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Students' Reading Motivation from a Social Cognitive Perspective

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the structural relationships among environmental factors, personal factors, and behavioral factors in students' reading motivation based on Social Cognitive Theory. A quantitative research design was employed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to examine both direct and indirect relationships among the variables. Data were collected through questionnaires administered to eleventh-grade students at SMA Yadika Bandar Lampung to measure environmental support, personal motivation, and reading behavior. The findings revealed that environmental factors significantly influenced personal factors and reading behavior, while personal factors played a mediating role in strengthening students' reading behavior. These results provide practical implications for educators to create supportive learning environments and enhance students' self-efficacy in order to improve reading motivation in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context.

Keywords: EFL, reading motivation, reciprocal determinism, self-efficacy, social cognitive theory

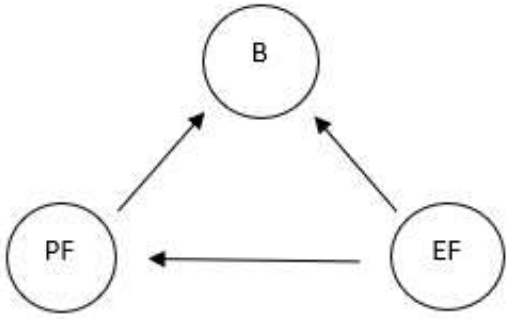
1.Introduction

English has evolved into a global language that bridges communication, education, and cultural exchange across nations. Its increasing significance in academic and professional contexts has prompted a surge in individuals striving for English proficiency, particularly in regions where it is taught as a foreign language (Rao, 2019). Among the four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—reading plays a particularly vital role, serving as the foundation for academic success and lifelong learning (Anggia & Habók, 2024). Despite its importance, fostering reading competence remains a major challenge in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, where learners often encounter linguistic barriers, limited exposure to authentic texts, and low motivational engagement (Suryani et al., 2023).

Bandura (1997) emphasizes self-efficacy as a central concept influencing students' motivation and persistence in academic tasks. Self-efficacy is the conviction in one's own capacity to carry out certain tasks necessary to get desired results. Students who have strong self-efficacy are more likely to use the right tactics, stick with challenging texts, and stay engaged over time in reading environments. Self-efficacy is a powerful predictor of students' motivation, learning behavior, and academic success, as empirical research has repeatedly shown (Zimmerman, 2000; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2021).

Within this framework, reading motivation can be interpreted as a product of three interrelated components:

1. Personal factors, such as self-efficacy, interest, and goal orientation, which determine the learner's confidence and persistence;
2. Environmental factors, including teacher support, peer collaboration, and access to resources, which shape external reinforcement; and
3. Behavioral factors, reflected in reading habits and strategy use, which represent the observable outcomes of motivation.



Note. B = Behavior, PF = Personal Factors, EF = Environmental Factors

Figure 1: Hypothesis model of "Empirical Analysis of Student's Reading Motivation Model Based on Social Cognitive Theory" by Albert Bandura

H_1: EF has a positive correlation with PF, B

Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) provides a comprehensive framework for understanding learning motivation through the interaction of personal factors, environmental influences, and behavioral outcomes, known as reciprocal determinism (Bandura, 1989). Within this framework, reading motivation can be viewed as the result of interactions among personal factors such as self-efficacy and goal orientation, environmental factors including teacher support and learning resources, and behavioral factors reflected in reading habits and strategy use.

Prior research has investigated reading motivation within EFL contexts; however, many have concentrated on discrete variables, such as self-efficacy or environmental support, in isolation. There is still not much empirical research that tests the structural relationships between these factors in a single SCT-based model, especially among Indonesian high school EFL learners. Consequently, this study seeks to examine the direct and indirect relationships among environmental, personal, and behavioral factors affecting students' reading motivation through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).

2. Method

This research utilized a quantitative correlational design within the framework of Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) to examine the interrelationships among personal, environmental, and behavioral factors that shape students' reading motivation. A correlational approach was chosen to identify the direction and strength of relationships among these variables without manipulating them (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The quantitative method allows for the collection and statistical analysis of numerical data, providing objective insights into how students' beliefs and surroundings influence their reading behavior (Ghanad, 2023). This design is suitable for modeling theoretical constructs using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), enabling a comprehensive examination of direct and indirect effects among variables.

Participants

Purposive sampling selected 120 eleventh-graders from SMA Yadika Bandar Lampung for this study. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that participants had sufficient experience in learning English reading and could provide relevant responses regarding reading motivation. English reading activities are regularly taught at the chosen school, making it suitable for EFL motivation research.

SEM requires at least 5 to 10 participants for each estimated parameter (Hair et al., 2021). This ensured structural analysis statistical power.

Instruments

Two instruments were used in this study:

1. A Reading Motivation Questionnaire (measuring Environmental and Personal Factors).

2. A Reading Behavior Scale

The questionnaire consisted of 15 items rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The constructs were defined as follows:

- Environmental Factors (teacher support, peer interaction, family encouragement)
- Personal Factors (self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, goal orientation)
- Behavior (reading frequency, persistence, engagement)

The instrument was reviewed by experts and piloted prior to data collection to ensure clarity and content validity.

However, the convergent validity test showed that PF4 and PF5 had low factor loadings (less than 0.50). Future studies will change or remove these items to improve construct validity. Clearer operational definitions and confirmatory factor analysis will improve measurement accuracy.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to examine the relationships among variables. Prior to structural analysis, the Rasch Model was employed to assess item quality, reliability, and construct validity. SEM analysis involved model specification, goodness-of-fit evaluation, and hypothesis testing to determine direct and indirect effects among environmental, personal, and behavioral factors (Kline, 2018).

3. Findings and Discussion

Findings

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the study construct

Variables	Mean	SD
Environmental Factors	16.55	3.06
Personal Factors	16.97	3.27
Behavior	17.18	2.92

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the study constructs. Behavior showed the highest mean score (17.18), followed by Personal Factors (16.97) and Environmental Factors (16.55). The standard deviation values indicate moderate variability across constructs, suggesting an acceptable distribution of responses for SEM analysis.

Table 2. Convergent validity of the questionnaire construct

Latent Variables	Item	Factor Loading	CR	Alpha	AVE
Environmental Factors			0.738	0.716	0.474
	EF1	0.497			
	EF 2	0.679			
	EF 3	0.728			
	EF 4	0.784			
	EF 5	0.720			
Personal Factors			0.724	0.643	0.445
	PF1	0.826			
	PF 2	0.790			
	PF 3	0.798			
	PF 4	0.431			
	PF 5	0.308			
Behavior			0.785	0.656	0.427
	B1	0.592			
	B 2	0.695			
	B 3	0.791			

B 4	0.508
B 5	0.645

The table above shows the results of convergent validity testing for the questionnaire constructs, including Environmental Factors, Personal Factors, and Behavior. Overall, the three constructs demonstrate acceptable levels of reliability, with Composite Reliability (CR) values above 0.70 for all variables 0.738 for Environmental Factors, 0.724 for Personal Factors, and 0.785 for Behavior. The Cronbach's Alpha values also show internal consistency, although Personal Factors (0.643) and Behavior (0.656) are slightly below the ideal threshold of 0.70, they are still considered acceptable for early-stage research.

However, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all three constructs are below the recommended cutoff of 0.50, with Environmental Factors at 0.474, Personal Factors at 0.445, and Behavior at 0.427. These values indicate that the items for each construct explain less than 50% of the variance, which suggests weak convergent validity. Looking at the factor loadings, most items have acceptable values above 0.5, but there are some weak items particularly EF1 (0.497), PF4 (0.431), and PF5 (0.308) which contribute less to their respective constructs. These items may need to be revised or removed to improve the overall validity of the instrument. These findings indicate acceptable reliability but limited convergent validity, requiring refinement of weak indicators in future research.

Table 3. Discriminant validity of the questionnaire

Variables	EF	PF	B
EF			
PF	0.950		
B	1.008	1.257	

The table presents the correlation values among the three study variables: Environmental Factors (EF), Personal Factors (PF), and Behavior (B). The correlation between Environmental Factors and Personal Factors is 0.950, indicating a very strong positive relationship. The correlation between Environmental Factors and Behavior is 1.008, and between Personal Factors and Behavior is 1.257, both of which are unusually high exceeding 1.0, which is not common or acceptable in correlation analysis.

These extremely high values may indicate a multicollinearity issue, meaning that the variables are too closely related and may overlap in what they are measuring. It could also suggest potential problems with the measurement model or data quality. In conclusion, while the data show strong relationships among the variables, the unusually high correlations especially values above 1 should be carefully examined and addressed before further analysis is conducted.

Table 4. The results from the hypothesis test

Path	**Estimate**	**t-value**	**p-value**	**Result**
EF -> B	0.296	4.129	0.000	Supported
EF -> PF	0.639	10.789	0.000	Supported
PF -> B	0.637	9.351	0.000	Supported
EF -> PF -> B	0.407	7.407	0.000	Supported

The table shows that all the relationships between the variables are significant and supported. Environmental Factors (EF) have a strong effect on Personal Factors (PF), with a high estimate of 0.639, meaning that a better environment helps improve students' motivation and interest. Personal Factors also strongly influence Behavior (B), with an estimate of 0.637, showing that motivated students tend to show better learning behavior.

Environmental Factors directly affect Behavior as well, with a smaller but still significant estimate of 0.296. This means that the environment alone can influence how students behave in learning. Additionally, there is an indirect effect from EF to B through PF, with a value of 0.407. This shows that the environment also influences behavior through personal motivation. In short, a good environment helps improve motivation, and motivated students show better behavior. The environment affects behavior both directly and indirectly through personal factors. Notably, the indirect effect (EF → PF → B) was stronger than the direct effect of EF → B, reinforcing the mediating role of Personal Factors.

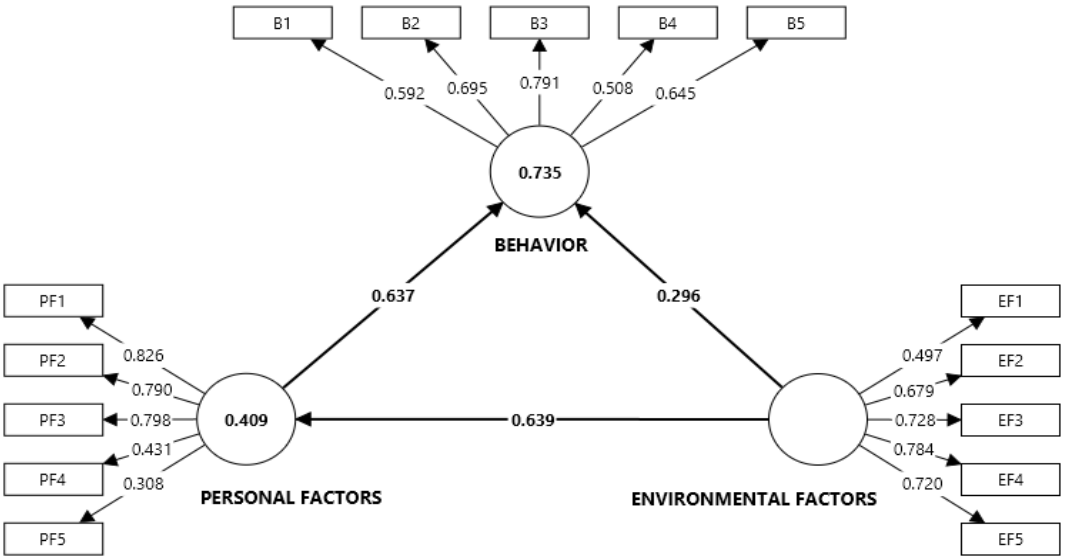


Figure 2. The standardized relationship between the factors

3. Discussion

The results of this study are in line with other studies that showed a substantial correlation between reading behavior, internal motivation, and learning settings. Students' reading enthusiasm and engagement are greatly increased by supportive classroom methods, according to Guthrie and Klauda (2014). In a similar vein, motivated readers exhibit greater perseverance and deeper cognitive participation in reading activities, according to Schiefele et al. (2012). The current results that environmental support boosts individual motivation, which in turn encourages good reading behavior, are supported by this research.

This study aims to examine the structural relationships among Environmental Factors, Personal Factors, and Behavior in shaping students' reading motivation, grounded in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT). The findings demonstrate that students' reading behavior is not influenced by a single factor, but rather by the dynamic interaction between external learning environments and internal motivational processes. The results of the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis provide empirical support for SCT's core principle of reciprocal determinism, which posits that personal, environmental, and behavioral factors continuously influence one another.

The findings indicate that Environmental Factors have a significant and positive effect on Personal Factors, as shown by a strong path coefficient. This result suggests that supportive learning environments, such as teacher encouragement, classroom atmosphere, peer interaction, and access to learning resources, play a crucial role in strengthening students' internal motivation, self-efficacy, and goal orientation. This aligns with Bandura's view that environmental conditions can shape learners' beliefs about their own capabilities, which in turn affects their engagement in learning activities. When students perceive their environment as supportive, they are more likely to develop confidence and motivation toward reading tasks.

Furthermore, Personal Factors were found to significantly influence students' Behavior, with a path coefficient of 0.637 ($p < 0.001$). This finding confirms that students' beliefs, intrinsic motivation, and self-regulation are key determinants of their learning behavior. Students who believe in their reading ability and possess strong internal motivation tend to engage more consistently in reading activities. This supports previous research suggesting that self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation are strong predictors of academic engagement and persistence, particularly in language learning contexts.

In addition to direct effects, the study revealed a significant mediating effect of Personal Factors on the relationship between Environmental Factors and Behavior ($\beta = 0.407$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that while environmental support is essential, it does not directly translate into behavioral engagement unless it is internalized by students. In other words, a positive environment enhances students' internal motivation, which then leads to improved reading behavior. This finding emphasizes the importance of addressing both external and internal dimensions of motivation, as environmental support alone may be insufficient without fostering students' self-beliefs and autonomy.

Despite the strong support for the structural relationships, the study also identified several measurement model limitations. The convergent validity analysis revealed that the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for Environmental Factors, Personal Factors, and Behavior were below the recommended threshold of 0.5. This suggests that the constructs did not fully capture the variance of their respective indicators. Additionally, the discriminant validity results showed excessively high correlations among the constructs, indicating potential conceptual overlap or redundancy in questionnaire items. These issues suggest that future studies should refine the measurement instruments by revising or removing weak items and ensuring clearer distinctions among constructs.

Overall, this study confirms the applicability of Social Cognitive Theory in explaining students' reading motivation within the EFL context. The findings highlight the critical role of both Environmental and Personal Factors in shaping students' reading behavior, with Personal Factors acting as a key mediator. From a pedagogical perspective, the results suggest that teachers should not only create supportive learning environments but also actively foster students' self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation to promote sustained reading engagement. Although the study faces measurement limitations, it provides valuable insights into the complex mechanisms underlying reading motivation and offers a foundation for future research and instructional improvement in EFL classrooms.

4. Conclusion

This study investigated the structural relationships among Environmental Factors, Personal Factors, and Behavior in students' reading motivation based on Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory. The findings indicate that both Environmental and Personal Factors significantly influence students' reading behavior, either directly or indirectly, with Personal Factors functioning as a key mediating variable. A supportive learning environment was shown to strengthen students' internal motivation and self-beliefs, which in turn promoted more active and consistent reading behavior. The results further demonstrate that students with higher self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation are more likely to engage positively in reading activities. These findings confirm the interconnected nature of environmental support, internal motivation, and learning behavior as proposed in Social Cognitive Theory. Although the measurement model revealed certain limitations, particularly related to convergent and discriminant validity, the overall structural model was strongly supported by the hypothesis testing. Teachers are encouraged to integrate motivational support strategies alongside structured reading instruction to promote sustained engagement.

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