

## **Unpacking the Conscientiousness–Reading Achievement Relationship Among Junior High School Learners**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This research aimed at (i) examining the correlation between conscientiousness personality traits and reading comprehension achievement among students; (ii) investigating the extent to which conscientiousness contributes to reading comprehension achievement. This quantitative research applied a correlational design involving 60 students selected through criterion sampling based on their dominant conscientiousness trait. Data were collected through a conscientiousness questionnaire adapted from Goldberg (1992) and a multiple-choice reading comprehension test covering narrative and recount texts, both of which were tested for validity and reliability prior to the study. The data were analyzed using the Pearson product-moment correlation and simple linear regression. The results indicated that (i) there was a significant positive correlation between conscientiousness and reading comprehension achievement ( $r = 0.364$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) which was categorized as moderate; (ii) conscientiousness contributed 11.8% to reading comprehension achievement, showing a significant yet relatively small effect with other factors likely playing a greater role. In conclusion, the findings emphasize the importance of fostering the six facets of conscientiousness identified by Costa and McCrae competence, order, dutifulness, achievement striving, self-discipline, and deliberation as key personal attributes that can support the improvement of students' reading comprehension skills.*

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### **Introduction**

In recent years, English language education has increasingly emphasized the development of reading comprehension as a fundamental skill for academic success and lifelong learning. In the era of digital information, students are required not only to decode written texts but also to critically interpret, evaluate, and synthesize information from various sources. Consequently, reading comprehension has become one of the most essential

competencies in English language learning, particularly at the junior high school level where students begin to engage with more complex academic texts.

Despite continuous improvements in teaching methodologies and learning resources, many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners continue to experience difficulties in achieving satisfactory reading comprehension outcomes. This challenge has prompted researchers and educators to investigate not only cognitive factors but also non-cognitive factors that may influence reading achievement. Among these factors, personality traits have attracted increasing attention due to their potential role in shaping students' learning behaviours, motivation, persistence, and academic engagement.

Reading is an essential skill in learning English as it plays a crucial role in supporting academic success, career opportunities, and effective communication (Yurko & Protsenko, 2020 & Yeow, 2021). Through reading, students are able to acquire new knowledge, expand their vocabulary, and develop critical thinking skills. However, mastering reading comprehension is not an easy task. Many students face difficulties in understanding vocabulary, drawing conclusions, and identifying the main ideas in texts (Lisiana et al., 2021 & Sachran & Aeni, 2022). These challenges present serious obstacles in English language learning. Previous studies have indicated that reading comprehension problems are influenced by both internal and external factors. Internal factors include interest, motivation, reading habits, and psychological conditions, while external factors consist of family support, school environment, and the availability of reading materials (Adeyemi & Adeyemi, 2014; Sampe et al., 2023 & Sardiyannah, 2015). When these factors are not supportive, students find it difficult to build effective reading skills. Therefore, teachers and schools need to provide sufficient guidance and resources to help students overcome these difficulties.

Preliminary observations conducted at the research site revealed that students demonstrated varying levels of reading comprehension achievement despite receiving similar instructional materials and learning opportunities. During classroom activities, some students consistently completed reading tasks, paid close attention to instructions, and actively participated in learning activities. In contrast, other students tended to be less organized, less persistent when encountering difficult texts, and more likely to leave reading tasks unfinished. These differences suggest that individual characteristics beyond linguistic competence may contribute to variations in reading comprehension achievement. Informal discussions with English teachers further indicated that students who exhibited greater responsibility, self-discipline, and persistence generally performed better in reading-related assessments. Such observations highlight the possible role of conscientiousness as an important personality factor influencing reading comprehension achievement among junior high school students.

In addition to these factors, personality is also an important element influencing learning outcomes. According to the Big Five Personality framework, conscientiousness is one of the most consistent predictors of academic achievement (Nofle and Robins, 2007 &

O'Connor & Paunonen, 2007). Individuals with high conscientiousness tend to be disciplined, organized, persistent, and achievement-oriented (Simanullang, 2021). Costa and McCrae (1992), identify six facets of conscientiousness: competence, order, dutifulness, achievement striving, self-discipline, and deliberation. These traits are believed to support students in becoming more focused and persistent in developing their reading comprehension skills.

Previous studies have highlighted the potential role of conscientiousness in academic achievement, including reading comprehension performance. Several researchers have reported a positive correlation between conscientiousness and students' academic outcomes, suggesting that learners who demonstrate higher levels of responsibility, persistence, self-discipline, and organization tend to achieve better academic results (Andhiyanti, 2014; Tirtawati & Rozak, 2018; Kertechian, 2018; Sari et al., 2019 & Rizfalah, 2021). In the context of reading comprehension, conscientious students are more likely to engage in sustained reading activities, apply effective learning strategies, and persist when encountering challenging texts, which may contribute to higher levels of reading achievement.

However, the existing body of literature has not yielded consistent findings. In contrast to the studies mentioned above, Aidah (2019) and Ulin (2020) reported no significant correlation between personality traits and reading comprehension achievement. These contradictory findings suggest that the relationship between conscientiousness and reading comprehension may be influenced by differences in educational contexts, learner characteristics, research designs, and participant demographics. Consequently, the existing evidence remains inconclusive, indicating the need for further empirical investigation in diverse educational settings.

Furthermore, preliminary interviews conducted with English teachers at SMP Negeri 3 Palembang revealed that many eighth-grade students continue to experience difficulties in reading comprehension. According to the teachers, these difficulties are primarily associated with limited vocabulary mastery, low learning motivation, and a lack of persistence when dealing with complex reading texts. Interestingly, teachers also observed that students who consistently completed assignments, paid attention during lessons, and demonstrated greater responsibility toward learning activities generally achieved better reading performance than their peers. These observations suggest that conscientiousness may play an important role in supporting students' reading comprehension achievement.

Given the inconsistencies in previous research findings and the challenges identified through preliminary observations, further investigation is warranted. Therefore, the present study aims to examine the correlation between conscientiousness and reading comprehension achievement among eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 3 Palembang. The findings of this study are expected to enrich the existing literature on personality and language learning, particularly in the Indonesian EFL context, and provide practical insights

for teachers in developing instructional strategies that foster both academic skills and positive learner characteristics.

The existing literature has established the importance of conscientiousness in predicting academic success; however, several gaps remain. First, many previous studies have investigated the relationship between conscientiousness and overall academic achievement rather than specific language skills such as reading comprehension. Second, much of the available evidence has been derived from higher education settings, while studies involving junior high school EFL learners remain limited. Third, the influence of conscientiousness on reading comprehension achievement in Indonesian EFL contexts has not been sufficiently explored.

Addressing these gaps is important because reading comprehension constitutes a core component of English language learning and academic literacy. Understanding whether conscientiousness is associated with reading comprehension achievement may provide educators with valuable insights into the role of personality factors in language learning. Furthermore, such knowledge may assist teachers in developing instructional approaches that foster not only linguistic competence but also positive learner characteristics that support academic success. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the correlation between conscientiousness and reading comprehension achievement among junior high school students.

## Method

This study employed a quantitative correlational design to examine the relationship between conscientiousness and reading comprehension achievement among eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 3 Palembang. Quantitative research was chosen because it allows testing objective theories through statistical analysis of numerical data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The population consisted of 332 students across ten classes, from which 60 were selected using criterion sampling (Fraenkel et al., 2023), focusing on those with dominant conscientiousness traits measured by Goldberg's (1992) Big Five Personality questionnaire. The instruments used were a conscientiousness questionnaire consisting of 30 items reflecting the six facets of conscientiousness (Costa & McCrae, 1992), and a reading comprehension test with 30 multiple-choice questions based on narrative and recount texts. Both instruments were tested for validity and reliability prior to administration.

The data were collected through the administration of the questionnaire and the reading comprehension test. Responses to the questionnaire were measured on a four-point Likert scale, while the reading test was scored dichotomously (correct = 1, incorrect = 0). The analysis was conducted using SPSS version 27, beginning with normality and linearity checks. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was applied to identify the relationship between conscientiousness and reading comprehension, while Simple Linear Regression was used to determine the extent to which conscientiousness contributed to students' reading

comprehension achievement. A significance level of  $p < 0.05$  was set as the basis for interpretation of results.

## Results and Discussion

### Results

#### 1. Students' Conscientiousness Level

The result of the conscientiousness questionnaire shows that the majority of students demonstrated a high level of conscientiousness, while the rest were in the moderate category, and none fell into the low category. This indicates that eighth-grade students of SMP Negeri 3 Palembang generally possess strong traits of responsibility, order, and self-discipline.

Table 1  
The Result of Students' Conscientiousness Questionnaire

Conscientiousness Questionnaire Category	N	% of Total N
High	38	63,33 %
Moderate	22	36,67 %
Low	0	0 %
Total	60	

These results suggest that most students already show personality traits that support academic achievement, aligning with Costa and McCrae's (1992) view that conscientiousness is a predictor of learning success.

#### 2. Students' Reading Comprehension Achievement

The reading comprehension test revealed a diverse distribution across categories, with the majority of students performing in the good to excellent range. Only a small number of students were in the bad or enough category.

Table 2  
The Result of Reading Comprehension Test

Scoring Range	Category	N	% of Total N
10-49	Bad	4	6,67 %
50-64	Enough	8	13,33 %
65-69	Good Enough	5	8,33 %
70-79	Good	14	23,33 %
80-89	Very Good	15	25 %
90-100	Excelent	14	23,33 %
Total		60	

This distribution shows that the majority of students' reading comprehension ability was good to excellent, which is consistent with their high levels of conscientiousness.

### 3. Correlation Between Conscientiousness and Reading Comprehension

Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis indicated a positive correlation between conscientiousness and reading comprehension achievement ( $r = .364$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This correlation is categorized as moderate (Creswell, 2012).

Table 3  
 Correlation Between Conscientiousness and Reading Comprehension Achievement

Correlations			
		Conscientiousness	Reading Comprehension
Conscientiousness	Pearson Correlation	1	.364**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.004
	N	60	60
Reading Comprehension	Pearson Correlation	.364**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	
	N	60	60

This finding supports previous studies (Adhiyanti, 2014; Tirtanawati & Rozak, 2018; Kertechian, 2018) which also confirmed conscientiousness as a positive predictor of academic and reading outcomes.

### 4. Contribution of Conscientiousness to Reading Comprehension

Regression analysis revealed that conscientiousness contributed **11.8%** (Adjusted  $R^2 = .118$ ) to students' reading comprehension achievement. While this shows a significant effect, it also suggests that other factors beyond conscientiousness play a larger role.

Table 4  
 The Contribution of Conscientiousness to Reading Comprehension Achievement

Model	R	R Square	Standard of The Estimate	Adjusted R Square	Sig. F Change
1	.364	.133	13.937	.118	.004

This result indicates that conscientiousness has a measurable impact, but reading achievement is also influenced by other variables such as vocabulary knowledge, motivation, and external learning environments (Sardiyanah, 2015).

## Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that the majority of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 3 Palembang demonstrated a high level of conscientiousness. This result indicates that most students possess positive personality characteristics such as responsibility, self-discipline, persistence, organization, and achievement orientation. According to Costa and McCrae (1992), conscientiousness is characterized by six major facets, namely competence, order, dutifulness, achievement striving, self-discipline, and deliberation. These characteristics are closely associated with academic behaviours that facilitate successful learning outcomes. Students with higher conscientiousness are generally more capable of managing their learning activities, completing academic tasks, and maintaining consistent effort when facing challenges.

The results also showed that most students achieved good to excellent scores in reading comprehension. This finding suggests that the students generally possessed adequate reading abilities to comprehend narrative and recount texts. Reading comprehension is a complex process involving the ability to understand vocabulary, identify main ideas, infer meanings, and interpret textual information. Therefore, successful reading achievement requires not only linguistic competence but also psychological and behavioural factors that support sustained learning efforts.

The Pearson Product Moment analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between conscientiousness and reading comprehension achievement ( $r = .364, p < .05$ ). This result indicates that students with higher levels of conscientiousness tended to achieve better reading comprehension scores. Although the correlation was categorized as moderate, the finding confirms that conscientiousness plays an important role in supporting students' reading performance. Students who are disciplined, organized, and persistent are more likely to spend sufficient time reading, reviewing materials, and applying effective learning strategies when encountering difficult texts. Consequently, they tend to demonstrate better comprehension outcomes than students with lower levels of conscientiousness.

This finding is consistent with several previous studies. Andhiyanti (2014) found that conscientiousness was positively associated with reading achievement, suggesting that responsible and diligent learners tend to perform better in reading tasks. Similarly, Tirtnawati and Rozak (2018) reported that conscientiousness significantly contributed to students' reading ability. The present findings also support the study conducted by Sari et al. (2019), which demonstrated that conscientious students were more likely to achieve higher reading comprehension scores due to their persistence and commitment to learning activities. Furthermore, Kertechian (2018) emphasized that conscientiousness is one of the strongest personality predictors of academic achievement because it promotes effective learning behaviours and goal-oriented actions.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings support the Big Five Personality Theory, which identifies conscientiousness as one of the most influential traits associated with educational success. Students with higher conscientiousness are generally more motivated

to complete assignments, follow classroom rules, and regulate their learning behaviours. These qualities enable them to engage more effectively in reading activities, thereby improving their comprehension performance. In contrast, students with lower levels of conscientiousness may experience difficulties maintaining attention and persistence when reading complex texts, which can negatively affect their comprehension achievement.

The regression analysis indicated that conscientiousness contributed 11.8% to students' reading comprehension achievement. Although this contribution was statistically significant, it was relatively small, indicating that reading comprehension is influenced by multiple factors. Approximately 88.2% of the variance in reading comprehension achievement was explained by factors outside the scope of this study. This result is reasonable because reading comprehension is a multidimensional skill influenced by vocabulary knowledge, grammatical competence, motivation, reading strategies, prior knowledge, intelligence, teaching quality, and learning environment. As suggested by Sardiyanah (2015), both internal and external factors interact in determining students' academic achievement. Interestingly, the relatively modest contribution of conscientiousness may also explain why previous studies have reported inconsistent findings. While some researchers identified significant relationships between personality traits and reading achievement, others found no significant association. Such inconsistencies may be attributable to differences in educational contexts, participant characteristics, measurement instruments, and instructional practices. Therefore, the present study contributes additional evidence supporting the view that conscientiousness plays a meaningful, although not dominant, role in reading comprehension achievement among junior high school EFL learners.

The findings have important pedagogical implications. English teachers should recognize that successful reading development depends not only on linguistic instruction but also on the cultivation of positive learner characteristics. Classroom practices that encourage responsibility, self-discipline, persistence, and goal-setting may help students develop stronger reading habits and improve comprehension performance. Consequently, integrating character development with language instruction may provide a more comprehensive approach to enhancing students' reading achievement.

## Conclusion

This study investigated the correlation between conscientiousness and reading comprehension achievement among eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 3 Palembang. The findings revealed that most students demonstrated high levels of conscientiousness and achieved good to excellent performance in reading comprehension. Statistical analysis confirmed a significant positive correlation between conscientiousness and reading comprehension achievement ( $r = .364$ ,  $p < .05$ ), indicating that students with higher levels of responsibility, self-discipline, persistence, and organization tended to obtain better reading comprehension scores.

Furthermore, the regression analysis showed that conscientiousness contributed 11.8% to students' reading comprehension achievement. Although the contribution was statistically significant, the relatively small percentage suggests that reading comprehension is influenced by numerous additional factors, including vocabulary mastery, learning motivation, cognitive ability, reading strategies, instructional quality, and learning environment. Therefore, conscientiousness should be viewed as one of several important factors supporting reading success rather than the sole determinant of achievement.

The findings enrich the growing body of literature on personality and language learning by providing empirical evidence from an Indonesian junior high school EFL context. They also help address inconsistencies reported in previous studies regarding the relationship between conscientiousness and reading achievement. Practically, the study highlights the importance of fostering positive personality traits, particularly conscientiousness, alongside linguistic competence in English language instruction. Future research is recommended to examine additional psychological and educational variables and involve larger and more diverse samples to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing students' reading comprehension achievement.

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