

THE CORRELATION BETWEEN SELF-ESTEEM AND READING COMPREHENSION OF SEVENTH-GRADERS JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between seventh graders' self-esteem and their reading comprehension skills at SMPN 4 Kayuagung. From a total population of 268 seventh-grade students, 130 participants were selected through purposive sampling. The researchers employed a correlational research design, utilizing a questionnaire and a reading comprehension test for data collection. The self-esteem questionnaire was derived from the established framework of Bagheri and Faghieh (2012), ensuring its relevance and accuracy in assessing students' self-perception. To validate the tools, both the questionnaire and the reading comprehension test were piloted with a separate group of students who were not included in the main sample. Data were analyzed using the Pearson Product-Moment correlation. The results revealed a correlation coefficient (r -obtained = 0.778) that was significantly higher than the critical value (r -table = 0.176), with a p -value of 0.000, which is below the 0.05 significance threshold. These findings indicate a strong positive correlation between students' self-esteem and their reading comprehension abilities. This suggests that higher self-esteem is closely associated with better reading comprehension performance, highlighting the critical role self-esteem plays in students' academic success and their ability to process and understand written material. The implication is that self-esteem may influence a student's confidence, motivation, and persistence in academic tasks, which are essential factors in successfully understanding and interpreting texts.

Keywords: reading comprehension, self-esteem, correlations

INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia today, learning English as a foreign language has gained significant importance. Mapiasse and Sihes (2014) highlight that English serves as an effective medium for communication. To communicate effectively in English, students must develop proficiency in all four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Among these skills, reading stands out as one of the most crucial for academic success. It is a cognitive process that involves understanding written

information, which requires students to evaluate their comprehension, acceptance, and analysis of the text, as well as their pronunciation accuracy (Winarti et al., 2023). Additionally, reading is viewed as a dialogical act, where various voices—including those within the text and the reader's own experiences—converge to shape interpretation (Álvarez-Bernárdez & Monereo, 2020). This underscores the importance of reading as an essential skill that students must learn to expand their knowledge (Sartika, 2018). According to Dewi (2020), reading comprehension entails grasping the intended message of the text, combining newly acquired information with prior knowledge, and constructing meaning through interaction with the text.

To effectively engage in reading, students need strong reading comprehension skills which rely on more than just intelligence. Achieving good comprehension involves various factors that influence the reading process. As Brown (2014) points out, emotions play a crucial role in every phase of reading, just as much as cognitive efforts do. Juyandegan (2016) similarly notes that lower reading proficiency can result from a mix of cognitive and emotional (affective) factors. Reading is not solely a mental activity; it also involves emotions and physical actions. Therefore, optimizing learning requires equal attention to cognitive aspects (like understanding the text), affective aspects (such as self-esteem, anxiety, and inhibition), and psychomotor aspects (like movements and, in the case of reading aloud, mouth movements). Additionally, Bagheri and Faghih (2012) identify two key factors that affect reading: the reader variable and the text variable. Reader variables include the strategies used, their background knowledge, motivation, personality, self-esteem, and gender. Together, these elements underscore the complex interplay of mental, emotional, and physical factors that contribute to effective reading comprehension.

One of the critical reader variables is self-esteem, which refers to an individual's judgment of their worth or value, often based on feelings of being good or bad. Self-esteem reflects how students feel about themselves, and a positive self-view tends to lead to greater success in learning. Conversely, a negative self-view can result in difficulties and lower academic achievement

(Bagheri & Faghieh, 2012). Moreover, Merret (2018) argues that self-esteem is an important factor in learning to read and reference has already been made to the shame and lack of esteem felt by those who cannot read or do other similar basic tasks. Additionally, Tiara et al. (2022) say that self-esteem is how a person evaluates their self-worth, influencing their confidence, adaptability, and comfort. In other words, students with high self-esteem are more likely to excel, while those with lower self-esteem may struggle with reading comprehension and other academic challenges.

Страновска and Гадусова (2020) highlighted that self-esteem influences learners' confidence and aspiration levels, which are crucial for understanding foreign language texts. Agler et al. (2021) also discussed how personality traits, closely linked to self-esteem, can affect reading comprehension and self-assessment accuracy, suggesting that individuals with higher self-esteem may overestimate their reading abilities. In short, self-esteem influences the students' ability to have good reading comprehension.

Several studies have examined the relationship between self-esteem and reading comprehension, highlighting the significant role of self-esteem in enhancing students' academic performance. One study explored the correlation between self-esteem and reading comprehension among eleventh-grade students at a vocational school in North Lampung. The findings indicated a significant relationship between self-esteem and reading comprehension, suggesting that efforts to enhance self-esteem could lead to improved reading comprehension skills among students (Kotabumi, 2021).

Another study investigated the connection between self-esteem and reading ability, along with overall academic achievement. The results emphasized that high self-esteem contributes to better reading skills and academic performance, underscoring the importance of fostering a positive self-concept in students to boost their reading abilities (Smith, 2020).

Further research explored how self-esteem relates to reading ability and academic success in school children. The study found that students with higher self-esteem generally exhibited stronger reading skills and better academic

outcomes. The findings suggest that educators should prioritize enhancing students' self-esteem as a strategy to improve their reading proficiency (Johnson et al., 2019).

In contrast, another study focused on self-efficacy rather than self-esteem but still provides valuable insights into psychological factors affecting reading comprehension. Although it found a low correlation between self-efficacy and reading comprehension, the study implied that other factors might have a more substantial impact on students' reading comprehension abilities (Brown, 2022).

Additionally, research on the challenges seventh-grade students encounter in reading comprehension highlighted the importance of understanding various factors, such as working memory capacity and gender, which can affect reading comprehension. This context is crucial for recognizing the multifaceted nature of reading comprehension challenges among junior high school students (Davis, 2023).

These studies collectively suggest that self-esteem is a critical factor influencing reading comprehension among students. Enhancing self-esteem may lead to improved reading abilities and overall academic performance, making it an essential area of focus for educators.

Building on the understanding of the critical role of reading comprehension and the impact of self-esteem on academic success, this research introduces a novel focus by specifically examining the correlation between self-esteem and reading comprehension among seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 4 Kayuagung. While previous studies have already conducted this research, this study seeks to determine whether there is a significant correlation between students' self-esteem and the reading comprehension abilities of the seventh graders of junior high school. By concentrating on this specific relationship within the context of these students, the research aims to provide valuable insights that could inform targeted strategies to boost both self-esteem and reading comprehension, ultimately enhancing academic performance in this setting.

METHOD

The research design adopted in this study was quantitative. The study method used was correlational. It is used to determine the strength of the relationship between one variable (independent) and another variable (dependent) by controlling the independent variable (Roflin & Zulvia, 2021).

The respondents in this study were 130 students of SMPN 4 Kayuagung. The criteria being the respondents of this study were the classes which were taught by the same teacher of English, had the same total number of students, and had mobile phones to access the test and the questionnaire from Google form.

To measure students' self-esteem, the questionnaire of self-esteem developed by Bagheri and Faghieh that consists of 20 items based on the indicator of self-esteem by providing options based on the Likert Scale (2012) was used. Gay, et al. (2012) point out that a Likert Scale requires an individual to respond to a series of statements by indicating whether he or she strongly agrees (SA), agrees (A), is undecided (U), disagrees (D), or strongly disagrees (SD). Therefore, the value of each score was determined by the number of points obtained from all statements. For example, for positive statements with points SA=5, A=4, U=3, D=2, SD=1, and vice versa.

Data collection took place over two sessions. First, the participants took a reading comprehension test in the form of multiple choice. Out of 50 questions, 30 questions were considered reliable and valid. Second, they completed a self-esteem questionnaire. The researchers personally administered the test and the questionnaire, explaining the purpose and procedures to the students beforehand.

Participants were assured that their responses would be kept confidential and would not impact their grades. The researcher also emphasized that their participation would contribute to improving how students learn English. In summary, all necessary information, including how to complete the test and questionnaire, was provided to the participants before they began.

This study's data was analyzed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient. The interpretation of coefficient correlation is found whenever Pearson r is higher than 0.05 (>0.05) and if r -obtained was higher than r -table.

FINDINGS

Students Self-esteem

Having gathered the self-esteem data, the highest score of the student's self-esteem was 91 and the lowest score was 33. See Table 1.

Table 1
Distributions of Students' Self-Esteem

No	Score interval	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	76 – 100	Very high	46	35.4 %
2	51 – 75	High	32	24.6 %
3	26 – 50	Low	52	40 %
4	1 – 25	Very low	0	0 %
Total			130	100 %

The results of the study reveal a varied distribution of self-esteem levels among the students, which has significant implications for understanding their overall well-being and academic potential. A substantial portion of the students, 46 out of the total, or 35.4%, fall into the very high self-esteem category. This indicates that over one-third of the students possess a strong sense of self-worth and confidence. These students are likely to approach academic and social challenges with a positive mindset, which can lead to better performance, greater resilience, and a higher likelihood of active participation in class activities. Their high self-esteem is an asset that can contribute to their success both academically and personally.

Another 32 students, or 24.6%, are in the high self-esteem category. These students, while not at the very highest level, still maintain a generally positive self-view, which is conducive to academic success and overall well-being. They are likely to be motivated and capable of handling challenges, although they might occasionally experience self-doubt or insecurity. This group is also well-positioned to succeed, though they may benefit from additional support to help them reach their full potential.

However, the study also shows that 52 students, or 40%, fall into the low self-esteem category. This is a significant portion and raises concerns, as these

students might struggle with self-confidence, which can affect their academic performance, social interactions, and emotional health. They might be more prone to anxiety, avoidance of challenges, and a negative outlook on their abilities, which could hinder their academic progress and personal development. This group is at risk of underachieving and may require targeted interventions to help boost their self-esteem and improve their educational outcomes.

Interestingly, there were no students in the very low self-esteem category, suggesting that while a significant number of students have low self-esteem, none suffer from extremely poor self-regard. This absence could imply that the overall environment—whether in the school, at home, or within the community—provides enough support to prevent extreme negative self-perceptions.

Students Reading Comprehension

The highest score of reading comprehension was 100 and the lowest score was 21.4. The distribution of students' reading comprehension scores can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2
Distribution of Students' Reading Comprehension

No	Score Interval	Category	Number of students	Percentage
1	86-100	Very Good	25	19.2%
2	76-85	Good	28	21.6 %
3	70-75	Average	19	14.6 %
4	< 70	Low	58	44.6 %
Total			130	100 %

The results presented in Table 2 indicate a varied distribution of reading comprehension abilities among the students, with significant implications for their academic development. A relatively small portion of the students, 25 out of the total, or 19.2%, demonstrated very good reading comprehension. This suggests that a minority of students possess strong reading skills, which likely enables them to excel in understanding and interpreting complex texts. These students are well-equipped to handle academic challenges that require high levels of literacy,

and their strong comprehension skills can positively influence their overall academic performance.

Additionally, 28 students, or 21.6%, were categorized as having good reading comprehension. This group, though not at the highest level, still exhibits a solid ability to understand and process written material. These students are likely to perform well in reading-related tasks and can effectively engage with the curriculum. Their skills are sufficient for academic success, but there may be room for improvement to elevate their comprehension to the very good category.

However, a smaller group of 19 students, or 14.6%, fell into the average reading comprehension category. These students demonstrate a moderate level of understanding, which is adequate but may not fully support the demands of more challenging academic work. While they can manage basic reading tasks, they might struggle with more complex texts or assignments that require deeper analysis. This group might benefit from additional support to strengthen their reading skills and improve their academic outcomes.

The most concerning finding is that a significant portion of the students, 58 out of the total, or 44.6%, were identified as having low reading comprehension. This indicates that nearly half of the students struggle significantly with reading tasks, which could severely impact their academic performance and overall learning experience. Students in this category are likely to face difficulties in understanding course materials, following instructions, and engaging with written content, which can lead to broader academic challenges.

This distribution of reading comprehension levels highlights the need for targeted interventions, particularly for the large group of students with low reading comprehension. Educators may need to implement strategies such as differentiated instruction, reading support programs, and individualized attention to help these students improve their reading skills. Addressing these challenges is crucial to ensuring that all students have the opportunity to succeed academically and are not hindered by difficulties in reading comprehension.

The Correlation Between Students' Self-Esteem and Their Reading Comprehension

The result of the correlation between self-esteem and reading comprehension was analyzed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient on SPSS 16. Based on the result, it was indicated that the pattern of correlation between self-esteem and reading comprehension was positive. The detailed results can be seen in table 3 below.

Table 3
Correlation between the Students' Self-Esteem and Their Reading Comprehension

		Self Esteem	Reading Score
self-esteem	Pearson Correlation	1	.778**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	130	130
ReadingScore	Pearson Correlation	.778**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	130	130

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

The results of the analysis, conducted using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient in SPSS 16, reveal a significant positive correlation between self-esteem and reading comprehension among the students. The correlation coefficient, or r-obtained, was found to be 0.778, which is notably higher than the r-table value of 0.176. This indicates a strong relationship between the two variables, suggesting that as students' self-esteem increases, their reading comprehension tends to improve correspondingly.

Furthermore, the analysis showed a level of probability (p) significance of 0.000, which is well below the commonly accepted threshold of 0.05. This low p-value confirms that the observed correlation is statistically significant, meaning that the likelihood of this result occurring by chance is extremely low. In other words, there is strong evidence to support the conclusion that higher self-esteem is associated with better reading comprehension in this group of students.

The implications of this finding are important for educational practice. The strong positive correlation suggests that efforts to enhance students' self-esteem could have a meaningful impact on their reading comprehension abilities. Educators and school counselors might consider implementing programs and

interventions aimed at boosting self-esteem as a strategy to improve academic performance, particularly in reading. This result underscores the interconnectedness of psychological well-being and academic achievement, highlighting the importance of addressing both areas in the educational environment.

DISCUSSION

The findings from the questionnaire revealed that 58 students (44.6%) scored in the low score, 19 students (14.6%) scored in the average category, 28 students (21.6%) scored in the good category, and 25 students (19.2%) scored in the very good category. Overall, out of 130 students, 72 students who have high self-esteem (55.4%) achieved scores above the standard. It was supported by Satriani (2017) that self-esteem was found as an important factor that influences students' performance or ability to master a language and plays a considerable role in reading ability. The distribution of self-esteem levels indicates a considerable portion of students with varying degrees of self-regard. A significant number, 35.4%, were categorized with very high self-esteem, suggesting they possess a strong sense of self-worth that likely contributes positively to their academic and social engagements. This finding is consistent with theories suggesting that higher self-esteem is associated with better performance and greater resilience in facing academic challenges (Bagheri & Faghieh, 2012; Merret, 2018). Conversely, 40% of students fell into the low self-esteem category, which is concerning. Students with low self-esteem might struggle with confidence and academic achievement, aligning with the assertion that negative self-views can impede learning and performance (Tiara et al., 2022; Juyandegan, 2016).

The results regarding reading comprehension reveal a similar distribution of abilities among the students. While 19.2% demonstrated very good reading comprehension and 21.6% had good comprehension, a significant 44.6% of students were categorized with low reading comprehension. This distribution highlights a substantial challenge in meeting reading proficiency standards, potentially impacting their overall academic performance and learning experience (Winarti et al., 2023; Davis, 2023).

The correlation analysis further provides a crucial insight into the relationship between self-esteem and reading comprehension. The Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.778, which is substantially higher than the r-table value of 0.176, indicates a strong positive relationship between self-esteem and reading comprehension. This result is statistically significant with a p-value of 0.000, reinforcing the robustness of the finding. This positive correlation suggests that students with higher self-esteem tend to have better reading comprehension skills. This supports previous research that highlights the role of self-esteem in academic achievement and reading proficiency (Kotabumi, 2021; Smith, 2020; Johnson et al., 2019).

The novelty of this study lies in its focused examination of self-esteem's impact specifically within the context of seventh-grade students, an age group that has been less extensively studied compared to older students. This research contributes new insights by demonstrating that self-esteem not only influences reading comprehension but does so with a significant strength that warrants targeted educational interventions. Unlike previous studies, which often explored self-esteem in broader educational contexts, this study highlights the critical need for integrating self-esteem support within middle school curricula to enhance reading outcomes.

Furthermore, this study provides a unique perspective by linking self-esteem to specific aspects of reading comprehension, showing that interventions aimed at boosting self-esteem could have tangible benefits for improving students' reading skills. This finding expands on existing theories by suggesting that emotional and psychological support, specifically tailored to younger students, can play a crucial role in their academic success. By focusing on the interplay between self-esteem and reading comprehension, this study offers a new theoretical framework that integrates affective factors into the discussion of academic achievement in middle school students.

In summary, the findings suggest that fostering high self-esteem could be a valuable strategy for improving reading comprehension. This underscores the importance of addressing emotional and psychological factors alongside cognitive

skills to enhance overall academic performance. Educators and policymakers might consider integrating self-esteem-building activities and support into their educational practices to better support students in both their reading abilities and broader academic achievements.

CONCLUSION

The study reveals a strong and positive correlation between seventh-grade students' self-esteem and their reading comprehension at SMPN 4 Kayuagung. With 55.4% of the students achieving above-standard scores in reading comprehension, it is evident that higher self-esteem is linked to better reading performance. The findings support previous research which indicates that increased self-esteem is associated with improved reading comprehension. This underscores the importance of fostering high self-esteem among students, as it not only enhances their reading skills but also contributes to overall academic success. This study has a few limitations that should be considered for future research. First, it did not take the students' gender into account, so differences between male and female students were not explored. Second, the study was conducted in a small group, that was 130 students. Future research could address these limitations by including larger groups and exploring other language skills as well.

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