

“AN ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS’ DIFFICULTIES IN READING COMPREHENSION AT SMP NEGERI 32 PALEMBANG”

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the difficulties encountered by ninth-grade students in reading comprehension. The sample of this research was 31 students of the ninth grade of SMP Negeri 32 Palembang. Employing a descriptive qualitative method, data were collected through questionnaires. that students ninth grade at SMP Negeri 32 Palembang had faced various difficulties in reading comprehension, namely: (a) Difficulty in understanding reading english texts, (b) Difficulty in understanding vocabulary, (c) Difficulty in understanding long English texts.

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menyelidiki kesulitan yang dihadapi siswa kelas sembilan dalam pemahaman membaca. Sampel penelitian ini adalah 31 siswa kelas sembilan SMP Negeri 32 Palembang. Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif, data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner. Ditemukan bahwa siswa kelas sembilan SMP Negeri 32 Palembang menghadapi berbagai kesulitan dalam pemahaman membaca, yaitu: (a) Kesulitan memahami teks bacaan bahasa Inggris, (b) Kesulitan memahami kosakata, (c) Kesulitan memahami teks bahasa Inggris yang panjang.

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Introduction

Reading comprehension is one of the most essential skills in English language learning, as it enables students to understand, interpret, and evaluate written texts. Through reading, learners gain access to new information, expand their vocabulary, and develop critical thinking skills. According to Harmer (2010) if students more or less understand what they read, the more they read, the better they get at it. Reading is useful for other skills in the English language. For the students who learn foreign language, they need to master four skills: reading, listening, speaking, and writing. Blachowicz&Ogle (2017) found that reading is crucial. In line with Aritonang et al. (2019), reading is a crucial activity in life that one may use to refresh their knowledge. It means that reading is an important skill in learning.

According to Harmer (2003), to study the English language process, such as vocabulary, grammar, punctuation and the technique we use to create sentences, paragraphs and textbooks given the opportunity by reading. However, despite its importance, many students particularly at the junior high school level continue to struggle with reading comprehension. Understanding longer texts can be tough because the process of making sense of the content is disrupted by the challenge and slow pace of recognizing words (Snow, 2013). These difficulties often prevent them from achieving the expected learning outcomes in English classes.

In the Indonesian context, reading is a major focus of the English curriculum, especially in the ninth grade, where students are required to comprehend various types of texts such as narratives, recounts, and descriptive passages. Nevertheless, a considerable number of students still find it challenging to identify main ideas, infer meanings, and understand vocabulary in context. Such challenges may stem from linguistic factors, including limited vocabulary and grammatical knowledge, as well as non-linguistic factors such as motivation, background knowledge, and reading habits. This is proven by a survey conducted by Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2018 that was released in 2019. The survey shows that the students' reading ability in Indonesia is considered very low since it sits on the 72th position out of 77 surveyed countries.

Sloat *et al.*, (2007) argue that the failure of achieving the reading comprehension objectives during the students' primary grades will lead them to have lack of reading

ability. This includes lack of vocabularies, difficulties in academic field, and difficulties in mastering English in general. Therefore, reading comprehension needs to be given more attention, particularly in EFL classes (Robinson, *et al.*, 2019).

Suparman (2012) states, "There are several aspects of reading comprehension skills that should be mastered by the reader to comprehend the text deeply. They are the main idea, supporting detail, inference, and vocabulary". These aspects will be described as follows:

1) Main Idea

Main idea of a paragraph is what the author wants you to know about the topic. Main idea makes a particular statement or emphasizes a special aspect of the topic.

2). Supporting Detail

Identifying supporting detail means that we should look for the information that relevant to the goal in mind and ignore the irrelevant one.

3). Reference

Reference is the intentional use of one thing to show something else in which one provides the information necessary to interpret the other. Findings reference means that the reader should interpret and determine one linguistic expression to another

4) Inference

The inference is good guess or conclusion drawn based on the logic of passage. Drawing inference means that the readers imply the sentences' meaning, then, conclude it logically

5) Vocabulary

Readers are often not knowing or understanding the whole vocabulary they read. They will find new vocabulary while they are reading. The readers often read the next sentence to guess the meaning from the context.

Previous studies have shown that students' difficulties in reading comprehension are often linked to their lack of reading strategies and their dependence on word-by-word translation. As a result, they fail to grasp the overall meaning of the text. Furthermore, inappropriate teaching methods and insufficient exposure to reading materials may

contribute to poor comprehension skills. Therefore, it is crucial to analyze the specific difficulties students face in order to provide effective pedagogical solutions.

This study aims to analyze the types and causes of students' difficulties in reading comprehension among ninth-grade students. By identifying these factors, the research seeks to offer insights and recommendations for teachers to improve reading instruction and enhance students' overall comprehension abilities.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design. The purpose of this approach was to describe of students' difficulties in reading comprehension. The study involved 31 ninth grade students from SMP Negeri 32 Palembang. It was conducted on October 3rd, 2025 in academic year 2025/2026 .The instrument used in this research was a questionnaire. The questionnaires contained five questions assessing students' perceptions of difficulties in reading comprehension.

FINDINGS

The findings of the research deals with the scoring classification of the students' questionnaire. This is the classification of students' questionnaire for each item:

TABLE 1

Question 1 : Do you like English Subject ?

No	Opinion	Frequency	Percentage %
1.	Yes	17	55 %
2.	No	14	45 %
Total		31	100 %

Table 1 showed that 17 (55%) out of students chose yes and 14 (45%) chose no. It means that most students like learning English subject.

TABLE 2
Question 2 : Do you like Reading English Texts ?

No	Opinion	Frequency	Percentage %
1.	Yes	11	34 %
2.	No	20	66 %
	Total	31	100 %

Table 2 showed that 11 (34%) out of students chose yes and 20 (66%) chose no. It means that most students do not like reading English text.

TABLE 3
Question 3 : Is Reading English Texts Difficult ?

No	Opinion	Frequency	Percentage %
1.	Yes	23	71 %
2.	No	8	29 %
	Total	31	100 %

Table 3 showed that 23 (71 %) out of students chose yes and 8 (29%) chose no. It means that most students difficult in reading English text.

TABLE 4
Question 4 : Do You often Find Difficult Words When Reading English Texts ?

No	Opinion	Frequency	Percentage %
1.	Yes	25	77 %
2.	No	6	23 %
	Total	31	100 %

Table 4 showed that 25 (77 %) out of students chose yes and 6 (23%) chose no. It means that most students find difficult words when reading English text.

TABLE 5
Question 5 : Is Long English Texts Difficult ?

No	Opinion	Frequency	Percentage %
1.	Yes	26	80 %
2.	No	5	20 %
	Total	31	100 %

Table 5 showed that 26 (80 %) out of students chose yes and 5 (20%) chose no. It means that most students difficult reading long English text.

DISCUSSION

Based on the result above, the researcher discussed the research finding covering the students' difficulties in reading comprehension. The researchers found that students ninth grade at SMP Negeri 32 Palembang had faced various difficulties in reading comprehension, namely: (a) Difficulty in understanding reading english texts, (b) Difficulty in understanding vocabulary, (c) Difficulty in understanding long English texts.

The first difficulty was understanding reading English text. It was revealed by some students that most of them found it hard to comprehending the reading text. In line with Aida (2021) stated that many students had difficulty understanding reading texts. The second was understanding vocabulary. These difficulties were primarily attributed to a lack of vocabulary knowledge, particularly unfamiliar words and idiomatic expressions. According to Siahaan et al. (2022), while mastering the meaning of words from a book was challenging, it was crucial. Limited vocabulary knowledge contributed significantly to student's reading comprehension problems. Since they were unable to identify many new words, they struggled to grasp the full meaning of sentences and passages. Poor vocabulary retention further weakened their understanding of complex texts. Moreover, frequent exposure to unknown words in reading materials often generated frustration and reduced reading engagement.

The last difficulties was understanding long English texts. Long sentence can be quite difficult for readers, especially for students who have not yet developed strong reading skill. Because of this, they often lose track of the main ideas in the text, making it

hard to understand the overall meaning. Most students explain that their difficulty in dealing with lengthy sentences was caused by a lack of vocabulary mastery. Ratnasari (2023) stated that students faced difficulties in understanding long sentences in texts; this was mostly due to limited vocabulary and the need for extra time to look up meanings, which hindered their comprehension. In addition, Baiti & Sofa (2023) also stated that students were often confused

when reading long sentences. One of the reasons was that they were not yet familiar with many new words.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Based on the results above, it was shown that students ninth grade at SMP Negeri 32 Palembang had various difficulties in reading comprehension, namely: (a) Difficulty in understanding reading english texts, (b) Difficulty in understanding vocabulary, (c) Difficulty in understanding long English texts.

The English teachers are suggested to improve their teaching methods especially teaching reading comprehension. Teachers should give students more opportunities to practice reading, use a variety of topics, and manage the class. For students who still have problems with reading comprehension are expected to improve their skills by studying regularly, practicing more and reading many English texts. For future researchers, it is suggested to conduct deeper research on this topic to provide better insights and recommendations for improving students' reading comprehension.

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Declarations

I hereby declare that the disclosed information is correct and that no other situation of real, potential or apparent conflict of interest is known to us. I undertake to inform you of any change in these circumstances, including if an issue arises during the course of the meeting or work it (2025)