



READING ATTITUDE AND READING INTEREST OF STATE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS TOWARD THEIR FUNCTIONAL READING ACHIEVEMENT

by

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Abstract:

Despite growing emphasis on reading literacy in educational policy, limited attention has been given to the specific contributions of reading attitude and reading interest to students' functional reading achievement (FRA), particularly among junior high school learners. This study examines the relationship between various aspects of reading Attitude and interest and students' FRA, providing empirical insights from a less-explored context. The objectives were to examine students' FRA, reading attitude, and reading interest; the correlations among these variables; and the extent to which attitude and interest contribute to FRA. Data were collected through the Functional Reading Achievement Test (FRAT) and the Attitude Toward and Interest in Reading Literacy (ATIReal) questionnaire, administered to 237 students at state junior high schools in Seberang Ulu 1 and 2, Palembang. Results indicated that students' FRA was very low (mean = 41.78), with no significant difference between male and female students. While students generally showed a positive attitude toward reading, their reading interests varied. Correlation analysis revealed no significant relationship between the total scores of FRA and the total scores of reading attitude or interest. However, two specific attitude components and 17 interest components were significantly correlated with FRA. Among them, seven interest items and two attitude items significantly contributed to FRA. The highest contributions came from interest in another language (6.1%) and the attitude towards reading to learn new things (5.2%). These findings suggest that although overall reading disposition may not directly predict FRA, particular specific interests and attitudes play a meaningful role in shaping students' reading performance.

Keywords: functional reading achievement (FRA), reading Attitude, and reading interest

Abstrak: Meskipun semakin menekankan literasi membaca dalam kebijakan pendidikan, perhatian terbatas telah diberikan pada kontribusi spesifik sikap membaca dan minat membaca terhadap prestasi membaca fungsional (FRA) siswa, terutama di kalangan pelajar sekolah menengah pertama. Studi ini mengkaji hubungan antara berbagai aspek sikap dan minat membaca dan FRA siswa, memberikan wawasan empiris dari konteks yang kurang dieksplorasi. Tujuannya adalah untuk memeriksa FRA siswa, sikap membaca, dan minat membaca; korelasi di antara variabel-variabel ini; dan sejauh mana sikap dan minat berkontribusi pada FRA. Data dikumpulkan melalui Tes Prestasi Membaca Fungsional (FRAT) dan kuesioner Sikap dan Minat Literasi Membaca (ATIReal) yang diberikan kepada 237 siswa di SMP negeri di Seberang Ulu 1 dan 2, Palembang. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa FRA siswa sangat rendah (rata-rata = 41,78), dengan tidak ada perbedaan yang signifikan antara siswa laki-laki dan perempuan. Sementara siswa umumnya menunjukkan sikap positif terhadap membaca, minat membaca mereka bervariasi. Analisis korelasi menunjukkan tidak ada hubungan yang signifikan antara skor total FRA dan skor total sikap atau minat membaca. Namun, dua komponen sikap spesifik dan 17 komponen kepentingan berkorelasi secara signifikan dengan FRA. Di

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antara mereka, tujuh item minat dan dua item sikap berkontribusi signifikan pada FRA. Kontribusi tertinggi berasal dari minat pada bahasa lain (6,1%) dan sikap membaca untuk mempelajari hal-hal baru (5,2%). Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa meskipun disposisi membaca secara keseluruhan mungkin tidak secara langsung memprediksi FRA, minat dan sikap spesifik tertentu memainkan peran yang berarti dalam membentuk kinerja membaca siswa.

Kata kunci: prestasi membaca fungsional (FRA), sikap membaca, dan minat membaca

INTRODUCTION

It is indisputable that reading is a fundamental skill that significantly impacts students' learning activities. It serves as a gateway to various forms of information essential for daily survival and personal development. Ningsih et al. (2019) highlight that reading is considered a highly valuable skill in our technology-driven society today. Thus, reading literacy forms the basis of nearly all learning processes, enabling students not only to acquire languages and study literature but also to understand other subjects through reading itself. In Indonesia, English is a mandatory subject in secondary education. For EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students, reading skills are integrated with other skills such as listening, speaking, and writing, according to the Indonesian curriculum (School-Based Curriculum, 2006; Kurikulum 2013). The goal of learning English for junior high school students is to equip them with the ability to communicate in English and prepare them to compete in a global context. Moreover, students are expected to master reading skills in English to support their higher education (Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia, 2006). Efforts to improve reading performance in the classroom often emphasize strategy training or language exposure. However, learners' internal motivation and emotional orientation toward reading are frequently underemphasized. Investigating how these elements shape students' real-world reading performance could shed light on persistent challenges in EFL literacy development, particularly in contexts where reading proficiency remains low despite structured instruction. Although various studies have acknowledged the importance of both reading interest and attitude, few have considered how these factors jointly influence students' reading behavior in practical, everyday contexts. Particularly in the EFL learning environment, where English is not used as a first language, understanding the combined impact of these internal factors may offer valuable insights into why some students succeed in functional reading tasks while others do not.

Previous research has highlighted challenges in reading achievement both in English and Bahasa Indonesia. Functional reading, whether in English or Bahasa Indonesia, is crucial

for academic success. However, a study by Diem et al. (2015) revealed that the functional reading skills of junior high school students in Palembang city were below average (57.20). Additionally, international studies such as PISA 2022 Results and PIRLS consistently reported that Indonesian students faced difficulties in reading, with Indonesia ranking 71st out of 81 countries in 2022. In terms of English reading, the EF English Proficiency Index (2022) ranked Indonesia 80th out of 111 countries with moderate proficiency, while Sudarmi (2009) and Pamuji (2015) found low English reading achievement in Palembang (58-59.93). These findings suggest that despite the acknowledged importance of reading, many students still struggle to achieve proficiency. Factors such as attitudes and interests are believed to influence these outcomes significantly. Nevertheless, the extent of their effects remains underexplored, particularly in the EFL context of Indonesian junior high schools.

Recognizing these persistent challenges, it becomes clear that there are still notable gaps in the existing literature. Although some studies (Sudarmi, 2009; Hasan, 2023; Khairuddin, 2013; Musta'aliyah et al., 2022) have explored the influence of reading attitude and interest on reading achievement, their findings remain somewhat inconsistent. For instance, while some studies above found a positive correlation between reading attitude and English reading performance, Nuraini et al. (2023) and Dewani et al. (2024) reported that such relationships were not always statistically significant. Additionally, much of the prior research, including that by Diem et al. (2015), has focused on functional reading in Bahasa Indonesia, leaving the English context less thoroughly examined. Few studies have addressed how both reading attitude and interest relate to students' functional reading achievement in English, especially within the context of junior high school EFL learners in Indonesia. Therefore, this study seeks to fill that gap by investigating these relationships among students in Seberang Ulu 1 and 2 districts of Palembang, where English is taught as a foreign language in a region with previously documented low reading performance.

This study potentially contributes both practically and empirically. Practically, it offers insights for teachers, curriculum designers, and education stakeholders to develop strategies that foster positive reading attitudes and interests, thereby enhancing functional reading achievement among EFL learners. Empirically, the study fills a research gap by providing new data and analysis on the relationship between functional reading, attitude, and interest in

Indonesian junior high school contexts, thus enriching the body of knowledge on EFL reading education.

In addition to the gaps already mentioned, previous studies show several specific empirical shortcomings. First, concerning variables, most studies focused on either reading attitude or reading interest separately, without combining both as predictors of functional reading achievement. Second, in terms of research design, many studies utilized simple correlational or descriptive designs without a comprehensive examination of how multiple psychological factors simultaneously relate to reading achievement. Third, participants in earlier studies often included university students (Cheng & Good, 2009; Nuraini et al., 2023) rather than junior high school students. Fourth, regarding instruments, few previous works developed specific tools to measure functional reading in the EFL context. Fifth, in terms of data collection and analysis, many studies lacked triangulated or systematically validated instruments. Finally, conclusions drawn often did not fully address the complex interplay among reading achievement, attitude, and interest in the EFL junior high school setting. Therefore, this study employs a survey design with validated instruments to collect quantitative data through functional reading tests and questionnaires and uses correlational techniques to draw more comprehensive conclusions.

Differences in reading achievement have also been associated with demographic variables such as gender and grade level, which are other relevant considerations for this study. Studies by McQuillan (2013) and Yoder (2010) found that girls tend to show more positive reading attitudes and higher reading achievement than boys. Similarly, Nonte et al. (2018) reported that female students generally outperform their male counterparts in reading tasks, both in English and Bahasa Indonesia. Regarding grade levels, older students, typically those in higher grades, are expected to demonstrate better reading skills due to cognitive maturity and accumulated learning experiences. Nevertheless, factors like motivation, quality of instruction, and reading habits can cause some younger students to outperform older peers. These demographic differences highlight the necessity of considering both gender and grade level when analysing reading achievement among EFL junior high school students.

Theoretically, this study is grounded in several key frameworks. Dewi et al. (2020) emphasize that reading broadens experiences and deepens interests, while Rahmawati et al. (2021) stress the motivational role of interest in achievement. Kush et al. (2005) view reading

attitude as a developmental factor that fosters continuous engagement in reading activities. Functional reading theory (Roe & Ross, 1990) underscores reading's role in enabling individuals to navigate educational, occupational, and social environments successfully. In the EFL context, Cheng and Good (2009) argue that reading is a critical skill for academic success across disciplines. This study thus operates within a theoretical framework that connects functional reading achievement with psychological constructs of attitude and interest, explicitly tailored to Indonesian junior high school EFL learners, where English mastery is not only an academic requirement but also a key to global competitiveness.

The context of this study involves state junior high schools in the Seberang Ulu 1 and 2 districts in Palembang, areas where students' English achievements have been consistently low. Rahmi and Diem (2014) reported that the mean SEA (Students' English Achievement) scores in these two districts were 36.44 and 35.63, respectively, with no significant differences between them. Given the low achievement levels and the urgent need to improve EFL reading skills, this context provides a compelling setting to explore the functional reading achievements of junior high school students concerning their attitudes and interests. In line with the stated objectives and framework, the present study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the students' functional reading achievement (FRA), reading Attitude, and reading interest of the state junior high school students in Seberang Ulu 1 and Seberang Ulu 2 Districts in Palembang?
2. Are there any significant differences in terms of grades (7th, 8th, 9th) and genders (female and male) of students' functional reading achievement of the state junior high school in Seberang Ulu 1 and 2 Districts in Palembang?
3. Are there any significant correlations among students' reading attitude(total), reading interest, and their functional reading achievements(total) of the state junior high school students in Seberang Ulu 1 and 2 Districts, Palembang?
4. Are there any significant contributions among students' reading attitudes (total), reading interests, and their functional reading achievements (total) of the state junior high school students in Seberang Ulu 1 and 2 Districts, Palembang?

METHOD

Design

This study employed a descriptive quantitative approach with a survey design to investigate the phenomena of reading attitude, reading interest, and functional reading achievement among state junior high school students in Seberang Ulu 1 and Seberang Ulu 2 Districts of Palembang. Beyond identifying these trends, the study also examined the relationships among the variables, employing a correlational design. As Creswell (2018) explains, correlational research aims to determine whether a relationship exists between variables, assess the strength of that relationship, and evaluate its statistical significance.

Participant

The population of this study is all of the students from state junior high students in Seberang Ulu 1 and Seberang Ulu 2 Districts Palembang (N= 4758), meanwhile the total sample of this study is formulated by using Curry's Rule of Thumb Sampling in which if the total of population is 1001-5000 respondents, so the percentage of the sample is 5% out of the population (N=237). Those samples from 8 different schools are equally chosen by using stratified random sampling based on gender, grades, and schools from 2 different districts.

Table 1. The population and sample distribution (n=237)

Districts	Schools	Populati on 100%	Sample 5%	Gender		Grade		
				Male	Female	7 th	8 th	9 th
Seberang 1 District	SMP A	1081	54	27	27	18	18	18
	SMP B	510	24	12	12	8	8	8
	SMP C	763	39	19	20	13	13	13
	SMP D	428	21	10	11	7	7	7
	SMP E	432	21	11	10	7	7	7
	SMP F	432	21	10	11	7	7	7
Seberang District	Ulu 2 SMP G	567	30	15	15	10	10	10
	SMP H	545	27	14	13	9	9	9
TOTAL		4758	237	118	119	79	79	79

Instrument

This study used two kinds of instruments: tests and questionnaires. To measure the students' functional reading achievement, *the Functional Reading Achievement Test, invented by Warncke & Shipman (1984)*, was used. Furthermore, in order to measure the students' reading attitude and interest, a questionnaire named *Attitude Towards Reading and Interest in Reading Literacy (ATIReal)* was applied. All the instruments had been verified, tried out, and checked by SPSS 21.0 previously. FRAT items that used the data from the sample had a good internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha value 0.808). For ATIReal, the writer utilized the reliability, which researchers had previously checked (Diem et al., 2015), indicating that ATIReal items also exhibited good internal consistency with a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.830. The standard value of the Alpha (α) is ≥ 0.70 ; if the Alpha (α) value is 0.70 or higher 0.70, the instrument is considered reliable (Creswell, 2018). It means that both the test (FRAT) and questionnaire (ATIReal) are reliable. In this study, all FRAT items were deemed valid ($r > 0.127$), and ATIReal items were also considered to have good content validity. In brief, both instruments were ready-made, having been used and verified in a previous study (Diem et al., 2015). Therefore, the instruments (tests and questionnaires) were considered valid and reliable.

Data collection

This study employed two instruments for data collection: the Functional Reading Achievement Test (FRAT) and the *Attitude Toward and Interest in Reading Literacy (ATIReal)* questionnaire. The FRAT was designed to evaluate students' functional reading achievement. It comprised 50 multiple-choice questions covering eight key reading components: main idea, sequence, cause and effect, inference, detail, vocabulary, study skills, and critical reading. On the day of the test, students assembled in their respective classrooms and received clear instructions on the test procedures. The assessment was administered under supervision and took approximately 60 minutes to complete. The resulting scores, ranging from 0 to 100, were treated as interval data and categorized into five performance levels: excellent, good, average, poor, and abysmal.

Following the test, the ATIReal questionnaire was administered to the same group of students to measure their attitudes and interests toward reading. The questionnaire consisted

of 25 items. Items 1 to 15 used a 4-point Likert scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree) to assess students' reading attitudes, providing ordinal data. Items 16 to 24 involved multiple-choice and checklist formats to explore reading interests, yielding nominal data. Item 25 was an open-ended question asking students to describe the type of reading they were most interested in, which provided qualitative content data.

Data analysis

The data in this study were analyzed quantitatively using SPSS version 21.0. Each type of data was analyzed based on its measurement scale. The scores from the Functional Reading Achievement Test (FRAT) were treated as interval data. These were analyzed descriptively to find the frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. Based on the results, student performance was categorized into five levels: excellent, good, average, poor, and abysmal.

Additionally, the results were analyzed by school, District, and eight aspects of reading performance. Responses from items 1–15 of the ATIReAL questionnaire used a Likert scale and were considered ordinal data. These were analyzed using frequency and percentage to explore students' reading attitudes.

Meanwhile, items 16–24 provided nominal data about reading interests and were also analyzed descriptively. To compare reading achievement between groups, such as gender and school grade, the study used a t-test (Levene's Test). To explore the relationships between variables (reading interest, attitude, and achievement), the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was used, and a stepwise multiple regression analysis was done to see how much reading attitude and interest contributed to reading achievement.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

1. Descriptive Statistic

a. Functional Reading Achievement

To examine the distribution of students' functional reading achievement scores, Table 2 presents the results of the score distributions.

Table 2. The distribution of students' functional reading achievement based on five categories (n=237)

<i>Reading categories</i>	<i>Scales</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>% of Total N</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
<i>Excellent</i>	86-100	-	-	-	-
<i>Good</i>	71-85	75.78	9	3.8%	3.930
<i>Average</i>	56-70	62.48	33	13.9%	5.124
<i>Poor</i>	41-55	48.12	67	28.3%	3.715
<i>Very Poor</i>	0-40	30.75	128	54.0%	6.254
<i>Total</i>		41.78	237	100.0%	14.506

As shown in Table 1, less than a quarter of the student samples are categorized into the Good and Average categories, which account for approximately 17.72% of the total, or 42 students (N=237). Conversely, the results obtained showed that most of the students are still classified into the Poor category, and 128 students (54%) were classified into the inferior achievement category.

There were 2 Districts involved in this study: Seberang Ulu 1 and Seberang Ulu 2. Each District has a different number of schools and students. Table 3 shows the analyses of the data based on those two districts and schools.

Table 3. The distribution of students' functional reading achievement based on the district and school (n=237)

<i>Districts</i>	<i>Schools</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
<i>Seberang Ulu 1 District</i>	<i>SMP A</i>	47.56	54	16.149
	<i>SMP B</i>	51.33	24	12.324
	<i>SMP C</i>	36.77	39	8.542
	<i>SMP D</i>	50.19	21	13.265
	<i>SMP E</i>	28.00	21	5.514
	<i>SMP F</i>	26.48	21	7.692
<i>Total</i>		41.29	180	15.082
<i>Seberang Ulu 2 District</i>	<i>SMP G</i>	44.87	30	13.325
	<i>SMP H</i>	41.63	27	11.623
<i>Total</i>		43.33	57	12.543
TOTAL		41.78	237	14.513

The result in Table 3 shows a low mean score (total) of functional reading achievement from all students (41.78), which was still below the minimum standard score (75.00). SMP B had the highest mean score (51.33), whereas SMP E had the lowest (28.00). Meanwhile, in Seberang Ulu 2, SMP G had a higher mean score (44.87) than SMP H (43.33).

In addition, the description below was not included in the research question, but to assess the contribution of the functional reading test aspect to students' functional reading achievement. Every aspect played a role in contributing to the total percentage of FRAT. As depicted in Chart 1.

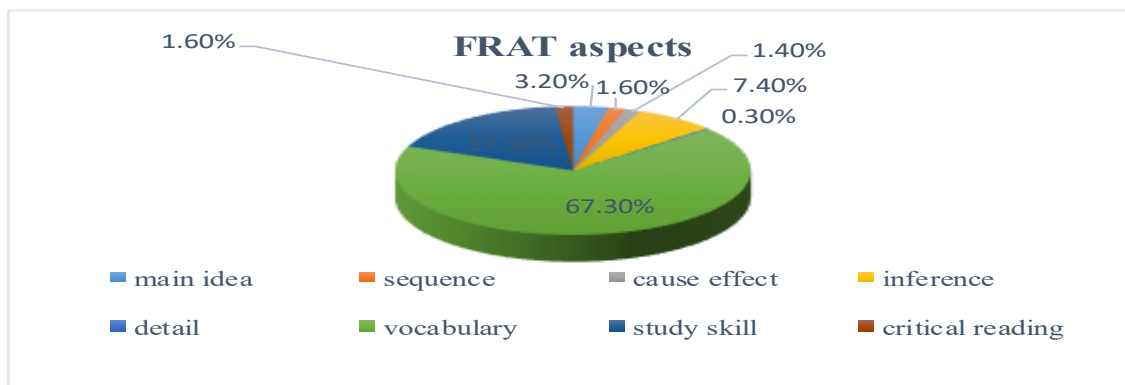


Chart 1. Distribution of FRAT aspects

b. Reading Attitude

To measure students' reading attitudes, items 1 to 15 of the *Attitude Toward and Interest in Reading Literacy (ATIReL)* questionnaire were administered. This instrument uses a 4-point Likert scale; however, for data analysis, the responses were categorized into two groups: *Agree* and *Disagree*. The results of this analysis are presented in Chart 2.

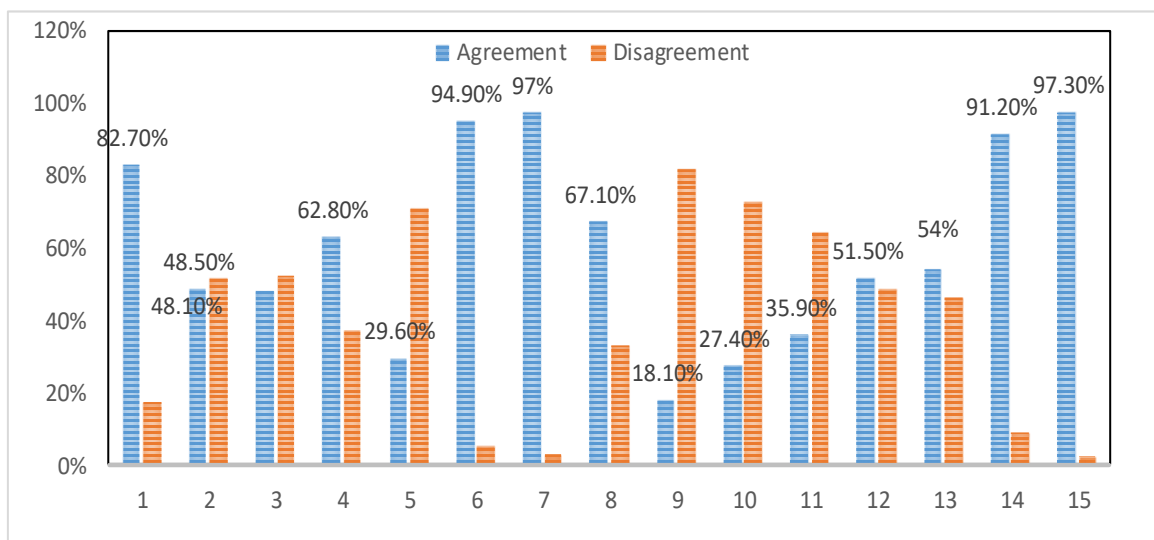


Chart 2: The distribution of the contributions of each functional reading achievement aspects

Chart 2:

Students' Reading Attitude	
1	Sometimes I like to read in my spare time
2	Sometimes I'd rather read than watch TV
3	Sometimes I'd rather read than play
4	Other people in my family seem to like to read
5	My friends seem to like read
6	I think it is important to be a good reader
7	My family thinks it is important to be a good reader
8	I like to go to the library to read or look things up that I want to know about
9	I read parts of a newspaper several times a month
10	I read parts of magazine several times a month
11	I enjoy reading aloud to someone else at home
12	Sometimes I like for someone to read to me
13	I like to read to learn new things or how to do something
14	I like to read to learn new things or how to do something
15	I want to be able to read better than I can now

Chart 2. Details of students' reading attitude

As illustrated in Chart 2, most students selected "Agree" in response to the questionnaire items. Notably, 97.3% of students agreed with item 15, which stated, "I want to be able to read better than I can now." This positive attitude was further supported by high agreement rates for item 6 ("I need to be a good reader") and item 7 ("It is important for my family that I become a good reader"), with 94.9% and 97% agreement, respectively.

c. Reading Interest

To assess the students' reading interest, ATIReAL questionnaire items 16 to 25 were administered to the students. The analyses for students' responses to those items that were designed to assess their reading interest were conducted separately in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Summary of the students' reading interest based on ATIReAL items 16–24:

Item	Most Preferred	Least Preferred
16. Reading Material	Adventure story (70.5%)	People-related (30%)
17. Newspaper Section	Comic strips (56.5%)	Store ads (5.9%)
18. School Subject	Music (75%)	Math (23.6%)
19. Fun Reading Topic	Something I like (87.3%)	People's problems (12.2%)
20. Animal to Catch	Fish (70.2%)	Tadpoles (2.1%)
21. Collection	Other things (52.7%)	Stamps (4.2%)
22. Group Belonging	Family (100%)	Social club (9.3%)
23. Lessons Taken	Another language (51.6%)	—
24. Activities	Listening to music (70%)	Boating (4.2%)

In addition, item 25 in reading interest is an open-ended question. The answers are categorized into two groups based on the data obtained: students' interest in technology and daily activities. The results indicate that technology interests among students are around

46.41%, comprising five activities: playing gadgets, watching TV and movies, using social media, browsing the *internet*, and *listening to music*. That percentage is still smaller than the *daily activity* percentage (53.59%), which is dominated by *exercising* activities (27.43%).

2. T-test Analyses

a. School's Grades

Table 5. The distribution of students' functional reading achievement based on grades

Grade	Mean Difference	N	Std. Deviation
7 th	38.43	79	13.269
8 th	40.46	79	11.529
9 th	46.46	79	17.118
	41.78	237	14.513

Based on the results, ninth-grade students performed significantly better (46.46) than eighth-grade students (40.46) and seventh-grade students (38.43) in terms of functional reading achievement.

Table 6. T-test of students' functional reading achievement based on grades

Independent Samples Test of grade 8 and 7										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Total_FRA T	Equal variances assumed	1.775	.185	-1.012	156	.313	2.000	1.976	-5.903	1.903
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.012	153.072	.313	2.000	1.976	-5.904	1.904
Independent Samples Test Grade 9 and 8										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Total FRAT 3	Equal variances assumed	17.796	.000	-2.584	156	.011	6.000	2.322	-10.587	-1.413
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.584	136.688	.011	6.000	2.322	-10.592	-1.408
Independent Samples Test Grade 9 and 7										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Total_FRAT 2	Equal variances assumed	8.241	.005	-3.285	156	.001	8.000	2.436	-12.811	3.189
	Equal variances not assumed			-3.285	146.782	.001	8.000	2.436	-12.813	3.187

The t-test analysis revealed significant differences in mean scores between Grade 9 and Grade 8 ($p = 0.011 < 0.05$), as well as between Grade 9 and Grade 7 ($p = 0.001 < 0.05$), with the latter showing the greatest mean difference of 8.00. However, no significant

difference was observed between Grade 8 and Grade 7, as indicated by a p-value greater than the significance threshold ($p = 0.313 > 0.05$).

b. Students' Gender

According to the data analysis presented in Table 7, female students achieved a higher mean score in functional reading achievement (42.92) compared to male students (40.63). The t-test analysis revealed no significant difference in functional reading achievement scores between female and male students ($p > 0.05$).

Table 7. data distribution and t-test of students' functional reading achievement based on Genders

Gender	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Sum	Minimum	Maximum	% of Total Sum	% of Total N
female	42.92	119	14.998	5108	20	82	51.6%	50.2%
male	40.63	118	13.976	4794	20	82	48.4%	49.8%
Total	41.78	237	14.513	9902	20	82	100.0%	100.0%

Independent Samples Test of the Genders

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Total score of FRAT	.763	.383	1.220	235	.224	.297	1.884	-1.413	6.008
Equal variances assumed			1.220	234.100	.224	2.297	1.883	-1.412	6.007
Equal variances not assumed									

3. Correlation analyses

Table 8 Correlation analyses of students' functional reading achievement and their reading attitude; and students' functional reading achievement and their reading interest

Variables	r (Pearson Correlation)	p Sig.(2-tailed) $p < 0.05$
Functional Reading Achievement	Reading Attitude Total Score	.031 .636
	Reading Interest Total Score	.073 .264

As shown in Table 8, there was no significant correlation between students' overall functional reading achievement and their overall reading attitude. Similarly, no significant correlation was found between functional reading achievement and overall reading interest, as indicated by p-values greater than 0.05.

Table 9 presents the results of the correlation analysis between students' total functional reading achievement scores and each of the 15 individual items representing aspects of their reading attitude.

Table 9
Correlational Analysis: Aspects of Students' Reading Attitudes towards Their Functional Reading Achievements

Variables	r (Pearson Correlation)	p Sig.(2-tailed) p<0.01
Functional Reading Achievement	I thinks it is important to be a good readers	.167**
	I like to read to learn new things or how to do something	.233**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The result of the correlation analysis is provided in Table 10; 2 of them correlated significantly (p<0.01). There were items number 6 (r=.167**) and item number 14 (r=.233**).

Table 10
The Correlation Analyses of Reading Interest and the Students' Functional Reading Achievement

Reading Interest Item	R	P Sig.(2-tailed) (p < .05);(p<.01)
16). Reading materials students might enjoy reading	Crime and spy stories	.142*
	About travel to visit	.138*
	A murder mystery	.130*
	Western stories	.139*
	About wars and fighting	-.140*
17). Part of a newspaper that students would read...	Just headline	.198**
	Advice column	-.145*
	Comic strips	.124*
18). School subjects students would rather read for..	English	.233**
	Physical education	-.162*
19). Reading topics that might that students' reading activity more fun	-	-
20). Students like to catch	Frogs	-.204**
	Snakes	-.211**
21) Students' collection	-	-
22). "I belong to" the organization or group students belong to	Social club	.182**
23). Lesson students take or have taken	Another language	.248**
	Go boating	-.179**
24). What students like to do	Go to movies	.151*
	Listen to music	.148*

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

It is concluded that 17 out of 79 items related to reading interest aspects were found to be significantly correlated (p<0.05). For example, item number 16 about *reading materials*, only 4 out of 12 items had significant correlations to functional reading achievement (See table 8). Another case, for the statement "I belong to" the organization or group students belong to (item number 22), the significant correlation only existed in *a social club*

($r=.182^{**}$). In addition, five items have negative correlations, such as the advice column ($r=-.145^*$), physical education ($r=-.162^*$), and going *boating* ($r=-.179^{**}$).

4. Regression Analyses

As previously presented, there are 17 aspects of reading interest which were found significantly correlated with students' functional reading achievement, and then those aspects were checked using stepwise multiple regressions to know which correlated aspects had a contribution and which aspect gave the most significant contribution to students' functional reading achievement (See table 11)

Table 11. Reading interest aspect contribution

<i>Model</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R Square</i>	<i>R Square Change</i>	<i>Sig. F Change</i>
1	.247 ^a	.061	.061	.000
2	.320 ^b	.103	.041	.001
3	.372 ^c	.139	.036	.002
4	.420 ^d	.176	.037	.001
5	.450 ^e	.203	.027	.006
6	.483 ^f	.233	.031	.003
7	.507 ^g	.257	.023	.008

a. Predictors: (Constant), another language

b. Predictors: (Constant), another language, just headlines

c. Predictors: (Constant), another language, just headlines, go boating

d. Predictors: (Constant), another language, just headlines, go boating, English

e. Predictors: (Constant), another language, just headlines, go boating, English, a social club

f. Predictors: (Constant), another language, just headlines, go boating, English, a social club, physical education

g. Predictors: (Constant), another language, just headlines, go boating, English, a social club, physical education, a murder mystery

Based on the data in Table 11, only eight aspects of reading interest contributed to students' functional reading achievement, accounting for a total of 27.7% of the variance. Among these, *reading in another language* made the highest individual contribution (6.1%), followed by *reading headlines* (4.1%), *reading while boating* (3.6%), and five other aspects. The lowest contribution among the eight came from *reading a murder mystery*, which accounted for 2.3%.

As previously mentioned, the two reading attitude aspects that were significantly correlated with functional reading achievement together contributed 6.8% to the outcome. Specifically, the statement "*I like to read to learn new things or how to do something*"

contributed approximately 5.2%. At the same time, "I think it is important to be a good reader" contributed 1.6%.

Discussion

The students' functional reading achievement, reading attitude, and reading interest

The descriptive data indicate that students' Functional Reading Achievement (FRA) remains alarmingly low, with a mean score of 41.78. More than half of the students (54%) were classified as *very poor*, and only 3.8% reached the *sound* level. These findings align with global trends showing a decline in adolescent reading proficiency (OECD, 2023), and they are particularly reflective of the situation in Indonesia (Kurniati et al., 2023).

One major contributing factor is the status of English as a foreign language in Indonesia, which is not yet fully internalized by most students. Reading comprehension in a second or foreign language is inherently more complex than in a first language. Many Indonesian students speak a local language at home before they learn Indonesian at school, placing English even further from their linguistic foundation (Masduqi, 2014). Although English is a compulsory subject from Grade 3 through tertiary education, the instructional time allocated is insufficient to develop basic reading competence. In junior high schools, for instance, students typically receive only two 45-minute English lessons per week. In other words, English is often treated like any other general subject, rather than being prioritized as a key skill.

Moreover, the strongest predictor of students' FRA was vocabulary knowledge, contributing 67.3% to their overall achievement. This suggests that while students may recognize individual words, they often struggle to comprehend texts deeply or apply information functionally. This finding supports Chen and Liu's (2020) argument that vocabulary breadth alone is not sufficient for comprehensive reading competence.

In contrast, the reading attitude results were dominantly positive. For instance, 97.3% agreed with the statement "I want to be able to read better than I can now," indicating high motivation and aspirations. This finding aligns with the Expectancy-Value Theory, which postulates that students are more likely to engage in reading if they value it and believe they can improve (Tegmark et al., 2022). However, these attitudes have not yet translated into higher achievement, suggesting a gap between intention and outcome, possibly due to limited access to meaningful texts or instructional support.

The analysis of reading interest showed that students preferred narrative and entertainment-based texts (e.g., adventure stories, comic strips, music topics). At the same time, academic or human-focused materials (e.g., math, people's problems) were less favored. This confirms recent research by Kheang et al. (2024), who found that student engagement with reading is higher when texts align with personal enjoyment rather than academic purpose. However, preferences for non-functional or less cognitively demanding texts may explain the low FRA despite high interest.

Moreover, by investigating the open-ended question, it is found that students most likely engage in activities related to their hobbies and technology. They will be more likely to engage with something if it is related to their passions. It is also undeniable that the developed technology can influence students' interest, encompassing reading interest, attitude, and achievement, across various subjects. Consistent with Annamalai and Muniandy (2013) and Ding (2020), research indicates that students prefer technology-related activities over reading. Therefore, if it is appropriately placed and supervised, it will be more beneficial to students.

The differences in students' FRA based on grade level and gender

The results showed a significant difference across grade levels, with ninth graders outperforming seventh and eighth graders. These findings align with the theory stated by Snow et al. (1998), which posits that early and sustained reading experience predicts achievement. The improvement is expected as students are exposed to more complex texts and academic demands. However, the performance gap is still small, and even grade 9 students did not reach a satisfactory level of FRA, indicating that progression alone does not guarantee proficiency. In addition, it can be argued that more experienced students who engage in English reading texts will achieve better reading outcomes. It is in line with Valcárcel Jiménez et al. (2024), who mention that one of the predictors influencing reading achievement is the experience with literacy from an early age and long-term comprehension of reading.

In terms of gender, the results revealed no statistically significant difference, although female students scored slightly higher than male students (42.92 vs. 40.63). It is consistent with global trends, where girls tend to show marginally higher reading achievement, but the differences are often not substantial (OECD,2023; Milal et al., 2021) The lack of significant disparity here implies that gender-neutral interventions are preferable and that the key

problem lies in instructional design and reading environment rather than inherent demographic traits. It is assumed that male and female students have almost the same level of skill in functional reading. It happens since all of them are taught equally by the same teacher through the same treatments. The students comprehend the materials in their way to reach the same point.

The correlations among students' reading attitude, reading interest, and FRA

Interestingly, this study found no significant correlations between the total scores of reading attitude or reading interest and overall Functional Reading Achievement (FRA). This contradicts earlier findings, such as Hasan (2023), who reported that positive dispositions toward reading are generally associated with better academic performance. However, more recent research suggests a more complex relationship. For example, Xiao (2023) found that domain-specific components of reading motivation, such as attitudes toward specific types of reading tasks or contexts, are more predictive of achievement than global or aggregated motivational measures. This insight provides a compelling explanation for the current findings.

Supporting this, further analysis in our study revealed that two specific attitude items, "reading to learn new things" and "the importance of being a good reader," and 17 individual interest items were significantly correlated with FRA. These results align with Xiao (2023), who found that affective and cognitive reading attitudes (particularly self-concept and perceived reading importance) are significantly linked to achievement. However, global attitudes alone were weak predictors.

Moreover, recent international studies echo this pattern. Akhmetova et al. (2022) conducted a study on multilingual middle school students. They found high levels of general reading positivity, yet little to no correlation with reading test scores. Similarly, a study shows that specific motivational factors (like interest in a particular book or topic) are more strongly linked to reading comprehension than general enjoyment (Jansen et al., 2016).

From a neurological perspective, a 2023 study in *Frontiers in Psychology* showed that attitudinal specificity has measurable neural correlates, with particular beliefs about the value or utility of reading linked to increased activation in cognitive control areas of the brain. It lends further support to our finding that the quality, not the quantity, of students' positive reading beliefs is what matters most for academic achievement (Lu et al., 2023).

Additionally, our finding of negative correlations between reading achievement and interests in non-academic areas (e.g., boating, physical education, frogs) may point to a divergence in motivational focus. This finding is consistent with more recent developments in interest theory, especially the updated four-phase model by Renninger & Hidi (2019). According to this model, situational interest can help capture a student's attention at first. However, it only leads to deeper learning when it connects to something meaningful and relevant to the academic task. A systematic review on motivation in learning also supports this, explaining that situational interest improves learning only when students see the task as valuable and related to their goals (Musta'aliyah et al., 2022). In the context of reading, this means that students' interests need to be connected to academic content, such as reading for learning, curiosity, or understanding texts to improve their reading achievement.

On the other hand, interests unrelated to learning, such as physical activities or animals (e.g., frogs), may be enjoyable but do not facilitate deep engagement with reading. They may even distract from academic focus. So, it is not just about having interests, but having the right kind of interests that truly support reading development.

Local studies reinforce this interpretation. For instance, a 2023 study in Palembang by Purnama et al. found a moderate correlation ($r = 0.419$) between students' interest in reading and their reading comprehension. However, another study at UIN Raden Fatah (2023) found no significant correlation between global reading interest and achievement ($r = 0.107$, $p = .459$), supporting the notion that aggregate scores may obscure meaningful item-level differences (Pratami et al., 2023).

Taken together, these findings underscore a critical point: not all positive attitudes and interests in reading are equally impactful. It is the content-specific, cognitively engaged attitudes and interests, such as those related to learning, curiosity, and the perceived importance of reading, that serve as stronger predictors of achievement. These insights should inform how educators assess and nurture students' reading motivation, shifting focus from general enthusiasm to more purposeful and academically relevant orientations.

The contribution of students' reading attitude and reading interest to FRA

The stepwise regression analysis revealed that only specific aspects of reading interest and attitude contributed meaningfully to students' Functional Reading Achievement (FRA). For reading interest, the strongest predictors were interest *in another language* (6.1%),

interest in reading just headlines (4.1%), and interest in English as a school subject (3.6%). These findings suggest that students who are drawn to linguistically rich content and cognitively engaging reading formats, such as informational texts or second languages, tend to perform better in functional reading tasks. This aligns with recent research by Peng et al. (2024), which emphasizes the role of domain-specific executive functions, such as reading-focused working memory and flexible attention, in supporting reading comprehension, particularly among students with lower vocabulary levels.

In contrast, interests in leisure activities such as *boating or physical education* showed negative regression coefficients, indicating a potential distraction from academic reading. It supports findings by Renninger and Hidi (2019), who argue that while leisure interests can support general well-being, they may compete with the time and mental effort needed for literacy development, especially if not aligned with academic tasks, which means it is not aligned with literacy, may distract attention and effort from reading.

Regarding reading attitude, two specific items emerged as significant predictors of FRA, contributing a total of 6.8% variance. These included *liking to read to learn new things* (5.2%) and *believing it is important to be a good reader* (1.6%). These results align with Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which emphasizes the importance of intrinsic motivation, learning driven by personal interest or internal value in fostering sustained academic engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2020). This idea means that when students feel competent and in control of their reading activities, their performance improves significantly, particularly in comprehension tasks.

Interestingly, while the total score for reading attitude did not significantly predict FRA, these two motivation-linked items did. This finding supports the work of Sur & Ünal (2024), who showed that reading engagement mediates the relationship between attitude and achievement, meaning that students' positive attitudes only translate into better performance when paired with consistent, focused engagement in reading tasks.

Finally, while student motivation and interest play key roles, family and home literacy environments continue to serve as essential external influences. A study by Birnbaum and Kroner (2022) found that parents' beliefs about reading and the frequency of shared reading at home were strong predictors of children's literacy development, even after controlling for socioeconomic background. Similarly, Araújo & Costa (2023), using cross-national PISA

data, confirmed that early exposure to books and positive reading routines at home lead to improved reading outcomes in adolescence.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

Conclusion

This study examined the functional reading achievement (FRA), reading attitude, and reading interest of junior high school students in Seberang Ulu 1 and Seberang Ulu 2 Districts of Palembang. It also explored differences across grade levels and gender, as well as the relationships and contributions of attitude and interest to FRA. The results reveal several key findings.

First, students' overall FRA was very low, with more than half (54%) categorized as very poor. Despite this, students generally held positive attitudes toward reading, many valuing the importance of being a good reader and expressing a willingness to improve. Their interests varied widely, with stronger preferences for narrative and entertainment-based texts such as adventure stories, music, and comics. In contrast, academic texts (e.g., math or informational content) were less favored.

Second, FRA differed significantly by grade level, with ninth graders outperforming seventh and eighth graders, indicating a developmental trend. However, no significant difference was found between male and female students.

Third, while total reading attitude and interest scores did not significantly correlate with FRA, several specific components did. For example, students who read to learn new things or become better readers had higher FRA. Interest in another language, headlines, and English also showed positive correlations. In contrast, interest in leisure activities like boating or PE showed negative associations.

Lastly, regression analysis showed that interest in another language (6.1%) and reading to learn (5.2%) were the strongest predictors of FRA. These findings emphasize the importance of targeting specific motivational and content-based factors to improve students' functional reading outcomes.

Limitation

This study has several limitations. It focused on students from only two districts in Palembang, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other regions with different

socioeconomic and cultural contexts. Additionally, while it explored the correlation between reading attitudes, interests, and functional reading achievement, it did not examine other potential influencing factors such as cognitive skills, home literacy environment, or the impact of digital media. The study also did not control for variables like parental education or socioeconomic status, which could affect reading outcomes. Lastly, the reliance on self-reported measures for attitudes and interests may introduce bias, suggesting the need for more diverse assessment tools in future research. It is hoped that teachers and future researchers will explore new methods to enhance functional reading achievement and investigate other factors that might influence it. It is also suggested to incorporate modern tools, such as technology or internet-based assessments, to improve reading performance and engagement further.

Implication

The results of this study show that although many students have a positive attitude toward reading and are interested in specific topics, their functional reading achievement (FRA) remains low. This suggests that merely enjoying reading is insufficient; what students read and their reasons for reading are equally important.

For teachers, this means selecting reading tasks that are relevant to real-life situations, such as reading to learn new things or solve problems. Texts related to students' interests, such as language, music, or news, can increase motivation and engagement. Teaching strategies should be adjusted to match students' specific reading attitudes and preferences.

Curriculum planners should make reading purposeful across all subjects, not just in language lessons. Schools can support this by offering programs like *Sustained Silent Reading (SSR)* and providing reading materials that are both engaging and skill-building.

Parents and families also play an important role. When families encourage reading at home by reading together, providing access to books, and showing a positive attitude toward learning, children are more likely to develop strong reading habits and better comprehension.

Teachers need professional development to understand how motivation influences reading. Policymakers should ensure that underperforming schools receive more support and that reading programs are both meaningful and enjoyable.

In short, improving reading outcomes requires a combined effort from schools, families, and communities to build both reading skills and motivation through purposeful, interest-driven reading experiences.

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