findings suggest that Project-Based Learning promoted students' enthusiasm by encouraging active participation and sustained involvement during reading comprehension learning.

Positive Attitudes toward Project-Based Learning

The findings indicate that students developed positive attitudes toward the implementation of Project-Based Learning. Both observation and interview data showed that students perceived the learning activities as more interesting, interactive, and less monotonous than conventional reading instruction. Classroom observations revealed that students responded positively to the learning activities. They willingly participated in classroom discussions, collaborated effectively with their peers, and showed confidence in expressing their ideas during project completion. Student 5 stated:

“I think this method is interesting because it makes learning more active and not boring.” ^ (S5)

In addition, several students reported that working in groups enabled them to exchange ideas, support one another, and understand the learning materials more effectively.

These findings indicate that students developed positive attitudes toward Project-Based Learning because it created a more interactive, collaborative, and engaging learning environment. Both classroom observations and interview responses consistently demonstrated that students viewed Project-Based Learning

positively during reading comprehension learning.

Tabel 1 Summary of Students' Emotional Engagement during Project-Based Learning

Theme	Observation Evidence	Interview Evidence	Interpretation
Interest	Students actively participated in group discussions, paid attention to the learning activities, and expressed their ideas during project work.	Student 2 stated that group discussions and opportunities to interact with peers made learning more interesting and enjoyable.	Collaborative discussions and opportunities for interaction fostered students' interest in reading comprehension learning
Enjoyment	Students worked comfortably with their peers, shared responsibilities, and helped one another during project completion.	Students reported feeling happy because they could learn together, ask questions, and support one another.	Collaborative learning created enjoyable learning experiences and promoted positive emotional responses.
Enthusiasm	Students actively contributed ideas, participated in discussions, and completed project tasks enthusiastically.	The teacher explained that students became more enthusiastic and interactive during Project-Based Learning activities.	Meaningful project activities encouraged students to participate enthusiastically throughout the learning process
Positive Attitudes	Students responded positively to classroom activities and confidently participated in project work	Students perceived Project-Based Learning as more interesting, interactive, and less boring than conventional learning.	Positive learning experiences encouraged students to develop favorable attitudes toward reading comprehension learning through Project-Based

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4. Discussion

Students' interest during project-based learning

The findings revealed that students demonstrated interest during the The findings suggest that students' interest emerged because Project-Based Learning created opportunities for active participation, collaboration, and idea sharing during reading comprehension learning. These learning experiences encouraged students to engage more actively with the reading materials and interact with their peers, making the learning process more meaningful and stimulating their curiosity.

This finding supports Fredricks et al. (2004), who identified interest as one of the indicators of emotional engagement. According to Fredricks et al. (2004), students who are emotionally engaged tend to show greater interest when learning activities are perceived as meaningful and enjoyable.

The finding is also consistent with Gabuardi (2021), who argued that Project-Based Learning promotes meaningful learning experiences by encouraging collaboration, active participation, and knowledge construction. Similarly, the present study found that opportunities to discuss texts, exchange ideas, and work collaboratively contributed to students' interest during reading comprehension learning.

These findings suggest that the collaborative nature of Project-Based Learning plays an important role in fostering students' interest by creating meaningful learning experiences. This study extends previous research by providing empirical evidence that students' interest, as a dimension of emotional engagement, emerged through collaborative reading activities in an Indonesian EFL classroom.

Students' Enjoyment during Collaborative Learning Activities

The findings suggest that students experienced enjoyment because Project-Based Learning created a collaborative learning environment where they could work together, exchange ideas, and support one another during reading comprehension activities. Working collaboratively reduced the difficulties students encountered when completing reading tasks individually and enabled them to participate in a more comfortable and enjoyable learning atmosphere. These collaborative experiences appeared to encourage students to engage more positively throughout the learning process.

This finding supports Fredricks et al. (2004), who identified enjoyment as one of the indicators of emotional engagement. According to Fredricks et al. (2004), students who experience positive emotions during learning are more likely to participate actively and maintain their engagement throughout classroom activities.

The finding is also consistent with Heilporn et al. (2024), who reported that emotional engagement contributes to students' classroom participation and positive learning experiences. Similarly, the present study found that collaborative learning activities enabled students to enjoy reading comprehension learning because they could exchange ideas, help one another, and complete project tasks together.

These findings suggest that the collaborative nature of Project-Based Learning plays an important role in creating enjoyable learning experiences that foster students' emotional engagement. This study extends previous research by demonstrating how enjoyment, as a dimension of emotional engagement, emerged through collaborative reading comprehension activities in an Indonesian EFL classroom.

Students' Enthusiasm during Project Activities

The findings suggest that students' enthusiasm emerged because Project-Based Learning actively involved them in meaningful project activities that required collaboration, discussion, and shared responsibility. Rather than passively receiving information, students were encouraged to contribute ideas, complete project tasks, and participate actively throughout the learning process. These learning experiences appeared to increase students' enthusiasm and sustain their active involvement during reading comprehension activities.

This finding is consistent with Fredricks et al. (2004), who explained that enthusiasm reflects students' positive emotional responses toward learning activities. Students who are emotionally engaged tend to demonstrate greater willingness to participate actively and remain involved throughout the learning process.

The finding is also supported by Evenddy et al. (2023), who reported that Project-Based Learning enhances students' motivation and participation through meaningful project activities. Similarly, Wang (2025) emphasized that positive emotional engagement is closely associated with students' motivation and active involvement in learning. In the present study, students' enthusiasm was reflected in their willingness to contribute ideas, participate in discussions, and complete project tasks collaboratively.

These findings suggest that Project-Based Learning promotes students' enthusiasm by creating meaningful and interactive learning experiences that encourage active participation. This study extends previous research by illustrating how enthusiasm, as a dimension of emotional engagement, emerged throughout Project-Based Learning activities in an Indonesian EFL reading comprehension classroom.

Positive Attitudes toward Project-Based Learning

The findings indicate that students developed positive attitudes toward Project-Based Learning because they perceived the learning activities as more interactive, engaging, and less monotonous than conventional reading instruction. Opportunities to collaborate with peers, exchange ideas, and participate actively in classroom activities encouraged students to view reading comprehension learning more positively.

This finding supports Fredricks et al. (2004), who described positive attitudes as an important indicator of emotional engagement. Students who experience positive emotional responses toward learning activities are more likely to participate actively and maintain favorable perceptions of the learning process.

The finding is also consistent with Wang (2025), who argued that positive emotional experiences contribute to students' motivation and learning success. Likewise, Gabuardi (2021) emphasized that Project-Based Learning creates meaningful learning environments that encourage student engagement. Similarly, the present study found that collaborative project activities helped students develop more positive attitudes toward reading comprehension learning.

These findings suggest that the student-centered and collaborative characteristics of Project-Based Learning foster positive attitudes by creating meaningful learning experiences and encouraging active participation. This study extends previous research by demonstrating how positive attitudes, as a dimension of emotional engagement, developed during Project-Based Learning in an Indonesian EFL reading comprehension classroom.

5. Conclusion

This study investigated students' emotional engagement in learning reading comprehension through Project-Based Learning. The findings revealed that students demonstrated emotional engagement through four main forms, namely interest, enjoyment, enthusiasm, and positive attitudes toward Project-Based Learning. Students showed interest in learning activities because they were given opportunities to participate actively in discussions and collaborate with their peers. They also experienced enjoyment during collaborative learning activities, demonstrated enthusiasm in completing project tasks, and developed positive attitudes toward the learning process. These findings suggest that Project-Based Learning can support the development of students' emotional engagement in reading comprehension learning by creating interactive, collaborative, and meaningful learning experiences.

However, this study was limited to one class of eleventh-grade students in a single senior high school. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all educational contexts. In addition, this study focused only on emotional engagement and did not examine other dimensions of student engagement, such as behavioral and cognitive engagement, in greater depth.

Based on the findings of this study, English teachers are encouraged to implement Project-Based Learning in reading comprehension classes to create more engaging and enjoyable learning experiences for students. Future researchers are recommended to conduct similar studies involving larger participant groups and different educational contexts to obtain a broader understanding of students' emotional engagement. Further studies may also explore the relationship between emotional engagement and other dimensions of student engagement or investigate the impact of emotional engagement on students' reading comprehension achievement.

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