

The Analysis of Difficulties in Reading and Understanding English Texts among Eighth-Grade Students at SMPN 10 Kupang

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Article history	This study aims to analyze the difficulties faced by eighth-grade students at SMPN 10 Kupang in reading and understanding English texts. Employing a descriptive qualitative method, data were collected through observation, interviews, and note-taking. The findings reveal that students experience difficulties in several areas of reading comprehension, including identifying main ideas, understanding vocabulary, making inferences, and recognizing detailed information. Vocabulary mastery emerged as the most dominant barrier, affecting students' ability to interpret meaning from the text. In addition, long and complex sentences, lack of interest, and unfamiliar reading topics further contribute to their comprehension challenges. The study also found that limited reading practice and insufficient use of reading strategies hinder students' ability to process information effectively. It is recommended that teachers apply more varied teaching techniques, provide targeted vocabulary instruction, and encourage students to engage in consistent reading practice. These findings are expected to support English teachers in developing more effective strategies to improve students' reading comprehension.
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1. Introduction

Reading comprehension is a fundamental skill in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, especially at the junior secondary school level. Through reading, students are expected to understand written texts, identify main ideas, interpret implicit meanings, and locate relevant information. In the Indonesian EFL context, where English exposure outside the classroom is limited, reading functions as a primary source of language input. Consequently, students' ability to comprehend English texts plays a crucial role in their overall language development and academic achievement.

Despite its importance, many EFL learners still experience considerable difficulties in reading comprehension. Previous studies have shown that these difficulties are commonly

caused by limited vocabulary mastery, unfamiliar grammatical structures, lack of background knowledge, and ineffective reading strategies (Nuttall, 1982; Oakhill, 1993). Among these factors, vocabulary limitation is frequently identified as the most dominant barrier, as it restricts students' ability to understand sentence meaning and interpret the message of a text as a whole. In addition, students often struggle with identifying main ideas, making inferences, and understanding detailed information, particularly when dealing with long or complex texts.

A number of empirical studies have investigated students' reading comprehension difficulties in EFL contexts. Septia (2022) reported that eighth-grade students experienced major difficulties in identifying main ideas, understanding vocabulary, and making inferences due to low reading motivation and limited exposure to English texts. Similarly, Larasati (2019) found that students' difficulties in reading comprehension were closely related to inadequate vocabulary mastery and challenges in interpreting implicit information. These studies confirm that reading comprehension remains a persistent problem for EFL learners. However, most previous research tends to discuss reading difficulties in a general manner and pays limited attention to specific classroom contexts, particularly in junior high schools in eastern Indonesia.

To address this limitation, the present study focuses on analyzing the difficulties faced by eighth-grade students at SMPN 10 Kupang in reading and understanding English texts. This study examines both the types of reading difficulties encountered by students and the factors that contribute to these difficulties based on classroom observations and students' responses. By concentrating on a specific educational context, this research provides more contextualized insights into how reading comprehension difficulties manifest in actual classroom practice. The urgency of this study is grounded in the essential role of reading comprehension in students' academic success and English language learning. Without a clear understanding of the specific difficulties students' experience, teachers may struggle to design effective instructional strategies that meet learners' needs. Identifying students' reading difficulties is therefore necessary to support the development of appropriate teaching approaches, particularly in EFL classrooms with limited instructional resources.

Accordingly, this study aims to (1) identify the types of difficulties experienced by eighth-grade students in reading and understanding English texts at SMPN 10 Kupang, and (2) analyze the factors that contribute to these reading comprehension difficulties. To achieve these aims, the study addresses the following research questions: (1) What difficulties do

eighth-grade students face in reading and understanding English texts? and (2) What factors contribute to these difficulties?

2. Research Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to analyze students' difficulties in reading and understanding English texts. A qualitative approach was selected because it allows for an in-depth exploration of students' experiences, behaviors, and responses during the reading process. This approach is appropriate for identifying types of reading difficulties and the factors contributing to those difficulties in a natural classroom setting. The research was conducted at SMPN 10 Kupang. The participants of this study were eighth-grade students, with Class VIII A selected as the research sample. This class was chosen purposively based on preliminary observations indicating that the students experienced noticeable difficulties in reading comprehension. The selection was also influenced by the accessibility of the class and the students' willingness to participate in the research process. Prior to data collection, the researcher prepared research instruments and obtained permission from the school and English teacher.

The instruments used in this study were classroom observation and note-taking. Observation was employed to examine students' reading behaviors, participation, and difficulties during English reading lessons. An observation sheet was used as a guide to ensure systematic data recording. Note-taking was used as a complementary instrument to capture detailed information such as students' responses, expressions of confusion, and strategies used while reading.

Data collection was carried out chronologically through classroom observation during reading activities. The researcher observed students' engagement with reading texts, their ability to identify main ideas, understand vocabulary, make inferences, and locate detailed information. Important events and student behaviors related to reading difficulties were recorded through structured notes.

The data obtained from observation and note-taking were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's qualitative data analysis model, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, the researcher selected and focused on relevant data related to students' reading difficulties. In the data display stage, the reduced data were organized and presented in descriptive form to illustrate patterns of difficulties. Finally, in the conclusion drawing stage, the researcher interpreted the findings to identify the dominant reading difficulties and the factors contributing to them. Through this

systematic process, the study was able to provide a clear description of students' difficulties in reading and understanding English texts and to answer the research questions.

3. Research Findings and Discussion

Research Findings

This section presents the research findings based on classroom observation and note-taking, focusing on answering the research questions. The findings are organized according to the types of students' reading difficulties and the factors contributing to those difficulties.

4.1. What difficulties do eighth-grade students face in reading and understanding English texts?

The first research question focuses on identifying the types of difficulties experienced by eighth-grade students in reading and understanding English texts. Based on classroom observations and note-taking, several reading comprehension difficulties were identified.

The students experienced difficulties in understanding vocabulary, particularly unfamiliar and complex words, which affected their ability to comprehend sentences and paragraphs. They also had difficulty understanding sentence structures, especially when dealing with long and grammatically complex sentences. In addition, students struggled to identify the main ideas of texts, as they were often confused by excessive details and varied text structures.

Furthermore, difficulties were found in making inferences, as students had trouble interpreting implicit meanings and drawing conclusions from the texts. Students also faced challenges in locating detailed information, as they often overlooked important details or failed to apply appropriate reading strategies such as scanning and skimming. These findings indicate that vocabulary comprehension, sentence structure understanding, identifying main ideas, making inferences, and finding detailed information were the main difficulties faced by the students.

4.2. What factors contribute to these difficulties?

The second research question addresses the factors contributing to students' difficulties in reading and understanding English texts. The findings reveal that several internal and instructional factors influenced students' reading comprehension. One major factor was limited vocabulary mastery, which caused students to rely heavily on word-by-word reading and dictionary use, leading to slow reading and poor comprehension. Another contributing factor was students' low interest and motivation in reading English texts, particularly when

the texts were long, complex, or unrelated to their interests. This lack of interest reduced students' engagement and concentration during reading activities.

In addition, insufficient practice and limited use of reading strategies were identified as contributing factors. Students tended to read without applying strategies such as predicting, skimming, or scanning, which made it difficult for them to understand the overall meaning of the texts. Instructional factors, such as limited time allocation for reading practice, also affected students' reading development. Overall, the findings indicate that students' reading difficulties were influenced by limited vocabulary mastery, low reading motivation, inadequate reading strategies, and limited practice opportunities in the classroom.

Discussion

This discussion interprets the findings by situating them within relevant empirical studies and established theoretical perspectives in EFL reading comprehension. The results demonstrate that limited vocabulary mastery constitutes the most dominant difficulty faced by eighth-grade students in comprehending English texts, a finding that corroborates earlier studies identifying vocabulary knowledge as a key determinant of reading comprehension in EFL contexts (Nuttall, 1982; Oakhill, 1993; Al-Jarrah & Ismail, 2018).

The students' reliance on word-by-word reading and frequent dictionary use reflects the condition described by Nuttal (1982), in which inadequate lexical knowledge constrains meaning construction beyond the word level. From a theoretical standpoint, this finding aligns with the interactive model of reading, which emphasizes the interaction between lower-level linguistic processing and higher-level comprehension processes (Grabe & Stoller, 2002). Insufficient vocabulary knowledge limits readers' ability to integrate textual information, thereby impeding higher-order skills such as identifying main ideas and making inferences. In addition to lexical limitations, difficulties in processing long and grammatically complex sentences further contributed to students' comprehension problems.

This result is consistent with Klingner et al. (2007) and Westwood (2008), who argue that syntactic complexity increases cognitive load for EFL learners and hinders accurate interpretation of sentence meaning. These findings support a bottom-up view of reading processes, suggesting that weaknesses at the sentence-processing level negatively affect overall text comprehension (Nunan, 1991). Moreover, students experienced difficulties in identifying main ideas and making inferences, particularly when texts contained dense information and varied organizational patterns. This outcome aligns with previous research indicating that EFL learners often struggle with higher-order comprehension due to limited linguistic resources and ineffective reading strategies (Shehu, 2015; Septia, 2022).

Such difficulties can be explained through schema theory, which posits that comprehension depends on the activation of relevant background knowledge and cognitive frameworks; when students lack sufficient linguistic and contextual knowledge, their ability to construct meaning at the discourse level is reduced (Nunan, 1991). Furthermore, the limited use of effective reading strategies, such as skimming, scanning, and predicting, exacerbated students' comprehension difficulties. Consistent with Joseph (2005), the dominance of inefficient strategies, particularly word-by-word reading, impeded students' ability to locate detailed information and understand overall text meaning. Low reading motivation also emerged as a contributing factor, as students' lack of interest in lengthy or unfamiliar texts negatively affected their engagement and comprehension performance, supporting findings from earlier studies (Al-Jarrah & Ismail, 2018).

The factors contributing to students' reading difficulties indicate that both learner-related and instructional aspects influence reading development. Low reading motivation limits students' engagement with English texts, particularly when the materials are perceived as difficult or irrelevant. Additionally, the limited use of reading strategies suggests that students have not been sufficiently trained to approach texts strategically. This supports previous pedagogical assumptions that explicit instruction in reading strategies such as skimming, scanning, and predicting is essential for improving comprehension.

For future research, further studies could employ mixed-method or quantitative approaches to examine the relationship between specific reading difficulties and students' achievement levels. Investigating the effectiveness of targeted instructional interventions may also provide deeper insights into improving reading comprehension among EFL learners.

Overall, these findings suggest that students' reading comprehension difficulties stem from the interaction of lexical limitations, syntactic complexity, insufficient reading strategies, and low motivation. This conclusion is consistent with the multidimensional perspective on reading difficulties proposed by Grabe and Stoller (2002), underscoring the need for integrated instructional approaches to improve EFL reading comprehension at the junior high school level.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that eighth-grade students at SMPN 10 Kupang experience various difficulties in reading and understanding English texts, particularly in vocabulary comprehension, sentence structure understanding, identifying main ideas, making

inferences, and locating detailed information. These difficulties are influenced by limited vocabulary mastery, low reading motivation, inadequate use of reading strategies, and limited instructional practice. The findings highlight that reading comprehension difficulties are not caused by a single factor but result from the interaction of learner-related and instructional factors. Therefore, improving students' reading comprehension requires systematic vocabulary support, explicit instruction in reading strategies, and sufficient opportunities for guided reading practice. Overall, this study provides context-specific insights that contribute to a better understanding of EFL reading difficulties and offers practical implications for improving English reading instruction at the junior high school level.

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