

The Relationship Between Reading Interest and The Ability to Understand Narrative Texts Among Fourth-Grade Elementary School Students

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine the relationship between reading interest and the ability to comprehend narrative texts among fourth-grade students at SD Negeri 06 Kelapa Tujuh. The study was motivated by the persistently low literacy achievement of elementary school students in Indonesia, particularly following the 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results, which indicated that students' reading literacy performance remained below expectations. Reading interest is considered one of the factors that may influence students' text comprehension ability; therefore, investigating the relationship between these two variables is important. This study employed a quantitative approach with a correlational design involving 57 students selected through a total sampling technique. Data were collected using a 20-item reading interest questionnaire and a 20-item narrative text comprehension test and were analyzed using Spearman's Rho correlation test. The findings revealed a correlation coefficient of 0.483 with a significance level of $p < 0.01$ ($N = 57$), indicating a positive, statistically significant, and moderate relationship between reading interest and narrative text comprehension ability. Reading interest contributed 23.3% to students' narrative text comprehension ability, while the remaining 76.7% was explained by other factors beyond the scope of this study. These findings suggest that fostering students' reading interest should become a key focus of literacy enhancement efforts in elementary schools to improve their reading comprehension skills.

Keywords: Reading Interest, Narrative Text Comprehension, Reading Literacy, Elementary School

INTRODUCTION

The ability to read and comprehend texts is a crucial foundation for students' learning activities in elementary school (Khairunnisa et al., 2025). Students who can understand texts well will find it easier to absorb information from various subjects, making this skill a key prerequisite for overall academic success (Subandiyah, 2015). However, international data indicate that Indonesian students' literacy skills are at an alarming level.

The official results of the 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), show that Indonesian students achieved a reading literacy score of approximately 359 points. This score is substantially below the OECD member countries' average of 476 points. Indonesia also ranked among the lowest-performing countries out of the 81 participating countries (Pisa, 2022). These findings indicate that literacy challenges are not confined to the secondary education level but are likely to have originated during elementary education. Unfortunately, comparative data at the elementary school level remain limited because Indonesia has not participated in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) since 2011 (Mullis et al., 2023). This lack of

comparative data underscores the importance of mapping students' literacy skills through the Minimum Competency Assessment, enabling the reading abilities of elementary school students to be continuously monitored and evaluated.

At the national level, the 2023 Computer-Based National Assessment (ANBK) conducted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Pendidikan, 2022) indicates that the average reading literacy achievement of elementary school students has not yet reached the expected level. Many students are only able to read at a basic level but are not yet able to make inferences, interpret, or evaluate the texts they read (Andina et al., 2026). The primary text type used in Indonesian language instruction in fourth grade is the narrative text a text that chronologically recounts an event with structured elements of characters, setting, plot, and moral (Agustin & Citrawati, 2024).

Reading comprehension is an active cognitive process in which readers construct meaning by integrating their prior knowledge with the information presented in a text (Anderson & Pearson, 1984, as cited in Kristiantari et al., 2026). In the context of narrative texts, comprehension extends beyond identifying explicit information to include making inferences, recognizing relationships between events, interpreting characters' traits, and understanding the moral messages conveyed in the story (Adi & Harsono, 2024; Nurgiyantoro, 2010). For fourth-grade elementary school students, these skills are expected to reach the levels of understanding and analyzing according to Bloom's taxonomy, enabling students to explain the content of a text while identifying and relating its essential narrative elements (Faridah, 2024)

In the learning process, the ability to comprehend narrative texts does not develop automatically (Rahman & Khoiri, 2026). One factor that is believed to contribute to this ability is reading interest. Reading interest refers to an individual's tendency to engage in reading activities voluntarily, driven by intrinsic motivation rather than external pressure or coercion (Zelpamailiani, 2020). It is reflected in regular reading habits, enjoyment of reading activities, and awareness of the benefits of reading for knowledge development (Sari, 2020). The development of reading interest is influenced by various factors, including the family environment, the availability of reading materials, and reading habits established from an early age (Hasan & Khosiah, 2025). In elementary school settings, teachers play a crucial role in fostering students' reading interest through activities such as read-aloud sessions, the provision of classroom reading corners, and the use of engaging and age-appropriate reading materials, all of which have been shown to enhance students' reading interest (Syifa & Santoso, 2025; Ramadhani et al., 2025; Marlina et al., 2026)

Various previous studies have examined the relationship between reading interest and text comprehension skills among elementary school students. Ma'sita et al. (2025) found that fourth-grade students at SD Inpres 1 Birobuli struggled to identify the main idea of narrative texts due to their low critical thinking skills, reading interest, and vocabulary mastery, compounded by teachers' monotonous teaching methods. Similarly, Resitaningrum & Saptono (2024) found that a lack of reading interest among fourth-grade students at Bintaran Elementary School led to weak reading comprehension; however, this situation could be improved by integrating children's literature into instruction, which was shown to enhance students' interest and comprehension.

On the other hand, quantitative studies have shown inconsistent results regarding the strength of this relationship. Kurniawati (2023) found a very strong correlation ($r = 0.963$) between reading interest, verbal-linguistic intelligence, and thematic learning outcomes among 95 fourth-grade students. In contrast, Windi et al. (2025) studying 79 fourth-grade students at SDN 231 Palembang, found no significant relationship between reading interest and reading comprehension ($r = 0.035 < \text{table } r = 0.22$), which is thought to be influenced by other factors such as reading strategies and the family environment.

Previous studies have shown inconsistent findings regarding the relationship between reading interest and reading comprehension ability. While some studies have reported a very strong relationship, others have found only a weak or statistically insignificant association. These inconsistencies suggest that the influence of reading interest may vary depending on the characteristics of the learning environment and the school context. Furthermore, most previous studies have been conducted in urban schools with relatively adequate literacy facilities and resources. Empirical evidence from schools located in semi-urban areas, including SD Negeri 06 Kelapa Tujuh in North Lampung Regency, remains limited. Therefore, this study was conducted to expand the empirical evidence on the relationship between reading interest and narrative text comprehension ability within the context of elementary schools in semi-urban areas.

Previous studies examining the relationship between reading interest and students' academic achievement have reported mixed findings, limiting the generalizability of the results across different educational contexts. Most of these studies were conducted in urban schools with relatively well-developed literacy facilities, such as libraries and readily accessible learning resources. In contrast, empirical evidence from schools located in semi-urban areas remains limited, including SD Negeri 06 Kelapa Tujuh in North Lampung Regency, Lampung Province. Differences in learning environments may influence students' reading habits and their ability to comprehend written texts. Therefore, research in this context is needed to broaden the empirical evidence on the relationship between reading interest and narrative text comprehension while providing findings that better reflect the conditions of elementary schools in regional areas.

Based on this background, this study was conducted to determine whether there is a significant relationship between reading interest and the ability to comprehend narrative texts among fourth-grade students at SDN 06 Kelapa Tujuh. It is hoped that the findings of this study will provide practical benefits for teachers, school principals, and local education policymakers in developing more targeted literacy programs.

METHOD

Type and Research Design

This study was designed using a quantitative approach through a correlational design. This design was chosen because it focuses on identifying the existence and strength of relationships between variables without involving any treatment or intervention on the research subjects (Selviana et al., 2024). The variables examined in this study consist of reading interest as the independent variable (X) and the ability to comprehend narrative texts as the dependent variable (Y).

Population and Sample

The study population consisted of all 57 fourth-grade students at SDN 06 Kelapa Tujuh, divided into two classes. Since the total population was relatively small and could be fully reached, the researcher employed total sampling, or a census, which involves selecting all members of the population as research respondents (Suriani & Jailani, 2023). Using this method, the study did not involve a random sampling process because all 57 fourth-grade students participated as respondents.

Data Collection Techniques

Research data were collected using two main instruments. The first instrument was a reading interest questionnaire consisting of 20 statements using a 1-to-4 Likert scale, developed based on reading interest indicators from the theory (Sari, 2020) which included reading frequency, enjoyment of reading, and awareness of the benefits of reading. The second instrument was a test of narrative text comprehension consisting of 20 multiple-choice questions that measured students' mastery of the story's characters, setting,

plot, and moral. The validity of both instruments was tested using the Product-Moment correlation formula; items with a significance level below 0.05 were deemed valid. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha (0.907) for the questionnaire and the Kuder-Richardson Coefficient (0.953) for the test, both tested on 30 fourth-grade students outside the study sample who shared comparable characteristics. All questionnaire items and test questions were deemed valid and reliable, making them suitable for use in obtaining scientifically sound data (Zayrin et al., 2025).

Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis phase of this study began with descriptive statistical tests to examine the general profile of reading interest scores and narrative text comprehension ability, including the mean, median, mode, and standard deviation. Next, a normality test was conducted using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test to determine whether the data from the two variables were normally distributed. The test results indicated that the p-values for both variables were below 0.05, meaning the data were not normally distributed. Since the assumption of normality was not met, the relationship between variables X and Y was assessed using Spearman's Rho correlation test, as this method is suitable for ordinal data or data that are not normally distributed. The strength of the relationship between the variables was interpreted using the guidelines from (Guilford, 1950), which classifies correlation coefficients into five categories: very weak (0.00–0.19), weak (0.20–0.39), moderate (0.40–0.59), strong (0.60–0.79), and very strong (0.80–1.00). All data processing in this study was performed using SPSS version 26

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

This section presents the results of the data analysis obtained from 57 fourth-grade students at SD Negeri 06 Kelapa Tujuh. The analyses were conducted to address the research objective of examining the relationship between reading interest and narrative text comprehension ability. The results are presented systematically, beginning with descriptive statistical analysis to provide an overview of the characteristics of each research variable. This is followed by a normality test to determine the appropriate statistical analysis technique. Based on the normality test results, the relationship between the two variables was subsequently analyzed using Spearman's Rho correlation test to determine the direction, strength, and statistical significance of the relationship.

Descriptive statistical analysis was employed to summarize the data using the mean, median, mode, and standard deviation. These statistics provide an overview of students' reading interest and narrative text comprehension ability, while also illustrating the distribution and variability of scores for each variable. A summary of the descriptive statistical analysis is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistical Analysis of Reading Interest and Narrative Text Comprehension Ability

Variable	N	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation
Reading Interest	57	51.77	52.00	50.00	8.75
Comprehension	57	17.82	19.00	20.00	3.36

Table 1, descriptive statistics, shows that the reading interest of fourth-grade students at SDN 06 Kelapa Tujuh has a mean of 51.77 out of a maximum score of 80 (equivalent to 64.71%). The median and mode are 52.00 and 50.00, respectively, with a standard deviation of 8.75. This indicates that students' reading interest overall falls into the moderate category, with moderate variability among respondents.

For the narrative text comprehension ability variable, the mean score was 17.82 out of a maximum score of 20 (equivalent to 89.10%). The median was 19.00 and the mode was 20.00, with a standard deviation of 3.36. The data distribution is left-skewed because the mean is lower than the median and mode. These findings indicate that fourth-grade students' narrative text comprehension skills generally fall into the high category, with relatively low variation. Overall, although students' reading interest is at a moderate level, their narrative text comprehension skills are relatively high. After conducting descriptive statistical tests, we proceeded with the prerequisite tests described in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Results of the One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Normality Test

Statistic	Value
N	57
Mean	0,000
Std. Deviation	2,819
Test Statistic	0,120
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0,039 ^c
Statistic	Value

As shown in Table 2, the normality test in this study was conducted using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test applied to the data on reading interest and narrative text comprehension ability. The test results showed a statistic value of 0.120 and a significance value (Asymp. Sig., 2-tailed) of 0.039. Since this significance value is smaller than the 0.05 level, it can be concluded that the data for both research variables are not normally distributed. This finding confirms that the distribution of the research data does not meet the assumption of normality as required in parametric analysis. Consequently, the use of parametric tests is inappropriate for this study. As a solution, the researcher decided to use Spearman's Rho non-parametric correlation test to examine the relationship between reading interest and narrative text comprehension ability, as further explained in Table 3.

Table 3. Spearman's Rho Correlation Test

Spearman's rho	Reading Interest	Text Comprehension
Reading Interest	1.000	.483
Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
N	57	57
Text Comprehension	.483	1.000
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
N	57	57

Spearman's correlation analysis indicates a positive and significant correlation between reading interest and text comprehension ($r = 0.483$; $p < 0.01$). A correlation coefficient of 0.483 indicates that the relationship between the two variables is moderate. These results reinforce the notion that the higher a student's reading interest, the higher their level of text comprehension will be. With a sample of 57 respondents, these findings suggest that reading interest is a crucial factor in developing text comprehension, although 76.7% of the variance in text comprehension is still influenced by other variables.

Discussion

The results of the Spearman correlation test reveal a significant positive relationship between reading interest and the ability to comprehend narrative texts among fourth-grade students at SDN 06 Kelapa Tujuh

($r_s = 0.483$, $p < 0.01$, $N = 57$). The strength of this relationship is classified as moderate and accounts for approximately 23.3 percent of the variance in text comprehension ability, as indicated by the coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.233$). This means that the majority of the variation in text comprehension ability among fourth-grade students at this school is determined by factors other than reading interest. A more important question to answer, then, is: from a psychological perspective, how exactly does reading interest which is an affective aspect contribute to text comprehension ability, which is a cognitive aspect.

To address this issue, it is important to examine the actual characteristics of fourth-grade elementary school students, who are generally between the ages of 9 and 10. According to Piaget's theory of cognitive development, children in this age range are classified as being in the concrete operational stage a stage in which children are capable of reasoning logically about real objects and events, yet their understanding remains heavily dependent on direct experience and repetition (Saputra, 2024; Mifroh, 2020). The implication for reading activities is that children at this age require repeated engagement with texts in order to build a comprehensive understanding of the plot, characters, and underlying message.

This is where the role of reading interest becomes psychologically crucial. Students with a strong interest in reading will be motivated to read voluntarily and repeatedly, rather than out of compulsion or as a result of assignments from teachers (Rodin et al., 2024; Amalia et al.2024; Haqqe et al.2025). This repetition, driven by enjoyment within the framework of schema theory introduced by Anderson and Pearson (1984) in (Kristiantari et al., 2026) regarding reading comprehension studies enables children to build and enrich their cognitive schemas regarding narrative structure, such as character recognition patterns, sequences of conflict, and story resolutions.

This mechanism is also consistent with the "Matthew effect" in reading, as proposed by Stanovich in (Sa'ud et al., 2021), that is, a situation where children who enjoy reading will read more, and because they read more, their reading skills become increasingly honed, creating a self-reinforcing cycle between interest and ability. A child who is initially drawn to a story for a simple reason such as liking the characters or finding the plot amusing indirectly trains themselves to recall details about the characters, the sequence of events, and the moral message each time they reread the story or read similar ones. This contrasts with students who read only because they are required to, as they tend to skim through the text once without making an effort to reread or delve deeper into the story's content, resulting in a shallower memory trace of the narrative elements. This framework is further reinforced by the perspective on reading engagement from (Wigfield et al., 2004) which explains that cognitive engagement in reading is optimal when accompanied by intrinsic motivation rather than merely external pressure because the child's attention to story details becomes more focused, and their working memory capacity can be utilized more efficiently to comprehend the text.

Nevertheless, the relationship found in this study was only moderate, not strong. This is quite reasonable, considering that reading interest among fourth-grade elementary school students is still developing and is heavily influenced by external factors such as teacher encouragement, the availability of engaging books, and reading habits at home. This means that the affective-cognitive mechanisms described above are not yet fully operational in all students; consequently, even some students with moderate reading interest can still achieve a high level of text comprehension through other channels, such as direct teacher guidance in the classroom or well-developed basic cognitive abilities from an early age.

To confirm the place of these findings within the broader research landscape, the moderate correlation results from this study need to be compared with previous studies that examined similar relationships among fourth-grade elementary school students. The findings most closely resembling those of this study come from (Atin et al., 2024) who studied 28 fourth-grade students at SDN 13 Marga Mulya and found a correlation coefficient of 0.504 with a contribution of 25 percent, which also falls into the moderate category. The near-

perfect similarity between the findings of (Atin et al., 2024) and this study both in terms of the magnitude of the correlation coefficient and the percentage of contribution provides a strong indication that the relationship between reading interest and text comprehension ability among fourth-grade elementary school students in Indonesia, in many contexts, is indeed consistently in the moderate category.

However, if the scope of the comparison is broadened, the strength of this relationship actually varies quite widely depending on the school context. Kurniawati (2023) studying 95 fourth-grade students at SDN Gugus Dokter Wahidin Sudiro Husodo, reported a very strong correlation ($r = 0.963$) between reading interest, verbal-linguistic intelligence, and thematic learning outcomes, whereas (Windi et al., 2025) in a study of 79 fourth-grade students at SD Negeri 231 Palembang, found no significant relationship ($r = 0.035$). This pattern of positive relationships albeit with varying strengths is also consistent with the qualitative findings of Ma'sita et al. (2025) who found that fourth-grade students at SD Inpres 1 Birobuli struggled to identify the main idea of narrative texts. In addition, (Resitaningrum & Saptano, 2024) in a study of fourth-grade students at Bintaran Elementary School, reported that low interest in reading leads to poor reading comprehension, although this situation can be improved through the integration of children's literature into instruction

Based on a comparison of these five studies, the findings of this study are consistent with most previous research, which indicates that reading interest is positively correlated with text comprehension ability. The strength of the relationship in this study most closely matches the findings of (Atin et al., 2024). However, the results of this study differ from those of (Kurniawati, 2023) which found a very strong relationship, and also differ from those of (Windi et al., 2025) which found no significant relationship at all. These differences are likely due to the differing characteristics of the populations in each study. In the study by (Kurniawati, 2023), the very strong relationship likely arose due to an additional variable verbal-linguistic intelligence which was measured alongside reading interest. This means the strength of that relationship may not have stemmed purely from reading interest alone. Meanwhile, in the study by (Windi et al., 2025), while the majority of students did indeed have high reading interest, their reading comprehension skills were largely in the low category. It is this condition that caused the relationship between the two variables to be very weak.

This study was conducted at SDN 06 Kelapa Tujuh with a total sample of 57 fourth-grade students, ensuring that the data reflect the entire population rather than merely a partial sample. The use of Spearman's Rho test is also more methodologically appropriate because the residual data are not normally distributed. This differs from a number of similar studies that still use Pearson's correlation without rigorously testing the assumption of normality. Therefore, the results of this study can serve as a statistically robust empirical reference for mapping the relationship between reading interest and the ability to comprehend narrative texts among elementary school students.

These findings reinforce the debate regarding the consistent role of reading interest in text comprehension, while also supporting Piaget's theory of cognitive development, schema theory, the Matthew effect, and the perspective of reading engagement. The relationship between reading interest and text comprehension was found to be significant, though its strength was only moderate. This is because the affective-cognitive mechanism has not yet functioned optimally in all students, given that reading interest at this age is still developing and influenced by many external factors.

For teachers and schools, these results indicate two things. First, programs designed to foster reading interest such as school literacy initiatives, reading corners, or the provision of reading materials tailored to children's interests remain important and should be implemented on an ongoing basis. Second, since reading interest accounts for only about 23.3 percent of the variance in text comprehension ability, teachers still need to strengthen direct instruction, such as training students to identify main ideas, answer text-based questions, and expand their vocabulary.

There are four main limitations. The study was conducted at only one school with 57 respondents, so generalizing the results requires caution. The correlational and cross-sectional design also does not allow for causal conclusions, meaning the psychological mechanisms discussed remain theoretical. Measuring reading interest via a self-report questionnaire has the potential to introduce response bias. Finally, this study did not include other control variables such as vocabulary proficiency, family literacy support, and teaching methods.

Future research is recommended to expand the number of schools and respondents to ensure more representative results. Experimental or longitudinal designs could also be used to directly test causal mechanisms, for example, by comparing students who received reading interest-enhancement interventions with those who did not. The inclusion of mediator or moderator variables such as vocabulary proficiency and reading strategies as well as a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches through interviews, is also recommended to deepen our understanding of these relationships

CONCLUSION

This study found a positive and significant relationship between reading interest and narrative text comprehension among fourth-grade students at SDN 06 Kelapa Tujuh ($r = 0.483$), with a moderate effect size contributing approximately 23.3 percent to the variance in narrative text comprehension. Psychologically, this relationship occurs because a high interest in reading encourages children to read voluntarily and repeatedly, thereby strengthening their cognitive schemas regarding narrative structure, in line with Piaget's theory of cognitive development, schema theory, the Matthew effect in reading, and the engagement perspective. Compared to previous studies, these results are most consistent with findings among fourth-grade elementary school students in other schools, which also reported a moderate-strength relationship, while confirming that the strength of the relationship between reading interest and text comprehension does indeed vary across school contexts. The original contribution of this study lies in the use of total sampling of the entire fourth-grade population and methodological rigor in selecting a correlation test appropriate for the data characteristics.

In practical terms, these findings underscore the importance of school policies that integrate the cultivation of reading interest through literacy programs with the explicit reinforcement of text comprehension strategies, so that improvements in students' literacy skills do not depend on a single factor alone. The relationship between reading interest and the ability to comprehend narrative texts among elementary school students still warrants further study, and it is hoped that these findings can serve as an empirical foundation for more targeted and evidence-based efforts to improve literacy among Indonesian children

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