

# Exploring the Relationship Between Reading Interest and Comprehension Skills in Grade IV Students: A Study on Children's Literature

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the initial low reading interest and comprehension skills of fourth-grade students at Bintaran Elementary School and the impact of using children's literature to address these issues. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed to provide an in-depth analysis of students' reading habits and comprehension abilities. Data were collected through interviews, observations, questionnaires, and documentation to capture a comprehensive picture of the situation. Findings revealed that students exhibited a low interest in reading, characterized by a general dislike of books, which directly impacted their reading comprehension skills. After the integration of children's literature into the curriculum, students demonstrated improved engagement and comprehension. Teachers employed strategies such as book-reading competitions to motivate students, fostering both enjoyment and understanding of reading materials. The results highlight the importance of cultivating reading interest and comprehension skills in students to facilitate knowledge acquisition and the development of competencies essential for lifelong learning. Children's literature emerged as an effective medium for enhancing these abilities, providing an engaging and relatable context for students. The use of children's literature significantly improves reading interest and comprehension among elementary students. Future studies should explore the long-term effects of this approach and its application across diverse age groups and educational settings.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Efforts to cultivate smart and capable human resources (HR) through quality education require an effective and efficient learning process, as education serves as the cornerstone for building a progressive and high-quality nation. The landscape of education has undergone significant transformations, particularly in learning methods, media, and communication tools. Zufitri et al. (2022) emphasized that

advancements in the education sector are integral to national development. The essence of the learning process lies in fostering growth across cognitive, affective, and spiritual domains, enabling individuals to acquire the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for personal and societal advancement.

Indonesian language learning aims to equip and guide students to communicate with courtesy and ethics. As the unifying language of the nation, Indonesian plays a vital role in fostering national cohesion. Effective communication through writing requires strong reading comprehension skills to grasp the intended content. The importance of Indonesian language education lies in its intellectual, emotional, and social contributions, enabling students to communicate effectively, engage in scientific writing, and develop critical thinking. Moreover, Indonesian lessons significantly contribute to students' overall success by supporting their knowledge, social skills, and emotional intelligence, which in turn enhances their performance in other subjects (Kristiawan et al., 2021; Nurjanah & Nugraheni, 2022).

In elementary schools, one of the core materials in Indonesian language learning is literature. Literature serves as a medium for influencing society, offering stories and ideas that reflect real-life phenomena and emotional expressions (Septinasari, 2011; Munaris, 2020). However, students' reading comprehension skills remain low due to limited interest in reading and a learning process that does not align with their developmental needs (Laila, 2009; Anggrasari & Dayu, 2022). Children's literature is categorized into two genres: fiction and nonfiction. Previous studies on children's literature, particularly those addressing genre issues, include notable research by Burhan Nurgiantoro in 2004, which continues to serve as a foundational reference in this area.

Learning Indonesian language material on children's literature is expected to be able to provide and help vocabulary to students. The benefits provided when learning children's literature is applied in elementary schools are improving spiritual abilities, affective abilities, psychomotor abilities, and cognitive abilities. The use of children's literature makes it easier for students to read and find new vocabulary that may be difficult to understand, so students can discuss with their friends. (Sapanti et al., 2021; Febriyanto & Yanto, 2019). Learning using children's literature aims to increase vocabulary and teach character education to students.

Based on a 2016 *Central Connecticut State University* research report, Indonesia is ranked 60th out of 61 countries with low literacy levels. Meanwhile, according to UNESCO statistics, Indonesia's interest in reading is only 0.001% or only 1 person out of 1,000 people have an interest in reading. According to the Central Statistics Agency (BSP) in 2022, it was stated that the level of reading habit or interest in society, especially students in Indonesia as a whole, was at 59.52 with a reading duration of 4 to 5 hours per week and 4-5 books per quarter. The results of this research are very concerning, even though every human activity must involve the ability and skills of reading to obtain information and / or knowledge to be discussed in solving problems and applying the solutions that have been obtained in social life.

Reading comprehension activities require a high interest in reading, so that students are able to understand the content of the reading. Conversely, if learners do not have an interest in reading due to various causal factors, then it is certain that these learners cannot understand the reading they read. Reading skills are vital in society (Burns, 1996). Every human activity involves reading. The teacher's obligation is to assist students who have difficulty reading comprehension such as making children's literature literacy activities routine. The word "understand" in the Big Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI) which means clever and correctly understand something. Understanding is an activity, process, act of understanding and comprehending something that is being studied by each individual with different levels of understanding (Syahreni, 2016; Dalam & Sinarti, 2019; Pramudyani & Indratno, 2022). When the different levels of understanding that students have are not balanced with solutions or handling, it will result in low learning achievement.

Despite the well-documented importance of reading interest and comprehension in academic success, a persistent gap exists in understanding how children's literature can address these challenges, particularly among elementary students in Indonesia. Factors contributing to low reading interest include a lack of supportive school environments, underutilized libraries, limited access to engaging reading materials, insufficient family encouragement, and the growing distraction of digital devices (Asniar et al., 2020; Solahudin et al., 2022). Interviews with fourth-grade teachers and students at Bintaran Elementary

School revealed declining reading comprehension, attributed to minimal engagement with reading materials, uninspiring textbook designs, and learning driven by external pressure rather than intrinsic motivation.

This study aims to address this gap by analyzing the impact of children's literature on improving the reading interest and comprehension skills of fourth-grade students. By integrating relatable and visually appealing literature into the curriculum, this research seeks to explore its potential in fostering a love for reading and enhancing understanding. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on applying children's literature as an intervention for Indonesian elementary students, an area that has received limited attention.

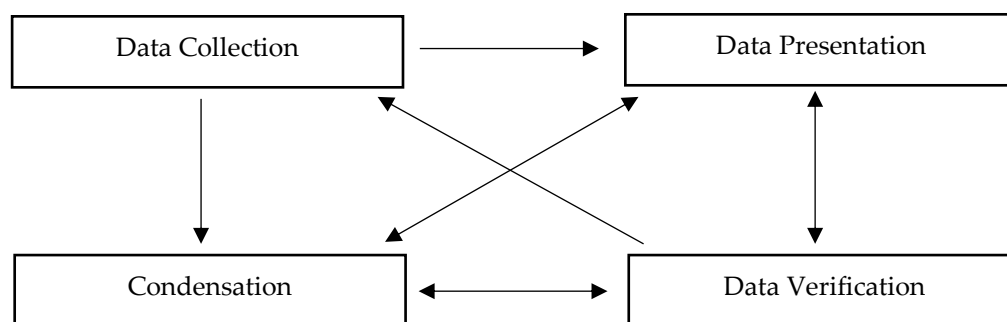
The findings are expected to contribute to educational strategies by demonstrating how tailored reading materials can transform learning experiences, foster independent reading habits, and improve overall academic outcomes. This study also offers practical insights for educators and policymakers in designing more effective literacy programs to address the declining interest in reading among students.

## 2. METHODS

This type of research uses qualitative research with the phenomenon method, because researchers will describe the realities that occur in the field and present data in sentence form. Researchers do not manipulate data or provide certain treatment to research objects to obtain principles and explanations using data collection techniques through interviews, observations, tests, questionnaires and documentation. (Restu, 2020) In addition, the authors argue that phenomenology is included in descriptive analysis research, namely research that focuses on a particular case to be observed and researched. The qualitative method is an analysis that is carried out in detail on various factors that are directly related to the case in order to obtain accurate conclusions and really happen. (Sutedi, 2009; Sidiq & Choiri, 2019).

This research was conducted at SD Bintaran in Bantul Regency. SD Bintaran is located at Cikal, Srimulyo, Piyungan Sub-district, Bantul Regency, Yogyakarta Special Region 55792. SD Bintaran is located between a tourist attraction and a rattan factory, so students who go alone are expected to be careful and always alert because large trucks always pass by at 06.00-07.00 WIB. SD Bintaran is a merged school of two elementary schools that used to lack students. The former SD Bintaran was located in Bantaran Kulon, Srimulyo, Piyungan District, Bantul Regency.

Data analysis in descriptive qualitative research is examining an object and then telling or presenting the results in the form of a description that explains the causes and effects on the object. Wandu et al., (2013) explained that data analysis in qualitative is a series of stages to find problems and provide solutions and find out the benefits of a given action. The stages of data analysis according to Milles & Huberman (2014) include:



**Figure 1.** Milles & Huberman Analysis Stages (2014)

The explanation regarding the analysis stages includes:

- 1) **Data Collection:** This stage involves collecting all relevant data for research or analysis. Data can be obtained from various sources, such as surveys, interviews, observations,

documentation, and others. This data collection is usually carried out using methods that have been previously determined in the research design.

- 2) **Data Reduction:** After the data is collected, the next stage is data reduction. Data reduction aims to simplify and organize the data that has been collected so that it is easier to understand and analyze. Techniques that are often used in this stage are data coding, selecting relevant data, grouping data, and data abstraction.
- 3) **Data Presentation:** After the data has been reduced, the next step is to present the data visually or descriptively. Data presentation can be done in the form of tables, graphs, diagrams, or descriptive narratives. The purpose of presenting data is to make the information contained in the data easier to understand and use in the analysis process.
- 4) **Drawing Conclusions/Verification:** The final stage in data analysis is drawing conclusions or verification. At this stage, the researcher interprets the data that has been presented and tries to conclude the findings or patterns that emerge from the data. The conclusions drawn must be supported by data that has been carefully analyzed. Apart from that, at this stage verification is also carried out on the conclusions that have been drawn to ensure their validity and reliability. This can be done through various techniques, such as data triangulation or discussions with other parties involved in the research or analysis.

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Learner Reading Interest

Interest is an activity carried out seriously to get maximum results because of an interest in something to be achieved. (Metsapelto et al., 2017; McTigue et al., 2018; Ruf et al., 2022). Interest contributes to the learning process because it greatly affects the readiness and seriousness of the learners. (Yusri et al., 2021; Darlin & Fitriani, 2020). Reading is the basic knowledge that a person needs to have in order to obtain information or ideas; it requires a desire to acquire knowledge and skills. (Fitriana, 2017; Bekti et al., 2022).

Reading interest encourages a person to understand language patterns in obtaining information or knowledge that requires willingness and activity, thus creating reading and comprehension skills. (Delfina, 2018); Azhari et al., 2020). An individual's reading interest is caused by the tendency to sort, select, remember, and evaluate knowledge or information on certain strong reading sources balanced by effort in reading (Rofi'uddin & Hermintoyo, 2017; Prameswari & Priyadi, 2021; Kusmaladewi et al., 2022).

This research focused on fourth-grade students of Bintaran Elementary School. The researcher found that fourth-grade students of SD Bintaran rarely have any desire to read. Based on the observation of books in the library, and interviews with teachers and students. The low interest in reading that occurs at SD Bintaran is caused by several factors, including: 1) the factor of students' readiness to read, 2) the factor of students' habits and motivation, 3) the factor of the availability of reading books, 4) school environment factors, and 5) home or family environment factors. The ways that learners can increase their interest in reading include: creating a comfortable and safe environment for reading, providing scheduling, varying reading books, and between learners can exchange or take turns reading the books they have

Based on interviews with teachers and students, the results show that the supporting factors for interest in reading are the availability of books in the library and the readiness of students to learn. In line with the opinion of Asniar et al., (2020) about the factors that cause interest in reading, including: 1) factors of students' readiness to read, 2) factors of students' habits and motivation, 3) factors of reading book availability, 4) factors of the school environment, and 5) factors of the home or family environment. Therefore, teachers and parents work together in fostering and increasing students' interest in reading. The following is documentation of books used by students when doing literacy to foster interest in reading.



**Figure 2.** Library Book Collection

The library's book collection is very unattractive, such as reading books with old publication years, books that only contain writing, some books have missing pages, only a small number of fiction books, and the library room is poorly lit and has poor air circulation. Students often find it difficult to find fiction books, because the book layout is not appropriate or has not been rearranged. This has an impact on students feeling lazy about reading books.

Researchers used a questionnaire to determine fourth grade students' reading interest. The aim of using a reading interest questionnaire is to determine the continuity of data obtained from interviews and learning observations. The reading interest questionnaire consists of 18 questions covering students' interest in reading fiction or non-fiction books, feeling happy or not when reading, students' behavior when they get difficult sentences, and students' behavior after reading the book. The following is a list of learners with different levels of reading interest, among others:

**Table 1.** Questionnaire results of students' interest in reading

Description	Learner Name	Total
Very interested in reading	AOSH, DRP, GPA, SUIT, SKA	5
Enough interest in reading	ARA, AA, AMR, ANMA, ADP, AHK, AZW, CAPA, DAS, FEPP, FAP, FAN, HPM, IL, JMB, NAP, NAH, NCP, NSR, SAN, SMA, VPZ,	22
Lack of interest in reading	KR, MNF, NF, RAK	4
No interest in reading		0
Total learners		31

Students feel bored and have difficulty reading books from the library. This is reinforced by the teacher's opinion that the books in the library are old publications, the language used is very difficult to understand, and the condition of the library room does not support students' reading. In this way, students bring reading books from home to read at school, later students can take turns reading books brought by their friends. Then, teachers and students create a reading corner in their class to increase students' interest in reading and reading comprehension skills.

Based on the results of interviews with teachers and students, as well as reading interest questionnaires for students, it can be concluded that the school literacy movement in improving and familiarizing to have an interest in reading for class IV students of Bintaran Elementary School, namely: 1) providing scheduling to read fiction books and non-fiction books, 2) conducting evaluations to create a competitive situation among students, and 3) the more knowledge and information obtained, the impact on the activeness of students in the learning process.

Learners' involvement in providing a safe and comfortable place to support interest in reading, and learners can take books from the library or bring reading books from home in accordance with the schedule. This involvement has an impact on the sense of pleasure that arises and triggers students to read. Interest in reading arises intentionally without coercion, the use of schedules aims to help learners sort and choose reading books according to their needs, and the implementation of feedback to determine the usefulness of reading interest for students. Teachers should not use evaluation to determine the level of reading interest because it cannot be measured using grades. The assessment of reading interest will change at any time according to the learners' desire to read books that interest them.

### 3.2 Reading Comprehension Skills

Reading is a complex activity that requires many things such as memorizing language sounds, visual activities, thinking, and vocabulary. (Rahim, 2008). Reading is a vital process, where the process of translating symbols and symbols of writing in the form of sound. There are three terms in the reading process, namely *recording* which means recording and digesting words, *decoding* which means translating words, and *meaning* which means understanding meaning. *Recording* and *decoding* activities are beginning reading activities in the early grades, while *meaning* is a reading comprehension activity in the high grades.

Skills refer to an individual's ability to utilize language effectively in various forms—writing, reading, listening, and speaking—to acquire information or knowledge, whether through technological tools or manual methods, and to further develop their potential (Bursal & Yilmaz, 2019; Muhafidin & Indrayani, 2023). Among these, reading comprehension is the ability to process and reorganize information from text to derive meaning and gain factual insights (Safitri, Marsidin, & Subandi, 2020; Humaeroh et al., 2024). The primary goals of reading activities are to impart knowledge, provide enjoyment, and offer entertainment (Azhari et al., 2020; Wirayani, 2023). Reading comprehension involves cognitive engagement, encompassing both the understanding of written material and the ability to articulate the insights gained from the text (Fauyan, 2019; Anggrasari & Dayu, 2022).

The learning process in class IV uses children's literature to help students improve reading comprehension skills. According to the teacher, learning Indonesian with the help of children's literature will make it easier for the teacher to deliver the material. So, when students are faced with story problems, students are able to analyze and answer questions well. Teachers assume that students who are able to think critically must have good reading comprehension skills, this is in line with the opinion of Ramadhani & Ayriza (2019). The following is documentation of reading comprehension activities during the Indonesian language learning process and taking tests:



**Figure 3.** Reading comprehension activity

Reading comprehension skills in children's literature are categorized as good. Because before the learning process takes place, learners will read the books they bring. The teacher asks learners to analyze the reading by ADiKSiMBa and write down sentences that are considered difficult. Thus, students can understand the reading as a whole. So, when the teacher gives a new reading, the learners

are able to analyze and answer the questions. However, in reality, learners find it easier to answer questions according to the text read and not to compose opinions using their language.

The relationship between reading interest and reading comprehension is very close and inseparable. With an interest in reading, students are able to carry out reading activities and understand reading (Dini & Rochmiyati, 2023). Reading interest and reading comprehension greatly affect the quality of human resources which can be seen from the learning outcomes and the level of understanding that students have (Saputri et al., 2021). Interest in reading and reading comprehension will create students who have a sense of responsibility for the information obtained and are able to apply it in life (Siswandari, 2021). Although the relationship between reading interest and reading comprehension is not that significant, the positive impact of both is to invite and hone students' thinking skills so that they get maximum scores or learning outcomes (Yusuf, 2021).

### 3.3 Children's Literature

Literature is a means to influence society. Literature here functions the same as the media, media that can convey messages or positive influences for the community, especially students. (Firdaus et al., 2022; Sariat et al., 2023). Literature presents story ideas related to human life. Literature is divided into two, namely adult literature, which uses the language style of adults and children's literature using the language style of children and is presented to children. Children's literature is great if read by children with diverse characteristics, themes, language styles, and images. (Febriyanto & Yanto, 2019; Munaris, 2020). Literature is the embodiment of a person's main idea of the social environment around him using beautified language. Literature is a picture of life. Media in learning is not always in the form of technology, but additional reading books to help students deepen their knowledge (Febriyanti & Mustadi, 2020; Ulia et al., 2022).

The selection of children's literature should align with students' levels of understanding to ensure effective learning. In this context, study groups for reading children's literature are typically divided into two categories: advanced and less advanced learners. Advanced learners, who require minimal guidance, often encounter few difficulties. These students rarely seek help from teachers and instead collaborate with peers when needed. To enhance comprehension, advanced learners commonly highlight key sentences in the text to simplify the meaning.

In contrast, less advanced learners, who require full guidance, often struggle with motivation and the skills necessary to identify key sentences in the text. Although they are capable of analyzing important sentences, their lack of intrinsic motivation often leads to reluctance in reading entire texts. As a result, these learners benefit from structured support and direction to improve their reading and comprehension skills.

Integrating literature reading activities into Indonesian language learning facilitates students' understanding of paragraphs within the text. Learning groups are sometimes organized by mixed ability levels to foster peer tutoring, and at other times, by similar proficiency levels. Peer tutoring encourages learners to reflect on and practice the values of Pancasila, as advanced readers assist less proficient peers by explaining the content in their own words. While children's literature, such as short stories, is included in Indonesian language subjects, many students still face challenges in fully comprehending the material. These activities aim to bridge the gap by creating a collaborative and supportive learning environment.

## 4. CONCLUSION

This study examined the low reading interest and comprehension skills of fourth-grade students at Bintaran Elementary School, highlighting the challenges in fostering engagement with traditional learning materials. The findings revealed that students' limited interest in reading, influenced by uninspiring textbooks and a lack of access to diverse literature, negatively impacts their comprehension abilities. The research underscores the importance of integrating children's literature into educational

practices to improve reading interest and skills. However, this study is limited in its scope, focusing solely on traditional formats of children's literature and its short-term effects. Future research should explore the development and integration of technology-based children's literature, such as interactive e-books or gamified reading platforms, to enhance accessibility and engagement. By leveraging technology, educators can provide students with diverse and dynamic reading experiences, encompassing both fiction and non-fiction, to broaden their knowledge and foster lifelong learning habits.

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