



An Analysis of Factors that Influence Reading Interest of Grade 8 at SMPN 01 Buay Madang

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi minat baca siswa kelas 8 di SMPN 01 Buay Madang. Minat baca merupakan faktor penting dalam mendukung prestasi akademik dan pengembangan diri siswa. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif melalui observasi dan wawancara terstruktur dengan 27 siswa untuk mengeksplorasi preferensi dan tantangan membaca mereka secara mendalam. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mayoritas siswa (77,8% atau 21 siswa) lebih menyukai buku fiksi yang menarik secara visual dan memiliki plot seru, serta menghindari teks yang panjang dan padat. Selain itu, penggunaan teknologi sangat mempengaruhi kebiasaan membaca, di mana 74,1% (20 siswa) lebih memilih membaca melalui gawai karena kemudahan akses dan variasi bahan bacaan, sementara 25,9% (7 siswa) tetap menyukai buku fisik. Tantangan utama yang dihadapi meliputi kurangnya keberagaman buku di perpustakaan, gangguan media sosial, dan keterbatasan waktu. Untuk meningkatkan minat baca, disarankan untuk mendiversifikasi koleksi perpustakaan, mengoptimalkan teknologi, dan mengadakan kegiatan membaca interaktif. Temuan ini sangat penting bagi praktik pendidikan dan perubahan kebijakan sekolah guna menciptakan lingkungan literasi yang lebih adaptif terhadap perkembangan digital dan kebutuhan siswa, sehingga berkontribusi secara signifikan pada keberhasilan akademik mereka.

Kata Kunci: buku fiksi; faktor yang mempengaruhi; minat baca; siswa SMP; teknologi.

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the factors influencing the reading interest of grade 8 students at SMPN 01 Buay Madang. Reading interest is a crucial factor in supporting students' academic achievements and personal development. The study employed a qualitative research methodology, utilizing observations and structured interviews with 27 students to deeply explore their reading preferences and challenges. The results revealed that a significant majority of students (77.8% or 21 students) preferred fiction books that were visually appealing with exciting plots, avoiding lengthy and dense texts. Additionally, technology significantly influenced reading habits, with 74.1% (20 students) opting to read on gadgets due to easier access and a wider variety of materials, while 25.9% (7 students) still preferred physical books. Challenges faced by students included the lack of diverse books in the library, distractions from social media, and limited time for reading. To enhance reading interest, it is recommended to diversify the library collection, make optimal use of technology, and organize interactive reading activities. These findings are vital for educational practices and school policy changes to create a literacy environment that adapts to digital advancements, ensuring students' reading interest continues to grow and contributes to their academic success.

Keywords: fiction books; influencing factors; reading interest, SMP students; technology.

INTRODUCTION

Reading is one of the most essential skills in the academic and personal development of students. It not only improves knowledge but also enhances critical thinking and cognitive abilities. At SMPN 01 Buay Madang, fostering a strong reading interest among students is crucial for their success in various subjects and overall educational growth. However,



preliminary observations and initial assessments at SMPN 01 Buay Madang reveal a noticeable shift in reading habits; it was estimated that a significant majority of students rarely utilize the physical library for leisure reading, with early indications showing that over 70% of students prefer engaging with digital gadgets rather than traditional printed texts. This disparity highlights that students' reading interest is heavily influenced by multiple factors, such as their preferences for certain types of reading materials, the availability of books, and the impact of modern technology on their reading habits (Saepurrohman & Fazani, 2023).

In recent years, there has been a shift in how students engage with reading materials. Traditional print books, once the primary source of reading, are now often overshadowed by digital devices (Harbi et al., 2024). Smartphones, tablets, and computers provide access to a vast range of online reading platforms, such as Wattpad, social media, and e-books, which may compete with physical books for students' attention. As a result, understanding the factors that shape students' reading preferences has become increasingly important for educators and parents alike. Several previous studies have investigated this phenomenon. For instance, Janawati & Riantini (2024) highlighted how digital platforms shift reading habits, while Utomo & Hendriyanto (2019) explored general factors affecting middle school reading interests. Furthermore, Amri (2019) emphasized the role of physical library environments in shaping reading motivation. While these studies provide a foundational understanding, there remains a significant research gap regarding how the rapid integration of specific digital reading apps interacts with localized challenges, such as outdated library collections and language complexity, specifically among transitioning grade 8 students in suburban or regional contexts

The novelty of this research lies in its specific focus on the intersection of modern digital platform preferences (e.g., Wattpad, Manga apps) and traditional physical barriers (e.g., library collection quality, peer influence, language complexity) within the specific context of SMPN 01 Buay Madang. Unlike previous studies that often isolate digital reading from physical library habits, this study provides a holistic, qualitative analysis of how these dual forces simultaneously shape the reading identities of grade 8 students.

Among grade 8 students, the selection of reading materials plays a significant role in maintaining their interest. Many students are drawn to books with engaging stories, vibrant illustrations, and appealing designs. Fiction books, in particular, seem to capture students' attention more than non-fiction or academic texts. The length and complexity of a book also



influence students' choices, with many preferring shorter, more engaging reads that keep them entertained without feeling overwhelmed by dense, long passages (Putra et al., 2023).

Students' use of technology has introduced new patterns in their reading habits. With smartphones becoming increasingly prevalent, many students now read digital content on apps such as Wattpad, Twitter, or Manga readers (Janawati & Riantini, 2024a). These platforms provide access to a wide variety of reading materials, including novels, comics, and even interactive stories. The convenience of having an entire library at their fingertips allows students to read on the go, contributing to their growing preference for digital reading over traditional printed books.

Despite the rise of digital platforms, there are still students who prefer the tactile experience of reading physical books. These students find comfort in books that can be accessed without the need for a device or an internet connection. Physical books are seen as a more stable and focused medium, especially when compared to the distractions of social media or online games. However, the availability of physical books remains a challenge in some educational environments, limiting students' access to a variety of reading materials. In addition to personal preferences, social and environmental factors also affect students' reading interest. Peer influence and teacher recommendations can play a significant role in encouraging students to read more. Book discussions, reading groups, or even casual conversations about books among classmates can spark curiosity and motivate students to explore new genres. Teachers also have the power to shape students' attitudes toward reading through their recommendations and classroom activities.

In addition to personal preferences, social and environmental factors also affect students' reading interest. Peer influence and teacher recommendations can play a significant role in encouraging students to read more. Book discussions, reading groups, or even casual conversations about books among classmates can spark curiosity and motivate students to explore new genres. Teachers also have the power to shape students' attitudes toward reading through their recommendations and classroom activities.

Another important factor is the complexity of the language used in reading materials. Students at this age often prefer books with simple, relatable language that aligns with their comprehension levels. Books with difficult vocabulary or challenging topics may deter students from reading altogether, while those with easily understandable language and



engaging narratives tend to be more attractive. This highlights the importance of choosing age-appropriate and accessible content that matches students' language skills and interests.

Based on the contextual background and the identified research gaps, the specific objective of this study is to comprehensively analyze the internal and external factors influencing the reading interest of grade 8 students at SMPN 01 Buay Madang, evaluating their preferences across digital and physical mediums, and identifying the barriers they face. To guide this study, the following research questions are formulated: 1) What types of reading materials and platforms are most preferred by grade 8 students at SMPN 01 Buay Madang?; 2) How does the widespread use of digital technology influence their reading habits compared to traditional physical books?; 3) What are the primary social, environmental, and linguistic challenges that hinder students from sustaining a strong interest in reading?

RESEARCH METHOD

This study on the factors influencing the reading interest of grade 8 students at SMPN 01 Buay Madang employs a qualitative research methodology. The qualitative approach was chosen to allow for an in-depth understanding of the students' preferences, habits, and challenges related to reading. This methodology emphasizes exploring subjective experiences, enabling the researchers to capture the nuances of the students' reading behaviors and the contextual factors that affect them.

To gather comprehensive data, the research utilized two primary techniques: observation and interviews. Observations were conducted during specific times, such as library sessions and breaks, to study students' reading habits in a natural environment. The goal was to identify patterns in how students interacted with books and other reading materials, as well as to observe their preferences and engagement levels. For instance, attention was given to whether students gravitated towards certain types of books, how long they spent reading, and how often they chose to read during their free time. These observations provided a baseline understanding of their reading tendencies and the external factors that might encourage or discourage their reading interest.

Interviews formed the second key technique for data collection, offering deeper insights into the students' perspectives. The structured interviews were conducted with 27 grade 8 students. To ensure a representative and rich dataset, these participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique. The selection criteria were based on capturing a



diverse range of reading profiles, including frequent readers, reluctant readers, and students with varying levels of academic achievement. This deliberate sampling ensured that the study could explore different dimensions of reading experiences across a broad spectrum of the student population.

Questions were designed to uncover their preferences, such as the types of books or materials they enjoyed, the platforms they used for reading (e.g., physical books or digital media), and their motivations for choosing certain texts. The interviews also explored barriers to reading, including challenges like boredom with certain materials, difficulty accessing desired reading materials, or distractions from other activities. By directly engaging with the students, the researchers were able to gather rich, detailed data that complemented the observational findings.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the research process. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from both the participating students and their parents or guardians. The participants were fully briefed on the purpose of the study and were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary. To protect their privacy, confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed; all personal identifiers were removed or replaced with pseudonyms during the transcription and reporting phases. Additionally, students were assured that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences.

The process of data collection was structured to ensure accuracy and reliability. The researchers maintained detailed field notes during the observation sessions, recording key behaviors and contextual factors. During the interviews, responses were carefully documented to capture the students' verbatim statements and the rationale behind their choices.

To ensure the validity and reliability (trustworthiness) of the qualitative data, several rigorous steps were taken. First, methodological triangulation was applied by continuously cross-referencing the data obtained from the observations with the interview responses. This helped confirm whether the students' self-reported habits matched their actual behaviors. Second, a "member checking" process was conducted, wherein initial interpretations of the interview data were shared back with a subset of the participants to verify that their perspectives were accurately captured and understood. Finally, an audit trail of the research procedures, including detailed field notes and interview transcripts, was maintained to ensure the study's transparency and consistency.

Data analysis involved a systematic process of categorizing and interpreting the information gathered from observations and interviews. Initially, the data were organized into thematic categories based on recurring patterns and significant insights. For example, students' preferences for certain types of reading materials, such as fiction or digital texts, were grouped under relevant themes. Similarly, challenges faced by the students, such as limited access to engaging books or distractions from technology, were categorized to facilitate a clearer understanding of the factors influencing their reading interest. After categorizing the data, the researchers performed a comparative analysis to identify relationships between the themes and to assess how various factors interacted. The findings from the interviews were cross-referenced with observational data to validate the conclusions and ensure that the results were not biased or overly reliant on a single data source.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Category	Number of Students	Percentage (%)	Description
Prefer fiction books	21	77.8%	Students prefer books with attractive visuals, varied content, illustrations, and engaging plots; they avoid long, dense, and monotonous texts.
Prefer reading on gadgets	20	74.1%	Main reasons: easier to carry, wider access, faster, and more diverse reading options (popular platforms: Wattpad, Twitter, comic/manga reading apps).
Prefer reading physical books	7	25.9%	Preferred due to free accessibility, although fewer students chose this option compared to digital reading.

Notes:

- Percentages are calculated based on the total number of students (27).
- Some students may fall into more than one category as their reading preferences can vary between physical and digital media.

The table summarizes the findings from an observation of 27 grade 8 students at SMPN 01 Buay Madang regarding their reading preferences. The data reveal key insights into the types of reading materials and platforms that appeal most to students, as well as the factors influencing their choices.

The majority of the students, 21 out of 27, expressed a preference for fiction books, making up 77.8% of the respondents. These students favored books with visually appealing designs, varied content, and engaging storylines. The preference for fiction likely reflects the desire for captivating narratives that provide an escape from everyday life. Additionally, students preferred books that were visually stimulating, incorporating elements such as illustrations or diverse layouts that could maintain their attention. Another crucial point is that students in this group were less inclined to choose dense, lengthy, and monotonous texts, which they found boring and tedious. This preference suggests that the structure and presentation of reading materials play a significant role in sustaining students' interest. The choice for fiction books, which often provide shorter, more dynamic stories, is a clear indication of their desire for entertaining and engaging content that is easier to consume.

In terms of reading platforms, 20 students (74.1%) favored reading digital materials on gadgets such as smartphones and tablets. This preference highlights the growing role of technology in shaping students' reading habits. The main reasons for choosing digital platforms were convenience, accessibility, speed, and the wide variety of available content. Digital platforms, such as Wattpad, Twitter, and apps dedicated to reading comics or manga, offer students a broad selection of genres and formats that cater to their diverse interests. Students also noted that digital reading is faster and more accessible compared to traditional physical books, making it a preferred choice for those seeking flexibility in their reading habits. This preference for digital materials reflects broader societal trends where technology has become a primary tool for consuming content, including literature.

On the other hand, 7 students (25.9%) still preferred reading physical books. While this number is smaller compared to the digital preference, it is noteworthy that these students valued physical books for their free accessibility, which contrasts with the often paid nature of digital content. Some students also mentioned that they enjoyed the tactile experience of holding a book and the absence of digital distractions. The preference for physical books may also be linked to the fact that these students did not have regular access to gadgets or preferred the simplicity of traditional reading materials over the technological alternatives (Utomo & Hendriyanto, 2019). Despite the dominance of digital reading, the presence of physical book readers underscores that for some students, the charm of printed material still holds value, especially in environments where access to technology is limited.

The table also highlights the variability in reading habits and preferences among the students. While a significant portion of students favored digital reading, a large number still gravitated towards fiction, suggesting that content type plays a key role in maintaining reading interest. The divergence between the preference for digital versus physical books indicates a shift in how students consume reading materials, driven by the convenience and variety offered by digital platforms (Dede et al., 2021). However, the continued preference for fiction and the occasional choice for physical books point to the enduring appeal of traditional reading experiences, suggesting that a balance between digital and physical media may be ideal for fostering broader reading habits among students.

The findings from the observations and interviews revealed several factors that affect the reading interest of grade 8 students. These factors are discussed under the following subheadings:

3.1 Types of Reading Materials Preferred

The findings from this study reveal that the majority of students in grade 8 at SMPN 01 Buay Madang prefer reading fiction books. Out of the 27 students interviewed, 21 expressed a clear preference for this genre, highlighting the significant role that content and presentation play in shaping their reading habits. One of the key factors influencing their choice is the visual appeal of the books. Many students stated that they are drawn to books with eye-catching designs, vibrant covers, and illustrations. The presence of images and creative layouts was mentioned as an essential factor that makes a book more attractive and engaging. These elements help to break up large blocks of text and add an extra dimension to the story, making the reading experience more enjoyable. The visual appeal is particularly important for young readers, as it enhances their initial impression of a book and often encourages them to pick it up in the first place (Aprilia, 2024).

In addition to the aesthetics of the book, the content itself plays a crucial role in determining students' interest in reading. Students expressed a preference for books with engaging and exciting narratives. They are drawn to stories that feature intriguing plots, relatable characters, and dramatic twists that keep them hooked from the beginning. Books with strong, captivating plots seem to hold students' attention better than those with slow-moving or overly descriptive content. The excitement and suspense that accompany a well-paced fiction book make reading feel less like a chore and more like a thrilling adventure. This preference for engaging content also reflects the students' desire for an



escape, as fiction often allows them to immerse themselves in new worlds and experiences far removed from their everyday lives. The books that are more successful in capturing their interest tend to be those that offer not only entertainment but also a sense of emotional connection, with characters they can relate to or aspire to be like (Triatma, 2016).

On the other hand, students tend to avoid books that are dense or monotonous in their content. Many students expressed a dislike for long, detailed texts that they found difficult to follow or boring. These types of books, often rich in description and complex in their narrative structure, do not appeal to the students' current reading preferences. They tend to lose interest quickly when confronted with material that feels too heavy or tiresome. This observation suggests that for students in this age group, the format and pacing of the text are crucial for maintaining their engagement. When a book becomes too dense or repetitive, it can lead to a sense of frustration or boredom, which ultimately results in a loss of interest. The preference for shorter, more varied reads shows that students are looking for books that offer quick gratification and constant stimulation. Fiction books with shorter chapters or segmented storylines seem to cater to this need for variety, providing students with frequent breaks in the narrative and allowing them to absorb the content in smaller, more digestible portions.

These preferences indicate that the format and content of reading materials play a pivotal role in capturing students' attention. The visual elements, the pace of the narrative, and the level of engagement offered by the story all contribute to whether a student will continue to read a book or abandon it halfway through. The fact that students prefer shorter, more visually stimulating books with exciting narratives suggests that they are looking for a balance between entertainment and ease of access. They want to read something that feels accessible, enjoyable, and, most importantly, not overwhelming. The findings also highlight the importance of offering a diverse selection of books that cater to these varied preferences. By providing students with fiction books that combine engaging content, appealing visuals, and a manageable length, educators and libraries can foster a more positive reading experience and encourage students to continue developing their reading skills.

3.2 Technological Influence on Reading Habits

The influence of technology on students' reading habits has become increasingly prominent, especially with the growing availability and use of smartphones, tablets, and other gadgets. In this study, 20 out of 27 grade 8 students at SMPN 01 Buay Madang expressed a clear preference for reading digital materials, such as e-books and online articles, using their mobile devices. This preference was driven by several factors that aligned with the students' lifestyles and reading needs.

First and foremost, convenience played a significant role in the shift toward digital reading. Smartphones and gadgets offer a level of portability and accessibility that physical books cannot match (Al Hudawy et al., 2022). Students can carry an entire library of books and reading materials in their pockets, making it possible to read at any time and place, whether at home, during breaks at school, or while traveling. This ease of access is particularly appealing in an era where students are accustomed to multitasking and moving between various activities throughout the day. The ability to seamlessly switch between different reading materials without the need to physically carry a book or find a specific location to read is an undeniable advantage that technology provides.

The variety and availability of digital reading materials significantly influence students' choices. With internet access, students can easily explore a wide array of genres and formats, including novels, short stories, articles, comics, and manga. Platforms like Wattpad, which offer a vast collection of user-generated content, allow students to find books and stories that cater to their unique interests. In addition to traditional novels, many students enjoy digital comics and manga, which are readily accessible through specialized apps or websites. This variety of reading options gives students more control over what they read and when they read it, making digital platforms an attractive option compared to physical books, which may be limited in variety, especially in school libraries or local bookstores (Panjaitan & et al., 2022).

Another significant factor contributing to the preference for digital reading is speed. Students often find that reading digital materials is faster compared to traditional printed books. Digital platforms allow readers to search for specific content quickly, skip to chapters or sections of interest, and even adjust text size for easier reading (Pratama, 2018). This speed and ease of navigation make digital reading an efficient option for students who are constantly juggling academic tasks, social media, and extracurricular

activities. The ability to explore multiple reading materials without the constraints of physical books allows students to indulge in a greater number of reading experiences in a shorter amount of time.

Despite the clear advantages of digital reading, there is still a subset of students who continue to value physical books for various reasons. Some students expressed a preference for physical books due to their tactile experience, which digital screens cannot replicate. Holding a book, flipping through its pages, and even the smell of the paper contribute to the sensory experience of reading, which many students find enjoyable. Additionally, physical books do not rely on battery life, internet access, or device storage, making them a more reliable option in certain situations. For instance, when digital devices run out of battery or are inaccessible due to connectivity issues, physical books offer a consistent and dependable alternative. Physical books are seen by some students as a more permanent medium for reading, offering a sense of ownership and connection to the material that digital books, which can easily be deleted or lost, may not provide.

The fact that some students still appreciate physical books highlights the mixed approach that many students take toward reading. While technology offers a range of benefits, it does not entirely replace the value of traditional reading formats. For some students, the combination of both digital and physical books enhances their overall reading experience. For example, they may use digital platforms for quick access to a variety of materials or for reading when they are on the go, while still enjoying physical books when they have the time and space to read more deeply or leisurely. This mixed approach suggests that the ideal reading experience for students may not be an either/or situation but rather one that combines the advantages of both digital and physical reading.

3.3 Challenges in Sustaining Reading Interest

In analyzing the challenges faced by grade 8 students at SMPN 01 Buay Madang in sustaining their interest in reading, several key issues emerged that hindered their ability to engage with books consistently. One of the most significant challenges highlighted by the students was limited access to engaging physical books. Many students expressed dissatisfaction with the school library's collection, citing that it lacked variety and did not offer enough modern, appealing reading materials. The students felt that the books available were often outdated, and the selection didn't align with their interests or the trends they were exposed to outside of school. The limited options in the school library

made it difficult for students to find books that captured their attention, especially when compared to the wide range of materials available digitally. For students who prefer physical books, this shortage in variety created a sense of frustration, ultimately leading to a decline in their motivation to read (Amri, 2019).

Another significant challenge affecting students' reading habits was the constant presence of distractions from social media and digital games. In an age where smartphones and digital devices are an integral part of daily life, students often found themselves torn between the allure of entertainment apps and the need to focus on reading. Social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok, as well as gaming apps, offered instant gratification through short, engaging content, which made it difficult for students to maintain sustained attention on longer and more complex texts. These distractions were particularly prevalent in the classroom and at home, where students often had easy access to their gadgets. While some students acknowledged that reading on their phones was convenient and sometimes preferred, they also admitted that the temptation of social media and games often diverted their attention from books. As a result, reading became a secondary activity that was easily overshadowed by the immediate pleasure provided by digital entertainment.

Time management also emerged as a critical factor in students' ability to sustain interest in reading (Tanjung et al., 2022). Balancing the demands of schoolwork, extracurricular activities, and personal time posed a significant challenge for many students. The heavy academic workload, particularly during exam periods, left students with little free time to engage in reading outside of their studies. Additionally, students involved in extracurricular activities, such as sports or clubs, often found themselves exhausted and unable to allocate time for recreational reading. The growing pressure to perform well in school further reduced the time available for reading, as students prioritized completing assignments and studying over leisurely activities. Moreover, personal leisure time was often consumed by other interests, including watching television or browsing the internet, which students found more accessible and less mentally demanding than reading a book. As a result, even students who expressed an interest in reading struggled to find the time and energy to engage with books regularly.

The combination of limited access to appealing reading materials, distractions from digital media, and time management issues created a complex set of challenges for

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students trying to maintain a consistent reading habit. While some students found ways to overcome these obstacles, such as reading digital books on their phones, others felt that their reading interests were constantly undermined by the distractions of modern technology and the pressure to balance academic responsibilities with personal and social activities. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that not only enhances access to engaging reading materials but also helps students navigate the competing demands on their time and attention.

3.4 Social and Environmental Influences

Social and environmental influences have a significant impact on students' reading interest, particularly in how peers and teachers can shape their reading habits. The research indicates that peer influence plays a pivotal role in the selection of reading materials. Many students mentioned that their reading choices were often influenced by recommendations from friends. This suggests that students are more likely to pick up books that their peers are reading or discussing, which creates a form of social validation around certain texts. When a book becomes popular within a group, it sparks curiosity among others, fostering a collective interest in reading. Peer groups that share common interests in books or reading activities can form a support system that encourages sustained reading habits. This peer-based motivation is especially important in a school setting, where group dynamics and shared experiences play a central role in shaping students' behaviors (Ruslan & Wibayanti, 2019).

The encouragement and guidance of teachers have a noticeable effect on students' reading interests. Teachers are not only sources of academic knowledge but also act as influential figures who can inspire students to explore literature. In the study, students noted that when teachers recommended books or organized reading-related activities, they were more inclined to engage with those materials (Banowati et al., 2023). Teachers can introduce students to genres, authors, and topics that they might not have discovered on their own. Additionally, when teachers actively promote reading through classroom discussions, book reports, or reading challenges, they help create a culture of reading that extends beyond the classroom. Students who feel encouraged by their teachers are more likely to view reading as a rewarding and enjoyable activity, rather than a chore or obligation. The teacher's role, therefore, extends beyond imparting knowledge to becoming a motivator and role model in fostering a love for reading.



A supportive reading environment is another key factor that influences students' interest in reading. The research highlights that organized reading groups or interactive library activities can significantly enhance students' enthusiasm for reading. Reading groups, whether formal or informal, offer a platform for students to discuss books and share their thoughts with peers. These group discussions provide an avenue for students to engage critically with the material, making reading a more social and enjoyable activity. The act of sharing opinions and exchanging recommendations within a group can make students feel more connected to the books they are reading, as it encourages a sense of community and belonging. Moreover, when students witness their peers' excitement about reading, it can generate a sense of curiosity and prompt them to pick up the same books, perpetuating the cycle of peer influence.

Interactive library activities also contribute to creating a positive reading environment. Activities such as book clubs, storytelling sessions, and reading challenges turn the library into more than just a place for borrowing books—it becomes a dynamic space for learning and engagement. Such activities not only make reading more fun and accessible but also encourage students to be more proactive in their reading choices. When students are involved in interactive library events, they gain exposure to a wider range of books, which can expand their reading interests and knowledge. In this environment, reading becomes an experience that is shared with others, further reinforcing the social aspects of reading. A library that fosters interaction, creativity, and collaboration between students and teachers can become a hub that encourages and nurtures a long-lasting interest in books.

The influence of social media and digital platforms cannot be overlooked in today's age, as they have become integral to students' social environments. Many students today are exposed to reading recommendations through social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok, where influencers, authors, and even fellow students share their reading lists and thoughts on books. These platforms allow students to connect with broader reading communities, where they can discover new books, participate in reading challenges, and join book discussions. Social media can act as a bridge that connects students to a larger world of literature, beyond the confines of their immediate social circles. This online interaction further amplifies peer influence, as students are motivated

not only by their immediate friends but also by a global network of readers who share similar interests.

The role of family in shaping students' reading habits also plays into the environmental influences on their reading interest. Families that prioritize reading and create a reading culture at home provide an environment that supports the development of reading habits. Whether through reading together, discussing books, or simply having a variety of reading materials available, families can reinforce the importance of reading and make it a regular part of daily life. This familial support can be particularly influential in shaping students' attitudes toward reading during their formative years. When students come from homes where reading is valued, they are more likely to develop positive associations with reading, which can translate into greater interest and motivation throughout their school years.

3.5 Content Language and Complexity

The language used in reading materials plays a crucial role in shaping students' interest in reading. From the data gathered through interviews and observations, it became evident that students at SMPN 01 Buay Madang were more likely to engage with reading materials that featured simple, clear, and relatable language. These materials were easier to understand and connect with, which led to greater enjoyment and a higher level of engagement. For many students, the complexity of language often determined whether they would continue reading a text or abandon it midway. When faced with reading materials that used overly complicated vocabulary or dealt with unfamiliar concepts, students often expressed feelings of frustration and disinterest. This was particularly true for texts that contained challenging words, long sentences, or abstract ideas that were difficult for them to relate to their own experiences or prior knowledge.

The use of complicated language not only hindered their understanding but also made the reading experience feel more like a chore than an enjoyable activity. Students reported that they preferred books that used everyday language, which felt more natural and easier to digest. Such materials allowed them to focus on the story or content without being distracted by the need to constantly look up unfamiliar words or try to decipher convoluted sentences. In contrast, when reading materials were written in a way that was too dense or academic, students found it harder to stay engaged, often losing interest quickly (Janawati & Riantini, 2024a).

The complexity of language also influenced students' ability to connect emotionally with the material. Many students stated that they preferred reading stories with characters and scenarios that felt real or relatable. For instance, books with language that mirrored their everyday speech or that featured characters in situations they could understand resonated more with them. On the other hand, when books introduced sophisticated vocabulary or dealt with abstract or academic topics, students often struggled to establish a personal connection. They noted that such materials felt distant and hard to relate to their own lives. This suggests that reading materials should not only be linguistically accessible but also culturally and contextually relevant to the experiences of the readers.

Another aspect of language complexity that emerged in the study was the students' varying levels of comfort with more formal or literary styles of writing. While some students appreciated the challenge that came with reading more advanced texts, most of the students preferred to read books that were written in a casual and conversational tone. These types of books allowed them to easily follow the narrative and immerse themselves in the story without being bogged down by complex syntax or overly formal language. In this sense, language complexity serves as both a gateway and a barrier to reading interest. When students are confronted with materials that use simple and accessible language, they are more likely to engage deeply with the content. However, when the language is too complex or academic, it can lead to disengagement and disinterest.

It is important to note that students' reading preferences were not only influenced by the linguistic simplicity or complexity of the texts but also by their prior knowledge and familiarity with the topics being discussed. Materials that introduced new concepts or dealt with unfamiliar subject matter required students to put in extra effort to understand, which could be overwhelming for some. For instance, when students encountered historical, scientific, or technical content written in complex language, they often felt lost or confused. In contrast, books that were set in familiar contexts or that addressed themes they had already encountered in their daily lives were much easier for them to engage with. This highlights the significance of providing reading materials that are not only linguistically appropriate but also contextually relevant to the students' knowledge base and life experiences.

Despite the valuable insights gained from this research, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. First, the study was conducted with a relatively small sample size of only 27 grade 8 students from a single



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institution, SMPN 01 Buay Madang. Consequently, the findings are highly contextual and may not be entirely generalizable to the reading habits and preferences of students in different geographical locations or varied educational settings. Second, the qualitative data collected through structured interviews relied heavily on self-reported responses. This method inherently carries the risk of response bias, such as social desirability bias, where students might slightly overstate their reading frequency or alter their stated preferences to align with what they perceive as favorable to the researchers or their teachers. Finally, while the qualitative approach provided deep, nuanced understandings of student experiences, future research could benefit from a mixed-methods approach involving a larger participant pool to statistically validate these findings on a broader scale. Acknowledging these constraints ensures transparency and provides a clearer boundary for the study's implications.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the reading interest of grade 8 students at SMPN 01 Buay Madang is significantly influenced by a complex interplay of internal and external factors. Students demonstrate a strong preference for visually appealing fiction books with engaging plots, and predominantly favor reading on digital devices such as smartphones. Conversely, their reading habits are consistently hindered by localized challenges, including limited access to relevant books, pervasive social media distractions, and a lack of free time. Crucially, positive social environments—driven by peer influence and teacher support—remain vital in fostering and enhancing students' interest in reading. The significance of this study extends well beyond the local context, highlighting a critical shift required in modern educational practices. As digital natives increasingly favor technology over traditional print, educational institutions must recognize that conventional literacy approaches alone are no longer sufficient. Creating a literacy environment that adapts to these digital advancements is essential to ensure that students' reading interests continue to grow, ultimately contributing to their overall academic success and foundational literacy skills.

It is recommended that educators and schools actively update and diversify their library collections by prioritizing visually appealing fiction that aligns with current student interests. Furthermore, teachers and library staff should organize interactive reading activities, such as peer book discussions and reading competitions, to cultivate a supportive and socially engaging reading culture. On a broader scale, educational policymakers and administrators



must recognize the shift in reading habits and officially integrate digital literacy tools into standardized curricula. This involves funding and introducing approved reading apps and digital platforms as formal educational resources, ensuring a strategic balance between modern digital integration and the sustained availability of traditional physical books.

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