

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter reviews some related literature with relationship between reading fanfiction on AO3 and readers' perceptions of English literacy. The Free Voluntary Reading (Krashen, 2004, p. 21) states that interest-driven voluntary reading, such as fanfiction can enhance vocabulary, grammar, and reading confidence through repeated exposure. Findings by Mills, Pajares, and Herron (2007, p. 94) also show that successful reading experiences help strengthen perceived language competence.

A. Literacy in a Modern Perspective

Initially, literacy was only understood as the ability to read and write. However, developments in information technology and the transformation of online culture have broadened the meaning of literacy to include the ability to understand, interpret, and use text in various social and media contexts. Lankshear and Knobel (2011) refer to this as new literacies, which are forms of literacy that have developed due to changes in culture and digital technology. They state that modern literacy includes:

1. Active Engagement with Digital Texts

The concept of activity in digital texts does not only include the ability to access or read online content; rather, it is oriented towards active participation in digital cultures and communities that collaboratively produce, distribute, and interpret texts. In the context of modern literacy, this activity is related to the ability of individuals to contribute, interact, and build participatory meaning within the digital ecosystem.

This participation occurs in a space called affinity spaces, interest-based spaces (fandom) that allow users with different backgrounds to gather, learn, produce work, and support each other (Gee, 2004). In these spaces, users are not only consumers but also producers of digital texts, so that activities such as reading, writing, commenting, providing feedback, and modifying content become part of a broader literacy process.

2. Multimodal Understanding

Modern literacy is not limited to the ability to read linear texts such as paragraphs or written narratives. In the digital ecosystem, users must have multimodal understanding, which is the ability to interpret various forms of meaning representation presented through various modes of communication. These modes can be text, images, audio, video, hyperlinks, icons, navigation structures, and metadata. Serafini (2014) states that multimodal texts are integrated entities that utilize various semiotic resources such as language, visuals, and design. In line with this, UNESCO (2018) emphasizes that digital literacy involves the ability to access, understand, evaluate, and create information through digital technologies. This indicates that multimodal comprehension is an essential component of digital literacy, as individuals are required to interpret meaning from multiple modes of communication in an integrated manner.

In the context of digital platforms such as AO3, users are constantly confronted with multimodal elements. For example, readers must understand how tags, content warnings, and genre classifications help shape expectations before reading a work. Hyperlinks and navigation systems facilitate movement between texts, making

interpretation interactive. Meanwhile, comments and discussions between users become an additional layer that enriches the interpretation of a work, creating a form of collaborative meaning that does not exist in traditional printed texts.

Through, multimodal understanding requires individuals to process and integrate various sources of information into a single reading experience. This ability is important in digital literacy because it determines the extent to which a person can adapt, participate, and interpret texts in complex technology-based spaces.

Furthermore, this development highlights the growing importance of digital literacy is no longer merely an additional skill but has become an essential necessity in navigating increasingly complex flows of information. Individuals are required to be able to access, evaluate, and utilize information in a critical and ethical manner (Bahrudin, 2026).

In the educational context, an emphasis on literacy is no longer sufficient if it focuses solely on traditional reading and writing. Digital literacy must encompass various dimensions, including technical, cognitive, social, and ethical skills, all of which collectively support modern learning processes (Bahrudin, 2026). This becomes increasingly important in light of global challenges such as disinformation, the digital divide, and the demands of 21st-century competencies, including critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and communication.

Therefore, digital literacy can be understood as a core competency that not only supports the learning process but also serves as a foundation for building relevant, inclusive, and sustainable education in the digital era. It plays a crucial role in

shaping individuals' ability to adapt to technological changes while actively participating in digital-based learning ecosystems.

B. EFL Learners'

Learners of English as a Foreign Language (*EFL learners*) are individuals studying English in contexts where English is not the primary language of daily communication. EFL learners often have limited exposure to English, primarily through formal instruction in schools or courses, and occasionally through non-formal sources. Based on Brown (2007), English as a Foreign Language (EFL) refers to a language learning context in which English is learned in countries where it is not the primary language of communication, resulting in fewer opportunities for natural exposure outside the classroom. This situation leads learners to develop learning and reading strategies different from native speakers, with motivation influenced by both academic requirements and personal interests.

In the digital era, EFL learners increasingly utilize online media as a supplementary learning resource. Digital platforms, forums, social media, and user-generated content, including fanfiction on AO3, provide opportunities to access authentic texts, expand vocabulary, and interact with English content in a contextualized manner. Engagement with such digital texts allows EFL learners to have enjoyable, interactive, and personally relevant reading experiences, which in turn can enhance their self-perceived English literacy. Therefore, understanding the characteristics and engagement patterns of EFL learners is crucial for examining how non-formal media, such as AO3, can support the development of English literacy in the digital era.

C. English Literacy

English literacy is an individual's ability to understand, interpret, evaluate, and use English texts in various academic, digital, and social contexts. In modern literacy studies, this ability goes beyond literal text comprehension and includes learners' engagement with texts, cognitive and metacognitive strategies, as well as meaningful independent reading experiences. According to Kern (2000), literacy is more than the ability to read and write; it involves interpreting meanings, constructing understanding, and using language appropriately within social and cultural contexts.

In the context of a second language, reading literacy (L2 reading literacy) involves cognitive components that support meaningful interaction with texts. Grabe and Stoller (2011, p. 7) explain that reading literacy in a second language is supported by several components, including decoding, vocabulary knowledge, discourse structure comprehension, reading fluency, and integrative comprehension. These components serve as a foundation that enables learners to engage more meaningfully with English texts rather than being the primary focus of literacy itself.

In this study, English literacy is not measured through formal linguistic tests; instead, it is understood as learners' self-perceived literacy, which refers to individuals' assessment of their ability to comprehend texts, develop contextual vocabulary, interpret textual meanings, and use English confidently in written communication. This operationalization is also informed by descriptors from the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2020), particularly in reading comprehension, vocabulary range, and written production.

First, Krashen's (2004, p. 21) Comprehensible Input Theory states that language learning occurs naturally when individuals are exposed to comprehensible, meaningful, and voluntarily selected input. Reading fanfiction on AO3 can be seen as a form of extensive reading that provides such input. When learners believe that this exposure enhances their vocabulary and comprehension, this belief is reflected in their increased perception of English literacy.

Second, the concept of reader self-efficacy (Mills, Pajares, & Herron, 2007, p. 94) emphasizes that readers' confidence in their reading ability influences motivation, engagement, and perception of language competence. Repeated exposure to authentic and engaging texts, such as fanfiction on AO3, can strengthen learners' belief that they can comprehend challenging English texts, thereby enhancing their perceived literacy.

Third, reading motivation is a critical factor in literacy practice. Suyono and Hariyanto (2014) argue that learning motivation develops when learners are interested in reading materials, find personal relevance in the content, and have enjoyable learning experiences. Similarly, Tarigan (2008) highlights that reading interest and the proximity of reading topics to learners' experiences play an important role in increasing the frequency and depth of reading activities. Therefore, in this study, English literacy is operationalized into four aspects: understanding, interpretation, vocabulary, and production, which are considered relevant to learners' experiences while engaging with fanfiction on AO3.

D. AO3 (Archive of Our Own)

Archive of Our Own (AO3) is one of the largest fanfiction platforms, developed by the Organization for Transformative Works (OTW) in 2008. Its creation

emerged from the need within fan communities for a space that is ad-free, non-commercial, and participatory, where creative works can be shared without commercial constraints or excessive censorship. Since its inception, Archive of Our Own (AO3) has grown into a multimodal platform hosting millions of fanfiction texts from diverse fandoms, ranging from popular works to niche communities known only within specific groups. Although Archive of Our Own (AO3) is primarily known as a text-based fanfiction platform, it also supports various other forms of digital representation, such as fan art and links to fan videos integrated through hyperlinks.

Archive of Our Own (AO3) features a unique tagging system, allowing users to categorize works by character, genre, pairing, or theme. This system not only facilitates content discovery but also demonstrates how digital literacy operates in everyday practice. Readers can customize their experience using filters for ratings, genres, and languages, while writers receive feedback in the form of comments, kudos, or bookmarks. In this way, Archive of Our Own (AO3) functions as an interactive space that connects readers and writers within a digital literacy ecosystem.

E. Fanfiction in Archive of Our Own

Fanfiction is a form of creative writing produced by fans, utilizing pre-existing characters, plots, or fictional worlds, which are then expanded according to the writer's imagination. Fanfiction can encompass various types of stories based on length and structure, such as half drabble (±50 words), drabble (100–350 words), ficlet (±500–900 words), oneshot (a complete story in a single installment),

chaptered fanfic (a serial with several chapters), and series fic (multiple chapters comparable to a novel), each with its own writing purpose and narrative function.

According to Bahoric and Swaggerty (2015), fanfiction is regarded as part of participatory literacy practices that allow readers who are also writers to extend their engagement with the original text, both inside and outside the classroom. Activities such as reading, writing, and discussing fanfiction provide opportunities for students to practice critical reading and express ideas, making fanfiction a tool for enhancing literacy skills.

In an academic context, fanfiction is increasingly recognized as a form of contemporary literacy relevant to the twenty-first century, as it combines reading practices with creativity, community participation, and digital text production. Previous studies indicate that engaging in reading and writing fanfiction can strengthen literacy skills, including through practices of reviewing, critiquing, and reflecting on the works of others.

In Indonesia, research such as that conducted by Cornella Austin and Santoso (2023) demonstrates that incorporating fanfiction as reading material in the classroom can improve students' reading skills, although some participants still encounter vocabulary challenges. Furthermore, ethnopedagogical studies on the fanfiction genre in the context of Indonesian language education show that this genre can enhance writing motivation, enrich vocabulary, and deepen cultural understanding within second language learning contexts. Through, fanfiction can be viewed as a form of multimodal literacy that not only enhances vocabulary and textual comprehension but also fosters motivation, engagement, and a sense of

ownership over the language learning process, both through reading consumption and creative writing production.

F. EFL Learner Engagement on AO3 and English Literacy

In this study, learner engagement refers to the involvement of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in using Archive of Our Own (AO3), including activities such as reading fanfiction, navigating tags and metadata, giving comments, and exploring relevant content. This engagement reflects the frequency, intensity, and patterns of learners' interactions with AO3 as a digital platform. As a non-profit fanworks archive, AO3 requires users to understand community systems, tags, metadata, and participation rules in digital environments. These activities are related to the concept of New Literacies proposed by Lankshear and Knobel (2011), which emphasizes active participation, collaborative meaning-making, and the ability to understand and navigate digital texts.

The concept of learner engagement describes how learners are involved in learning activities through behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. According to Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004), engagement has three main dimensions:

1. Behavioral engagement, which refers to observable activities such as participation, effort, persistence, and involvement in learning activities.
2. Emotional engagement, which refers to learners' interest, feelings, and emotional responses toward learning activities.
3. Cognitive engagement, which refers to the mental effort learners use to understand and process information.

In the present study, learner engagement on AO3 is operationalized into three aspects: Habit, Interact/Respond, and Navigation. These aspects were selected to reflect learners' experiences while engaging with fanfiction and digital reading environments.

The Habit aspect measures learners' frequency and intensity of reading fanfiction and using AO3. This aspect is associated with behavioral engagement, which includes active participation, persistence, and observable involvement in learning activities (Skinner, Kindermann, & Furrer, 2009).

The Interact/Respond aspect measures learners' participation in AO3 communities, such as giving comments, leaving kudos, responding to authors, and engaging in discussions with other readers. This aspect reflects both behavioral engagement and emotional engagement, as it demonstrates active participation as well as learners' interest and emotional connection toward reading activities (Fredricks et al., 2004).

The Navigation aspect measures learners' ability to use AO3 features, including tags, filters, hyperlinks, and author's notes. This aspect is supported by the concept of New Literacies, which highlights the importance of navigating, locating, evaluating, and using information effectively in online environments (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011).

In digital language learning, engagement is not only reflected by how often learners use a platform but also by their emotional involvement with reading materials and the strategies they employ to understand texts. Therefore, learner engagement is considered an important concept for explaining EFL learners' interactions with digital media such as AO3. Fanfiction on AO3 provides authentic

English input for learners. These texts are written by native speakers and proficient language users and use natural language ranging from informal conversations to more complex narratives. The length and diversity of fanfiction support extensive reading, while the connection between the content and readers' interests helps learners understand texts more easily.

The frequency and intensity of learners' engagement with AO3 also represent the amount of English input they receive. This engagement can be explained through Krashen's (2004) Free Voluntary Reading (FVR) theory, which suggests that voluntary reading based on personal interest contributes to language development, including vocabulary growth, reading fluency, and comprehension. Fanfiction on AO3 aligns with this theory because learners select texts according to their fandom interests, which may lower the affective filter and increase receptivity to language input.

In addition, positive reading experiences may enhance reader self-efficacy, which refers to learners' confidence in their reading abilities. According to Mills, Pajares, and Herron (2007), successful reading experiences can improve learners' perceptions of their language competence. In this study, this concept is closely related to self-perceived English literacy.

Based on the explanations above, EFL learners' engagement with AO3 through reading, navigating, and interacting with fanfiction is considered an important factor that may influence their self-perceived English literacy. The independent variable, Learner Engagement on AO3 (X), is measured through three aspects: Habit, Interact/Respond, and Navigation. Meanwhile, the dependent variable,

English Literacy (Y), is measured through Understanding, Interpretation, Vocabulary, and Production.

G. Previous Study

Research on the use of fanfiction, particularly through digital platforms such as AO3 (Archive of Our Own), has drawn considerable attention from scholars in the field of English literacy. Previous studies highlight that students' engagement with fanfiction texts not only provides a more authentic and enjoyable reading experience but also has the potential to enhance motivation, vocabulary development, and text comprehension. These studies employ a variety of approaches, ranging from quantitative experiments that directly assess reading ability to perception surveys and analyses of digital literacy practices. By reviewing prior research, it becomes evident how AO3 is positioned as a unique literacy space, offering opportunities to explore the relationship between students' perceptions of fanfiction and their English literacy skills.

Fauriza (2024) investigated the use of fanfiction on AO3 as a learning medium to improve EFL students' narrative reading skills. Employing a quasi-experimental design with pre-tests and post-tests, along with an Independent Sample T-test analysis, the study reported a significant improvement in students' reading scores, indicated by a Sig. (2-tailed) value of $0.014 < 0.05$ and an effect size of 0.798 (moderate category). While affirming AO3 as an effective instructional medium, the study focuses primarily on direct measurement of reading ability rather than on perceptions or variable correlations.

Austin and Santoso (2023) examined students' perceptions of fanfiction as an authentic reading material in classroom settings. Using a survey-based approach,

the study explored students' views regarding engagement, motivation, and the relevance of fanfiction to their reading experiences. Findings indicate that students felt more motivated and more emotionally connected to fanfiction texts compared to conventional readings. Although the study emphasizes affective aspects and perceptions, it does not quantitatively measure reading proficiency.

Silberstein-Bamford (2024) discussed AO3 as a paradigm of digital literacy. The study focuses on AO3's tagging system, which facilitates text navigation and enhances reader engagement. AO3 is framed as a digital literacy space that strengthens community-based reading practices, in which readers not only consume texts but also participate in production and discussion. The emphasis, however, lies more on the technical and social dimensions of digital literacy rather than on reading ability or inter-variable relationships.

Zhai, Liu, and Razali (2021) investigated the role of online fanfiction in developing EFL students' English literacy. Their findings suggest that engagement with fanfiction can enrich vocabulary, improve text comprehension, and foster reading motivation. However, the study places greater emphasis on students' perceptions and learning experiences, without employing direct reading assessments or quantitative correlation analyses.

The emerging pattern indicates that AO3, as a fanfiction platform, has been shown to enhance students' motivation, positive perceptions, and engagement in reading English texts. Much of the prior literature focuses on student perceptions (Austin & Santoso, 2023; Zhai et al., 2021) or on technical aspects of digital literacy (Silberstein-Bamford, 2024). Conversely, some studies directly measure reading ability through statistical testing (Fauriza, 2024). However, a research gap remains

due to the limited number of studies employing correlational methods to examine the relationship between students' perceptions of AO3 fanfiction and English literacy. In other words, previous research tends to choose between:

1. Directly measuring reading ability (quasi-experimental).
2. Exploring student perceptions and motivation (qualitative/descriptive).

Few studies have attempted to connect perceptions, motivation, and engagement with English literacy through quantitative correlational analysis. Therefore, the present study aims to address this gap by examining the correlation between learner engagement on Archive of Our Own (AO3) and English literacy using a correlational research design.