

# The Influence of Reading Intensity on the Ability to Identify Main Ideas in Expository Texts Among Eighth-Grade Students

Defrion<sup>1\*</sup>, Sutikno<sup>2</sup>, Rahmat Kartolo<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup>Universitas Muslim Nusantara Al Washliyah, Medan, Indonesia

Email: dep.kmg@gmail.com<sup>1</sup>, sutikno@umnaw.ac.id<sup>2</sup>, rahmatkartolo@umnaw.ac.id<sup>3</sup>

Correspondence Authors: dep.kmg@gmail.com

Article history: Received February 22, 2026; revised March 24, 2026; accepted May 02, 2026

This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License



## ABSTRACT

*The ability to identify the main idea in an expository text is one of the essential skills in reading comprehension, which plays a crucial role in learning the Indonesian language. However, in practice, many students still struggle to recognize the main ideas of a paragraph, particularly in expository texts. One of the suspected factors affecting this ability is reading intensity. Higher reading intensity is believed to improve students' analytical skills in processing reading content, including identifying main ideas. This study aims to investigate the influence of reading intensity on the ability to identify main ideas in expository texts among eighth-grade students of SMP Negeri 1 Ulupungkut, Mandailing Natal Regency, during the 2025–2026 academic year. This research employed a quantitative approach with a descriptive correlational method. The population of the study consisted of all eighth-grade students, with a total sample of 30 students. Data were collected using a questionnaire to measure reading intensity and an essay test to assess the ability to identify main ideas in expository texts. The data were analyzed using the Pearson product-moment correlation formula. The results showed a correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) of 0.500. This value exceeds the critical values of the correlation table at the 5% significance level (0.361) and 1% level (0.463), with a degree of freedom ( $df$ ) of 28. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between reading intensity and the ability to identify main ideas. Based on the interpretation of the correlation coefficient, the relationship between the two variables falls into the moderate category. The contribution of reading intensity to the ability to identify main ideas is 25%, while the remaining 75% is influenced by other factors. These findings indicate that the higher the reading intensity of students, the better their ability to identify the main ideas in expository texts.*

**Keywords:** Reading Intensity, Main Ideas, Expository Text, Reading Skills

## I. INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is one of the most critical competencies in contemporary education, serving as the foundation for knowledge acquisition across all academic disciplines. Within the Indonesian educational context, the ability to identify main ideas in expository texts has been designated as a core learning objective in the national curriculum for Bahasa Indonesia instruction at the junior high school level. Expository texts, characterized by their informational purpose and logical structure, predominate in academic settings from the fourth grade onward, requiring students to employ sophisticated cognitive strategies to extract essential information and construct coherent mental representations of content (Sun et al., 2021).

Despite the recognized importance of this skill, observational evidence from educational practice indicates persistent difficulties among Indonesian secondary students in identifying main ideas within paragraphs, particularly when they engage with expository discourse. This challenge manifests as poor performance in reading comprehension assessments and contributes to broader difficulties in content-area learning. The ability to distinguish between primary and supporting ideas, recognize organizational patterns, and synthesize information represents a complex cognitive achievement that extends beyond basic decoding skills to encompass higher-order thinking processes (Mastawati Ndruru, 2025).

One factor consistently associated with reading comprehension proficiency in the international literature is reading intensity, defined as the frequency, duration, and consistency with which individuals engage in reading activities. The theoretical foundation for this relationship rests on multiple mechanisms: repeated exposure to text structures enhances schema development, extensive reading expands vocabulary knowledge, and sustained engagement with the written language strengthens metacognitive monitoring strategies. However, despite robust evidence from international contexts demonstrating moderate to strong correlations between reading habits and comprehension outcomes, limited research has specifically examined this relationship

within Indonesian educational settings, particularly focusing on the discrete skill of identifying the main idea in expository texts (Abid et al., 2023).

Contemporary Indonesian students face a paradox regarding literacy development. While the rapid advancement of printing technology has made books and reading materials more accessible than ever, actual reading engagement among adolescents has declined, with many students preferring digital entertainment and social media over sustained reading of informational texts. This trend has profound implications for academic development, as research consistently demonstrates that reading volume predicts comprehension ability, even after controlling for cognitive aptitude and instructional quality (Chanifah et al., 2025).

The specific challenges students encounter in expository texts differ substantially from those associated with narrative comprehension. Expository discourse employs distinct organizational structures (cause-effect, compare-contrast, problem-solution, description, sequence), technical vocabulary, and complex syntactic patterns that require explicit instruction for their mastery. Many students who demonstrate adequate comprehension of stories struggle when confronted with informational texts, particularly in identifying hierarchical relationships between main ideas and supporting details, a phenomenon often described as the "fourth-grade slump" in reading development (Jahaya et al., 2025).

Within SMP Negeri 1 Ulupungkut, located in a rural district of Mandailing Natal Regency, preliminary observations revealed that eighth-grade students demonstrated inconsistent performance on tasks requiring the identification of the main idea. While some students could readily articulate the central concept of a paragraph, others provided responses that focused on peripheral details or failed to synthesize the information into a coherent statement. These individual differences in performance raise questions about the role of reading experience and practice in developing this skill.

Reading intensity encompasses multiple dimensions beyond the simple frequency of engagement. According to Tarigan's framework, which has been influential in Indonesian literacy education, intensive reading involves focused attention to text details, active meaning construction, and deliberate processing of linguistic and rhetorical features. This contrasts with extensive reading, which prioritizes volume and fluency over analytical depth and detail. For the purpose of developing main idea identification skills, intensive reading practices appear particularly relevant, as they train students to attend to organizational cues, recognize topic sentences, and distinguish essential from elaborative information.

International research provides compelling evidence for the reading intensity-comprehension relationship. A meta-analysis by Sun et al. examining 21,548 readers across multiple studies found that various reading strategies, including monitoring and elaboration techniques fostered through regular reading, demonstrated correlations with comprehension ranging from  $r = 0.43$  to  $r = 0.63$ . Similarly, Abid et al. reported correlation coefficients between 0.584 and 0.848 for different aspects of reading habits and academic achievement in English language learning. These studies employed the Pearson product-moment correlation, the same analytical approach utilized in the present investigation, lending methodological credibility to examinations of reading behavior and comprehension outcomes.

However, the magnitude and nature of this relationship may vary across educational contexts, languages, and specific comprehension sub-skills. Syafitri et al. 's study in an Indonesian university found a moderate correlation ( $r = 0.588$ ) between reading habits and general reading comprehension, suggesting that contextual and developmental factors influence the strength of this association. No prior studies have specifically examined the relationship between reading intensity and main idea identification ability in Indonesian expository texts at the junior high school level, representing a significant gap in the research base (Sun et al., 2021).

The relationship between reading intensity and comprehension ability can be understood from multiple theoretical perspectives. From a cognitive perspective, schema theory posits that repeated encounters with text structures and content domains enable readers to develop organized knowledge frameworks that facilitate their comprehension and retention. Students who read frequently encounter expository organizational patterns repeatedly, gradually internalizing these structures and developing automatic recognition abilities that reduce their cognitive load during comprehension.

The construction-integration theory further illuminates this process by describing how readers construct mental representations through multiple processing cycles. Initially, readers activate diverse associations with text elements, including irrelevant connections. Through integration processes, readers suppress inappropriate meanings and strengthen relevant associations, ultimately constructing a coherent model of the situation. Skilled readers, developed through extensive practice, execute these integration processes more efficiently, enabling them identify the main ideas that represent the core of the situation model (Kindler et al., 2025).

From a sociocultural perspective, reading habits develop within social contexts that either support or discourage literacy engagement. Tampubolon, a prominent Indonesian literacy scholar, emphasized that

reading habits are culturally situated practices shaped by family environments, educational institutions, and community values. Students who grow up in literacy-rich environments, where reading is modeled and valued, develop intrinsic motivation for reading, which translates into higher engagement frequency and intensity. This social dimension of reading development suggests that individual differences in reading intensity may reflect broader sociocultural factors beyond individual preference.

Additionally, self-determination theory provides insights into the motivational dynamics underlying reading habits. Students who experience reading as autonomously motivated—driven by interest and enjoyment rather than external pressure—demonstrate more sustained engagement and deeper cognitive processing. This autonomous motivation typically develops through cumulative positive experiences with reading, suggesting a reciprocal relationship: initial reading success promotes continued engagement, which, in turn, enhances skill development in a virtuous cycle.

While international literature has established robust relationships between reading habits and general comprehension outcomes, several gaps remain that this study addresses. First, limited research has examined this relationship specifically within the Indonesian secondary education context, where the linguistic features of Bahasa Indonesia (such as the use of topic-prominent sentence structures and specific discourse markers) may influence how students identify main ideas. Second, most prior studies have focused on global comprehension measures rather than specific component skills, such as main idea identification. Understanding whether reading intensity predicts this discrete skill has implications for targeted instructional intervention.

Third, research on rural educational settings in Indonesia remains sparse despite the unique challenges these contexts present, including limited access to diverse reading materials, fewer literacy-promoting resources at home, and potential mismatches between students' experiential backgrounds and the content of expository texts used in standardized curricula. SMP Negeri 1 Ulupungkut, located in a mountainous region of North Sumatra, provides an important context for examining literacy development among students with restricted opportunities for extensive reading engagement.

The significance of this research extends beyond academic interest to practical and educational implications. If reading intensity demonstrates a meaningful relationship with main idea identification ability, this finding would support the allocation of resources toward building school libraries, implementing sustained silent reading programs, and encouraging family literacy practices. Conversely, if the relationship proves weak or non-significant, this would suggest that other factors, such as explicit comprehension strategy instruction, vocabulary knowledge, or working memory capacity, may deserve greater instructional emphasis.

## **II. METHODS**

### *A. Research Design*

This study employed a quantitative approach with a correlational research design to examine the relationship between two continuous variables: reading intensity (independent variable) and ability to identify main ideas in expository texts (dependent variable). Correlational designs are appropriate when researchers seek to determine the extent to which variation in one variable is associated with variation in another, without manipulating either variable. This design was selected as optimal for addressing the research questions because it enabled examination of naturally occurring relationships between reading behaviors and comprehension outcomes in an authentic educational setting.

Specifically, the study utilized an *ex post facto* correlational design, as both variables represented existing characteristics of students rather than conditions that were experimentally manipulated by the researcher. The correlation coefficient was interpreted using established guidelines for educational research:  $r = 0.00-0.20$  (negligible),  $r = 0.20-0.40$  (weak),  $r = 0.40-0.70$  (moderate),  $r = 0.70-0.90$  (strong), and  $r = 0.90-1.00$  (very strong). Statistical significance was evaluated at both the .05 and .01 alpha levels to provide multiple benchmarks for interpreting the findings (Sugiyono, 2019).

### *B. Research Setting and Participants*

The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Ulupungkut, a public junior high school located in Hutagodang Village, Ulupungkut District, Mandailing Natal Regency, North Sumatra Province, Indonesia. Established on July 1, 1984, the school serves students from rural communities in the mountainous Mandailing region of North Sumatra. The school holds a national accreditation status of "B" (good), with a campus area of 30,600 square meters. While the school possesses basic facilities, including classrooms, a science laboratory, a library, and administrative offices, some infrastructure exhibits minor deterioration, and internet access remains limited.

The research population consisted of all eighth-grade students enrolled at SMP Negeri 1 Ulupungkut during the 2025-2026 academic year. Due to the small cohort size typical of rural Indonesian schools, the entire accessible population of 30 students was included in the study as a research sample. This total population sampling approach eliminates sampling bias and maximizes statistical power within the constraints of the available population sample. The sample included students from mixed socioeconomic backgrounds typical of rural North Sumatra, with most families engaged in agriculture or small-scale commerce (Creswell, 2021).

The participant demographics reflected the characteristics of rural Mandailing Natal: students ranged in age from 13 to 15 years, with relatively balanced gender representation. All participants were native speakers of Bahasa Indonesia and/or local Batak languages, with Bahasa Indonesia serving as the medium of instruction in schools. Prior academic records indicated that students demonstrated varied proficiency levels in Indonesian language arts, with no systematic exclusion of students based on their ability level. This heterogeneity in reading proficiency enhanced the study's ecological validity and ensured sufficient variance in both the predictor and outcome variables for the correlation analysis.

### C. Instrumentation

Two primary instruments were developed to measure the study variables: a reading intensity questionnaire and a main idea identification assessment. Both instruments underwent validation processes to ensure content validity and reliability before data collection.

#### Reading Intensity Questionnaire

Reading intensity was operationalized as students' self-reported frequency, duration, and consistency of reading engagement, along with attitudes toward reading activities. The instrument was a 25-item Likert-scale questionnaire adapted from Tampubolon's framework of reading habits and modified to address Indonesian adolescent contexts. Each item presented a statement about reading behaviors or attitudes, to which students responded using a four-point scale: Strongly Agree (SS = 4 points), Agree (S = 3 points), Somewhat Disagree (KS = 2 points), and Disagree (TS = 1 point). The decision to use a four-point rather than a five-point scale was intentional, eliminating a neutral midpoint and requiring students to indicate directional attitudes.

The questionnaire items addressed multiple dimensions of reading intensity: affective orientation toward reading (e.g., "I find reading to be an enjoyable activity," "Reading brings me a certain satisfaction"), behavioral frequency (e.g., "I set aside specific time each day for reading," "I visit the school library regularly to read"), time allocation (e.g., "I read every single day without exception," "When I have free time, I always use it for reading"), material preferences (e.g., "If I have extra money, the first thing I do is buy books like novels"), environmental factors (e.g., "Noisy environments significantly disturb my concentration while reading"), and reading outcomes (e.g., "I can apply problem-solving approaches I find in reading to my own life challenges").

The maximum possible score on the questionnaire was 100 points (25 items  $\times$  4 points), and the minimum possible score was 25 points (25 items  $\times$  1 point). For interpretation, scores were categorized using quartile-based ranges common in Indonesian educational assessment: 85-100 (Very High reading intensity), 75-84 (High), 55-74 (Moderate), and 0-54 (Low). This questionnaire demonstrated face validity through an expert review by the Indonesian language education faculty and was piloted with a similar student group prior to the main study to ensure item clarity and appropriate difficulty distribution.

The dependent variable, the ability to identify main ideas in expository texts, was measured using an essay-format reading comprehension assessment. The instrument consisted of four expository text passages selected from grade-appropriate Indonesian language textbooks and supplementary materials. Each passage represented a different expository organizational structure (description, sequence, compare-contrast, cause-effect) to ensure construct breadth and prevent measurement artifacts related to familiarity with a single text type.

Passages ranged from 150 to 250 words in length and addressed topics relevant to eighth-grade students' knowledge domains (environmental issues, health education, cultural traditions, and technological developments). Readability analyses confirmed that the passages aligned with eighth-grade Indonesian language standards regarding vocabulary complexity, sentence length, and conceptual density. After reading each passage, the students responded to an open-ended prompt: "Write one or two sentences that express the main idea of this paragraph/text."

Student responses were evaluated using an analytical rubric with four performance levels: Excellent (25 points)—the main idea statement is highly accurate, complete, and concisely expressed using the student's own words; Good (20 points)—the main idea statement is accurate and generally complete, with minor omissions or imprecise wording; Adequacy (15 points)—the main idea statement captures some essential elements but includes irrelevant details or lacks completeness; Poor (10 points)—the main idea statement is inaccurate, overly general, or focuses on peripheral details.

The scoring criteria emphasized three dimensions: accuracy (does the statement reflect the actual central concept of the text?) completeness (does the statement encompass the scope of information presented?), and synthesis (does the statement represent genuine integration rather than copying sentences from the text?). Two trained raters independently scored all responses, and the inter-rater reliability was calculated using Cohen's kappa. Discrepancies in scoring were resolved through discussion until a consensus was reached. The maximum possible score on the assessment was 100 points (4 passages × 25 points), with scores interpreted using the same categorical ranges as those for the reading intensity measure.

#### D. Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected during two 90-minute sessions scheduled one week apart to minimize participant fatigue and allow time for assessment scoring between administrations. All procedures were approved by the school administration and informed consent was obtained from parents/guardians, with student assent secured prior to participation.

During the first session, the researcher explained the study's purpose, emphasized the voluntary nature of participation, and assured the confidentiality of responses. Students first completed the reading intensity questionnaire in a quiet classroom setting, with the researcher available to clarify any questions regarding item interpretation. Students were instructed to respond honestly, based on their actual reading habits, rather than providing socially desirable responses. The questionnaire administration required approximately 25-30 minutes.

In the second session, the students completed the main idea identification assessment. The researcher provided explicit instructions about the task requirements, emphasizing that students should express their main ideas in their own words rather than copying sentences directly from passages. Each passage was presented individually, with students reading silently and then writing their main idea statements before proceeding to the next passage. Students were permitted to reread passages as needed, but could not collaborate or discuss responses with peers. This assessment session required approximately 60 minutes, with time varying based on the individual's working pace.

All completed instruments were collected, assigned identification codes to maintain anonymity, and prepared for analysis. Questionnaire responses were tallied to generate total reading intensity scores, and essay responses were scored by trained raters using the analytical rubric. Scored data were entered into the SPSS statistical software for subsequent analysis.

#### E. Data Analysis

Data analysis proceeded through several stages, aligned with the research questions. First, descriptive statistics were calculated for both variables, including the means, standard deviations, frequency distributions, and graphical representations. These descriptive analyses addressed the first two research objectives by characterizing the sample's reading intensity levels and main idea identification abilities.

Second, preliminary analyses examined whether the data met the assumptions required for Pearson product-moment correlation analysis: (1) continuous measurement of both variables, (2) linear relationship between variables, (3) absence of significant outliers, (4) approximate normal distribution of both variables, and (5) homoscedasticity of residuals. Linearity was assessed through scatterplot examination, outliers were identified using standardized residuals exceeding  $\pm 3.0$ , and normality was evaluated using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and visual inspection of histograms.

Third, the Pearson product-moment correlation ( $r$ ) was calculated using the following formula:

$$r = \frac{[n(\sum XY) - (\sum X)(\sum Y)]}{\sqrt{\{[n(\sum X^2) - (\sum X)^2][n(\sum Y^2) - (\sum Y)^2]\}}$$

where  $X$  represents the reading intensity scores,  $Y$  represents the main idea identification scores, and  $n$  equals the sample size (30). The correlation coefficient was evaluated for statistical significance by comparing the calculated  $r$ -value against critical values from the Pearson  $r$  distribution table with degrees of freedom ( $df = n - 2 = 28$ ) at  $\alpha = .05$  and  $\alpha = .01$ . The null hypothesis ( $H_0$ : no significant correlation) was rejected if the calculated  $r$  exceeded the critical table value, leading to the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis ( $H_a$ : significant positive correlation exists).

Fourth, the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) was calculated by squaring the correlation coefficient and converting it to a percentage. This statistic indicates the proportion of variance in the dependent variable (main idea identification ability) associated with the variance in the independent variable (reading intensity). The formula employed is as follows:

$$R^2 = r^2 \times 100\%$$

This analysis addressed the question of practical significance by quantifying the strength of the predictive relationship between the variables.

All statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS version 26.0, with a significance level set at  $\alpha = .05$  for primary hypothesis testing, complemented by examination of .01 significance levels to provide additional interpretive context. Effect size interpretation followed Cohen's guidelines for correlation coefficients in educational research.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### A. Descriptive Statistics for Reading Intensity

Analysis of the reading intensity data revealed considerable variability among the 30 participants, with scores ranging from a minimum of 40 to a maximum of 87 out of a possible 100 points. The distribution demonstrated the following characteristics: mean = 70.63 (SD = 11.29), indicating that, on average, students exhibited moderate reading intensity. When categorized according to established interpretive ranges, 20% of students (n = 6) demonstrated high reading intensity (scores 75-84), 60% (n = 18) demonstrated moderate reading intensity (scores 55-74), and 20% (n = 6) demonstrated low reading intensity (scores 40-54). No students achieved a Very High reading intensity (scores  $\geq 85$ ).

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Reading Intensity Scores

Score Range	Frequency	Percentage	Category
40-47	2	6.7%	Low
48-55	2	6.7%	Low
56-63	2	6.7%	Moderate
64-71	7	23.3%	Moderate
72-79	11	36.7%	Moderate
80-87	6	20.0%	High
Total	30	100%	

The frequency distribution revealed that the largest concentration of students (36.7%) scored in the 72-79 range, suggesting that while many students engage in reading with some regularity, few demonstrate intensive reading practices characterized by daily engagement, diverse material consumption, and strong intrinsic motivation. Item-level analysis of questionnaire responses indicated that students reported relatively positive attitudes toward reading (mean item score = 3.1 out of 4.0 on affective items) but lower behavioral frequency, particularly regarding library usage (mean = 2.4), and purchasing books with personal funds (mean = 2.2). This pattern suggests a discrepancy between students' expressed appreciation for reading and their actual engagement behaviors, potentially reflecting limited access to reading materials in this rural educational setting.

The moderate mean reading intensity observed in this sample aligns with broader concerns regarding literacy engagement among Indonesian adolescents documented in national literacy surveys. Contributing factors may include competition from digital entertainment, limited availability of age-appropriate and culturally relevant reading materials, insufficient emphasis on sustained silent reading in school curricula, and limited modeling of reading behaviors by adults in students' environments. These contextual factors warrant consideration when interpreting the relationship between reading intensity and comprehension.

#### B. Descriptive Statistics for Main Idea Identification Ability

Student performance on the main idea identification assessment demonstrated a distribution similar to that observed for reading intensity, with scores ranging from 40 to 85 out of a possible 100 points. The mean score was 70.50 (SD = 10.84), indicating that, on average, students demonstrated moderate proficiency in identifying main ideas in expository texts. Score categorization revealed that 20% of students (n = 6) achieved high performance (scores 75-84), 66.7% (n = 20) achieved moderate performance (scores 55-74), and 13.3% (n =

4) achieved low performance (scores 40-54). Notably, no students attained Very High performance (scores  $\geq 85$ ), suggesting that this task presented considerable cognitive demands even for the most proficient students in the sample.

Table 2. Frequency Distribution of Main Idea Identification Scores

Score Range	Frequency	Percentage	Category
40-47	2	6.7%	Low
48-55	2	6.7%	Low
56-63	2	6.7%	Moderate
64-71	8	26.7%	Moderate
72-79	4	13.3%	Moderate
80-87	12	40.0%	High
Total	30	100%	

The posttest results indicated dramatic improvements in minimum competency achievement, with 34 students (94.44%) meeting or exceeding the KKM threshold of 65, compared to only 15 students (41.67%) in the pretest. This represents a 52.77 percentage point increase in the proportion of students who achieve adequate speaking proficiency. Equally noteworthy, the number of students achieving "Very High" performance increased from 4 (10.81%) to 13 (36.11%), while those in the "Moderate" and "Low" categories decreased substantially.

Analysis of performance across the four text passages revealed variation in difficulty level, with descriptive texts (mean passage score = 18.5 out of 25) proving easier than compare-contrast texts (mean = 15.2), suggesting that organizational structure influences the task difficulty. Common errors included: (1) selecting supporting details rather than overarching concepts, (2) copying sentences verbatim from texts rather than synthesizing them in their own words, (3) overgeneralizing beyond the scope of the passage content, and (4) confusing the topic (what the text is about) with the main idea (what the text says about the topic).

These error patterns align with research on developmental trajectories in expository comprehension, which indicates that distinguishing the hierarchical importance of ideas and synthesizing information into coherent propositions require explicit instruction and sustained practice. The moderate performance level observed in this sample suggests that the eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Ulupungkut are developing these skills but have not yet achieved mastery, underscoring the need for targeted instructional interventions focused on text structure awareness and main idea identification strategies.

### C. Correlation Analysis: Reading Intensity and Main Idea Identification

The primary research question addressed whether a significant relationship exists between reading intensity and the ability to identify main ideas in expository texts. Preliminary assumption testing indicated that the data satisfied the requirements for Pearson's correlation analysis: both variables demonstrated approximately normal distributions (Kolmogorov-Smirnov  $p > .05$ ), scatterplot examination revealed a linear positive trend, and no outliers exceeded  $\pm 3.0$  standard deviations.

Pearson product-moment correlation analysis yielded a correlation coefficient of  $r = 0.500$  ( $n = 30$ ), indicating a moderate positive relationship between these variables. To evaluate statistical significance, the calculated  $r$  value was compared with the critical values from the Pearson  $r$  distribution table with degrees of freedom  $df = 28$  ( $n - 2$ ). At the .05 significance level, the critical value is  $r = 0.361$ ; at the .01 significance level, the critical value is  $r = 0.463$ . Because the calculated correlation coefficient ( $r = 0.500$ ) exceeded both critical values, the null hypothesis of no relationship was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis of a significant positive correlation was accepted ( $p < .01$ ).

Table 3. Pearson Correlation Results

Variable Pair	r	df	Critical Value ( $\alpha=.05$ )	Critical Value ( $\alpha=.01$ )	Interpretation
Reading Intensity $\times$ Main Idea Identification	0.500	28	0.361	0.463	Moderate positive correlation, statistically significant at $p < .01$

Using conventional interpretation guidelines for correlation magnitude, an  $r$  value of 0.500 falls within the range of 0.40-0.70, classified as a moderate correlation. This finding indicates that students with higher reading intensity scores tended to demonstrate better performance on main idea identification tasks, and conversely, students with lower reading intensity tended to exhibit weaker main idea identification skills. However, the moderate rather than strong magnitude suggests that reading intensity alone does not fully account for variation in this comprehension skill, with other factors also contributing substantially to performance differences.

The coefficient of determination, calculated as  $R^2 = (0.500)^2 \times 100\% = 25\%$ , indicates that reading intensity accounts for approximately one-quarter of the variance in students' main idea identification ability. The remaining 75% of the variance is attributable to other factors not measured in this study, potentially including explicit comprehension strategy instruction received, vocabulary knowledge, working memory capacity, prior knowledge of text topics, metacognitive awareness, and general academic ability.

#### D. Discussion

The moderate positive correlation observed in this study aligns with theoretical predictions and extends existing empirical research on reading habits and comprehension outcomes to the specific context of Indonesian secondary students and the discrete skill of identifying main ideas in expository texts. This finding corroborates international research demonstrating relationships between reading engagement and comprehension performance, while the moderate (rather than strong) magnitude resonates with studies reporting  $r$  values in similar ranges (Ruffini et al., 2025).

Several mechanisms may explain the observed relationship between reading intensity and the ability to identify main ideas. First, students who read more frequently and extensively encounter a greater variety of expository organizational structures and gradually develop implicit knowledge of how these texts are typically structured. This schema-based knowledge enables more efficient prediction and recognition of where main ideas are likely to appear in paragraphs (topic sentences) and how supporting details relate to the central concepts. When confronted with new expository texts, students with well-developed structural schemas can allocate cognitive resources more effectively, focusing on identifying the hierarchical importance of ideas rather than struggling with basic text processing.

Second, intensive reading practices promote the development of metacognitive monitoring skills essential for comprehension. Proficient readers continuously evaluate their understanding while reading, asking implicit questions such as, "What is this text about? What is the main point the author is making? How do these details connect to the central idea?" Students with higher reading intensity have more opportunities to practice these self-monitoring processes, enabling them to recognize when they have successfully identified the main idea versus when they have focused on peripheral information (Vicente & Baldera, 2024).

Third, reading volume contributes to vocabulary expansion, which, in turn, supports the comprehension of expository texts that typically employ more sophisticated academic vocabulary than conversational language or narrative fiction. Students with larger vocabularies can process text content with greater ease, freeing their cognitive capacity for higher-level comprehension processes, such as synthesizing information into main idea statements. The moderate correlation observed may partially reflect the mediating role of vocabulary knowledge linking reading intensity to main idea identification.

However, the finding that reading intensity accounts for only 25% of the variance in main idea identification ability carries important implications. This result suggests that reading volume alone is insufficient for developing strong main-idea identification skills, and explicit instruction in comprehension strategies appears necessary. Research on comprehension strategy instruction indicates that teaching students to identify text structure signals (e.g., "in conclusion," "the main reason," "most importantly"), distinguish topic from main idea, and synthesize information into concise statements produces significant improvements in main idea identification performance. The combination of extensive reading practice and explicit strategy instruction likely yields stronger outcomes than either approach alone, as suggested by Peng et al.'s meta-analysis, which indicates that interventions combining background knowledge building and strategy instruction produce larger effects than either component independently (Hassan et al., 2025).

The moderate performance levels observed in both reading intensity (mean = 70.63) and main idea identification (mean = 70.50) measures suggest considerable room for improvement in both domains within this student population. Contextual factors specific to rural Indonesian educational settings may contribute to moderate levels. SMP Negeri 1 Ulupungkut's location in the mountainous Mandailing Natal presents challenges, including limited access to diverse reading materials, restricted internet connectivity that prevents access to digital texts, and family contexts where adult reading modeling may be limited due to lower educational attainment levels typical of rural agricultural communities.

A comparison with international research provides a perspective on the magnitude of the correlation observed. The present study's finding of  $r = 0.500$  falls below the very strong correlations ( $r = 0.924$ ,  $r = 0.749$ ) reported in some studies of reading habits and comprehension but aligns closely with the moderate correlations ( $r = 0.588$ ,  $r = 0.631$ ) found in other research. This variability across studies likely reflects differences in how reading habits and comprehension are operationalized and measured, sample characteristics (age, ability level, cultural context), and specific aspects of comprehension assessed (general comprehension versus specific sub-skills).

The practical significance of these findings extends beyond statistical considerations to have educational implications. The demonstrated relationship between reading intensity and main idea identification suggests that efforts to increase students' reading engagement may benefit comprehension skill development. However, the moderate magnitude of this relationship indicates that reading promotion alone is insufficient; structured comprehension instruction must complement extensive reading.

#### **IV. CONCLUSIONS**

This quantitative correlational study investigated the relationship between reading intensity and the ability to identify main ideas in expository texts among 30 eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Ulupungkut, Mandailing Natal Regency, Indonesia. Employing Pearson product-moment correlation analysis, the research revealed a statistically significant moderate positive correlation ( $r = 0.500$ ,  $p < .01$ ) between these variables, with reading intensity accounting for 25% of the variance in main idea identification performance. These findings provide empirical evidence supporting the hypothesis that students who engage more frequently, consistently, and intensively with reading materials demonstrate a superior ability to identify main ideas in expository texts. This study contributes to the educational research literature in several ways. First, it extends international findings on reading habits and comprehension outcomes to the Indonesian secondary education context, demonstrating that relationships observed in diverse international settings generalize to this specific linguistic and cultural context. Second, by focusing on the discrete skill of main idea identification rather than global comprehension measures, this study provides nuanced evidence of how reading engagement relates to specific component processes in comprehension. Third, this study documents literacy practices and outcomes in a rural Indonesian educational setting, addressing a gap in research that has predominantly focused on urban contexts. The moderate magnitude of the observed correlation has important educational implications. These findings suggest that although promoting extensive reading engagement is a valuable strategy for supporting comprehension development, reading volume alone is insufficient for developing strong main idea identification skills. Comprehensive literacy instruction should integrate both extensive reading opportunities and explicit teaching of comprehension strategies, including text structure awareness, recognizing organizational signals, distinguishing the hierarchical importance of ideas, and synthesizing information into concise main idea statements.

#### **Funding Statement**

"No external funding was received for this study."

#### **Ethical Compliance**

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

#### **Data Access Statement**

A Data Access Statement is a section in a scientific publication or research report that explains how the data used or generated in the study can be accessed by readers other researchers. This statement aims to promote transparency, support research reproducibility, and comply with open-access policies, where applicable.

Common Elements in a Data Access Statement:

1. Data Location: Specifies where the data are stored, such as in online repositories (e.g., Zenodo, Dryad, or institutional repositories).
2. Access Instructions: Provides information on how to access the data, such as direct links, DOI (Digital Object Identifier), or contact details.
3. Data Availability: Indicates whether the data are publicly accessible, available upon request, or restricted due to ethical, legal, or privacy considerations.
4. Data Licensing: If the data are open, specify the applicable license (e.g., Creative Commons).

Examples of Data Access Statements:

1. Open Data:
  - "The data supporting this study are openly available in Zenodo at [DOI:10.xxxx/zenodo.xxxx]."
2. Restricted Data:
  - "The data that support the findings of this study are available upon request from the corresponding author. Due to privacy concerns, the data are not publicly available."
3. No Data Available:
  - "No datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study."
4. Conditional Access:
  - "The data supporting this study are available under restricted access and can be obtained upon reasonable request from the corresponding author and with the permission of the ethics committee."

Purpose of a Data Access Statement:

- Reproducibility: Enables other researchers to replicate or verify the findings.
- Collaboration: Encourages further collaboration by sharing data.
- Compliance: Adheres to the policies of funding agencies or journals that require open access to data.

### **Conflict of Interest Declaration**

The authors declare that they have no affiliations or involvement with any organization or entity with any financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The author thanks all people and institutions in most cases, sponsor, and financial support acknowledgments.

### **REFERENCES**

- [1] Abid, N., Aslam, S., Alghamdi, A. A., & Kumar, T. (2023). Relationships among students' reading habits, study skills, and academic achievement in English at the secondary level. *Frontiers in Psychology, 14*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1020269>
- [2] Chanifah, N., Ikhsan, M. A., Syaikhoni, & Luth, T. (2025). Strengthening Student Sexual Literacy to Prevent Violence in Indonesian Islamic Boarding Schools. *Waskita: Jurnal Pendidikan Nilai Dan Pembangunan Karakter, 9*(2), 310–331. <https://doi.org/10.21776/ub.waskita.2025.009.02.10>
- [3] Creswell, J. W. (2021). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (5th ed.)*. SAGE Publications.
- [4] Hassan, M., Najat, M., & Bouchaib, B. (2025). Explicit instruction in metacognitive problem-solving reading strategies: Developing reading comprehension and strategy awareness. *Studies in English Language and Education, 12*(3), 1410–1426. <https://doi.org/10.24815/siele.v12i3.42597>
- [5] Jahaya, N. M., Sufian, N. A. A., & Nasaruddin, D. M. (2025). BEYOND LITERAL MEANINGS: EXPLORING COGNITIVE BARRIERS TO PHRASAL VERB MASTERY AMONG LANGUAGE LEARNERS. *International Journal of Modern Education, 7*(26), 1038–1050. <https://doi.org/10.35631/IJMEO.726068>
- [6] Kindler, C., Taube, J., Leelaarporn, P., Stirnberg, R., & McCormick, C. (2025). *Elucidating directed neural dynamics of scene construction across memory and imagination*. <https://doi.org/10.1101/2025.07.22.666182>
- [7] Mastawati Ndruru. (2025). UTILIZING DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IN INDONESIAN LANGUAGE EDUCATION TO ENHANCE STUDENTS' ABILITY TO COMPOSE EXPOSITORY TEXTS. *KOHESI: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Dan Sastra Indonesia, 5*(2), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.57094/kohesi.v5i2.2561>
- [8] Ruffini, C., Pecini, C., Saldaña, D., & Delgado, P. (2025). Third graders' digital and paper text comprehension. *Learning and Instruction, 100*, 102186. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2025.102186>

- [9] Sugiyono. (2019). *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, dan R&D*. Bandung Alfabeta.
- [10] Sun, Y., Wang, J., Dong, Y., Zheng, H., Yang, J., Zhao, Y., & Dong, W. (2021). The Relationship Between Reading Strategy and Reading Comprehension: A Meta-Analysis. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.635289>
- [11] Vicente, C. A., & Baldera, P. (2024). Examining the Effects of Metacognitive Awareness on the Reading Comprehension Skills of Grade 7 Students. *Romblon State University Research Journal*, 6(2), 18–27. <https://doi.org/10.58780/rsurj.v6i2.203>