

A CASE STUDY ON READING ACHIEVEMENT OF EIGHTH- GRADE STUDENTS AT MTs IN BADEGAN PONOROGO

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Abstract

This study investigates the difficulties of eighth-graders in comprehending English reading texts and what leads to those difficulties. Employing the case study strategy, this study recruited 52 students at Badegan's junior high school, Ponorogo as the subjects. Data were collected using questionnaires and interviews and analyzed quantitatively with the Likert scale and qualitatively with thematic analysis. Findings revealed that the main challenges students had were understanding the overall gist of texts ($M = 3.06$), limited mastery over vocabulary ($M = 2.92$), and difficulty following English grammar and sentence structure ($M = 2.73$). The other areas included main and supporting points, understanding idioms, and grasping word roles. Apart from language issues, there were also some non-linguistic variables found to affect comprehension, such as inadequate reading time ($M = 2.98$), insufficiency of practice ($M = 2.83$), and lack of strategies for reading provided by teachers ($M = 2.69$). All these results indicate that internal and external factors interact to hinder reading comprehension among the students.

Keywords: EFL; Reading Comprehension; Vocabulary; Motivation

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji kesulitan yang dihadapi siswa kelas VIII dalam memahami teks bacaan bahasa Inggris dan faktor-faktor yang menyebabkan kesulitan tersebut. Penelitian ini menggunakan strategi studi kasus, penelitian ini melibatkan 52 siswa di SMP Badegan, Ponorogo. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner dan wawancara, kemudian dianalisis secara kuantitatif menggunakan skala Likert dan secara kualitatif dengan analisis tematik. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa tantangan utama yang dihadapi siswa adalah memahami inti keseluruhan teks ($M = 3.06$), penguasaan kosakata yang terbatas ($M = 2.92$), dan kesulitan mengikuti tata bahasa dan struktur kalimat bahasa Inggris ($M = 2.73$). Area lain meliputi poin utama dan pendukung, pemahaman idiom, dan pemahaman peran kata. Selain masalah bahasa, terdapat juga beberapa variabel non-linguistik yang ditemukan mempengaruhi pemahaman, seperti waktu membaca yang tidak memadai ($M = 2.98$), kurangnya latihan ($M = 2.83$), dan kurangnya strategi membaca yang diberikan oleh guru ($M = 2.69$). Semua hasil ini menunjukkan bahwa faktor internal dan eksternal saling berinteraksi untuk menghambat pemahaman membaca di kalangan siswa.

Kata kunci: EFL; Pemahaman Membaca; Kosakata; Motivasi

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is likely the key ability in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) acquisition. It is not merely the activity of decoding written symbols but rather the process of constructing meaning through a synthesis of linguistic information, textual information, and background knowledge (Grabe & Stoller, 2002). For junior high school students, reading comprehension is significant because it provides a gateway to information, allows other language skills, and prepares students for the use of academic and authentic materials. Reading comprehension remains one of the most challenging skills to achieve in Indonesian English learning, particularly for students in rural settings where exposure to English outside the classroom is zero (see Saputra et al, 2022; Qomariyah et al, 2023; Rohmatin et al, 2023).

Some classroom observations show that students often fail to grasp the overall sense of texts, struggle with unfamiliar words, and get confused by complex grammatical structures. They read verbatim without synthesizing ideas, resulting in fragmented understanding. This scenario fits Schema Theory (Anderson & Pearson, 1984), which stipulates that comprehension relies on the reader's ability to connect new information to prior knowledge. Without sufficient vocabulary, mastery of grammar, and background information, students cannot move forward beyond the literal level of interpretation.

In Indonesia, various studies have shown the same thing. Nurhayati and Wulandari (2019) showed that students are also at a loss when it comes to identifying main ideas and supporting details, which hinders their ability to summarize paragraphs. Handayani (2020) also asserted that syntactic complexity is one of the causes of difficulty because

most learners are not familiar with English sentence structures. More recent studies, for instance, Sari (2021) and Lestari (2022), also note that affective influences such as low motivation and lack of interest impede reading comprehension performance.

Literature on teacher practices has also shown significant influence on students' reading performance. Azizah, Putra, and Arkam (2023) investigated pre-service teachers' reading strategies and found that the majority of potential teachers had not acquired productive strategies such as skimming, scanning, and inference-making to a reliable extent. This is a sign that the instruction of reading strategies through direct instructions is not yet widespread in EFL classrooms. In the same vein, Susilowati and Harida (2023) conducted an error analysis of language features in recount texts and identified frequent grammar and vocabulary errors, indicating that language proficiency significantly affects understanding. In a different area, Rohmatika and Ro'is (2022) demonstrated that English debate argument structure correlates highly with linguistic accuracy, again establishing the central role of language proficiency in communication and comprehension.

In addition to linguistic difficulties, reading comprehension of students is also hindered by non-linguistic factors. Day and Bamford (1998) felt that sufficient reading practice is the greatest contributor to the development of fluency and comprehension, yet Indonesian students spend most of their school hours reading and do little practice outside school. Dörnyei (2001) emphasized that motivation is a key predictor of sustained engagement in language acquisition. When students are demotivated, they will avoid challenging texts, then limiting them to reduced exposure and growth. Krashen (1985)

further noted that affective considerations such as anxiety and low confidence also hinder comprehension performance.

With such conditions as the background, it is imperative to carry out a rigorous investigation of what kind of reading comprehension issues junior high school pupils are facing and under what circumstances. Such an inquiry can provide teachers with empirical evidence to guide the establishment of appropriate interventions, integrate vocabulary and grammar skills into reading classes, and offer strategy training in clear terms.

This study, therefore, focuses on eighth-grade students at a junior high school in Badegan, Ponorogo. The objectives of the research are (1) to introduce the challenges of students in English reading comprehension, and (2) to identify the internal and external factors leading to these challenges. Through answering these questions, the research aims to provide input for teachers, curriculum makers, and future researchers to improve teaching reading comprehension in EFL settings.

METHOD

This study employed a case study with a descriptive qualitative approach that was augmented by quantitative analysis. The rationale for this design is that the research purpose was to describe the difficulties of students in reading comprehension in detail and to identify the causes of those difficulties. By focusing on a single group of participants, i.e., eighth-grade students at a junior high school at Badegan, Ponorogo, the study was able to explore the phenomenon in-depth in its natural environment.

The research was conducted within the even semester of the 2024/2025 academic

year and involved fifty-two grade VIII students. The topics were purposively chosen because they were considered relevant to the research topic. Reading is focused on at this level in the English course, yet most of the students had very limited access to English books outside of school. Their learning environment positioned them as a good sample to explore comprehension problems.

Two instruments were used in the data collection, i.e., an interview guide and a questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to reveal the students' difficulties in understanding English texts as well as the external and internal factors that contribute to such difficulties. There were two main sections in the questionnaire, thirteen statements on reading comprehension difficulties and seven statements on factors affecting comprehension. All of it was also stated in Bahasa Indonesia to avoid misinterpretation and for the items to be able to be read by the participants. The responses were measured on a four-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The interview protocol was prepared to obtain more detailed information about students' experience and approaches in reading and teachers' knowledge regarding students' difficulties in comprehension. The interviews were audio-recorded, semi-structured, one-to-one in an informal environment, and then transcribed for analysis.

Data collection procedures were performed in a variety of stages. The preparation stage began with gaining research permission from the school and negotiating with English teachers. With the consent obtained, the researcher explained the purpose and worth of the research to the students in order to secure their understanding and agreement. The questionnaire was completed and administered within the classroom under

the researcher's supervision to ensure that the directions were understood by all the students. Subsequent interviews took place with ten students who had been selected to represent a range of standards of attainment and two teachers of English. All the interviews lasted between fifteen and twenty minutes and included the students' major difficulties, measures taken, and teachers' support during reading activities.

Data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed statistically using descriptive statistics. A mean score and standard deviation were assigned to each item to identify the areas that were rated as most and least difficult. The scores were then converted to percentages using the index formula to enable the results presentation. At the same time, the interview data were qualitatively analyzed using several steps like transcription, coding, categorization, and interpretation to obtain themes. The interview findings were utilized to support and supplement the questionnaire findings.

In order to test for the reliability and validity of data, a number of steps were taken. Content validity of the questionnaire was established with expert judgment by the supervisors who are also English education experts. Methodological triangulation was applied with the matching of the quantitative data from the questionnaire with qualitative observations from the interviews. Member

checking was also completed by going back to the participants with the interview interpretations to allow them to check if accuracy in the researcher's interpretation was right.

Through this format, tools, methodology, and analysis, the study aimed to provide an integrative account of the reading comprehension issues of the students and the external and internal variables that influence them.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This study investigated the reading comprehension challenges experienced by eighth-grade students and what underlies these challenges. The data was collected through a questionnaire completed by fifty-two students and an interview with selected students and educators. The two-sectioned questionnaire included students' reading comprehension challenges and internal and external factors affecting comprehension. The results were quantitatively examined employing descriptive statistics, and interview answers were qualitatively analyzed to corroborate and expound the findings.

The following table discusses the questionnaire results on reading comprehension difficulties.

Table 1: Student' Difficulties In Reading Comprehension

No	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Means	SD
1	I understand the meaning of the text	6	7	17	22	3,06	1,01
2	I understand the terms of the text	8	7	18	19	2,92	1,05
3	I have good mastery of vocabulary in English texts	7	9	21	15	2,85	0,99
4	I understand English word order in a text	10	10	16	16	2,73	1,09

5	I understand in find supporting idea	12	5	22	13	2,69	1,08
6	I understand idioms in a text	10	11	18	13	2,65	1,05
7	I understand the function of the words in the text	14	8	16	14	2,58	1,15
8	I have difficulties in understanding the meaning of every paragraph.	16	21	5	10	2,17	1,07
9	I have difficulties in finding the main idea	18	19	5	10	2,13	1,09
10	I have difficulties in mastering reading text comprehensively	19	17	6	10	2,13	1,11
11	I have difficulties in understanding the meaning of the texts that I read	18	19	6	9	2,12	1,07
12	I get difficulties in mastering reading text	23	14	6	9	2,02	1,12
13	I have difficulties in understanding the whole meaning of the text	25	17	5	5	1,81	0,96

The results reveal that the most challenging aspect for the students was comprehending the general sense of a text ($M = 3.06$). This reveals that most students could not make a meaningful interpretation from the text because of narrow vocabulary, lack of background information, and sophisticated sentence structure. Vocabulary mastery was the second most salient issue where students admitted that unfamiliar words disrupted their comprehension ($M = 2.92$ and $M = 2.85$). Grammar and sentence construction were also issues ($M = 2.73$), particularly word order and involved constructions.

The other challenges were identification of supporting ideas ($M = 2.69$), knowledge of idioms ($M = 2.65$), and recognizing the

functions of words in a sentence ($M = 2.58$). Although rated lower, they too were highly influential in comprehension. Challenges at the paragraph level ($M = 2.17$) and determination of the main idea ($M = 2.13$) further confirmed that there were no strategies for students to extract key information. These were the lowest-rated activities, such as reading texts that are difficult to learn ($M = 2.02$) and the overall sense of texts ($M = 1.81$), suggesting that while these were pinpointed as problems, students tended to perceive them as products of more specific issues with vocabulary and grammar. The results of the internal and external factors questionnaire influencing students' reading comprehension issues are summarized in the table below:

Table 2: Factors influencing students' reading comprehension difficulties

No	Statements	SA	A	D	SD	Means	SD
1	I have limited time to reading English text	7	9	14	22	2,98	1,07
2	I have limited practice reading English text	8	12	13	19	2,83	1,09
3	I do not do enough research before reading	10	9	14	19	2,81	1,13
4	The teacher provides limited reading strategies	9	8	25	10	2,69	0,97

5	The English teacher rarely motivates students to read English texts	12	6	21	13	2,67	1,09
6	I make little effort to get the books I need	12	10	18	12	2,58	1,08
7	I lack interest in English	13	11	17	11	2,50	1,08

From Table 2, it can be seen that the most dominant outside factor was insufficient reading time ($M = 2.98$), followed by inadequate practice ($M = 2.83$) and insufficient preparation before reading ($M = 2.81$). These circumstances mean that students did not read extensively outside class, and therefore they failed to attain fluency and understanding. In addition, teacher-related factors such as lack of provision of reading strategies ($M = 2.69$) and motivation ($M = 2.67$) were also among the problem. Less rated but still on their part were lack of interest in English ($M = 2.50$) and minimal effort to procure reading materials ($M = 2.58$), which influenced students' attitudes and reading habits.

These findings were corroborated by the interview results. The students frequently reported that they read only English books within the classroom and struggled to maintain the habit at home since they had full schedules and weren't interested. Teachers attested that while they encouraged students to read, they themselves did not provide explicit instruction in reading strategies but instead focused on translation or exercising. The results show that comprehension difficulties were not solely caused by language limitations but also by environmental factors like insufficient exposure to texts, ineffective teaching methods, and lack of motivational support.

Discussion

The results of this study show that the eighth-grade students encountered a wide range of reading comprehension challenges with the most significant being the

understanding of the total meaning of texts, command of vocabulary, and grammatical or sentence structure. These results uncover the relationship between language ability and the ability to construct meaning from texts. Those students with weak vocabulary and weak grammatical knowledge were not able to process information at sentence and discourse levels, thereby automatically affecting their global understanding of texts.

Difficulty in overall meaning comprehension ($M = 3.06$) confirms the relevance of Schema Theory (Anderson & Pearson, 1984), highlighting that understanding occurs when readers have been able to connect textual information with prior knowledge. Here in this study, the students lacked sufficient background knowledge and vocabulary to make those connections. Similarly, Nurhayati and Wulandari (2021) stated that EFL readers misinterpreted reading texts when they attempted to infer meanings with limited linguistic resources.

Vocabulary mastery, as revealed in this study ($M = 2.92$ and 2.85), was the second most pressing concern. This concurs with Nation's (2001) assertion that knowledge of vocabulary is a key factor in reading comprehension. Learners in this study frequently complained that receiving several words they did not know in one sentence made them lose sense of the entire passage. This is an outcome of Putra (2019), who demonstrated that vocabulary shortages prevented learners from achieving even minimum comprehension in recount texts. Vocabulary and comprehension are also

illustrated in Susilowati and Harida (2023), which indicated that lexical errors in recount texts disrupted the simplicity and coherence of students' writing, demonstrating that vocabulary limitations affect receptive and productive skills.

Grammar and sentence structure ($M = 2.73$) were also the main difficulties. The students admitted that they got confused when they encountered complex sentences or passive voice, causing fragmented comprehension. This supports the contention of Carrell (1988).

In addition to language difficulties, the study also revealed that the students had difficulty identifying major ideas and supporting details ($M = 2.13$ and 2.69). The majority of students perceived all sentences as the same degree of significance or based on guesswork. The problem has also been noted by Lestari (2019), which found that the inability of the students to distinguish central and peripheral information made them poor summarizers. Anderson (1999) pointed out that the detection of key ideas is a second-order skill requiring practice and experience, which was lacking in the setting of this study.

Idioms ($M = 2.65$) also created disturbance in understanding because students used to interpret them literally. For instance, break a leg and spill the beans were interpreted literally. This was highlighted in Wallace (1992), who asserted that figurative language is a particular challenge to EFL learners. The findings agree with Handayani (2020), who showed that minimal exposure to natural English materials restricted students' ability to understand idiomatic phrases.

On the side of contributory factors, restricted practice ($M = 2.83$) and reading time ($M = 2.98$) were most important. Students admitted that they read hardly any English texts outside the class. This testifies to Day

and Bamford's (1998) principle of extensive reading, which advocates for fluency and comprehension in reading to be obtained only by sustained and abundant practice. Practice in this study was undermined by inadequate teacher support as well. Students reported teachers provided them with few strategies ($M = 2.69$) and did not frequently prompt them to read ($M = 2.67$). This agrees with Oxford (1990), who reported that strategy training is one of the keys to reading proficiency.

Motivation and interest were rated lowest ($M = 2.50$), but their influence cannot be underestimated. Some students admitted they only enjoyed reading when the text was easy. This confirms Dörnyei's (2001) view that motivation sustains learning effort and Krashen's (1985) affective filter hypothesis, which explains how anxiety or lack of interest blocks comprehension.

Generally, the findings of the current study are consistent with previous studies but also bring some new insights concerning the interaction of linguistic and non-linguistic variables. While previous studies such as Lestari (2019) pointed to linguistic constraints, in this research it has been observed that factors from outside the teacher or the students (such as time, practice, and guidance by the teacher) exacerbate these constraints. Moreover, through interviewing the students and teachers, this current study provides a wider picture concerning the issue.

The pedagogical implications are clear. Teachers must integrate vocabulary and grammar instruction into the backdrop of reading activities rather than a distinct endeavor. Direct instruction in reading skills such as main ideas, skimming, scanning, and inferring on the basis of context must also be offered. Additionally, opportunities for extensive reading, both in and out of the classroom, must be offered in order to facilitate

practice and fluency. As suggested by Putra (2021), the use of interactive reading activities and motivational strategies can be used to improve the motivation and understanding of students. Teachers can further build students' reading understanding in a sustainable way by looking at both linguistic and non-linguistic factors.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicated that eighth-grade students of Badegan, Ponorogo junior high school encountered some problems in comprehending English reading texts. The most frequent problem was the comprehension of the texts' general meaning, followed by limitations in vocabulary mastery, grammar and sentence structure, main idea and supporting detail determination, and idiom understanding. These difficulties expose that students' comprehension issues do not only stem from language limitations but also from the inability to employ higher-order cognitive skills in working with texts.

Aside from linguistic limitations, several non-linguistic factors contributed significantly to the students' problems. Limited reading time, a lack of practice outside class, a lack of pre-reading preparation, a lack of teacher guidance in strategy use, and low motivation were discovered to be contributory. The interaction of these internal and external factors explains why global comprehension was the most difficult area for the students.

The study concludes that successful development of reading comprehension of students must be addressed in an integrated manner. Vocabulary and grammar development in contextualized reading activities, explicit instruction in reading strategies, and ample opportunities for extensive reading should be prioritized by

educators. Motivational support and engaging learning content are also necessary to build students' confidence and interest in English reading.

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