

AN ANALYSIS OF THE READING COMPREHENSION DIFFICULTIES FACED BY YOUNG LEARNERS

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Abstract

The purposes of this research were 1) To know the student's difficulties in reading comprehension, 2) To know how the difficulties in reading occur, and 3) To know why the difficulties in reading comprehension occur. The research used a qualitative descriptive method to describe the detail of students' difficulties in reading comprehension. To find out the result of the analysis that had been conducted and to describe the student's difficulties, the instrument the researcher used in this research are observation, interview, and documentation. The data sources were obtained from the second grader students of Nurul Jannah Islamic School. The result showed that the students have difficulties finding the meaning of the words because 1) The students are lack of vocabularies, 2) The students unable to comprehending the reading text, 3) The students unable to understand the technique in reading comprehension, and 4) Lack of facilities in supporting the teaching and learning process, especially for reading material. It can be concluded that the student's difficulties in reading comprehension can occur when they lack English vocabulary, do not know the effective techniques in reading text, and lack facilities for the teaching and learning process.

Key Words: Reading comprehension, difficulties, young learners

INTRODUCTION

Reading is one of the most fundamental skills in language learning, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. It serves as a primary source of linguistic input and plays a crucial role in academic success. Through reading, learners are exposed to vocabulary, grammatical structures, discourse patterns, and cultural knowledge that support the development of other language skills such as writing, speaking, and listening. Therefore, reading is not merely a receptive skill but a dynamic and interactive process that contributes significantly to overall language proficiency.

In academic settings, reading is essential because students are required to comprehend textbooks, journal articles, reports, and other written materials. Effective reading enables learners to identify main ideas, understand supporting details, make inferences, and evaluate arguments. As a result, reading often becomes a passive activity focused on decoding words rather than constructing meaning. This condition may hinder students' academic achievement and reduce their confidence in engaging with more complex texts (Perfetti, & Oakhill: 2005). Therefore, it is crucial for educators to provide appropriate guidance and strategy-based instruction to help learners develop active reading practices.

Reading comprehension is an activity that makes the reader try to understand what is being read and understand the main idea, important details, and all the meanings in the reading. Reading comprehension is a multifaceted cognitive process comprised of two primary abilities, the ability to understand the meaning of words and the ability to think about verbal concepts (Grabe: 2009). This means that in reading comprehension activities, the reader's mind is concentrated in two directions simultaneously. In addition, readers must actively connect the information presented in the text with their prior knowledge in order to construct meaningful interpretation. Therefore, reading comprehension is not merely a mechanical decoding process, but a complex interaction between linguistic knowledge, cognitive processing, and critical thinking skills.

Based on observation conducted by researchers, there are several factors that cause young learners to have difficulty in learning reading comprehension such as 1) Limited vocabulary mastery makes it difficult for them to understand sentences and grasp the overall meaning of a text. 2) A lack of background knowledge prevents them from connecting new information with prior experiences, which may lead to misunderstanding. 3) Low reading motivation reduces their engagement and effort in comprehending texts. 4) Cognitive development factors, such as short attention spans and limited concentration, affect their ability to process information effectively. Finally, ineffective reading strategies hinder active comprehension, causing students to read passively without fully understanding the main ideas (Observation results in December 2025).

Considering these challenges, it is essential for educators to identify the specific factors that hinder young learners' reading comprehension and to design appropriate instructional strategies to address them. Understanding the nature of these difficulties will help teachers create more engaging, supportive, and strategy-based reading activities that promote active meaning construction. Therefore, this research seeks to analyze the reading comprehension difficulties faced by young learners and to explore the underlying factors contributing to these challenges in the classroom context.

METHOD

The type of this research is a qualitative approach using a descriptive research design. Descriptive research are designed to obtain information concerning the current status of phenomena and to describe 'what exists' with respect to variables or conditions in a situation (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, & Walker: 2014). Instead, the researcher aimed to obtain a detailed picture of the students' difficulties in reading comprehension as they naturally occurred in the classroom. The focus of the research was to explore and interpret the data related to students' reading problems based on the information gathered. Therefore, the researcher sought to systematically describe and analyze the challenges experienced by the students without manipulating any variables. This design was appropriate to provide a clear and in-depth description of the students' difficulties in their natural classroom setting.

The data of the research were from the results of observation, and interviews. The data sources were obtained from the second-grade student of Nurul Jannah. The researcher conducted a thorough

interview to elicit the most detailed information needed regarding the students' difficulties understanding the text are reading. The research uses a cell phone to record the information from the interview. Additionally, the researcher employed non-participant observation in this research. The researcher maintains an eye on how the students are learning in class during the observation since it can help the research by showing when the students are understanding what students reading.

The qualitative data in this research were analyzed using the interactive analysis model. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2018) explain that this model involves three main stages such as 1) Data reduction, 2) Data display, and 3) Conclusion drawing or verification. Data reduction refers to the process of selecting, focusing, and simplifying the collected information. Data display involves organizing the data in a systematic way so that patterns and relationships can be clearly identified. Since qualitative data are generally presented in narrative form, arranging the information into an organized structure facilitates interpretation and supports the process of drawing and verifying conclusions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Research Findings

The student's difficulties found in comprehending reading texts in the second grade of Elementary school at Nurul Jannah were as follows:

1) Students lack English vocabulary

Students' lack of English vocabulary can be influenced by several factors. First, limited exposure to English reduces their opportunities to encounter and practice new words, especially when English is used only in the classroom. Second, a low reading habit prevents students from acquiring vocabulary naturally through texts. Third, insufficient practice and repetition make it difficult for learners to retain newly learned words in their long-term memory. Fourth, low learning motivation discourages students from exploring and memorizing unfamiliar vocabulary independently. Finally, the absence of effective vocabulary learning strategies, such as using context clues or vocabulary notebooks, hinders students from developing and expanding their lexical knowledge systematically.

2) Unable to Comprehending the Reading Text

Students may fail to understand the content of a reading text due to several interconnected factors. One of the primary causes is limited vocabulary knowledge, which prevents them from grasping the meaning of sentences and overall ideas in the text. In addition, a lack of background knowledge makes it difficult for students to relate new information to their prior experiences, resulting in incomplete comprehension. Weak reading strategies also contribute to the problem, as students who do not apply techniques such as predicting, identifying main ideas, or summarizing tend to read passively. Furthermore, complex sentence structures and unfamiliar grammatical patterns can confuse learners, especially those with limited language proficiency.

Low motivation and poor concentration may also reduce students' engagement with the text, ultimately affecting their ability to comprehend its content effectively.

3) Unable to Understand the Technique in Reading Comprehension

Students' inability to understand reading comprehension techniques can be caused by several factors. First, they may not receive explicit instruction on how to apply reading strategies such as skimming, scanning, predicting, summarizing, or identifying main ideas. Without clear guidance and modeling from the teacher, students often do not know when and how to use these techniques effectively. Second, limited vocabulary and grammatical knowledge can prevent students from applying strategies properly, as they struggle to process the text itself. Third, insufficient practice and reinforcement make it difficult for students to internalize reading techniques and use them independently. Fourth, low motivation and lack of confidence may discourage students from actively engaging with strategic reading processes. Finally, teaching methods that focus more on answering questions than on strategy training can result in students completing tasks mechanically without truly understanding the purpose of the reading techniques.

4) Lack of Facilities

Based on the researcher's observation, Elementary School of Nurul Jannah has limited educational facilities that may affect the teaching and learning process. Adequate facilities play a significant role in creating a comfortable and supportive learning environment, enabling students to participate actively and achieve learning objectives effectively. However, several important facilities in the school were found to be insufficient, particularly the library and the language laboratory.

The school library lacks adequate reading materials and is rarely accessible because it is seldom opened. English reading books and dictionaries are especially limited, even though these resources are essential to support students' reading comprehension and vocabulary development. Access to dictionaries, in particular, would greatly assist students in understanding unfamiliar words while reading. Furthermore, the school does not have a language laboratory, which could otherwise provide a more engaging and conducive environment for learning English. In other words the lack of proper facilities may hinder students' opportunities to improve their English skills effectively.

B. Discussions

Based on classroom observations in the second grade at Nurul Jannah Islamic School, it was found that many students showed little interest in learning English. One of the main reasons was their limited background knowledge and language ability, which made the subject feel challenging. The differences between English and Indonesian in terms of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation contributed to this perception. Because of these linguistic differences, students often felt confused and insecure when learning English. Many of them were afraid of

making mistakes, especially in reading activities, which reduced their confidence and willingness to participate actively in the learning process.

During the lesson, the teacher consistently delivered explanations of the material, including reading texts. However, not all students paid attention to the instruction. Some students were engaged in conversations with their classmates, while others appeared distracted or even fell asleep. Their lack of interest in the subject seemed to affect their concentration, making it difficult for them to focus on the teacher's explanation. Even among those who appeared to listen, many were unable to respond when the teacher asked questions related to the material. In several instances, no students volunteered or were able to answer the teacher's questions, indicating that they had not fully understood the lesson being presented.

Students who are comprehending reading text should be a mystery the vocabulary because it is related to the unfamiliar vocabulary. Zuhra (2015) stated students' difficulties were influenced by their weaknesses in mastering vocabulary. In learning activities especially in learning reading English, a large knowledge of vocabulary is very important for the students in comprehending reading texts. Besides that, background abilities and the students' interest to read is important.

Yuhana (2013) stated that background knowledge of vocabulary is important in comprehending reading text. Comprehending reading texts need a large vocabulary. The students always found an unfamiliar word in each of the texts. If the students felt confused in reading, it made them got difficulties. According to Perera students' difficulties are presented by unfamiliar vocabulary. Students who have a lot of vocabulary that will easily learn the English language as learning vocabulary is one important component. Mastery of vocabulary is generally regarded as an important portion of the process of learning a language or developing a capability in a language that is already mastered.

Students' reading difficulties are largely influenced by unfamiliar vocabulary. This issue was also identified among second-grade students of Elementary School of Nurul Jannah. Many of them struggled to recognize words in the text and found it challenging to retell or summarize the content they had read. In fact, most students were unable to fully understand the meaning of the reading passages. Another major obstacle in learning English, particularly in reading comprehension, was their difficulty in translating and interpreting unfamiliar words. Because of their limited vocabulary knowledge, students often depended on dictionaries to support their understanding. However, several students did not have dictionaries, which further hindered their ability to comprehend the text. As a result, many of them were unable to answer the comprehension questions provided.

Based on the interviews conducted, the researcher discovered that one of the main factors contributing to students' reading difficulties was their limited vocabulary mastery. Because they did not understand the meanings of many words, they were unable to grasp the overall content

of the text. This lack of understanding often led to confusion and reduced their confidence in completing reading tasks. In addition, the findings indicated that low motivation also affected students' ability to comprehend English texts. Many students expressed that they disliked reading English passages because they struggled with unfamiliar vocabulary. This situation highlights the crucial role of teachers in encouraging and supporting students who experience difficulties in learning English. One effective way to address this issue is by helping students systematically build their vocabulary knowledge. Vocabulary mastery is a fundamental component of learning English, which functions as a second language for most students in Indonesia. Therefore, strengthening students' vocabulary should become a primary focus in improving their reading comprehension skills.

Grabe (2011) argues skimming technique is helpful for students. Since most of the students agreed that the skimming technique increased their interest in reading comprehension. It facilitated them to find the main idea in the text, and saved their time in reading and understanding the text. This technique makes the students not bored reading the texts, because they may have a lot to read but not much time. Therefore, it is necessary to guide the students in applying the proper technique to obtain the information from the text appropriately and quickly.

Lack of students' motivation in learning reading, both for themselves and teachers. If the lack of motivation in learning English, especially reading the learning process will be not successful because there is the attraction of students studying these subjects, otherwise, if students are interested in the subject of English, especially in reading courses students will learn the subject well. The teacher's role here is very important to motivate students who lack interest in learning English, especially reading.

According to Parera (2002), one of the factors contributing to students' difficulties in reading comprehension is the lack of adequate facilities. Educational facilities play a crucial role in supporting effective teaching and learning activities. Resources such as a language laboratory, LCD projector (in-focus), tape recorder, dictionaries, and other instructional media can significantly enhance the learning process. When schools are equipped with sufficient and appropriate facilities, the quality of classroom instruction is likely to improve.

In the context of reading instruction, the availability of dictionaries is particularly essential. Students often encounter unfamiliar vocabulary in reading texts, and a dictionary helps them understand the meanings of new words independently. By bringing and using dictionaries regularly, students can immediately look up unknown words, which supports better comprehension. Therefore, dictionaries should be readily available, both for students to bring to class and as part of the school library resources. Without adequate facilities, students' opportunities to improve their reading skills may be significantly limited.

Learning facilities are among the important factors that influence students' academic achievement, both at school and at home. Adequate facilities can motivate students to study more diligently and support them in developing optimal reading comprehension skills. However, the facilities available at Nurul Jannah Islamic School are still limited and do not sufficiently support effective learning activities.

Due to the lack of instructional resources, teachers often rely solely on textbooks in delivering the material. This situation may reduce teaching effectiveness and cause students to feel bored, as the learning media are not varied or engaging. In reading lessons, the availability of dictionaries is especially crucial because students frequently encounter difficult or unfamiliar vocabulary in the texts. Nevertheless, many students do not bring dictionaries to class, which prevents them from independently finding the meanings of new words. As a result, their understanding of the reading material becomes limited, and the learning process is less effective.

In conclusion, those are the main difficulties experienced by the students, with limited vocabulary mastery identified as the most significant problem. Even though vocabulary is not always explicitly emphasized in the curriculum like other language components, it plays a crucial role in supporting students' ability to comprehend reading texts. Vocabulary knowledge greatly influences how well students understand the content of what they read.

Therefore, teachers need to place greater emphasis on developing students' vocabulary and encouraging them to build a positive attitude toward reading English texts. In addition, teachers should introduce and apply appropriate reading comprehension techniques to help students understand texts more easily and make the reading process more enjoyable and meaningful.

CONCLUSION

This research found that students of second grade at Elementary School of Nurul Jannah encounter several obstacles in learning reading comprehension. The main challenges include limited English vocabulary, difficulty in understanding the content of reading texts, inability to apply effective reading techniques, and insufficient learning facilities. These factors collectively hinder students' ability to comprehend texts, reduce their engagement and motivation, and limit their opportunities to develop essential reading skills. Addressing these challenges through vocabulary development, strategy-based instruction, and improvement of educational facilities is crucial to enhance students' reading comprehension outcomes.

Based on the results of the interviews, it was showed that many students feel frustrated and lack confidence when encountering unfamiliar words in reading texts. Several students admitted that they often do not know how to find the meaning of difficult vocabulary and feel reluctant to ask for help. Additionally, some students expressed that they find reading English texts boring because they cannot fully understand the content, which further lowers their motivation to engage in reading activities.

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