The Effect of Group Guidance Services Using Positive Reinforcement Techniques on Improving Junior High School Students' Reading Interest

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of group guidance services using the positive reinforcement technique in improving reading interest among seventh-grade students at SMPN M Pekanbaru. A quantitative approach with a one-group pretest-posttest design was applied. The research was conducted from September 2025 to January 2026. The participants were 10 students selected through purposive sampling based on low and moderate reading interest categories. Data were collected using a reading interest scale consisting of 30 valid items with four Likert response options. The instrument demonstrated high reliability, with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.894. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test, and normalized N-Gain analysis. The findings showed that before the intervention, 70% of students were in the low category and 30% were in the moderate category. After eight treatment sessions, 60% of students moved to the moderate category and 40% reached the high category. The Wilcoxon test indicated a significant difference between pretest and posttest scores, with p = 0.005. The mean N-Gain score was 0.6784, indicating moderate effectiveness. These findings suggest that group guidance with positive reinforcement can improve students' reading interest. This strategy may serve as a practical counseling intervention in junior high schools.

Kata Kunci:
bimbingan kelompok; positive reinforcement; minat baca; siswa SMP; bimbingan dan konseling.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menguji efektivitas layanan bimbingan kelompok dengan teknik *positive reinforcement* dalam meningkatkan minat baca siswa kelas VII di SMPN M Pekanbaru. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan desain *one group pretest-posttest*. Penelitian dilaksanakan pada September 2025 sampai Januari 2026. Subjek penelitian berjumlah 10 siswa yang dipilih melalui teknik *purposive sampling* berdasarkan kategori minat baca rendah dan sedang. Data dikumpulkan menggunakan skala minat baca yang terdiri atas 30 item valid dengan empat alternatif jawaban skala Likert. Instrumen penelitian memiliki reliabilitas tinggi dengan nilai Cronbach's Alpha sebesar 0,894. Data dianalisis menggunakan statistik deskriptif, uji Wilcoxon, dan uji N-Gain ternormalisasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sebelum intervensi, 70% siswa berada pada kategori rendah dan 30% pada kategori sedang. Setelah delapan sesi perlakuan, 60% siswa berada pada kategori sedang dan 40% mencapai kategori tinggi. Hasil uji Wilcoxon menunjukkan adanya perbedaan signifikan antara skor pretest dan posttest dengan nilai p = 0,005. Rata-rata skor N-Gain sebesar 0,6784 menunjukkan efektivitas pada kategori sedang. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa layanan bimbingan kelompok dengan teknik *positive reinforcement* dapat meningkatkan minat baca siswa dan dapat digunakan sebagai alternatif intervensi bimbingan konseling di sekolah menengah pertama.

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Introduction

The 21st century marks an era of digital transformation and globalization that presents both challenges and opportunities for education. Students are expected not only to master subject knowledge but also to develop critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity, commonly known as the 4C skills. These competencies are essential for preparing students to participate actively in a rapidly changing global society (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Among these competencies, reading literacy serves as a fundamental foundation because it enables students to understand, analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information from various sources critically.

Reading is a fundamental skill that supports lifelong learning. It is not merely the ability to recognize written symbols or understand text, but also involves cognitive, linguistic, psychological, and metacognitive processes in constructing meaning. Rahim (2011) explains that reading is a complex process involving visual, psycholinguistic, and metacognitive activities to obtain meaning from written language. Strong reading ability allows students to expand their knowledge, enrich vocabulary, understand academic concepts, distinguish facts from opinions, and make rational decisions. In line with this view, Wigfield et al. (2016) emphasize that reading motivation is closely related to reading comprehension because motivated readers tend to be more engaged, persistent, and active in understanding texts.

In educational contexts, reading interest is one of the important factors that determines students' engagement in reading activities. Interest can be understood as a condition in which individuals pay attention to something, accompanied by a desire to know, learn, possess, and prove it (Rahmat, 2018). In the context of literacy, reading interest refers to a sense of enjoyment, attraction, attention, and internal motivation to engage in reading activities consciously and voluntarily. H. Idris and Ramdani (2014) define reading interest as a preference and attraction toward meaningful reading activities, shown through attention, willingness, enjoyment, and efforts to read without external pressure. Therefore, reading interest does not only reflect how often students read, but also indicates their emotional, cognitive, and behavioral involvement in reading.

High reading interest has an important role in supporting students' academic success. Students with strong reading interest tend to understand learning materials more easily, develop broader knowledge, and improve their critical thinking skills. Taboada Barber and Klauda (2020) state that reading motivation and engagement support reading achievement because both encourage students to interact more actively with texts. Thus, strengthening reading interest among junior high school students is important because early adolescence is a strategic developmental stage for building learning habits, academic independence, and positive attitudes toward literacy activities.

However, reading literacy in Indonesia still faces serious challenges. The PISA 2022 results showed that only about 25% of Indonesian students reached Level 2 or higher in reading, while the OECD average was 74% (OECD, 2023). Level 2 indicates the minimum proficiency level at which students are able to identify the main idea in a text, locate information based on explicit criteria, and reflect on the purpose and form of texts when directed. These results indicate that many Indonesian students have not yet achieved the expected minimum level of reading proficiency. This condition highlights the need for systematic efforts to improve students' reading interest and reading engagement.

A similar problem was found among seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri M Pekanbaru. Based on preliminary research using a reading interest scale administered to 25 seventh-grade students, the percentage scores for each indicator were as follows: enjoyment of reading was 48%, motivation to read was 47%, awareness of the benefits of reading was 49%, reading frequency and availability of reading time was 44%, and quantity of reading sources was 48%. Overall, the average percentage of students' reading interest was 47%, indicating that students' reading interest was still in the moderate category and had not yet reached an optimal level. Information obtained from the school counselor also showed that the school had not implemented a specific guidance and counseling intervention to address students' reading interest. Therefore, an appropriate intervention is needed to improve students' reading interest.

One service that can be used to improve students' reading interest is group guidance. Group guidance is a service that utilizes group dynamics to help students obtain information, develop self-understanding, build positive attitudes, and solve problems related to personal, social, academic, and career development (Prayitno et al., 2017). Through group guidance, students can share experiences, discuss ideas, provide support, and learn from other group members. A supportive group atmosphere can help students become more confident in expressing their thoughts, including discussing their experiences, difficulties, and motivation related to reading.

The effectiveness of group guidance can be strengthened by integrating an appropriate technique, one of which is the *positive reinforcement* technique. This technique is rooted in the behavioristic approach, particularly the principle of operant conditioning, which views behavior as influenced by the consequences that follow it (Corey, 2013). *Positive reinforcement* refers to the provision of a pleasant stimulus after a particular behavior occurs in order to increase the likelihood that the behavior will be repeated (Purwanta, 2020). In the context of improving reading interest, positive reinforcement can be given when students show reading behavior, complete reading tasks, express opinions about reading materials, or demonstrate increased engagement in literacy activities.

Empirically, positive reinforcement has a strong foundation in educational settings. Cameron and Pierce (1994) found that reinforcement and reward do not always reduce intrinsic motivation; in fact, verbal praise can increase intrinsic motivation when used appropriately. However, Deci et al. (1999) caution that expected tangible rewards may weaken intrinsic motivation when students become more focused on obtaining rewards than on the activity itself. Therefore, the use of *positive reinforcement* in group guidance should be proportional by combining social reinforcement, such as praise, recognition, and appreciation, with tangible reinforcement as an initial stimulus to build student engagement.

In schools, behavior-specific praise can serve as a simple yet meaningful strategy to support students' positive behavior. Royer et al. (2019) explain that behavior-specific praise can enhance students' academic engagement and positive behavior in school settings. In the context of reading interest, verbal praise, recognition of reading effort, and appreciation for students' courage in expressing opinions can create positive emotional experiences related to reading activities. As a result, students do not only read because of academic demands, but also begin to associate reading with meaningful, enjoyable, and valued experiences.

Previous studies have shown that group guidance and reinforcement techniques can improve students' motivation and academic behavior. Syahputra and Hasibuan (2025) found

that group guidance services using reinforcement techniques were effective in increasing the learning interest of tenth-grade students at MAN 3 Medan. Similarly, Sutarso et al. (2024) found that group guidance using discussion techniques improved junior high school students' reading interest, as shown by an increase in the mean score from 70.30 before treatment to 121.07 after treatment. These findings indicate that group-based interventions can support students' academic motivation and literacy-related behavior.

Although previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of group guidance and reinforcement techniques in improving students' academic behavior, research specifically integrating group guidance services with the *positive reinforcement* technique to improve junior high school students' reading interest remains limited. Sutarso et al. (2024) focused on discussion techniques, while Syahputra and Hasibuan (2025) focused on learning interest rather than reading interest. Therefore, the novelty of the present study lies in examining the use of group guidance services with the *positive reinforcement* technique specifically to improve reading interest among junior high school students.

Based on the above explanation, this study aims to examine the effect of group guidance services using the *positive reinforcement* technique on improving junior high school students' reading interest. This study is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of guidance and counseling studies, particularly in the application of behavioristic techniques in group services. Practically, the findings are expected to provide an alternative strategy for school counselors to help students improve their reading interest through structured, engaging, and reinforcement-based guidance services.

Research Method

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative approach with a pre-experimental design. The specific design used was a one-group pretest-posttest design, in which a single group of participants was measured before and after receiving an intervention. This design is commonly used to examine changes in participants' scores after a treatment has been implemented, particularly when the researcher intends to compare the initial condition and the final condition of the same group (Capili & Anastasi, 2024). However, because this design does not involve a control group, the interpretation of treatment effects should be made carefully, especially regarding possible threats to internal validity (Marsden & Torgerson, 2012).

In this study, the pretest was administered to measure students' initial reading interest. After that, the students received group guidance services using the *positive reinforcement* technique. The posttest was then administered to determine whether there was an increase in students' reading interest after the intervention.

The research design is presented as follows.

Table 1. One-Group Pretest-Posttest Design

Group	Pretest	Treatment	Posttest
Experimental group	O_1	X	O_2

Note.

O_1 = Pretest of students' reading interest

X = Group guidance service using the *positive reinforcement* technique
O_2 = Posttest of students' reading interest

Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at SMPN M Pekanbaru from September 2025 to January 2026. The participants were students of class VII.2. The selection of participants was conducted using a purposive sampling technique, which allows researchers to select participants based on specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives (Palinkas et al., 2015). In this study, the inclusion criteria were students who had low and moderate levels of reading interest based on the initial screening results.

Based on these criteria, 10 students were selected as research participants. These students were considered appropriate for the intervention because the purpose of the study was to improve reading interest among students who had not yet reached a high level of reading interest.

Data Collection Instrument

The data collection instrument used in this study was a reading interest scale developed using a Likert-scale model. The Likert scale is widely used in educational and social science research because it allows researchers to measure attitudes, perceptions, interests, and psychological tendencies through structured response categories (Kusmaryono et al., 2022). In this study, the scale was designed to measure students' reading interest based on five main indicators: enjoyment of reading, motivation to read, awareness of the benefits of reading, reading frequency and availability of reading time, and quantity of reading sources.

The initial version of the instrument consisted of 40 items. After validity testing, 30 items were declared valid and used as the final research instrument. The instrument contained favorable and unfavorable items. Favorable items reflected positive statements toward reading interest, while unfavorable items reflected negative or less supportive statements toward reading activities.

The blueprint of the reading interest instrument is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Blueprint of the Reading Interest Instrument

Variable	Indicator	Sub-indicator	Favorable Items	Unfavorable Items	Number of Items
Reading Interest	Enjoyment of reading	Students' attention to reading activities	1, 2, 3, 4	-	4
		Students' psychological condition toward reading activities	5, 6, 7, 13	8	5
	Motivation to read	Desire to read	-	28	1
		Use of supporting facilities for reading activities	16, 18, 19	-	3

Variable	Indicator	Sub-indicator	Favorable Items	Unfavorable Items	Number of Items
	Awareness of the benefits of reading	Awareness of the importance of reading activities	9, 10, 12	-	3
		Awareness of the benefits obtained from reading	11, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27	-	6
	Reading frequency and availability of reading time	Time used for reading	14, 17, 29	-	3
		Reading activities during leisure time	-	15, 30	2
	Quantity of reading sources	Number of reading sources owned	20, 21, 22	-	3
Total					30

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

Before being used in the main study, the reading interest scale was tested for validity and reliability. The validity test involved 40 students as respondents. Based on the validity test results, 30 out of 40 items were declared valid and suitable for use in the main research.

The reliability of the instrument was examined using Cronbach's Alpha. Cronbach's Alpha is commonly used to estimate the internal consistency of a scale, especially when the instrument consists of several items intended to measure the same construct (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). The reliability test showed a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.894, indicating that the instrument had a high level of internal consistency. Therefore, the reading interest scale was considered reliable for measuring students' reading interest in this study.

Research Procedure

The research procedure consisted of four main stages. First, the researcher conducted an initial screening to identify students' reading interest levels. Students whose scores were categorized as low and moderate were selected as participants. Second, the researcher administered the pretest to measure the initial reading interest of the selected students.

Third, the students received group guidance services using the *positive reinforcement* technique. The intervention was conducted in eight treatment sessions. During the sessions, students were encouraged to participate in reading-related activities, express opinions, respond to questions, share reading experiences, and reflect on the benefits of reading. Positive reinforcement was provided in the form of verbal praise, positive recognition, and tangible rewards. Reinforcement was given when students showed desirable behaviors related to reading, such as active participation, willingness to read, confidence in expressing opinions, and consistency in completing reading activities.

Fourth, after all treatment sessions had been completed, the researcher administered the posttest using the same reading interest scale. The posttest was conducted to determine changes in students' reading interest after receiving the intervention.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive analysis was used to describe students' reading interest before and after the intervention. The results were presented in the form of frequency, percentage, mean score, and category of reading interest.

Inferential analysis was used to test the research hypothesis. Because the study involved two related measurements from the same participants, namely pretest and posttest scores, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test is a nonparametric statistical test used to compare two paired measurements, especially when the sample size is small or when parametric assumptions are not fully met (Rosner et al., 2006). In this study, the Wilcoxon test was used to determine whether there was a significant difference in students' reading interest before and after receiving group guidance services using the *positive reinforcement* technique.

In addition, the normalized gain score, or N-Gain, was used to determine the level of improvement in students' reading interest. N-Gain is used to measure the proportion of actual improvement achieved by participants compared with the maximum possible improvement (Hake, 1998). The N-Gain score was calculated using the following formula:

$$N\text{-}Gain = \frac{Posttest\ Score - Pretest\ Score}{Maximum\ Score - Pretest\ Score}$$

The N-Gain results were interpreted into three categories: high, moderate, and low. This analysis was used to determine the effectiveness level of group guidance services using the *positive reinforcement* technique in improving students' reading interest.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted by considering ethical principles in educational research. The researcher ensured that the participants were involved voluntarily and that the data collected were used only for research purposes. Students' identities were kept confidential by using initials in the presentation of research data. The intervention was conducted in a school guidance and counseling context and was designed to support students' positive development, especially in improving their reading interest.

Results and Discussion

Results

This study used a reading interest scale consisting of 30 items with four Likert-scale response options. Students' reading interest was categorized into three levels: high, moderate, and low. The descriptive comparison of students' reading interest before and after receiving group guidance services with the positive reinforcement technique is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Percentage of Students' Reading Interest Levels Before and After Group Guidance Services with Positive Reinforcement Technique

No.	Category	Score Range	Pretest F	Pretest %	Posttest F	Posttest %
1	High	90–120	0	0%	4	40%
2	Moderate	60–89	3	30%	6	60%
3	Low	30–59	7	70%	0	0%
Total			**10**	**100%**	**10**	**100%**

Source: Researcher's processed data, 2026.

Based on Table 2, before the intervention was implemented, most students were in the low reading interest category, namely 7 students, or 70%. This condition indicates that most students had not yet developed a strong desire and consistent effort to engage in reading activities. Only 3 students, or 30%, were in the moderate category, and no student was in the high category.

After eight treatment sessions of group guidance services using the positive reinforcement technique, students' reading interest increased. The posttest results showed that 6 students, or 60%, were in the moderate category, while 4 students, or 40%, reached the high category. No student remained in the low category. This finding indicates that group guidance services with positive reinforcement helped students improve their reading interest through appreciation, recognition, verbal praise, and rewards. This finding is consistent with previous research showing that group counseling with positive reinforcement techniques can support positive behavioral change in school settings, particularly in improving students' learning discipline (Durrotunnisa & Cristin, 2023).

The Wilcoxon signed-rank test was conducted to examine whether there was a significant difference between students' reading interest before and after the intervention. The result is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test Result Using SPSS 22

Test Statistics	Posttest – Pretest
Z	-2.805
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.005

a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test
b. Based on negative ranks

Source: Researcher's processed data, 2026.

Based on Table 3, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test obtained a significance value of 0.005. Since the value is lower than 0.05, it can be concluded that there was a significant difference in students' reading interest before and after the group guidance service was provided. In other words, the intervention had a statistically significant effect on students' reading interest. All group members experienced improvement from pretest to posttest, with no students showing unchanged or decreased scores.

To determine the level of effectiveness of the group guidance service with the positive reinforcement technique, the normalized gain score, or N-Gain, was calculated. The N-Gain score is relevant in pretest–posttest intervention studies because it shows the proportion of

actual improvement compared with the maximum possible improvement that could be achieved by participants (Hake, 1998). The result is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Normalized Gain Score of Students' Reading Interest

No.	Student Initials	Pretest	Posttest	N-Gain Score
1	AS	55	88	.73
2	AB	53	93	.85
3	AQ	54	97	.93
4	HY	59	89	.73
5	ML	58	81	.55
6	NS	62	78	.42
7	NZ	62	87	.66
8	QN	61	91	.77
9	TL	58	73	.36
10	ZA	59	91	.78
	Mean	**58.10**	**86.80**	**0.6784**

Source: Researcher's processed data, 2026.

Based on Table 4, the mean pretest score was 58.10, while the mean posttest score increased to 86.80. The average N-Gain score was 0.6784, which falls into the moderate category. This indicates that group guidance services with the positive reinforcement technique had a moderate level of effectiveness in increasing students' reading interest.

Discussion

The findings of this study show that group guidance services with the positive reinforcement technique can improve students' reading interest. Before the intervention, most students were categorized as having low reading interest. This condition suggests that reading had not yet become a strong habit or a personally meaningful activity for them. After eight treatment sessions, students' reading interest increased, as reflected in the movement from the low category to the moderate and high categories.

The improvement can be explained by the role of positive reinforcement in strengthening desirable behavior. In this study, students received reinforcement when they showed reading-related behaviors, such as participating in discussions, answering questions, expressing opinions, completing reading activities, and showing effort during the group guidance process. Reinforcement helped students associate reading activities with positive experiences. This is in line with Cameron and Pierce's (1994) meta-analysis, which found that reinforcement and reward do not automatically reduce intrinsic motivation; instead, verbal praise can increase intrinsic motivation when used appropriately.

The group guidance setting also contributed to the improvement of students' reading interest. Through group activities, students were able to share experiences, listen to peers, receive support, and build confidence in expressing their thoughts. At the beginning of the sessions, several students showed low self-confidence, felt embarrassed, and were afraid of making mistakes when asking questions or giving opinions. However, after several meetings, the group atmosphere became more comfortable. Students became more active and willing to participate. This shows that group dynamics can support behavioral change when combined with reinforcement strategies.

The positive reinforcement used in this study consisted of tangible rewards and social reinforcement. Tangible rewards included bookmarks, sticky notes, stationery, mini notes, and snacks. These rewards were useful, especially at the early stage of intervention, when students still needed external encouragement to participate in reading activities. However, tangible rewards should be used carefully so that students do not become dependent only on external rewards. Deci et al. (1999) explained that expected tangible rewards may reduce intrinsic motivation when individuals become more focused on receiving the reward than on the activity itself. Therefore, tangible rewards in this study should be understood as an initial motivational bridge rather than the main long-term goal of the intervention.

Social reinforcement also played an important role in this study. Verbal praise and positive recognition were given consistently throughout the treatment sessions. Praise made students feel appreciated and encouraged them to repeat positive reading behaviors. Royer et al. (2019) stated that behavior-specific praise can support students' academic engagement and positive behavior in school settings. In the context of this study, praise and recognition helped students become more confident and more willing to engage in reading-related activities.

Although the intervention improved students' reading interest, the average N-Gain score was in the moderate category, not the high category. This indicates that the intervention was effective but still had limitations. One possible factor is the strong influence of social media, online games, and digital entertainment, which may reduce students' attention toward reading activities. Liu (2022) explained that digital distraction can interfere with reading concentration, especially when students are exposed to multitasking and screen-based activities. In addition, smartphone use has also been found to have a negative effect on students' learning when it interferes with study activities (Sunday et al., 2021). Therefore, students' reading interest may improve through counseling intervention, but digital distractions remain a strong competing factor.

Overall, the results indicate that group guidance services with the positive reinforcement technique are effective in improving students' reading interest. This is supported by the descriptive data, the significant Wilcoxon test result, and the moderate N-Gain score. The intervention helped students become more confident, more active in group activities, and more motivated to read. Therefore, this technique can be considered a useful strategy for school counselors to increase students' reading interest, particularly when implemented consistently, supported by meaningful group interaction, and followed by efforts to build students' internal motivation toward reading.

Conclusion

This study concludes that group guidance services using the *positive reinforcement* technique effectively improved the reading interest of seventh-grade students at SMPN M Pekanbaru. The results showed that before the intervention, 70% of students were in the low reading interest category, while after eight treatment sessions, no students remained in the low category; 60% were in the moderate category and 40% reached the high category.

The Wilcoxon signed-rank test showed a significant difference between pretest and posttest scores, with a significance value of $0.005 < 0.05$. In addition, the average N-Gain score was 0.6784, indicating a moderate level of effectiveness. These findings show that group guidance combined with verbal praise, recognition, and tangible rewards can encourage students' participation, confidence, and positive attitudes toward reading.

Therefore, group guidance with *positive reinforcement* can be used as an alternative strategy by school counselors to increase students' reading interest. Future studies are recommended to involve a control group, a larger sample, and a longer intervention period to strengthen the evidence of effectiveness.

CRediT Authorship Contribution Statement

All authors contributed substantially to the conceptualization, methodology, instrument development, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of findings, manuscript drafting, critical revision, and approval of the final version of the manuscript. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript and take full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and accountability of the work.

Data Availability Statement

The data used in this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. The data are not publicly available due to respondent confidentiality, ethical considerations, and the protection of students' personal information.

Declaration of AI-Assisted Writing

The authors declare that AI-assisted writing tools were used only to improve language clarity, grammar, structure, and readability. No AI tools were used to generate research data, conduct statistical analysis, interpret findings, or draw scientific conclusions. The research design, data analysis, interpretation of results, conclusions, and academic responsibility remain entirely with the authors.

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Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no financial or non-financial competing interests that could have influenced the research process, data analysis, interpretation of findings, manuscript preparation, or publication of this article.

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