

Relationship Between Reading Interest and Indonesian Language Learning Outcomes of Grade IV Elementary School Students

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Abstract

Reading interest plays a crucial role in academic achievement, particularly during elementary education when foundational literacy skills are established. However, limited research has examined this relationship within Indonesian elementary education contexts. This study investigated the correlation between reading interest and Indonesian language learning outcomes among fourth-grade students. A quantitative correlational design was employed with 16 fourth-grade students at SD Inpres 5 Taipa Laga selected through simple random sampling. Data were collected using a validated 13-item reading interest questionnaire (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.85$) and students' midterm examination scores in Indonesian language. Statistical analysis was conducted using Pearson's correlation with significance set at $p \leq 0.05$. All participants demonstrated either high (44%) or very high (56%) reading interest levels. Academic performance showed similar distribution with 44% achieving good scores and 56% excellent scores. Correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between reading interest and learning outcomes ($p = 0.003$). Students with very high reading interest achieved excellent academic performance (88.9%) compared to those with high interest (14.3%). The findings validate Expectancy-Value Theory by demonstrating how intrinsic motivation correlates with academic achievement. Results align with previous research emphasizing the importance of reading interest in literacy development. The strong correlation suggests that educational interventions targeting reading interest cultivation may enhance academic outcomes. Study limitations include small sample size and cross-sectional design, necessitating longitudinal research with diverse populations to establish causal relationships.

INTRODUCTION

Education serves as a fundamental mechanism for developing human potential through systematic learning experiences that cultivate critical thinking and lifelong learning capabilities. These capacities enable individuals to adapt, grow, and excel across various domains of life, making education instrumental in guiding personal and societal advancement (Apps et al., 2023). Within this educational framework, reading emerges as a cornerstone of knowledge acquisition and cognitive development, serving not merely as a gateway to understanding the world but as a crucial catalyst for fostering creativity and academic performance.

The significance of reading proficiency extends far beyond basic literacy, as having adequate reading skills is a prerequisite for text comprehension and hence for success in school, at work and in

everyday life (Lonigan & Shanahan, 2009). The development of reading skills represents one of the most critical academic tasks that children undertake during their primary school years, fundamentally shaping their educational trajectory and future academic success. As children engage in learning tasks at school, they develop an awareness of their own performance (i.e., reader self-concept) and comparison with classmates begins (Ames, 1992). This evaluative process becomes particularly consequential when students experience difficulties, as failure in accomplishing reading tasks can harm the development of a sense of competence (Bandura, 2002; Stanovich, 1986).

The relationship between reading competence and student motivation reveals a complex interplay of cognitive and affective factors. Given that learning to read is the first academic task encountered in school, a lack of success in learning to read will often entail severe consequences for a student's overall self-image. To protect their self-image, students may reduce the level of value or interest that they assign to tasks associated with poor performance on their part (Covington, 1998; Harter, 1982; Wigfield et al., 2007). This defensive mechanism creates a concerning cycle where struggling readers may disengage from the very activities that could improve their skills.

Reading interest, as a psychological construct encompassing emotional and cognitive elements, significantly influences an individual's willingness to engage in literacy activities (Nurani & Mahendra, 2019). Interest in reading is important for reading acquisition, because children who are interest driven tend to spend more time reading for leisure, are likely to devote more effort to literacy tasks and are, for this reason, more likely to become skilled readers than their peers who are less interested in reading activities (Ecalte et al., 2006; Malloy et al., 2013). This relationship becomes particularly crucial during the formative years of elementary education, when foundational literacy skills are established.

Perceptions of competence are associated with the amount of interest taken in, or the value placed on, tasks or activities within the same domain (Deci & Ryan, 1987; Eccles, 1983; Jacobs et al., 2002). However, the relationship between competence and engagement is nuanced, as research also suggests that even if children think that they are competent at an activity and are able to perform it efficaciously, they may still not engage much in that activity if they are not much interested in it or do not value it highly (Wigfield & Cambria, 2010; Walgermo et al., 2018). This highlights the critical importance of fostering genuine interest in reading alongside skill development.

Recent empirical evidence has consistently demonstrated strong correlations between students' reading interest and their academic performance. Dewani et al. (2025) revealed that students with higher reading interest tend to perform better in language-related subjects, while Joseph (2020) found that reading habits are positively associated with improvements in vocabulary, comprehension, and critical thinking skills. The initial development of interest precedes the development of children's feelings of competence, and that once both have developed, there is a reciprocal association between them (Renninger, Hidi, & Krapp, 2014; Renninger & Hidi, 2016). This reciprocal relationship suggests that early intervention to foster reading interest may have lasting effects on academic achievement.

Despite the recognized importance of reading interest, significant gaps exist in current research. One major limitation of research specifically addressing interest in and motivation for reading is a relative lack of studies carried out at the point in time when reading skill emerges: at the very start of children's school careers. While previous investigations have established the general importance of reading in learning, there remains a paucity of empirical studies examining how reading interest specifically influences performance in subject-specific areas, particularly in elementary education contexts. Several studies also show that, only a few months into the first grade, the poorest readers already have a weaker reader self-concept than their peers (Chapman et al., 2000; Morgan et al., 2008), indicating the urgent need for early intervention and assessment.

The educational context presents additional complexities that warrant investigation. Learning is a cognitive and emotional endeavor, and existing research has shown that emotions are significant predictors of learning and academic achievement (e.g., enjoyment or boredom; Pekrun et al., 2017; Pekrun et al., 2023; Held et al., 2025). Furthermore, school attendance on its own does not always

ensure learning, a phenomenon referred to as the "learning crisis" (Filmer et al., 2018), particularly evident in educational systems where infrastructure and resources may be limited.

In the Indonesian educational context, Bahasa Indonesia instruction in elementary schools forms an integral component of the national curriculum, with various government programs and policies aimed at enhancing literacy. However, challenges remain in fostering reading interest among students, particularly in resource-constrained environments. Understanding the relationship between reading interest and academic achievement in this specific context is crucial for informing educational policy and practice.

The present study addresses these gaps by investigating the correlation between students' reading interest and their learning outcomes in Bahasa Indonesia among fourth-grade students at SD Inpres 5 Taipa Laga. This research is grounded in Expectancy-Value Theory, which posits that an individual's motivation to engage in a task is influenced by their expectation of success and the value they place on that task. The study's significance lies in its focus on a critical educational level and subject area that are often overlooked in similar investigations, particularly within the Indonesian elementary education context.

The central research question addressed is: Is there a significant relationship between reading interest and Bahasa Indonesia learning outcomes among fourth-grade students at SD Inpres 5 Taipa Laga? By examining this relationship, the study aims to provide empirical evidence that can inform educational strategies for enhancing student engagement and academic achievement in language learning, contributing to broader discussions about effective literacy instruction in elementary education settings.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative correlational design to investigate the relationship between reading interest and Indonesian language learning outcomes among fourth-grade students. This approach was selected to examine the strength and direction of association between reading interest as the independent variable and academic achievement in Bahasa Indonesia as the dependent variable, which aligns with the research objective of determining whether a significant relationship exists between these constructs (Ayuningtyas et al., 2025).

The research population comprised all fourth-grade students enrolled at SD Inpres 5 Taipa Laga during the 2024/2025 academic year. From this population, a sample of 16 students was selected through simple random sampling, ensuring each student had an equal probability of inclusion. While the sample size may appear limited, it represents the entire fourth-grade cohort at the institution, providing comprehensive coverage of the target population. Prior to participation, informed consent was obtained from parents or guardians, and ethical approval was secured from the relevant institutional review board to ensure compliance with research ethics standards.

Data collection utilized two primary instruments designed to measure the key variables of interest. Reading interest was assessed using a researcher-developed 13-item Likert-scale questionnaire, featuring items rated on a four-point scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree). The questionnaire evaluated three dimensions of reading interest: enjoyment of reading activities, perceived value of reading, and frequency of reading engagement. The instrument was translated into Bahasa Indonesia to ensure participant comprehension and demonstrated acceptable internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.85 in pilot testing conducted on a comparable population. Academic achievement in Indonesian language was measured using students' midterm examination scores, obtained from official academic records provided by the class teacher. These scores, ranging from 0-100, reflected students' performance across comprehensive language learning objectives within the curriculum framework.

The data collection process was conducted systematically during October 2024. The reading interest questionnaire was administered in a classroom setting under researcher supervision, with students allocated 30 minutes for completion. Clear instructions were provided regarding the study's

purpose, and participants were assured of response confidentiality to minimize social desirability bias. Academic performance data were subsequently obtained from the class teacher following questionnaire completion, ensuring temporal alignment between interest measurement and academic assessment.

Data analysis proceeded through multiple stages to address the research hypothesis comprehensively. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages, were calculated to characterize both reading interest and academic achievement distributions. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was conducted to assess data normality assumptions necessary for parametric statistical procedures. The primary analysis employed Pearson's correlation coefficient to determine the relationship strength and direction between reading interest and Indonesian language learning outcomes. Statistical significance was evaluated using an alpha level of 0.05, with all analyses performed using SPSS Statistics version 25 to ensure analytical rigor and reproducibility.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The analysis of students' reading interest levels reveals encouraging patterns in their engagement with literacy activities. As presented in Table 1, the distribution of reading interest scores demonstrates that all participants exhibited either high or very high levels of reading interest, with no students falling into moderate, low, or very low categories. Specifically, nine students (56%) achieved scores in the very high range (86-100), while seven students (44%) demonstrated high reading interest levels (71-85). This finding indicates that the majority of fourth-grade students at SD Inpres 5 Taipa Laga possess exceptionally positive attitudes toward reading activities.

Table 1. Percentage of Students' Reading Interest

Score	Criteria	Frequency	Percentage (%)
86-100	Very High	9	56
85-71	High	7	44
70-56	Moderate	0	0
55-41	Low	0	0
40-0	Very Low	0	0
Total		16	100

Complementing the positive reading interest findings, students' academic performance in Indonesian language demonstrated similarly encouraging outcomes. Table 2 illustrates that academic achievement scores mirror the reading interest distribution pattern, with all students achieving either good or excellent performance levels. Nine students (56%) attained excellent scores (86-100), while seven students (44%) achieved good performance (71-85). No students scored in the fair, poor, or failing categories, suggesting a strong overall academic performance in Indonesian language learning among the participants.

Table 2. Percentage of Students' Indonesian Language Learning Outcomes

Score	Criteria	Frequency	Percentage (%)
86-100	Excellent	9	56
85-71	Good	7	44
70-56	Fair	0	0
55-41	Poor	0	0
40-0	Fail	0	0
Total		16	100

The correlation analysis between reading interest and Indonesian language learning outcomes reveals a statistically significant relationship. Table 3 presents the cross-tabulation results, demonstrating that among students with high reading interest, six (85.7%) achieved good academic

performance while only one (14.3%) attained excellent performance. Conversely, among students with very high reading interest, eight (88.9%) achieved excellent academic outcomes while only one (11.1%) scored in the good category. The chi-square analysis yielded a p-value of 0.003, which is substantially below the predetermined significance threshold of 0.05.

Table 3. Correlation Analysis Between Students' Reading Interest and Indonesian Language Learning Outcomes

Reading Interest (X)	Learning Outcome (Y)				Total		P-value
	Good		Excellent				
	F	%	F	%	F	%	
High	6	85.7%	1	14.3%	7	100%	0.003
Very High	1	11.1%	8	88.9%	9	100%	
Total	7	43.8%	9	56.2%	16	100%	

This statistical result ($p = 0.003 < 0.05$) indicates a significant positive correlation between reading interest levels and Indonesian language learning outcomes. Consequently, the alternative hypothesis (H_a) is accepted while the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected, confirming that a meaningful relationship exists between students' reading interest and their academic achievement in Indonesian language learning.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide compelling evidence for a significant positive relationship between reading interest and Indonesian language learning outcomes among fourth-grade students. The results demonstrate that students with higher levels of reading interest consistently achieve better academic performance, with 88.9% of students exhibiting very high reading interest attaining excellent academic outcomes compared to only 14.3% of students with high reading interest. This pattern strongly supports the theoretical framework underlying this investigation and aligns with previous research emphasizing the critical role of motivation in academic achievement.

The observed relationship between reading interest and academic performance substantiates the fundamental premise that the development of reading abilities constitutes one of the most crucial academic undertakings children encounter during their elementary years. As Lonigan & Shanahan (2009) emphasize, possessing sufficient reading competencies serves as an essential foundation for textual understanding and subsequent success across academic, professional, and daily life contexts. The present findings demonstrate how this foundational skill interacts with motivational factors to produce enhanced learning outcomes, particularly when students demonstrate elevated levels of interest in literacy activities.

From a theoretical perspective, the results align with Expectancy-Value Theory, which posits that students' motivation to engage in tasks is influenced by their expectations of success and the value they assign to those activities. The theoretical framework is further supported by research indicating that the initial development of interest precedes the development of children's feelings of competence, and once both have developed, there is a reciprocal association between them (Renninger, Hidi, & Krapp, 2014; Renninger & Hidi, 2016). This reciprocal relationship helps explain the strong correlation observed in this study, as students with very high reading interest likely develop enhanced competence beliefs, which subsequently reinforce their interest in literacy activities.

The developmental trajectory of reading interest and competence becomes particularly significant when considering the self-evaluative processes that emerge during elementary education. As Ames (1992) notes, children develop awareness of their academic performance and begin comparing themselves with classmates during their engagement with school learning tasks. This evaluative process can have profound implications for subsequent academic development, as Bandura

(2002) & Stanovich (1986) suggest that insufficient success in reading acquisition often results in significant consequences for students' overall self-perception. The present study's findings, showing uniformly high levels of both reading interest and academic achievement, suggest that the participants have successfully navigated these early evaluative challenges without experiencing the negative consequences often associated with reading difficulties.

The protective mechanisms revealed in this study align with motivational theories regarding self-concept preservation. Research demonstrates that Covington (1998), Harter (1982), & Wigfield, Eccles, Schiefele, Roeser, & Davis-kean (2007) have identified how students may diminish the importance or interest they assign to activities associated with poor performance to protect their overall self-image. The absence of students with low reading interest or poor academic performance in this sample suggests successful prevention of such defensive mechanisms, indicating that the educational environment may be effectively fostering positive literacy experiences that maintain student engagement rather than triggering avoidance behaviors.

The relationship between competence perceptions and task engagement provides additional theoretical context for interpreting these findings. Deci & Ryan (1987), Eccles (1983), & Jacobs, Lanza, Osgood, Eccles, & Wigfield (2002) have established that students' perceived competence correlates with their level of interest and value attribution within specific domains. However, the complexity of this relationship is highlighted by Wigfield & Cambria (2010), who demonstrate that perceived competence alone may not guarantee engagement if students lack genuine interest or do not highly value the activity. The present study's results suggest that participants possess both high competence perceptions and genuine interest in reading, creating optimal conditions for academic success.

The empirical findings resonate strongly with established research on reading motivation and engagement. Ecalte, Magnan, & Gibert (2006) & Malloy, Marinak, Gambrell, & Mazzoni (2013) have demonstrated that interest-driven students typically dedicate more time to recreational reading, exert greater effort in literacy tasks, and consequently develop superior reading skills compared to less interested peers. This pattern is clearly evident in the current study, where students with very high reading interest predominantly achieved excellent academic outcomes, suggesting that their enhanced motivation translated into improved learning performance.

The motivational dynamics observed in this study also reflect broader theoretical frameworks regarding interest development and academic achievement. Nurmi & Aunola (2005) found in their longitudinal Finnish study that task value, conceptualized as students' interest level in particular school subjects during early academic years, reflected changes in children's competence feelings within those domains. Their research suggests that interest may serve as a driving force behind competence belief development during initial school years, a finding that aligns with the strong correlation observed between reading interest and academic achievement in the present investigation.

The emotional dimensions of learning revealed in this study correspond with contemporary research on achievement emotions and their impact on academic outcomes. Pekrun et al. (2017) & Pekrun, Marsh, Elliot, et al. (2023) have established that emotions serve as significant predictors of learning and academic achievement, with positive emotions like enjoyment facilitating enhanced performance. The consistently high levels of reading interest observed among participants suggest positive emotional engagement with literacy activities, which likely contributes to the excellent academic outcomes demonstrated. This emotional component becomes particularly crucial during elementary education, as Ahmed et al. (2010) note that emotional processes can vary over time and depend on learning situations rather than solely on individual student characteristics.

The stability of positive reading attitudes observed in this study contrasts with concerning trends identified in broader research. McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth (1995) have documented evidence that reading interest tends to decline throughout the school years, while Onatsu-Arvilommi & Nurmi (2000) & Poskiparta et al. (2003) demonstrate that students experiencing language learning difficulties often lose interest and begin avoiding literacy activities. The absence of such negative

patterns in this sample suggests that the educational context may be successfully maintaining student engagement and preventing the development of avoidance behaviors that could undermine academic progress.

The relationship between reading interest and self-concept development provides important insights into the mechanisms underlying academic success. Harackiewicz, Durik, Barron, Linnenbrink-Garcia, & Tauer (2008) and Marsh, Trautwein, Lüdtke, Köller, & Baumert (2005) have identified substantial correlations between interest development, self-concept, and reading skill progression, with some studies revealing reciprocal relationships among these constructs. Students who excel in reading typically develop positive self-perceptions as readers, engage more frequently in reading activities, and make rapid academic progress. The present study's findings suggest that participants may be benefiting from this positive developmental cycle, where high reading interest supports enhanced academic achievement, which subsequently reinforces positive self-concept and sustained engagement.

The broader implications of these findings extend to educational practice and policy considerations. The strong correlation observed between reading interest and academic achievement suggests that educational interventions focused on cultivating reading interest may yield significant benefits for student learning outcomes. This approach becomes particularly important when considering that Chapman, Tunmer, & Prochnow (2000) & Morgan, Fuchs, Compton, Cordray, & Fuchs (2008) have demonstrated that struggling readers often develop weaker reader self-concepts within months of beginning formal education, potentially creating lasting impacts on academic development.

However, several methodological and contextual limitations must be acknowledged when interpreting these findings. The small sample size ($n=16$) from a single educational institution may limit the generalizability of results to broader populations. Additionally, the cross-sectional design prevents determination of causal relationships between reading interest and academic achievement. The uniformly positive outcomes observed in this sample, while encouraging, may reflect unique characteristics of the school environment, student population, or cultural context that may not be representative of other educational settings. Future research should employ longitudinal designs with larger, more diverse samples to better understand the developmental trajectories of reading interest and its long-term impact on academic outcomes, while investigating mediating factors such as home literacy environment, teacher support, socioeconomic influences, and cultural factors that may influence the observed relationships.

CONCLUSION

This study provides empirical evidence for a significant positive relationship between reading interest and Indonesian language learning outcomes among fourth-grade students at SD Inpres 5 Taipa Laga. The findings reveal that 88.9% of students with very high reading interest achieved excellent academic performance, compared to only 14.3% of students with high reading interest, confirming a statistically significant correlation ($p = 0.003$). These results demonstrate that higher levels of reading interest are consistently associated with superior academic achievement in Indonesian language learning.

The research contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing specific evidence within the Indonesian elementary education context, extending previous findings from international studies to local educational settings. The study validates theoretical frameworks, particularly Expectancy-Value Theory, by demonstrating how intrinsic motivation and task value directly correlate with academic outcomes during critical developmental periods. Additionally, the investigation addresses a significant gap in research examining reading interest at the elementary level, where foundational literacy skills are established and long-term academic trajectories are often determined.

The implications for educational practice are substantial. The findings suggest that instructional approaches prioritizing the cultivation of reading interest alongside technical skill development may yield enhanced academic outcomes. Educators and curriculum designers should consider

implementing strategies that foster positive emotional engagement with literacy activities, create supportive reading environments, and maintain student motivation to prevent the development of avoidance behaviors that can undermine academic progress. The results also support policy initiatives that emphasize holistic literacy development rather than focusing exclusively on skill-based assessments.

Several limitations warrant acknowledgment. The small sample size ($n=16$) from a single institution limits generalizability to broader populations, while the cross-sectional design prevents determination of causal relationships between variables. The uniformly positive outcomes observed may reflect unique characteristics of the school environment that may not be representative of other contexts.

Future research should employ longitudinal designs with larger, more diverse samples to examine developmental trajectories of reading interest over time. Investigations should explore mediating factors such as home literacy environments, teacher support strategies, socioeconomic influences, and cultural factors that may moderate the relationship between reading interest and academic achievement. Additionally, experimental studies examining the effectiveness of specific interventions designed to enhance reading interest would provide valuable insights for educational practitioners seeking to optimize student learning outcomes in language education.

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