

An Investigation of Students' Reading Habits and Vocabulary Mastery

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to describe and determine the correlation between students' reading habits and their vocabulary mastery among eleventh-grade students at a private high school in North Sulawesi. The research design was descriptive-correlative method using Mean score and Pearson-product moment correlation coefficient. There were 92 respondents who participated in this study. The instruments were 23 items questionnaire on reading habits and 39 objective questions of vocabulary test. The findings of this research were: (a) the type of reading most frequently read was the *Bible*, and there was a relatively small number of students who are interested in reading; (b) the level of students' reading habits was moderate; (c) the level of students' vocabulary mastery was low; (d) there was no significant correlation between students' reading habits and their vocabulary mastery ($p=0.093$, $r=0.176$). This study recommends that: (a) the other types of books should be read, and the reading interest increased; (b) the moderate level of reading habits should be kept up and even improved; (c) the other factors for improving vocabulary mastery should be identified.

Keywords: *Correlation, Reading Habits, Students, Vocabulary Mastery***Article History:**Received 24th June 2026Accepted 11th July 2026Published 13th July 2026

INTRODUCTION

Learning English as a foreign language (EFL) is quite challenging. All learners are expected to master English grammar. Nonetheless, to master this, learners must also master vocabulary simultaneously. In the same way, students with limited vocabulary do not have a wide range of words to communicate. Thus, mastering vocabulary is one of the most important aspects of communicating well in English. In reality, teachers typically ask students to memorize a large amount of vocabulary to enhance their English proficiency. However, forcing students to memorize various vocabulary words is challenging. Hasanah (2018) found that students find memorizing vocabulary annoying. Hoque (2018) stated that he experienced this. He said he had spent a lot of time memorizing the vocabulary, but quickly forgot it and could not recall everything. To verify this, the researchers conducted a random informal interview with students at a private high school. It was carried out by asking a question directly. The question is on a scale of 1-10, "How well do they remember the vocabulary they memorized a few weeks ago?" Based on the results of the informal interview, none of them scored this question higher than 5. This indicates that they have difficulty memorizing vocabulary.

Furthermore, the researchers found studies indicating that students in certain schools have poor vocabulary mastery. To begin with, Erniawati (2018) conducted a study on the vocabulary mastery and reading comprehension of tenth-grade students at SMA Muhammadiyah 9 Makassar. In summary, the results showed that students' vocabulary mastery remained low, with an average vocabulary test score of 48.25. Moreover, Budiman (2020) conducted a similar study on eighth-grade students at MTs Sengeti. Based on the interview with the English teacher, students at that level still lack vocabulary, which hinders their mastery of English. Similarly, a study conducted by Sitorus et al. (2021) found that

students still lack vocabulary. Therefore, based on several studies on vocabulary mastery in Indonesia, Indonesian students still lack vocabulary or have low levels of vocabulary mastery.

Moreover, some studies have claimed that reading habits are essential for learning a language, including vocabulary mastery. For instance, both Noor (2011) and Tella & Akande (2007) claimed that reading proved very useful for long-term learning. In other words, for students, the learning process in class may end over time, but reading books provides an education that can continue. Additionally, Chandran & Shah (2019) stated that reading is a vital skill for mastering a language. This indicates that those who use it to learn a language, especially beginners or those learning a foreign language, can begin by developing good reading habits. Frijuniarsi & Marliarningsih (2016) also supported this, informing that knowledge and vocabulary can be improved through reading. For this reason, improving vocabulary mastery through reading as a habit is essential.

The theoretical foundation supporting the relationship between reading and vocabulary acquisition can be explained through several perspectives. Krashen input Hypothesis (1985) posits that language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to comprehensible input slightly above their current proficiency level. Reading serves as an ideal source of such input, as it exposes learners to large amounts of meaningful language. Additionally, Depth of Processing Theory Craik & Lockhart (1972) suggests that words learned in meaningful contexts are more likely to be retained in long-term memory due to deeper cognitive processing. Extensive reading theory (Day & Bamford, 1998) further supports the idea that frequent reading of large amounts of accessible texts facilitates vocabulary growth through repeated exposure.

Recent empirical studies also reinforce the importance of reading in vocabulary acquisition. A quantitative study involving English learners found that reading English texts contributed to vocabulary growth and increased motivation for language learning, supporting the view that reading habits can facilitate vocabulary acquisition both within and beyond formal educational settings (Alias et al., 2025). Moreover, Sahibzada et al. (2024) found that extensive reading promotes vocabulary growth by providing learners with substantial exposure to meaningful language input, resulting in noticeable improvements in EFL students' vocabulary knowledge. Similarly, a recent study by Arifin & Huy (2025) found that learners who participated in a ten-week extensive reading program demonstrated significantly greater vocabulary growth than those who did not, indicating that extensive reading can effectively support vocabulary development among EFL learners. Taken together, these findings suggest that regular engagement in reading activities, particularly extensive reading, plays a significant role in enhancing vocabulary acquisition by increasing learners' exposure to language and opportunities for incidental vocabulary learning.

Despite their importance, students' reading habits remain relatively low. Maharsi et al. (2019) found that a majority of students allocated minimal time for reading activities, with many readings only one hour per week or not at all. Andayani & Maryam (2019) reported that only 40% of respondents regularly engaged in reading activities. Furthermore, Anugrah (2019) observed that most university students spent only one to two hours per day on reading. National data reported by the National Library of Indonesia also revealed that reading interest among Indonesians remains low, with only around 10% of individuals aged over 10 years showing strong reading interest (Wibowo, as cited in Kurniasih, 2016).

In addition, several studies have established a positive relationship between reading habits and vocabulary mastery Syaifuddin (2016) found a significant positive correlation between reading habits and vocabulary mastery among English Department students at IAIN Antasari Banjarmasin. Similarly, Laili (2018) reported a positive although weak correlation between reading habits and vocabulary mastery among high school students in Palangkaraya. These findings indicate that while reading habits contribute to vocabulary development, the strength of the relationship may vary depending on learner characteristics and learning contexts.

Based on the theoretical foundations and empirical evidence, it is evident that reading habits play an essential role in vocabulary acquisition through repeated exposure, contextual

learning, and incidental learning processes. However, despite its recognized importance, many EFL learners still demonstrate low reading engagement and limited vocabulary mastery. Therefore, further investigation is necessary to examine the relationship between students' reading habits and their vocabulary mastery, particularly in the Indonesian EFL context.

This study aimed to determine the frequency of students' reading habits and the level of students' reading habits in terms of reading patterns and the level of students' vocabulary mastery. Moreover, the researchers sought to determine whether there was a significant correlation between students' reading habits and their vocabulary mastery, and whether it was positive or negative.

Having reading habits is essential for students Maharsi et al. (2019) argued that reading is one of the fundamental skills students need to develop in language learning, particularly in countries such as Indonesia where English is learned as a foreign language and is often considered difficult. Reading helps students broaden their knowledge, gain new experiences, and obtain enjoyment. They also emphasized that reading plays a significant role in education and intellectual development. In the same vein, Musfiroh (2014) highlighted reading as a key factor in achieving academic success. Supporting this view, Shaw & Shea (2006) found that students who read more frequently tend to acquire greater knowledge. This suggests that regular reading activities contribute to knowledge development. Since habits involve repeated actions, developing a reading habit enables students to gain a deeper understanding of various topics through their reading experiences. Furthermore, Renandya (2007) noted that reading can improve students' vocabulary and grammatical competence. Therefore, reading is an important activity for students learning a language.

All learners are expected to develop the four language skills: reading, listening, speaking, and writing. In this regard, Wakania et al. (2018) argued that vocabulary plays a significant role in improving these language skills. They further emphasized that learners cannot effectively master the four skills without sufficient vocabulary knowledge. This suggests that vocabulary is a fundamental component of language learning. Similarly, Bahri (2018) stated that individuals with a strong vocabulary foundation tend to learn a language more easily. This indicates that vocabulary mastery can facilitate students' acquisition of a foreign language, including English. According to Coulson et al. (as cited in Lamante, 2020), mastery refers to the ability to effectively acquire and apply knowledge. While vocabulary consists of the words that learners know and understand, mastery involves the ability to use that knowledge appropriately. Therefore, vocabulary mastery can be understood as learners' ability to remember, comprehend, define, and use words accurately in different contexts. As a result, both teachers and students should pay close attention to vocabulary mastery because of its importance in language learning.

Furthermore, vocabulary mastery reflects the extent of learners' knowledge and understanding of words. Styaningrum (2019) explained that vocabulary mastery refers to learners' ability to remember and comprehend the words they have learned. Likewise, vocabulary mastery involves not only remembering words but also being able to translate, analyze, and use them appropriately according to context. Aliyah (2020) stated that vocabulary mastery enables individuals to express their ideas and communicate effectively with others. This suggests that students with strong vocabulary knowledge can convey their thoughts more easily and confidently. Supporting this view, Jannah & Munifah (2021) described vocabulary mastery as a high level of proficiency in understanding and using words within a language. Since proficiency is closely related to individual ability, students' personal effort and capability play an important role in developing vocabulary mastery. Therefore, although vocabulary mastery is essential for language learning, students themselves are largely responsible for achieving success in this area.

METHOD**Respondents**

The respondents of this study were the eleventh-grade students at a private high school in North Sulawesi. Convenience sampling was used to select the respondents. The respondents included students from science 1 (33), Science 3 (33), Science 4 (34), and social class (25). So, there were 125 students in total. Nevertheless, when the instruments were distributed, some students did not attend class. Thus, the total number of respondents was 112 students. Moreover, after analyzing all the collected data, 20 respondents did not answer all items; therefore, the researchers discarded those data as invalid. As a result, 92 respondents provided valid data.

Instruments

The instrument of this study was a questionnaire adapted from Salindeho & Pauner (2015), originally from Scales & Rhee (2001). The questionnaire was used to collect data about students' reading habits. The questionnaire consisted of 24 items, which were divided into two parts. The first part consisted of four items related to the type of reading and the number of books or texts, including the Bible, newspapers, letters, academic books, novels, comics, blogs or articles on the internet, magazines, short stories, anecdotes, history, poetry, and others. Orderly, frequency in number of hours, and pages read by students are in the second part. For the first item, respondents could choose their reading type. The respondents could choose more than one choice at that item because it was based on their experience. For the second to fourth items, the respondent selected the appropriate answer but could choose only one of several available options. Moreover, the second part consisted of 20 items.

Procedures

Firstly, permission to conduct the research was requested from the vice principal of the school under study, and an appropriate time for data collection was arranged. Subsequently, discussions regarding the distribution of the questionnaire and vocabulary test were held with the homeroom teachers. Due to time limitations, it was agreed that the data collection process would be completed within a single day. A schedule for administering the questionnaire and vocabulary test was then coordinated with the homeroom teachers. On the scheduled day, the vice principal was met first before the eleventh-grade face-to-face classes were held. The questionnaire and vocabulary test sheets were distributed to the students, and instructions for completing the instruments were provided. The questionnaire and vocabulary test were then completed simultaneously by the students. After all responses had been submitted, the questionnaire and test sheets were collected, and appreciation was expressed to the students for their participation. Finally, the collected data were analyzed and interpreted to address the research questions and achieve the study's objectives.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using statistical tools. To answer the first research question and determine the frequency of students' reading habits in terms of the type of reading materials, the number of books read, the number of hours spent reading, and the number of pages read, a frequency formula in Microsoft Excel was utilized. To answer the second and third research questions, which concerned students' reading habits in terms of reading patterns and their vocabulary mastery, descriptive statistical analysis based on mean scores was employed. Finally, to answer the fourth research question and examine the relationship between students' reading habits and their vocabulary mastery, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was used.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**What is the Frequency of Students' Reading Habits in Terms of Types of Reading?**

The first research question in this study is to identify the frequency of students' reading habits across the types of reading they engage in. Based on the findings, the highest frequency refers to the Bible because most students, namely 82 of them, stated that they read the Bible more. The academic book had the second-highest frequency. It was selected by 47 students. Novel is the third most popular, chosen by 45 students. Moreover, comics had the fourth-highest frequency among students, namely 38 students, followed by Blogs or Articles on the Internet, chosen by 37 students. As to the remaining students, 11 have indicated that they read History regularly. Nine students read the letter and the magazine. Lastly, eight have a habit of reading newspapers and Poetry, and only two students read Anecdotes regularly.

In analyzing the study's results by the type of reading students most often engage in, the Bible is the book most frequently read. The researchers assumed that this is due to the geographical location where the data was gathered. The data were collected at a Christian school where most students are Christian. Therefore, it is reasonable that they would choose the Bible as their favorite reading. The remaining books consist mainly of general books, such as textbooks, comics, newspapers, letters, and magazines. In comparison with the study by Hanah et al. (2020), which was conducted with students who are not under a religious institution, most of the reading by their students consists of educational books and internet articles. It is therefore likely that the results of different institutions will vary due to differences in their environments. It is proven by a study of Florence (2012), which demonstrated that the environment has a significant effect on a student's reading preference. Thus, to obtain a more accurate result from this study, future research may include another school not affiliated with a private institution, namely one not affiliated with a religious organization.

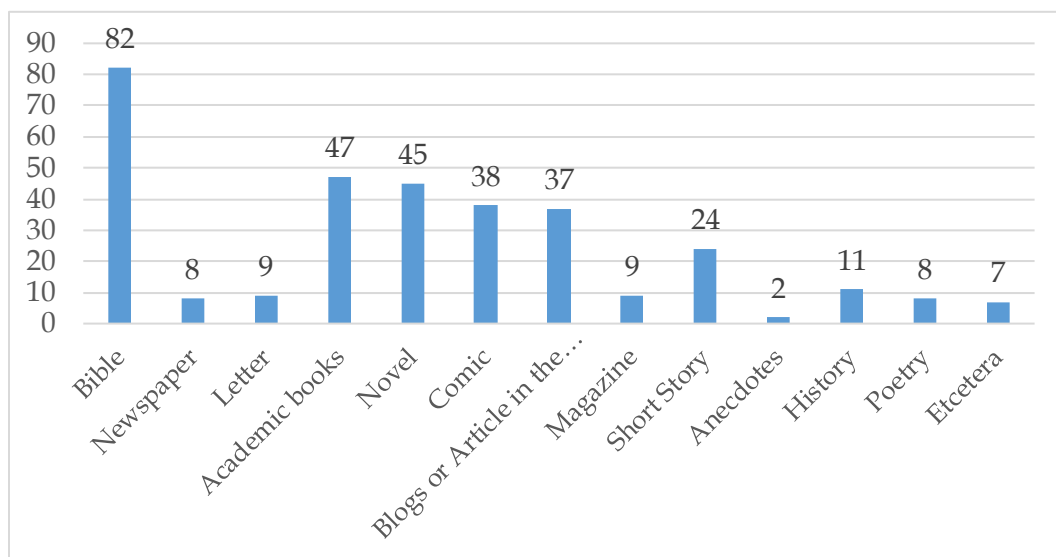


Figure 1. Frequency of Students' Reading Habits in Terms of Types of Reading

What is the Frequency of Students' Reading Habits in Terms of the Number of Books Read?

In this research question, it was sought to investigate the frequency of students' reading based on the number of books read in a week, which was categorized as (1) less than one book per week, (2) one book per week, (3) two books per week, (4) three books per week, and (5) more than three books per week. The results showed that a total of 33.37% (33 students) read less than one book per week, while 25.28% (25 students) read one book per week. Accordingly, 15.17% (15 students) reported reading more than three books per week, 12.13% (12 students) reported reading two books per week, while only 5.5% (5 students) reported reading three books per week.

These percentages indicate that relatively few students are interested in reading. Because not everyone has a reading habit, Mustafa (2012) study found that the reading habit

in Indonesia is very low. Moreover, Chairanissa & Wirza (2019) reported in their study that students are more interested in watching TV and surfing the internet than in reading. In addition, Curcic (2021) reported that most people preferred playing video games to reading during the pandemic. Thus, this might also explain why the study found a low frequency of students' reading habits, as measured by the number of books read.

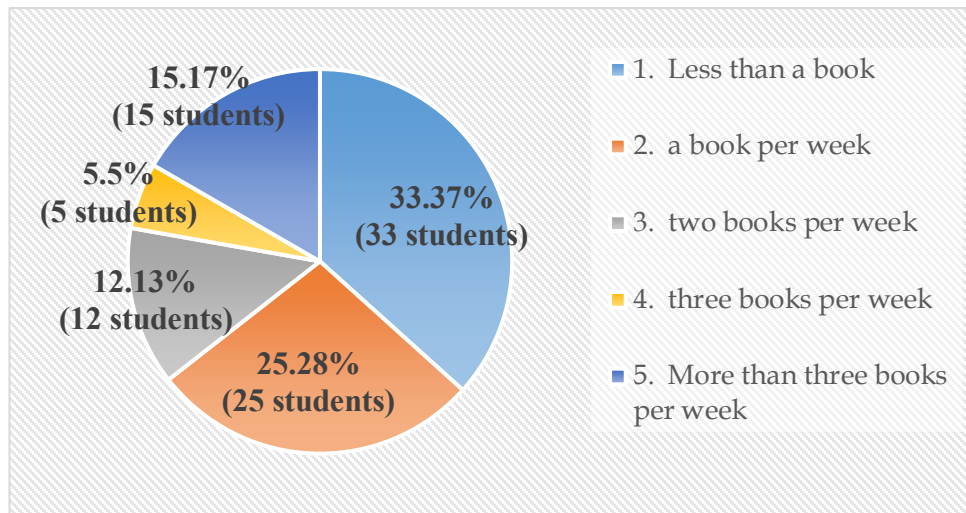


Figure 2. Frequency of Students' Reading Habits in Terms of the Number of Books Read

What is the Frequency of Students' Reading Habits in Terms of the Number of Hours Spent Reading?

Regarding the frequency of students' reading habits in terms of number of hours spent in reading, it was found that 39.43% (39 students) spend their time less than an hour per day, 25.28% (25 students) spend an hour per day, 13.15% (13 students) spend two hours per day, 12.13% (12 students) spend more than three hours per day, and only 1.1% (1 student) read a book for three hours each day. The results indicate that students prefer to spend their time on other activities rather than reading. In fact, the number of students who chose to spend more than three hours per day reading is fewer than those who chose to read less than an hour per day. These results are consistent with those of a study by Dipika & Mehedi (2013) on students at a private university, which found that most students spent less than an hour per day reading. However, most students, particularly Indonesians, spend most of their time watching videos or movies (402 minutes per day), rather than reading regularly (Noviadhista, 2016). Moreover, Chairanissa & Wirza (2019) also reported the same case through their study. Their study resulted in the finding that mostly students read only one to two hours per day because in their leisure time, they prefer to watch television and surf the internet as opposed to reading. Furthermore, a study found that people spent 16.8 more minutes playing video games than reading during the pandemic (Curcic, 2021). Therefore, students preferring to watch television, surf the internet, and play video games might also be among the reasons why the students in this study spent very little time reading.

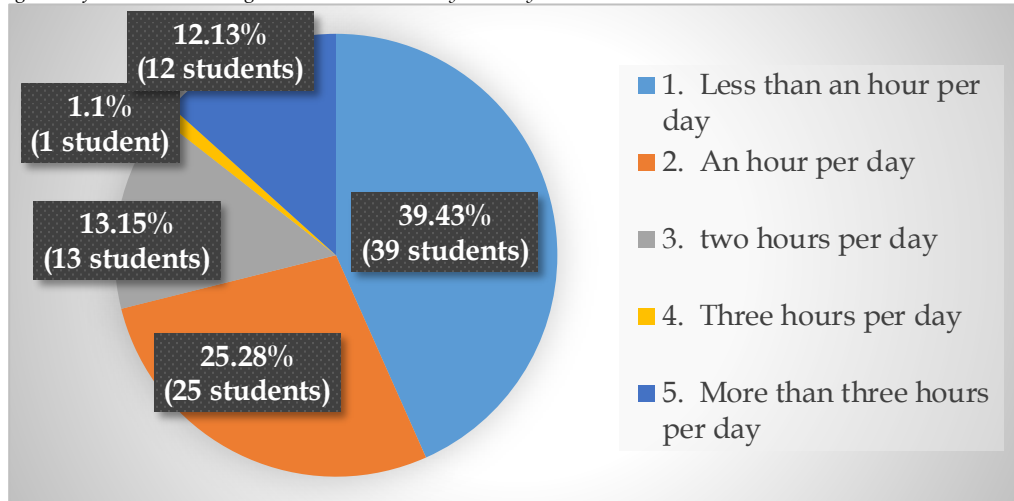


Figure 3. Frequency of Students' Reading Habits in Terms of Number of Hours Spent

What is the Frequency of Students' Reading Habits in Terms of The Number of Pages Read?

Based on this research question, the findings indicated that most students read one to five pages per day. There were 33 students who admitted to doing so. Moreover, 25 students reported reading more than 15 pages each day. Furthermore, nine students reported reading 6-10 pages of books per day, while nine reported reading fewer than 1 page per day. Finally, the remaining 10 students reported reading between 11 and 15 pages each day. Since most students read only 1 to 5 pages a day, their reading habits can be classified as low or not very good. It could be so because nothing triggers students to read more. Regarding this, the researchers found a study conducted by Klatt & Klatt (2011) in the United States. In that study, they reported that students would read when they have a teacher or lecture to attend, assignments to complete, or answers to find. Hence, based on the study by Klatt et al., it could also be that eleventh-grade students might not have a purpose or reason to read further; therefore, their reading habits, in terms of pages read, were considered poor.

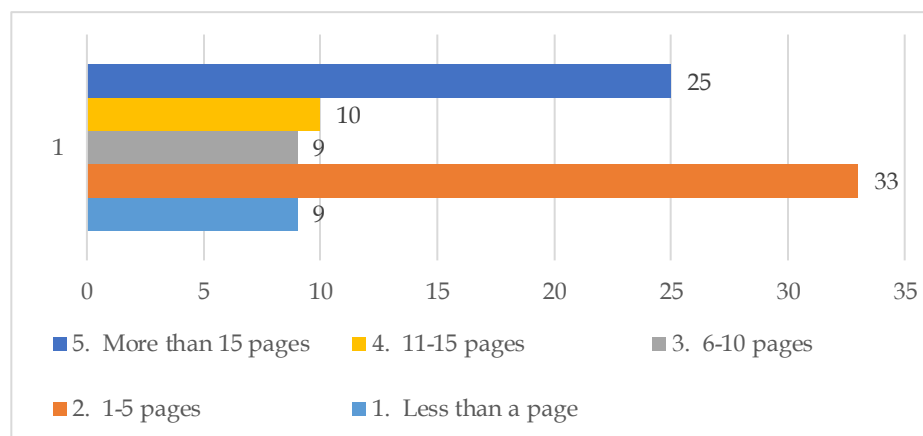


Figure 4. Frequency of Students' Reading Habits in Terms of The Number of Hours Spent

What is the Level of Students' Reading Habits in Terms of Reading Patterns?

This research question was addressed using descriptive statistics. The data were collected using a questionnaire containing 20 items related to reading patterns. Accordingly, the mean score based on the collected data was 3.19. Thus, the level of students' reading habits in terms of reading patterns is interpreted as moderate.

The result indicates that the students have neither poor nor high reading habits. Regarding this result, a study by Aisah et al. (2019) found that students recognize the importance of reading, as it provides them with information that increases their knowledge. However, Mereille (2021) said that students get bored easily when reading. It showed that, although students understand the importance of reading, they get bored doing so, they might

read but would quickly stop because of boredom. Consequently, they do not have high reading habits. Thus, the same reason could also account for the result of this study, in which students' reading habits were moderate.

The other reason was also found in a study by Anggraini (2022), which found that motivation from both the family and academic environments can increase students' reading habits. In other words, if students lack motivation to read, even though they know how important reading is, they will not be able to improve their reading habits. In this case, since students might lack motivation to read, they might read only to fulfill school requirements rather than because they enjoy reading. This might explain why their reading habits were only moderate.

Table 1. Mean Score of The Level of Students' Reading Habits in Terms of Reading Pattern

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Reading Habits in Terms of Reading Pattern	92	1.65	4.65	3.19	0.54
Valid N (listwise)	92				

What is The Level of Students' Vocabulary Mastery?

In this particular case, 39 vocabulary questions were used to collect data. Accordingly, the data calculated using the scoring system was developed by Aisyarani (2014). The results were generated using statistical tools, and the highest score was 92.31, the lowest 15.38, and the mean 64.60. As per the scoring system, a mean score between 55 - 65 indicates that the students' vocabulary mastery is low. Therefore, students' vocabulary mastery was categorized as low. It means that students still lack vocabulary.

Regarding the low level of students' vocabulary mastery, the researchers found a possible reason: the vocabulary test was administered suddenly to all students and participants without prior notice. Regarding this, one of the researchers also had a personal experience as a student: during a sudden test, the researcher received a low grade and even failed. In the case of sudden exams, Agustin (2014) claimed that students are under tremendous pressure due to insufficient preparation, resulting in poor scores. Thus, pressure during a sudden exam could be one reason why students' vocabulary mastery in this study was low.

Moreover, the time students took to complete both the questionnaire, and the vocabulary test was less than 30 minutes. Considering that the vocabulary test consisted of 39 objective questions and the time constraints students face, they might take the test recklessly. As McGlynn (2022) argues, time constraints on tests cause students to become anxious and to think more slowly. Therefore, time constraints might also help explain why the students' vocabulary mastery, as measured by the vocabulary test in this study, was low.

Lastly, the researchers found that the results of this study are like those obtained by Hersalina (2021). Regarding students' low level or poor vocabulary mastery, Hersalina claimed that this is because students have difficulty answering the vocabulary test. The difficulties may stem from students' limited understanding of the word's meaning, synonyms, or even antonyms in English. Thus, besides time constraints, students' limited understanding of word meanings, synonyms, or even antonyms in English could also be a reason their vocabulary mastery remains low.

Table 2. Mean Score of The Level of Students' Vocabulary Mastery

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Vocabulary Mastery	92	15.38	92.31	64.60	19.72
Valid N (listwise)	92				

Is There Any Significant Correlation Between Students' Reading Habits and Their Vocabulary Mastery?

The answer to this final research question was utilized using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient Analysis. As shown in Table 3, the study's findings indicated a p-value of 0.093, which is greater than $\alpha = 0.05$. This indicates that there is no significant correlation between students' reading habits and vocabulary mastery. Also, the r value indicated that $r = 0.176$. Based on Sarwono and Budiono's (2012) interpretation of the coefficient r, the r value (0.176) in this example does not correspond to 0.00–0.00, indicating no correlation, since the result falls between 0.01 and 0.20 (see Table 3). The range of 0.01–0.20 showed a very low correlation. Regarding this, Nickolas (2021) stated that a positive correlation is indicated by a correlation coefficient greater than zero (e.g., 0.01); conversely, a negative correlation is indicated by a coefficient less than zero. So, since the correlation coefficient was $r = 0.176$, this means the reading habits and vocabulary mastery of the eleventh-grade students at the school under study are still positively correlated, but at a very low level. However, the correlation was not significant.

To clarify this result, the researchers found studies indicating that other factors correlate with or affect students' vocabulary mastery. For instance, Afidah & Machfudi (2022) noted that students often forget the vocabulary they have just learned. Furthermore, they added that students did not pay attention to or put effort into their English studies. Thus, it is clear that even if students read English books or texts more but forget all the vocabulary they learned while reading, or if they do read but fail to pay attention to the English reading texts, ultimately, it results in an inability to master the vocabulary. For this reason, the results showed that reading habits were not significantly correlated with the students' vocabulary mastery. Despite the finding that there is no significant correlation between reading habits and vocabulary mastery, reading remains beneficial to students and their learning because it enables them to gain a deeper understanding of the world and advance their knowledge (Ithriyah & Nuramalia, 2021). Therefore, even if students' habits do not correlate significantly with their vocabulary mastery, reading habits may still help the students in their learning.

Further, the results on the types of reading students engage in show that students read the Bible more than other types of books (see Figure 1). Hence, since the Bible is read the most by students, it could be that the students' vocabulary might be more related to the Bible, or in other words, the vocabulary they got through reading did not match the vocabulary test in this study because it was more about academic words, not the terms used in the Bible. Additionally, the Bible that students read might also be in Bahasa Indonesia. Thus, these might be reasons why students' reading habits do not significantly correlate with their vocabulary mastery, as found in this study. Accordingly, the result of this study is similar to that obtained by Naimatun (2015), which showed a positive correlation between students' reading habits and their vocabulary mastery, but the correlation was not significant, with $r = 0.106$ and $p = 0.278 > \alpha = 0.05$. Thus, there are factors that are significantly correlated with students' vocabulary mastery.

Table 3. Correlation Between Students' Reading Habits and Their Vocabulary Mastery

Reading Habits (X)	Vocabulary Mastery (Y)	
	Pearson Correlation	0.176
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.093
	N	92

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings, several conclusions can be drawn. First, students tended to read religious texts, particularly the Bible, more frequently than other reading materials. Overall, however, their reading interest remained relatively low, indicating limited engagement with diverse types of texts. Second, students' reading habits were categorized as moderate, whereas their vocabulary mastery was classified as low. Finally, the analysis revealed no significant relationship between students' reading habits and their vocabulary mastery.

These findings suggest that greater attention should be given to improving reading engagement and vocabulary development. Teachers are encouraged to provide varied and level-appropriate reading materials and integrate vocabulary-focused activities, such as identifying unfamiliar words, inferring meanings from context, and summarizing texts, to promote deeper language learning. Students should broaden their reading beyond familiar texts, establish consistent reading routines, and actively record and review new vocabulary. Future research should investigate other factors affecting vocabulary mastery, including learning motivation, vocabulary learning strategies, classroom practices, and exposure to English outside formal instruction, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of vocabulary development.

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