Students’ Difficulties Analysis in Reading Comprehension at The Second Grade of MTs Nurul Ikhas

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Abstract
Regarding the basic competence of the second grade of junior high schools in Curriculum 2013, the pupils are supposed to comprehend the generic structure, social function, and language features in reading material (narrative, descriptive, recount, and so on). However, the students still have some difficulties comprehending a text. This could be known by identifying some previous studies related to reading comprehension difficulties in Indonesia. They have problems finding the main idea and specific information in the text, making inferences, or identifying the meaning of the word. Thus, this paper tried to analyze the difficulties that the students faced when comprehending an English reading text, to determine the reasons why the students are having problems with those difficulties, and to examine how a teacher can help the students to overcome these difficulties. This research used a mixed method and was classified as descriptive research. The participants of this research consisted of second-grade students and an EFL teacher of MTs Nurul Ikhas Ambon. Reading comprehension tests, questionnaires, and interviews were used by the researcher to collect the data. Then, the data were analyzed by using descriptive quantitative analysis; calculating the result of students’ reading comprehension test and calculating the scale of the questionnaire. Moreover, the qualitative data was done by describing the interview result. The research revealed three findings. Firstly, the difficulty faced by the students when comprehending an English reading text was identifying vocabulary. Secondly, the students completely agreed that the reading process, student background knowledge, language knowledge, and motivation were factors that influenced them to have problems with those difficulties. And lastly, the strategies that can be used by the teacher to overcome the difficulties were memorizing strategy, reciprocal teaching, question-answer relationship, and fun learning strategy.

keywords: students’ difficulties; reading comprehension; nurul ikhas

INTRODUCTION
Reading is one of the four English basic skills which has purpose to acquire knowledge in written material. Reading is an activity of problem-solving and meaning-making which increases the power and flexibility when it is more practiced (Charlton, 2005 in Syahabuddin, Yusny, & Zahara, 2019). Satriani (2018) defined that the main objective of reading is to comprehend a reading text. Comprehend a reading text refers to the ability to fully understanding all of the aspects of the text. Reading comprehension is the ability in understanding a text and creating a meaning from a printed text (Stoller & Grabe, 2013). Thus, reading comprehension is the ability to fully processing and understanding the meaning of a written text. This skill is important in influencing the readers’ ability in understanding the text and constructing their enjoyment and effectiveness of reading.
There are several aspects of reading comprehension which proposed by Nuttal (1982). The aspects of reading comprehension are determining the main idea, identifying reference, making inference, finding specific information, and identifying vocabulary. The aspects also considered as the difficulties which contributes students in comprehending reading texts.

While related to the factors difficulties of reading comprehension encountered by the students, the factors are separated into internal and external factors. Alderson (2000) defines several factors which contribute to the problems that students face when comprehending a reading text, as follows: 1) Language knowledge, Krashen and Terrel (1998) explained language knowledge difficulties as an activity when readers cannot comprehend the text well because there are many unfamiliar words. Thus, learners have to learn about language knowledge first before they are asked to read in a second or foreign language. 2) Students’ prior knowledge, Students’ prior knowledge refers to background knowledge of the students about the world, involving cultural information. 3) Motivation, Alderson (2000) explained that more studies about poor readers from first and second language have illustrated that lack of motivation becomes one factor that influences students’ difficulties in reading activity. 4) Lack of reading strategies, reading strategies are including techniques in learning, behaviors, problem-solving, or learning skills which make the learning process effective and efficient (Oxford & Crookall, 1989). 5) Reading process, a reading process defined as the communication between the readers and the text.

In addition, Peter (2001) indicates that the environment is an external factor that contributes to the reading comprehension process. The environments, such as school and house, are students’ environments that affect their ability in comprehending a reading text.

Furthermore, there are several strategies related to reading comprehension. Nuttal (1982), divided reading strategies into 4 types which are skimming, scanning, extensive reading, and intensive reading. Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016) also define that there are a lot of reading comprehension strategies as follows: Activating and using background knowledge; Generating and asking a question; Making Inferences; Predicting; Summarizing; Visualizing; Comprehension monitoring.

Moreover, According to Vacca and Vacca (1999:53), there are some strategies in teaching reading comprehension, are scaffolding, think-aloud, reciprocal teaching, Question-Answer Relationship (QARs), SQ3R (Survey, Question, Read, Recall, and Review). There are also several strategies proposed by other experts about strategies in teaching reading comprehension which are memorizing strategy and fun learning strategy through educational games and extensive reading.

At this moment, all schools implement a curriculum that is relevant to their students’ needs. The term curriculum is assigned to the education or academic aspect taught in a school or in a program. Most schools in Indonesia are required to use Curriculum 2013 as their current curriculum. Furthermore, depending on the basic competence of the second grade of junior high schools in Curriculum 2013, the pupils are supposed to comprehend, generic structure, social function, and language features in reading material (narrative, descriptive, recount, and so on).

However, Comprehending an English reading text is included as one of the challenging sides for secondary students in Indonesia. Based on Syahubuddin, Yusny, & Zahara (2019), Indonesian secondary school students consider reading comprehension as a challenging aspect of learning English. Most
of them are having difficulties understanding the context of what they read in English texts even though they have learned English. Furthermore, Jayanti (2016) in his research admits that a lot of Indonesian secondary school students still have difficulty gaining information in an English reading text. Alaraj (2015) also pointed out that according to his experience as an English language teacher for three years, he found that the students prefer not to read and feel bored when they read an English text. They also got some problems understanding the meaning of some sentences in an English text.

In line with those cases, this paper tried to analyze the difficulties that the students faced when comprehending an English reading text, to determine the reasons why the students are having problems with those difficulties, and to examine how a teacher can help the students to overcome the difficulties.

METHOD

Since the objectives of the research are to analyze the difficulties that the students faced when comprehending English reading text, to determine the reason why the students are having problems with those difficulties, and to examine how teachers can help the students to overcome the difficulties, therefore the appropriate method is mixed methods, survey descriptive quantitative method and descriptive qualitative method. According to Creswell (2010:12), the definition of mixed method refers to the association or combination of qualitative method and quantitative method in one research.

According to Sugiyono (2015), a descriptive design used to identify the characteristics of human groups, conditions, objects, and thoughts and activities that will arise. In using this design, the researcher does not need to manipulate or give any treatments to the participants, but only observes and measures it (McCombes, 2019).

The Participants of this research are the eighth-grade students of MTs Nurul Ikhlas Ambon and an English teacher of MTs Nurul Ikhlas Ambon. The reason for selecting the second-grade students and an English teacher of MTs Nurul Ikhlas as the participants of the study is based on preliminary observation and personal communication with the teacher and students.

The techniques applied by the researcher to collect the data are quantitative and qualitative. The researcher collected the data by using a questionnaire, reading test, and interview questions as the instruments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RQs</th>
<th>Methods of data collection</th>
<th>Instruments of data collection</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the difficulties that the students faced when comprehending an English reading text?</td>
<td>Test</td>
<td>Test item</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why are the students having problems in those difficulties?</td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How can teachers help the students to overcome the difficulties?</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Interview questions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The researcher analyzes the data by combining the information from every finding through the data-collecting instruments. To analyze the reading comprehension test, the researcher used Sudjono’s formula (2001) in Salma and Syahputra (2021), the measurement of the percentage, to analyze the percent of the difficult item of each reading aspect.

Moreover, to analyze the qualitative data, and interview, the researcher used Miles and Huberman’s theory in Sugiyono (2015:337-345) about the methodology that can be used to analyze qualitative research.
They explained that analyzing the data can be formulated in three ways they are data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification.

The procedure of conducting this research used a sequential explanatory design. In this design, the researcher first collects and analyzes the quantitative data. Then, the researcher collects and analyzes the qualitative data in order and support to explain or develop the quantitative data results collected in the first phase (Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick, 2006:5).

The researcher also measured the validity and reliability of the data. To measure the validity and reliability of the quantitative data the researcher used the Pearson and Cornbanch alpha formula. Moreover, to show the validity and reliability of the qualitative research, and interview data, the researcher used some references from the experts, such as Vacca and Vacca (1999), Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016), and Nuttal (1982). The data was also validated by the expert judgment which is the researcher’s supervisor.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The difficulties that the students faced when comprehending an English reading text

The first research question is focusing on the difficulties that students faced when comprehending English reading text. Based on the results of the reading comprehension test, indicated that the students have difficulties comprehending the English reading text. As explained in Table 4.1 only 5 out of 25 students can achieve the minimum criterion for English subject. Thus, the mean of the student’s score is 44,4.

Furthermore, according to the analysis of the findings above, the researcher provides the percentage of difficult question items of reading comprehension in the following table to simplify the data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Reading comprehension aspects</th>
<th>The percentage of difficulty</th>
<th>Classification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Main idea</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Detail information</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Locating reference</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>Difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Making inference</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>Fair</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on table 2, it can be concluded that the difficult aspect that the students faced in comprehending English reading text is identifying vocabulary which has a 77% difficulty percentage. Then the students considered making inference questions (63%), locating reference questions (56%), determining main idea questions (43%), and finding detailed information (39%) as fair questions which means that they have fair levels in answering the questions.

These findings are similar to previous research conducted by Zuhra (2015), who found that the students were difficulty answering making inferences, and identifying vocabulary questions. In addition, Aziz (2019) in his research found that the students have difficulties finding the meaning of the words and determining the main idea of the text. Recently, the results of Matondang’s research (2020) also showed that the students have difficulties in determining the main idea, understanding vocabulary, finding detailed information, and making an inference. Moreover, Putri (2020) stated that the students are difficult to understand the meaning of the word, understand the main idea, and make inferences.

Contrary to other studies, Hidayati (2018) pointed out that the difficulties faced by the students are answering the main idea, answering making inferences, and answering locating inference questions. However, answering vocabulary questions is categorized as a fair question, and answering detailed information is categorized as easy questions for the students.
The reasons why the students are having problems in those difficulties

The second question research is related to the reasons why the students are having problems with those difficulties. Therefore, based on the analysis of the questionnaire before, it can be concluded that language knowledge, learners’ prior knowledge, motivation, lack of reading strategies, reading process, and environment are factors that influence students’ ability in reading comprehension. In addition, the factor which most affects students’ difficulties in reading comprehension is the reading process factor whose total percentage of students’ response scores is 74% (strong). The students completely agreed that they faced problems in predicting the next sentence, concentrating while reading a long and boring text, and understanding the information from each part, thus they cannot receive the message delivered by the writer. These difficulties are included in the reading process factor.

Then, the second factor is learners’ prior knowledge (69%). When students have inadequate prior information and the text has an unfamiliar cultural context or differences between cultural knowledge and vocabulary knowledge, thus this will influence the students in having difficulties when comprehending the text (Alderson, 2000). Related to this factor, the students pointed out that they have difficulty in understanding all aspects of the text and identifying the main idea because they have limited prior knowledge, and difficulty in identifying the meaning of the vocabulary that they have learned before hence they cannot understand what they have read, difficulty in memorizing long and complicated vocabulary, and difficulty in identifying the types of the text because of limited prior knowledge.

Then, it is followed by the language knowledge factor which has 68 % (strong). The terms knowledge refers to an important aspect in reading comprehension because the learners could not comprehend the text without connecting the meaning to the word (Define, 1986 in Melandita, 2019). Having difficulty in understanding the structure of the text that had been read and difficulty in understanding the grammar of the text are included in this factor. As result, most of the students felt that this factor is also considered as the reason why they have problems in those difficulties.

Moreover, the students also believed that motivational factors are affecting them in facing difficulty when comprehending English reading text. Alderson (2000) explained that more studies about poor readers from first and second language have illustrated that lack of motivation becomes one factor that influences students’ difficulties in the reading activity. Related to this factor, most of the students agreed that they do not have an interest in reading a book, always feel lazy to read when they face difficult and monotonous text, and always found many difficulties when they do not interested in the topic that has been discussed in the text.

However, even the environmental factors (69,5%) and lack of reading strategies factors (65%) are also influencing students’ ability in achieving reading comprehension successfully but they are not included as the reasons why the students are having problems in those difficulty aspects. This is because almost all the students agreed that they got motivation from their family when reading, English learning media are available in their school, read aloud helping to memorize, and read each word to understand the text.

The findings of this research also have similarities to research done by Melandita. She explained that the reasons why the students are having difficulties in reading comprehension are because of the language knowledge factor, learners’ background knowledge factor, motivation factor, lack of reading strategies factor, and reading process factor. Nanda and Azmy (2020) also
emphasized that the findings of their research indicate that poor reading comprehension occurs due to three remarkable factors, which are students’ lack of motivation, low prior knowledge, and poor English vocabulary. Recently, Salma and Syahputra (2021) in their research mentioned that factors that influence students’ difficulties in reading comprehension are the first was difficulty in Language knowledge, the second was Learner’s background knowledge, the third was Motivation, the fourth was lack of reading strategies, and the last was Reading process.

Otherwise, Aziz (2019) defined that the students have a lack of reading strategies which impacts them become did not to like to read English text and find difficulties when answering reading exercises. Moreover, the lack of facilities in the teaching and learning process also causes students difficulties. There are no language laboratories and dictionary provided in the library.

**How teacher can help the students to overcome the difficulties**

The last research question is about the strategies that could be used by the teacher to overcome students’ difficulties in reading comprehension. Based on the findings of the interview with an English teacher in MTs Nurul Ikhlas and the literature review in the previous chapter, strategies that can apply to help the students in facing difficulties are memorizing, Reciprocal teaching, Question-Answer Relationship (QARs), and fun learning.

**Memorizing strategy**

“….Related to students’ difficulty in vocabulary aspect, I will ask them to find difficult words in a text and then I try to help them by finding the meaning of the difficult words together. Moreover, I will also give them the assignment to write and memorize some vocabulary in students’ worksheets to build their vocabulary mastery…."

When memorizing strategy is applied, the students are encouraged to study more and improve their vocabulary mastery. Peters and Levin in Ariyana and Nanda (2017) pointed out that by using memorizing strategy, students are able to summarize words and grouped them into keyword. This would make the students feel easier to remember the words or phrases which they would memorize. Ariyana and Nanda (2017) in their research explained that the teacher asked the students to memorize several vocabularies related to the topic that would analyze and the meaning of the words.

**Reciprocal teaching**

“….I will ask the students to find difficult words in a text and then I try to help them by finding the difficult word together…”

“…..I give them several questions and then ask them to find the answer of the questions in the text. Stimulating the students from common things to specific things, such as from the title of the text, then the introduction, discussion, and last is the conclusion or closing. I will also ask them to work in pairs to discuss the text and drawing the conclusion……”

The reciprocal teaching strategy is one of the reading comprehension strategies that stimulate students to enhance their effective or successful reading skills automatically (Palinscar & Brown in Zakiyah, Rahmawati, & Ridwan, 2021:41). Students and the teacher are allowed to lead the discussion about the reading text given. The strategy is applicable in pairs or small group projects. Several techniques will help the students and teacher to guide the discussion.

**Question-Answer Relationship (QARs)**

“……regarding the reading process factor, lack of background knowledge, and language knowledge difficulties, the appropriate strategy is before I ask them to read the text, I give them several questions
and then ask them to find the answer of the questions in the text…..”

The question-Answer Relationship strategy (QARs) refers to the strategy of reading by understanding and identifying the questions. This strategy allows the readers to understand the questions to find the information from the reading material. The procedure of this strategy can be taught directly. The students are asked to do scanning techniques and then answer the questions given by the teacher.

The question types delivered to the students should be based on their needs to answer the question (Pearson & Johnson in Sarjan & Mardiana, 2017:153). Asking pertinent questions will improve students’ focus on the significant information in the text (Wood, Woloshyn, &Wiloughby cited from Lestari, Muljanto, & Hamzah, 2020:4). By making the relevant questions, the students will be more aware of the difficulties with comprehension and tried to solve the problems. Thus, the teacher should remind the students to aware of the information sources while responding to the questions given. This strategy helps the students in combining information, identifying the main idea, and summarizing information (Gilakjani & Sabaoouri, 2016).

**Fun learning strategies**

“…..And the last is I will use games or other fun learning strategies to build students’ motivation in reading…. “

By applying fun learning strategies, the teacher can help the students in improving their enthusiasm and motivation to keep learning (Kohn in Ariawan & Pratiwi, 2017:204). Reading motivation is the significant aspect of reading process which is pointed out as particular objectives, morals, and trusts which influenced reading activities, outcomes, and ideas (Wigfield & Guthrie in Ceyhan and Yildiz, 2020:422). In this strategy, the teacher is free to apply any learning methods which support the fun concept and students’ needs. Educational games and extensive reading are included as fun learning strategies to improve students’ motivation in learning reading based on the findings of the interview and literature review.

Abror as cited from Fauziah, Meilani, and Salsabila (2021) identified educational games refers to an innovative learning strategy which able to support the process of teaching and learning and engage students’ interest in learning by combining games and education aspects. Moreover, the educational game’s strategy is one of the EFL classroom strategies to teach vocabulary and build students’ motivation. Educational games have been used in educational environments for many years (Pekalongan & Rahma, 2019). Hashemi (2021:152) explained that educational games make the learning language process more important and comprehensible. It also can improve both teachers’ and students' feel pleasure and obtain motivation. Treasure clue game method, Anagram games, Team Game Tournament (TGT), and Jenga are several educational games that can be used to increase students’ motivation.

Furthermore, extensive reading means a reading strategy to read a longer text, and the aims are for enjoyment and for an overall understanding which was proposed by Nuttal (1998). The purposes of extensive reading are to acquire a general understanding of the text and increase students reading motivation. Extensive reading strategy comes up when the students read a large amount of high-interest reading material, establishing the meaning, reading for gist and bounds unknown words (Long & Richards in Listike, Delila, & Manurung, 2020:17).

According to Day and Barnford (2002:137-140), in teaching extensive reading teacher should consider these 10 principals. 1) The reading material is easy; 2) a variety of reading material on various topics
should be available; 3) Students pick what they want to read; 4) Students read extent possible; 5) The aim of reading is related to the information, general understanding, and pleasure; 6) Reading has its own reward; 7) The speed of the reading is usually fast; 8) Reading is an independent and silent activity; 9) The teacher helps and guides the students; 10) The teacher as a role model of the students.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings and discussions, conclusions can be drawn regarding the formulation of the problems: (1) The difficulty that students faced when comprehending English reading text is identifying vocabulary questions. Moreover, the students also consider making inference questions, locating reference questions, determining main idea questions, and finding detailed information as fair questions which means that sometimes they found difficulties in answering those questions and vice versa; (2) Related to the reasons why the students are having problems in those difficulties, the students completely agreed that the reading process, student’s background knowledge, language knowledge, and motivation are factors which influenced them to have problems in those difficulties. In addition, even environmental factors and lack of reading strategies factors are also influencing students’ ability in achieving reading comprehension successful but they are not included as the reasons why the students having problems in those difficulties; (3) The strategies that can be used by the teacher to overcome students’ difficulties can be inferred as follows: memorizing strategy, reciprocal teaching, question-answer relationship, and fun learning strategies through games and extensive reading. Those strategies are presented by Vacca and Vacca, Nuttal, and Gilakjani and Sabaori. The EFL teacher in MTs Nurul ikhlas believes that those strategies can help the students to overcome the difficulties faced by the eighth grade students of MTs Nurul Ikhlas Ambon.

SUGGESTIONS

Concerning the conclusions above, the researcher would like to give some suggestions for the students, EFL teachers, and other researchers who have a similar field of study.

The students of junior high school are required to practice reading more, enrich their vocabulary, and try to learn reading comprehension strategies which suitable for their needs. To be able to comprehend English reading text the students need to know the difficulties and reasons why they have problems in difficulty, thus they can decide to pick the most appropriate reading comprehension strategies.

The EFL teachers have to be aware of the difficulties faced by the students in reading activity and provide motivation to make them interested in reading a book. After knowing the difficulties and reasons why students are having difficulties in reading comprehension, the EFL teachers should more aware in deciding what strategies that they will apply to achieve reading success.

Investigating some difficulties faced by the students will be useful for further discoveries. The researcher recommends other researchers to find out more about students’ difficulties in reading activity and how to overcome the problems. May this research give some information for the readers and encourage the other researchers to conduct similar research related to students’ difficulties in reading comprehension.

DAFTAR PUSTAKA


