

## INVESTIGATING STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN COMPREHENDING ENGLISH READING TEXT

**\*Rezki Aprilia<sup>1)</sup>, Mochtar Marhum<sup>2)</sup>, Agussatriana<sup>3)</sup> Darmawan<sup>4)</sup>**

<sup>1,2,3,4)</sup>English Education Study Program, Teacher Training and Education Faculty  
Tadulako University, Palu

\*rezkiaprilial1@gmail.com

### **ABSTRACT**

This research aims to discover the most difficult aspect of reading comprehension, especially in descriptive text, encountered by the tenth-grade students of SMA Negeri 2 Sigi and the contributing factors to this difficulty. This research employs a mixed method, where the test and interview are used to collect the data. The subject of this research is students of class X IPA 1 at SMA Negeri 2 Sigi in the academic year 2022/2023. The test was given to 25 students and consisted of 15 questions divided into five types: main idea, locating references, understanding vocabulary, making inferences, and detailed information. Then, the researcher interviewed three students by giving them ten questions. The results of the test show that the most difficult aspect encountered by the tenth-grade students of SMA Negeri 2 Sigi is understanding vocabulary, while the results of the interview show that there are two factors that cause students' difficulties in comprehending the text, namely internal and external factors. Internal factors are a lack of reading strategies, limited stock of vocabulary, and lack of student interest, while the external factor is the students' environment.

***Keywords: Students' Difficulties; Descriptive Text; Reading Comprehension***

## INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is the quest for meaning to understand each new thing we read by actively using our knowledge of the world and text (Sutriyono, 2018). While according to Hidayati (2018) reading comprehension is the way to get all information and the meaning of the content about the topic in the text. Based on the previous explanations, the researcher can conclude that reading comprehension is the ability to process the text, comprehend its meaning, and connect it to what the reader already knows. Reading comprehension is very important for students because they must be able to comprehend all of the text they have read in the learning process to achieve their learning objectives. They must fully grasp implied and stated text information by interpreting or analyzing the phrases to comprehend the questions (Nurjanah, 2018). It also encourages them to consider the text's main idea in depth. In other words, reading comprehension is crucial for students because it helps them find key information, understand the text, and achieve their learning objectives.

According to Nuttal in Larasati (2019), students must master five aspects of reading comprehension. They must be able to identify the text's main idea, find specific information or detailed information provided in the text, make inferences, identify references, and comprehend the meaning of words. Moreover, in the 2013 curriculum, students are expected to master reading by achieving standard and basic competence.

According to the curriculum in Senior High School (K13), students from first grade to senior high school are expected to comprehend social functions, text structure, and language features in reading texts (descriptive, narrative, recount text, and so on) in oral and written form. High school students have learned about different types of English texts and are expected to have mastered the comprehension skills for reading English texts.

However, difficulty in reading comprehension is a common issue for students. According to preliminary observation by interviewing some students and the English teacher at SMA Negeri 2 Sigi, the researcher found that many students still struggled to understand what they read. Students stated that the English text was difficult for them to understand because they did not know the meaning of the text. Likewise, when answering questions, they had difficulties making an inference, locating reference and determining the text's main idea. So, they required a lot of time to understand the text, and many failed to comprehend it correctly.

In this case, the researcher was interested in determining the students' difficulties in reading comprehension, particularly in reading descriptive text. The researcher used descriptive text because this text is the material studied by the tenth-grade students of SMA Negeri 2 Sigi. So, this text was suitable for the research's focus.

Then, the researcher wanted to conduct the research at SMA Negeri 2 Sigi because, based on the researcher's observation, students have low reading comprehension abilities.

Therefore, the researcher was triggered to know deeply about students' difficulties in reading comprehension. These difficulties in understanding reading text should be known and solved by the students and the teacher because the difficulties would negatively impact the students' achievement in learning English. Therefore, the researcher conducted research entitled **"Investigating Students Difficulties in Comprehending English Reading Text at the Tenth Grade of SMA Negeri 2 Sigi"**.

## METHOD

In this research, the researchers applied mixed-method, especially a sequential explanatory research design, using a test and an interview to collect data. Twenty-five students took the test. The test consisted of 15 questions and was divided into five types: main idea, locating references, understanding vocabulary, making inferences, and detailed information. At the same time, the interview was an in-depth interview, with open-ended questions consisting of 10 questions, and there were three students as informants, one who got a good score and two who got a poor score.

The researcher analyzed the data from the test by using descriptive statistics. First, the researcher examined the result of students' tests by counting the incorrect answers. Second, the researcher categorized the students' difficulties in comprehending the text by getting the appropriate percentage. Finally, the researcher explained the results based on the category and made a conclusion based on the results obtained to answer the first research question. While for the interview, the researcher analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (1994) technique: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### FINDINGS

#### 1. Results of the Test

The following table presents the frequency and percentage of the students' incorrect answers in the reading comprehension test. The researcher calculated the frequency of difficulties by using the formula from Sudijono (1987:20), and the results are described as follows:

Table 1- the Results of Frequency and Percentage of Difficulties

No.	Types of Difficulties	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Determining Main Idea	34	14%
2.	Locating Reference	55	22%
3.	Understanding Vocabulary	60	24%
4.	Making Inference	57	23%
5.	Detail Information	39	16%

#### 2. Results of the Interview Questions

Based on the interview results, the researcher found several factors contributing to students' difficulties in reading comprehension of descriptive text. They were a lack of reading strategies, limited vocabulary stock, lack of students' interest, and the student's environment. Causes of student difficulties can be divided into internal and external factors, and the results are described as follows:

1. Internal Factors

a. Lack of reading strategies

Based on the interview with the students, the researcher found that this factor greatly influences the student's ability to comprehend the reading text. The results show that students did not use the reading strategies to determine the answer. There are some questions related to students' knowledge of reading strategies. The researcher asks them how they determine the text's main idea, locate references, and conclude the content of the text. From 3 questions, only 1 question about determining the main idea that ST 01 can answer properly, she said, *"I see from the first and the last sentence of the paragraph to see what is discussed"*.

Meanwhile, for the other questions, neither ST 01, ST 02, nor ST 03 can answer the questions properly. ST 01 said, *"I see from the sentence that there is the word 'it', so I answer c"*. ST 02 said, *"I think from here"*, and ST 03 said, *"I do not understand it. That is why I am just rambling. I do not know how to answer it"*. So, based on the answers given by the students above, it can be seen that they just read the text and gave rambling answers.

b. Limited vocabulary stock

Based on the interview results, all students admitted that they have a limited vocabulary stock. When the researcher asked what kind of difficulty they encountered when reading descriptive text, ST 01 said, *"The meaning of vocabulary is difficult. Usually, there are words I do not know the meaning"*. ST 02 said, *"Translating them is difficult. There are words that I do not understand"* and ST 03 said, *"The meaning is hard to understand and I also do not understand how to read it"*. So, it can be seen that they have limited vocabulary stock because there are some vocabulary they do not understand, which causes them to have difficulty reading the text and understanding the contents.

c. Lack of students interest

The psychological factor is related to students' motivation and interest. Based on the results of interviews, the researcher found that the students lacked interest in learning to read, especially English text. Students' interest influenced their success in reading comprehension. Therefore, students with little interest in reading English will have difficulty comprehending the text. In the interview, there were 2 questions related to this factor; the first was about their interest in reading English books, ST 01 said, *"I quite like it because it can add insight into English vocabulary, so it is fun"* while ST 02 said, *"I do not like it because it is so hard"* and ST 03 said, *"I*

*open more biology books than English books because I do not know what they mean ....*". Then the second question is about how they feel when learning descriptive text. ST 01 said, *"I am pretty happy ..."* while ST 02 said, *"... Not very excited,"* and ST 03 said, *"As usual ...."*

Based on the results above, it can be seen that only ST 01 likes reading English books and have an interest when learning descriptive text in class. While ST 02 and ST 03 do not like reading English books and are not excited when learning descriptive text in class.

## 2. External Factor

### Students' environments

Based on the interview results, neither ST 01, ST 02 nor ST 03 get support and motivation to learn English at home and at school. There are some interview questions related to this factor. The researcher asks about how their English teacher teaches them, how their teacher and school facilitate them, what makes it difficult to concentrate while reading descriptive text in class, how they learn English at home, and whether their family supports them in their efforts to learn English. ST 01 said, *"Nothing... I am not sure ... noise usually makes it difficult to focus ... I usually only read my English notebooks. I learn it by myself. I just have a dictionary, and no one can speak English at home"*.

Based on the results above, it can be seen that due to the lack of English reading books available in the library, the unavailability of dictionaries for students while studying, and also because of the noisy classroom conditions, students have difficulty achieving success in their learning.

## DISCUSSION

After analyzing the data, the researcher found out that the tenth grade students of SMA Negeri 2 Sigi have the following difficulties: 1) Determining the main idea (14%); 2) Locating references (22%); 3) Understanding vocabulary (24%); 4) Making inference (23%); and 5) Detail information (16%).

By looking at the result above, the researcher found that the most difficult aspect for the students is understanding vocabulary (24%). Students have difficulty understanding vocabulary, and it can be seen from the test results, as follows: *the word "satisfy" could be replaced by ....* Many students make a mistake answering this question, such as: *"Threat"*. While the correct answer is *"Pleased"*. *The word "good" could be replaced by ....* There are many students who answer *"Amazing"* while the correct answer is *"Great"*. *The word "evil" could be replaced by ....* There are many students who answer *"Hideous"* while the correct answer is *"Iniquitous"*. The results of this research are the same as those conducted by Lestari, et al. (2017), which shows that the major difficulty students encounter is understanding vocabulary. She found that many students make a mistake when answering questions related to this aspect with a percentage of 27%.

The second is making inferences (23%). Students have difficulty making inference and it can be seen from the results of the test, as follows: *It can be inferred from the text that Orchard road becomes business and entertainment center because ....* Many students make a mistake answering this question, such as: *"Orchard road is a suburban street lined with orchards, plantations nutmeg, and pepper farming"*. While the correct answer is *"Orchard road is a one-way street flanked by a variety of shopping malls, hotels, and restaurants"*. *What can be inferred from the third paragraph?* Many students answer, *"The lesson which can be taken that Hanoman is a monkey god"*. While the correct answer is *"The lesson which can be taken that good always prevails against evil"*. *What does the last paragraph infer?* Many students answer *"Sanggar Karang Bomang isn't a dancer club"* while the correct answer is *"The dancers and visitors are part of the show"*. This result is in line with research conducted by Larasati (2019), which shows that many students have difficulty when answering the question about this aspect, students make 52 incorrect answers with a percentage of 43.70%. This aspect becomes the most difficult aspect of her research, while in this research, making inferences becomes the second difficulty after understanding vocabulary.

The third is locating references (22%). Students have difficulty locating references, which can be seen from the test results: *.... it turned into a shopping centre in Singapore. The word "it" in line 4 refers to?* Many students give incorrect answers to this question, and most of them answer *"Singapore"*. While the correct answer is *"Suburban Street"*. *".... the visitors receive handouts in their own languages ...." the word "their" in line 10 refers to?* Many students answer *"The dialogues"* while the correct answer is *"Visitors"*. *".... to make them as part of the show too...." The word "them" in 18 line refers to?* Many students answer *"The dancer"* while the correct answer is *"The audience"*. It is the same as the results of the research conducted by Lestari, et al. (2017). They found that many students still make a mistake in this aspect. This aspect gets the third difficulty with a percentage of 18%.

The fourth is detailed information (16%). Students have difficulty in detail information, which can be seen from the test results: *Which of the following statements is true?* Many students answer this question incorrectly, such as: *"Orchard road became business and entertainment center since 1974"* while the correct answer is *"Vehicles from Dundrean road turn to the left at intersection of the Marriott Hotel junction"*. *How many times to reach the Pura Uluwatu from the airport?* There are many answers for *"1.5- hour"* while the correct answer is *"1 hour"*. *Kecak and Fire Dance are the traditional dance from?* 2 students answer *"Lombok"* while the correct answer is *"Bal"*. This result is in line with Lestari, et al. (2017) research findings, which show that some students still have difficulty in this aspect with a percentage of 14%. Detailed information becomes the least difficult aspect of their research, while in this research, this aspect becomes the fourth most difficult aspect for students.

The least difficult aspect for the students is determining the main idea (14%). Students have difficulty in determining the main idea, which can be seen from the test results, as follows: *The text mainly focuses on .... ?* Many students give an incorrect answer to this question, and most of them answer “*Singapore*”. While the correct answer is “*Orchard road as business and entertainment center*”. *What is the main idea of the third paragraph?* Many students answer, “*Kecak and Fire dance are colossal acapella group*” while the correct answer is “*The performance of Kecak and Fire dance*”. *What is the main idea of the second paragraph?* Many students answer, “*The story comes to its climax*” while the correct answer is “*The ending of Kecak and Fire dance*”. This result is in line with the research that has been conducted by Lestari, et al. (2017), the results show that determining the main idea still becomes a problem for students. This aspect has percentage of 23%, which becomes the second most difficult aspect of their research. While this research shows that this aspect becomes the least difficult encountered by students.

Furthermore, the researcher conducted an in-depth interview with open-ended questions to identify the factors that cause students' difficulty in reading comprehension. Based on the interview results, the researcher found that the factor that causes students difficulties in reading comprehension can be divided into 2 categories, there are internal and external factors. Internal factors include a lack of reading strategies, limited vocabulary, and lack of student interest, while external factors include students' environment.

The first factor is the students' lack of reading strategies. Based on the results of the interview, shows that students do not use strategy in comprehending the text. Students have a lack of knowledge about the reading strategies, so they have difficulty comprehending the text, and finally, they fail the test. It is the same as the results of the research conducted by Lestari, et al. (2017). Students faced difficulties in reading comprehension because they do not use any strategy when reading texts even though the teacher had taught them about that before. Besides that, this result is also in line with the research from Hidayati (2018), who found that the students have difficulty understanding the strategies for reading text. A lack of knowledge about the strategies of reading comprehension causes students to fail to understand the text.

Second, limited vocabulary stock is the biggest issue for students. Based on the results of the interview shows that limited vocabulary is the dominant factor that students have. They state that they have difficulty comprehending the descriptive text because they do not know the meaning and how to pronounce the words. There are many unfamiliar words they meet while reading the text. Therefore, it is difficult to comprehend the text. This result is in line with the research conducted by Wahyuni (2019), in which she states that in reading comprehension, vocabulary is crucial because to understand a reading text course, students need to have a wide vocabulary to understand the main idea, specific information or answer the question well. If the students do not have many vocabularies, how could they comprehend a reading text.

The third factor is the lack of student interest. Based on the interview results, students lack interest in reading English text because they do not know the meaning of the word and do not know how to pronounce them, so they think English text is hard to be understood. Therefore, they do not really like English subjects. This result is in line with Prihatini's findings (2020). Students are not interested in the lesson itself, they had trouble understanding English. So, she found that it would be very challenging for students to comprehend the reading, and one of the differences between the language they use every day with the language they have just learned is what makes them lose interest. In addition, the results of the research conducted by Kholiq and Lutfiyati (2020) are also in line with this research that psychological factors greatly influence students. Students who have low interest in language subjects, affect their ability to read and thus become low.

The last factor is the students' environment. There are 2 students' environments: home environment and the school environment. Based on the results of the interview, show that students do not get support and motivation to learn English either at home or at school. Students are less well-facilitated in the learning process at school because English reading books and dictionaries are unavailable. In addition, the students admit that noisy classroom conditions disturb them while studying. Apart from the school environment, the house environment also greatly influences students. Without support from family, students are less motivated to learn English.

It is in line with research conducted by Larasati (2019), who found that the environments at home and school influenced the problems that students encountered. Most students are not motivated to read English texts, and they have little interest in learning to read. Most of them are not properly motivated to learn English by their parents. Likewise, students are unable to learn reading well at school because there is not enough reading material available. Additionally, Hidayati (2018) found that all of the students had difficulty concentrating on the text. It is in line with the result of this research that students have difficulty concentrating while reading the text due to the noisy classroom environment.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussions of this research, it shows that the tenth grade students of SMA Negeri 2 Sigi have difficulties in reading comprehension, especially in descriptive text. From the five types of reading comprehension aspects, the researcher found that the most difficult aspect encountered by the students is understanding vocabulary (24%). While the factors that cause students' difficulties are divided into internal and external factors. Internal factors include lack of reading strategies, limited vocabulary stock, and lack of student interest, while external factor is students' environment.



## REFERENCES

- Akmal, N. I. M. (2019). Improving Students' Reading Comprehension in Descriptive Text through Reciprocal Teaching Technique at Tenth Grade of SMA Cerdas Tembung. *Unpublished Thesis*, Bachelor Program. State Islamic University. Medan.
- Brown, H. D. (2001). *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy Strategies of Reading*. San Francisco: Pearson Education.
- Diana, M. Syahrial. & Yunita, W. (2020). Students' Problems in Answering Reading Comprehension Question of Descriptive Text in the "Mandiri" Textbook Published by Erlangga at SMPN 1 Kepahiang. *Jadila : Journal of Development and Innovation in Language and Literature Education*, 1 (2): 161-174.
- Grabe W. and Stoller, F. L. (2002). *Teaching and Researching Reading*. Harlow: Pearson Education.
- Grellet, F. (1981). *Developing Reading Skills: A Practical Guide to Reading Comprehension Exercises*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Grellet, F. (1999). *Developing Reading Skill: A Practice Guide to Reading Comprehension Exercise*. Cambridge: Cambridge Press.
- Gultom, J. M., Purba, N. F., Padang, L. & Tarigan, M. S. B. (2021). An Analysis of Students Reading Comprehension on Narrative Text at SMP Pencawan Medan, *International Journal of Multi Science*, 2 (1): 45-52.
- Hidayati, D. (2018). Students' Difficulties in Reading Comprehension at the First Grade of SMAN 1 Darussalam Aceh Besar. *Unpublished Thesis*, Bachelor Program. Ar-Raniry State Islamic University. Darussalam Banda Aceh.
- Islam, C. & Steenburgh, C. (2009). *A good Read Book : Developing Strategies for Effective Reading 1*. Singapore: Cengage Learning.
- Kementrian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan. (2012). *Kurikulum 2013*. Jakarta: Depdikbud.
- Kholiq, A. & Luthfiyati, D. (2020). Tingkat Membaca Pemahaman Siswa SMA Kabupaten Lamongan. *Jurnal Kredo: Jurnal Ilmiah Bahasa dan Sastra*, 4 (1):17-32.
- Kopitski, M. (2007). *Exploring the Teaching of Inference Skills (A Capstone Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in English as a Second Language)*. Minnesota: Hamline University.

- Larasati, D. (2019). An Analysis of Difficulties in Comprehending English Reading Text at the Eleventh Grade Students of MA LAB UIN-SU Medan. *Unpublished Thesis*, Bachelor Program, State Islamic University. North Sumatera Medan.
- Lestari, R. P., Fitriani, S. S., & Erdiana, N. (2017). Reading Comprehension Difficulties Encountered by Senior High School EFL Students. *Read: Research in English and Education*, 2 (2): 110-118.
- Longan, J. (2002). *Reading and Study Skill: Seventh Edition*. Atlanta Cape Community College. New York: McGraw-Hill Companies.
- Long, M. H. & Richards, J.C. (1987). *Methodology in TESOL*. USA: Heinle & Heinle.
- Mardiani, S., Jismulatif., & Erni. (2021). Indonesian High School Students' Difficulties in Understanding English Text. *Jurnal Pajar (Pendidikan dan Pengajaran)*, 5 (4): 985-993.
- Melandita, Y. (2019) Students' Difficulties in Comprehending The English Reading Text at The Second Semester of The eighth grade of SMP Darul Falah Bandar Lampung. *Unpublished Thesis*, Bachelor Program, Raden Intan State Islamic University. Lampung.
- Miles, M. & Huberman, M. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis*. California: Sage Publications.
- Nurjanah, R. L. (2018). The Analysis on Students' Difficulties in Doing Reading Comprehension Final Test. *Metathesis: Journal of English Language Literature and Teaching*, 2 (2): 253 – 264.
- Prihatini, S. O. (2020). An Analysis of Students' Difficulties in Reading Comprehension at SMA Negeri 1 Sukodadi Lamongan. *E-Link Journal*, 5 (1): 21-29.
- Satriani, E. (2018). Reading Comprehension Difficulties Encountered by English Students of Universitas Islam Riau. *J-SHMIC: Journal of English for Academic*, 5 (2): 15-26.
- Schwegler, R. A. (2010). *Patterns of Exposition 9<sup>th</sup> Ed*. Boston: Pearson Education.
- Sharpe, J. P. (2005). *How to Prepare the TOEFL Test 11th Edition*: New York: Barron's Educational Series.
- Siahaan, S. (2008). *The English Paragraph*. Yogyakarta: Graha Ilmu.

- Sudijono, A. (1987). *Pengantar Statistik Pendidikan*. Jakarta: Rajawali.
- Sugiyono. (2018). *Metode Penelitian Kombinasi (Mixed Methods)*. Bandung: Alfabeta.
- Sutopo, H. B. (2006). *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif (Dasar Teori dan Terapannya dalam Penelitian)*. Surakarta : Sebelas Maret Press.
- Sutriyono. (2018). An Analysis Students' Reading Comprehension through Repeated Reading Technique in Narrative Text at the Eleventh Grade of SMA Negeri 1 Sekampung East Lampung. *Unpublished Thesis*, Bachelor Program, State Islamic Institute for Islamic Studies of Metro.
- Wahyuni, S. (2019). The Students' Difficulties in Reading Comprehension at Second Grade at Islamic Senior High School Laboratorium Jambi. *Unpublished Thesis*, Bachelor Program. Islamic University of Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin. Jambi.