

Exploring Sixth Graders' Interest in English Language Learning : A Descriptive Study in Ngabang

Aswan¹⁾, Aunurrahman^{2*)}, Maliqul Hafis³⁾

^{1,2,3)}English Education Study Program, Faculty of Languages, Arts, and Vocational Studies PGRI University of Pontianak, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author

Email: aswanapriliya58@gmail.com, yarrha@gmail.com, maliqulwiya@gmail.com

Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the level of students' interest in learning English at a public primary school in Ngabang in the academic year 2025/2026. This research employed a quantitative descriptive survey design. The population of this study consisted of sixth-grade students. The sample was selected using a total sampling technique, involving all students as participants. The instrument used in this study was a closed-ended questionnaire consisting of 14 items. After conducting a pilot test, two items were found to be invalid and excluded. This resulted in 12 valid items used in the main data collection. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean scores and percentages. The findings showed that the overall mean score of students' interest was 3.44, which was categorized as "Very High". Based on the two measured aspects, namely knowledge of English and need for English, the results indicated that students possessed adequate basic knowledge and strong curiosity toward learning English. However, their exposure to the language outside the classroom was relatively limited. Furthermore, students demonstrated a high perception of the importance of English for their future, including education, communication, and career opportunities. In conclusion, students at a public primary school in Ngabang exhibited a very high level of interest in learning English. This finding suggests that students are psychologically ready to learn English despite limited (Schiefele, 1991) external exposure. Therefore, English teachers and school administrators should provide more interactive learning activities and increase exposure to support the learning process.

Keywords: *Students' Interest, English Language Learning, Primary School, Quantitative Descriptive Survey*

INTRODUCTION

English has established itself as the primary global lingua franca, serving as an essential medium for international communication, education, and professional advancement. Competence in English is increasingly recognized as a necessity for global participation rather than merely an academic asset. Recognizing this, many countries have integrated English into their educational curricula at various levels (Salim & Hanif, 2021). In Indonesia, the status of English in primary schools has undergone several changes. Recently, the Indonesian government implemented the Merdeka Curriculum, which reintroduces English as an optional primary school subject. This policy grants schools the autonomy to offer English based on their readiness and institutional resources (Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi RI, 2024).

The reintroduction of English at the primary level highlights the importance of early language exposure. Young learners are widely hypothesized to possess a critical period for language acquisition, facilitating natural language absorption and native-like pronunciation (Lenneberg, 1967). However, language learning success does not depend exclusively on cognitive abilities or curricular design. Affective factors also play a critical role. Among these (Salim & Hanif, 2021; Wahyuni & Tin, 2024) materials, persist through academic challenges, and achieve better learning outcomes (Schiefele, 1991).

Interest in learning represents a psychological state characterized by focused attention, increased cognitive functioning, and persistent effort (Hidi & Renninger, 2006). Within English language learning, this interest is shaped by variables such as language exposure, awareness of its utility, and the educational environment (Salim & Hanif, 2021; Wahyuni & Tin, 2024). Students who exhibit higher interest tend to participate more actively and develop positive

attitudes toward their learning process. Supporting this, (Henry & Cliffordson, 2017) found that interest correlates with academic achievement and sustained motivation, pointing to the relevance of early educational intervention.

Empirical studies further emphasize the role of affective factors in language acquisition. Puspita, Ristianti, and Soviyah (2022) reported that familiarity with English and its perceived usefulness influence learner engagement and classroom participation. Similarly, Lestari (Lestari, 2020) observed a positive correlation between intrinsic interest and learning achievement. Despite these established links, current literature predominantly focuses on secondary school learners or students in urban areas with greater access to English exposure outside the classroom (Salim & Hanif, 2021). Consequently, data regarding the interest levels of primary school students in semi-urban or rural Indonesian contexts remain limited. This presents a gap in understanding how younger learners in localized settings perceive and interact with early language instruction.

To address this gap, the present study examines the interest levels of sixth-grade students at a public primary school in Ngabang, a semi-urban district. The research specifically evaluates two indicators: students' existing knowledge of English and their perceived need for the language. Analyzing these components helps determine students' readiness for language learning before transitioning to secondary education. In the end, the empirical findings aim to assist educators and school administrators in developing pedagogical strategies that align with actual learner needs and motivations.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative descriptive survey design. This methodology involves a systematic investigation of phenomena by gathering quantifiable data and applying statistical analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The survey design was selected to gather data regarding students' attitudes, opinions, and characteristics. Specifically, it assessed sixth-grade students' interest in learning English. This approach was appropriate for determining the level of interest within the target group.

Population and Sample

The research population comprised all sixth-grade students at a public primary school in Ngabang during the 2025/2026 academic year. The population size was 30 students. Due to the small population size, a total sampling technique was employed. Total sampling, or exhaustive sampling, is a technique where the entire population is selected to participate (Tajik et al., 2024). Consequently, the final sample consisted of 30 students, ensuring that the findings are highly representative of this cohort.

Data Collection Instrument

The primary data collection instrument was a structured questionnaire. A questionnaire consist of a series of items designed to gather information from respondents (Ary et al., 2018). The questionnaire measured students' interest across two indicators:

1. **Knowledge of English:** This indicator assesses students' familiarity with the language, their extracurricular exposure, and their basic vocabulary comprehension.
2. **Need for English:** This indicator evaluates students' perceptions of the importance of English for education, career, and global communication, alongside their willingness to learn.

The initial questionnaire comprised 14 items, with seven items dedicated to each indicator. Items utilized a four-point Likert scale to measure either agreement intensity or experiential frequency. The response options were tailored to specific questions. For frequency, options

ranged from "Daily" to "Very Rarely". For importance, they ranged from "Very Important" to "Not Important at All". A four-point scale was chosen to compel a definitive choice. This design avoids the neutral midpoint, which undecided respondents frequently select (Cohen et al., 2018).

Prior to administration, the instrument underwent validity and reliability testing. A pilot study was conducted with a cohort representing the target sample. Item validity was determined using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation formula, while reliability was assessed via Cronbach's alpha (Cohen et al., 2018; Wahyuni et al., 2025). The pilot results confirmed that the instrument was valid and reliable.

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection procedures were executed in four stages:

1. **Administrative Clearance:** The researchers obtained formal permissions from the school principal and the class teacher.
2. **Administration:** The researchers visited the classroom during a scheduled period. They explained the study's purpose, emphasizing that participation was voluntary, confidential, and had no impact on academic grading.
3. **Completion:** The questionnaires were distributed to the 30 students. The researchers guided the completion process and clarified any item misunderstandings.
4. **Collection:** Completed questionnaires were collected immediately for analysis.

Data Analysis Technique

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to calculate mean score and categorize interest levels. The analysis procedure as follows:

1. **Scoring:** Likert scale responses were coded from 1 to 4, with 4 representing the highest frequency and 1 the lowest.
2. **Mean Calculation:** Individual student means were calculated by dividing the total score by the number of valid items. The overall sample mean was also computed.
3. **Categorization:** Mean scores were interpreted using a classification scale (Sugiyono, 2019):
 1. 3.26 – 4.00: Very High
 2. 2.51 – 3.25: High
 3. 1.76 – 2.50: Low
 4. 1.00 – 1.75: Very Low

This classification framework enabled clear determination of the students' overall interest levels.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results of the Study

The result were derived from the questionnaires administered to the sixth-grade students. The analysis included 12 valid items, as two invalid items (Q2 and Q10) were excluded based on the pilot results. To determine the interest level, data were analyzed across two subscales: knowledge of English and need for English. Following this, the overall mean score was computed.

Knowledge of English

Table 1. Students' Knowledge of English

NO.	Item	Mean Score	Percentage (%)	Category
1.	Q1	2.87	71.77 %	High
2.	Q3	3.23	80.65%	High
3.	Q4	3.10	77.42%	High
4.	Q5	3.58	89.52%	Very High
5.	Q6	3.42	85.48%	Very High

6.	Q7	3.77	94.35%	Very High
Average Mean Score		3.33	83.20%	Very High

Table 1 indicates that half of the knowledge subscale items fell into the "Very High" category, while the remainder were categorized as "High." Specifically, the highest-scoring item, Q7 (M = 3.77), indicates student curiosity toward English. Conversely, the lowest-scoring item, Q1 (M = 2.87), points to limited exposure to the language outside the classroom. In summary, although their daily exposure is restricted, students demonstrate basic familiarity and curiosity toward English.

Need for English

Table 2. The Mean Score of Students' Need for English

No.	Item	Mean Score	Percentage (%)	Category
1.	Q8	3.68	91.94%	Very High
2.	Q9	3.74	93.55%	Very High
3.	Q11	3.39	84.68%	Very High
4.	Q12	3.32	83.06%	Very High
5.	Q13	3.39	84.68%	Very High
6.	Q14	3.84	95.97%	Very High
Average Mean Score		3.56	89.18%	Very High

Table 2 shows that all items in the need subscale were categorized as "Very High." Specifically, Q14 yielded the highest mean score (M = 3.84), suggesting that students found English learning enjoyable. Conversely, Q12 recorded the lowest score (M = 3.32) but remained within the same category. Collectively, these results indicate that students are aware of the global utility of English and perceive it as important for their future.

Students' Levels of Interest

Table 3. Overall Result of Students' Interest

No.	Item	Mean Score	Percentage (%)	Category
1.	Q1	2.87	71.77%	High
2.	Q3	3.23	80.65%	High
3.	Q4	3.10	77.42%	High
4.	Q5	3.58	89.52%	Very High
5.	Q6	3.42	85.48%	Very High
6.	Q7	3.77	94.35%	Very High
7.	Q8	3.68	91.94%	Very High
8.	Q9	3.74	93.55%	Very High
9.	Q11	3.39	84.68%	Very High
10.	Q12	3.32	83.06%	Very High
11.	Q13	3.39	84.68%	Very High
12.	Q14	3.84	95.97%	Very High
Average Mean Score		3.44	86.19%	Very High

Table 3 shows that most items fell into the "Very High" category, with the remainder categorized as "High." The overall mean score was 3.44, confirming a "Very High" interest level. Specifically, Q14 obtained the highest mean score (M = 3.84), indicating that students found learning English enjoyable, whereas Q1 recorded the lowest score (M = 2.87), reflecting limited exposure to the language outside the school environment. Overall, these findings demonstrate that students exhibit a positive interest in learning English, despite their limited external exposure.

Comparison Between the Two Aspects of Students' Interest

After analyzing the valid items, the researchers compared the mean scores of the two subscales, Knowledge of English and Need for English, to determine the dominant aspect.

Table 4. Recapitulation of Mean Scores of Two Aspects

Aspect	Mean Score	Percentage (%)	Category
Need for English	3.56	89.18%	Very High
Knowledge of English	3.33	83.20%	Very High
Total Mean Score	3.44	86.19%	Very High

Table 4 shows that both the Need for English and Knowledge of English aspects were categorized as "Very High." However, the Need for English aspect was more dominant, recording a mean score of 3.56 (89.18%) compared to 3.33 (83.20%) for Knowledge of English with a difference of 0.23 points. These findings indicate that while students demonstrated basic knowledge and curiosity, their perception of the language's future utility (e.g., for communication, education, and professional opportunities) exceeded their current familiarity and exposure.

Discussion

The findings revealed that students' interest in learning English at this public primary school in Ngabang was "Very High," suggesting that they exhibited positive attitudes toward language learning. Hidi and Renninger (2006) state that interest is closely linked to attention, enjoyment, and active involvement. In the present study, students demonstrated curiosity and positive reactions, reflecting their strong engagement with the subject.

Within the knowledge aspect, students exhibited adequate familiarity and basic comprehension. Most participants recognized simple English words and expressions while showing curiosity to learn more. This aligns with Schiefele's (1991) assertion that prior knowledge and familiarity support the development of student interest and classroom engagement. However, the result of Q1 indicates that student exposure to English outside the classroom remains limited. This condition is likely influenced by the semi-urban context of Ngabang, where access to English learning resources, courses, media, and target-language environments is more constrained than in urban centers (Wahyuni & Tin, 2024). Despite this constraint, students maintained a strong interest in learning English. Such a finding suggests that internal factors, including curiosity and positive perceptions of utility, could exert a stronger influence on student interest than environmental exposure alone.

In terms of the need aspect, students demonstrated strong perceptions of the language's future importance. Most participants believed that English is essential for communication, education, and career opportunities. This finding aligns with the principle that students exhibit higher interest when they understand the instrumental value of the subject matter (Rachmajanti & Anugerahwati, 2019). High scores on items measuring enjoyment (Q14) and participation willingness (Q12) further indicate that students possessed positive emotional engagement rather than merely recognizing the language's utility. Wang and Guan (2020) similarly reported that highly interested learners display more positive attitudes and active participation in learning activities. Overall, students maintained a robust interest in learning English despite their limited external exposure, driven significantly by their curiosity, positive affect, and awareness of the language's utility.

Several limitations of this study must be acknowledged. Because the sample was drawn from a single public primary school in Ngabang, the findings may not generalize to other regions with different educational resources. The descriptive quantitative design relied solely on numerical questionnaire data, which inherently precluded deeper exploration of qualitative experiences or personal motivations. The self-reported nature of questionnaires also introduces potential response bias, such as social desirability. Moreover, the study examined only two aspects, namely knowledge of English and need for English, without investigating other variables like teaching methodologies, classroom environment, or teacher influence.

These findings carry important pedagogical implications for primary-level English instruction. Teachers are encouraged to design interactive, student-centered activities to maintain the high interest observed among learners. School administrators could support this by facilitating extracurricular English opportunities, such as language clubs or media-based projects. Integrating real-world relevance into curriculum materials can also reinforce students' instrumental motivation. Given the students' positive attitudes and readiness, the results support policy initiatives to reintroduce English as a compulsory subject in Indonesian primary schools (Hawanti, 2018; Salim & Hanif, 2021; Suseno, 2021). Future research should involve larger, more diverse samples across multiple regions to enhance generalizability. Employing mixed-methods approaches would also provide a deeper qualitative understanding of student experiences, motivations, and interests.

CONCLUSION

The overall interest level of sixth-grade students in learning English was categorized as "Very High" ($M = 3.44$). This result indicates that students possess high attention, curiosity, and positive attitudes toward the language. While students demonstrated basic comprehension and familiarity by recognizing simple words and expressions, their exposure to English outside the classroom remains limited, likely due to their semi-urban environment. Nevertheless, they exhibited a high awareness of the language's future utility, recognizing its importance for communication, education, and professional opportunities. This perception contributed significantly to their high interest levels. When comparing the two aspects, the Need for English ($M = 3.56$) emerged as more dominant than the Knowledge of English ($M = 3.33$). The difference of 0.23 points indicates that students' perceptions of the language's future utility are stronger than their current familiarity and exposure. In conclusion, primary school students in this semi-urban setting are psychologically ready and motivated to learn English despite facing limited exposure. Their high level of interest forms a solid foundation for implementing English language instruction at the primary education level.

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To sustain this momentum, educators and policymakers should integrate interactive, student-centered activities and real-world relevance into the primary curriculum. School administrators could further support this readiness by facilitating extracurricular language opportunities. Moving forward, future studies should involve larger and more diverse samples across multiple regions to enhance generalizability. Employing a mixed-methods approach would also provide deeper qualitative insights into student experiences and personal motivations.

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