Students' Difficulties in Reading Comprehension at the Eighth Grade of Islamic Junior High School

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Abstract

The objectives of this research are to investigate the difficulties faced by the students' and the factors of causing the students' difficulties in reading comprehension at the eighth grade of MTs Ash-Salihin. This research used mixed methods; research data analysis used quantitative and qualitative methods. The research subjects were thirty-two students. To collect information for this research, researcher used questionnaire and conducted interview. The findings show that students experience difficulties in reading comprehension, including determining main idea, making inference, detail information, and understanding vocabulary. Besides, the factors of causing the students difficulties in reading comprehension are students' background knowledge, teacher's technique, and students' environment. The implications of this research are the teacher need to pay attention to the challenges that students face when they read materials written in English. Teacher can use acceptable, appropriate, and easily understandable teaching strategies for students if they are aware of the many challenges and the variables contributing to them.
Keywords: *Students' difficulties; reading comprehension; factors; Islamic junior high school*

INTRODUCTION

Reading serves as a foundational skill and is closely linked to writing, listening, and speaking. Among the four fundamental skills essential in mastering English, it holds particular significance for student success in academic settings. At its core, reading entails comprehension, allowing students to extract and understand the information displayed in written text. This process opens doors to a vast storehouse of knowledge, enriching their insights and perspectives. Therefore, prioritizing the development of strong reading skills becomes crucial for navigating the challenges and complexities of academic life. Without strong reading skills, students may struggle to comprehend textbooks, research articles, and other academic materials. Furthermore, reading proficiency also enhances critical thinking abilities, empowering students to successfully analyze, assess, and comprehend information. This basic skill is not only practical for academic success but also for the lifelong pursuit of knowledge. Ultimately, prioritizing the development of strong

reading skills equips students with the necessary tools to excel in their academic journeys and beyond.

Reading is not only a vocal exercise, but also a process of internalizing the meaning of the text to improve comprehension. By reading with expression, students can develop their understanding by extracting key information and gain insights that lead them towards a deeper analysis of the text. Teachers can further enhance this process by guiding the students and facilitating their interpretation through discussion and critical thinking prompts. It is based on Malinda et al., (2022) that the students who comprehend what they are reading are better able to go beyond the page's content. They point out that students who possess a deep comprehension of the text they are reading are more likely to engage in critical thinking and analysis. Understanding the underlying concepts and themes enables these students to delve deeper into the subject matter, making connections and drawing conclusions beyond the surface-level information provided. In turn, this heightened level of comprehension fosters a more enriched learning experience, where students can actively apply their knowledge and expand their understanding beyond what is explicitly written on the page.

Al-Qahtani (2020) adds that Reading and comprehension are inseparable. As readers actively interact with a text, they extract meaning from it. This makes comprehension the primary goal of any reading activity. In essence, reading comprehension means understanding the explicit and implicit information in a text. Through active engagement with a text, the reader constructs meaning, making comprehension the key aim of any reading activity. Therefore, Reading comprehension involves understanding the content of a reading, both explicitly stated and implied, through knowledge and reasoning, to grasp the intended meaning.

Shihab (2003) argues that the command to read is intended to foster a love of learning, encourage critical thinking, and promote engagement with the world around us. This includes delving into both written and non-written sources, from books and articles to the natural environment itself. Unfortunately, many students still struggle to understand reading texts, hindering their ability to fully benefit from these valuable resources. Supiah (2021) identifies several main problems faced by students: limited vocabulary knowledge, complex sentence structures, and inappropriate reading strategies. These issues can lead to students struggling to understanding the content of the text correctly.

In this case, to overcome this problems Nuttal (2005) classifies four aspects of reading comprehension in order to face the students' problems they are; determining main idea, making inference, detail information, understanding vocabulary. Moreover, Westwood (2001) also classified there are several factors that cause students' difficulty in reading comprehension, namely; students' background knowledge, teachers' technique, and the students' environment.

A counterargument to conducting the study at MTs Ash-Shalihin would be that focusing solely on one school may not provide a comprehensive understanding of the reading process in English lessons, as there could be various factors contributing to the students' low results that are specific to this particular school. However, conducting research at MTs Ash-Shalihin can still be

valuable in understanding the effectiveness of certain teaching methods or interventions in improving reading comprehension. Additionally, by focusing on one school, the researcher can closely monitor and analyze the progress of the students over a specific period of time, providing more detailed insights into the factors that may be contributing to their low results. This research can then serve as a starting point for further investigations in other schools to gain more comprehensive understanding of reading process in English lessons.

Therefore, the researcher is interested in investigating the difficulties faced by eighth-grade students at MTs Ash-Shalihin in reading comprehension. This research aims to identify the specific challenges they encounter and the underlying factors contributing to these difficulties.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

This research used research designs that combine quantitative and qualitative methods or mixed methods explanatory designs used by the Researcher. Research using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods is known as mixed methods in one study. As stated by Creswell and Clark (2018), when researchers combining quantitative and qualitative research methods, approaches, concepts, or language into a single study are doing mixed mixed research (MM). The purposes of mixed methods research are to gather a broader range of data, providing a more comprehensive understanding of a research topic or question. The ability to harness the power of diverse methods, offer deeper insights into phenomena of interest that cannot be fully understood using only quantitative or qualitative methods, and address research questions requiring multi-perspective levels, cultural influences, and real-life contextual understanding are just a few of the many benefits of mixed research designs.

Research participants and Sampling Procedures

As stated by Sugiyono (2022), a population is a broad category generated up of items or subjects chosen for study based on specific criteria, including quantity and quality, from which conclusions are made.. Populations in this study are class eight students at MTs Ash-Shalihin. Based on information from English teachers, there are 32 grade eight students at MTs Ash-Shalihin. According to Sugiyono (2022), The sample is a portion of the population as a whole. However the researcher used a sampling technique, namely Total Sampling. Total Sampling is an overall sampling technique. Since there were less than 100 people in the population, Sugiyono (2013) stated that total sampling was necessary, and the entire population served as the research sample. So, subjects that used are the entire number of students from the population in this research. And the researcher only chooses 10 students purposively in the interview process to support quantitative data.

Data Collection

There are several data collection methods that used to acquire accurate, scientific data, depending on the study context and the objectives to be fulfilled. Choosing the right data

collection technique will depend on the characteristics of the research, availability of resources, and the research objectives to be achieved. A combination of several techniques can often provide more comprehensive and reliable results. Data collection methods that used in this study are:

1. Questionnaire

This questionnaire contains statements related to existing research indicators. And using a close ended questionnaire, meaning answers are available in the form of a checklist column. Questionnaires were distributed to respondents who were determined to answer honestly and independently. The Likert scale, according to Sugiyono (2013) was employed in order to gauge an individual's or a group's attitudes, beliefs, and understandings of social phenomena.

2. Interview Guidelines

In the interview, various questions were prepared which also represented the 3 indicators discussed in this research. However, it does not rule out the possibility that various other questions will arise during the research. Through interviews, data, information, and information frameworks from study subjects are examined by researcher. Free and guided interview are the method employed for conducting interview; this means that the questions posed to respondents are not restricted by the prepared interview guide, allowing them to be improved upon or adapted to the specific situations and situations encountered in the field. Interview was conducted directly with 8th grade students of MTs Ash-Shalihin to answer the second research question.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this study, the researcher conducted the research at MTs Ash-Shalihin. The research was conducted on Friday, April 19th 2024. There are 32 students, there are sixteen male and sixteen female students. The study findings allow the researcher to demonstrate that:

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Based on the data from the questionnaire results that have been displayed, the majority students chose to be neutral in answering the statement in the first indicator. Statements on the second indicator, many students answered agree to the statements provided. Meanwhile, in the statement for the third indicator, and many students chose the agree statement. Finally, in the fourth indicator, many students answered neutral to the statements made in this research.

The first students' difficulties are determining main idea. Based on the data the researcher described that most of students chose "neutral" in answering statements about determining main idea. This indicates that students do not show strong tendencies or clear opinions in terms of their capacity to recognize the main ideas in the text or material provided. Students may face challenges in finding and identifying the main ideas of the texts they read. As with determining the main idea

in a passage they have read, this can be due to the complexity of the material, the need for more in-depth analytical skills, or a lack of practice in those skills.

Table 1. Result of Students' Difficulties in Reading Comprehension

Indicators	Number	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Determining Main Idea	1	4 (12%)	8 (25%)	17 (53%)	3 (9%)	0 (0%)
	5	8 (25%)	7 (21%)	12 (37%)	4 (12%)	1 (3%)
	9	5 (15%)	8 (25%)	14 (43%)	5 (15%)	0 (0%)
	13	5 (15%)	10 (31%)	13 (40%)	3 (9%)	1 (3%)
	17	4 (12%)	11 (34%)	15 (46%)	2 6(%)	0 (0%)
Making Inference	2	4 (12%)	11 (34%)	7 (21%)	9 (28%)	1 (3%)
	6	6 (18%)	11 (34%)	13 (40%)	2 (6%)	0 (0%)
	10	9 (28%)	5 (15%)	8 (25%)	10 (31%)	0 (0%)
	14	6 (18%)	13 (40%)	8 (25%)	4 (12%)	1 (3%)
	18	9 (28%)	8 (25%)	6 (18%)	9 (28%)	0 (0%)
Detail Information	3	8 (25%)	7 (21%)	14 (43%)	3 (9%)	0 (0%)
	7	6 (18%)	11 (34%)	11 (34%)	3 (9%)	1 (3%)
	11	5 (15%)	10 (31%)	10 (31%)	6 (18%)	1 (3%)
	15	5 (15%)	14 (43%)	6 (18%)	6 (18%)	1 (3%)
	19	9 (28%)	5 (15%)	5 (15%)	11 (34%)	2 (6%)
Understanding vocabulary	4	5 (15%)	8 (25%)	7 (21%)	12 (37%)	0 (0%)
	8	4 (12%)	9 (28%)	12 (37%)	5 (15%)	2 (6%)
	12	6 (18%)	6 (18%)	10 (31%)	10 (31%)	0 (0%)
	16	7 (21%)	6 (18%)	9 (28%)	8 (25%)	2 (6%)
	20	8 (25%)	9 (28%)	7 (21%)	7 (21%)	1 (3%)

The second students' difficulties are making inference. Based on the data the researcher described that most of students chose "agree" in answering statements about making inference. This indicates that based on the data analyzed by the researcher, the majority students chose the "agree" option when answering statements related to making inferences. This means that most students show agreement with statements that test their ability to draw conclusions or make inferences from the information provided. These results indicate that students have a fairly low level of ability in making inferences based on the information provided. This shows that most of them are unable to make good and correct conclusions after reading English material because they dont understand a step in making conclusions and dont know the implying of the reading material given.

The third students' difficulties are detail information. The majority of students selected "agree" when responding to comments regarding detail information, according to the data the researcher presented. The response option "agree" suggests that students have a lower capacity for comprehending and identifying specific details found in the reading material. They are also unable to identify and respond appropriately to statements that require a deep understanding of a particular topic or content. Apart from that, students are unable to understand information in detail even though they are often trained by teacher at school.

The last students' difficulties are understanding vocabulary. In accordance to the data, the majority of students selected "neutral" when responding to questions about their understanding vocabulary. This shows that students do not show a strong tendency or clear opinion in terms of understanding the vocabulary tested in the statements that have been given. Most likely, most students do not feel confident or do not have strong opinions regarding vocabulary.

The most dominant student difficulty among the indicators discussed and faced by students in this research is making inferences and detailed information. Similar to previous research conducted by Kusuma (2022), the most dominant difficulty for students was making conclusions and finding the main idea. So, the results of this study are making inference and detail information. In this case students predominantly face obstacles when making inference and providing detail information.

The Factors of Causing the Students' Difficulties in Reading Comprehension at the Eighth Grade of MTs Ash-Shalihin

Based on the results of research from interview conducted with eighth class students at MTs Ash-Shalihin, the researcher discovered several factors that caused students to have difficulties in reading comprehension, including: students background knowledge, teacher technique, and students environment. From the interview number 15 above, there were 9 students who said that they were not supported by their classmates to learn English and the remaining 1 said that he had never been supported by his classmates. So in this statement, most students are not supported by classmates to studying English.

Students' background knowledge is the primary cause of students reading comprehension issues. Background knowledge is comprehension that students have of the content they have studied. Regarding the results of the interviews that were done, dominant students' are confused about reading English material because they do not know the content. Students also said there is a lot of vocabulary they do not know. So, students think that reading comprehension is difficult and they do not know the techniques for reading comprehension.

Teachers' methods are the second factor contributing to students reading comprehension problems. It is the role and responsibility of teachers, who are subjects in education, to impart knowledge to students and must have the best teaching techniques that are appropriate to students because they relate to comprehension of the course content by students. Several students stated in the interviews, teachers do not provide English reading texts that are less interesting for students. This makes students unable to understand what has been given, taught and conveyed by the teacher.

The environment in which students learn is the final aspect contributing to their issues with reading comprehension. School and home environment have a big influence on students to learning English. Regarding the interview, most students are not supported by their families and friends to learn to understand English reading texts. Apart from that, the hot and non-conducive classroom atmosphere also greatly affects students' focus when receiving material.

Based on the data, also the same with previous study by Kusuma (2022), the dominant factors that contribute to students' difficulty with reading comprehension are students' background knowledge and students' environment.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research result that has been analysed in the previous section, the researcher decided that the researcher concluded that in class eighth at MTs Ash-Shalihin there was determining main idea, making inference, detail information, and understanding vocabulary. These several aspects as difficulties that are often faced and experienced students when comprehend reading in English texts. Then, the most dominant difficulties is making inference and detail information. So, findings of this study are making inference and detail information.

Based on the data analysis findings, the researcher identified and examined three elements that contributed to the reading comprehension issues of the students at this school, including: The first thing to consider is the student's background knowledge, which is information that the student has personally acquired. This has to do with how students approach reading, including their motivation and level of interest, as well as their prior knowledge. Secondly teacher technique: educators are subjects with a duty, responsibility, and obligation to impart knowledge to their students. Teachers are required to be able to present material in a way that is easily understood or accepted by students, whether they are learning in a classroom setting or not. If the instructor does not employ effective teaching strategies, students will struggle to comprehend the assigned

content. Third, Student Environment: A person's reading skills will increase if they live in a community where people value reading. In the meanwhile, those who surround or live with someone who has poor reading habits also encourage it. The two main contexts that have a significant impact on students' reading habits are the home and the school. A student will develop poor reading habits if one of these settings does not encourage learning. So, the most dominant findings in this research are students' background knowledge and students' environment.

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