

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN READING INTEREST AND READING LITERACY IN INDONESIAN FOLK TALES- BASED ENGLISH LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

Reading interest is an important affective factor influencing students' reading literacy, yet evidence in Indonesian EFL contexts using local culture-based materials remains limited. This study examined students' reading interest, English reading literacy, and the relationship between the two following Indonesian Folk Tales-based English learning. A quantitative correlational design was employed with 30 eighth-grade students of SMP Negeri 4 Angkola Timur selected through total sampling. Data were collected using a 22-item Reading Interest Questionnaire and a 35-item English Reading Literacy Test. Descriptive statistics, the Shapiro–Wilk normality test, and Pearson Product-Moment correlation were used for data analysis. The findings showed that students' reading interest was at a moderate-to-high level ($M = 72.79\%$), while their English reading literacy was at a moderate level ($M = 68.74\%$). Both variables were normally distributed ($p > .05$). Pearson correlation analysis revealed a significant moderate positive relationship between reading interest and English reading literacy ($r = 0.497$, $p = 0.005$), indicating that students with higher reading interest tended to achieve better reading literacy. These findings suggest that Indonesian Folk Tales-based learning can foster reading interest and support English reading literacy development. The study highlights the value of culturally relevant reading materials in promoting EFL literacy in Indonesian junior high schools.

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A. INTRODUCTION

Reading literacy is a fundamental competence that determines students' success in accessing, understanding, and evaluating information, including within the context



of learning English as a foreign language. Within the PISA framework, reading literacy is defined as the capacity to understand, use, evaluate, reflect on, and engage with texts in order to achieve one's goals, develop knowledge, and participate in society (OECD, 2019a). This definition underscores that reading literacy is not merely the ability to recognize words, but a complex cognitive process that does not occur in a vacuum; rather, it is shaped by affective factors such as motivation and reading interest (Liu et al., 2022).

In Indonesia, secondary students' reading literacy achievement remains a matter of concern, particularly with respect to reading English texts, which for most students constitutes a foreign language with limited exposure. One major challenge in teaching English reading at the junior high school level is students' low interest in reading foreign-language texts, a problem often compounded by reading materials that lack cultural and contextual relevance to students' lives (Nasir et al., 2019). When the texts used feel foreign both linguistically and culturally, students tend to lose the motivation to engage deeply with them.

Indonesian folk tales offer a promising solution to this issue. As part of local wisdom that students have been familiar with since early childhood, folk tales possess familiar narrative structures, meaningful moral messages, and cultural contexts close to students' lived experience (Upa & Mangalik, 2018). When such folk tales are translated into English and used as reading materials, students gain the opportunity to learn the target language through background knowledge schemata they already possess, consistent with schema theory, which emphasizes the importance of alignment between a reader's schemata and the content of a text in the comprehension process (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983). A number of studies have shown that the use of local folk tales, whether from Sulawesi, Kalimantan, or other regions, generally contributes positively to EFL students' reading comprehension (Nurmia et al., 2016; Rinardi et al., 2019; Suryani et al., 2021).

However, prior research on folk tales in English language teaching has largely focused on their effectiveness as a treatment for improving reading comprehension, using pre-test and post-test or descriptive designs (Nasir et al., 2019; Upa & Mangalik, 2018; Wijanarko, 2021). These studies are generally causal-experimental or single-group descriptive in nature, while the relationship between reading interest as an affective variable and reading literacy as a cognitive outcome, measured after students have experienced folk tale-based learning, has not been widely explored specifically within the EFL context at the junior high school level in Indonesia.

This research gap becomes increasingly relevant given that findings from first-language literacy contexts and large-scale studies such as PISA consistently show that reading interest correlates positively with reading literacy achievement (Liu et al., 2022), yet this pattern of relationship has not been extensively tested specifically

among students learning to read English through locally rooted cultural materials. In other words, it remains an open question whether the generally observed relationship between reading interest and reading literacy also holds consistently when the instructional materials are specifically designed around students' own local culture.

Based on the foregoing, this study aims to: (1) identify the level of eighth-grade students' reading interest after participating in Indonesian Folk Tales-based English learning; (2) measure students' English reading literacy following that instruction; and (3) examine the relationship between students' reading interest and their English reading literacy. This study is expected to contribute empirical evidence on the role of reading interest within culturally grounded reading instruction, while also offering practical considerations for teachers in designing English reading materials that are contextual and meaningful for students.

B. LITERATUR REVIEW

2.1 Reading Interest as an Affective Factor in Reading

Reading interest is understood as an individual's affective tendency to engage voluntarily and repeatedly in reading activities, encompassing dimensions such as enjoyment of reading, reading frequency, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, preference for particular types of texts, and reading habits (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) emphasize that reading engagement results from the interaction of motivation, cognitive strategies, and conceptual knowledge, with motivation, including interest, serving as the primary driver determining how deeply a reader engages with a text. Krashen (2004), through the concept of extensive reading, further argues that reading enjoyable, freely chosen material (free voluntary reading) contributes significantly to language development, including second or foreign language competence, because the language exposure that occurs is natural and non-pressured.

In the context of learning English as a foreign language, reading interest arguably plays an even more crucial role than in first-language reading instruction, since students' limited linguistic competence can become an additional barrier that further undermines motivation if reading materials are not designed to be engaging and relevant (Amrinah & Kamilah, 2016).

2.2 Reading Literacy and Its Assessment Framework

Reading literacy within the PISA 2018 framework is operationalized through three main cognitive processes: locating information, understanding, and evaluating and reflecting on texts (OECD, 2019a, 2019b). These three processes align with the reading literacy indicators commonly used in Indonesian English education research, namely identifying main ideas, locating explicit information, making inferences, understanding vocabulary in context, and evaluating the message of a

text. Large-scale studies based on PISA data indicate that, among individual-level factors, reading interest and reading metacognition are the strongest predictors of reading literacy, even surpassing several school-level factors (Liu et al., 2022).

2.3 Folk Tales as English Reading Instructional Material

The use of folk tales as English reading material has been widely studied within the Indonesian education context. Upa and Mangalik (2018) found that using Sulawesi folk tales in reading instruction effectively improved students' reading comprehension through a pre-test and post-test design. Nurmia et al. (2016) and Ridwan et al. (2014) reported similar results using local legends from Kalimantan and the Dayak Pesaguan community as reading materials based on Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL). Meanwhile, Rinardi et al. (2019) developed a storybook based on Kalimantan legends as supplementary reading material for junior high school students, and Wijanarko (2021) reconstructed Indonesian folk tales in English translation to improve the reading skills of primary school students.

When compared, most of these studies position folk tales as a treatment variable within quasi-experimental designs, with the primary focus on comparing scores before and after the intervention (Nasir et al., 2019; Upa & Mangalik, 2018). Suryani et al. (2021), through a systematic literature review, similarly confirm that the majority of studies on folklore in reading instruction are oriented toward the effectiveness of improving reading ability, rather than mapping the relationship between affective and cognitive variables after instruction has taken place. A similar pattern is evident in the work of Nurfadhilah et al. (2017), who focused on developing comic materials based on local folklore, where success was measured purely by gains in comprehension scores rather than by the relationship between reading interest and literacy achievement following instruction.

In contrast to this body of research, the present study is not intended to test the effectiveness of folk tales as a treatment, but rather to capture the relationship between reading interest and English reading literacy among students after they have experienced Indonesian Folk Tales-based learning. This correlational approach complements the existing literature, which is predominantly experimental or single-group descriptive, by positioning reading interest not as a learning outcome, but as a predictor variable in relation to reading literacy within the context of culturally grounded instruction.

2.4 Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

Based on the theoretical and empirical review above, it is assumed that students with higher reading interest in English-language folk tale texts will demonstrate deeper reading engagement, and consequently may achieve higher reading literacy scores. This relationship is tested through the following hypotheses:

H₀: There is no significant relationship between reading interest and English reading literacy after the implementation of Indonesian Folk Tales-based learning.

H₁: There is a significant positive relationship between reading interest and English reading literacy after the implementation of Indonesian Folk Tales-based learning.

C. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach using a correlational design. The research was not intended to test the effectiveness of an instructional treatment, but rather to identify whether a relationship exists between two variables, namely reading interest (independent variable/X) and English reading literacy (dependent variable/Y), measured after students had experienced Indonesian Folk Tales-based English learning (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The population of this study comprised all eighth-grade students of SMP Negeri 4 Angkola Timur. The sample consisted of 30 students determined through a total sampling technique, given the relatively limited size of the population, such that all eligible members of the population were included as research subjects.

Data collection was carried out in four stages. First, students participated in a series of Indonesian Folk Tales-based English learning sessions using folk tales translated into English. Second, after completing the instructional sessions, students filled out the Reading Interest Questionnaire. Third, students took the English Reading Literacy Test. Fourth, scores from both instruments were statistically analyzed to answer the research questions.

The first instrument was a Reading Interest Questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree), consisting of 22 items covering five indicators: (a) enjoyment of reading, (b) reading frequency, (c) reading motivation, (d) preference for English texts, and (e) reading habits. The second instrument was an English Reading Literacy Test consisting of 35 multiple-choice items based on Indonesian folk tale texts translated into English, covering five indicators: (a) identifying main ideas, (b) locating explicit information, (c) making inferences, (d) understanding vocabulary in context, and (e) evaluating the message of the text, in line with the PISA reading literacy framework (OECD, 2019a).

Data were analyzed in three stages. First, descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum scores) were computed to provide a general overview of both variables. Second, assumption tests were conducted, including a normality test using the Shapiro-Wilk test (chosen due to the relatively small sample size of $n = 30$) and a linearity test of the relationship between variables. Third, hypothesis testing was conducted using the Pearson Product-Moment correlation technique when the data were normally distributed, or the Spearman Rank correlation as an alternative when the normality assumption was not met (Field,

2013). All analyses were conducted at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$.

D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Level of Students' Reading Interest

Descriptive analysis showed that students' reading interest scores (converted to a percentage scale of the maximum total score) had a mean of 72.79% with a standard deviation of 7.92, a minimum score of 54.55%, a maximum score of 87.27%, and a median of 74.09% (see Table 1). In raw score terms (range 22-110), students' mean reading interest score was 80.07 (SD = 8.71).

Table 1.

Descriptive Statistics of Reading Interest and Reading Literacy

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Median
Reading Interest (%)	30	72.79	7.92	54.55	87.27	74.09
Reading Literacy (%)	30	68.74	11.26	51.4	87.1	68.45

Based on a three-level categorization (low < 60%, moderate 60-80%, high > 80%), the majority of students (24 out of 30) fell into the moderate reading interest category, while 4 students were in the high category and 2 students in the low category (Table 2 and Figure 1). This pattern indicates that Indonesian Folk Tales-based learning tends to foster a fairly good level of reading interest, although it does not yet fully drive the majority of students to reach the high reading interest category.

Table 2.

Frequency Distribution of Reading Interest and Reading Literacy Categories

Category	Score Range	Reading Interest (f)	Reading Literacy (f)
Low	< 60%	2	6
Moderate	60% - 80%	24	18
High	> 80%	4	6

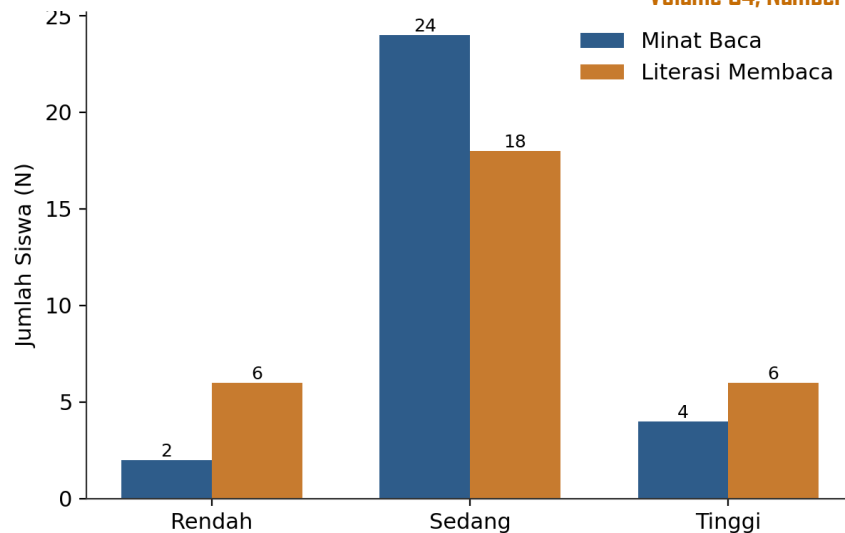


Figure 1.

Distribution of Reading Interest and Reading Literacy Categories

This finding is consistent with Guthrie and Wigfield's (2000) view that reading interest develops optimally when readers find personal and cultural relevance in the texts they read. Indonesian folk tales, as material that students have culturally been familiar with since childhood, appear to function as a schema bridge that helps students connect affectively with English-language texts, consistent with the schema theory proposed by Carrell and Eisterhold (1983).

4.2 Level of Students' English Reading Literacy

Students' English reading literacy scores showed a mean of 68.74% (SD = 11.26), with a lowest score of 51.4% and a highest score of 87.1% (Table 1). In raw scores out of 35 items, students' mean number of correct answers was 24 (SD = 3.93). Based on the same categorization, 18 students fell into the moderate category, 6 students into the high category, and 6 students into the low category (Table 2 and Figure 1).

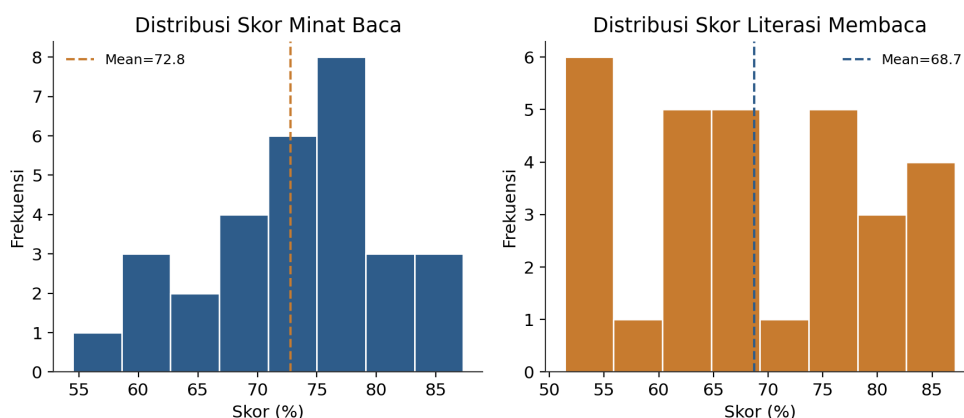


Figure 2.

Distribution of Students' Reading Interest and Reading Literacy Scores

The wider spread of reading literacy scores compared to reading interest scores

(a larger SD for reading literacy) indicates greater heterogeneity in students' reading ability. This pattern is consistent with findings from various folklore-based reading studies, showing that although folk tale materials can foster interest relatively evenly, reading literacy achievement remains influenced by other factors, such as vocabulary mastery and reading strategies, which vary considerably among students (Nasir et al., 2019; Suryani et al., 2021).

4.3 Assumption Tests: Normality and Linearity

The results of the Shapiro-Wilk normality test showed that the reading interest data were normally distributed ($W = 0.967$, $p = 0.469$; $p > .05$), as were the reading literacy data ($W = 0.95$, $p = 0.172$; $p > .05$), meaning the normality assumption was satisfied for both variables (Table 3). Inspection of the scatter plot in Figure 3 also showed a pattern of points tending to follow a straight line, indicating that the linearity assumption for the relationship between reading interest and reading literacy was met.

Table 3.
Shapiro-Wilk Normality Test Results

Variable	W Statistic	df	Sig. (p)	Note
Reading Interest	0.967	30	0.469	Normal
Reading Literacy	0.95	30	0.172	Normal

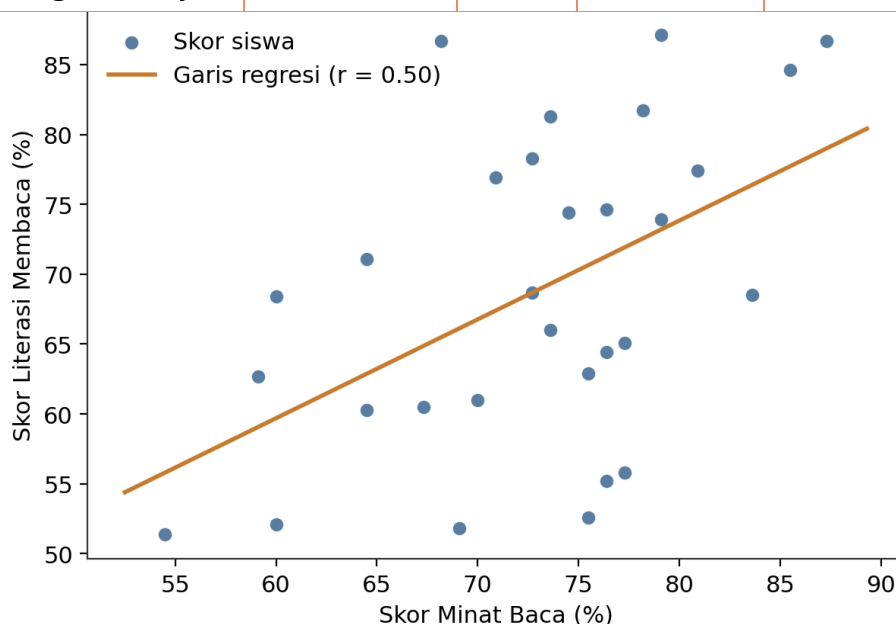


Figure 3.
Scatter Plot of the Relationship between Reading Interest and English Reading Literacy

4.4 Hypothesis Testing: The Relationship between Reading Interest and Reading Literacy

Since both variables were normally distributed, hypothesis testing was conducted using the Pearson Product-Moment correlation. The analysis revealed a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.497$ with a significance value of $p = 0.00516$ ($p < .01$), as shown in Table 4. The coefficient of determination (r^2) of 0.247 indicates that reading interest accounts for approximately 25% of the variance in students' reading literacy scores, while the remainder is explained by other factors outside the model, such as reading strategies, vocabulary mastery, and teacher support.

Table 4.

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Test Results

Variable Pair	N	Pearson r	Sig. (p)	Decision
Reading Interest - Reading Literacy	30	0.497	0.00516	H ₀ rejected

With a significance value of $p < .05$, the null hypothesis (H_0), which states that there is no significant relationship between reading interest and reading literacy, is rejected, while the alternative hypothesis (H_1), which states that there is a significant positive relationship, is accepted. The strength of the relationship is classified as moderate, indicating that the higher students' reading interest in English-language folk tale texts, the higher their tendency toward achieving greater reading literacy, although this relationship is not deterministic.

4.5 Discussion and Research Contribution

The finding that reading interest correlates significantly and positively with reading literacy reinforces the results of Liu et al. (2022), who used large-scale PISA data and found that reading interest is one of the strongest individual-level predictors of reading literacy, second only to reading metacognition. However, the strength of the correlation in this study is classified as moderate rather than strong, suggesting that within the context of folk tale-based learning, reading interest plays an important role but is not the sole determinant of students' English reading literacy.

The main contribution of this study lies in positioning Indonesian folk tales not merely as a treatment variable, as in the studies by Upa and Mangalik (2018) and Nasir et al. (2019), but as an instructional context underlying the relationship between two affective and cognitive variables. This study thus complements the existing map of folklore-based ELT literature, which has largely been dominated by experimental or single-group descriptive designs, by offering a correlational perspective suggesting that the effect of folk tale-based instruction on reading literacy likely operates through, or at least is associated with, the strengthening of

students' reading interest.

Another important insight is the proportion of students in the moderate reading interest category, which dominates the sample (24 out of 30 students), while only a small proportion reach the high category. This pattern suggests that a single exposure to folk tale-based learning may not be sufficient to produce a significant leap in reading interest, and that a more structured, sustained local-wisdom-based reading program is needed for its impact on reading literacy to be more optimal, consistent with Krashen's (2004) concept of extensive reading, which emphasizes the importance of continuous rather than one-time reading exposure.

Practically, this finding suggests that English teachers at the junior high school level may consider integrating Indonesian folk tales more systematically into the reading curriculum, not merely as a thematic supplement, but as a sustained strategy for fostering reading interest, which in turn has the potential to contribute to improvements in students' English reading literacy. Nevertheless, given the correlational nature of this study, causal claims between reading interest and reading literacy cannot be established, and third variables such as teacher support and parental involvement still need to be considered when interpreting the results (Liu et al., 2022).

E. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to identify the level of eighth-grade students' reading interest and English reading literacy, and to examine the relationship between the two after the implementation of Indonesian Folk Tales-based learning. Based on the analysis, three conclusions can be drawn. First, students' level of reading interest after folk tale-based learning falls into the moderate-to-high category ($M = 72.79\%$). Second, students' English reading literacy falls into the moderate category ($M = 68.74\%$). Third, there is a significant positive relationship between reading interest and English reading literacy ($r = 0.497$, $p < .01$), leading to the rejection of H_0 and acceptance of H_1 .

These findings affirm that strengthening reading interest through culturally relevant material, such as Indonesian folk tales, has the potential to contribute to students' English reading literacy, although this relationship is correlational and should not be interpreted as causal. Future research is recommended to expand the sample across multiple schools, consider experimental or mixed-methods designs to explore the underlying mechanism of the relationship between the two variables in greater depth, and examine moderating variables such as teacher support and parental involvement in fostering students' reading interest.

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