

## **Students' Difficulties in Reading Comprehension**

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### **Abstract**

Reading comprehension is a fundamental skill that enables individuals to understand and interpret written text. Many students encounter significant difficulties in comprehending text, leading to difficulties in academic performance and overall language development. This study aims to investigate the difficulties in reading comprehension faced by students at MA Patra Mandiri Plaju. The approach used in this study was qualitative. Participants in this study were grade XII students at MA Patra Mandiri Plaju, who were selected using homogeneous sampling techniques. Data were obtained through an interview process and then analyzed using thematic analysis. From the research that was conducted, several difficulties in reading comprehension faced by students at MA Patra Mandiri Plaju were found, namely difficulties in understanding the meaning of words, difficulties in understanding long sentences, difficulties in understanding the main idea, difficulties in making inferences, difficulties in understanding grammar, difficulties in understanding reading strategies, and difficulties in concentration.

***Keywords:** Reading, Difficulties, Reading Comprehension.*

### **A. Introduction**

Reading is a fundamental skill that plays a pivotal role in language acquisition and academic success. According to Aritonang et al. (2019), reading is a crucial activity in life that one may use to refresh their knowledge. Students will acquire the knowledge and concepts they need via reading. In addition, out of all of the language skills, reading holds the highest significance. Siahaan et al. (2022) argued that among the four skills, reading is one of the most important skills to learn, because through reading students can obtain information, add insight, practice thinking and analysis skills and also add vocabulary that is useful for developing their language skills. According to Chotimah (2021), Reading can help readers train their brains to remember information more readily. Therefore, reading is emerging as an indispensable skill in language acquisition and academic achievement.

Through reading, it is expected that students' reading comprehension is achieved. As stated by Oakhill et al. (2015), reading comprehension is a multifaceted endeavour that necessitates the coordination of numerous cognitive skills and abilities. This implies that reading comprehension involves the capacity to read a text, process its content, and grasp its significance. In addition, Asani (2022) claimed that reading comprehension is the ability to fully process and understand the meaning of a written text and this skill is crucial in shaping readers' capacity to comprehend the text and enhancing their enjoyment and effectiveness in reading. Moreover, According to Nurhasanah et al. (2020), one of the fundamental linguistic abilities that helps students get better marks is reading comprehension. Therefore, students must have reading comprehension because students who understand what they read can more easily get information clearly.

Despite its significance, students encountered difficulties with reading comprehension. A research conducted by Satriani (2018) discovered that students encounter difficulties in comprehending written texts due to various factors, including a lack of motivation, lengthy and unfamiliar passages, as well as intricate grammar and sentence structures. In addition, a study by Siahaan et al. (2022) argued that the real evidence that student's reading comprehension is very low is they have difficulty in understanding the essence of reading such as finding the main idea or making conclusions about the content of the reading. Furthermore, according to Westwood (as cited in Septia et al., 2022), there are several internal difficulties that influence students' reading comprehension which are generally found in students, including: (1) difficulty in understanding long sentences, (2) difficulty in using reading strategies, and (3) difficulty in concentration. Moreover, Aida (2021) claimed that students face difficulties in reading comprehension, namely: (1) difficulty in understanding grammatical complexity of sentences, (2) difficulty in knowing certain vocabulary used in the text (3) difficulty in using reading strategies. When students come across unfamiliar words, their comprehension is compromised as they grapple with comprehending the intended meaning or establishing connections within the text.

In connection with this, a preliminary study was carried out through informal interviews with one of the teachers of English at MA Patra Mandiri Plaju regarding the students' reading comprehension and data of the students' reading comprehension. Based on the interview, the teacher claimed that students still experience difficulties in learning reading comprehension. The majority of the students still experienced limitations in vocabulary. Thus, the teacher concluded that the students experience difficulties, especially when

understanding and answering questions related to reading. These difficulties include students' low motivation in learning English reading (R.W, Personal Communication, September 29<sup>th</sup> 2023). Furthermore, based on the data of exercises in reading comprehension obtained from the teacher, it was found that 9 students of class XII scored below the KKM of 65. Thus, the data indicated that the students encountered difficulties in their reading comprehension.

Previous studies have addressed the difficulties associated with English reading comprehension, supporting the need to explore this topic further. A study conducted by Siahhaan et al. (2022) at SMA Negeri 4 Pematangsiantar revealed that several difficulties that students encountered in reading comprehension include: (1) difficult to understand the meaning of word, (2) difficult to understand long sentence, (3) difficult to determining the main idea, (4) difficult to understand the grammar, and (5) difficult in inferencing. Secondly, a study conducted by Lisiana et al. (2021) at SMK N 3 Padang revealed that the students' difficulties can be categorized into three main areas: vocabulary knowledge, the length of the text, and reading strategy. Moreover, a study conducted by Hidayati at (2018) SMAN 1 Darussalam Aceh Besar revealed that the difficulties faced by the students are difficulty in answering main idea questions, making inferences questions, and locating reference questions. Thus, the researchers will conduct a study at MA Patra Mandiri Plaju.

Based on the explanation above, the researcher is interested to conduct a similar study on the students' difficulties in reading comprehension at MA Patra Mandiri Plaju. The main objective of this study is to find out what students think about the difficulties they experience in English reading comprehension at MA Patra Mandiri Plaju. Through the implementation of this case study, opportunity is provided to address the research gap and gain insights into the distinct difficulties encountered by students within this specific educational environment. The results of this investigation will not only add to the current body of knowledge concerning English reading comprehension but will also offer targeted suggestions and actions that can be employed to assist students in improving their reading abilities. Therefore, a study entitled "Students' Difficulties in Reading Comprehension: A Case Study at MA Patra Mandiri Plaju" was conducted.

## **B. Research Methodology**

For this study, a qualitative research approach was utilized to explore and understand the students' difficulties in reading comprehension at MA Patra Mandiri Plaju. The use of qualitative research allows the researchers to delve deeply into the phenomenon under

investigation (Mohajan, 2018). In qualitative research, multiple steps of analysis are often employed to analyze the gathered information (Creswell, 2014). This approach provided flexibility for the researchers to employ various data collection strategies, such as observation, questionnaires, and interviews, to gather comprehensive data for analysis.

The research was conducted at MA Patra Mandiri Plaju. The participants of this research were selected from the twelfth-grade students at MA Patra Mandiri Plaju by using a purposeful sampling technique. According to Palinkas et al. (2013), purposeful sampling is commonly employed in qualitative research to specifically identify and select information relevant to the intended case. In this research, a homogeneous sample was used for sampling. According to Etikan et al. (2016), the homogeneous sampling form focuses on candidates who have certain traits or characteristics in common. Based on the data of the twelfth-grade students' exercise in reading provided by the teacher of English, 9 of the students were below KKM. Therefore, 9 students who scored below KKM were chosen as the participants of this research.

In the data collection, interviews were utilized to find out the students' difficulties in English Reading comprehension at the twelfth-grade students of MA Patra Mandiri Plaju. Students' interviews as an instrument were used in this study for data collection. According to O'Keeffe et al. (2015), interviews conducted as conversations between an interviewer and an interviewee can effectively uncover findings related to a specific issue. During an interview, the interviewer could guide the conversation by asking relevant questions, while the interviewee had the opportunity to share their perspectives, experiences, and insights on the issue being discussed.

In addition, a semi-structured interview was conducted. Al Balushi (2016) suggests that utilizing semi-structured interviews can be advantageous in research as it allows for a deeper exploration of participants' perceptions and their experiences, which are grounded in reality. Moreover, Magaldi and Berler (as cited in Ruslin et al., 2022) argued that semi-structured interview allows researchers to delve deeply for a finding even though topical trajectories are given ahead of time.

In analyzing the data, the researchers applied a thematic analysis. Thematic analysis focuses on the purpose of exploring and identifying common themes in data. In the study, the researchers needed to understand and clarify the students' viewpoints on the challenges they faced in comprehending English reading materials. According to Maguire and Dellahunt (as cited in Umyati et al., 2022), there are 6 steps in conducting thematic analysis, namely: (1)

Familiarized the data; (2) Attached prior codes; (3) Looked for the forms of themes; (4) Reviewed themes; (5) Defined and named themes; (6) Produced the report. The researchers used the steps outlined above to conduct a thematic analysis to gain a deeper understanding of the difficulties students encountered when comprehending English reading material.

### **C. Results and Discussion**

#### **1. Results**

After analyzing the data using thematic analysis, the researchers found that students had difficulties in reading comprehension, such as difficulty in understanding the meaning of words, difficulty in understanding long sentences, difficulty in determining the main idea, difficulty in understanding grammar, difficulty in inferencing, difficulty in using reading strategies, and difficulty in concentration. The following themes were identified as follows:

**Table 1**  
**Theme and Code of the Students' Difficulties in Reading Comprehension**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Codes</b>
1. Difficulty in Understanding the Meaning of Word (Lack of Vocabulary)	Most students felt that their English vocabulary was still lacking, so they had difficulty in understanding the meaning of words and wanted to increase their English vocabulary even more.
2. Difficulty in Understanding Long Sentence	Most students attributed their difficulty in understanding long sentences due to their lack of vocabulary.
3. Difficulty in Determining the Main Idea	Most students did not know what the main idea was and could not distinguish between the main idea and supporting idea when answering related questions.
4. Difficulty in Understanding the Grammar	Some students felt that grammar was boring and difficult to learn, which caused them to make mistakes when answering questions about

	grammar.
5. Difficulty in Inferencing	Some students thought that summarizing the contents of a text was quite difficult because there were many words which meanings they did not know.
6. Difficulty in using reading strategies	Some students still thought that reading comprehension was difficult. Even if they used reading strategies, they still cannot understand the content of the text.
7. Difficulty in Concentration	Some students struggle to comprehend reading material due to their difficulties in concentration.

#### *Difficulty in Understanding the Meaning of Word*

According to information gathered from interviews, the researchers found that some students had difficulty in understanding the meaning of words due to the lack of English vocabulary. Student NDA stated that *“I feel that my English vocabulary is still limited because I don't really like English lesson. Therefore, I still don't feel satisfied with the amount of vocabulary that I know at the moment.”* (Personal Communication, August, 23rd 2024). Student M added *“Honestly, I feel that my mastery of English vocabulary still needs to be improved because I often find words that I don't understand when learning English.”* (Personal Communication, August, 23rd 2024).

#### *Difficulty in Understanding Long Sentence*

Based on the data obtained, the students often associate their difficulty in understanding long sentences when reading with a lack of vocabulary. When faced with long sentences, they may have difficulty in understanding the meaning of certain words, which interferes with their ability to understand the overall meaning of the text. Student M stated that *“I often find new words in long sentences and if I don't know the meaning of the word, the whole sentence becomes difficult to understand.”* (Personal Communication, August, 23rd 2024). Student NDA added *“In my opinion, I have difficulty because my English vocabulary*

*is small while the sentences are long. I couldn't grasp the content of the text well.*" (Personal Communication, 23rd 2024).

#### *Difficulty in Determining the Main Idea*

From the data obtained, the researchers found that most students did not know what the main idea was and could not distinguish between the main idea and supporting idea when answering questions related to this. Many students struggled to identify the main idea of a text and differentiate it from supporting details. This difficulty often led to incorrect responses to questions that required a deep understanding of the text. Students often became confused by the various details presented and were unable to discern the central theme or message. This inability to identify the main idea hindered their overall comprehension of the text. Student MRAW added *"The difficulty is that I don't understand the characteristics of the main idea and what the main idea is."* (Personal Communication, August, 24th 2024).

#### *Difficulty in Understanding the Grammar*

Based on the data obtained, some students felt that grammar was boring and difficult to learn, which caused them to make mistakes when answering questions about it. Their lack of interest in the subject matter made it challenging for them to engage with the material, leading to a superficial understanding of grammar rules. Student MRAW claimed that *"I don't really understand, because I think grammar is complicated and boring to learn."* (Personal Communication, August, 24th 2024). Student NDA added *"My grammar skills are still very lacking, because I think English is still difficult to learn."* (Personal Communication, August, 23rd 2024).

#### *Difficulty in Inferencing*

According to information gathered from interviews, the researchers found that some students thought that summarizing the contents of a text was quite difficult because there were many words whose meanings they did not know. Encountering unfamiliar vocabulary made it hard for them to fully understand the text, which in turn affected their ability to identify the key points. Student NDA stated that *"Because my vocabulary is lacking and there are many things I don't understand, it is difficult to summarize the content of the text."*

(Personal Communication, August, 23rd 2024). Then, Student MRAW said that *“I find it difficult because there are many words that I don't understand in the English text. Therefore, I have trouble drawing accurate conclusions.”* (Personal Communication, 24th 2024).

### *Difficulty in Using Reading Strategies*

From the interview data, some students still thought that reading comprehension was difficult, even when they used reading strategies, if they did not understand the content of the text. Despite employing techniques like summarizing, highlighting key points, or breaking the text into smaller parts, they continued to struggle. Student RNS said that *“Not really, sometimes it is a little helpful when I need to find information in the text, but it is still quite difficult if I don't understand the content of the text.”* (Personal Communication, August, 23rd 2024). Student MZ also said that *“Sometimes, I find it difficult to understand the content of the text in depth. So, I prefer to read slowly and thoroughly.”* (Personal Communication, August, 24th 2024).

### *Difficulty in Concentration*

Based on data from interviews, for students, one of the main obstacles to effective reading comprehension is difficulty concentrating. When students struggle to focus, they may miss important details and fail to grasp the overall meaning of the text. This lack of focus can be caused by a variety of factors, one of which is a noisy environment. Some students gave their statements related to their difficulties in understanding the reading text when they faced difficulties in concentrating. Student MR stated that *“Yes, if I concentrate I kind of understand the content of the text. But if I don't concentrate, I don't understand.”* (Personal Communication, August, 24th 2024). Student MZ added *“I think it does, but even when I'm concentrating, I still have trouble understanding the text and if I'm not focused, I get bored more easily and don't want to continue reading.”* (Personal Communication, August, 24th 2024).

## **2. Discussion**

After analyzing the data obtained from the interviews using thematic analysis, the researchers found that students at MA Patra Mandiri Plaju had faced various difficulties in reading comprehension, namely: (1) Difficulty in Understanding the Meaning of Words (2)

Difficulty in Understanding Long Sentences (3) Difficulty in Determining the Main Idea (4) Difficulty in Understanding the Grammar (5) Difficulty in Inferencing (6) Difficulty in using reading strategies and, (7) Difficulty in Concentration.

The first was difficulty in understanding words. Some students stated that most students had encountered difficulties in comprehending the meaning of words in reading texts. These difficulties were primarily attributed to a lack of vocabulary knowledge, particularly unfamiliar words and idiomatic expressions. According to Siahaan et al. (2022), while mastering the meaning of words from a book was challenging, it was crucial. Moreover, Aida (2021) stated that many students had difficulty understanding reading texts. This was due to a lack of vocabulary mastery. They admitted that they did not recognize many new words, making it difficult to understand the meaning of the sentence as a whole. This gap in vocabulary retention further limited their understanding of more complex texts, making it difficult for them to grasp the overall meaning. In addition, the large number of new words encountered in academic texts could be frustrating, resulting in some students losing interest in the reading process.

The second was the difficulty in understanding long sentences that most students experienced based on the results of research that had been conducted. Long sentences could be a significant challenge for readers, especially for those with limited reading skills. This could cause readers to lose track of the thoughts being expressed, which ultimately hindered their comprehension of the text. Most students stated that their difficulty with the length of sentences in a text was due to their lack of vocabulary. Ratnasari (2023) stated that students faced difficulties in understanding long sentences in texts; this was mostly due to limited vocabulary and the need for extra time to look up meanings, which hindered their comprehension. In addition, Baiti & Sofa (2023) also stated that students were often confused when reading long sentences. One of the reasons was that they were not yet familiar with many new words.

The third difficulty was one of the common difficulties faced by students in reading comprehension, namely the difficulty in identifying the main idea of a text. The main idea was the theme or central message that the author wanted to convey. Most students still did not really understand what the main idea was. Students might have had difficulty distinguishing between the main idea and supporting details, which led to confusion and misinterpretation. The results of this study were in line with the statement from Putri (2020), which also showed that students' difficulties in understanding reading showed that students had difficulty in

understanding the main idea and determining the main idea. In addition, according to Sapitri et al. (2022), students might have had difficulty pinpointing the main idea of a passage because it could be positioned at the beginning, middle, or end of a sentence.

The fourth was that many students found it difficult to understand the grammar presented in reading materials. One of the common difficulties' students encountered in reading comprehension was difficulty in understanding the grammar used in the text. When students were unsure about the grammatical rules and how they functioned within a sentence, it could lead to misinterpretation of the meaning. This was particularly problematic for students who were learning a foreign language, as they might have struggled to differentiate between grammatical structures in their native language and the language they were studying. Nurmallasari and Haryudin (2021) found that the most difficulty experienced by students in reading comprehension was grammar and most students could not answer with a good structure. In addition, Hidayati (2018) mentioned in her research that most students experience difficulties in grammar.

The fifth difficulty experienced by students in reading comprehension was difficulty in making inferences. Students often faced difficulties in reading comprehension, especially when making inferences. Some students thought that summarizing the content of the text was quite difficult because there were many words whose meanings they did not know. This lack of vocabulary knowledge affected their ability to create accurate summaries. Putri (2020) claimed that students had difficulty in making inferences from the reading text because they did not understand the reading text. This was due to a lack of understanding of terms and a lack of mastery of vocabulary that should have been mastered. In her research, Zuhra (2015) stated that making inferences was the most difficult type of question in reading comprehension because of their weakness in vocabulary acquisition. This lack of direct information made it harder for them to infer the intended message.

The sixth difficulty that students often faced in understanding reading was related to the application of effective reading strategies. Many students had not yet understood the strategies they used when reading a text. Some students still thought that reading comprehension was difficult even though they used reading strategies if they did not understand the contents of the text. As a result, their reading process was often slower and less efficient. In line with the results of this study, Satriani (2018) stated that students will still struggle in reading if they are unable to understand the text well even though they have used reading strategies. In addition, according to Lisiana et al. (2021), a lack of reading strategies

is a major issue for students in reading comprehension. Without effective strategies, students struggle to understand what they are reading and fail to grasp the main ideas or key details in the text.

The last difficulty concerned concentration. Distractions from the surrounding environment, personal thoughts, or lack of interest in the topic hindered students' ability to focus on the text. Most students gave the same statement that they found it difficult to concentrate which caused them to be unable to comprehend the reading. The results of this study are in line with the statement from Intan Ummul Baiti & Eros Meilina Sofa (2023) which stated that without concentration, students will not be able to get maximum results from the reading process and will have difficulty understanding the reading. This is also reinforced by the statement of Halil et al. (2015) who conducted a study that highlighted similar evidence that shows the higher the student's concentration in reading, the more effective the reading process is. Likewise, if concentration was low, then comprehension would also be low.

## **D. Conclusion and Suggestion**

### **Conclusions**

Based on the results of interview data that were analyzed in the previous chapter, it was shown that students at MA Patra Mandiri Plaju had difficulties in reading comprehension. Researchers identified several difficulties experienced by students, such as: (1) Difficulty in understanding the meaning of words (2) Difficulty in understanding long sentences. (3) Difficulty in determining the main idea, (4) Difficulty in understanding grammar, (5) Difficulty in inferencing, (6) Difficulty in using reading strategies, and (7) Difficulty in concentration.

### **Suggestions**

Based on the results of the study, the researchers would like to provide customized recommendations for students, teachers, and future researchers. Since students have difficulties in reading comprehension, they can take steps to improve their reading comprehension, such as actively developing their vocabulary. In addition, they are encouraged to strive to improve their focus and concentration while reading, perhaps through techniques such as mindfulness or time management strategies.

Furthermore, it is recommended that teachers play a more proactive role in addressing these difficulties. Teachers are encouraged to incorporate vocabulary development activities

into their lessons, such as memorizing more vocabulary or using games. Using a variety of reading materials that match students' proficiency levels is also suggested to gradually improve their comprehension skills. Moreover, teachers are advised to emphasize the importance of grammar in understanding texts and consider using interesting teaching methods to make grammar lessons less daunting. Finally, teachers need to foster a supportive and motivating classroom environment to help students stay focused and maintain their interest in improving their reading comprehension skills.

The researchers expect that future researchers who will conduct similar research can build upon the findings of this study to gain deeper insights into the difficulties faced by students in reading comprehension through different methods or strategies used by current researchers.

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