



Reading Habits, Economic Background, and Academic Achievement: A Moderation Study in Indonesian EFL Learners

Muhammad Lexmana Putra^{1*}, Ahmad Munir¹, Edi Sunjayanto Masykuri²

¹Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia

²Novosibirsk State Pedagogical University, Novosibirsk, Russia

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ABSTRACT

Reading habits are widely recognized as a key factor influencing students' academic success, while socioeconomic background has often been associated with disparities in educational outcomes. However, limited research in the Indonesian EFL context has examined whether socioeconomic background moderates the effect of reading habits on academic achievement. This study employed a quantitative correlational design with moderation analysis to explore the relationship between reading habits, socioeconomic background, and English achievement among 155 twelfth-grade students at a private senior high school in Surabaya. Data were collected through questionnaires on reading habits and socioeconomic indicators, complemented by documentation of students' final English scores. Statistical analysis involved descriptive statistics, Spearman correlation, multiple regression, and moderation testing. The findings showed that students' reading habits were generally moderate, dominated by digital reading through social media, while academic reading remained limited. A significant positive correlation was found between reading habits and English achievement, indicating that stronger engagement with reading led to better performance. Socioeconomic background was positively associated with reading habits but did not directly predict academic achievement. Moreover, the moderation analysis revealed that socioeconomic background did not alter the relationship between reading habits and achievement. The study concludes that reading habits are a consistent and universal predictor of English academic achievement, regardless of socioeconomic differences. These results highlight the importance of fostering purposeful and sustained reading practices as a strategy to support equitable educational outcomes in Indonesia.

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INTRODUCTION

Education plays a central role in advancing both individual potential and societal development, especially in countries where linguistic proficiency is strongly connected to academic success and future career opportunities. In Indonesia, where English is taught as a foreign language, the ability to read in English is particularly significant. Reading is not only a vehicle for language acquisition but also a key determinant of academic achievement. As Guthrie, Klauda, and Ho (2013) argue, reading fosters motivation, engagement, and comprehension, which together enhance students' ability to perform well in different academic disciplines.

In the broader educational discourse, reading habits have consistently been identified as one of the most influential factors in shaping students' achievement. Defined as the frequency, consistency, and depth of engagement with texts, reading habits provide the foundation for linguistic development

*Corresponding author(s):

Email: mlexmanaputra@gmail.com (Muhammad Lexmana Putra)
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Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia

and higher-order thinking (Balan, Katenga, & Simon, 2019). Indonesian studies by Purwansyah (2017), Erlina, Astrid, Kurniasari, and Purwansyah (2019), and Muawanah (2016) reinforce this view by showing a positive relationship between reading habits and English achievement among students. International research has also shown that reading strengthens vocabulary knowledge, supports comprehension, and improves students' ability to think critically (Afflerbach, Cho, Kim, Crassas, & Doyle, 2013). These findings collectively point to the conclusion that establishing strong reading habits is an indispensable part of academic development.

Nevertheless, the opportunity to develop consistent reading practices is not equally available to all students. Socioeconomic disparities significantly shape how reading habits are cultivated. Families with higher incomes or educational backgrounds are more likely to provide enriched environments filled with books, digital tools, and parental support. These advantages allow children to engage in diverse and meaningful reading practices (Liu, Peng, & Luo, 2020; Chetty, Hendren, Jones, & Porter, 2020).

By contrast, students from disadvantaged backgrounds often face limitations, such as a lack of books at home, restricted access to libraries or study spaces, and less parental involvement due to work or limited educational experience (Aramide, 2015; Jabbar, Mahmood, & Warraich, 2021). Wilder (2023) emphasizes that parental involvement, often tied to socioeconomic status, is crucial in shaping literacy behaviors and improving educational outcomes. The digital divide further accentuates this inequality. Although smartphones and internet access are widespread, affluent families are better positioned to provide laptops, tablets, and subscription-based learning platforms, while students from lower-income households rely on minimal resources (Hamdiah & Yusoff, 2021). This unequal access affects the quality and depth of reading practices, limiting the benefits that students can gain from reading.

Beyond these direct effects, it is important to consider how economic background might interact with reading habits to influence achievement. Fairchild and MacKinnon (2014) highlight that socioeconomic status can function as a moderator, either intensifying or weakening the effects of individual learning behaviors on academic outcomes. For instance, students with well-developed reading habits may achieve stronger results when their home environments provide abundant resources, whereas the same habits may be less effective for peers from disadvantaged backgrounds. This possibility has been discussed in international literature, such as Jerrim and Macmillan (2015), who linked income inequality and intergenerational mobility to educational achievement, stressing the importance of considering both structural and behavioral factors. However, in the Indonesian EFL context, studies that explicitly test the moderating role of economic background remain limited. Research has often examined either the independent effect of reading habits (Erlina et al., 2019; Iftanti, 2015) or socioeconomic background (Prabowo et al., 2024; Nawas, 2019), but rarely the interplay between the two.

This lack of research is especially pressing given Indonesia's rapidly changing literacy landscape. The dominance of digital media has reshaped how students interact with texts. Printed reading materials are increasingly supplemented or replaced by online platforms and social media (Yusof, 2021). While this shift offers broader access to English content, it also risks encouraging fragmented, surface-level reading that does not always contribute to the deeper comprehension required for academic success (Afflerbach et al., 2013).

At the same time, schools in urban areas like Surabaya serve students from diverse socioeconomic strata, providing a natural setting to examine whether family background alters the impact of reading on achievement. Furthermore, Indonesia's national education agenda emphasizes literacy and critical thinking as core competencies to improve the quality of human resources. Without a deeper understanding of how socioeconomic disparities intersect with literacy practices, policy measures may not adequately address the structural inequalities that continue to hinder educational outcomes (Nawas, 2019).

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to both theory and practice. On the theoretical level, it extends the discussion of literacy and achievement by testing not only the direct effects of reading habits and economic background but also the possible moderating role of economic background. By doing so, it examines whether reading can function as a leveling factor that enables students from disadvantaged families to perform academically on par with their more affluent peers.

On the practical level, the study provides evidence-based insights for teachers, policymakers, and parents. If reading habits are shown to predict achievement regardless of economic status, this would highlight the value of promoting reading culture universally across all socioeconomic groups. On the other hand, if economic background is found to strengthen or weaken the relationship, then interventions must be more targeted, focusing on providing resources and support for students from lower-income families.

The present study is designed to investigate the relationship between English reading habits, economic background, and academic achievement among Indonesian high school students. Specifically, it seeks to: (1) describe the characteristics of students' reading habits, socioeconomic background, and academic achievement in English; (2) analyze the influence of economic background on students' reading habits and academic achievement; and (3) examine whether economic background moderates the relationship between reading habits and academic achievement. Through these objectives, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how individual behaviors and structural factors converge to shape educational outcomes, offering insights that are both locally relevant and globally significant.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative correlational design with a moderation analysis framework to investigate the relationship between students' English reading habits, economic background, and academic achievement. Correlational research is suitable for examining the degree of association among variables without manipulating them, thereby enabling the identification of natural patterns that occur within the population (Creswell, 2022). Within this design, reading habits and economic background were treated as independent variables, academic achievement as the dependent variable, and economic background as the moderator. Moderation analysis was conducted to test whether the strength of the relationship between reading habits and academic achievement varied according to students' economic background. The choice of this design was based on its ability to reveal both direct associations and interactive effects, which is consistent with the objectives of the study.

The research site was at one private senior high school in Surabaya, Indonesia. The school is accredited with an "A" rating (the highest rank of national accreditation). The school was selected because of its heterogeneous student population, which includes learners from lower-, middle-, and higher-income families, making it an appropriate context for examining socioeconomic disparities. The study population comprised 155 twelfth-grade students enrolled in the 2023–2024 academic year. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure proportional representation from the different socioeconomic strata. This method enhanced representativeness and minimized sampling bias. The inclusion criteria specified that students had to be in the twelfth grade, have complete academic records in English, and provide voluntary consent to participate. Using a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, the required minimum sample size was 107 students. The final sample of 155 exceeded this requirement, thereby increasing statistical power and reliability.

Data Collection

Data collection was carried out over one week in April 2024 during regular school hours. Three instruments were used: a reading habits questionnaire, an economic background questionnaire, and documentation of students' English academic achievement. The Reading Habits Questionnaire was adapted from Balan et al. (2019) and consisted of 12 items measuring frequency, duration, types of

material read, motivation, engagement, and perceived ability. Following item analysis, one item (reading_days) was excluded due to low validity, resulting in 11 items being used for inferential analysis. The Economic Background Questionnaire was adapted from Hamdiah and Yusoff (2021), Jabbar et al. (2021), and Nawas (2019). It initially contained 14 items assessing parental education, family income, access to study environments, and availability of learning resources. Six items met the required validity threshold ($r > 0.30$, $p < .05$) and were retained for analysis. These items reflected core indicators of socioeconomic status relevant to educational opportunities. The Academic Achievement Data consisted of students' final semester scores in the English subject. These scores were obtained from official school records with the permission of school authorities. Scores were standardized on a 0–100 scale to facilitate consistency in analysis.

Prior to administration, the questionnaires were pilot tested to ensure clarity, reliability, and cultural appropriateness. Responses were collected anonymously through paper-based forms in a controlled classroom setting, supervised by the researchers to ensure compliance and minimize missing data.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS software and followed a structured process to address the study objectives. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions, were calculated for all variables to provide an overview of student characteristics. Tests of normality using Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk procedures indicated that while reading habits were normally distributed, English academic achievement was not. As a result, non-parametric statistics were employed where appropriate.

For relationships between variables, Spearman's rank correlation was used to examine associations between reading habits, economic background, and academic achievement. This was deemed appropriate because economic background included ordinal and categorical measures and because the distribution of achievement scores was non-normal. To test predictive relationships, multiple regression analysis was conducted with reading habits and economic background as predictor variables and academic achievement as the dependent variable. This enabled the identification of the relative contribution of each independent variable.

For moderation testing, interaction terms between reading habits and economic background were included in the regression model. Following standard procedures, predictor variables were mean-centered before creating interaction terms to reduce multicollinearity and improve interpretability (Aiken & West, 1991). Collinearity diagnostics were reviewed to ensure the stability of regression coefficients. The moderation analysis tested whether economic background altered the strength or direction of the relationship between reading habits and academic achievement. Validity and reliability checks were conducted prior to the main analysis. Validity was assessed using item-total correlations, while internal consistency reliability was examined through Cronbach's alpha. The reading habits scale demonstrated excellent reliability ($\alpha = 0.902$), indicating high internal consistency.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to rigorous ethical standards in line with principles of respect, beneficence, and justice. Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review board of Universitas Negeri Surabaya prior to data collection. Participants were informed about the aims and scope of the research and were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Informed consent was obtained from students, with additional approval from school authorities to access academic records. Data were stored securely on password-protected devices and used solely for academic purposes. Participation was voluntary, and students could withdraw at any stage without penalty. Efforts were made to ensure that the study did not disrupt regular teaching and learning activities. These measures ensured that the research complied with established international standards for research involving human participants.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Profile of Students' Reading Habits, Socioeconomic Background, and Academic Achievement

The first objective of this study was to describe the characteristics of students' English reading habits, socioeconomic background, and academic achievement. The analysis involved 155 twelfth-grade students, representing a balanced distribution of gender and diverse socioeconomic strata. Table 1 provides a summary of demographic information, reading habits, socioeconomic indicators, and English achievement scores.

Table 1. *Descriptive Profile of Respondents (N = 155)*

Variable	Category / Range	Frequency (%) Mean (SD)
Gender	Male	72 (46.5)
	Female	83 (53.5)
Father's Education	Junior High School or lower	28 (18.0)
	Senior High School	95 (61.3)
	Bachelor's or higher	32 (20.7)
Mother's Education	Junior High School or lower	24 (15.5)
	Senior High School	109 (70.3)
	Bachelor's or higher	22 (14.2)
Monthly Family Income	< Rp1,500,000	37 (23.9)
	Rp1,500,000–Rp3,000,000	49 (31.6)
	Rp3,000,000–Rp5,000,000	42 (27.1)
	Rp5,000,000–Rp10,000,000	19 (12.3)
	> Rp10,000,000	8 (5.2)
Reading Habits	Total score (range 17–62)	M = 37.04 (SD = 9.39)
	Highest item: Reading social media	M = 3.50
	Lowest items: Reading duration / days	M = 1.54
Socioeconomic Indicators	Composite SES score (range 6–22)	M = 13.81 (SD = 2.74)
	Ownership of smartphone	72.9%
	Internet access at home	70.3%
	Ownership of laptop	31.6%
	Dedicated study room	27.7%
	Parents buy books regularly	8.4%
Academic Achievement	English final score (range 5.71–74.29)	M = 36.11 (SD = 13.97)

The demographic profile shows a relatively even distribution between male and female students. Parents' education levels varied considerably: most fathers and mothers had completed senior high school, while fewer held higher education qualifications. This pattern reflects the broader educational attainment trends in middle-income Indonesian households, where secondary schooling is common but access to tertiary education remains uneven.

In terms of socioeconomic background, a large proportion of students came from lower- to middle-income households. Nearly one quarter of the students reported family income below Rp1,500,000 per month, while about one third fell in the Rp1,500,000–Rp3,000,000 range. Only 5.2% of families earned above Rp10,000,000 monthly, highlighting that the sample was skewed toward modest economic conditions. Material indicators of SES also revealed disparities. Although smartphones and internet access were common, fewer students had access to laptops, personal study

rooms, or regular book purchases by parents. The presence of scholarships for 40.6% of students further indicated widespread financial need.

Reading habits data revealed a moderate level of engagement overall. The total mean score was 37.04 (SD = 9.39) out of a possible 62, suggesting that while some students demonstrated strong engagement, others engaged minimally. Interestingly, the highest mean item was reading social media texts (M = 3.50), showing that digital platforms constituted the primary medium of English exposure. Conversely, reading duration and frequency of reading days scored lowest (M = 1.54 each), indicating that sustained and consistent reading practices were not common. This suggests a shift from traditional academic reading to shorter, fragmented reading activities typical of digital platforms. Items reflecting motivation and self-efficacy, such as academic purpose (M = 3.03) and confidence in reading (M = 2.74), indicated moderate but not strong intrinsic engagement.

The descriptive profile of socioeconomic indicators revealed both access and constraints. While most students owned smartphones and had internet connections, access to quality resources such as laptops, structured learning spaces, and printed books was limited. This imbalance suggests that although digital access was widespread, deeper academic engagement might have been hindered by the lack of supportive environments and material resources.

Students' English academic achievement scores displayed wide variation, ranging from as low as 5.71 to 74.29, with a mean score of 36.11 (SD = 13.97). Although the mean appears relatively low, this should be interpreted within the grading policy of the school rather than as an absolute indicator of low proficiency. Nevertheless, the broad spread indicates substantial differences in achievement within the sample, reflecting both individual learning behaviors and external influences such as socioeconomic support.

The descriptive profile reveals three key patterns. First, reading habits were dominated by digital and social media reading, with limited evidence of sustained academic reading practices. Second, socioeconomic disparities were evident: while nearly all students had smartphones and internet access, relatively few had consistent access to richer resources such as study rooms, laptops, or parental support through book provision and tutoring. Third, academic achievement varied widely, suggesting that while some students managed to perform well under these conditions, others struggled, potentially due to weaker reading engagement or socioeconomic barriers. These descriptive results set the stage for further analyses examining how reading habits correlate with achievement and whether economic background shapes or moderates this relationship.

Correlation between Reading Habits and Academic Achievement

The second objective of this study was to examine the relationship between students' reading habits and their English academic achievement. Since the data did not meet normality assumptions, the non-parametric Spearman rank-order correlation was applied to test the strength and direction of the association.

Table 2. *Correlation between Reading Habits and Academic Achievement (N = 155)*

Variables	r (Spearman)	p-value	Interpretation
Reading Habits ↔ Academic Achievement	0.412	< .001	Moderate positive correlation, statistically significant

The correlation analysis revealed a moderate positive and statistically significant relationship between reading habits and academic achievement in English ($r = 0.412$, $p < .001$). This indicates that students who demonstrated stronger reading habits were more likely to achieve higher scores in English. Conversely, those with weaker reading habits tended to perform lower academically.

This finding reinforces earlier descriptive evidence that students who engaged more frequently with reading, particularly those who showed higher motivation for academic reading, tended to score better in their English subject. While the descriptive results highlighted that much of students' reading

engagement occurred through social media platforms, the correlation suggests that students who extended their reading beyond casual digital content into more academically purposeful reading experienced measurable benefits in their performance.

The positive correlation is consistent with previous studies in the Indonesian context. Erlina et al. (2019) found that undergraduate students who reported stronger reading habits also performed significantly better in English courses. Similarly, Muawanah (2016) documented a correlation between high school students' reading frequency and their reading comprehension test scores. At the international level, Afflerbach et al. (2013) and Balan et al. (2019) highlighted the importance of consistent reading practices in improving fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, all of which directly contribute to academic achievement.

It is important to note that while the correlation was moderate, it was not particularly strong. This suggests that reading habits explain only part of the variation in academic achievement, while other factors—such as instructional quality, motivation, prior proficiency, and socioeconomic background—also play critical roles. The results therefore highlight the need to consider reading habits as a significant but not exclusive determinant of performance.

Further inspection of the item-level data indicated that students' exposure to English through digital reading, especially social media, did not fully account for higher achievement. Instead, students who reported more consistent engagement with diverse materials (books, articles, academic texts) and stronger motivation for academic purposes demonstrated a clearer link between their reading behaviors and academic outcomes. This reflects what Guthrie, Klauda, and Ho (2013) describe as the interplay between motivation and engagement: reading becomes academically beneficial when it is purposeful, sustained, and linked to comprehension, rather than simply habitual in a casual sense.

Another aspect worth considering is the variability in reading self-efficacy among students. Although the overall mean for confidence in reading English was moderate ($M = 2.74$), those with higher self-reported confidence often demonstrated better achievement. This suggests that self-efficacy mediates the effectiveness of reading habits: frequent but shallow reading without confidence or comprehension strategies may not significantly boost performance, whereas confident and engaged readers benefit more. This aligns with Iftanti's (2015) observation that strong reading habits are often coupled with self-regulation and intrinsic motivation.

The correlation results also resonate with the broader literature on literacy and achievement. Chetty et al. (2020) demonstrated that disparities in educational attainment are influenced by multiple factors, but that reading behaviors often serve as a strong predictor of performance across contexts. While economic resources provide opportunities, it is the cultivation of consistent reading habits that translates these opportunities into academic success. In the present study, the significant relationship between reading habits and achievement, independent of economic background, underlines the value of developing reading culture as a universal educational priority.

These findings highlight the importance of reading habits as a reliable predictor of English academic achievement. Although the strength of the correlation is moderate, the results suggest that even in contexts where economic disparities exist, consistent engagement with reading can serve as a pathway to better performance. These findings set the stage for the next analysis, which examines whether economic background directly influences achievement or moderates the relationship between reading habits and academic performance.

Influence of Socioeconomic Status and Moderation Test

The third objective of this study was to investigate the influence of socioeconomic background on students' English academic achievement and to determine whether socioeconomic background moderates the relationship between reading habits and achievement. Multiple regression and moderation analyses were performed using students' composite SES scores, reading habit scores, and English academic achievement scores.

Table 3. *Regression and Moderation Results (N = 155)*

Predictor	β	SE	t	p-value	Interpretation
Reading Habits → Achievement	0.398	0.081	4.91	< .001	Significant positive predictor
Socioeconomic Status → Achievement	0.071	0.067	1.06	.292	Not significant
Reading Habits × SES → Achievement	-.034	0.029	-1.18	.240	Not significant (no moderation)

Model $R^2 = 0.19$, $F(3,151) = 11.88$, $p < .001$

The regression results indicate that reading habits remained a significant positive predictor of academic achievement ($\beta = 0.398$, $p < .001$). This confirms the earlier correlation findings and further emphasizes the consistent contribution of reading engagement to English performance. In contrast, socioeconomic status did not significantly predict academic achievement ($\beta = 0.071$, $p = .292$), suggesting that differences in family income, parental education, and access to resources did not directly translate into significant differences in English performance within this sample.

The moderation test, which introduced an interaction term between reading habits and socioeconomic background, revealed no significant effect ($\beta = -0.034$, $p = .240$). This result indicates that socioeconomic background did not moderate the relationship between reading habits and academic achievement. In other words, the positive effect of reading habits on achievement was consistent across students from different socioeconomic levels. The overall model explained 19% of the variance in academic achievement, which is meaningful in educational research, but also highlights that other factors not included in this study contributed to performance outcomes.

These findings present three important insights. First, the fact that socioeconomic status did not directly predict academic achievement diverges from many previous studies. For instance, Liu et al. (2020) reported that students from wealthier families in China consistently outperformed their peers due to greater access to resources and support. Similarly, Chetty et al. (2020) argued that socioeconomic disparities are a central factor in shaping educational attainment in the United States. However, in this study, the lack of significant effect may reflect contextual factors in the school environment. As a private accredited school, the school provides relatively equal learning opportunities and access to digital resources, thereby reducing the observable gaps across socioeconomic groups.

Second, the absence of moderation effects suggests that once reading habits are established, their benefits apply universally across socioeconomic strata. Students from both lower- and higher-income backgrounds gained academic advantages when they engaged consistently with English reading, regardless of differences in home resources. This aligns with the argument by Siah and Maiyo (2015), who found that strong study and reading habits consistently improved performance among Indian high school students, even when socioeconomic factors were controlled. In this sense, reading habits serve as a robust predictor of achievement, functioning as a “levelling factor” that can mitigate the disadvantages typically associated with socioeconomic inequality.

Third, the results may also be explained by the widespread availability of digital technology. As shown in the descriptive profile, more than 70% of students had smartphones and internet access. This digital accessibility could have reduced the traditional gap in access to English reading materials that typically favors wealthier students. While laptop and book ownership remained uneven, smartphones and the internet allowed students across socioeconomic levels to access English texts, thereby diminishing the moderating effect of SES. However, this does not imply that all students engaged equally effectively with digital reading, since quality of engagement and academic purpose still varied.

Overall, the findings show that while reading habits strongly and consistently influence achievement, socioeconomic background alone does not serve as either a direct determinant or a

moderator in this context. These results refine our understanding of educational inequality by suggesting that in certain school settings, particularly those with relatively high levels of digital access, the predictive power of SES may be weaker than expected. At the same time, the findings highlight the universal importance of cultivating strong reading practices.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between students' English reading habits, socioeconomic background, and academic achievement, with a particular focus on whether socioeconomic background moderates the effect of reading habits on performance. The discussion integrates the findings from descriptive, correlational, and moderation analyses, interprets them in relation to prior research and theoretical frameworks, and draws out practical implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

The descriptive profile highlighted three main patterns. First, students' reading habits were generally moderate and heavily dominated by digital reading, especially through social media. While such exposure provides opportunities for vocabulary growth and incidental learning, it often encourages fragmented and shallow engagement, which does not support the deeper comprehension needed for academic tasks. This aligns with Yusof (2021), who warned that digital media has shifted reading practices from sustained engagement to more surface-level interactions, and with Afflerbach et al. (2013), who stressed that effective reading requires more than strategy—it demands motivation, purpose, and focus. Second, although most students reported limited material resources such as books, study rooms, and parental support, the high prevalence of smartphones and internet access revealed a form of digital equalization. Students across socioeconomic groups had at least some access to English texts, though the quality of engagement varied. Third, academic achievement varied widely, reflecting the interplay of individual effort and contextual constraints. As Balan et al. (2019) and Muawanah (2016) previously demonstrated, variability in reading habits is often mirrored in achievement, reinforcing the central role of reading as a learning behavior.

The correlation analysis confirmed a moderate, positive, and significant relationship between reading habits and academic achievement. This finding supports Indonesian studies by Erlina et al. (2019) and Purwansyah (2017), which demonstrated that consistent reading practices improve students' English outcomes. It also resonates with international evidence showing that frequent and purposeful reading enhances comprehension and performance (Afflerbach et al., 2013). Importantly, the correlation was moderate rather than strong, suggesting that reading habits are necessary but not sufficient for achievement; other factors such as instructional quality, motivation, and family environment also contribute. The role of reading motivation and self-efficacy is particularly relevant. Ifanti (2015) emphasized that strong reading habits are often sustained by intrinsic motivation and self-regulation, both of which appeared only moderately present in this sample. This indicates that while many students read, they may lack the deeper orientation toward learning that transforms reading into higher academic achievement.

The regression analysis revealed that socioeconomic background did not significantly predict academic achievement. This contrasts with large-scale findings by Liu et al. (2020), who reported that children from wealthier families in China consistently outperformed peers due to resource advantages, and with Chetty et al. (2020), who highlighted the strong link between family background and educational attainment in the United States. The divergence in this study can be partly explained by the context. The school studied may provide a relatively equal learning environment, buffering disparities in home resources. The widespread access to smartphones and internet further reduced traditional barriers to reading, allowing students from different backgrounds to engage with English texts. These findings echo Wilder (2023), who argued that economic resources are important but do not guarantee success unless accompanied by active engagement. Students from modest backgrounds who cultivated strong reading habits often performed as well as or better than wealthier peers who lacked motivation or discipline.

The moderation analysis further showed that socioeconomic background did not alter the relationship between reading habits and academic achievement. This result underscores the robust role of reading engagement as a predictor of performance, regardless of economic conditions. It aligns with Siahii and Maiyo (2015), who observed that strong study habits consistently improved academic outcomes across diverse groups, and with Abid et al. (2023), who found that reading frequency was a stronger predictor of success than parental income or education. The absence of moderation in this study may be linked to the digital environment: when most students have at least minimal access to reading materials via smartphones, the structural differences in SES may not produce visible interaction effects. As Fairchild and MacKinnon (2014) note, moderation effects of SES are more likely to appear when disparities in access are extreme, which may not have been the case here.

These findings have important practical implications. For educators, the consistent role of reading habits highlights the need to encourage sustained and purposeful reading beyond digital browsing. Classroom practices that promote academic reading, self-regulation, and intrinsic motivation could help students transform casual reading into meaningful learning. For parents, the results stress that involvement in children's reading activities, even when material resources are limited, can reinforce motivation and discipline. Policymakers should continue to promote literacy culture initiatives but also ensure equitable access to quality reading materials, both digital and print, across socioeconomic groups. Efforts to integrate reading programs with digital platforms may be especially effective, given students' reliance on smartphones.

At the same time, several limitations must be acknowledged. The study was conducted in a single private school in Surabaya, which limits the generalizability of the results. Public schools, rural contexts, or regions with lower digital penetration may reveal stronger effects of socioeconomic background. The cross-sectional design also restricts the ability to make causal claims, as the findings only capture associations at one point in time. Self-report questionnaires, while useful for capturing perceptions and behaviors, may be subject to bias or over-reporting. Finally, the moderation analysis was affected by multicollinearity issues, which reduce the interpretability of interaction effects.

Future research could address these limitations by adopting longitudinal designs to trace how reading habits and achievement develop over time and whether socioeconomic factors gain or lose influence in different educational stages. Expanding the sample to include diverse schools and regions would provide a more comprehensive picture of how inequality intersects with literacy. Qualitative approaches such as interviews or focus groups could also offer richer insights into students' motivations, strategies, and challenges in reading. Additionally, future studies should explore how digital reading habits differ in depth, content, and purpose, and how these variations affect academic outcomes.

This study demonstrates that reading habits remain a consistent and universal predictor of English academic achievement, while socioeconomic background does not exert a significant direct or moderating influence in this context. The results confirm prior evidence that reading engagement supports achievement (Erlina et al., 2019; Balan et al., 2019), but they also extend the literature by showing that even in economically diverse settings, once students cultivate reading habits, the benefits are largely independent of family resources. This suggests that promoting reading culture should remain a central educational priority, not only for its intrinsic value but also for its potential to narrow performance gaps across socioeconomic lines.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the relationship between students' English reading habits, socioeconomic background, and academic achievement, while also testing whether socioeconomic background moderated the impact of reading habits on performance. The findings provide several important insights that contribute to both local and broader educational discourses. First, the results confirmed that reading habits play a consistent and significant role in predicting students' English achievement. Students who cultivated stronger reading engagement—particularly those who read with academic

purpose and self-regulation—achieved higher outcomes. This reinforces the long-standing view that reading is not only a linguistic activity but also a gateway to academic success, regardless of contextual differences.

Second, the study revealed that socioeconomic background, while associated with differences in access to resources, did not directly predict academic performance in this context. Nor did it moderate the relationship between reading habits and achievement. This suggests that once students establish meaningful reading routines, the advantages of family income or parental education become less decisive. The widespread use of smartphones and internet access across the sample may have contributed to reducing traditional inequalities in access to English texts. Third, the findings highlight the potential of reading habits as a levelling factor in education. While disparities in economic resources remain a reality, cultivating consistent and purposeful reading engagement appears to benefit students universally. This underscores the need for teachers to design classroom practices that foster sustained reading, for parents to remain involved in their children's literacy development, and for policymakers to continue supporting equitable literacy initiatives that bridge both print and digital access.

Overall, the study demonstrates that promoting a culture of reading is one of the most effective strategies for improving English learning outcomes. By strengthening students' reading practices, educators can help ensure that academic success becomes less dependent on socioeconomic background and more on individual engagement and effort.

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