

READING COMPREHENSION DIFFICULTIES: A STUDY FACED BY ENGLISH DEPARTMENT STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Dedicated to enhancing reading comprehension among English Department students at the Islamic University of Malang, this research focuses on identifying and addressing challenges inherent in advanced English education. It aims to develop effective strategies by exploring factors such as vocabulary expansion, sentence structure comprehension, and cultural nuances in language use. Through qualitative methods like narrative inquiry, the study seeks to offer practical solutions to improve students' ability to grasp complex academic texts, aiming to foster academic excellence within higher education contexts. This study intends to investigate how factors such as challenges in concentration, linguistic barriers, and complex sentence structures affect outcomes. Additionally, it will explore strategies used to overcome these challenges. Through the use of a qualitative methodology and a narrative inquiry design, this study examines particular difficulties with reading comprehension that third-semester English Department students at the Islamic University of Malang face. The study highlights the capabilities of the qualitative research paradigm for qualitatively dominating concurrent triangulation, with a focus on the significance of individual experiences.

Keywords: reading, reading comprehension, reading difficulties, reading strategies

INTRODUCTION

Improving academic performance and mastering English both hinge on proficient reading comprehension. Advanced English departments in higher education face distinct challenges in aiding students to overcome deficiencies in this skill. Many students struggle with processing and understanding more intricate texts as they progress through their coursework. Factors such as limited vocabulary, complex sentence structures, and cultural

nuances in language usage contribute to these difficulties. This study aims to investigate the specific reading comprehension challenges encountered by students in the English Department at the Islamic University of Malang. By gaining a deeper understanding of these challenges, we can develop more effective methods and techniques to help students enhance their proficiency in advanced reading comprehension.

According to (Sadiku, 2015), one of the essential skills in the English language that facilitates extracting information from texts is reading comprehension. However, comprehending materials rich in reading content poses challenges. The skill of reading is vital for children as it enables them to acquire new knowledge, expand their understanding, and foster critical thinking skills (Duke & Pearson, 2004).

Reading demands the reader to comprehend what the author is saying, which makes it a difficult talent. Reading and understanding are therefore inextricably linked. Thinking, experience, and knowledge are all processes that go into understanding. According to (Alroud, 2015) Understanding results from the interaction between word identification, prior knowledge, comprehension methods, and engagement. Employing engaging reading strategies will encourage pupils to (Khodabandehlou et al., 2012). Based on the findings mentioned earlier, children's language development hinges significantly on their ability to read and comprehend effectively. However, qualitative research has explored the experiences of students who often encounter difficulties understanding lengthy texts and complex language. Therefore, this study seeks to delve deeper into common challenges in reading comprehension faced by students, as well as strategies for improving text comprehension within the English Department. To introduce innovative methodologies, contexts, and participants, this research focuses on students enrolled in the third-semester reading course at the University of Islam Malang, employing narrative inquiry as its methodological approach.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative approach utilizing a narrative inquiry design, aimed at exploring specific phenomena experienced by students. It seeks to understand the challenges students encounter in comprehending reading materials, their interpretations, and deeper insights into their experiences. The authors underscore the significance of capturing

individual experiences, emphasizing the unique strengths of qualitative research. According to (Creswell, 2003), the current study can be categorized under qualitatively dominant concurrent triangulation, a methodological approach that integrates qualitative methods to explore multiple perspectives concurrently.

Participants

The research was conducted within the English Department of the Islamic University of Malang, focusing on two students enrolled in the third-semester Reading course. These students were selected based on their significant challenges in reading comprehension and their low grades in the course. Grade data was obtained through interviews with instructors teaching the Reading 3 course. Both selected students are currently active and pursuing studies in the English Department.

Sampling Technique

The researchers employed a method combining purposive sampling and probability sampling to select participants for the study. Two college students enrolled in the thirdsemester reading course were randomly chosen by the researchers, and any other accessible college students were invited to participate in interviews. Simple random sampling ensures that every member of the population being studied has an equal likelihood of being selected and included in the study. In the qualitative phase of the study, the population consisted of two students from the English Department at the Islamic University of Malang in their third semester.

Data Collection

Researchers conducted interviews with two students from the English Department who were enrolled in Reading courses. Initially, the researchers obtained the students' consent and willingness to participate in the interviews. Subsequently, individual interviews were conducted with each student using predetermined interview questions. These interviews were face-to-face and employed in-depth questioning to gather detailed insights into the students' challenges related to internal and external factors affecting their reading comprehension, as well as the strategies they employed to overcome these difficulties. Each interview lasted approximately 20-25 minutes. During the interviews, the researcher used a

mobile phone to record additional information beyond written notes. Following the interviews, the researcher transcribed the recorded data for further analysis.

Data Analysis

in this study, the data were analyzed by using procedures of thematic analysis adopted from Braun and Clarke (2006) including familiarization, general initial code, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing reports. Researchers utilized in-depth interview techniques to analyze the data. Initially, face-to-face interviews were conducted, and the voices of the participants were recorded to capture their perspectives on reading comprehension difficulties. Subsequently, the interview data was analyzed by listening to the recordings multiple times to identify key points made by the students. Important aspects were highlighted during transcription, with reading comprehension challenges marked in blue, purple, and red, while strategies were denoted in green, gray, and yellow. Finally, the data was organized and presented according to the themes relevant to each interview question.

FINDINGS Students' Difficulties in Reading Comprehension

The result of the test students' difficulties in reading comprehension can be seen in table 1.

Table 1. The Classification of Students' Difficulties in Reading Comprehension

No.	Question items number	Types of Difficulties	Frequency
1	6, 9, 2, 7	Detail information	38
2	3, 5, 8, 10	Understanding new vocabulary	31
3	1, 4	The structure of long sentences	22
Total			91

After classifying and analyzing the students' answer in reading comprehension interview, the researcher finally found that were difficulties of students' reading comprehension.

Based on the result of interview, the first faced by the students is finding new vocabulary, from two students who were interviewed regarding the causes of their reading difficulties (DND, DYN). Participant 1 initially struggled to understand new vocabulary but found that by delving deeper into the meaning and context, he could eventually grasp it on his own. Participant 2 also shared that encountering new vocabulary posed challenges for comprehension due to its complexity, hindering his overall understanding of the reading material. These insights were gathered during the interview :

DND: I am often hampered by a lack of understanding when discovering new vocabulary because it will be very difficult for me to understand the content of the reading. However, when I look for the meaning and meaning, I will be able to understand. (Interview, Participant 1, 5th of June 2024)

DYN: Likewise, I often have difficulty when I get new vocabulary in reading, because I have difficulty understanding the meaning of the reading and it hinders my understanding of my reading. (Interview, Participant 2, 5th of June 2024)

The second problem was difficulty in understanding the structure of long sentences.

Participant 1 mentioned struggling with understanding the topic or theme of a reading when encountering lengthy sentence structures. To comprehend the content, she emphasized the need to reread important sections multiple times. Participant 2 similarly highlighted challenges with lengthy sentence structures, expressing boredom when faced with extensive passages or sentences during the interview :

DND: When I get a long sentence structure, I also have a really hard time understanding it, but I always read the important part of the text several times and then I can understand it well. (Interview, Participant 1, 5th of June 2024)

DYN: I also feel very bored and lazy. When I get a very long sentence structure in the reading, it also makes it difficult for me to understand the reading. (Interview, Participant 2, 5th of June 2024)

DISCUSSION

This section summarizes the key findings from the detailed research question exploration. Firstly, participants shared their positive and negative experiences related to the classroom learning system. They highlighted that the structure of the learning environment played a crucial role in shaping their experiences, noting both discomfort and boredom at times. Additionally, participants discussed their distinct learning styles, which significantly impacted their reading comprehension abilities. This aspect was emphasized as pivotal in their overall experience with reading comprehension.

Despite these challenges, participants exhibited adaptability by employing innovative strategies to enhance their reading comprehension skills. They actively sought collaboration with peers to enrich their learning experiences. Their efforts were directed towards making the learning process engaging and enjoyable, thereby addressing the potential for boredom during reading comprehension lessons in the course.

Participants also acknowledged encountering challenges stemming from various factors, such as grappling with unfamiliar topics and vocabulary. They expressed difficulty in comprehending long sentence structures within reading materials. This aligns with prior research conducted by (Sonny et al., 2019), which underscored that understanding written text differs significantly from merely reading it. Participants struggled when encountering unfamiliar vocabulary, hindering their comprehension of text content.

Research has identified that students often face difficulties in comprehending texts due to losing focus when navigating lengthy sentences. For instance, starting with the first sentence and continuing to subsequent sentences can lead to boredom and confusion when confronted with extensive sentence structures. This lack of concentration becomes particularly evident when transitioning between paragraphs, exacerbating their challenges in reading comprehension.

The third aspect involves how participants addressed the challenges they encountered. They shared their methods for improving reading comprehension and applying reading techniques, highlighting the difficulties faced by 3rd semester English Department students enrolled in the Reading course. Their strategies included identifying the most effective approach to grasp reading materials, such as marking significant information or revisiting crucial points repeatedly. Participants elaborated on their approaches to deciphering complex sentence structures in their readings.

The final aspect concerns the Impact of environmental factors and participant focus on reading comprehension. Participants emphasized that these factors significantly influence their ability to comprehend reading material. They described their difficulties with maintaining focus, particularly when feeling tired, bored, or sleepy. Additionally, they noted that lengthy reading passages also posed challenges to their concentration. Environmental factors were highlighted as another significant issue affecting their focus. Participants explained that being in crowded and noisy environments disrupted their ability to concentrate on reading. The noise and distractions around them made it extremely difficult to stay focused on the text in front of them.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study aimed to gain insights into participants' experiences and how these experiences impacted their challenges in reading comprehension. The research focused on identifying and understanding these experiences, difficulties, coping strategies, environmental influences, and levels of focus. It sheds light on common issues and obstacles students encounter in reading comprehension. Among the most significant challenges identified were lengthy sentence structures, which hindered participants' understanding of reading content. Additionally, participants struggled with unfamiliar topics and concepts, along with

environmental distractions that impeded their ability to concentrate during reading activities.

Students who struggle with comprehending reading materials should be guided to adopt effective learning methods while maintaining an engaging and enjoyable learning environment in their reading classes. This approach can also serve as a model for instructors aiming to enhance their students' reading comprehension skills. Additionally, students should seek conducive environments that facilitate better concentration, avoiding crowded spaces to aid in their comprehension efforts. The researcher recommends that future studies focus on similar challenges and explore alternative strategies for improvement.

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