

IDENTIFYING STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION DIFFICULTIES

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ABSTRACT

This research focused on the reading comprehension difficulties that the 8th grade students experienced. The goals of this research were to determine the aspects and factors of reading comprehension as discovered by the 8th grade students. The descriptive quantitative approach was employed to collect data for this study, and the instruments were a test and a questionnaire. The test consisted of twenty questions divided into five categories: main idea, specific information, making inference, locating reference, and vocabulary. The data were analysed using the index difficulty. The exam results revealed that the most difficult aspects that the 8th grade students encountered were locating references (63%) and making inference questions (63%). Furthermore, based on the students' questionnaire replies, they typically received inadequate word recognition such as understanding vocabulary 78% and the difficulty understanding the intent of the text 76%, second, a lack of background knowledge such as students' difficulty in determining the main idea (65%), grammatical structure (75%), inferences of the text (53%) and students' understanding the context of the text (70%), next, a lack or bad use strategy (73%), and the home environment that lack of motivation from family to read English text (65%). In addition, the students did not have difficulty with the psychological element and school environment factors. As a result, the most common cause of the students' issues was inadequate word recognition or comprehension of vocabulary. The result implied that most of the students found difficult in reading comprehension. It became notation for the teacher to assess the students as well as to improve the teacher's strategy in teaching reading comprehension.

Keywords: Students, Reading Comprehension, Difficulties

1) INTRODUCTION

Language is one of the instruments that human use to demonstrate their ability to communicate with one another, and communication skills are models by an understanding of sounds, words, phrases, and sentences, as well as culture. (Kaharuddin & Ahmad, 2018). One of the most common languages used in this world is the English language. It has become an international language because it is one of the official

languages used by the United Nations (Crystal, 2011). Therefore, language plays an important role, especially in the English language, which is one of the international languages. The importance of English as a communication tool, as well as access to knowledge, is considered by Indonesia to be included in the Indonesian education curriculum. English was established as a foreign language to be taught in junior high to high school in 1967.

The four abilities that should be mastered by learners, namely reading, listening, speaking and writing. Basically, skills of English language are categorized in three types, those are: productive skills consisting of speaking and writing, receptive skills consisting of listening and reading and productive plus receptive skills consisting of interpreting skills and translating skills (Kaharuddin & Ahmad, 2018). From the four skills that should be mastered in learning English, reading is one of the important skills that students should master in order to succeed in academic life.

The importance of reading has already discussed, it becomes the first commend and also the first verse come down that was surah Al-‘Alaq verse 1-5 (Mubarokfuri, 1997). The repetition of the word iqra' in this letter shows that the command of reading is very important for human life. Muhammad Quraish Shihab explained that reading means someone doing activities of studying, reading, exploring, researching, knowing the characteristics of something and gathering knowledge and information obtained by a person. The activity of reading, studying, researching, exploring, gathering allows a person to gain knowledge and information (Shihab, 2003).

In the Indonesian context, Indonesia was rated 62 out of 70 nations in terms of literacy levels according to the results of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2019, it means Indonesia located in the top 10 countries with low literacy levels. The total number of publications with the number of Indonesians has a national 0.09 ratios. It means that 90 people wait for one book every year, making Indonesia the country with the lowest level of reading (Utami, 2021).

Comprehension is the primary goal of any reading activity (Al-Qahtani, 2020). According to Pearson and Stephens, text comprehension is a complicated interaction between the reader and written language in which the reader uses a variety of psychological processes such as

perception, attention, memory, learning, and motivation to derive meaning from the text (Mahapatra 2016).

To develop their reading skills, children should practice reading frequently and employ certain tactics. Students' ability to comprehend the material is determined by their ability to utilize a way to comprehend what the author is saying. Nuttal (2005) categorized reading approaches into four groups. Examples include skimming, scanning, extensive, and focused reading.

The aspects to be analysed in this study were five aspects of reading comprehension by Nuttal (1982, as cited in Putra & Munawwaroh, 2021), those were determining main idea, locating reference, understanding vocabulary, making inference, detail information.

Inadequate word recognition abilities, a lack of prior information, a lack of or bad use strategy, and a psychological element, according to Forgan and Mangrum (1981, as cited in Kasvia, 2017), are all factors to consider when reading comprehension problems arise.

There was an earlier study conducted by Hidayati (2018) that was equal to this investigation. This study looked into students' reading comprehension challenges in the first grade at SMAN 1 Darussalam Aceh Besar. Her research needed to identify the root reasons of reading comprehension issues. Her research revealed that the majority of students failed the reading comprehension test due to insufficient vocabulary, poor grammar proficiency, trouble comprehending lengthy phrases and material, inadequate media learning or family assistance, and ignorance of reading comprehension tactics. However, it is crucial to understand the challenges of reading comprehension.

The next was from Pandiangan (2021), her research aimed to discover students' difficulties with online learning in reading comprehension. Her research used a qualitative phenomenology study technique with purposive sampling as the methodology. According to the findings of her research, the majority of 8th grade students had difficulty answering the test questions. Students have difficulty distinguishing the primary idea and comprehending the meaning of words or terminology, as well as working on difficulties. Students' issues in online learning are caused by a lack of understanding of the exam's meaning, which makes it difficult for them to determine the information contained in the test. They have difficulty developing reading comprehension due to a lack of vocabulary knowledge.

Students may experience distinct issues in one school than they may in another. One of the phenomena that occurred to this study was in MTs Madani Alauddin Paopao. It was discovered during the PLP 2 in the school by researchers. The researcher took the 8th grade because it has become medium level in junior high school, and if the researcher took the 7th grade, it is too early to identify reading comprehension difficulties, because not all of them have studied English in elementary school. The 9th grade, it consumed time to conduct this research while they soon to passed to the school. As a result, the researcher conducted preliminary study to ensure that the study could be conducted at the school. The preliminary study was done in Wednesday, 2 March 2022 by interviewing the English teacher of eight grade students about the learning process in the reading lesson.

The researcher is interested in conducting the study at MTs Madani Alauddin Paopao because this school is one of the places where the researcher did PLP 1 and 2, so the researcher wants to continue the observation in the school. The researcher chose the 8th grade students, especially those in the 8thA grade of MTs Madani Alauddin Paopao, because, on the result of the preliminary study, the English teacher said that the 8thA grade has low results in English lessons, especially in the reading test. Based on the problem stated above the researcher is interested to identify student's difficulties in reading comprehension.

2) METHODS

The researcher used descriptive quantitative approach in this study. Quantitative research, according to Gay (2012), is the gathering and examination of numerical data for the purpose of describing, clarifying, predicting, or controlling occurrences of interest. Descriptive quantitative research is a type of scientific investigation that uses numbers to explain events. The population in this study was the 8th grade of MTs Madani Alauddin Paopao. Based on the information from the English teacher, the 8th grade students consist of 142 students. A representative sample in quantitative research is one that accurately reflects the population from which it was drawn, and this procedure is not done at random (Gay 2012). In this research the researcher used Purposive Sampling. According to Gay (2012), purposive sampling is the process of picking a sample of a population that is thought to be representative. The sample criteria of this research are the students who score lower in English tests, especially in reading. The researcher took the 8thA grade with the number of students equal to 37 from the population of the sample. The class was chosen based on the preliminary study.

The researcher collected data in this study by employing a reading comprehension test and a questionnaire as data collection instruments. The researcher administrated a reading exam to the students in order to evaluate their reading comprehension. The researcher attempted to determine whether or not the students can answer the reading test correctly by administering the test. In this exam, the researcher also used five aspects of reading comprehension. The five aspects of reading comprehension were: identifying the main idea; making inferences; identifying references; locating specific information; and grasping the meaning of terms or vocabulary. The next, the researcher used questionnaire as the research instrument. The form of the questionnaire was closed in this case with an alternate answer that the students chose. The questionnaire was typed in Indonesian, so the students can understand what the questions imply. The multiple choice of the questionnaire is (always, frequent, seldom, and never). The questionnaire is adopted by Hidayati's Research.

3) RESULTS

The data were collected using two different instruments, and the research findings showed the results of the study based on those data. The first information came from the test results that were given to the students, and the second information came from the questionnaire results that were given to the students, and it concerned the reasons why the students have trouble in comprehending English text especially for recount texts.

The Analysis of Reading Test

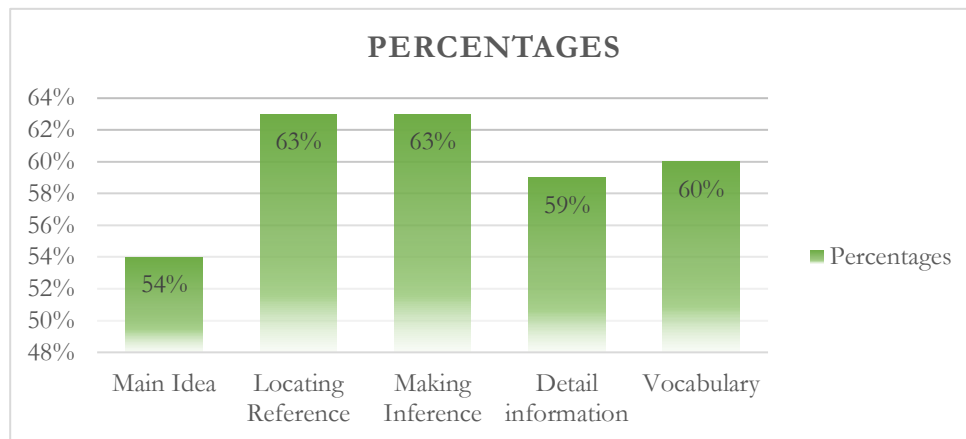
Table 1. The Frequency of the Students' Correct Answer and Score of the Reading Comprehension Test

No.	Correct Answer	Frequency	Score
1	17	3	85
2	14	1	70
3	11	1	55
4	10	2	50
5	9	4	45
6	8	7	40
7	7	4	35
8	6	8	30
9	5	4	25
10	4	2	20
11	3	1	15
Mean			40

The table above indicated that not all of the questions could be correctly answered by the 8thA grade students of MTs Madani Alauddin Paopao. Only 3 out of 37 students were able to

answer correctly respond to 17 out of the 20 reading comprehension questions. Additionally, the average score for all students was 40, which showed that the students had trouble understanding the questions on the reading comprehension test. It demonstrated that the students were unable to gain the English subject's minimal completion criterion (KKM) score. The minimal set of requirements (KKM) was 75. The fact that only 3 students obtained the KKM score suggests that the students' reading comprehension abilities were not good.

Figure 1. The Percentage of Difficulty Question Items of Reading Comprehension



Based on the Percentages in the chart above, the researcher concluded that nearly every component of reading was rated as difficult, with the Percentage of difficulty items above 56%. Finding references and answering inference questions were the parts of the exam that were the most difficult, according to the Percentage chart, which had a Percentage of 63 percent. Following that, there were questions about vocabulary with a 60% rate and questions about detail information with a 59%. With a Percentage of 54%, the main idea questions had the lowest proportion.

The Analysis of Questionnaire

One of the tools for gathering data is the questionnaire. The questionnaire's goal is to identify the factors contributing to the difficulties faced by the students at MTs Madani Alauddin Paopao.

Inadequate Word Recognition

Table 2. Students' Understanding of the Vocabulary of the Text

No.	Option	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Always	1	3%
2.	Often	7	19%

3.	Seldom	27	73%
4.	Never	2	5%

Table 3. Students' Difficulty in Understanding the Intent of the Text

No.	Option	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Always	8	22%
2.	Often	20	54%
3.	Seldom	9	24%
4.	Never	0	0%

Psychological Element

Table 4. Students' Difficulty in Concentrating on the Text

No.	Option	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Always	5	14%
2.	Often	9	24%
3.	Seldom	15	40%
4.	Never	8	22%

A Lack or Bad Use Strategy

Table 5. Students' Understanding of the Strategy of Reading Text

No.	Option	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Always	4	11%
2.	Often	6	16%
3.	Seldom	21	57%
4.	Never	6	16%

House Environment

Table 6. Family Motivation for Students to Read English Texts

No.	Option	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Always	9	24%
2.	Often	4	11%
3.	Seldom	16	43%
4.	Never	8	22%

School Environment

Table 7. Students' Perceptions about the Availability of Learning Media at the Library

No.	Option	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Always	19	51%
2.	Often	7	19%
3.	Seldom	10	27%
4.	Never	1	3%

A Lack of Background Knowledge

Table 8. Students' Difficulty in Determining the Main Idea of the Text

No.	Option	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Always	6	16%
2.	Often	18	49%
3.	Seldom	12	32%
4.	Never	1	3%

Table 9. Students' Difficulty in Understanding the Grammatical Structure of the Text

No.	Option	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Always	7	19%
2.	Often	21	56%
3.	Seldom	8	22%
4.	Never	1	3%

Table 10. Students' Understanding about the Context of the Text

No.	Option	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Always	1	3%
2.	Often	10	27%
3.	Seldom	19	51%
4.	Never	7	19%

Table 11. Students' Difficulty in Determining Inferences from the Text

No.	Option	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Always	6	16%
2.	Often	14	37%
3.	Seldom	14	37%
4.	Never	4	10%

4) DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the reading test and questionnaire above, most of the 8thA grade students had difficulty with reading comprehension. The reading test resulted in only 3 out of 37 students being able to answer the questions with a test score of 85 (see table 4.1). Meanwhile, most of the students got a score below the minimum criterion of completeness (KKM). Therefore, the students' average score was only 40. It indicated that most of the students had difficulties with reading comprehension.

Additionally, the locating reference and making inference questions those were categorized most difficult types for the students with the Percentage 63%. Likewise, the vocabulary and detail information questions were categorized difficult with each Percentage 60% and 59%. Next, the main idea question classified as fair with a percentage was 54%.

Numerous studies have looked into students' difficulties with reading comprehension. Thai EFL learners' difficulties reading English were examined by Chawwang (2008 as cited in Al-Jarrah et al. 2018). According to the study, the majority of students had trouble reading in English text.

The findings also had related with the previous study. First, as related to the Pandiangan (2021) research, her study found that the cause of reading comprehension difficulties faced by the students because of lack of vocabulary knowledge, and the second was the study from Hidayati (2018) that the students had difficult in detail information, making inference and main idea questions.

The result of the questionnaire showed that there were some factors that influenced the students' comprehension of English texts. First, inadequate word recognition skills, such as understanding vocabulary (78%) and the difficulty understanding the intent of the text (76%), second, a lack of or bad use strategy (73%), third, a lack of background knowledge, such as students' difficulty in determining the main idea (65%), grammatical structure (75%), inferences of the text (53%) and students' understanding the context of the text (70%), and the last was from the house environment, that lack of motivation from family to read English text (65%). In addition, the students did not have difficulty with the psychological element and school environment factors. Those explanation showed that the most factor caused the students difficult in reading comprehension was inadequate word recognition or understanding vocabulary with Percentage 78%.

The factors that caused the students' difficulty in reading comprehension, as stated above, were related to Forgan and Mangrum's (1981) analysis of the factors that caused reading comprehension difficulties. Those were inadequate word recognition, a lack of background knowledge, a lack of good use of strategy, and physiological elements. As found in this study the students in the 8thA grade students at MTs Madani Alauddin Paopao did not have difficulties in the psychological element such as concentrating on the text. In addition, Pater (2001) stated that there were two elements that came from the external factors that caused the students' difficulties in reading comprehension, such as their home environment and school environment. However, in the context of this study, the researcher did not find school environment factors, because in the school the learning media was completely available.

Therefore, to overcome the difficulty of reading comprehension, students need reading habits. According to Palani (2012 as cited in Satriani 2018), reading habits are an essential and important aspect for creating a literate society in this world. Furthermore, mastery of the reading strategy and test-taking strategies is required to overcome reading comprehension difficulties.

5) CONCLUSION

The majority of the students had difficulty in understanding what they were reading. Finding references and making inferences were the most difficult questions for the 8thA grade students, accounting for 63% difficulties each of them. In addition, the students' difficulties with reading comprehension were brought on by received inadequate word recognition such as understanding vocabulary 78% and the difficulty understanding the intent of the text 76%, second, a lack of background information such as students' difficulty in determining the main idea (65%), grammatical structure (75%), inferences of the text (53%) and students' understanding the context of the text (70%), next, a lack or bad use strategy (73%), and the home environment that lack of motivation from family to read English text (65%). In addition, the students did not have difficulty with the psychological element and school environment factors. As a result, the most common cause of the students' issues was inadequate word recognition or comprehension of vocabulary.

The researcher attempted to develop the following suggestions for the 8thA grade students as well as the teachers: First, in order to succeed on reading comprehension tests, students need to understand more about reading comprehension, including reading strategies, and test-taking tactics. In order to improve their grade on reading comprehension assessments, students should practice reading and taking reading comprehension quizzes frequently. Specifically, students need to learn more about finding reference and making inference. Next, to make reading comprehension questions easier for students to comprehend, the teacher should use a variety of instructional strategies to improve reading comprehension. Otherwise, teachers should teach their students about the many sorts of reading comprehension questions, in order to help students, become better readers. The strategy should be emphasized in finding reference and making inference, because based on the result, the 8th grade students found most difficult in finding reference and making inference.

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