

AN ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION DIFFICULTIES OF EIGHTH GRADE STUDENTS

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate students' reading comprehension difficulties of eighth grade students at SMP N 4 Tegallalang. This study used descriptive quantitative method. To run this research, 129 eighth grade students of SMP N 4 Tegallalang in the academic year 2020/2021 were chosen as the sample. The data of students' reading comprehension difficulties collected through reading comprehension test. The result of students' reading comprehension test indicated eight grade students of SMP N 4 Tegallalang have difficulty in all five aspects of reading comprehension. Those were determining main idea, locating reference, understanding vocabulary meaning, making inference, and finding specific information. Determining main idea was the most difficult aspect faced by students which got 72% of the percentage of difficulty. It was followed by locating reference which got 70%. For students' difficulty in understanding vocabulary and finding specific information the percentage of difficulty were 68% and 67% which only one percent difference. Meanwhile, students' difficulty in making inference got the lowest of the percentage difficulty which was 63%.

Keywords: Difficulties; Reading; Reading Comprehension.

1. Introduction

It is notable that English has been internationally used as a means of communication despite of the speakers' background differences. This makes English mastery becomes something that is highly expected in the society. Altbach (2007) agrees that the significant role of English has made it applied as the main international academic language in many countries. Realizing this fact, the government of Indonesia has also established English as one of the subjects taught as a foreign language starting from kindergarten to the senior high school level. There are four basic skills in English that must be mastered by the students through the learning process (Harmer, 2007). Those skills are reading, listening, writing, and also speaking.

All of the basic skills in English are equally important in supporting the students' English mastery. However, reading has always been seen as a fundamental skill that could assist the students in mastering the other skills (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). This argument is supported by McDonough & Shaw (1993), Snow, *et al.*, (1998), and Krashen & Brown (2007) who all agree that reading could give positive influence on students' other language aspects, as well as prepares them with the social and economic aspects that they are going to meet in the society. Through reading, students can build their vocabularies and create a continuing language learning (Ahmadi, 2016). This makes reading becomes a major concern in education since it involves a complex process of obtaining information through comprehending text (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

Reading comprehension is not merely a process of recognizing and understanding words and their meanings. It involves a more complex cognitive process where students could understand the meaning of written language, link it to their prior knowledge, and build up a mental representation of the information that they have read (Keenan, *et al.*, 2008; Takaloo & Ahmadi, 2017). Sloat *et al.*, (2007) argue that the failure of achieving the reading comprehension objectives during the students' primary grades will lead them to have lack of reading ability. This includes lack of vocabularies, difficulties in academic field, and difficulties

in mastering English in general. Therefore, reading comprehension needs to be given more attention, particularly in EFL classes (Robinson, *et al.*, 2019).

The indicators that denote the success of students' reading comprehension are their ability to respond and convert the information that is presented in the text. This is the reason why students are often tested through a test with a list of reading texts where they are asked to answer some questions related to the texts. Nuttal (1982) suggests that there are five reading aspects that must be mastered by the students. They must be able to determine the main idea of the text, find specific information provided in the text, make reference, identify reference, and understand the meaning of word or detailed information. Koda (2005) provides further aspects of reading by categorizing decoding, vocabulary knowledge, syntactic processing, text-structure knowledge, main idea detection, background knowledge, and comprehension strategies as the aspects of reading comprehension. In Indonesia, reading is suggested to be mastered by students as written on the Decree of Education and Cultural Ministry No. 061/U/1993.

Students are expected to master reading by achieving the competency standard and basic competency which are established based on the curriculum 2013. The 2013 curriculum comprises four core competencies (CCs), which consecutively cover religiosity, sociality, knowledge and knowledge application. As in basic competency, students are expected to understand, apply, and analyze the social function, meaning, and the language feature, text structure of the text as well as to apply and analyze those four criteria in order to understand the text as well as to pass the standard score. A study conducted by Kasper, *et al.*, (2018) suggests that students need to at least comprehend 90% of the vocabulary in the text in order to comprehend it. If the amount of vocabulary comprehension is inadequate, then the students' reading comprehension can be negatively affected (Mckee, 2014).

Unfortunately, since English is taught as a foreign language in Indonesia, students have higher possibilities of facing difficulties in comprehending reading text. Students are also not regularly exposed to the language, which makes it harder for them to master it in a short period of time and further leads them to have limited vocabularies. Moreover, when it comes to their reading motivation, the students' reading motivation in Indonesia can be considered low. This is proven by a survey conducted by Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2018 that was released in 2019. The survey shows that the students' reading ability in Indonesia is considered very low since it sits on the 72th position out of 77 surveyed countries.

Joseph (2001) and Rohmatillah (2014) reveal the main problems of reading that often faced by students whose first language is not English. These problems include difficulty in understanding and deriving meaning from text, making inferences, identifying and understanding vocabulary and sentence structure, and understanding the context of words in the text. These problems can appear worse for students in Indonesia as their first language has different sentence structure, form, sound, and vocabulary spelling, when being compared to English. Silfia *et al.*, (2016) also found that most students still have difficulties in reading especially in terms of identifying the topic, main idea, vocabulary meaning, reference and inference, communicative purpose, language feature, and generic structure of the text. Meanwhile, a study conducted by Qrgez & Rashid (2017) found that students in Yarmouk University faced the difficulties of reading comprehension in terms of ambiguous words, and unfamiliar vocabulary found in the text. This will for sure leads them to difficulties in comprehending the reading text, which can result retardation in mastering the other basic skills in English.

Considering the importance of reading skill in facilitating the students' English mastery, then students' difficulties in comprehending English reading text must be identified. By identifying the difficulties, the teachers will be able to design a suitable reading strategy that could assist the students in improving their reading comprehension (Oberholzer, 2005). Therefore, this study arose to analyze the students' reading comprehension difficulties.

Several studies have been conducted previously which also discuss about the students' reading comprehension difficulties. These studies were conducted by Sari (2017), Puspita (2017), Samad (2017), Al-jarah (2018), Hidayati (2018), Nurjanah (2018), and Ganieet *al.*, (2018). The studies investigated the' reading comprehension problems and students' difficulties in learning English. The studies suggest that students mostly have difficulties due to their lack of vocabularies. Students also find it hard to determine main idea and find specific information in the texts. This study offered a novelty since this study was conducted in a SMP Negeri 4 Tegalalang that is located in Bali Province. The setting was chosen due to the school's students' reading comprehension difficulties that were still unknown and the low result of the English national examination scores. Therefore, it offered novelty in terms of setting. Besides, this study also gave novelty in terms of in collecting the data which was through online platform which used google form.

This study took the eighth grade Junior High School students as the population of the study. Further, this study was conducted at SMP Negeri 4 Tegalalang. It was conducted on November 6th, 2020 in academic year 2020/2021. Eighth grade students have learnt about various kinds of texts since they were in the seventh grade. Since students' reading comprehension difficulties was investigated through text, it was important to make sure that they have learnt the texts that were being tested. Therefore, the eighth grade students were chosen as the population of the study and the texts were taken from the seventh grade's curriculum. Further, SMP Negeri 4 Tegalalang was chosen as their students' reading comprehension difficulties were still unknown and it was known that the students' achievement for English subject was low indicating that they have difficulties in comprehending text which was based on the pre-observation data. Moreover, the school's average score of national examination for the past four academic years from 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019 also indicated that the students seems to have problems in reading as the average national examination scores put the school on the 21st position out of 22 public junior high schools in Gianyar Regency, Bali (*Puspendik Kemendikbud*, 2019). The average national examination score indicated that there seems to be problems as the questions of English national examination test also consist of reading passages. The scores for English national examination got stuck among 38.13, 42.93, 46.24, 38.60 from 2016-2019. The scores further emphasize the urgency to address the reading comprehension difficulties that are faced by the students so that their English mastery can be improved.

This study became more urgent to be done considering the aforementioned theories about the importance of having reading comprehension in supporting the students' English mastery as well as the related studies that have been conducted previously. It was urgent since the difficulties faced by the students must be address sooner in order to assist them with an appropriate reading strategy.

2. Method

The research used in this study was descriptive quantitative research. Descriptive quantitative research is scientific investigation which explain phenomena by involving statistical process in analyzing the data. The population of this research was all of eighth grade students at SMP N 4 Tegallalang in the academic year 2020/2021. By using Slovin Formula, 129 eighth grade students were chosen as the sample of this study. Reading comprehension test was used in collecting the data which was constructed in the form of multiple choice test. It tested two competency standards and two basic competencies in the seventh grade of junior high school. Before the reading test was used in this research, the test should be validated by doing content validity test, item validity test, level of difficulty test, discrimination index of the text, and reliability test. It was done to ensure that the test fulfilled the criteria of a good test. The result of those testrevealed only 26 items were valid out of 30 items. Reading comprehension test was used to investigate reading comprehension difficulties faced by students based on five reading comprehension aspects by Nuttal (1982).

By giving reading comprehension test in form of multiple-choice test, the researcher tried to find out whether or not the students could answer the test's items. The students' correct and incorrect answers were used as the indicator of the students' difficulties. Then, the result was calculated by using the scale suggested by Arikunto (1989), as follows;

$$S = \frac{R}{N} \times 100\%$$

Note:
S = Correct percentage for each aspect
R = Correct answer for each aspect
N = Total sample

3. Finding and Discussion

Because of Covid 19 pandemic, reading comprehension test with 26 items has been distributed to 129 students as the sample of this study through online platform which used google form. The result of students' reading comprehension test could be seen in the table below.

Table 1. The frequency of students' correct answer and score of students' reading comprehension test.

No	Correct Answer	Frequency	Score
1	3	3	23.3
2	4	10	26.7
3	5	19	30
4	6	14	33.3
5	7	15	36.7
6	8	13	40
7	9	11	43.3
8	10	14	46.7
9	11	7	50
10	12	7	53.3
11	13	6	56.7
12	14	3	60
13	15	2	63.3
14	16	2	66.7
15	18	2	73.3
16	20	1	80
Mean Score			41

The minimum criteria of completeness (KKM) for English subject in SMP N 4 Tegallalang was 70. Meanwhile, the result of students' reading comprehension test in the table above revealed that most of eighth grade students could not achieve the minimum criteria of completeness since the mean score of the students got 41. The result indicated that most of eighth grade students in SMP N 4 tegallang must have difficulties in comprehending reading text.

To find reading comprehension difficulties faced by students, the question items were divided into five aspects of reading comprehension based on Nuttal (1982) and Koda (2005) include Determining Main Idea, Locating Reference, Understanding Vocabulary, Making Inference, and Finding Specific Information. Those five aspects were used to find out which types of questions items were difficult for students. So, students' reading comprehension difficulties could be found. The result of students' percentage difficulty based on five aspects of reading comprehension could be seen as followed.

Students' Reading Difficulty in Determining Main Idea Item

In reading comprehension test, there were six items used for determining main idea of the passages. Those items were item number 4, 6, 10, 14, 18, and 22. The result of the percentage of students' reading difficulty in determining main idea could be seen in the Table 2.

Table 2. The Percentage of Students' Reading Difficulty in Determining Main Idea

No	Question Items' Number	Incorrect Answer	Incorrect Percentage	Percentage of Students' Difficulty in Determining Main Idea
1	4	75	58%	72%
2	6	102	79%	
3	10	66	51%	
4	14	113	88%	
5	18	91	71%	
6	22	110	85%	

Based on Table 2, the percentage of incorrect answer for each item showed above of 50%. For items number 4, 10 and 5 the incorrect percentage were 51%-71%. Meanwhile, for items number 6, 14, and 22 the incorrect percentage were 79%-88%. The result revealed that, the percentage of students' reading difficulty in determining main idea was 72% out of 100%. It was categorized very high which indicated eighth grade students of SMP N 4 Tegallalang must have difficulty in determining main idea of the passages.

Students' Reading Difficulty in Locating Reference

There were five items used for locating reference of the texts. Those items appeared in item number 5, 12, 16, 24, and 25. The result of the percentage of students' reading difficulty in locating reference could be seen in the Table 3.

Table 3. The Percentage of Students' Reading Difficulty in Locating Reference

No	Question Items' Number	Incorrect Answer	Incorrect Percentage	Percentage of Students' Difficulty in Locating Reference
1	5	82	64%	70%
2	12	76	59%	
3	16	102	79%	
4	24	89	69%	
5	25	101	78%	

Based on Table 3, the percentage of incorrect percentage of students' reading difficulty in locating reference varied from 59% to 79%. Based on the incorrect percentage of students' answer for each item, it can be calculated that students' reading difficulty in locating reference was 70% out of five items. It was categorized very high which meant eight grade students in SMP N 4 Tegallalang must have difficulty in locating reference of the passages.

Students' Reading Difficulty in Understanding Vocabulary Meaning

In reading comprehension test, there were three items used for understanding of vocabulary meaning. The students were asked to find the most similar words which could replace the words presented in the text. Those items were item number 1, 8, and 19. The result of the percentage of students' reading difficulty in understanding vocabulary meaning could be seen in the Table 4.

Table 4. The Percentage of Students' Reading Difficulty in Understanding Vocabulary meaning

No	Question Items' Number	Incorrect Answer	Incorrect Percentage	Percentage of Students' Difficulty in Understanding Vocabulary Meaning
1	1	89	69%	68%
2	8	88	68%	
3	19	86	67%	

Based on the Table above, it showed that the incorrect percentage of students' answer in understanding vocabulary meaning for each items were 69%, 68%, and 67%. Meanwhile, for percentage of students difficulty in understanding vocabulary was 68% out of 100%. It was categorized high which indicated students must have difficulty in understanding vocabulary meaning.

Students' Reading Difficulty in Making Inference

For making inference question, there were six items used to find out students' difficulty in making inference. Those items appeared in item number 2, 9, 13, 17, 21, and 26. The result of the percentage of students' reading difficulty in making inference could be seen in the Table 5.

Table 5. The Percentage of Students' Reading Difficulty in Making Inference

No	Question Items' Number	Incorrect Answer	Incorrect Percentage	Percentage of Students' Difficulty in Making Inference
1	2	42	33%	63%
2	9	94	73%	
3	13	87	67%	
4	17	87	67%	
5	21	78	60%	
6	26	102	79%	

Based on Table 5, it showed most of the incorrect percentage for each item showed above of 50%. Only item number 2 that got the incorrect percentage under of 50% which was 33%. Meanwhile, the rest of items for making inference got the incorrect percentage above of 50% which were varied from 60% to 79%. The result of the calculation revealed that, the percentage of students' reading difficulty in making inference was 63% out of 100%. It was still categorized high which indicated students must have difficulty in making inference of the passage.

Students' Reading Difficulty in Finding Specific Information

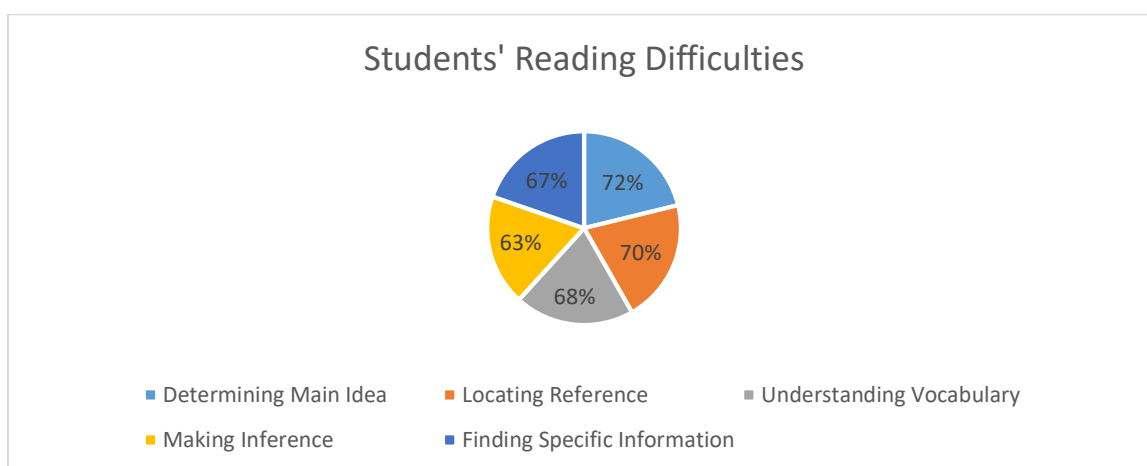
There were six items used to find out students' difficulty in finding specific information. Those items were item number 3, 7, 11, 15, 20, and 23. The result of the percentage of students' reading difficulty in finding specific information could be seen in the Table 6.

Table 6. The Percentage of Students' Reading Difficulty in Finding Specific Information

No	Question Items' Number	Incorrect Answer	Incorrect Percentage	Percentage of Students' Difficulty in Finding Specific Information
1	3	95	74%	67%
2	7	81	63%	
3	11	77	60%	
4	15	89	69%	
5	20	92	71%	
6	23	85	66%	

Based on Table 6, the percentage of incorrect percentage of students' reading difficulty in finding specific information of the text varied from 60% to 74%. It was categorized high because above of 50%. Based on the incorrect percentage of students' answer for each item, it can be calculated that students' reading difficulty in finding specific information was 67% out of five items which indicated students must have difficulty in finding specific information of the text.

Graph 1. The Percentage of Students' Reading Comprehension Difficulties in Each Aspect of Reading Comprehension



Based on the percentage of Students' reading difficulty on the pie chart above, it could be known, students' difficulty in determining main idea got the highest percentage which was 72%. Then, it was followed by students' difficulty in locating reference with the percentage of difficulty was 70%. For students' difficulty in understanding vocabulary and finding specific information the percentage of difficulty were 68% and 67% which only one percent difference. Meanwhile, students' difficulty in making inference got the lowest percentage which was 63%. So, it can be concluded that all of the five aspects of reading comprehension were categorized difficult. It was because the percentage of students' reading difficulty for each aspect above of 50%. It meant that eighth grade students of SMP N 4 Tegallalang have difficulty in all five aspects of reading comprehension.

The finding showed the first aspect was the most difficult aspect faced by students which was determining main idea. The difficulty faced by students were finding implicit main idea of the passages. It turned out students found it hard to determine the implicit main idea of the whole text. The result was related to the research that was conducted by Hidayati (2018) which revealed the same result which was finding main idea was the most difficult aspect faced by first grade students of SMA N 1 Darrusalam. A study by Mauli AD (2014) revealed that the difficulties faced by VIII A MTsN 1 Kotabumi students in determining main idea happened because of students' lack of students' interest, lack of vocabulary meaning,

poor reading strategy, length of sentence, grammatical confusion, and ignorant of paragraph component. Those problems were found by interviewing the students.

The second aspect, it followed by the difficulty in locating reference which got 70% percentage of difficulty which was categorized high which indicated eighth grade students at SMP N 4 Tegallalang have difficulty in locating reference of the passage. A study done by Hidayati (2018) revealed the same result which first grade students of SMA N 1 Darrusalam have difficulty in locating reference as the percentage of difficulty in locating reference was 71% which only one percent difference with this study. The percentage of difficulty in locating reference indicating that the students' have high difficulty. The difficulty faced by students happened because of students have poor mastery grammar, difficulty in understanding vocabulary, understanding long sentences, lack of media learning, less support from the family, and lack of reading strategy. These problems were found based on students' responses of the questionnaire. Meanwhile, a study done by Afsiah (2019) showed the difference result which was sixth grade of MIT Muhammadiyah Bandar Lampung students did not get any difficulties in locating reference as the percentage of the difficulty in locating reference was 28%. The percentage indicated that most of the students did not have difficulty in locating reference.

The third aspect was difficulty in understanding vocabulary which got 68% percentage difficulty. The percentage indicated eighth grade SMP N 4 Tegallalang students have difficulty in understanding vocabulary meaning. Most of the students failed in finding the most similar words which could replace the words presented in the texts. It showed most of the students still have lack of vocabulary knowledge. A study by Nurjanah (2018) revealed the difference result with this study which was understanding vocabulary was categorized as the most difficult aspect faced by students. Based on students' result of questionnaire, the difficulty in understanding vocabulary happened because of students have lack of vocabulary knowledge. It was hard for students to memorize new words and differentiate the meaning of each word as in English one word could have more than one meaning. This problem was related to poor habit of reading and lack interest of students in reading.

The fourth aspect was difficulty in making inference which got the lowest percentage difficulty which was 63%. It meant making inference was categorized the easiest aspect faced by students. The students found it more difficult in making elaborative inference than making coherence inference. It could be known from students' answer in reading comprehension test. A study conducted by Zuhra (2015) showed the different result which was making inference was the most difficult aspect faced by twelfth grade students of senior high school Lhoksumawe. The percentage of difficulty in making inference was 73%. It was found that all of question items in making inference were categorized difficult. The difficulty in making inference happened because of the lack of vocabulary, lack of grammar mastery, and lack of prior knowledge about the different types of reading comprehension.

The last aspect was finding specific information of the text which got 67% percentage of difficulty which was categorized high. A study conducted by Sari (2017) revealed the difference result which was finding specific information was not categorized difficult for seventh grade of MTs N Mlinjon Klaten students. Students' percentage difficulty in finding specific information was 33.78% which indicated that most of the students did not have difficulty in finding specific information. Furthermore, a study conducted by Zuhra (2015) also revealed the difference result which was twelfth grade students of senior high school Lhoksumawe did not have difficulty in locating reference as students' percentage difficulty was 34.44%. The percentage indicated twelfth grade students of senior high school Lhoksumawe have average level in finding specific information.

Based on the findings and discussion, it implied that eighth grade students of SMP N 4 Tegallalang have difficulty in all five aspects of reading comprehension. Those difficulties were the difficulty in determining main idea, locating reference, understanding vocabulary meaning, making inference, and finding specific information. The difficulties faced by

students in comprehending reading text indicated that the students have low reading comprehension. From the result of this study, it is suggested that the teacher need to design a suitable and appropriate teaching strategy that could assist the students in improving their reading comprehension. Here, the teacher also need to teach the students reading strategy that could help them in answering reading questions. As a result the students will know how to find the answer efficiently. Thus, students' reading comprehension can improve and the difficulties faced by students can be solved.

4. Conclusion and Suggestions

The result of students' reading comprehension showed eighth grade students of SMP N 4 Tegallalang have difficulty in all five aspects of reading comprehension. The result revealed the percentage of students' difficulty in determining main idea was 72% which was categorized as the most difficulty aspect faced by students. Then, followed by locating reference which got 70% percentage of difficulty. For students' difficulty in understanding vocabulary and finding specific information the percentage of difficulty were 68% and 67% which only one percent difference. Meanwhile, students' difficulty in making inference got the lowest percentage which was 63%. Those result revealed that eighth grade students of SMP N 4 Tegallalang have difficulty in all five aspects of reading comprehension.

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