

Students' Difficulties in Reading Comprehension at the Ninth Grade MTs Negeri 1 Manado

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Abstract

This research aims to identify the difficulties faced by students in reading and the causes of these difficulties. The researcher employed a mixed-methods research (MMR) approach, utilizing four research instruments: observation, interviews, tests, and documentation. The sample for this research consisted of 30 students from class 9-C and two English teachers from class 9 of MTs Negeri 1 Manado. There were three data collection procedures. The first procedure involved the researcher observing class 9-C. The second procedure included the administration of a multiple-choice test with 10 questions to the students of class 9-C. The third procedure involved conducting interviews with 30 students and 2 English teachers regarding the causes of students' difficulties in reading. Based on the research findings, the researcher identified four difficulties that students face in understanding reading: limited vocabulary with a percentage of 68.33%, drawing conclusions 60%, details comprehension 54.16%, and grasping the main idea 50%. There were two factors causing students' difficulties: internal factors and external factors. Internal factors included students not reading enough, texts in English, limited vocabulary, and student laziness. External factors included a lack of English books and students not bringing dictionaries.

Keywords: Student difficulties, Reading comprehension, Internal and External Factor

Introduction

Reading is an important skill for English learners' worldwide, (Nurviyani, V., Suherdi, D., & Lukmana, 2020). It is also beneficial for English language learning, (Yu, 2015). The more students read, the better their knowledge becomes. Reading has a positive effect on improving students' vocabulary, grammar, spelling, and writing. In addition, according to (Sumadoyo, 2011), reading comprehension is a

complex intellectual process that includes two major capabilities: the meaning of words and the ability to think about verbal concepts.

Reading comprehension is not an easy process as it requires the coordination of both the eyes and the brain to effectively, efficiently, and correctly process information or messages. Many students encounter difficulties in reading for various reasons. Consequently, teachers must provide well-prepared materials and employ effective teaching strategies to address these challenges and help students overcome difficulties in reading. Another challenging is from the students who faced difficulties in reading comprehension. According to Kuswidyastutik, as mentioned in (Thabrani, 2019), students who encounter difficulty in comprehending reading texts often struggle to provide accurate answers to associated questions. The students usually find difficulties in four aspects; understanding vocabulary, determining idea, making inference, and finding detail information.

Furthermore, according to Anderson, as discussed in (Thabrani, 2019), several factors contribute to students' difficulties in reading comprehension. These factors include: a) Language Knowledge, b) Learners' Background Knowledge, and c) Students' Motivation. Meanwhile, according to Richards, as outlined in his work, there are two types of causes for students' difficulties: a) Interlingual Difficulty, and b) Intralingual Difficulty.

Studies on students' difficulties in reading comprehension have been conducted and revealed interesting results. The first study, conducted by (Daryanti, 2017) which analyzed the difficulties faced by eighth-grade students in the first semester when identifying moral values in comprehension. The method employed was descriptive qualitative research, utilizing sample selection and data collection through tests and questionnaires. The second study, titled 'An Analysis of Difficulties in Comprehending English Reading Text at the Eleventh Grade Students of MA LAB UIN-SU Medan,' was conducted by (Larasati, 2019) as a language and education thesis in 2019. This research aimed to identify the difficulties encountered by eleventh-grade students and utilized qualitative methods for investigation.

The third study, conducted by (Baru, 2020) which entitled 'An Analysis of Students' Difficulties in Reading Comprehension at MTS Darel Hikmah Pekanbaru.' As part of the English education study program at UIN Suska Riau, the research aims to identify reading difficulties faced by grade 9 students, utilizing quantitative research with questionnaires as the primary data collection technique. The fourth study, by (Hidayati, 2018) focusing on 1st-grade high school students, this research employs a descriptive quantitative method. Another study was by (Multazam, 2021) that analyzes the challenges faced by grade 9-C students at Junior High School

Waru in understanding reading, particularly comprehension. Using descriptive qualitative research, the data collection technique involved interviewing 15 students from grade 9.

English learning in Indonesian schools remains low, with many students facing difficulties in reading and understanding texts. This is evident from the survey conducted by the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and released by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development in 2019. Based on preliminary research, the researcher conducted an interview with an English teacher at MTs Negeri 1 Manado in January 2022. The teacher reported that students still face difficulties in understanding reading materials. Additionally, the teacher mentioned that during daily tests, students often provide incorrect answers to questions related to reading texts. Despite these challenges, the 9-C grade students at MTs Negeri 1 Manado derive many advantages from reading comprehension. Therefore, the researcher is interested in investigating the difficulties faced by students.

Methodology

In this research, the researcher employed a mixed-methods research (MMR) approach. According to Sugiyono (in Azhari et al., 2023), MMR is a research approach that combines or connects quantitative and qualitative methods. This approach involves obtaining numerical data to assess the extent of students' difficulties in reading comprehension. Subsequently, the researcher provides a descriptive analysis of the nature of these difficulties and explores the underlying causes of students' challenges in reading comprehension.

The researcher conducted this research at MTS Negeri 1 Manado, located in Manado on Bailang, at Bailang Raya No. 293. The research took place in March 2022. The population of the study comprised the ninth-grade students of MTs Negeri 1 Manado, totaling 240 students. Due to the large population, the researcher opted for a sample from the overall student body. The focus of this research was on the 9-C grade students of MTs Negeri 1 Manado, involving 30 students and two English teachers as participants.

Three instruments were utilized in this research: tests, observation, and interviews. The researcher provided comments or marks on the observation sheet based on the observed state of the ninth grade. A reading test was administered to assess whether students could effectively answer the test questions. To collect data, the researcher adopted a text from the English book "Magic Candle." The test consisted of 10 multiple-choice questions, covering four aspects of reading

comprehension: determining the main idea, making inferences, finding detailed information, and understanding vocabulary.

The researcher conducted interviews with the 9-C students and two English teachers to explore the students' difficulties in reading comprehension and the causes behind these challenges. A structured interview approach was employed, with the researcher preparing eight questions for the interview, addressing students' difficulties and the causes of these difficulties in reading comprehension.

According to (Miles and Huberman, 1992), three simultaneous process activities occur: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. There are two analysis data of this study following the below formula:

$$M = \frac{\sum X}{N}$$

- M = Mean Score
- $\sum x$ = Accumulative Score
- N = Number of Respondents

$$P = \frac{F}{N} \times 100 \%$$

- P = Percentage
- F = Frequency of the wrong answer
- N = Number of samples

Table 1. Categories and Percentages of Students' Incorrect Answer

No	Percentages of students incorrect answer	Categorized
1	76-100%	Highest
2	56-75%	High
3	40-55%	Medium
4	0-39%	Low

The table showed, if the students' incorrect answer is about 76 – 100%, it is categorized that their difficulties in reading Comprehension is Highest and if the students' incorrect answer is about 56 – 75%, it is categorized that their difficulties in reading Comprehension is High. Then, if the students' incorrect answer is about 40 - 55%, it is categorized that their difficulties in reading Comprehension is Medium. And the last, if the students' incorrect answer is about 0 – 39%, it is categorized that their difficulties in reading Comprehension is Low.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Based on the research conducted at the ninth-grade MTs Negeri 1 Manado from March 15th, 2022, to March 30th, 2022, the researcher discovered the students' difficulties in reading comprehension through observation, tests, and interviews.

Observation of Reading Activity in the Classroom

The researcher observed the 9-C class, where learning activities were examined. During the observation of the learning activities in grade 9-C, the teacher shared a text story, explaining it in English and translating it into Indonesian. It was evident that several students paid attention to the learning material explained by the teacher, such as grasping the main idea of the text in the first paragraph, understanding vocabulary, obtaining detailed information in the second paragraph, and making inferences in the last paragraph. Consequently, these students were able to comprehend the material. In instances where students did not understand the material, they promptly asked the teacher for clarification. However, some students struggled to understand the material due to a lack of attention and hesitation to ask the teacher for help. As a result, they faced confusion regarding the main idea, detailed information, inferences, and vocabulary. Despite not having a physical dictionary book, all students utilized smartphones to search for meanings. The classroom conditions were conducive to learning, characterized by a positive relationship between students and teachers. Group work was evident in the class, with students asking each other for assistance and the teacher providing instruction.

Administering Reading Test to the Students

Reading test was given to the students to analyze their proficiency in making inference, understanding vocabulary, finding out detail information, and determining main idea. The students answered the multiple-choice test given by the researcher. The mean score is 41.66. The median score is 40, and the mode score is 40. The student who achieved the highest score is student number 30 with a score of 80, and the lowest score belongs to student number 1 with a score of 10.

Moreover, table 2 showed that students faced four categorized difficulties. These include understanding vocabulary, making inferences, identifying detail information, and determining the main idea. The first difficulty category is vocabulary, with a percentage result of 68.33%. This indicates that students still lack

vocabulary. The second difficulty category is making inferences, with a percentage result of 60%. Students seem to be confused when making inferences. The third difficulty category is detail information, with a percentage result of 54.16%. The last difficulty category is the main idea, with a percentage result of 50%. Students struggle with determining the main idea and extracting detail information, possibly due to inadequate reading skills.

Table 2. Students' Reading Difficulties

No	Criteria difficulties	Percentage
1	Vocabulary	68.33%
2	Making inference	60%
3	Detail Information	54.16%
4	Main Idea	50%

Interview with the Teacher and Students

The researcher conducted interviews with two English teachers at MTs Negeri 1 Manado and 30 ninth-grade students. The researcher prepared ten questions for the English teachers and eight questions for the students. The data collection process took place in March 2022.

The researcher conducted interviews with 30 students to identify their difficulties in reading comprehension and the causes of these difficulties. Eight questions were given to all the students in the 9-C class. Based on the results of the interviews with 30 students, the researcher found that students face difficulties in reading comprehension related to vocabulary, understanding detail information, grasping the main idea, and encountering comprehension issues. The common response among the interviewed students was a limited vocabulary.

The researcher posed the same set of questions to all the interviewed students. The first question related to the title was, 'In your opinion, what is a text that contains folk tales or children's stories called?' Twenty-five students answered 'comprehension,' while five others responded with 'do not know' because they were unfamiliar with the term. For the second question, the researcher asked, 'Do you often read?' Eighteen students answered 'no' because they do not enjoy reading, while six students answered 'yes' because they like reading, especially comprehension. Another six students answered 'sometimes.'

Furthermore, the third question was 'When do you read?' Twenty-eight students answered that they read comprehension when making assignments from the teacher. Two other students answered that they read comprehension during their free time. For the fourth question, 'What do you do with reading comprehension?' Twelve students answered that they read, another twelve said

they answer the test, and six students said they do not know. The fifth question was 'Have you faced difficulties in reading comprehension?' Fifteen students answered 'yes' because they feel difficulties with comprehension. Three students said 'no,' and twelve students answered 'sometimes,' depending on the test given to the students.

The sixth question was 'What are the difficulties in reading comprehension?' Fourteen students answered that they still have difficulties with vocabulary, one student mentioned difficulties in determining the main idea, one student pointed out difficulties in finding detailed information, and fourteen students said they do not understand because they have limited vocabulary. The seventh question was 'What are the causes of difficulties in reading comprehension?' Ten students answered that the causes of difficulties are students' laziness, eighteen students answered that they do not know the causes, and two students mentioned English text. For the eighth question, 'How do you overcome difficulties in reading comprehension?' Fourteen students answered that they do not know how to overcome reading comprehension difficulties. Eleven students mentioned using Google to overcome difficulties, three students said intensive reading could help, and two other students suggested asking the teacher or friends for help in overcoming their difficulties.

Discussion

The students' Difficulties in Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is a complex process that involves understanding a text with the goal of extracting information clearly. While everyone can read texts correctly, not everyone comprehends the information within the text clearly. Therefore, students still face difficulties in reading, whether the text is in their native language or the target language (English). The difficulties students encounter in understanding reading texts include obtaining detailed information, understanding vocabulary, determining the main idea, and making inferences.

The researcher focused on identifying students' difficulties in reading comprehension and conducted observations, tests, and interviews with 9-C grade students and two English teachers. Based on the observations, some students demonstrated an ability to understand reading texts, as evident in their interactions with teachers during the learning process. These students could easily respond to questions posed by the teacher. However, other students experienced difficulties in understanding reading because they did not actively participate in the learning process in the classroom. They remained relatively silent when the teacher asked

questions, possibly due to limited vocabulary, feelings of anxiety, and other reasons.

The Causes of Students' Difficulties in Reading Comprehension

Every problem has causes, and difficulties are no exception. If someone faces difficulties in something, it implies that there are underlying reasons for it. Based on findings, students encounter difficulties in reading comprehension. Therefore, the researcher sought to identify the causes of these difficulties, which can serve as reasons for teachers to find better solutions.

The researcher discovered that there are two factors contributing to students' difficulties in reading comprehension: internal factors and external factors. Internal factors are difficulties that originate within the students themselves, while external factors stem from their environment, including school environments and family backgrounds. According to research conducted by Rahim in (Kurniawan, 2020), there are two factors causing students' difficulties in reading comprehension: internal factors such as physics, intellectual capacity, and psychological aspects, and external factors such as language knowledge, students' motivation, and learners' background. Learners' background, as proposed by Richards, includes the influence of students' first language, making it challenging for them to understand a second language, which, in turn, contributes to difficulties in reading comprehension.

Difficulties caused by internal factors include students' laziness and limited vocabulary. Students' laziness can impact their intellectual abilities, including language knowledge and motivation, affecting their learning outcomes. Limited vocabulary is the second cause of students' difficulties in reading comprehension, particularly for Indonesian students who find it challenging to understand English text due to their limited vocabulary.

External factors are difficulties stemming from outside influences on students. Rahim in (Kurniawan, 2020) elucidated that external factors arise from external sources, such as the school environment. The researcher identified some external factors that students in 9-C grade at MTs Negeri 1 Manado face in comprehending English text, including limited availability of English books and the absence of dictionaries. The lack of English books and dictionaries hinders students' exposure to English words, making it difficult for them to understand the language. To address this, schools should provide English books for students to encourage frequent reading, fostering familiarity with English words. Additionally, students should have access to dictionaries to ensure accurate understanding of word

meanings. The absence of these resources contributes to students' difficulties in reading comprehension stemming from the school environment."

Conclusion

The research concludes with the following key findings: (1) Four primary difficulties were identified among students in reading comprehension: understanding vocabulary, determining the main idea, extracting detailed information, and making inferences; (2) The causes of students' difficulties in reading comprehension can be attributed to two main factors. Internally, factors include students' laziness, challenges with English text, and limited vocabulary. Externally, limitations in English book availability and the absence of dictionaries contribute to the challenges faced by students in comprehending texts. Addressing both internal and external factors is essential to enhance students' reading comprehension skills. Hence, This research offered suggestions for the teacher and the further researchers: (1) For English Teachers Teaching Reading: This research provides valuable insights for English teachers involved in teaching reading. It is recommended that teachers explore and adopt effective teaching strategies identified in this research to enhance students' vocabulary acquisition. Implementing these strategies can contribute significantly to improving students' reading comprehension skills. (2) For Other Researchers: This research presents an opportunity for future investigations into students' reading interests and strategies to enhance their abilities. It is recommended that researchers delve deeper into this area, building on the findings of this study, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of factors influencing students' reading habits. Further research in this domain can contribute to the development of targeted interventions aimed at improving overall student proficiency in reading.

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