

EXPLORING THE DIFFICULTIES FACED BY EFL STUDENTS IN IDENTIFYING THE MAIN IDEA OF NARRATIVE TEXTS: A STUDY OF CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

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Abstract

This study investigated the challenges and strategies of EFL students in finding the main idea of narrative texts. It employed a qualitative research design with a case study approach, involving five students from the English Education department at the University of Islam Malang. Data was collected through interviews using a set of 10 semi-structured questions adapted from Qurniawan (2020) on reading comprehension. Interactive analysis was applied to the interview data. The findings of this study indicated that students' challenges in identifying the main idea of narrative text are a lack of vocabulary mastery, a lack of concentration, and difficulty in understanding of complex sentences. The findings also showed that the strategies used by students to identifying the main idea of narrative text are skimming and scanning. From the results of the interviews, the researcher found that the majority of students' challenges in identifying the main idea of narrative text were influenced by their weaknesses in mastering a wide range of vocabulary. It is hoped that this research can contribute to EFL students or teachers by providing insights into the specific challenges faced by EFL students in understanding and identifying the main idea of narrative texts. It can contribute to the development of more effective learning programs and suitable solutions. Future researchers are advised to consider similar research by adding the gender variables that make males and females have the same difficulties in identifying the main ideas of narrative texts.

Keywords: Students' challenges, students' strategies, main idea, narrative text

INTRODUCTION

For a long time, difficulties with understanding what is read have been a challenge within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Reading and comprehension are intricately connected since the primary aim of reading is to comprehend the content (Rachmanita, 2022). In English courses, the primary focus of reading is on comprehending the information and providing accurate answers to related questions (Asmara et al., 2022). Reading is considered the most important skill in promoting a literate society (Ashari et al., 2020).

By reading, people are able to open their minds to get much information, knowledge, and reading also provide entertainment, especially for the students who still need develop their experiences of learning many things. Afflerbach (2007) stated that the process of reading is dynamic and intricate, encompassing a range of skills, strategies, and prior knowledge. It means that, in order to get good objective and information easily, the students have to make some strategies. It is very important for foreign students to do this, because in reading English text students must have good vocabulary mastery to understand the information from the text. Bojovic (2010) explained that reading is rapid, which means that readers should maintain a flow of information by making appropriate connections and inferences. Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that in reading activity students should understand not only the explicit information that is stated clearly, but also the implicit information that is derived from the concluding information stated in the text.

To measure the students' comprehension of reading, there should be a test conducted by providing some questions. Mostly reading comprehension test is conducted by providing some questions considering the content of the text that the students are required to read. The common types of reading comprehension test are about identifying main idea, details, the tasks involve understanding the author's intent or suggesting an alternative title for the passage, identifying the passage's tone and style, understanding explicitly stated information (locating supporting details), responding to questions related to the author's viewpoint even if not explicitly expressed, recognizing the structural approach used to present the passage (e.g., sequencing, vocabulary usage, and pronoun reference), and drawing logical inferences to extend the limited information provided by the author (inference meaning) (Davenport, 2007). From this explanation, it can be seen that the importance of identifying the main idea cannot be underestimated in the process of reading comprehension. Comprehending main idea is important because understanding the main idea serves as the key to unlocking the text, making it easier for readers to comprehend and extract information from the entire text.

Key ideas in the text are expressed both explicitly and implicitly. Explicit means that the main idea is expressed directly and clearly. It can be placed at the first paragraph, in the middle of a paragraph, or at the end of a paragraph. In this state, it is usually easy to identify the main idea. Students are able to find the main idea easily because it can be clearly identified as the sentence which contains the core of the information in the paragraph. It will be little bit difficult when the students should compile the main idea by their own because the main idea is stated implicitly. This makes most of students confused when compiling their main idea based on the information they read from the text. To compile the main idea, students must read the entire text or paragraph to

understand what the text is actually about. When they read the full text, they encountered some difficulty before finally being able to highlight some key information. The problems faced by students when doing reading activities and finding the main idea can be caused by several problems such as: lack of vocabulary or boredom due to having to read the entire text without knowing the meaning of some terms used in the text, and many others problems that can occur when they reading the text. According to some researchers, the most of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students encounter challenges when it comes to comprehending English texts (Kasim and Raisha, 2017). EFL learners have various difficulties in understanding English text when the students have no idea with unfamiliar vocabularies and the concept of the text (Iklima et al., 2020).

In an earlier study, Risanda et al., (2022) concluded in their research that Students encountered three challenges when answering reading comprehension questions on report texts. These challenges included identifying pronouns, comprehending vocabulary, and making inferences. Among these difficulties, making inferences proved to be the most challenging aspect of answering reading comprehension questions. Then, the difficulties encountered by students in answering reading comprehension questions can be attributed to three causes, including insufficient comprehending of vocabulary, a lack of strategies, and a lack of interest or motivation. In addition, Fauzia (2019) concludes in her study that students encounter several challenging aspects in reading comprehension, which include determining the main idea, locating references, understanding vocabulary, making inferences, and detailing information.

From several previous studies, there are several aspects that need to be further investigated. The first one is exploring the students' factors of difficulties in identifying main idea especially in aspect of students' concentrations. The second one is in aspect of vocabulary mastery. The last one is an aspect in understanding of complex sentences. So, by considering those necessities this current research aims to reveal in-depth detail and gain new insight into the students' challenges and strategies in identifying the main idea of narrative text.

METHOD

In this study, the researcher used qualitative research design. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research refers to a research methodology that focuses on understanding and interpreting a group of individuals or communities in relation to social issues. In collecting data, the research was conducted at the University of Islam Malang. This research focused on investigating the students of the English education department in second semester that consist of 5 students (2 males and 3 females). They are students majoring in the English education who have taken literal reading

course, and all are aged 18-20 years. The reason that they were selected as subjects is because they have experience with the difficulty of identifying main ideas, and they are also willing to share their experiences with the researcher so that the problems they faced in identifying main ideas could be resolved.

This research used interview as the instrument for data collection using voice notes sent via WhatsApp to students. Conducting interview with students is one of the ways to obtain accurate research data. Interview Questions were adapted from (Qurniawan, 2020) regarding reading comprehension. There are 10 questions asked to students (see Appendix 1). Interview was used to find out what challenges students faced in identifying main ideas of narrative texts, what strategies were used by students when they had difficulty in identifying main ideas of narrative texts, etc. The researcher used semi-structure interview, where the researcher gives several questions flexibly or can add additional questions depending on the responses given by students. The process of collecting data was conducted approximately on April 2023.

For this research, the researcher used a reading comprehension interview as the data collection instrument. The interviews conducted by the researcher were semi-structured interviews to uncover the deepest information about the EFL students' challenges and strategies in identifying main idea of narrative texts. In this level, the researcher's mobile phone was used to record the interview data. The interview conducted less than 30 minutes each participants. Notes were also used as another tool for obtaining additional information during the interview. To make it easier for participants to understand the interview, the interview conducted alternately using the national language and English. The interviewer poses inquiries to each person in the sample and records their responses.

After that, the researcher used an interactive analysis model to analyze the qualitative data in this research. The model of an interactive analysis is proposed by Miles & Huberman (1994), the interactive analysis encompassed of three activities, as well as data reduction, data display, and drawing/verifying conclusions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The EFL Students' Challenges in Identifying Main Idea of Narrative Text

a. Lack of Vocabulary Mastery

A crucial component of reading comprehension is vocabulary. A wide range of vocabulary enables students to articulate their ideas more effectively. Insufficient vocabulary knowledge often leads to confusion among students when trying to identify the main idea of a narrative text.

Therefore, the students who have a rich vocabulary find it easier to comprehend reading texts, especially in narrative text.

“When looking for the main idea, I was confused by the content of the passage, because I did not know the meaning of the words in the text. Therefore, I have difficulty recognizing the meaning of vocabulary.” (Interview with OEE, April 11th, 2023)

“In comprehending narrative text, I got difficulties to get the meaning. So, I can not to find the main idea of the text because did not know the meaning of the word.” (Interview with LL, April 10th, 2023)

The student’s challenge in finding main idea of narrative text is caused by a lack of vocabulary mastery. Encountering unfamiliar words and being unable to comprehend their meanings caused confusion for them while reading the text. Consequently, they faced difficulties in extracting information and comprehending the overall content of the text so they have difficulty when looking for the main idea.

“I got the difficulties in comprehending narrative text, because I did not know the meaning of the words. Every text had new words; it made me difficulties to get the information to find the main idea.” (Interview with MBS, April 10th, 2023)

b. Lack of Concentration

Psychological factors can contribute to challenges in maintaining focus during reading. Poor concentration results in students not understanding the text. This situation can become more challenging when students take reading assessments. Difficulty in concentrating is another cause of students' low reading ability, because having good concentration is a vital factor in achieving proficient and effective reading skills.

The student’s challenge in identifying main idea of narrative text is caused by a lack of concentration. The importance of concentration while reading to understand the ideas and content as well as information from reading. Students have difficulty processing words properly. It keeps them from focusing on the text. They encounter challenges in comprehending the information and overall content of the text so they have difficulty in finding the main idea.

“It's hard to concentrate, sis, especially when the class is crowded because I cannot focus while reading.” (Interview with FAS, April 10th, 2023)

“Sometimes I cannot concentrate while reading, sis, because there are so many foreign words that make me worry about running out of time to understand what I am reading.” (Interview with RS, April 10th, 2023)

c. Difficulty in Understanding of complex sentences

In addition to words and phrases, sentences serve as fundamental units of meaning that need to be taken into account when enhancing reading speed and comprehension. Having a clear and accurate comprehension of sentences is crucial for developing other comprehension skills. A

common challenge that students encounter is difficulty in understanding lengthy sentences with complex structures.

"I think narrative text is very complex, sis. So that sometimes I have trouble because it takes accuracy to find the information in the reading. Besides that, I also have to be able to understand the meaning of the reading within a certain time". (Interview with MBS, April 10th, 2023)

"If the reading text is very complex, it is often makes me confused, sis, and even dizzy." (Interview with FAS, April 10th, 2023)

The EFL Students' Strategies in Identifying Main Idea of Narrative Text

a. Skimming

Skimming refers to finding the common topic or main idea of a reading text, and which best with nonfictional or factual material. Skimming is a reading technique that enables readers to scan for specific details or information beyond the main idea. Based on the outcomes of interview with students, the researcher found that most the students used the skimming strategy to identify the main idea in narrative text. They often use this strategy because it can help them find the overall main idea of a text.

"When looking for the main idea of a text, I use the skimming method to see an overview of the text, because this method can help me find the main idea sis." (Interview with OEE, April 11th, 2023)

"In finding main idea I do not read word by word sis. I read the overview of the reading topic." (Interview with LL, April 10th, 2023)

The students' strategy in finding the main idea of narrative text is by using skimming. Skimming is reading briefly without going into detail. Students use the skimming strategy because it helps them determine the main idea of the sentence in each paragraph.

"I use the Reading method briefly without looking for details first, sis. This method helps me when searching for main ideas." (Interview with RS, April 10th, 2023)

b. Scanning

Scanning is a fast reading tool. When scanning, the readers seek only a specific fact or element of information without reading everything. Scanning consists of verifying the organization, formulating specific questions, predicting cue words, determining probable locations of responses, using systematic models and confirming the response. Scanning is a reading technique to obtain specific information quickly and accurately from a book or reading. Based on the outcome of interviews with students, the researcher discovered that there are two students who used the scanning strategy to identify the main idea in narrative text. They often use this strategy because it can help them to find the information specifically from a text.

“Usually when looking for the main idea, I read the whole text first. And then search for the keyword, Sis.” (Interview with FAS, April 10th, 2023)

“Usually I read quickly then look for keywords to find out the general description or content of the text and understand it.” (Interview with MBS, April 10th, 2023)

Based on all of the findings above, that there are three challenges faced by students in identifying main idea of narrative text, namely a lack of vocabulary mastery, a lack of concentration, and difficulty in understanding of complex sentences. This finding was suitable with the study conducted by Fajar (2009) that there are several factors impact students' reading comprehension abilities, including challenges in comprehending long sentences and texts, difficulties stemming from limited background knowledge, struggles with employing effective reading strategies, and issues with maintaining concentration. The related finding was also reported by Zuhra (2015) that the students' challenges were influenced by their limited proficiency in vocabulary. Especially in English reading learning activities, substantial vocabulary knowledge is crucial for students to comprehend reading texts effectively. The students have challenges in word recognition and summarizing the content of texts. The majority of students struggle to comprehend the meaning of the text. Through interviews with the students, the researcher discovered that these difficulties arise from a lack of mastery in vocabulary. Khairulman (2020) was supported this finding that the students' difficulties in reading comprehension involve, lack of vocabulary, difficulty in identifying main idea, making inference, and the last understood word concepts. As a result, the students were unable to comprehend the meaning of words and the content of the text. It cause the students felt confused.

This finding was also consistent with the theory of Shaw (1959) that the ability to comprehend a text is a direct outcome of reading with concentration. Besides that, Slameto (2010) argues the factors that influence students learning concentration include; 1) Lack of interest in the subject studied. 2) Feeling of anxiety, depression, anger, worry, fear, hatred, and revenge. 3) The atmosphere of the learning environment is boisterous and chaotic. But, in the majority of cases the students cannot or do not concentrate adequately while reading. Students have difficulty processing words properly. It keeps them from focusing on the text. They have difficulty in getting information and comprehending all aspects of the text, so that they have difficulty in finding the main idea. Thus, concentration is very important because concentration has aspect of controlling focus in reading. This result supported the previous study by Biederman (2007) that students with low concentrations have a lower grade point average than students with high concentration.

Another study by Larasati (2019) also supported the finding of this study. The result showed that there are several factors of causing the students' difficulties in comprehending English reading

texts including challenges with understanding long sentences, insufficient instruction provided by teachers, difficulty in grasping vocabulary, household environment, and school environment. Based on pre-test and post-test conducted by Barfield (1999) that approximately 12 percent of students faced difficulty in comprehending long sentences in graded stories, and 20 percent encountered challenges in academic texts. Consequently, this difficulty has a significant impact on students' ability to find the main idea conveyed in the text. A common challenge faced by many students is the difficulty in comprehending lengthy sentences with complex structures. Understanding longer texts becomes difficult due to the disruption caused by the challenges and delays in word recognition, which hinder the construction of meaning.

Besides that, the researcher found that there are two strategies used by students in identifying main idea of narrative text, namely: skimming and scanning. This finding was appropriate with the theory of Nuttal (1982) that there are four types of reading strategies, namely skimming, scanning, extensive and intensive readings. The related finding was also reported by Aritonang et al. (2019) that skimming and scanning are effective techniques for identifying the main idea, keywords, and content of a text without reading it in its entirety. Skimming enables readers to grasp the main idea of the text quickly before engaging in a more detailed reading. Santoso (2017) argues that the skimming technique is beneficial for students as it increases their interest in reading comprehension. It enables them to efficiently identify the main idea in a text and saving time while enhancing their understanding. Additionally, this technique prevents students from getting bored when faced with a large volume of reading material and limitate time. Consequently, it beomes crucial to guide studets in applying appropriate tehniques that allow them to gather information from texts promptly and effectively.

Based on the result of interview with students, the researcher found that scanning also used by students in finding main idea of narrative text. This finding was suitable with the previous study conducted by Wahyuningsih (2018) that using skimming and scanning techniques in reading classes can help students read texts more easily and get information quickly in minutes. According to Fauzi and Raya (2018) scanning is a method used to locate specific details or information that may be requested towards the end of an assignment. The implementation of scanning in reading comprehension will motivate students in the learning process. With the scanning technique, students will be easier to find information. Because when students scan, they will be beyond words without having to read the entire passage. Thus, scanning is very valuable for students as it helps them quickly locate specific information to answer questions in assignments or exams. This technique enables them to minimize the time required to find answers, particulary when idetifying the main idea in the text.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the finding and discussion above, the researcher conclude that EFL students have challenges to identify main idea of narrative text. Their vocabulary mastery is lack because they were unfamiliar with the meaning of the words. They always were getting confused when reading English text. The students' challenges when identifying the main idea of narrative text is lack of concentration when reading text. In addition, the students also experienced difficulties in understanding of complex sentences. Besides that, students have strategies to identify the main idea of narrative text, namely skimming and scanning strategies. They think that these strategies can help them in identify the main ideas of paragraphs in the sentence. Therefore, the researcher suggests that students and teachers should elaborate in order to boost the utilization of effective reading strategies in identifying main idea of narrative text. For Future researchers are advised to consider similar research by adding the gender variables that make males and females have the same difficulties in identifying the main ideas of narrative text.

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