



Reading Difficulty Viewed from Its Indicators in the Junior High School

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis kesulitan membaca siswa dalam memahami teks deskriptif. Penelitian ini menerapkan penelitian deskriptif kualitatif. Objek penelitian ini adalah kesulitan proses pembelajaran siswa pada pembelajaran membaca teks deskriptif dalam menemukan ide pokok atau tema, menelusuri informasi yang spesifik, menentukan rujukan tekstual, dan mengartikan arti kata dan frasa. Penyebab kesulitan siswa di dapatkan dari hasil tes pertama dalam memahami teks deskriptif yang berbeda khususnya dalam menentukan ide pokok atau tema pokok, informasi spesifik, rujukan tekstual, dan arti rujukan kata atau frasa dari teks deskriptif orang, hewan, dan teks prosedur. Subjek penelitian ini adalah siswa kelas tujuh di SMP Negeri yang terdiri dari 22 siswa pada 1 kelas dan dokumen-dokumen dari hasil tes siswa dari kesulitan memahami teks deskriptif orang, hewan, dan teks prosedur. Data dikumpulkan dalam bentuk data primer dan sekunder. Instrumen yang digunakan oleh peneliti untuk mengumpulkan data adalah peneliti sendiri sebagai instrument inti, tes non-objektif atau tes jawaban singkat yang terdiri dari 30 soal berhubungan dengan teks deskriptif orang, hewan, dan teks prosedur dan panduan wawancara grup. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan para siswa memiliki kesulitan dalam membaca tiga teks deskriptif berdasarkan indikator membaca seperti menyimpulkan ide pokok atau tema pokok, mencari informasi spesifik, rujukan tekstual, dan mengartikan arti kata dan frasa. Penyebab kesulitan membaca telah teridentifikasi oleh peneliti di sesi wawancara dengan 5 perwakilan siswa, yaitu memiliki kemampuan kosakata terbatas, kurangnya minat membaca, kurangnya Pendidikan atau ketidaktahuan, dan kompleksitas kata atau kalimat yang terlalu tinggi di dalam teks.

ABSTRACT

This research aimed to analyze students' reading difficulties in understanding the descriptive text. This research applied descriptive qualitative research. The objects in this research were students' difficulties in the learning process in reading instruction of descriptive text, especially in finding the main idea or central theme, locating specific information, determining textual reference, and getting the meaning of a word or phrase. Students' sources of difficulties derived from the preliminary test results in understanding different descriptive texts, especially the main idea or central theme, specific information, textual reference, and word or phrase referential meaning of descriptive texts of a person, an animal, and a procedure. The subjects of this research were the seven grade students, consisting of 22 students in a class, and documents of students' test results were from difficulties in understanding descriptive texts of a person, an animal, and a procedure. The data were collected in the forms of primary and secondary data. The instruments used by the researcher to collect the data were the researcher as the main instrument, a non-objective test or short answer test consisting of 30 short answer questions related to descriptive texts of a person, an animal, and a procedure, and a focused group interview guide. The obtained data were analyzed descriptively. The results of this research show that students had difficulties in reading three descriptive texts based on reading indicators such as deducing the main idea or central theme, locating specific information, textual reference, and getting a word or phrase meaning. The sources of reading difficulties were identified by the researcher in an interview session with 5 representative students, namely having a limited vocabulary, lack of reading interest, lack of background knowledge or absence of knowledge, and the complexity of words or sentences in the text.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Reading is one of the four language skills trained in Junior High School in Indonesia. Reading is an activity to get a language acquisition which is formed by the reader's prior knowledge, experience, attitude, and social community (Louis. et al., 2016; Sangria, 2018). Reading also can enhance the learners' comprehension about whether words or sentences (Singh et al., 2021; Tayyeh et al., 2021; Yilmaz et al., 2020). The students are trained in reading different texts--descriptive, narrative, and recount texts (Minaee et al., 2021; Sucipto & Cahyo, 2019). Broadly speaking, the learning goals of reading are to understand the social functions, text structures, and

language elements used in personal, interpersonal, and transactional communications (Mutakinati et al., 2018; Sadiku, 2015; Supina, 2018). The reading indicators are specified to understand the main idea or central theme, specific information, textual reference, and word or phrase referential meaning of the descriptive, narrative, and recount texts (Manurung et al., 2020; Pourhosein Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016).

Based on a preliminary observation test for seventh-grade students of *SMP Negeri 3 Sukasada*, it is found that students have a weakness in their inability in reading, especially 1) discovering the main idea or central theme, 2) locating specific information about content, 3) relating nouns with pronouns or textual references respectively, and 4) getting a word or phrase meanings contextually. Therefore the present research was aimed at discovering the students' ability to understand the major reading indicators specified in the 2013 Curriculum. They are the main idea or central theme, specific information, textual reference, and word or phrase referential meaning of descriptive texts of a person, an animal, and a procedure (Grether, 1949; Santhitwanich et al., 2014; Zhao et al., 2014). Moreover, most types of objective tests are limited to factual recall only and do not reveal the thinking process of the learner (Butler, 2010; Roediger III et al., 2011; Snyder & Snyder, 2008). Students don't get an opportunity to practice and demonstrate their reading skills; therefore, it is not suitable for language skills testing (Damanik & Zainil, 2019; Okkinga et al., 2018).

It is in line with previous research conducted on first-grade students in reading comprehension in grade XI Mas Baharuddin (Matondang, 2020). The student feels difficulty finding the main idea of the text, the students feel difficulty in understanding vocabulary, the student feels difficulty understanding the detail of the information, and the student feels difficulty making an inference. The teacher's efforts to solve the students' difficulties in reading comprehension are; explaining more detail about the structure of the text, supporting paragraphs, how to find the main idea, how to conclude, and giving the new vocabulary to the students before starting the lesson and not allowing the students to speak the Arabic language when study English (Canale, 2014; Ellis, 2010; Fahriany, 2018; Slabakova, 2021). It is also supported by another previous researcher to find out what are the problems of students in reading comprehension on online learning (Pandiangan et al., 2021). The results of the study explained that most of the ninth-grade students had problems answering the test questions that had been given. The result is that only a few students understand the comprehension after they read about it. The cause of student problems in online learning is the lack of understanding of the meaning of the test so they have problems determining the information contained in a test. Lack of vocabulary knowledge is the main factor in reading comprehension (Qrgez & Rashid, 2017; Schmitt et al., 2011; Zhang, 2012). So they have problems in learning reading comprehension.

Thus, what is new in the present research compared to the previous research lies in: 1) the students' difficulty in understanding different descriptive texts, especially the prime indicators such as the main idea or central theme, specific information, textual reference, and word or phrase referential meaning of descriptive texts of a person, an animal, and a procedure.; and 2) the students' source of difficulty in understanding different descriptive texts, especially the prime indicators such as the main idea or central theme, specific information, textual reference, and word or phrase referential meaning of descriptive texts of a person, an animal, and a procedure. The general research objective was to get the students' difficulties in understanding descriptive texts in *SMP Negeri 3 Sukasada*. The specific research objectives (*outputs*) are: 1) to analyze students' difficulties in understanding descriptive texts viewed from reading indicators in *SMP Negeri 3 Sukasada*; and 2) to analyze the students' sources of difficulties in understanding descriptive texts viewed from reading indicators in *SMP Negeri 3 Sukasada*.

2. METHOD

The present research was designed as a case study and applied descriptive qualitative research (Almeida, 2020). The research design was determined by the researcher to describe what difficulties and sources of difficulties faced by students in finding the main idea or central theme, locating specific information, determining textual references, and getting the meaning of word or phrase in reading instruction in junior high school (Abidah, 2020; Calderón et al., 2011; Parsons & Taylor, 2011). The research was conducted in *SMP Negeri 3 Sukasada*. The time of research was in the 2021/2022 year academic 2nd semester. The research subjects consisted of the students and documents of students' test results from difficulties in understanding descriptive texts of a person, an animal, and a procedure were probed. There were 2 research objects, namely the students' difficulties in the learning process in reading instruction of descriptive text and the students' sources of difficulties in reading descriptive texts. To collect the data, the researcher prepared two instruments. The first instrument was a non-objective test or diagnostic test to help the researcher identify the reading difficulty faced by the students. The second instrument was a focused group interview guide. These instruments had been validated by two experts, they were, language experts who are knowledgeable in writing and applied linguistics. The two instruments were theoretically judged for their reliability and validity. The process of collecting data was administering a test of reading descriptive texts of a person, an animal, and a procedure text. After the data were collected, they were analyzed descriptively and qualitatively. The students' responses during the reading test were tabulated and

classified systematically for further analysis and interpretation. The students' sources of difficulties were also tabulated and organized based on the reading indicators, namely main idea, specific idea, textual reference, and word or phrase meaning.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Reading Test

The objectives of this research were to get students' difficulties in understanding descriptive texts viewed from reading indicators and to analyze the students' sources of difficulties in understanding descriptive texts viewed from reading indicators in *SMP Negeri 3 Sukasada*. The student's difficulties in understanding different descriptive texts were gathered using a reading test. The test contained probing 30 questions which are divided into 3 types of descriptive texts on the person, animal, and procedure text based on their difficulties according to reading indicators in 1) deducing the central theme, 2) locating specific information, 3) relating noun with pronouns or textual reference, and 4) getting word or phrase referential meaning. The findings are explained systematically in Table 1.

Table 1. Students' Difficulty in Reading

No	Descriptive Text	Indicator	f	%
1	Person	Main Idea	6	27%
		Specific Information	13	59%
		Textual Reference	10	45%
		Word or Phrase Meaning	13	59%
2	Animal	Main Idea	9	41%
		Specific Information	11	50%
		Textual Reference	6	27%
		Word or Phrase Meaning	15	68%
3	Procedure	Main Idea	4	18%
		Specific Information	14	64%
		Textual Reference	17	77%
		Word or Phrase Meaning	19	86%

After analyzing the data from the reading test, the researcher identified the seven-grade students' difficulty in reading tests using three descriptive texts which are person, animal, and procedure text. Each text was applied to the same reading indicators according to Curriculum 2013. The indicators are discovering the main idea or central theme, identifying specific information, relating nouns with pronouns or textual references, and getting word or phrase meaning contextually. For the descriptive text on the person, there were 6 of 22 students who had difficulties in discovering the main idea or central theme with a percentage of 27%; 13 of 22 students who had difficulties in identifying specific information with a percentage of 59%; 10 of 22 students who had difficulties in relating nouns with pronouns or textual references with the percentage of 45%; and 13 of 22 students who had difficulties in getting a word or phrase meaning with the percentage of 59%. For the descriptive text on the animal, there were 9 of 22 students who had difficulties in discovering the main idea or central theme with a percentage of 41%; 11 of 22 students had difficulties in identifying specific information with a percentage of 50%; 6 of 22 students who had difficulties in relating nouns in pronouns or textual references with the percentage of 27%; and 15 of 22 students who had difficulties in getting a word or phrase meaning with the percentage of 68%. For descriptive text on the procedure, there were 4 of 22 students who had difficulties in discovering the main idea or central theme with a percentage of 18%; 14 of 22 students who had difficulties in identifying specific information with a percentage of 64%; 17 of 22 students who had difficulties in relating nouns in pronouns or textual references with the percentage of 77%; and 19 of 22 students who had difficulties in getting a word or phrase meaning with the percentage of 80 %.

Interview

To get deeper data, the researcher analyzed the students' interview responses based on the interview guide question instrument consisting of four main indicators. The responses of five representative students in the interview session are as follow: The researcher concluded that the students had several sources of problem in reading descriptive texts. The first question of the interview guide was related to the first indicator of reading difficulties, namely finding the main idea or central theme. The first student stated that she was facing problems in locating where the main idea or central theme of the text is. It was applied to the second student as well. She

admitted that it was difficult in finding the main idea or central theme in person descriptive text, animal descriptive text, or procedure text. The third student asserted that he didn't know how to locate the main idea or central theme of the text. This was the same problem as the first student's difficulty. The fourth student claimed that she had difficulty finding the main idea or central theme while reading the three descriptive texts in the reading test previously. In addition, she was not able to define what is meant by the main idea or central theme. The last student answered that in finding the main idea or central theme in the descriptive text, she didn't know to use a proper English word to determine the main idea and she had no idea how to locate it as well. The second question is about locating specific information in descriptive text. The first student admitted that she felt hard in comprehending the words in finding specific information while reading the text. The second student answered that she also had difficulty understanding the words of the descriptive texts given to locate specific information. The third student had the same problem as the second student. He claimed that it was really difficult to understand and define the words' meaning and context so he was unable to find specific information in descriptive text. The fourth student had a different difficulty compared to the previous students' difficulty. She answered that she was unable to translate the English text into Indonesian to find its meaning first because she confessed that she recently studied in the school as a seventh-grade student. The last student asserted that it was difficult to understand the content of the text to find specific information.

The third question of the researcher's interview guide for students is about determining textual references. The first student asserted that it was difficult to identify the structure of reference in the text and the process to determine textual reference like changing a noun to a pronoun based on the preliminary observation text questions. The second student admitted that she was unable to understand what is meant by textual reference and locate the reference of nouns and pronouns in the text. The third student answered that it was difficult to define what textual reference existed in the descriptive text, did not acknowledge the language, and did not recognize how to refer the noun to pronoun and vice versa. The fourth student responded that she was unable to find the words that related to textual reference and did not understand them for sure. The last student hardly answered that it was difficult to comprehend the language used in the questions of determining textual reference during the preliminary observation test and did not know how to understand them according to her level of learning. The last question of the interview guide for the five students is about getting the meaning of a word or phrase across. For the first student, she had problems like it was difficult to mention and define either words or phrases in getting their meanings. The second student asserted that it was difficult to comprehend and defined words or phrases in getting their meanings. The third student claimed that he hardly recognized the meaning of words and phrases and did not know the language's meaning of them. The fourth student answered that she had a problem defining the words or phrases' meanings because she did not understand them. The last student responded that it was really difficult to understand the language of words or phrases in descriptive texts she read before and in her opinion, the learning material of the descriptive text, especially in getting the meaning of word or phrase was very difficult according to her ability and learning level in English.

Discussion

The biggest difficulty faced by students in reading the text of descriptive text in person was identifying specific information and getting a word or phrase meaning with the same percentage of 59%. Then, the biggest difficulty faced by students in reading text of descriptive text on the animal was getting a word or phrase meaning with a percentage of 68%. And, the biggest difficulty faced by students in reading text of descriptive text on procedure text was getting a word or phrase meaning with a percentage of 86%. Overall, the main difficulty of seventh-grade students in the reading text was getting word and phrase meaning in the descriptive text of procedure with a percentage of 86%. The researcher conducted a small focused group interview which consists of five students that had been selected by the teacher to participate in the researcher's interview session. The results showed that they were facing real problems in reading descriptive texts during reading tests. Specifically, all five students had a similar problem in 1) finding the main idea or central theme, namely they did not know how to locate the main idea or central theme in the text and did not know what the main idea or central theme is; 2) locating specific information, namely to look for what exact meaning of the words in the text and then they did not know how to find or locate the specific information after all; 3) determining textual reference of descriptive texts were to comprehend the meaning of textual reference is and to decide to refer the noun to pronoun and vice versa; and 4) getting meaning of word or phrase across the descriptive texts, namely defining the meaning of words or phrases in the text and the language featured in each descriptive text was too difficult for them all.

It is in line with previous research which conducts "An Analysis of Students' Ability and Difficulties in Writing Descriptive Text" (Yoandita, 2019). This research focused on the students' ability and difficulties in writing descriptive text. The results of this study illustrate that students faced difficulties in organizing and developing ideas. They were not able to develop ideas from the texts they wrote. There are also significant difficulties for students to choose appropriate grammar, vocabulary, and the use of punctuation. It is suggested for teachers to pay attention to the teaching structure of the descriptive text in the development of ideas, arrangement

of ideas, grammar, vocabulary, and punctuation. Then there is also another previous study that supports current research, the study aims to find difficulties faced by the first grade of junior high school students in writing Descriptive text and the factors that causes the difficulties faced by the first grade of junior high school in writing Descriptive text at SMP Muhammadiyah 8 Batu (Rosalina, 2016). The researcher found two results in this study. Firstly, it was found that the highest difficulty faced by the students was about the difficulties in arranging the sentence into a paragraph of descriptive text with 100% (25 students), then the second difficulty was using tenses with 60% (15 students). Secondly, the researcher found that there were factors that cause difficulties in writing descriptive texts including a) Low Vocabulary Level, b) Confused Arranged the vocabulary in sentences, c) Did not Understand the Material Well, d) Did not Pay Attention to The Teacher Explanation, e) Low Motivation to Write / Study English.

It is in line with previous research conducted on first-grade students in reading comprehension in grade XI Mas Baharuddin (Matondang, 2020). The student feels difficulty finding the main idea of the text, the students feel difficulty understanding vocabulary, the student feels difficulty understanding the detail of the information, and the student feels difficulty making an inference. The teacher's efforts to solve the students' difficulties in reading comprehension are; explaining more detail about the structure of the text, supporting paragraphs, how to find the main idea, how to conclude, and giving the new vocabulary to the students before starting the lesson and not allowing the students to speak the Arabic language when study English (Canale, 2014; Ellis, 2010; Fahriany, 2018; Slabakova, 2021). It is also supported by another previous researcher to find out what are the problems of students in reading comprehension on online learning (Pandiangan et al., 2021). The results of the study explained that most of the ninth-grade students had problems answering the test questions that had been given. The result is that only a few students understand the comprehension after they read about it. The cause of student problems in online learning is the lack of understanding of the meaning of the test so they have problems determining the information contained in a test. Lack of vocabulary knowledge is the main factor in reading comprehension (Qrgez & Rashid, 2017; Schmitt et al., 2011; Zhang, 2012). So, they have problems learning reading comprehension. Respectively, the students' problem in finding the main idea or central theme is they did not know how to locate the main idea or central theme in the text and did not know what the main idea or central theme is. The students' problem in locating specific information is to look for what exact meaning of the words in the text and then they did not know how to find or locate the specific information after all. The students' problem in determining textual reference is to comprehend the meaning of textual reference and to decide to refer the noun to the pronoun and vice versa. Lastly, the student's problem in getting the meaning of a word or phrase across the text is defining the meaning of words or phrases in the text and the language featured in each descriptive text was too difficult for them all.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on research findings, it can be concluded that the student's difficulty and sources of difficulty in reading competency using three descriptive texts. The results were shown that the seven grade students in *SMP Negeri 3 Sukasada* have several problems and difficulties in reading English text which is descriptive text based on four indicators of reading problems, namely 1) finding the main idea or central theme; 2) locating specific information; 3) determining textual reference, and 4) getting meaning of word or phrase. Theoretically, there are various reasons behind students' difficulty in reading, especially reading descriptive text. Specifically, the reasons or problems of reading comprehension were namely having a limited vocabulary, lack of reading interest, lack of background knowledge or absence of knowledge, and the complexity of words or sentences in the text.

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