

# The Relationship Between Reading Interest, Life Meaning and Subjective Well-being in Middle School Students

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## ABSTRACT

In order to study the relationship between middle school students' reading interest and subjective well-being, as well as the mediating role of life meaning, this paper takes the survey data of PISA2018 as samples to explore the effects of middle school students' reading interest on life meaning and subjective well-being, and provides reference for advocating reading as a means to improve the happiness of middle school students. The study found that middle school students' reading interest is closely related to subjective well-being, and the life meaning plays an intermediary role in it, which suggests that teachers should pay attention to cultivating middle school students' reading interest, and parents should also pay attention to their children's reading interest rather than only care about their children's academic achievement.

**Keywords:** Reading interest, Life meaning, Subjective well-being, Middle school students.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

As the main group of reading, students love reading and are skilled at it, which of both making their learning process have more advantages. [1] From the utilitarian point of view, allowing students to form a strong interest in reading can bring relatively large benefits. There is another important role that should not be ignored. Reading may also be of great significance to students' mental health. First of all, studies have found that individuals with a higher interest in reading have a higher level of mental health [2], People who read regularly have higher life satisfaction and lower stress levels, which can help them take a break from the heavy burdens of real life, Even reading can be used as a kind of psychotherapy to help the psychological disorder of the individual environment of physical and mental stress[3].Reading can also provide individuals with a psychological space to escape from reality, and explore different lifestyles and values in this space, which is conducive to their psychological maturity and physical and mental health [4].In addition, reading can also help teenagers build self-efficacy, self-esteem and so on [5].However, most studies

have been conducted on adults or college students, and little attention has been paid to the effect of reading on the happiness of middle school students.

So, will high school students who love to read be happier? The learning task of middle school students requires a lot of text reading, so their happiness may be affected by their reading attitude, ability and interest. First of all, having a higher interest in reading can make them more willing to read, which can make them obtain higher academic achievement, and academic achievement is closely related to the psychological health of middle school students; Secondly, in a large number of text reading tasks, the interest in reading is an internal feeling that affects the willingness to process the text and causes their own emotional experience. When the interest in reading is very low, they will have a mentality like "I don't want to read and don't want to learn", which will seriously affect their academic achievement and experience strong pain in the learning process. Therefore, exploring the impact of middle school students' reading interest on their subjective well-being is of great significance for middle school mental health education. Many previous studies have shown that

reading has a predictive effect on people's subjective well-being. This study hypothesize H1: Middle school students' reading interest can positively predict subjective well-being.

How does reading make them happier? According to Owen Aronne's perspective on existential psychotherapy, there are four important principles of human existence: death, loneliness, freedom, and meaninglessness. Each subject will cause internal conflicts in the individual, and when these conflicts are not well resolved, they will lead to a variety of psychological and behavioral problems. Feelings of meaninglessness are common to many people, and when they don't find answers, they can lead to problems like emptiness, depression, and even suicide. He emphasized that the life meaning lies not in the result, but in the process, and the process of experiencing various feelings in life can give people life meaning. Reading is a thing to experience the process of life, through reading to seek the meaning of life, feel the story of a variety of life, little by little to build their own meaning of life. In addition, doing what you are interested in is a meaning in itself, so people with high reading interest may gain life meaning. Since no studies have directly explored the effect of reading interest on life meaning, this study hypothesized that reading interest of middle school students can predict life meaning(H2). In addition, overcoming the sense of meaninglessness, actively exploring the life meaning, and feeling the various experiences of life are an important source of happiness. Therefore, having life meaning is one of the essential elements for people's subjective well-being. Related studies have also found that the higher life meaning of middle school students, the higher their subjective happiness level[6]. Therefore, this study hypothesizes that H3: middle school students' life meaning plays an intermediary role between reading interest and subjective well-being.

In summary, this study attempts to explore the effect of middle school students' reading interest on their subjective well-being, and whether reading interest can help middle school students explore the meaning of life, so as to improve their mental health level. It not only provides a new perspective and entry point for middle school mental health workers to improve students' physical and mental health level, but also makes parents realize that it is more meaningful to promote children's reading interest than to urge children to get good grades.

## 2. METHODS

### 2.1 Data Sources and Samples

The study used data from the 2018 PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) survey conducted by OECD. PISA2018 surveyed middle school students born in 2002, including 12085 middle school students in four provinces and cities in China (Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang). After deleting the non-response and missing samples, 11,285 valid data were obtained, including 3929 (34.82%) in grade 9, 7356 (65.18%) in grade 10, 5864 (51.96%) in boys and 5421 (48.04%) in girls.

### 2.2 Variable Interpretation

#### 2.2.1 Reading Interest

Reading interest is numbered ST160 and contains five questions such as "Reading is one of my favorite hobbies". This variable was measured using a four-point scale of "strongly disagree ~ strongly agree", in which questions 1, 4 and 5 were inverted scores, and the internal consistency coefficient in this study was 0.813.

#### 2.2.2 Life Meaning

The life meaning is measured by ST185, which contains three questions such as "My life has a clear meaning or purpose". This measurement method comes from the dimension of sense of meaning in the Meaning of Life questionnaire of Steger [7]. The four-point score of "strongly disagree ~ strongly agree" was used to measure this variable, all of which were positive scores, and the internal consistency coefficient of this study was 0.854.

#### 2.2.3 Subjective Well-being

This study used ST016, "Overall, how satisfied are you with your life these days?" to estimates subjective well-being of middle school students' well-being. Subjective well-being is a subjective feeling that can be evaluated for a single self-report[8]. In the survey of PISA2018, the scoring method is 0~10 (representing very dissatisfied ~ very satisfied).

### 2.3 Data Process

After data collection with SPSS 25.0, descriptive statistics and correlation analysis were

carried out for all samples. Finally, PROCESS 3.2 macro program was used for mediation analysis.

### 2.4 Research Ethic

There is no violation of research ethics in this study: First, the data is open access and only be used it for scientific research; Secondly, there is no privacy information of participants in the obtained data, and most of the information is presented in serial numbers, so there is no privacy problem. Finally, this study only used secondary data for analysis and did not involve human studies.

## 3. RESULTS

### 3.1 The General Characteristics of Middle School Students' Reading Interest, Life Meaning and Subjective Well-being

Descriptive statistical analysis is made on the reading interest, life meaning and subjective well-being of middle school students. The results are shown in "Table 1": The score of reading interest ranges from 1.00 to 4.00, with an average value of  $3.19 \pm 0.56$ . The score of life meaning ranged from 1.00 to 4.00, with an average of  $2.84 \pm 0.67$ . The score of subjective well-being ranged from 0.00 to 10.00, with an average score of  $6.69 \pm 2.49$ . This indicates that the middle school students in Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang are at a good level in reading interest, life meaning and subjective well-being based on the measured median value.

Table 1. Description of the statistics and correlation analysis

	<i>M(SD)</i>	1	2	3
Reading interest	3.19(0.56)	1		
Life Meaning	2.84 (0.67)	0.196 **	1	
Subjective Well-Being	6.69(2.49)	0.150 **	0.338**	1

a Note: \*\* means  $p < 0.01$

### 3.2 Correlation Analysis

The correlation analysis results are shown in "Table 1". All the three are significantly positively correlated, which means that reading interest, life meaning and subjective well-being are closely related.

### 3.3 Mediation Effect Analysis

Model 4 of the PROCESS 3.2 macro was used to test the mediating effect, with reading interest as the independent variable, life meaning as the mediating variable, and subjective well-being as the dependent variable. The results showed that reading interest could significantly predict life meaning ( $\beta = 0.24$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and subjective well-being ( $\beta = 0.67$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). At the same time, the mediating effect of life meaning was significant. When life meaning was added as the mediating variable, the regression coefficient of reading interest on happiness decreased from the original  $\beta = 0.67$  to  $\beta = 0.39$ , and the mediating effect accounted for 41.79%. This indicates that the effect of middle school students' reading interest on subjective well-being is largely linked by the life meaning (see "Table 2" and "Table 3"), and the model is shown in "Figure 1".

Table 2. Analysis of mediating effects

Equation		Fix Index			Coefficient	
Outcome	Predictor	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>F</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>
LM	RI	0.20	0.04	450.33	0.24	21.22 **
SWB	RI	0.15	0.02	261.17	0.67	16.16 **
SWB		0.35	0.12	782.68		
	RI				0.39	9.72 **
	LM				1.18	35.70 **

a NOTE: \*\*means  $p < 0.01$ , LM means Life Meaning, RI refers Reading Interest, SWB means Subjective Well-Being

Table 3. Total effects, direct effects and indirect effects

	Effect size	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	Relative effect size
Total	0.67	0.04	0.59	0.76	
Direct	0.39	0.04	0.31	0.47	58.21%
Indirect	0.28	0.02	0.25	0.32	41.79%

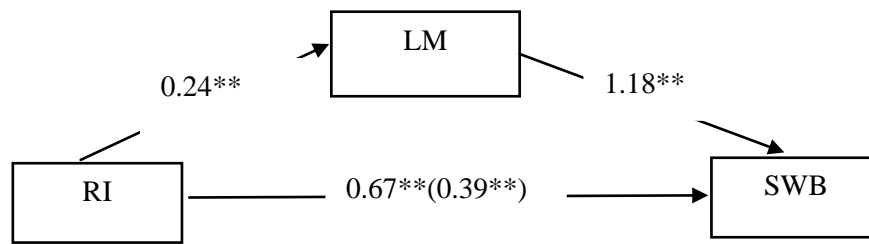


Figure 1 Mediation model diagram.

## 4. DISCUSSIONS

### 4.1 The General Characteristics of Middle School Students' Reading Interest, Life Meaning in Life and Subjective Well-being

From the survey data of PISA 2018, the reading interest, life meaning and subjective well-being of middle school students in four provinces and cities in China are in a good state, which is consistent with previous relevant studies [6,9]. First of all, middle school students' interest in reading is in a good state. Middle school students have heavy academic tasks and need to carry out a large number of text reading activities, including the reading of subject content, the reading of examination, assessment and other content, as well as the reading of their own interest. Under such heavy reading pressure, if the interest in reading is very low, it will not only harm their academic achievement level, but also have a great impact on their happiness.

Secondly, the life meaning of middle school students is in a better state, indicating that most of them know the meaning of most stages of their life and have a clear life goal. However, high school students spend most of their time in learning, and their meaning in life is largely related to academic achievement, and the meaning of life involves many aspects, not just academic achievement. Therefore, teachers and parents should help middle school students establish multidimensional life goals and enrich their sense of meaning in life. Finally, the survey results also show that the happiness level of middle school students is in a reasonable state. The subjective happiness level of middle school students is their subjective perception of their life status and inner feelings, which is closely related to their mental health level. A higher subjective happiness level means a more positive mental health state.

### 4.2 The Relationship Between Middle School Students' Reading Interest, Life Meaning and Subjective Well-being

Are high school students happier if they love reading? According to the results of this study, middle school students' reading interest can positively predict their subjective well-being, indicating that middle school students who love reading are happier, and verifying hypothesis H1. As hypothesized, middle school students are confronted with a large amount of text reading content, and their interest in reading text will greatly affect their attitude toward learning, academic achievement, and most importantly, their subjective well-being[10]. This means that if they have a very low interest in reading, it will be difficult to gain benefits from such a heavy text reading task, and harm their happiness.

How does reading interest make middle school students happier? The results show that middle school students' reading interest can predict their life meaning, and life meaning plays a mediating role between reading interest and subjective well-being, verifying hypotheses H2 and H3. First of all, reading interest can predict life meaning. According to Owen's viewpoint of existential psychotherapy, the sense of meaninglessness needs to be overcome by the individual feeling the process of life and searching for the life meaning. Reading can be used as a medium to understand life experience and find the meaning of life. Through reading different contents, middle school students can experience the various aspects of life, the warmth of the world and the truth philosophy, and enrich their understanding of life and the world. At the same time, doing what you are interested in is a meaningful thing in itself. Therefore, reading interest in middle school helps to enhance their sense of meaning in life. Secondly, the life meaning is an important source of subjective well-being[6]. When a person's sense of the meaning of life does not exist, he will live aimlessly and feel endless emptiness, which seriously affects his physical and mental health. For

middle school students, who need a lot of reading, if they have a strong interest in reading, it will help them to seek and improve the life meaning, and ultimately lead to the improvement of their subjective happiness level.

In general, high school students who read are actually happier, and a large part of this happiness is achieved through seeking life meaning. Helping middle school students to form a strong interest in reading has a great effect on the improvement of their happiness level.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The results of this study show that middle school students' reading interest, life meaning and subjective well-being are at a good level. At the same time, high school students who love reading are happier, in which the life meaning plays a key role. Middle school mental health educators should pay attention to the positive effect of middle school students' interest in reading on their physical and mental health, and take measures to strengthen their interest in reading. In addition, parents should not pay too much attention to their children's academic results, not only did not play the desired results, but also produced a bad emotional experience for themselves and their children, which damaged the parent-child relationship. Instead, teachers and parents should see the positive impact of reading interest on children's academic achievement and happiness. By enhancing children's interest in reading, they can not only improve their academic performance but also benefit their physical and mental health.

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