

ENGLISH READING INTEREST AND COMPREHENSION OF THE STUDENTS AT A TERTIARY EDUCATION LEVEL

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Received: September 13, 2024

Published: February 10, 2025

Abstract: The interest in reading significantly influences students' reading performance, especially in terms of their comprehension skills. This quantitative research explores the relationship between reading interest and reading comprehension among fourth-semester English Education students at the university level in Palembang. Data were analyzed utilizing Pearson's Product Moment correlation, based on a total sampling method of 30 participants from the academic year 2022/2023. The findings indicated negative correlations among various forms of reading interest and reading comprehension, specifically: individual interest (-0.354), situational interest (-0.319), and topic interest (-0.092). Nevertheless, the statistical significance of these correlations has not been defined, indicating a need for additional analysis. The findings reveal a noteworthy inverse relationship: As reading interest increases, reading comprehension ability tends to decrease. This unexpected result prompts an examination of the fundamental factors and possible explanations that are investigated in the research. The assessment of reading interest was conducted utilizing validated survey instruments, while comprehension was evaluated through TOEFL reading tasks. The sample size of 30 participants provides preliminary insights; however, it may restrict the broader applicability of the findings. The findings presented here hold significant implications for pedagogical approaches and curriculum development, especially in promoting a harmonious balance between stimulating interest and enhancing understanding. It is advisable to conduct additional research to elucidate these dynamics and investigate possible moderating variables.

Keywords: *correlation study, reading comprehension, reading interest*

How to Cite: Muthiah, R.A, Lestari, T.P, & Prakoso, D.A. (2025). English reading interest and comprehension of the students a tertiary education level. *The Journal of English Literacy Education: The Teaching and Learning of English as a Foreign Language*, 11(2), 218-230. <http://dx.doi.org/10.36706/jele.v11i2.44>

INTRODUCTION

Mastering the English language relies on the development of four essential skills that are complex and interrelated, demanding not only knowledge but also strategic approaches and consistent practice for individuals to excel: listening, speaking, writing, and reading. Among these competencies, reading emerges as a fundamental element, frequently regarded as simple yet embedded with deep importance. It operates as a receptive skill, where individuals engage in the absorption of

information without necessarily producing oral or written output. According to Napigkit and Rodriguez (2017), receptive language skills involve grasping spoken and written language, similar to decoding messages. Despite its seemingly passive nature, reading holds immense value, serving as a conduit for knowledge acquisition and intellectual growth. By reading, individuals acquire new information, learn, and discover fresh ideas. The more students comprehend what they read, the more proficient they become (Fitria, 2019).

Reading is an academic task to infer a conclusion from written information. Grabe and Stoller (2011) state that reading is steps to infer details from a text. In addition, Johnson (2008) also explains that reading is drawing a meaning from a text. Through the act of reading, individuals engage in a process of decoding written text, extracting meaning, and synthesizing information. This process not only facilitates the acquisition of factual knowledge but also nurtures critical thinking skills, analytical abilities, and a deeper understanding of complex ideas and concepts, which leads to reading comprehension.

Reading comprehension involves various elements, such as vocabulary, grammar, grasping the main idea, making inferences, and understanding text structure. Previous studies highlight several challenges in this area. Al-Jarrah and Ismail (2018) identify that Arab EFL learners struggle primarily with recognizing text types and structures, alongside issues like lack of attention, word complexity, and grammatical understanding. Nurjanah (2018) suggests that students often overlook difficulties in reading comprehension tests due to vocabulary limitations. Similarly, According to Hidayati (2018), first-grade students are discovered to face difficulties when responding to questions concerning the main idea, drawing inferences, and making references with the main idea being the most problematic aspect. Consequently, many students struggle to meet the standard grade in reading comprehension tests.

The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a revealing activity that exposes the lack of reading comprehension. In the PISA 2022 results, Indonesia's ranking for reading literacy improved by five positions compared to previous assessments. However, despite this apparent progress, the actual scores have declined, indicating a significant gap from the desired target. Since Indonesia's debut in PISA in 2000, its scores, particularly in reading, have consistently been among the lowest. In 2022, Indonesia's reading score was 359, which remains notably lower than desired, with similar low scores recorded in 2000 and 2018 (371) (Napitupulu, 2023).

Studies demonstrate that the interest in reading significantly influences acquiring a language, especially among students learning English as a foreign language. A robust interest in reading correlates with enhanced vocabulary development and greater overall language proficiency (Santi et al., 2021). The elements that affect students' engagement with English texts encompass individual effort, motivation, and preconceived notions regarding reading (Zur et al., 2022). The proficiency of educators and the availability of stimulating reading resources can profoundly influence students' enthusiasm for acquiring the English language (Ibhar, 2022). Therefore, having an interest in reading is essential for understanding English texts. A strong interest in reading not only enhances vocabulary mastery but also improves other aspects of English language skills. Guthrie et al. (2007) suggest that reading comprehension becomes more effective when supported by interest. When

students are genuinely interested in their English reading, they are less likely to feel discouraged by their language abilities. With sufficient interest, students are motivated to read regularly because they find it engaging and compelling.

Nonetheless, the interplay between interest and reading comprehension is intricate. Numerous scholarly studies exist that pertain to the relationship between reading interest and reading comprehension. The initial study conducted by Rahayu (2018) examined the correlation between reading interest and reading comprehension among students enrolled in the Indonesian Language and Literature Education program at Syiah Kuala University. The findings indicated that there is no significant correlation between enthusiasm for reading and proficiency in text comprehension. The second study conducted by Khadijah and Pasaribu (2022) investigated the impact of reading interest on the reading comprehension of grade XII students at SMAN 1 Brandan Barat. Their findings indicated a significant relationship between diverse reading interests and reading comprehension, although this relationship was classified as low. The findings indicated a small significant value, suggesting a weak positive correlation. The fourth pertinent study was conducted by Purnama et al. (2023), wherein the researchers examined the relationship between reading interest and reading comprehension at SMAN 9 Palembang. This study revealed a moderate correlation between reading interest and comprehension abilities, which is somewhat more pronounced than the previously discussed studies.

Previous studies have produced a variety of findings and discussions, with earlier studies suggesting a low to moderate significant relationship between reading interest and TOEFL reading comprehension. This study shares a significant similarity with previous research in its focus on investigating the relationship between reading interest and reading comprehension. This study is distinctive in its context, as it specifically examines English Education students at the tertiary level in Palembang, differing from previous research that primarily concentrated on senior high school students or individuals not enrolled in English majors. This study seeks to enhance the current body of research by examining the relationship within a higher education framework, thereby providing a more profound understanding of the impact of reading interest on comprehension among EFL learners at the university level.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, the researchers employed a correlation study design with a quantitative approach to investigate the potential correlation between students' reading interest and their reading comprehension. A correlation study involves statistical analysis of two or more variables to determine if they exhibit a consistent relationship (Creswell, 2005; Fraenkel, 2012). The rationale for selecting this method is to determine the correlation score between two variables using statistical quantitative measures, specifically the correlation coefficient.

Subjects

The population of this study consisted of 30 students studying critical reading in the English Education study program of Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Sriwijaya University. A sample size of 30 students was chosen using a total sampling method. The total sample meets the minimum requirement the minimal sample as Fraenkel (2012) suggests 30 participants as a minimum sample.

Data Collection

In order to systematically gather data, the researchers employed pre-existing questionnaires as the instruments, adhering to the recommendations of Arikunto (2014), who explains that at a structured approach to data collection enhances both efficiency and accuracy in research endeavors. The researchers utilized a 26-item reading interest questionnaire derived from Hutjanah (2017), alongside a 50-item reading comprehension test adapted from Sartika (2014). The Reading Interest Questionnaire was developed to assess multiple facets of students' engagement with reading, encompassing personal interest, contextual interest, and interest related to specific topics. The administration of both instruments occurred during designated class sessions to maintain consistency. The questionnaires were disseminated in a Google form, and participants received explicit instructions prior to their completion. The administration process was overseen by the researchers to maintain the integrity of the responses, ensuring their presence to address any questions or clarifications that arose. Participants were allotted a total of 15 minutes to complete the reading interest questionnaire, after which they took a brief intermission, and subsequently had an additional 60 minutes to finish the reading comprehension test. This sequence facilitated sustained participant engagement while mitigating feelings of fatigue. The reading comprehension assessment was also conducted in a Google form comprising passages accompanied by multiple-choice questions. This format evaluated participants' capacity to discern main ideas, draw inferences, and comprehend detailed-information. Reading Interest Questionnaire has specifics below:

Table 1. Reading interest questionnaire specification

Sub Variables	Number of Item	Item Numbers
Individual Interest	13	3,4,5,6,7,8,11,13,14,18,19,220,26
Situational Interest	9	1,9,10,12,15,16,23,24,25
Topic Interest	4	2,17,21,22
Total	26	

Source: Adopted from Hutjanah (2017)

Table 2. Reading comprehension test specification

Objectives	Types of Questions	Number of Items	Item Numbers
Scan/ skim for relating the main idea to supporting details or detail in text	Detail	14	7, 8, 11, 12, 15, 24, 30, 33, 36, 40, 45, 46, 48, 50
Skim for main ideas	Main Idea	7	1, 9, 10, 25, 31, 37, 41
Discuss direct references to text	Reference	13	3, 5, 13, 17, 20, 23, 26, 32, 35, 38, 39,42, 44
Answer correctly the question based on causal effect relationship in the	Cause-effect	5	4, 14, 16, 19, 43

text			
Interpret on complex messages	Inference	4	2, 21, 22, 28
Use context to identify (predict or guess) of meaning of words	Vocabulary	7	6, 18, 27, 29, 34, 47, 49
Total		50	

Source: adopted from Sartika (2014)

Validity

Validity is the most important component in research. Based on the validity test conducted by the researchers on 30 students of 4th semesters English Education students at Sriwijaya University Palembang the result showed that the significant value of the items was .017 lower than 0,05 ($< 0,05$) and r value was .432 higher than r- table ($> 0,361$) it means that this questionnaire was valid. Besides, there are some researchers who used this questionnaire to measure students' reading interest in their research. On the other hand, the reading comprehension test that the researcher used was a ready-made reading test by Sartika (2014). This reading test was validated in a prior study by Sartika (2014), and the result of the validity test was 0.47 which was higher than > 0.325 .

Reliability

According to Fraenkel et al., (2012), the instrument of the research was declared reliable if the coefficient score was .70 and preferably higher. Based on a validity test that the researchers conducted on 4th semester students of Sriwijaya University Palembang. The result of the reliability test of reading interest questionnaire was 0.94. Furthermore, Hutjanah (2017) reported thta the result of reliability test of reading interest questionnaire was 0.93. It means the reading interest questionnaire is highly reliable. Then, according to Sartika (2014), the reliability of the reading test was also highly reliable as its score was 0.94

Table 3. Score interval of reading interest

Categories	Score Interval	Description
High	96-130	Always likes to read without any coercion
Medium	61-95	Sometimes likes to read to get information needed
Low	26-60	Rarely to read and reading out of necessity

Table 4. Reading comprehension score classification

Score Interval	Category
81-100	Very good
61-80	Good
41-60	Average
21-40	Poor
0-20	Very Poor

Ethical Consideration

This research followed with rigorous ethical standards to safeguard the rights and welfare of participants. Participation was conducted on a voluntary basis, with informed consent secured prior to involvement. Fundamental principles encompassed the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity, the preservation of voluntary participation, and the reduction of potential harm (Ajemba & Chinwe, 2022; Kite & Whitley, 2018). The data were anonymized through responsible that excluded any identifiable information, and participants were guaranteed that their responses would be kept confidential and utilized exclusively for research purposes. Participants were also made aware of their right to withdraw at any point without incurring any penalties. These measures cultivated trust, honored the rights of participants, and maintained the integrity of the research (Roberts et al., 2004).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Result of Distribution Frequencies of Reading Interest

In general, the distribution frequencies of students' reading interest is:

Table 5. Distribution of students' reading interest

Categories	Score Interval	Frequency	Percentage
High	96-130	0	0%
Medium	61-95	27	90%
Low	26-60	3	10%
TOTAL	30	100%	

The table shows that none of the students fall into the high reading interest category. Instead, 27 students (90%) were classified as having medium reading interest, while 3 students (10%) are categorized as having low reading interest. In summary, the majority of students demonstrates a medium level of reading interest

Result of Distribution Frequencies of Reading Comprehension

Meanwhile the distribution frequencies of students' reading comprehension in general is:

Table 6. Reading comprehension achievement category

Score Interval	Category	Frequency	Percentage
81-100	Very Good	5	17%
61-80	Good	8	26%
41-60	Average	5	17%
21-40	Poor	12	40%
0-20	Very Poor	0	0%
Total		30	100%

The findings indicate that 5 students (17%) achieve a very good level of reading comprehension, 8 students (26%) demonstrate good reading comprehension skills, 5 students (17%) display average reading comprehension abilities, and 12 students (40%) exhibit poor reading comprehension skills. None of the students (0%) is classified as having very poor reading comprehension skills.

Result of Descriptive Statistics of Reading Interest

The descriptive statistical analysis of students' reading interests is presented. The findings reveal that the scores range from 59 to 93, with a mean score of 73.12. The summarized information is depicted on Table 7.

Table 7. Descriptive statistics of reading interest

	Descriptive Statistics			
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Reading Interest	30	59	93	73.12

Table 7 shows that the reading interest questionnaire varies, with “low” being the level that is least and “medium” being the level that is most recognized. Table 8 below presents all data.

Result of Descriptive Statistics of Reading Interest

Table 8. Descriptive statistics of each specification reading interest

	Descriptive Statistics			
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Individual Interest	30	29	52	37.64
Situational Interest	30	17	30	24.06
Topic Interest	30	8	16	11.41

Table 8 reveals that the smallest value for individual interest is 29 while its maximum value is 52. The individual interest has a 37.64 mean score. The second element of reading interest, situational interest achieves 24.06 mean score, 17 minimum value, and 30 maximum values. The last is topic interest, its minimum value is 8, and its maximum value is 16. This element perceives 11.41 of mean value.

Results of Homogeneity of Variances Test

Table 9 Test of Homogeneity of Variances

	Levene Statistics	df1	df2	Sig.
Individual Interest	1.821	2	27	.255
Situational Interest	2.891	2	27	.146
Topic Interest	.254	2	27	.785

Table 9 reveals that the p-values for all categories (Individual Interest: .255, Situational Interest: .146, Topic Interest: .785) exceed the minimum value of 0.05. This suggests that the null hypothesis of equal variances remains undisputed,

indicating that the variances of reading comprehension scores are consistent across the three categories of reading interest.

Results of Normality test

Table 10 Test of Normality

	N	Shapiro-Wilk Statistics	Df	Sig.
Reading	Individual Interest	.961	30	.335
	Situational Interest	.953	30	.197
	Topic Interest	.947	30	.140

The results above indicated that the p-values for all categories of reading interest (Individual: .335, Situational: .197, Topic: .140) exceed 0.05, suggesting that the null hypothesis of normality remains unopposed. This indicates that reading comprehension scores exhibit a normal distribution across each category

Results of Linearity test

Table 11 Test of Linearity

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Individual Interest	3001.456	1	3001.456	12.34	.002
Situational Interest	2005.897	1	2005.897	10.56	.005
Topic Interest	200.567	1	200.567	4.85	.031

The result above demonstrates that there are significant linear relationships among all three variables: Individual Interest, Situational Interest, and Topic Interest, in relation to Reading Comprehension. The p-values for the three variables are all below 0.05 (0.002 for Individual Interest, 0.005 for Situational Interest, and 0.031 for Topic Interest), suggesting that each type of interest has a significant linear effect on reading comprehension.

Result of Descriptive Statistics of Reading Comprehension

The descriptive statistical analysis of students' reading comprehension performance is depicted in Table 12. It reveals that scores vary from 22 to 94, with 22 representing the lowest score and 94 the highest. The mean score is 43. The compiled data is presented in Table 12.

Table 12. Reading Comprehension Test Result

	N	Descriptive Statistics			
		Minimum	Maximum	Mean	St. Deviation
Reading Comprehension	30	22	94	55	23.458

According to these statistics results, students score differently throughout the five categories of reading comprehension achievement. Table 13 shows the distribution of the data:

Table 13. Correlation between Reading Interest and Reading Comprehension

		Reading Comprehension	N
Individual Interest	Pearson	-.354	30
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.55	
Situational Interest	Pearson	-.319	
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.086	
Topic Interest	Pearson	-.092	
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.630	

The result shows that between individual interest and the TOEFL reading comprehension test is found to be -0.354. A negative correlation indicates an inverse link between the two variables. This implies that as individual interest increases, TOEFL reading comprehension ability tends to decrease, and vice versa. Nevertheless, the correlation coefficient of -0.354 indicates a moderately weak association between these variables. Moreover, with a significance value (Sig.) of 0.55, the correlation lacks statistical significance, implying that the observed correlation might have occurred randomly.

Next aspect, the Pearson correlation between situational interest and TOEFL reading comprehension test is -0.319. Similar to individual interest, the negative sign signifies a negative correspondence between the variables. Again, the correlation coefficient of -0.319 indicates a weak association. Despite this, the significance value (Sig.) of 0.086 suggests that the correlation observed does not reach statistical significance at the standard threshold level of 0.05.

Last, the Pearson correlation between topic interest and reading comprehension test yields a coefficient of -0.092. Once more, the negative correlation indicates an inverse relationship which means very weak. The correlation coefficient of -0.092 suggests an almost negligible alliance between topic interest and TOEFL reading comprehension test. Additionally, with a significance value (Sig.) of 0.630, it's evident that this correlation lacks statistical significance.

Discussion

The results indicate a slight correlation between reading interest and reading comprehension among fourth-semester English Education students, specifically in the context of the TOEFL reading comprehension test at the tertiary education level in Palembang. In negative correlation indicates that the two variables, reading interest and comprehension proceed in opposite directions; as the reading interest increases, the reading comprehension decreases and vice versa. It is an inverse relationship. It means that students' reading interest has no significant influence on students' reading comprehension. Moreover, the findings indicate that the majority of fourth-semester students enrolled in the English Education Study Program at Sriwijaya University do not exhibit a high level of reading interest, the majority of

students fall into the medium reading interest category, with only a few categorized as having low reading interest. Furthermore, the results reveal that a minority of students achieve very good reading comprehension scores, while others demonstrate moderate to poor reading comprehension skills.

Despite the absence of a significant correlation between reading interest and reading comprehension, it is worthy noted that interest remains important, it plays a crucial role in students' achievement in learning. Ruswandi (2013) explains that interest is basically a special concern. The level of achievement of abilities or competencies is largely determined by students' interest in the learning material. Therefore, it is crucial to prioritize fostering and sustaining interest at all costs. This responsibility doesn't solely fall on not only educators but also families play crucial roles in supporting students' interests as well. According to Tran (2019), parents are motivators, role models, and facilitators, they could encourage their children to read and provide them with various books that align with their reference.

However, it is noteworthy to acknowledge that the students bring diverse interests when it comes to reading, indicating that reading comprehension should not be confined to strictly challenging texts such as those encountered in TOEFL assessment. This study utilized the TOEFL test to investigate the relationship between reading interest and reading comprehension among university-level students. Based on the findings, the educators are recommended to expand the variety of reading materials to better align with students' individual preferences and interests, thereby enhancing overall reading engagement and comprehension. The educators hold a significant role in choosing teaching strategy (Simamora and Oktaviani, 2020), especially teaching reading that boost students' interest. The educators could employ creative approaches using digital tools is particularly pertinent in today's digital age. In contemporary Indonesian education, students' reliance on smartphones is undeniable. Leveraging digital media becomes indispensable for effective teaching and learning processes (Oktaviani & Desiarti, 2017). As founded by Erya and Pustika (2021), nowadays students prefer to favor unique and digital reading content, thus incorporating applications for instance Webtoon may enhance reading engagement and comprehension. Thus, integrating digital platforms and trends into educational practices becomes one of the imperative approaches to ensure engagement and improve reading interest.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

In conclusion, most students demonstrate moderate levels of reading interest, accompanied by diverse comprehension abilities, revealing an observed inverse relationship, not statistically significant. The results indicate that elements beyond mere interest, including test-specific strategies or the complexity of the text, may affect comprehension. Notwithstanding this, cultivating an interest in reading is essential for comprehensive academic success, as it can indirectly enhance motivation, expand vocabulary, and promote ongoing engagement with written material. Educators are urged to implement strategies that foster an interest in reading, including the utilization of varied materials, linking content to students' experiences, and integrating interactive activities, while simultaneously addressing comprehension difficulties through focused instruction. The limitations of the study, such as its limited sample size and dependence on self-reported data, underscore the necessity for additional research employing larger, more diverse samples and mixed

methodologies. Subsequent investigations ought to examine further variables, including cognitive and motivational influences, while also formulating interventions aimed at enhancing both reading interest and comprehension, especially within high-stakes testing environments.

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