

READING COMPREHENSION DIFFICULTIES IN INDONESIAN EFL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Getting knowledge by reading is one of the prominent ways, and reading comprehension is a skill to help students in learning process. In fact, there are many EFL students have some difficulties in reading comprehension. The objective of this study is to analyze the students' difficulties in reading comprehension skills. Descriptive qualitative method is used in this study, and by using purposive sampling, 98 students of Basic Reading Class at English Education Program in University of Indraprasta PGRI were engaged. The data collected by administering the questionnaires, then it was analyzed to find out what kind of the difficulties faced by EFL students in reading comprehension. The questionnaires were administered in collecting the data, and it was analyzed descriptively to know what kind of reading comprehension difficulties faced by EFL students. According to the results, the most reading difficulty faced by the students are distinguishing between main ideas and supporting details, getting main idea between paragraphs, the topic of the texts from other culture, relating topic and background knowledge, understanding vocabulary and inferring the text. Based on these findings, some reading strategies should be applied to figure out these barriers in reading comprehension skills.

Key Word: *reading comprehension; reading difficulties; reading strategies*

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge is something inevitable in learning process. It must be obtained as a learning outcome. One of sources of getting knowledge is from texts; furthermore we have to read the passage to pursue the information for the reason that reading is one of language skills that take an important role in grasping the information or knowledge in written texts. It is not only a passive process but also an active process that requires a cognitive way, and it needs a close attention to have

some understanding to what people are writing. Reading is a basic instrument in the learning process. (JALA, 2020). When students are reading, they intend to get some information, explanation or details, so they require more effort in paying attention to the words and sentences meaning. They use skills and strategies in order to identify the meaning of the texts. Since reading is an interactive process, it consists of complex and various elements that occur between readers and the texts to bring out the comprehension. Reading

comprehension involves much more than readers' responses to text, since the text presents letters, words, sentences and paragraphs that encode meaning. In other words it can be said that understand the texts means understand the words since knowing the words' meaning is very helpful in reading comprehension (Perfetti & Stafura, 2014).

Teaching reading in university level is a quite exacting activity due to the fact that mostly the materials have a bigger scope than high school level. This situation often made some students frustrated in elucidating the meaning or senses through the texts. Moreover, it happens to the students of English as a foreign language since they have to understand the vocabularies, and try to get the gist of the text as well.

Actually, many schools that carry out some reading strategies to develop the students' reading skills by reducing the reading problems (JALA, 2020). However in fact, based on a research there are many students often find the difficulties in reading comprehension. These problems are divided into external and internal factors. The latter includes problem to understand long sentence or text, lacking of background knowledge, problem in using the appropriate reading strategies and the problem in concentration.

These factors yield the students' inadequate performance in reading test. (Abbas, 2021).

More factors that arise in reading comprehension activity are for example the lack of interest into the topic, the lack of willingness to read, and the lack of vocabulary from the EFL learners. Those become the most common difficulties met by students in reading comprehension.

A research was conducted by (Satriani, 2018) revealed that having no motivation in reading habit, read only a little, or unwillingly to read anything are considered as problems that students faced in reading process. Some students need much time to read a long reading text. It is hard for them to memorize the information they have just read. In addition, unfamiliar topic in reading texts contribute this such difficulty, and the complexity of the grammar also affect their reading comprehension to the passage. Meanwhile (Kheirzadeh & Tavakoli, 2012) reported the causes of reading comprehension problems are the students were hard to find the meaning of some idioms in a text. An idiom is a common expression in a phrase that cannot be interpreted by defining each word, for it is different to the literal meaning of the words; as a consequence, many of students failed to understand the idioms into correct meaning.

The reading skills place an important stage in getting the knowledge or information; consequently, the students must improve this skill as the first input to support their studies. The better their reading comprehension skills, the better learning achievement they will get.

In order to have a good reading comprehension skill, a student can apply an appropriate reading strategy; in brief, it means they have to know some reading strategies.

Regarding the reading problems, there are some previous studies have been conducted in finding the solution by looking up some reading strategies. Those strategies that readers often use namely: scanning is reading technique in getting particular information from the passage, by looking at the title, tables, graphs, etc. Next, skimming is a reading technique to read quickly in getting the general subject of the passage without reading the entire text. Other strategy is predicting the meaning by using reader's knowledge; inferencing is also a common strategy by reading line by line in order to get conclusion. The last strategy is summarization the passage by reviewing or paraphrasing (Dara, 2019). Furthermore, (Alsamadani, 2012) revealed the teachers believe that cognitive reading strategies are essential to be applied in reading classes.

Another previous research has been administered that are related to the reading difficulties and also the strategies. Hamza Al- Jarrah and Nur Salina conducted a research to the Arab EFL learners. This study revealed that students faced some reading difficulties and those can affect their English proficiency and academic performance. To overcome these difficulties, the instruction policymakers, English teachers, public and private academic institutions together in charge of educational policy learning and implementation for the EFL learners. (Al-Jarrah & Ismail, 2018).

In addition, a research found that the using of reading strategy can increase the reading achievement for the EFL students. This reading strategy that used in in this study (Par, 2020) is the problem-solving strategy. The increasingly of students practice the problem –solving strategy in reading activities will raise their achievement in reading comprehension (Par, 2020).

Considering how important that reading skills in learning process, and how reading difficulties often occur to the EFL students, this research's objective is to analyze what kind of reading problems in students' reading comprehension, and how they use the reading strategies to help them

in understanding the passage. Hopefully by knowing the kinds of reading difficulties, students and teachers can work hand in hand to improve the students reading comprehension skills, and to do the reading strategies as well.

METHOD

In this study, descriptive qualitative method was used to describe the phenomenon and characteristic which concentrates to the event that has occurred. (Nassaji, 2015). This research is intended to describe systematically and accurately about students' difficulties in reading comprehension.

According to the research objective, the purposive sampling is used to get the participants as the sample. The participants were the first year students of Basic Reading class in English Education Program of Indraprasta University. There were 98 students who engaged in this study.

The observation of two classes of Basic Reading was done to identify the students' reading problems as the first procedure. The next step, reviewed the literatures as references to choose the appropriate theories about reading problems and reading strategies. After that, specified the students' reading problems to organize the appropriate instrument in collecting the

data. As the descriptive qualitative method, the research instrument was in the form of questionnaire adopted from Ricahrd's work which relates to the students' difficulties in reading comprehension. It is divided into two major-point: troubles that students often face, and the strategies used in reading activity. There were 8 close-ended questions about some difficulties in reading activity, namely: difficulties in reading comprehension subject, understanding vocabulary, pronouncing the words, determining the topic from different culture, getting main idea between paragraphs, relating topic to the background knowledge, distinguishing main idea and details, inferring the text; it also has 3 close-ended questions about reading strategies (Richards, 2001). They are getting the meaning by guessing, using dictionary and contex clues and using skimming or scanning in getting the gist of the passage.

This questionairre aimed to identify student's attitudes toward reading problems that will be analyzed. There were four options about adverbs of indefinite frequency: often, sometimes, seldom and never. The participant choosed only one of them based on the students' experience and attitude towards the statements related to reading difficulties and reading strategies.

The students' responses were presented in the form of percentage.

The data was analyzed qualitatively by describing the percentage of students' responses about how often they faced the reading problems, and what reading strategies they used in reading comprehension. By analyzing the data, it can be identified what are the students' common difficulties in reading comprehension.

DISCUSSION

Results

Based on the questionnaires were given to the students, the results are shown in the table below.

Table 1. Percentage of Students' Reading Difficulties

No	Difficulties	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
1	Reading comprehension subject	11.2	66.3	22.4	0
2	Understanding vocabulary	17.3	57.1	22.4	3.1
3	Pronouncing the words	7.1	50.0	37.8	5.1
4	Determining the topic of the text from different culture	19.4	53.1	25.5	2.0
5	Getting the main idea between paragraphs	26.9	50.0	18.4	2.0
6	Relating topic and the background knowledge	17.3	59.2	21.4	2.0
7	Distinguishing main idea and supporting details	29.6	44.9	22.4	3.1
8	Inferring the text	18.4	45.9	30.9	5.1

According to the table 1, the number of students that often face difficulty

in reading comprehension subject is 11.2%, meanwhile there are 22.4% of students who seldom encountered the difficulty in reading comprehension. Furthermore, there is 0% of the students who never faced problems in reading comprehension subject, but at the same time 66.3% of students encountered this problem sometimes.

On problem number 2, there are 17.3% of students who often had difficulty in understanding vocabulary when they were reading the text. On the other hand, there are 3.1% of students who never had such difficulty.

Based on the difficulty of number 3, there are 7.1% who often found hard to pronounce the words when they were reading the text. Meanwhile there are 5.1% of students who never met such difficulty.

Furthermore, on data number 4, it shows the data about difficulty that encountered by the students if the topic of the texts are from different culture. There are 2% of students who never faced it, meanwhile 19.4% of students who often got this problem. Most of them with 53.1% sometimes find the problem in reading comprehension if the topics are from other cultures, and there are 25.5% of students seldom faced such problem.

In getting main idea between paragraphs, there are 26.9% of students who

often found such problem. On the contrary, there are 2% who never faced this problem. Most of them or 50% of students sometimes had the problem in getting main idea between paragraphs.

Next, the difficulty number 6 shows that 17.3% students often got the problem in relating the topic with their background knowledge. Most of them or 59.2% of students sometimes faced this problem. While there are 21.4 % of students seldom had this problem, and there were 2% of them who never encountered this kind of problem.

At the same time, on number 7 illustrates the total of students who had problem in distinguishing between main ideas and supporting details. There are 29.6% often had problem to distinguish between main ideas and supporting details. In the mean time, there are 22.2% of the students who seldom found this problem.

The last data or the data number 8 illustrates the percentage of the students who dealt with the problem in inferring the text. There are 18.4% who often met this problem, and 30.9% of students seldom finding the problem to infer the text. Moreover, there are 5.1% who never experienced this kind of problem.

In addition, there is other findings regard to reading strategies that students

used to help them in grasping the information from the text. In reading comprehension, the readers did some strategies in getting the meaning, or inferring the information from the text. The result is shown as the following table 2.

Table 2. Percentage of Students' Reading Strategies

No	Strategies	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
1	Getting the meaning by guessing	53.3	38.8	8.2	0
2	Using dictionary and context clues	43.9	40.8	13.3	2.0
3	Using skimming and scanning	43.9	39.8	12.2	4.1

The first data on the table explains the number of students who used the strategy by guessing or predicting the meaning in reading comprehension. By looking the number with 0% of the students who never predicted the meaning, which means that all the students got the meaning by predicting. Most with 53.3% were often trying to predict the meaning in understanding the reading text; 38.8% of students did it sometimes; the rest are 8.2% of students who seldom found the meaning by predicting the words or sentences.

Next on the second data describes the number of students who often used dictionary and context clues in reading comprehension are 43.9% of them, on the contrary there are 2.0% of students who never used dictionary and context clue in reading comprehension. Moreover, there are

13.3% students who seldom applied this strategy.

As illustrated in data number 3, there are 43.9% students who often used skimming and scanning in understanding the text. The number of students who never practiced this strategy is 4.1%; meanwhile, there are 12.2% of students seldom used such strategy.

Discussion

According to the data analysis, there are 8 kinds of reading difficulties and 3 strategies in reading comprehension that have been identified. Considering that reading comprehension involves cognitive aspects, it needs brain activity to convert the words or sentence into the precise meaning as the writer's intention. Reading comprehension leads the important part in acquiring the knowledge, but unfortunately there are still many students often face some problems in comprehending the passage especially in English texts.

Based on the result, it shows 0% of the students which means, all of them ever experienced the problem in reading comprehension subject even in the different level of frequency. The number 66.3% illustrates the students who sometimes faced this problem, and 11% who often encountered such problem. This result is quite similar with other previous study that

70% of the students sometimes faced this problem, and 10% of students who often got this problem (Riadil, 2020). Students must use their memory, reasoning, and frame work in reading comprehension (Perfetti & Stafura, 2014).

Next problem is the difficulty in understanding vocabulary. There are 3% of the students who never found this difficulty; meanwhile there are 17% who often got it. Understanding vocabulary is important to get the precise meaning of the sentence in the text; students with lack vocabulary will face reading difficulty since they quite wrongly pronounced the words (Satriani, 2018). In line with this result, (Thao & Tham, 2018) suggested that teachers should give the variation of pre-reading activity, so the students can get more familiar to the words.

One of the reading purposes is to understand the topic of the passage that makes identifying the topic is necessary. It can help the readers to get the gist and the intention of the text. But in fact, there are some students who found the difficulty to get the topic if the passage brought other different culture with theirs. The result shows the number is around 19.4% who often met such difficulty. The reading text with different cultures will create problems

for the students in defining the meaning or the writers' intention. The students as readers must have the previous information about the topic. This is what makes relating the topic with the background knowledge also became the reading problem for the students. Lack of background knowledge might obstruct the reading comprehension since this background knowledge as a prior thing that helps reader to connect the words in the text with their experience. As (Hall et al., 2020) suggest in his research finding that English Language student should use their background knowledge in identifying the words or phrases in the text. The background knowledge can affect their reading comprehension since they have insufficient prior knowledge (Al-Jarrah & Ismail, 2018).

Another reading problem is the difficulties in getting main idea between paragraphs. It was hard for the students to find the suitable main idea that convey the content of the text. This is interrelated with their difficulty in distinguishing the main idea and supporting details, as a consequence they hardly infer the text correctly, and it is proven by the data with 45.9% of the students sometimes encountered this problem. The low level of readability, the longer sentence structures, and their deficiency in reading strategy

become the barriers in identifying main ideas and details (Ekorini, 2020).

Seeing those reading problems, some reading strategies are should be identified since the reading strategy is one of the ways to assist reader in understanding the passages. The problems in reading comprehension difficulties can be reduced or even be overcome if the readers have appropriate reading strategy. Based on the results, there are three reading strategies that students used in reading comprehension. Those are predicting the meaning, using dictionary and context clue, and using skimming and scanning technique. All of the students were trying to understand the texts by predicting the words meaning. In line with research was conducted by (Lenchuk, 2020), she stated that students can use prediction strategy to start up their background knowledge on the topic, in additional it makes students more awareness to the title, subtitles in the text.

Other strategies are using dictionary and context clues in understanding the text. According to the result, most of students often used dictionary in getting the meaning of the passage. Of course we need dictionary to get the precise meaning based on the context of the reading. It is important for the

readers to know the vocabularies and used them in the right context (Satriani, 2018).

The last strategies that students used is skimming and scanning technique. It has the same number to the result of using dictionary in reading strategy. Scanning can be applied when the reader wants to get the specific information from the text. The reader does not have to read all the paragraphs of the texts, but the reader only reads the importance once by focusing the reading to the importance information using who, what, whose, when, where, and how. Moreover, when the reader wants to answer the question about general ideas, he or she can read the title, or the underlined words to guess what are the topic and the main idea of the passages. This strategy can greatly increase students' skills in understanding the reading text (Banditvilai, 2020).

Realizing the problems that encountered by the students in reading comprehension, the lecturers or the teachers must be aware and try to overcome the problems by finding some ways such as reading strategy. There are some reading strategies can be applied; namely are skimming and scanning the text, guessing the meaning by using context clues, or using the dictionary to find the words meaning. By applying the reading strategies based on the

reading problems, thus the students' reading comprehension can be achieved. Knowing the importance of reading comprehension to the academic accomplishment, some ways must be attempted to avoid the reading problems (Kendeou et al., 2011).

CONCLUSION

Elicited from the result and discussion, the most reading difficulty faced by the students are distinguishing between main ideas and supporting details, getting main idea between paragraphs, the topic of the texts from other culture, relating topic and background knowledge, understanding vocabulary and inferring the text. Furthermore, there are 3 reading strategies which students often used namely predicting the words' meaning, using dictionary and context clues, and using skimming and scanning to get the information from the texts. Teaching Reading comprehension is a challenging stuff, since reading material has unlimited topics, and the readers must convey what the writers' intention. After knowing some problems in reading comprehension, both lecturer and students should find the solution to solve them. Teachers or lectures must pay attention to the reading problems their students' have. The policymakers and teachers should meet the most effective reading strategies to solve these problems (Qrquez & Rashid, 2017).

Some reading strategies can help the students in understanding the texts. By having good strategies, students can reduce their reading problems, so they can improve the reading comprehension skills. This research only discussed some small parts of reading comprehension difficulties and some reading strategies which means there are still many factors that cause the reading comprehension problems. For the next studies, future research can explore more factors in reading problems, and also discover more reading strategies.

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