

THE CORRELATION BETWEEN THE STUDENTS' READING HABITS AND ESSAY WRITING ABILITY

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Abstract: This study investigates the correlation between students' reading habits and their essay writing ability. A quantitative correlational research design was employed, with a sample of 39 sixth-semester students from the class of 2020 at one university in East Java in East Java. Data were collected using a questionnaire to assess reading habits and documentation of students' essays to evaluate their writing ability. The correlation was analyzed using Pearson and Spearman formulas in IBM SPSS version 29. The findings indicate that students demonstrated good reading habits and essay writing ability. However, the correlation between the two variables was found to be low, with a correlation coefficient of 0.334 and a significance value of 0.037. These results suggest that while a relationship exists between reading habits and writing ability, other factors may also contribute to students' writing performance.

Keywords: *Essay, reading habits, writing ability*

The ability to read and write effectively is fundamental to academic success and intellectual development. Reading serves as a gateway to knowledge, allowing individuals to access information, develop critical thinking, and refine their comprehension skills. Through reading, students are exposed to diverse vocabulary, sentence structures, and rhetorical strategies that shape their cognitive and linguistic abilities. Writing, on the other hand, is the productive counterpart of reading—it requires individuals to organize their thoughts, synthesize information, and articulate their ideas coherently. In academic settings, the ability to write well is particularly crucial, as it enables students to engage in scholarly discourse, construct logical arguments, and communicate their perspectives with clarity. However, despite the acknowledged importance of reading and writing, many students continue to struggle with writing due to a lack of consistent reading habits. Without adequate exposure to various texts, students may find it difficult to develop well-structured essays, leading to challenges in academic writing.

Prior research has established a strong link between reading habits and writing proficiency. Rinawati et al. (2020) found that students who engaged in frequent reading demonstrated better writing quality compared to those with limited reading exposure. This is because reading enriches vocabulary, improves grammatical accuracy, and enhances an individual's ability to structure ideas logically. Similarly, Amalia (2017) reported that students with a habit of reading regularly performed significantly better in writing tasks, suggesting that exposure to well-written texts plays a crucial role in shaping one's writing ability. Moreover, Khalisa (2018) highlighted that students who actively read a variety of texts tend to develop a broader knowledge base, which facilitates idea generation and argument construction in writing. However, despite these findings, the relationship between reading habits and writing ability remains a subject of debate. Some studies, such as Aprilia (2021), found only a weak correlation, indicating that additional factors may influence students' writing performance. These inconsistencies highlight the need for further investigation into how reading habits contribute to students' writing development, particularly in the context of academic essay writing.

Building upon this body of research, the present study seeks to examine the correlation between students' reading habits and their essay writing ability. While previous studies have explored this relationship, the specific connection between reading habits and the ability to produce well-structured academic essays remains interesting to be explored. This research focuses on students enrolled in a Writing Essay course in the sixth semester of the English Education Study Program at one university in East Java in East Java. By analyzing their reading behaviors and writing performance, this study aims to provide deeper insights into how reading habits influence students' ability to construct coherent and well-developed essays. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to educational strategies aimed at improving students' writing skills through enhanced reading engagement, thereby reinforcing the importance of fostering a strong reading culture in academic settings.

The hypotheses of the study are: (1) There is no significant correlation between students' reading habits and their essay writing ability (Null Hypothesis). (2) There is a significant correlation between students' reading habits and their essay-writing ability (alternative hypothesis).

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative correlational research design to examine the relationship between students' reading habits and essay-writing ability. Correlational research is appropriate for investigating the extent to which two variables are related without manipulating them (Sugiyono, 2013). According to Agung and Zahra (2016), quantitative research is structured and systematic, allowing researchers to quantify data and analyze relationships using statistical methods. Given the objective of determining whether a significant correlation exists between reading habits and writing ability, a correlational approach was deemed suitable, as it allows for statistical measurement of the strength and direction of the relationship between these two variables.

The participants in this study were sixth-semester students enrolled in the English Education Study Program at one university in East Java during the 2022/2023 academic year. The sample consisted of 39 students (5 male and 34 female) who had completed the Essay Writing course. This course was chosen because students in this stage are expected to have developed both reading and writing skills, making them suitable subjects for examining the potential correlation between these abilities. The participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, as they met the specific criteria necessary for this study, namely having prior exposure to academic writing and engagement in reading activities.

Two primary instruments were used to collect data: (1) Questionnaire on Reading Habits, and (2) Essay Writing Scores (Documentation). A questionnaire was used to measure students' reading habits. Cohen et al. (2017) describe a questionnaire as an efficient tool for collecting structured responses from participants. The questionnaire was adapted from Nazhari et al. (2016) and was based on seven indicators of reading habits: attitude toward reading, reading frequency, types of reading materials, time spent on academic reading, time spent on non-academic reading, motivation from family, and motivation from external sources. It consisted of 21 items, each rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The total maximum score was 105, and students' responses were categorized based on percentage intervals to assess the classification of their reading habits.

The study utilized a **reading habits questionnaire** as the primary instrument for measuring students' reading habits. The questionnaire consisted of **21 items**, distributed across **seven indicators** as proposed by Nazhari et al. (2016). Each indicator was represented by **three questions**, ensuring comprehensive coverage of different aspects of reading habits. The seven indicators were:

Table 1. Blueprint of the questionnaire

No	indicators	Question items
1	Attitudes toward reading	Questions 1-3
2	Reading frequency	Questions 4-6
3	Types of reading materials read	Questions 7-9
4	Time spent on academic reading	Questions 10-12
5	Time spent on non-academic reading	Questions 13-15
6	Motivation in the family environment	Questions 16-18
7	Motivation from outside the family environment	Questions 19-21

The responses were collected and analyzed to determine students' reading habits and their correlation with essay writing ability.

The documentation method was used to obtain students' essay writing ability scores. Documentation, as described by Jailani (2023), is a data collection technique that utilizes existing records or written evidence. The students' final scores from their Essay Writing course were collected from the course instructor as an objective measure of their writing ability. This method ensured that the writing scores were standardized, reliable, and reflective of students' overall performance in academic essay writing.

The data collection process involved the following steps: (1) The reading habits questionnaire was created using Google Forms and distributed to all participants. Students were instructed to complete the questionnaire independently, ensuring honest and accurate responses. (2) The questionnaire responses were scored based on the Likert scale system, and the total scores were calculated for each student. (3) The essay writing scores were obtained directly from the instructor of the Essay Writing course. (4) Both datasets (questionnaire results and writing scores) were compiled and prepared for statistical analysis.

To analyze the correlation between students' reading habits and their essay writing ability, the data were processed using IBM SPSS version 29. This study used the Shapiro-Wilk test to see if the data from the two variables, reading and writing scores, were normally distributed. The Pearson's Correlation Coefficient and Spearman's rho-one of the data did not have normality distribution were used to determine the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two continuous variables

By employing these statistical methods, the study ensured a rigorous and objective analysis of the relationship between students' reading habits and their writing ability. The use of Shapiro-Wilk, Pearson, and

Spearman's rho correlation tests provided a comprehensive interpretation of the data, allowing for greater accuracy in identifying the nature of the relationship between the two skills.

Here is the results of the normality test for each of the data:

Table 2. Test of Normality Result

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
READING HABITS	.145	39	.038	.960	39	.183
ESSAY WRITING ABILITY	.173	39	.005	.902	39	.002

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

The results of the Shapiro-Wilk test indicate that the reading habits variable is normally distributed, as evidenced by a significance value of 0.183 (≥ 0.05). This suggests that the data do not deviate significantly from normality.

However, the essay writing ability variable does not follow a normal distribution. The significance value for this variable is 0.002 (≤ 0.05), leading to the rejection of the alternative hypothesis for normality. This finding implies that the distribution of essay writing scores significantly deviates from normality, necessitating the use of non-parametric statistical tests for further analysis when required.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study indicate that students generally have a positive attitude toward reading. All participants acknowledged the importance of reading in their lives, stating that it motivates them in various ways and encourages them to seek out more reading materials. Many students expressed that reading helps them stay informed and improves their understanding of different topics. They also believed that regular reading enhances their ability to think critically and broadens their perspectives. However, while students recognize the benefits of reading, their level of engagement varies. Some students reported feeling intrinsically motivated to read, while others admitted that their reading habits were influenced by external factors, such as academic requirements or peer recommendations. Despite this variation, the overall consensus among students was that reading is a valuable activity that contributes to their personal and academic growth.

In terms of reading frequency, most students reported that they read approximately one hour per day. However, when examining the time spent on reading English materials specifically, the results show that students typically devote only 15-30 minutes to reading in English, and their reading sessions occur about three to five times a week. While this indicates a moderate level of reading engagement, it also suggests that students do not consistently engage with English texts on a daily basis. Many students admitted that their reading habits fluctuate depending on their academic workload or personal interest in a given topic. Some students also mentioned that they struggle to maintain a regular reading schedule due to competing responsibilities, such as coursework, extracurricular activities, or social obligations. Although they recognize the importance of reading, their reading frequency does not always reflect a strong commitment to regular reading practice.

Regarding reading materials, students demonstrated a balanced preference between fiction and non-fiction texts. Half of the students stated that they enjoy reading fiction, such as novels, short stories, and poetry, while the other half preferred non-fiction, including academic articles, essays, and self-improvement books. The majority of students reported that they primarily access their reading materials online, using websites, digital libraries, and e-books to find content that interests them. This suggests that students rely heavily on digital resources rather than physical books. Additionally, some students indicated that their choice of reading materials is influenced by their academic needs, meaning they often prioritize readings related to their coursework. However, others mentioned that they read for leisure, choosing materials that align with their personal interests rather than academic obligations.

When examining time spent on academic reading, the findings reveal that students generally do not dedicate a substantial amount of time to reading academic materials in English. Many students admitted that they rarely read English academic texts, such as journal articles, research papers, or essays, for an extended period. In fact, most students stated that they are unable to finish 50-100 pages of reading within an hour. However, despite their limited engagement with research-based texts, students reported that they do read academic books related to English skills, such as grammar guides, vocabulary books, or writing manuals, for about 15-30 minutes per day. This indicates that while students recognize the importance of academic reading, they may find lengthy academic texts challenging or less engaging compared to other types of reading materials. Their limited exposure to research-based reading could also explain their struggles with essay writing, as academic writing often requires familiarity with complex texts and critical analysis.

Interestingly, students exhibited a stronger preference for non-academic reading compared to academic reading. Many students reported that they enjoy reading fiction or other non-academic texts for 30 minutes to

an hour each day. This suggests that while students may struggle with engaging in academic reading, they are more inclined to read for leisure. However, despite their enjoyment of non-academic reading, students also acknowledged certain limitations. For example, while they frequently read short stories, online articles, or social media content, they struggled to finish longer works, such as 500-page novels, within a week. This may indicate that students prefer shorter, more accessible reading materials rather than lengthy and complex texts. Their preference for non-academic reading suggests that their reading habits are influenced more by personal interest rather than academic necessity, which could impact their ability to develop strong essay-writing skills.

A closer look at family influence on reading motivation reveals that many students do not receive encouragement from their families to develop strong reading habits. Several students reported that their families rarely recommend or purchase books beyond required university materials, and they generally do not foster a reading culture at home. This lack of motivation from the family environment may explain why some students struggle with developing consistent reading habits, especially in the academic domain. When students do not have role models or encouragement from their families to read, they may be less likely to see reading as an essential part of their daily routine. The findings suggest that for many students, reading is primarily an individual effort, shaped by their motivation rather than external support from their home environment.

Despite the lack of encouragement from family, students reported strong motivation from external sources, particularly from their university environment and peers. Many students stated that their lecturers play a crucial role in encouraging them to read. Lecturers frequently provide book recommendations and urge students to read beyond the required coursework. Some students also mentioned that their lecturers emphasize the importance of reading both inside and outside the classroom, reinforcing the habit of independent learning. Additionally, peer influence also plays a role in motivating students to read. Several students reported that their friends often share reading materials, including online articles and recommended books, which helps them stay engaged with reading. This finding suggests that while family support for reading is limited, the university environment and peer networks help compensate for this lack of encouragement, fostering students' interest in reading.

Overall, the findings suggest that while students recognize the importance of reading, their actual reading engagement varies significantly. Their reading frequency is moderate, with a preference for non-academic reading over academic reading. Family motivation plays a minimal role in fostering reading habits, while university lecturers and peers serve as primary motivators. Additionally, while students enjoy reading, they tend to prefer shorter, more accessible materials rather than lengthy, research-based academic texts. These factors may have contributed to the low correlation between reading habits and essay writing ability, as students' reading exposure may not sufficiently support the development of their academic writing skills.

In addition, to see the percentage and category of questionnaire results are presented as follows:

Table 3. Frequency of the Category of Students' Reading Habits

No	Score Interval	Category	Frequency	Percentage/%
1	81-100	Very high	3	7.7
2	61-80	High	35	89.7
3	41-60	Average	1	2.6
4	0-41	low	0	0
Total			39	100

Referring to Table 3, the data indicates that 7.7% of students fall into the very high reading habits category, 89.7% demonstrate high reading habits, and 2.6% have average reading habits. These results suggest that, overall, students exhibit a high level of reading habits.

Additionally, the students' final grades in the Essay Writing course, obtained from the lecturer, provide further insights. The scores reveal that students not only have strong reading habits but also perform well in essay writing. Their essay writing scores ranged from 79 to 92, with two students achieving the highest score of 92 and one student receiving the lowest score of 79. The most frequently occurring score (mode) was 82, indicating that most students performed at a high level in essay writing.

Table 4. Pearson Correlation Formula Result

Correlations

	READING HABITS			ESSAY WRITING ABILITY		
	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	N	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
READING HABITS	1		39	.337*	.036	39
ESSAY WRITING ABILITY	.337*	.036	39	1		39

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

Based on the research hypotheses, the correlation between the two variables is considered significant at $\alpha \leq 0.05$. The null hypothesis (H_0) is accepted if the significance value $\alpha \geq 0.05$ and rejected if $\alpha \leq 0.05$. The

findings indicate that the correlation coefficient is 0.337, with a significance value of 0.036. Since $0.036 \leq 0.05$, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis (H_1)—stating that there is a correlation between students' reading habits and their essay writing ability—is accepted. The correlation falls within the 0.21–0.40 range, indicating a low correlation. This suggests that while some students exhibit strong reading habits, their essay writing ability does not necessarily align, and vice versa. Given that the essay writing scores did not follow a normal distribution, a non-parametric Spearman's rho correlation analysis was conducted to validate the findings.

Table 5. Spearman's rho Correlation Formula Result

	Spearman's rho					
	READING HABITS			ESSAY WRITING ABILITY		
	Correlation Coefficient	Sig. (2-tailed)	N	Correlation Coefficient	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
READING HABITS	1.000	.	39	.334*	.037	39
ESSAY WRITING ABILITY	.334*	.037	39	1.000	.	39

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

The results of the Spearman's rho correlation test further confirm the relationship between students' reading habits and essay writing ability. The correlation coefficient was found to be 0.334, with a significance value of 0.037. According to the hypothesis testing criteria, since $0.037 \leq 0.05$, the alternative hypothesis is accepted, indicating a statistically significant correlation between the two variables among students in the English Education Study Program at one university in East Java. Although the correlation remains low, the findings suggest that students' exposure to reading may influence their writing proficiency, albeit to a limited extent.

The findings of this study reveal a low but significant correlation between students' reading habits and their essay-writing ability. The correlation coefficient of 0.334 with a significance value of 0.037 (≤ 0.05) indicates that while there is a relationship between the two variables, the strength of the association is weak. This suggests that although students with strong reading habits tend to perform better in essay writing, other factors also contribute significantly to their writing proficiency.

These results align with Shanti (2018), who emphasizes that reading habits contribute to academic progress by broadening knowledge and enhancing cognitive abilities. However, the low correlation found in this study suggests that merely having strong reading habits does not automatically translate into strong writing skills. This finding supports Krashen's (2004) Input Hypothesis, which asserts that while reading provides exposure to vocabulary and structures, it does not guarantee proficiency in producing well-organized, coherent written texts. Writing requires additional skills such as argumentation, coherence, and organization, which may not be fully developed through reading alone.

Moreover, the results correspond with the findings of Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture (2018), which highlights the multiple benefits of reading habits, including vocabulary expansion, better information retention, and stress reduction. However, the low correlation coefficient in this study suggests that while reading habits contribute to writing ability, students may not always transfer the knowledge they gain from reading into their writing practice. Grabe and Zhang (2013) argue that reading and writing are interconnected but require distinct cognitive processes—reading involves comprehension and interpretation, while writing demands synthesis and production of ideas in a structured manner.

Additionally, the weak correlation may be attributed to the types of reading materials students engage with. The findings indicate that students predominantly read non-academic materials, such as fiction and online content, rather than academic texts that align with essay writing conventions. According to Leki (2001), reading academic materials is essential for developing the formal writing skills needed for essay writing, as it exposes students to complex sentence structures, argumentation techniques, and discipline-specific conventions. This explains why some students in this study demonstrated strong reading habits but did not necessarily excel in essay writing.

Given the low correlation, it is crucial to emphasize the role of writing practice alongside reading. Graham and Perin (2007) assert that explicit writing instruction, including feedback and revision processes, plays a significant role in improving writing skills. Therefore, while fostering reading habits remains important, students should also engage in structured writing exercises to enhance their ability to articulate ideas effectively in essays.

In conclusion, the findings of this study are consistent with previous research, reaffirming the existence of a correlation between students' reading habits and their essay writing ability. Although the correlation is classified as low ($r = 0.334$, $p = 0.037$), the results suggest that the texts students engage with influence their writing outcomes. Exposure to diverse texts enhances vocabulary and grammatical structures, which in turn supports the development of written expression. Given the numerous academic and cognitive benefits of reading, students should recognize the importance of cultivating strong reading habits, not only to enhance their writing skills but also to foster lifelong learning and critical thinking abilities.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study presents several key conclusions based on the findings. First, sixth-semester students from the English Education Study Program at one university in East Java demonstrated high reading habits, indicating that they actively engaged in reading activities. Second, the findings revealed that students who exhibited strong reading habits also tended to perform well in essay writing. Third, the statistical analysis confirmed a significant but low correlation between students' reading habits and their essay-writing ability. The correlation coefficient ($r = 0.334$) with a significance value of $0.037 (\leq 0.05)$ suggests that while reading habits contribute to writing ability, other factors also play a crucial role in students' writing proficiency. Consequently, the hypothesis "There is a correlation between students' reading habits and their essay writing ability" was accepted.

Although reading habits expose students to vocabulary and language structures, the weak correlation suggests that reading alone is not sufficient for developing strong writing skills. Additional instructional support, such as structured writing practice, explicit teaching of writing strategies, and continuous feedback, is necessary to help students translate their reading comprehension into well-structured essays. Future studies should investigate other factors influencing writing proficiency, such as writing strategies, motivation, and the role of feedback in improving writing performance.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the sample size was relatively small, as it only involved 39 students from a single university in East Java. This limits the generalizability of the findings to a broader student population. Future research should consider including a larger and more diverse sample to enhance the reliability of the results. Additionally, the study relied on self-reported data through a questionnaire, which may be subject to response bias. Students might have overestimated or underestimated their actual reading habits. To obtain a more accurate picture, future research could incorporate alternative data collection methods, such as reading logs, direct observations, or interviews.

Another limitation is that the study primarily focused on the correlation between reading habits and essay writing ability without considering other influential factors, such as students' writing strategies, language proficiency, academic motivation, and exposure to different types of reading materials. Since writing proficiency is shaped by multiple variables, future studies should adopt a more comprehensive approach to better understand the complex relationship between reading and writing skills. Additionally, this study did not differentiate between academic and non-academic reading habits, which may have varying impacts on writing performance. Future research could explore how different types of reading materials—such as academic texts (journals, textbooks) versus recreational reading (novels, blogs, social media)—influence students' ability to produce well-structured essays.

Given these findings, several implications can be drawn for educators and students. Lecturers should consider integrating more reading activities into writing instruction to strengthen students' exposure to academic texts before they engage in writing tasks. Providing reading materials related to essay topics can help students develop both their content knowledge and writing skills. Furthermore, explicit instruction in writing strategies and structured writing exercises should be emphasized to bridge the gap between reading comprehension and written production.

Finally, future research should extend beyond this study by exploring different student populations and educational contexts to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between reading habits and writing ability. By addressing these limitations and broadening the scope of inquiry, further insights can be gained to improve reading and writing instruction in English language learning.

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