

INTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO STUDENTS' LOW MOTIVATION AND INTEREST IN ENGLISH READING: A CASE STUDY AT JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

Penelitian ini berusaha untuk menganalisis faktor-faktor internal yang berkontribusi terhadap rendahnya motivasi dan minat siswa SMP dalam membaca teks-teks bahasa Inggris. Meskipun membaca diakui sebagai keterampilan penting dalam pembelajaran bahasa, banyak siswa masih tidak terlibat sepenuhnya atau merasa percaya diri saat diminta untuk membaca. Penelitian sebelumnya sebagian besar berfokus pada motivasi umum atau hanya satu faktor pada satu waktu, meninggalkan celah dalam pemahaman bagaimana faktor-faktor internal yang beragam sebenarnya bekerja bersama, terutama di sekolah-sekolah negeri di luar kota besar. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi dan mendeskripsikan faktor-faktor internal yang berkontribusi terhadap rendahnya motivasi dan minat siswa dalam membaca teks bahasa Inggris. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode studi kasus kualitatif dengan pengamatan kelas terhadap 36 siswa dan wawancara dengan 10 siswa yang dipilih melalui sampling purposif. Temuan menunjukkan empat faktor internal utama: rendahnya rasa percaya diri, kesulitan dengan kosakata, kecemasan membaca, dan minat intrinsik yang rendah. Masalah-masalah ini tidak berdiri sendiri; sebagian besar waktu mereka tumpang tindih dan menciptakan hambatan internal yang membuat siswa kurang bersedia berpartisipasi dalam aktivitas membaca. Studi ini menunjukkan bahwa meningkatkan motivasi membaca tidak hanya tentang mengubah strategi pengajaran, tetapi juga memperhatikan rasa percaya diri siswa, persepsi mereka tentang kesulitan, dan menyediakan pengalaman membaca yang terasa lebih bermakna bagi mereka.

Kata kunci: Motivasi Instrinsik, Faktor Internal, Factors, Sekolah Menengah Pertama

ABSTRACT

This study attempts to examine the internal factors that contribute to junior high school students' low motivation and interest in reading English texts. Although reading is recognized as an important skill in language learning, many students still do not engage fully or feel confident when asked to read. Previous studies have largely focused on general motivation or only one factor at a time, leaving a gap in understanding how multiple internal factors actually work together, especially in public schools outside of major cities. Therefore, this study aims to identify and describe the internal factors that contribute to students' low motivation and interest in reading English. This study employed a qualitative case study with classroom observations of 36 students and interviews with 10 students selected through purposive sampling. The findings revealed four main internal factors: low self-efficacy, difficulty with vocabulary, reading anxiety, and low intrinsic interest. These issues do not stand alone; most of the time they overlap and create internal barriers that make students less willing to participate in reading activities. This study shows that increasing reading motivation is not just about changing teaching strategies, but also paying attention to students' self-confidence, their perception of difficulty, and providing reading experiences that feel more meaningful to them.

Keyword: *Intrinsic Motivation, Internal Factors, Factors, Junior High School.*

INTRODUCTION

One fundamental English language learning ability that is crucial to the growth of pupils' language proficiency is reading. Students can learn knowledge to complement other language skills, expand their vocabulary, and comprehend sentence structure via reading. However, a lot of junior high school pupils continue to lack desire and enthusiasm in improving their reading abilities. This is evident in their lack of enthusiasm when given reading assignments, minimal participation in text discussions, and difficulty comprehending the content of reading materials, even when the texts are relatively simple. Furthermore, students are often not taught effective reading strategies, rarely practice reading, and are reluctant to read aloud. Teachers also often underemphasize the importance of reading strategies in their teaching (Khafidhoh & Abdullah, 2022).

The phenomenon of low motivation and interest in reading is a problem that requires serious attention. Learning motivation has a significant influence on students' success in understanding material, including in learning English. Students with low reading abilities tend to have poorer grades in all subjects, not just English, because reading is a fundamental skill for understanding other subject matter (Buraga, 2025). In addition, reading errors such as mispronunciation, word substitutions, and ignoring punctuation can cause misinterpretation of the content of the reading and exam questions, resulting in decreased exam results (Agbofa, 2023). Without motivation and interest, the learning process is less than optimal and learning outcomes tend to be low.

There several factors that suspected to contribute to students' low motivation and interest in reading, such as a lack of varied teaching strategies, the use of uninteresting texts, vocabulary difficulties, and the perception that reading in English is difficult and boring. Motivation and interest in reading are fundamental factors influencing students' success in comprehending English texts. (Kalila et al., 2025) explain that student motivation is primarily driven by intrinsic factors such as curiosity and personal interest in reading, while teacher and parental support is helpful but not always consistent. This finding aligns with the research of (Apriani et al., 2021), which states that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation play important roles in shaping reading interest, and that students' self-confidence (self-efficacy) strongly influences their desire to read English

texts. Furthermore, difficulties in understanding complex vocabulary and sentence structures can quickly lead to students losing interest and motivation (AF, Nurhayati, & Istiqomah, 2021).

Self-efficacy has a major impact on students' reading skills; when self-confidence is poor, students tend to avoid reading activities and perceive English texts as challenging and unpleasant (Apriliyani & Usuludin, 2023). Another significant internal factor is *reading anxiety* (Alenezy, 2021) showed that reading anxiety—particularly the fear of misunderstanding a text or answering questions incorrectly—significantly reduces students' interest in reading English texts. Recent research by (Kha & Nhung, 2024) also confirms that low vocabulary mastery is directly correlated with students' low interest and confidence in reading activities. Meanwhile, research by (Fasirah et al., 2024) confirms that reading motivation significantly influences students' literacy skills; in addition, the family environment and the availability of reading materials are also important determining factors.

Rather than focusing on teacher strategies as the cause of low reading motivation, several studies confirm that internal factors originating from within students themselves have a more fundamental influence. At SMPIT Al-Fityan, for example, intrinsic motivation such as curiosity, control over the learning process, cooperation, and competition were found to be key drivers in English learning (Bismayanti, 2023). This trend is reinforced by other findings, which show that internal psychological aspects particularly reading self-efficacy are strongly correlated with junior high school students' reading interest and competence (Setiawan, 2022). Furthermore, research by Hidayati, Diem, Purnomo, & Izzah, (2025) adds that low internal motivation and limited vocabulary are also significant factors hindering students' reading comprehension. Overall, these findings confirm that motivation that grows from within students, whether in the form of self-confidence or the drive to explore reading, is a key element in increasing their engagement in reading activities.

Although various previous studies have addressed junior high school students' reading motivation, most of these studies have focused on specific aspects, such as reading anxiety, vocabulary difficulties, or general motivational patterns. However, several gaps remain that have not been thoroughly explored.

First, most research in the past five years has focused on motivation levels, but has not

comprehensively analyzed the specific factors contributing to low student motivation and interest in English reading in junior high schools. Comprehensive research specifically examining the internal factors contributing to low motivation and interest in reading in English learning in junior high schools is still limited. Second, previous research has generally been conducted in large cities or schools with relatively good learning facilities, so research in the context of public schools in areas like Kuningan is still very limited. Yet, each region has its own learning characteristics, environment, and literacy support.

Thus, this gap highlights the need for research that not only measures levels of reading motivation and interest but also explores the underlying factors in depth, conducted in a representative school context in the Kuningan area. This research is expected to make a significant contribution to a more holistic understanding of the problem of low student reading motivation.

The research problem can be formulated as follows: What internal factors contribute to the low motivation of junior high school students in learning to read English? What internal factors cause low student interest in participating in English reading activities?

This study aims to identify internal factors that contribute to low student motivation in learning to read English and analyze internal factors that cause low student interest in participating in English reading activities.

1. The Concept of Reading Skills in English Language Learning

Reading is a receptive skill that holds an important role in how students learn English. According to (Snowling et al, 2020), reading involves more than just word recognition; it also entails attempting to understand the text's meaning, structure, and context. In English language learning, reading is not simply a decoding activity; it also involves several cognitive processes, like using students' previous knowledge, trying to interpret what the text is saying, and building a more complete understanding of the message.

Many people believe that reading comprehension is one of the fundamental skills that supports students' development of speaking, writing, and vocabulary. As a result, even if it may first appear minor, students' overall academic performance is

typically impacted in some way when their reading proficiency is lacking. Research by (Jannah & Widowati, 2020) one typical issue students encounter while attempting to comprehend reading materials is their restricted vocabulary, which makes the entire reading process more challenging and takes longer for them.

2. Motivation in English Reading

According to (Ryan & Deci, 2020), intrinsic motivation basically results from a person's own desire to participate in an activity because it makes them feel good or piques their curiosity. When it comes to teaching English reading, intrinsic motivation is demonstrated when students choose to read for reasons other than task requirements or outside pressure, such as a desire to comprehend the text, enjoy the reading activity, or feel pushed to find new meanings. Students with this kind of motivation are typically more willing to actively participate in the reading process and more persistent when they encounter vocabulary challenges.

This motivation usually helps students who are trying to find meaning, even when they face difficulties with vocabulary or when the structure of the text is not very clear, so that they can achieve a better understanding of the reading. Several recent studies also show that motivation has a significant influence on how often students read and how well they understand the text, and these two aspects are later related to their academic achievement.

Motivation in reading is basically divided into two main types, namely intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation, and both have different impacts on student involvement in reading activities (Rahmadina et al, 2023).

Intrinsic motivation arises from students' internal drives, such as curiosity, enjoyment, and personal interest in reading. This type of motivation is the strongest contributor to reading engagement because it encourages students to read not out of pressure, but because they *want* to understand the text. With intrinsic motivation, students tend to be more active in searching for meaning, persisting with difficult vocabulary, and showing greater effort in reading comprehension. In contrast, extrinsic motivation comes from external factors such as grades, praise, rewards, or academic

demands. This type of motivation works as external reinforcement that encourages students to read, but is not always effective for long-term reading habits. This means that extrinsic motivation can indeed encourage students to read, but it is temporary and not strong enough to form long-term literacy habits. When the reward or pressure disappears, students' interest in reading declines. The authors also emphasize that students who rely solely on extrinsic motivation are more likely to lose interest when faced with difficult texts or when there is no immediate benefit from reading.

Overall, intrinsic motivation has a stronger and more lasting impact than extrinsic motivation in the context of learning to read English. However, the two can complement each other if used appropriately in learning strategies.

3. Students' Interest in Reading English Texts

In English, every skill determines the success of each individual. One of them is reading, a skill that needs to be learned for learners to succeed in learning English, but mastering reading skills usually requires enthusiasm first. Essentially, reading interest is what motivates students to pick up and continue reading a material on an emotional and cognitive level. According to (Zur, M, & Hestiana, 2022), "Students have a strong desire to read... student motivation has a significant impact on their desire to read." This shows that interest is formed by a student's motivation and how they perceive the worth or enjoyment of the reading activity, rather than just being a reading habit.

Student interest is influenced by several factors. Internally, students who have a positive view of reading tend to be more interested, as (Zur, M, & Hestiana, 2022) noted that "*motivation and assumptions about reading... were at 'high' levels.*" Furthermore, text selection is also crucial. Pustika, (2024) emphasized that "*teachers should take students' interests into account... not all texts are appropriate for the students.*" Teachers also play a role in creating engaging reading activities. (Agustina, Mandarani, Syaputra, Nujum, & Bagus A, 2024) stated that "*a learning approach that focuses on increasing interest and motivation can improve English learning outcomes.*"

4. Factors Affecting Students' Motivation

Research over the last five years shows that reading motivation and interest are influenced by various internal factors. Self-efficacy, or students' confidence in their reading abilities, significantly influences reading motivation; students with low self-efficacy tend to give up quickly, avoid difficult texts, and demonstrate minimal engagement, as research by (Indrayadi, 2021) found that intrinsic and extrinsic reading motivation are influenced by students' self-perceptions in completing reading assignments. Furthermore, vocabulary mastery is also an important internal factor; (Dwiyanti et al, 2023) showed that limited vocabulary significantly weakens vocational high school students' reading comprehension and reduces their interest in further reading. Reading anxiety *also* limits students' internal motivation — according to research at SMP Negeri 4 Baubau, reading anxiety in English can hinder reading strategies and reduce student engagement (B & Arisman, 2021). Furthermore, intrinsic interest in the reading topic also plays an important role; A study by (Hafizah & Fithriani, 2023) showed that Madrasah Ibtidaiyah students who had an internal interest in English reading had higher motivation to read, compared to those who did not feel the topic was relevant to their personal interests.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative method with a case study design. This design was chosen to allow the researcher to deeply explore the internal factors contributing to students' low motivation and interest in reading English texts within a natural learning context. Thru a case study approach, researchers can comprehensively understand students' experiences, perceptions, and psychological conditions related to reading activities in the classroom.

This research was conducted at SMPN 2 Kuningan. The research subjects include eighth-grade students. Eighth-grade students were chosen because they are at the initial stage of learning English in junior high school, where motivation and reading interest play an important role as the foundation for further language skills development.

Data Collection Techniques to obtain in-depth and relevant data, this study uses several data collection techniques as follows:

a. Reading Activity Task (Supporting Instrument)

Before the interview, students were asked to participate in a reading activity task, which involved reading English texts individually. This activity is not intended to assess students' reading abilities or directly measure internal factors, but rather to create a real and natural reading situation. During the reading activity, the researcher observed visible reading behaviors, such as hesitation, long pauses, mispronunciations, unsteady voice, and a tendency to avoid reading. The results of this observation are used as supporting data and as the basis for selecting students who show low reading engagement for further interviews.

b. Interview (Main Instrument)

The main instrument in this research is the semi-structured interview. Interviews were conducted individually with several students who were purposefully selected based on the results of the reading activity task. The purpose of the student interviews was to explore internal factors such as self-efficacy, vocabulary difficulties, reading anxiety, and intrinsic interest in reading English texts.

The data in this study were analyzed using qualitative descriptive analysis with the following steps:

1. Data Reduction: The researcher selected and focused on relevant data from the interview results and reading activity tasks according to the research objectives.
2. Data Categorization: The data was grouped into themes based on the internal factors being studied, namely self-efficacy, vocabulary difficulties, reading anxiety, and intrinsic motivation.
3. Data Presentation: The data is presented in the form of narrative descriptions and interview quotes to strengthen the research findings.
4. Drawing Conclusions: The researcher identified patterns and relationships between the internal factors found to draw conclusions about the causes of low student motivation and interest in reading English.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents research findings regarding internal factors that contribute to low student motivation and interest in reading English texts in class VIII K SMPN 2 Kuningan. Data were obtained through classroom observations,

individual observation *checklists*, and semi-structured interviews with students.

In the initial stage of the research, classroom observations were conducted to obtain a general overview of students' levels of motivation and interest in reading in English learning. These observations involved all 36 students in the classroom and served as baseline data to identify overall student reading behavior patterns. Furthermore, the observation results were used to identify students with the lowest motivation and interest indicators, who were then selected for purposive sampling for the in-depth interview phase.

Based on the observation instrument with a score range of 0–24, students were grouped into three categories of high, medium, and low with the following results:

Tabel 1. Students Observation

Category	Score	Number of Students
High	17-24	13 Students
Medium	9-16	13 Students
Low	0-8	10 Students

From the table above, we can see that out of 36 students, there are 10 students who have low motivation and interest in reading when reading English texts which will be presented based on 4 categories of internal factors: Self-Efficacy, Vocabulary Difficulty, Reading Anxiety, and Intrinsic Interest.

1. Self-Efficacy

Observations showed that most students appeared hesitant and unsure when asked to read English texts. Many students read with an unsteady voice, paused frequently, and some took deep breaths before beginning. This pattern was consistent across more than half of the eighth-grade students.

Interview findings corroborate these observations. Of the 10 students interviewed, most stated they lacked confidence when reading English texts, especially in front of peers. Statements such as "*Karena saya gugup jadi saya ga percaya diri....*" "*Saya takut salah baca....*," and "*Saya takut di tertawakan teman-teman....*" indicate that emotional factors and self-perception significantly influence their readiness to read.

Some students also admitted that previous experiences such as misreading and then being laughed at made them less likely to try again. This suggests that low self-

efficacy not only impacts current reading performance but also reduces their willingness to practice or engage in future reading activities. These findings align with several recent studies. According to (Apriliyani & Usuludin, 2023) self-efficacy has a major impact on students' reading skills; when self-confidence is poor, students tend to avoid reading activities and perceive English texts as challenging and unpleasant.

Thus, the observation and interview data in this study show a consistent pattern: students' low self-efficacy is one of the most dominant factors that reduces reading motivation, because students feel incapable, afraid of making mistakes, and are not confident in their own reading abilities.

2. Vocabulary Difficulty

Observations showed that most students struggled to find new vocabulary in English texts. When the teacher asked students to read the text individually, some students appeared to pause for long periods on certain words, stumbling because they didn't know how to read them. This behavior was particularly evident in about a third of the class.

Of the ten students identified as having low reading motivation and interest, several said that the large amount of unfamiliar vocabulary made them easily lose focus and reluctant to continue reading. One student said, "*Kalau saya menemukan kata-kata yang susah saya jadi bingung dan saya ga mau lagi melakukan nya karena saya takut salah...*" Other students added that they often guess meanings randomly or skip over words they don't understand, making the text unclear.

These vocabulary difficulties not only hinder comprehension but also decrease internal motivation. Some students admitted that when too many new words appear in a paragraph, they immediately assume the text is "difficult," leading to a decline in reading interest before even attempting to understand it. This aligns with research by (Kha & Nhung, 2024), which states that difficulty understanding complex vocabulary and sentence structures quickly leads to students losing interest and motivation.

Thus, vocabulary difficulty has been shown to be one of the most prominent internal factors influencing students' low motivation and interest in reading. Difficulty understanding vocabulary not only causes a

linguistic barrier but also triggers the perception that reading in English is a "tiring" and "unenjoyable" activity, thus reducing students' willingness to engage further in reading.

3. Reading Anxiety

Observations show that reading anxiety is a dominant internal factor that lowers students' reading motivation. When asked to read a text, some students appear willing to read, but their voices gradually decrease and become unclear during the reading process, or they stop when encountering difficult words. This behavior is seen in approximately half of the eighth grade students.

Of the ten students interviewed, five (S1, S2, S5, S6, and S9) admitted to feeling nervous or afraid of making mistakes when reading. One student said, "*Saya takut, takut salah baca...*" "*Saya gugup dan takut di tertawakan teman-teman...*" Another student added that they were afraid of not being able to answer the teacher's questions after reading, which made them even more reluctant to get involved.

Additionally, some students exhibited physical signs of anxiety, such as trembling in their voice, reading too quickly, or stopping abruptly when encountering difficult words. Observations also noted that in some cases, students simply gave up and said "Saya ga bisa..." when asked to read, even though the text was relatively short.

This reading anxiety not only hinders students' reading performance but also impacts their motivation to try. Students who are afraid of making mistakes tend to avoid reading activities altogether, both reading aloud and reading independently, thus directly impacting low interest and engagement in reading learning. This finding is in line with research by (Zarei, 2024) who stated that students who fear being evaluated by their classmates will experience reading difficulties and show physical symptoms such as a trembling voice and reading quickly.

Thus, these findings indicate that Reading Anxiety is a significant factor that reduces reading motivation and interest, especially when students feel emotionally insecure or afraid of being judged by friends and teachers.

4. Intrinsic Interest

Observations showed that some students were not interested in reading English texts and showed signs of disinterest in English reading. Some of the 10 students stated that they did not make time to read English texts unless it was an assignment. For example, one student said, *"Textnya sulit untuk dimengerti, itu yang membuat saya malas untuk membaca."* " Karena jika tidak ada tugas, saya tidak ingin membaca..." This indicates a low level of intrinsic interest in the students.

Observations showed that most students did not demonstrate full engagement during reading activities. Some students appeared to quickly lose focus, did not attempt to understand the text deeply, and simply followed the teacher's instructions without any additional initiative. This indicates a tendency toward low intrinsic interest in reading activities in English.

These findings were reinforced by interview results. Of the 10 students interviewed, most stated that they only read English texts when required by their teacher. Some students explained that reading was not an activity they voluntarily chose to do when they had free time. For example, one student said, *"Jika tidak ada tugas, saya tidak berpikir untuk membaca sebuah text bahasa inggris,"* while another student stated, *"Textnya sulit untuk dipahami, jadi itu membuat saya malas membaca..."* This statement indicates that low intrinsic interest is not only caused by a dislike of the reading activity itself, but also by the perception that English texts are difficult and irrelevant to them. This finding aligns with research by (Nurhayati, Kuswando, & Ena, 2024) which emphasized that intrinsic motivation plays a crucial role in encouraging student engagement in English learning. This research showed that intrinsic motivation in junior high school students arises primarily from self-satisfaction (satisfaction from successfully understanding a text) and excitement about the learning activity itself. However, when students lack enjoyment or interest in reading, their motivation tends to decline, even though extrinsic factors such as assignments or academic demands remain. Thus, low intrinsic interest is one of the most consistent internal factors contributing to students' low motivation and interest in reading English texts.

Overall, the research results indicate that there are four main internal factors contributing to students' low motivation and interest in

reading English texts: low self-efficacy, vocabulary difficulties, reading anxiety, and low intrinsic interest. These four factors are interrelated and consistently emerged in both observational and interview findings, thus providing direct answers to the two research problem formulations.

CONCLUSION

This study sought to identify internal factors that contribute to junior high school students' low motivation and interest in reading English texts. Observations and interviews revealed four key factors that consistently emerged within the students themselves: low self-efficacy, vocabulary difficulties, reading anxiety, and low intrinsic interest. These factors don't operate in isolation; they often overlap and influence each other, forming a kind of internal barrier that discourages students from engaging and truly participating in reading activities.

Low self-efficacy makes students doubt their abilities, leading them to avoid reading. Vocabulary difficulties reinforce the perception that reading is difficult and tiring. Furthermore, reading anxiety fuels fears of mistakes and social evaluation, further reducing students' readiness to engage in reading. Meanwhile, low intrinsic interest leads students to read only when required, rather than as a choice driven by personal interest. These findings suggest that barriers to students' reading motivation and interest largely stem from internal psychological factors, not solely from teaching methods or learning materials.

This study makes an important contribution to the literature, particularly because it focuses on the context of public schools in a region that has rarely been studied in depth. By uncovering the relationship between these four internal factors, the results broaden our understanding of how reading motivation is formed and hindered in junior high school students. Furthermore, this study confirms that efforts to improve reading ability are not simply a matter of improving teaching strategies; instead, it is necessary to consider strengthening students' internal factors, such as self-confidence, perceptions of reading difficulties, and creating more meaningful and engaging reading experiences.

This study opens up opportunities for further research, such as developing classroom-based interventions to improve reading self-efficacy, designing reading activities that can reduce anxiety, or developing teaching materials that better align with students' intrinsic interests.

Further research could also examine external factors such as family support, the school literacy environment, or specific teaching strategies to see how internal and external factors interact to influence students' reading motivation. Thus, this study not only answers its initial objectives but also provides a foundation for developing more effective reading instructional practices that are oriented toward students' psychological needs.

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