



The Relationship Between Students' Reading Interest and Critical Reading Skills Among Eighth-Grade Students at SMP Negeri 5 Padangsidimpuan

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the relationship between reading interest and critical reading skills among eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 5 Padangsidimpuan. Utilizing a quantitative research approach, a twenty-item Reading Interest questionnaire and a critical reading skills test were administered to a sample of 30 students. The data collected were analyzed using statistical methods to determine the correlation between the two variables. The findings reveal a significant relationship between reading interest and critical reading skills, indicating that students with higher reading interest tend to exhibit better critical reading abilities. This suggests that fostering a strong interest in reading can enhance students' critical reading skills, making them more adept at analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating texts. The study highlights the importance of engaging teaching methods and diverse reading materials to boost students' interest in reading. Recommendations include the implementation of interactive learning strategies and the promotion of varied literary genres to support the development of students' critical reading skills. Future research should consider a larger sample and more comprehensive assessment tools to further explore these findings.

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A. INTRODUCTION

Reading is one of the four essential language skills, along with listening, speaking, and writing. It plays a crucial role in human life by providing access to new knowledge, information, and insights. With the rapid development in various aspects of life, reading skills are increasingly important to keep up with changes and enhance one's intelligence.

A culture of reading also reflects the progress of a society or nation. Havis, Solehun, and Putra (2021) stated that reading and writing are the main instruments of the scientific tradition, driving change in a nation. An advanced society will regard reading as a vital necessity. Through reading, individuals can gain new knowledge and insights to increase their intelligence. This aligns with Farida Rahim's opinion that reading enables individuals to respond better to life's future challenges (Rahim, 2005). Additionally, reading provides an advantage over others, with one's success in life heavily influenced by their reading activity.

Understanding the importance of critical reading in reading activities is essential. Critical reading involves the ability to analyze, evaluate, and interpret the information contained in the text. It helps develop a deeper understanding, hones critical thinking skills, and enhances analytical and evaluative skills useful in everyday life (Hasanah, 2022). Critical reading also allows individuals to form diverse views, question received information, and develop healthy skepticism.

Analytical skills involve breaking down the text into smaller parts to understand them separately, analyzing elements such as arguments, evidence, opinions, and facts. Synthesis ability involves combining and organizing information from various text parts to form a more comprehensive understanding. Evaluative ability allows readers to assess the truth, reliability, and quality of the information presented. This helps readers develop a more critical understanding, question assumptions, and identify biases or weaknesses in the text.

Students who practice critical reading gain various benefits. They can delve deeper for information, uncover the truth behind the writing, and understand the reasoning behind the writer's opinion. Additionally, critical reading skills are essential for academic success, as students are expected to think critically in the learning process.

Critical reading is also beneficial in everyday life. In the context of news, it helps students understand conveyed information, identify trends or biases in news reports, and develop a more objective and informed understanding. Therefore, critical reading should be a primary activity for students, as it hones academic skills, scientific thinking, systematic thinking, decision-making, and fosters a more open attitude.

Several factors affect a person's critical reading skills, including language skills, knowledge and experience, motivation and interest, critical thinking skills, environment and practice, and the availability of quality reading materials. Johnson and Pearson (1984) stated that these factors could be divided into internal (linguistic ability, interest, motivation) and external (reading elements and environment).

Interest in reading, characterized by pleasure, satisfaction, and active participation without coercion, is related to psychological aspects such as personal feelings, objects, and activities. Interest in reading is a person's desire to pay attention, enjoy, and make serious efforts to engage in reading activities (Rahim, 2008). A strong interest in reading manifests in the willingness to obtain and read material without external pressure.

Several factors influence interest in reading. Frymeir (in Rahim, 2008) identified factors such as previous experiences, self-conception, values, meaningful subjects, level of pressure, and material complexity. Ruslan and Wibayanti (2019) stated that reading interest is influenced by the student's condition, family, culture, and school situation.

According to the "World's Most Literate Nations Ranked" study by Central Connecticut State University in 2016, Indonesia ranked 60th out of 61 countries with low literacy levels, whereas Finland topped the list with almost 100% literacy. This indicates that Indonesia needs to catch up with Singapore and Malaysia regarding reading interests (Devega, in Pitoyo, 2020). Furthermore, research by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) shows that Indonesia's Human Development Index (HDI) in education is relatively low at 14.6%, compared to Malaysia's 28%. Based on the above theory and issues, the author is interested in conducting specific research in Padangsidempuan City as the title.

B. LITERATUR REVIEW

1. Students' Reading Interest

Reading interest is a strong, deep concern accompanied by pleasure in reading activities, motivating individuals to read voluntarily. Kurniawati (2015) describes it as an attraction to understanding written symbols driven by personal desire. Wahadaniah (in Kosasi, 2012) defines it as a positive attitude and interest in reading activities. Rachmawati (2008) states that reading interest is a strong desire accompanied by efforts to read. Thus, reading interest is a willingness to read without external force, encompassing various types of written material.

2. Critical Reading

Critical reading involves constructing meaning from text through critical thinking. It goes beyond basic comprehension, requiring active engagement, questioning, and evaluating the text. Kurland (2000) defines it as active, careful, reflective, and analytic reading. Critical reading fosters interaction between the reader and author, promoting deeper understanding and critical thinking (Diman et al., 2020). It is considered the highest level of reading comprehension, activating readers' intellectual and affective faculties to evaluate the author's positions (Femilia, 2018; Quang & Tran, 2017).

Arifin's research shows significant differences in critical reading skills between experimental and non-experimental students, emphasizing the importance of critical reading for developing critical thinking and writing skills (Arifin, 2020; Par, 2018; Khonamri & Karimabadi, 2015). Critical reading requires understanding beyond common approaches, involving critical engagement with the text and using critical thinking to evaluate and judge its content (Sari et al., 2012; Nasrollahi et al., 2015).

3. Related Studies

Nasrollahi, Krishnasamy, and Noor (2015) found that critical reading strategies improve students' critical thinking, reading, and higher-order thinking skills. Rosdiana (2016) showed that critical reading positively influences students' critical writing abilities. Mokoginta (2017) noted that critical reading strategies might not significantly improve writing skills due to other factors like implementation quality. These studies highlight the impact of critical reading on students' reading interest, critical thinking, and writing skills, providing a basis for further research.

C. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses quantitative methods, which are based on the philosophy of positivism. Quantitative methods are used to examine specific populations or samples by collecting data with research instruments and analyzing it statistically (S. Arikunto, 2006). The aim is to describe and test established hypotheses. This study employs a correlational type of quantitative method to determine the relationship between the independent variables (influencing factors) and the dependent variable (affected factor). Statistical analysis is used to measure and describe the relationship between these variables.

The population consists of individuals with specific characteristics and qualities that are the focus of the research (S. dan S. Arikunto, 2006). In this study, the population includes all eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 5 Padangsidempuan, totaling 237 students across 8 classes. Data from all these students will be collected to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses.

A sample is a subset of the population selected using specific methods. The sampling technique used in this study is purposive sampling, where the sample is determined based on specific goals and assessment. The writer chose class VIII-1, consisting of 30 students, as the sample to save time in data collection.

An instrument is a tool used to collect data or information useful for answering research problems. The quantitative data collected were processed using statistical formulas, either manually or with the help of a computer. A questionnaire was designed to measure students' reading interest, and a critical reading skills test with multiple-choice questions was used to assess critical reading skills. Responses were quantified using the following scoring criteria: Always (4 points); Often (3 points); Sometimes (2 points); Never (1 point).

Table 1
 Reading Interest Questionnaire Instrument Grid

No	Indicator	Grille
1	Enjoyment of reading	Passion for reading
2	Need for reading	Awareness as a student to read, Awareness of the importance of books
3	Interest in reading	Interest in reading books, Interest in reading books

No	Indicator	Grille
4	Desire to read books	Utilizing time to read books
5	Desire to find book reading material	Choosing a reading book, Desire to find sources of readin

Data analysis is a crucial step in research, ensuring accurate conclusions. The Product Moment Correlation formula is used to determine the relationship between reading interest and students' critical reading skills. The condition for hypothesis testing is that if the calculated r is smaller than the table value, H_0 (null hypothesis) is accepted, and H_a (alternative hypothesis) is rejected. Conversely, if r count is greater than r table, H_a is accepted.

D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. The Result of Research

The sample consisted of 30 respondents. The steps carried out in this chapter are presented below.

a. The Result of Reading Interest Questionnaire

A twenty-item Reading Interest questionnaire was used to investigate the relationship between Reading Interest and critical reading skills. Higher scores indicate higher reading interest. The highest score was 75, and the lowest was 48. The average score was 63.83, with a standard deviation of 7.01.

Table 2
 Hypothetical Data Categorization of
 Student Reading Interest Questionnaire Results

Category	Criteria	Frequency	Percent
Low	< 56	5	16.67
Moderate	57 - 71	13	43.33
High	> 72	12	40.00
Total		30	100.00

The results show that 12 students have high reading interest, 13 have moderate, and 5 have low reading interest.

b. The Result of Critical Reading Skills Test

A multiple-choice test was given to assess students' critical reading skills. The highest score was 100, and the lowest was 70. The average score was 84, with a standard deviation of 8.55.

Table 3
 Hypothetical Data Categorization of
 Student Reading Interest Questionnaire Results

Category	Criteria	Frequency	Percent
Low	< 79	3	10.00
Moderate	80 - 90	23	76.67
High	> 91	4	13.33
Total		30	100.00

The results show that 4 students have high critical reading skills, 23 have moderate, and 3 have low critical reading skills.

c. The Test of Prerequisite Analysis

Data analysis included linearity and normality tests using SPSS 26.00.

1) Linearity Test

The linearity test determined if the relationship between variables was linear. The significance value (0.853) was greater than 0.05, indicating a significant linear relationship between reading interest and critical reading skills.

2) Normality Test

The normality test determined if the sample was normally distributed. The significance value (0.200) was greater than 0.05, indicating normal distribution.

d. Hypothesis Testing

Correlation analysis using the Pearson formula showed a significant relationship between reading interest and critical reading skills, with a significance value of 0.000 (less than 0.05).

Table 4
 Hypothesis Testing

Correlations	Reading Interest (X)	Reading Critical (Y)
Reading Interest (X)	1	.621**
Sig. (2-tailed)		.000

N	30	30
Reading Critical (Y)	.621**	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
N	30	30
Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).		

The results confirm a significant correlation between reading interest and critical reading skills.

2. The Discussion

The study aimed to determine the relationship between reading interest and critical reading skills in eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 5 Padangsidempuan. The Pearson correlation analysis showed a significant relationship, with higher reading interest correlating with better critical reading skills. This finding aligns with previous research (Sariyem, 2016; Yuono, 2019; Riana, 2021; Lutvianti, 2018) highlighting the importance of reading interest in developing critical reading skills.

The study suggests that fostering reading interest can enhance students' critical reading skills. Teachers and educators should implement strategies to increase reading interest, such as group discussions, engaging reading materials, and diverse literature genres. However, the study's limitations include its focus on a single class and the use of multiple-choice tests, which may not fully reflect critical reading skills. Future research should involve larger samples and comprehensive assessments.

Overall, the study underscores the importance of reading interest in developing critical reading skills, contributing to educational strategies and literature on this topic.

E. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study in the previous chapter, the following conclusions can be drawn. The research on the correlation between reading interest and critical reading skills in class VIII-1 students at SMP Negeri 5 Padangsidempuan found a significant relationship between these variables. Students with a high interest in reading tend to have better critical reading skills, as they are more accustomed to reading a variety of materials and analyzing them effectively. Therefore, the research hypothesis is accepted. This study provides a deeper understanding of the importance of reading interest in developing students' critical reading skills. The findings align with previous

studies, emphasizing that reading interest plays a crucial role in enhancing critical reading skills. Consequently, efforts to increase students' reading interest are essential in supporting the development of their critical reading skills.

Based on the results of this study, several suggestions can be made. Teachers and educators should further encourage and facilitate students' interest in reading. Engaging learning activities and varied reading materials can help increase students' reading interest. Effective learning strategies, such as involving students in group discussions, providing interesting reading materials, and introducing diverse genres of literature, are recommended to enhance students' reading interest and critical reading skills. Future research on students' reading interests and critical reading skills should be conducted on a wider population using a more comprehensive assessment approach. This will provide a broader understanding of the factors influencing students' critical reading skills and effective strategies to improve them. By optimizing students' interest in reading and improving their critical reading skills, students are expected to become more critical, intelligent, and better equipped to handle various information and challenges in their lives.

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