

DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS' INTEREST AND PREFERENCES IN LEARNING ENGLISH

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Abstract

This study investigates students' interests and preferences in learning English through a diagnostic assessment approach to improve learning engagement and effectiveness. Using a qualitative and quantitative descriptive design, data were collected from 11th grade students through questionnaires and teacher interviews. The findings show diverse interests and preferences among students. About 61.3% expressed a strong preference for developing speaking and listening skills through communicative activities, while only 6.5% focused on writing skills. Regarding learning media, 41.9% preferred films and visual content, 38.7% preferred online platforms such as Google Classroom, Kahoot, and Quizizz due to their interactivity and feedback, and 19.4% enjoyed music and audio-based materials. These results indicate that motivation and participation increase when learning is tailored to students' media preferences and learning styles. The findings of this study highlight the importance of diagnostic assessment in helping teachers identify individual needs. These insights can be used to design differentiated instruction and contextual activities that align with the Merdeka Curriculum, thereby increasing confidence and improving English learning outcomes.

Keywords: Diagnostic Assessment, Students' Interest, Learning Preferences, English Learning

INTRODUCTION

Despite the long history of English as a Foreign Language instruction in Indonesia, many students continue to demonstrate low motivation and inconsistent interest in learning English (Aprila, 2024). Interest is a primary aspect in improving students' English skills, enabling them to fulfill their goals of developing their English language skills. Therefore, students have different interests and preferences in achieving their goals of developing their English language skills, such as differences in learning materials, learning media, and learning activities. Recognizing these differences is essential for English teachers in order to create varied learning methods so that students can achieve their goals of improving their English language skills. Students' reflection on the variation of media they prefer can inform the teachers on the media that assist students to learn English more easily. Diagnostic assessments of students' learning to identify, understand their interests, preferences, and English language skills they are trying to achieve, can help teachers understand that by aligning all their interests, preferences, and goals, the learning is becoming more engaging, more effective, more interactive, and creating a more active classroom environment during the learning process.

Interest is a significant contributing factor to the level of engagement, persistence, and learning performance of students. A study by Woalder and Tripp (2017) found that interest is a very important motivational process in learning, because it can encourage engagement, increase attention, and influence students' academic success and career choices. When students are eager to participate in the lesson, they will actively engage in the learning process and study the material thoroughly, because the material being studied can enhance the English skills they are trying to improve. In addition, the loss of interest can affect the enthusiasm of students in learning English, because they are not attracted to the learning media, which makes them not enthusiastic, motivated to participate in learning, and get below-average scores. Teachers can organize the learning process according to the interests of the students by conducting diagnostic tests to find out what learning materials and media they are interested in, as well as what English language skills they want to achieve. It aligns with Jimola (2019) who states that diagnostic assessment has great potential to improve the effectiveness of English language teaching.

A study by Harding (2015) reflected that diagnostic assessment can be a tool as a cognitive evaluation. This study highlights that in the context of modern education, assessment should not only be used to measure learning outcomes but also to support learning by using diagnostic methods to collect the data that students need like interest in learning, preferred materials media, and to ensure what skills that students need to improve. Otherwise, it can be a learning progress track for the students.

Several recent studies have highlighted students' interest, and preferences in learning English. The study by Senjaya, Batan, and Myartawan (2018) investigated how English teachers use videos, slides, and internet-based materials in secondary schools. The researchers found that 78.5% of the students showed a positive interest in media-based learning. This study supports the different materials that the teacher uses, because according to the study the researchers found that 78.5% show a positive interest. Therefore, the students are more likely to learn by using videos, slides, and internet-based materials, because it is more relevant, and interactive.

Nurisma (2025) examined students' interest in online English language learning. Students more actively learn through online platforms, because this media is very relevant, interactive, and flexible. Which make students more enthusiastic while doing the English learning. However, some students still preferred face-to-face learning involving direct interaction with teachers and peers. This difference shows that students have their own preferred media, and that's why using diagnostic assessment is quite important to know what students preferred media in learning English.

In a related study on learning media, Sulistyanto and Prayoga (2024) examined the relationship between learning styles and student's interest in using YouTube for English language learning. The results showed a weak correlation. This study indicates that interest is not always determined by predefined learning style categories. Diagnostic assessments are necessary because they help teachers identify students' actual interests rather than relying on assumptions based on learning style categories.

There are current studies that highlight diagnostic assessment. The study by Taperiani (2025) that teachers can use the results of the diagnostics to differentiate learning in relation to the curriculum and the interests, preferences of students in learning. As a result, students tend to be more motivated, enthusiastic, and active in classroom participation, as interest and preferences significantly influence learning motivation. In a previous study, Black & William (2018) used questionnaires as the primary instrument to assess students' interest levels and classify them into different categories, although the results of this study provide a general overview, indicating that students' interests generally fall into the range of either uninterested, or interested. The questionnaire method cannot be used to reveal more specific outputs, benefits, and weaknesses related to student interests. In addition, only student self-reports were used for data collection, no additional sources, such as teacher interviews or pre-assessment exercises in class, were used to validate and enrich the findings. Hence, further studies using teacher interviews need to be conducted to add more information about student interest from a broader perspective.

Student motivation and certain cognitive or affective aspects that influence engagement in adapting learning activities (Alderson, 2005). The lack of systematic teacher preparation focused on affective aspects is also emphasized in research on student psychology by Dörnyei and Ryan (2015). This study highlights that student motivation, attitudes, and self-confidence are often overlooked, so by transforming education from a set of right or wrong answers into an interactive process that informs instructional decisions, formative assessment plays a crucial role in increasing student motivation in language learning (Leahy, Lyon, Thompson, and Wiliam, 2005).

Muho and Taraj, (2022) examined the connection between formative assessment procedures and motivation for learning English as a foreign language among high school students in Durres, Albania. For this research, they examined the connection between formative assessment procedures and motivation to learn English as a foreign language, which have a mutually beneficial relationship, because formative assessment is needed to evaluate learning.

In Indonesia, ninety *madrasah* (Islamic schools) students in East Java participated in this quantitative study, which shows that diagnostic testing combined with Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) has a effect on students motivation, actively, and learning awareness, strong beneficial impacts were linked to diagnostic evaluation, as evidenced by the high average scores in motivation, learning awareness, learning tools, and inventiveness obtained from questionnaires, interviews, and documentation using a Likert scale (Taperiani, 2025).

Jamrus (2019) found that enhancing learning feedback requires the use of student self-evaluation in formative assessment. Large class sizes can make it difficult for teachers to give timely feedback, but self-assessment gives students the ability to consider the quality of their work, evaluate it against predetermined standards, and make required revisions. Self-assessment for learning English has several opportunities, it can make students actively participate and reflect on their learning, supports the scaffolding of knowledge across language skills, and commitment to learning in English. Students who self-assess can make their language learning process, become more motivated, and improve their language accuracy in speaking and writing.

Successful language teaching and learning rely on alignment between learning objectives, teaching strategies, and assessment procedures. This study investigates this

alignment in English lessons at a public high school in Jakarta, Indonesia, using Biggs' constructive alignment paradigm. To ensure a successful learning experience, the idea that desired learning objectives should guide teaching activities and assessment tasks (Biggs, 1996). Given ongoing changes in education, the findings highlight the importance of professional development focused on collaborative lesson planning, language assessment literacy, and technology integration to facilitate alignment. By providing clear assessment goals and standards that guide teaching activities, enhancing alignment through the principles of constructive alignment can improve student learning Rouffet, (2023). Student motivation and learning outcomes are greatly influenced by their attitudes toward language mastery. This was reported in a mixed-methods study of Iranian high school students. The study found variations in beliefs across grade levels, indicating that learning was reported in a mixed-methods research of Iranian high school students. Overall, gender differences were not significant, but they were significant when it came to preferred of language learning aptitude and difficulty. These findings suggest that addressing and altering beliefs can contribute to more successful language learning, have significant ramifications for language education and policy creation (Abdollahzadeh, 2024).

At this stage, diagnostic evaluation becomes particularly important. Diagnostic evaluation is conducted at the beginning to determine students' current skills and interests, unlike other forms of evaluation that are conducted during or after the learning process. Black and Wiliam(1998) highlight that initial evaluation provides data for designing appropriate learning strategies. When student's needs are clear from the outset, learning tasks become more relevant to learning objectives. Everything can be aided by diagnostic evaluation to be identified and accommodated, having an impact on student motivation and interest. This is according to theoretical terms, intrinsic value, utility value, and personal relevance of learning tasks. According to Tomlinson (2006) thesis, teachers can improve learning efficacy by tailoring their lessons to each student's readiness, interests, and learning profile. In order to identify these distinct elements and adjust instructional tactics appropriately, diagnostic assessment is essential. In order to determine and examine students' interest in learning English and diagnose the assessment, this study administered a diagnostic evaluation focusing on students' interest.

Wardhani (2023) aimed to gather comprehensive data regarding students' interests in learning English and the variables influencing their interests in English learning. The main focus of inquiries are on students' general interest in learning English, motivational factors and preferred media, interest and individual learning goals, challenges in learning English, interest and learning styles and preferences. The findings inform that differentiating material, processes, and products allows the instructor to use the results of diagnostic tests to create differentiated instruction. When lessons are tailored to students' interests, they participate more completely and sustain their enthusiasm for learning over time. Students that are engaged are more energized and driven to succeed academically.

Using a questionnaire as the main tool, Sepyanda (2017) used qualitative methods to examine the level of interest of participants and divided them into general and specialist groups. The research focused on identifying the elements that supported or inhibited their desire. This approach provided an overview that student interest was generally moderate. Furthermore, the data were gathered solely from student self-reports. The aforementioned studies have explored motivation, interests, instructional design, diagnostic assessment and

the relationship among these aspects. However, as students are individually unique and may have diverse socio-cultural backgrounds and various learning contexts, every group of students in a specific ELT classroom may have different needs and preferences for their learning. Hence, a diagnostic assessment for every student cohort is still deemed significant. Therefore, this study aims to explore students' motivation and interests and their preferred media when learning English. A detailed image of students' choices, motives, and involvement patterns are provided by the diagnostic technique, which will also enable an organized assessment of interest indicators. It is anticipated that the findings will be a useful guide for educators, particularly of this specific student group being the respondent, in creating learning exercises and approaches that better suit students' interests, increasing their motivation, and English proficiency. The findings can also bring insights for the teachers to improve their teaching skill.

While previous studies have widely focused on diagnostic assessment (see Harding, 2015) and interest (see Woalder and Tripp, 2017; Jimola, 2019; Senjaya, Batan, and Myartawan, 2018; Nurisma, 2025; Sulistyanto and Prayoga, 2024; Taperiani, 2025; Black & William, 2018), they mainly explored interest rather than diagnostic assessment. Those studying interest also share wide ranges of topics from the effect of interest on learning (Woalder and Tripp (2017) to the potential of interest to achievement (Jimola (2019)). Other studies measure the effect of media to interest (Senjaya, Batan, and Myartawan, 2018; Nurisma, 2025), relationship between style and interest (Sulistyanto and Prayoga; 2024) level of interest (Black & William, 2018) and the relationship between interest and motivation (Taperiani, 2025). The study on diagnostic assessment by Harding (2015) only sees the potential of diagnostic assessment as a cognitive evaluation. A question remains: what are the students interest and preferences in English learning that the teacher can use as a reference to design English teaching and learning that best fit with students' interest to better facilitate their English learning. Hence, a diagnostic assessment on interest is deemed to be crucial.

This study aims to conduct a diagnostic assessment on students' interest and preferences in learning English. In particular, the study focuses on the preferred language skills and activities. In addition, this study aims to investigate the learning materials media that students prefer when learning English. The study also goes into details on their reasons for such preferences.

METHOD

This study employed qualitative technique using interview and quantitative using questionnaires to explore the interests of the students. These techniques enable us to identify their interest and preferences in learning English. Data collection used open-ended questions through semi-structured questionnaires to identify students' preferences and interests.

Braun and Clarke (2006) state that thematic analysis of qualitative data is used systematically to identify patterns and themes to enhance the richness of findings and validity. Thematic analysis plays a role in analyzing information collected from questionnaires, interviews. Cresswell and Poth (2018) states that in conducting research, ethical issues are very important, including the availability of participants, maintaining confidentiality, and the privacy of participants' identities. This study also conducted interviews with an English teacher who is still actively teaching, so that this study can have detailed and more accurate

data, which can then be used to support the results of the questionnaires that were given to students.

The data for this study was collected from a state senior high school consisting of a group of 11th grade students who were purposively selected from the cohort at SMAN 1 Gedangan. A comprehensive questionnaire consisting 20 question items was used covering various topics including the media and English teaching materials they liked and the reasons behind their preference for English. The questionnaire was first validated by an expert in English teaching to ensure the validity. Thirty students responded the questionnaire distributed through Google form. Using interviewing the teacher also helps the researcher to collect more data, and can support the data from the questionnaires.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Numerous significant insights into students' experiences and preferences in learning English were uncovered by the questionnaires and interviews. Although this varied in degree among individuals, the findings of the diagnostic assessment showed that pupils generally have a positive excitement for learning the language. In terms of preference, the students have a high tendency toward visual and multimedia-based material and online platforms while music and other audio-based media share a relatively lower percentage of students' preference.

Students' Interests and Preferences on the Language Learning and Activities

Data collected from questionnaires responded by 30 students inform that (61,3%) have strong interest in speaking and listening skills (32,3%), and some of students have interest in improving writing skill (6,5%), while for reading skills, none of the students filled in that they wanted to improve their reading skills. The following subsection provides detailed presentation and discussion of this quantitative data along with qualitative data from the teacher's interview.

Interest in Speaking and Listening Skills

A total of 19 out of 31 (61,3%) students expressed a strong interest in developing their speaking fluency and a total of 10 out of 31 (32,3%). This data from the questionnaire is confirmed by data from the teacher interview. The teacher stated, "*my students like practicing speaking, particularly on topics of describing something*" They enjoyed communicative activities such as *presentations, discussions, and role-plays*, which made them feel more confident and active in class. Students emphasized that they learn more effectively when they have the opportunity to express their thoughts in English and interact with others. While students ticked the option of presentations and roleplays as their preferred activities, the teacher only reflected on the discussion as the students-most preferred activity. Both interview and questionnaire data show almost half of the students are communicatively motivated learners. This finding supports previous findings by Aprila (2024) that task-based speaking activities and the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum improve students' oral fluency and confidence, reinforcing the importance of interaction-based diagnostic assessments to evaluate speaking proficiency. Referring to students' preference on communicative activities and previous studies on the benefit of task-based speaking activities, ELT teachers should

emphasize more communicative and meaningful tasks of English learning. Hence, the students can be more motivated and interested in learning as what they learn is what they prefer.

The above findings on students' interest and preference and the teacher's awareness of such preferences help the teacher to align his teaching strategies to the students' needs. Such alignment confirms Jimola (2019) that diagnostic assessment has great potential to improve the effectiveness of English language teaching because it can help teachers understand the individual needs of students and adjust their learning strategies. The finding also further highlights Tomlinson's proposal (2006) that teachers should tailor the lessons based on, among others, the students' interest. Such alignment of strategies and tailored lessons can further guide the instructional activities and assessment tasks (Biggs, 1996) to achieve the targeted learning goal.

Interest in Writing Skills

A total of 2 out of 31 students (6,5%) responded with an interest in improving their writing skills. This data from a questionnaire shows that 2 out of 31 students are interested in improving their writing skill, these students chose writing because they want to strengthen this specific skill. The teacher did not report anything about these two students in the interview. The questionnaire gives a clearer view of their individual preferences. The two students prefer different ways to develop their writing. One student likes to learn through description texts. The student wants to describe a video he watched and turn his ideas into clear sentences. The other student prefers narrative texts. The student wants to build stories and organize events in a sequence.

This finding aligned with study from, Graham and Perin (2007) found that direct instruction in specific writing tasks increases students' performance. Their meta-analysis showed that guided practice with targeted text types leads to better writing outcomes. The teacher can give targeted writing tasks. The student who prefers descriptive writing can describe a video or picture. The student who prefers narrative writing can create a short story, or use videos for descriptive writing practice and story prompts for narrative writing. These methods potentially give the students structured support and match their preferred ways of learning.

Preferred Learning Materials and Media

Data collected from questionnaires inform that for each of these materials and media share the same responses of (41,9%). The students could tick more than one option on their preference covering learning materials in film, video, and visual media, technology-based and online platforms (38,7%). Meanwhile, music and audio-based materials are only ticked by (19,4%) of the students. The following subsection provides detailed presentation and discussion of this quantitative data along with qualitative data from the teacher's interview.

Film, Video, and Visual Media

A total of 13 out of 31 students (41,9%) chose films, visual videos, and online visual content as their favourite learning media. These activities potentially help them understand real-life expressions, pronunciation, body movements, and cultural contexts more effectively than just reading. Through films and visual materials, they can observe how English is used naturally in various situations, which improves their understanding and fluency. These activities potentially help visual learning to focus and make lessons easier to remember because the combination of images and sound supports better understanding and long-term retention. In the interview, the teacher also reflected, *“My students are very interested in visual media, such as movies or short videos, especially animated films. This is especially true when their favorite actors or actresses appear in the film.”* When visual learning media such as films, videos, or images are used, students are more enthusiastic when the visuals shown are of someone they know, such as influencers, actors, actresses, especially those they are idolizing. Students will be more enthusiastic about participating in learning because there are individuals or people they know and revere. Teachers can help by using these media to bridge the gap between entertainment and education, so that students can enjoy learning English, feel more relevant, and make learning more interactive.

A combination of film or video consisting of images and audio is more effective for enhancing understanding, as emphasized by research conducted by Syafiq (2024) that found student engagement and contextual understanding increased with the use of audiovisual media. This indicates a strong preference for visual learning among senior high school students. Students are more potentially helped to connect with meaningful contexts through the use of films and visual media. Diagnostic activities such as understanding videos with text, watching short films, and visually appealing instructions can be effective in assessing and improving student comprehension. These methods not only promote contextual learning but also make lessons more interactive and engaging.

Technology-Based and Online Platforms

The questionnaire shows that 12 out of 31 students (38,7%) prefer to use online platforms such as Google Classroom, Kahoot, Quizizz, and Duolingo to learn English. Some of these online platforms are also preferred as flexible, engaging assessment techniques through Quizizz, Google Forms, and Google Classroom. These choices corroborate the findings of Leahy (2005) that motivation is increased by formative and interesting assessments. The teacher interview, however, did not bring about this students' preference on online platforms as the teacher commonly only uses Google Classroom. So, he could not reflect on students' preference on other varieties of online platforms. The questionnaire data indicates that given the high preference on the use of online platforms, a vast variety of those platforms need to be accommodated by the teacher in his future teaching.

A study by Nurlala and Pratolo (2024) supports that technology-assisted environments promote learner motivation and improved language performance. Furthermore, study by Kao

and Tsai (2020) and Sulistyanto and Prayoga (2025) state that game-based learning tools like Kahoot and Quizizz increase engagement, intrinsic motivation, and retention. The questionnaire data indicates that given the high preference on the use of online platforms, a vast variety of those platforms need to be accommodated by the teacher.

The use of online platforms in teaching the current students who are digital natives have the potential to make the learning process more interesting, flexible, and accessible. Students can take the benefits of the interactivity of these tools, which allow them to practise their language skills through games, quizzes, and customised exercises. Potential students are assisted by integrating several of these activities into their learning. Because students have complete control over their learning progress, they can more easily access materials anywhere. This shows that students are not only comfortable using technology but also motivated by it.

In addition, student independence and continuous learning will increase with the use of technology-based platforms. The use of digital tools can track their progress, receive instant feedback, and practice repeatedly until they master certain skills. Features such as progress tracking and direct feedback on Duolingo can help students understand what they are deficient in. This is in line with a study by Zimmerman & Moylan (2009) which states that students create goals, then track their learning progress, and evaluate the outcomes of their learning. For example, To strengthen English language skills through daily challenges, students are assisted by Duolingo and to make the learning process more enjoyable through competition and collaboration they use Quizizz and Kahoot. There is a platform called Google Classroom that teachers can use to organize assignments, materials, and feedback efficiently and encourage structured yet flexible learning. A dynamic learning environment is created because these features work together to support student motivation and engagement outside the classroom.

Music and Audio-Based Materials

Six out of 31 students (19.4%) showed a preference for learning English through audio-based media such as songs and podcasts. This preference was confirmed by the teacher, who stated, “*Students like learning media and materials that include music, especially contemporary music, both in English and Indonesian.*” The teacher also stated that students would only be interested in listening to lessons if the material was related to songs or music. Popular culture in this case influences modern learners because they tend to be more motivated when lessons connect with their daily interests. Teacher noted that students feel more connected to the content and can relate it to their real-life experiences when the learning material includes viral songs that are currently trending. This supports the findings of Amelia and Fardhani (2024), who highlight the intrinsic motivational value of music in maintaining student attention. The use of songs that reflect students' real-life experiences highlights the integration of contextual content to accommodate the proposition, as stated by Mohammed (2023), that considering the emotional and cognitive profiles of learners is necessary in diagnostic models.

From this, these students show a tendency to learn through audio. A previous study by Amelia and Fardhani (2024) found that integrating auditory-based teaching in English as a foreign language class can improve students' listening comprehension and motivation. However, by utilizing popular songs and relevant audio, which are effective for learning, teachers can increase the interest and motivation of students, making learning more engaging and enjoyable for them. This could potentially make learning English less stressful and create a more relaxed learning environment. It allows students to absorb the language in the music, or audio, while enjoying the media being provided by the teachers.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

As this research found, students have different interests and preferences regarding English language learning that will improve their skills. Students preferred visual and multimedia learning materials, such as films and videos. According to the data collected, students also preferred digital platforms, such as Google Classroom, Duolingo, Kahoot, Quizizz, and ZEP, because these platforms made students more enthusiastic about learning, allowed them to track their learning progress, and provided a more efficient way of providing assignments. Other students also prefer audio materials, such as music and podcasts. The results of the diagnosis also help teachers understand the needs of students and provide learning that fits their needs and preferences, so that students can gain a more comprehensive understanding of English, improve their language skills, and achieve outstanding performance.

Teachers have to utilize regularly conducted diagnostic assignments to identify students' interests and preferences. Teachers can use questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations to gather information about students' interests, learning preferences they want to improve, and learning methods that are suitable for them. Teachers must also integrate various types of learning media so that students do not get bored easily during lessons and are more enthusiastic about learning. Supporting different learning styles is important because students have different preferences. Therefore, teachers must make changes in teaching English that are in accordance with the interests and preferences of their students. Teachers should create a supportive environment, free from pressure during learning, to help students build confidence, especially in speaking materials. Data shows that students are less confident because they are afraid of being mocked and afraid of mispronouncing words. The role of teachers is very important here so that students can build confidence and be motivated to improve their speaking skills. Future research could involve larger samples and explore how digital diagnostic tools affect long-term motivation and English language development.

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