

## Difficulties of Undergraduate English Education Students on Reading Comprehension

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### ABSTRACT

The researcher could analyse the student difficulties on reading comprehension of in advance level of English. The aim of this study is to explore student's accounts and experiences to find difficulties which related to perceptions and experiences. The data gathered by interview and by in depth analysing showed that the difficulties were around improving knowledge content, building vocabulary, phrase, pronunciation, and getting the meaning or texts to contexts. There were various aspects influence this situation; the meaning of word of sentence, background knowledge, academic vocabulary, and finding of topic on text.

**Keywords:** *Difficulties; Reading Comprehension, Undergraduate English Education Students*

### INTRODUCTION

A fundamental resource for educational and social development is reading comprehension. It is a skill that brings into play a diverse and complex set of processes and cognitive functions based on building a mental representation of a given text (Abusamra et al., 2020). Therefore, the youth, builder of the future, is required to incessantly renew them. Among all other ways to obtain information, one of the best is reading (Koç and Müftüoğlu in Yuvaci & Demir, 2016). In same way reading comprehension has an important place in lifelong learning. It is an interactive process between the reader and the text. Students need reading comprehension skills at all educational levels and for all school subjects. (Özdemir & Akyol, 2019). Indeed, Knowing text information either in media or mass-media determining from reading skill of people that coming from their each perspective to construct meaning of word, sentence, and, paragraph. Similarly, "specific" reading comprehension problems have been identified among students with intact basic word reading. moreover, Specific comprehension difficulties have been associated with weaker oral language and vocabulary skills that Koriakin & Kaufman, (2016) have suggested. Woolley (2011) has assumed that Reading

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comprehension is the process of making meaning from text which affected by the experiences, abilities, motivation and reading goals of the reader.

However, mastering reading skill deeply to know context, meaning, is not easy as we think. earlier research Laufer, (1992), assumed that around 3,000 word families provided the lexical resources to read authentic materials independently nation argues that in fact 8,000–9,000 word families are necessary, Common sense dictates that more vocabulary is better, and there is probably no single coverage figure, for example 98%, over which good comprehension occurs and short of which one understands little in (Schmitt et al., 2011).in same references Woolley, (2011) clearly stated, as L2 students in English language should extremely understand in reading comprehension which containing of conceptualise the processes of learning how to read: (a) behaviourism, (b) cognitivism, (c) social constructivist learning theory, and (d) connectives.

Indeed, from those references knowing comprehension a context of text could follow some ways: reading strategies, encoding processes, learning outcomes, and performance measures. In order to develop an adequate theory of instruction for reading strategies, there must also be an adequate theory of learning from prose (Cook & Mayer, 1983). Still in same references, In particular, a theory of meaningful learning from prose provides information concerning how reader's process and store presented information. A cognitive theory of learning from prose assumes that a reader comes to the reading task with a vast storehouse of existing knowledge. The storehouse includes content, structural, and process knowledge. In other research also employed self-questioning as a reading strategy improve comprehension of prose texts in English (Miciano, 2002).

According to Widodo, (2016) In the context of Indonesian English language pedagogy, particularly most of the English teachers adopt reading comprehension or intensive reading programs, It has witnessed the fact that intensive reading classes commonly take the form of rigid question–answer exercises. These exercises are a way to ensure that students have understood particular teacher-assigned or textbook-oriented reading texts. In these mundane exercises, the students are asked to respond to questions following texts without any dialogic discussion. In some cases, intensive reading classes adopt multiple-choice format exercises in which students are asked to answer reading comprehension questions, and a teacher plays a role in giving right answers to the questions.

In spite of the challenge in English proficiency, the students have to emerge themselves in the English academic reading activities by employing their strategies to comprehend the reading such: decoding, fluency, vocabulary, sentence construction and cohesion, reasoning and background knowledge, working memory and attention, and skill development. The main element of emerging reading comprehension is metacognition, which is the reader's personal awareness to manage and monitor the cognition process (Dardjito, 2019). However, EFL tertiary learners usually confront comprehension problems in dealing with various texts, such as narrative, argumentative, and expository text.

Reading research which took place in Indonesia reported that less proficient university-student readers tended to use top-down strategies to comprehend reading academic texts. Additionally, they were more interested in using a dictionary to find the meaning of unfamiliar words during reading (Pammu et al., 2014).

According to Akcamete & Gokbulut, (2017) Reading-comprehension skills are effective on the achievement in all other courses (Güneyli 2003). In most general sense, reading comprehension is giving meaning and interpreting the concepts in the entire text, and reflecting them with one's own words with the purpose of obtaining information on the area of interest and having recreation and high-quality time.

Indeed Collins et al., (2019) identified three key components in reading comprehension: (a) the text to be comprehended, (b) the activity in which comprehension is a part, and (c) the reader who is comprehending. In this framework, each component interacts with the others before, during, and after reading, and is further mediated by the sociocultural context in which it is situated. In the present study, serves as our conceptual framework for examining the text, activity, and reader as sources of variance in different reading comprehension test scores. Prior research has examined how these three components contribute to variance in reading comprehension test scores, and studies guiding the purpose and methodological procedures.

Furthermore, maintained that when students have difficulty decoding their capacity to attend to meaning is limited. Thus, word decoding is necessary but not sufficient for reading comprehension and should be supplemented by the development of other contextualised strategies and language comprehension skills. It is asserted that these subgroups are not homogenous but that individuals will develop a wide assortment of attributes that make their problems somewhat unique. (Joshi and Aaron 2000; Kirby and Savage 2008 e.g. Catts et al. 2003; Snowling and Firth 1997 wholes Idol 1988; Kendeou et al. 2009; Robinson 2001 Block and Pressley 2007 Fielding-Barnsley et al. 2005; Woolley 2006 Kendeou et al. 2009 in Woolley, (2011)

A previous study by Andre, stated that (1987), reading comprehension was a topic of early interest and a number of studies were carried out attempting to measure reading comprehension and to relate reading comprehension to factors such as the rate of reading and to silent and oral reading. Reading was seen as a tool of the mind and understanding what was read was the essential component of reading comprehension was an active process in which the reader constructed meaning from ideas present in the reader's mind. His views anticipated many ideas that have been developed more explicitly in current theories.

The researcher could analyse the student difficulties on reading comprehension of in reading class advance level of English Teacher Training program in one of Indonesian University. More over the research questions are:

what are students' difficulties on reading comprehension in reading class?, And what are students' perceptions and experiences in their reading classes related to their reading comprehension?. The aims of this study are to investigate students' difficulties on reading comprehension in reading class. To explore students accounts and experiences in reading class and to relate what they have in class. To explore student's perceptions and experiences in their reading classes related to their reading comprehension

## **METHOD**

The method of this research is a qualitative and focuses on students' experiences descriptions on learning reading comprehension. This research used semi-structured tele-phone interviews to elicit a rich and nuanced description of students' difficulties especially in the learning process. The data got by Questionnaire and semi-structured interview with Tele-phone interviews with current conditions (Covid19). The participant of the study was students who take reading comprehension subject at five semesters. The recorded data are converted into raw text data using Microsoft Word. To analyse the qualitative research data, thematic analysis method is used. At the last stage, a content integrity is derived from the resulting themes and an interpretation is developed into two parts. In the first section of the structured interview form, questions were asked about the students with reading comprehension difficulties in the classrooms of teachers and the problems that these students suffer from. The second part of the questionnaire included questions on the solutions that lecturer found to deal with the said problems and the resources that they turned to for support/help that they needed, the last the prepared interview form was sent to follow up the questionnaire that has already answered by students that make the data to be valid.

## **FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

The explored data is based on interviews with students who describe their perspectives and experiences on reading comprehension. The researcher conducted a semi-structured as a deeper understanding of reading comprehension. Through the analysis, seven main themes emerged. These categories are: 1) decoding 2) fluency, 3) vocabulary, 4) sentence construction and cohesion, 5) reasoning and background knowledge, 6) working memory and attention, 7) and skill development. Each theme that appears will be described in detail below.

The majority of students reported that, the problem of difficulties on reading comprehension are meaning or interpreting of sentences on identifying a topic and main topic in paragraph, also some students stated that they have limited vocabulary, so it's difficult to understand a sentence which consists of academic vocabulary.

*One of The difficulties that I face in learning reading comprehension are understanding the meaning of the sentence (students1)*

The various problems could face by all students, as the big deal lack of students in learning reading comprehension is about the meaning of word and sentence. Based on the data of student, it's so difficult to understand the meaning without knowing the context of the paragraph, so its need to read repeatedly by knowing the meaning of sentence.

*My difficulties when understanding a sentence are academic word because my vocabulary is limited. (Students 4)*

Indeed the student have limited vocabulary, it's one of the problem of background knowledge, as well as background knowledge as the foundation to learn reading. Therefore this kind of problem could elaborate by the teacher in facing leaning reading vocabulary in the future

*The difficulty I found when the text I read used a lot of academic words. (students5)*

Academic words often appear in article text that ever read by student in learning reading comprehension. Moreover, the student always used dictionary or E-dictionary to find out the meaning of academic words. Also the student felt difficult about academic word it caused of never used in their daily life.

The responses of all students in the aspect of fluency are positive. In the contexts of their learning reading comprehension, most of students have practice activity in their classroom such: read an article, dictionary, and some academic text. Depend on their practice activity, it makes the students can fluent readers and able to read smoothly at a good pace after learn reading comprehension.

*Every meeting we were presented with a text and assigned to read and understand it. Then the lecturer asked what the meaning and content of the text was. The positive impact is that I am now more used to and fairly fluent in reading such texts, for example, reading articles. Although sometimes I still find it difficult to understand the contents of the article. So sometimes still use the dictionary. (Student 5)*

In the aspect of vocabulary which consist of 2 questions. The first, all students responses are increased. Normally to increase students' vocabulary, the students read the text to know the various kind of vocabulary and understand a meaning of vocabulary by used dictionary.

*Greatly increased (student 1)*

*Yes, because normally when you learn reading comprehension, we don't just read but also understand. So, the vocabulary will automatically increase. (Student 4)*

*After receiving many treatments for reading comprehension, I feel increase and I know more about vocabulary. So, it makes easier for me to understand text or articles (student 5)*

After learning reading comprehension, one of the relation of increasing their vocabulary, the student also could easier to understand about reading on article text.

*Of course, yes, because we surely found a lot of new vocabularies that haven't find before. (Students 7)*

Indeed, students' views in facing reading comprehension that have several kinds of matters in learning reading comprehension on sentences such as: Background knowledge of vocabulary, phrase, conjunction, structure of sentences, meaning of sentences. They felt difficult to understand the sentence that caused of never practice in their daily, so it influent to the students background knowledge of vocabulary.

*Maybe the main cause is the lack of knowledge about vocabulary, and also the sentence structure. In English, the sentence structure is interpreted one by one or word for word, the translation will be inconsequential. So that's what confusing is. Overall, with simple sentences it is still easy to understand, but sometimes if there is grammar that accompanies certain sentences it becomes a little more difficult (student 1)*

Based on students' view, sentence structure could be a problem to knowing of meaning of sentence, but is depend on their background knowledge of student in interpreting of each word on sentences. Moreover, it has connectivity with grammars' skill in side of sentence structure.

*To be honest, the most difficult thing for me when understanding sentences is conjunctions. Because, there is a lot of need to learn about conjunctions from the sentences before and after. The alternative is to use a dictionary to find the meaning of the conjunction. (Student 5)*

Every student has own manner to break-down their weakness on reading comprehension the solving reading comprehension about mining of sentences toward students' perceptions: translating, understanding the vocabulary that related to idea of sentences, select simple sentence to review, analyse the meaning of previous word in each sentences.

*Usually I often read and practice translating paragraph. (students 1)*

The problem solving of student in understanding the sentence of reading comprehension is exercise and translating into Indonesia language to make easier knowing a meaning in each word and sentence.

*Find a resource that can provide a steady supply of accurate sentences, Select simple sentences that demonstrate the word's meaning, Save those sentences in your notebook or flashcards, Periodically review. (Student 3)*

Generally, all teachers have role to promote effectively reading comprehension material with approaches to makes the student easy to uderstand about reading comprehension. Based on the data, there are various design that able to use in learning reading comprehension such as: reviewing design, thinking design, Think-pair-share design, grammar translation method, silent way. From

those data, instructors could easy to teach reading comprehension for EFL students.

*Design Thinking. (student 3)*

In addition, design thinking could assist the student in analyzing kind of vocabulary, sentence, text, and phrase to cover students problem in understanding reading comprehension.

*Think-pair-share, because this type of learning model makes it easier for me to better understand what I read. This learning model requires me to think which is then distributed to group members so that we can discuss the reading material that has been read which is then shared with other friends. (Student 4)*

There are many kinds of recommended learning model that able to implement by instructors in reading comprehension to cover the interest, motivation, and engagement that could assist the student in learning comprehension such think pair-share. It's requires the students to think which is then distributed to group members..

In edition, the materials of reading comprehension are need to explore for teacher to know the level of students' interest in learning reading comprehension such: up to date of issue that related on todays' conditions with provides factual informations and also some students' likes: novel and scientific article on education jurnal.

*Usually I am interested in reading through genres. I really like reading novels, so the reading materials that interest me are novels and my favorite genre is fantasy novels, but recently I started learning to read scientific works to increase my academic words. (Student 4)*

*If you're looking for interesting reading material to practice reading comprehension, I think we can look it up in your journal. But if the article is still difficult to start." Another alternative might be to look in political news, education which is being hotly discussed. (Student 5)*

Based on the data, scanning and skimming is not at all time use for learning reading comprehension. Indeed, the students' perceptions stated that reading coprehension it easy to fluent by determined a mieaning of each words and background knowledge is one of students' reasons to read fluent. However, most of student reported that scanning and skimming could assist the main point of a sentence in text and understanding overall content of factual main idea on the text.

All participants reported that they improved content knowledge of reading comprehension and increase their vocabulary, phrase, pronunciation, and mining of text. So, reading comprehension was extremely beneficial for English learner in level of undergraduate students.

*Yes, I did (student 3)*

*Of course, reading while understanding a passage will definitely increase knowledge, because reading is a way to find information, by reading the readers*

*will surely get information what they are looking for, so that it will make the reader increase their vocabulary, phrase, pronunciation, and mining of text. (Student 4)*

*It's improved a lot, since I learnt for reading courses and read articles from teacher (student 5)*

Reading by used article text could improve their reading knowledge either in academic vocabulary. So by that reason the teacher could frequently use article text as the media for reading comprehension to cover students' knowledge in reading skill.

*Yes, I Did. Reading is a process for us to understanding the content knowledge about the text. (Student 7)*

Based on the result, it was revealed that the majority of students stated that, the problem of difficulties on reading comprehension are meaning or interpreting of sentences on identifying a topic and main topic in paragraph, related with this study of Collins et al., (2019), in other studies stated that, students were more successful with multiple choice reading comprehension questions than open-ended questions to find out the topic (Özdemir & Akyol, 2019). Based on statement above, the students could be easier to understand a topic by used multiple choice and open-ended questions. However students reported that they have limited vocabulary, so it's difficult to understand a sentence which consists of academic vocabulary. This finding is similar to the opinion of students in research (Yeon et al., 2018) stated that, reading comprehension difficulties are often associated with academic vocabulary problems.

Another finding from this research is that all students in the aspect of fluency are positive. In the contexts of their learning reading comprehension, most of students have practice activity in their classroom such: read an article, dictionary, and some academic text. Depend on their practice activity, it makes the students can fluent readers and able to read smoothly at a good pace after learn reading comprehension, it has related with previous study Abusamra et al., (2020) stated that, In the first few years of education, special emphasis is placed on the student becoming a fluent reader because practice with read activities to deal with the high-level processes that text comprehension demands.

In the aspect of vocabulary which consist of 2 items. The first, after learning reading comprehension all students' responses are increased. Normally to increase students' vocabulary, the students read the text to know the various kind of vocabulary and understand a meaning of vocabulary by used dictionary. This study also support that statement (Pathan, 2019), indicates that there was a significant increase in the vocabulary size after learning reading comprehension in the context of students at University of Balochistan, Quetta, Pakistan. Also, the predictive model of the study also suggests that vocabulary is one of the key factors for poor/good reading ability of students. In other hand, the students have several problems difficulties of vocabulary such as: academic vocabulary, scientific vocabulary, and collocations, which used in their education context. Second, most



of students felt difficult in academic vocabulary, it caused rarely used in their habitual activity. Also its' related with this past study, (Collins et al., 2019; Khusniyah & Lustyantje, 2017) vocabulary is difficult to understand the meaning because, vocabulary of students plays a pivotal role in shaping their successful reading comprehension. Moreover Pathan, (2019), admitted that to look for difficult words in texts and find the meanings by looking up their meaning into dictionaries.

Based on the data, all teachers have role to promote effectively reading comprehension material with approaches to makes the student easy to understand about reading comprehension. Based on the data, there are various design that able to use in learning reading comprehension such as: reviewing design, thinking design, Think-pair-share design, grammar translation method, silent way. From those data, instructors could easy to teach reading comprehension for EFL students. In respect of past study support that finding (Kim et al., 2014; Pathan, 2019; Yeon et al., 2018)As for instructional methods, teachers to devote the considerable amount of time to facilitate learners to increase their reading knowledge by used various method or approach because it one of the key indicators for language learning success. In one line, to teach comprehension, the teachers primarily used main-sentence identification and graphic organizer. In addition, most lessons were conducted using whole-group instruction (Kim et al., 2014).

In addition, the materials of reading comprehension are need to explore for teacher to know the level of students' interest in learning reading comprehension such: up to date of issue that related on todays' conditions with provides factual information and also some students' likes: novel and scientific article on education journal. One of researcher agreed with that statement, to teach comprehension, the teachers primarily used main-sentence identification and graphic organizer to know student interest on reading comprehension also most lessons were conducted using whole-group instruction (Kim et al., 2014). Based on the data, scanning and skimming is not at all time use for learning reading comprehension. Indeed, the students' perceptions stated that reading comprehension it easy to fluent by determined a meaning of each words and background knowledge is one of students' reasons to read fluent. However, most of student reported that scanning and skimming could assist the main point of a sentence in text and understanding overall content of factual main idea on the text. In that case supported by past study (Dardjito, 2019; Yakut & Aydın, 2017) stated that, another way to find the meaning of the words was by applying reading strategies such as scanning, skimming, and guessing the meaning from the context they had recognized from background knowledge.

Based on the data, all participants admitted that they improved content knowledge of reading comprehension, increase their vocabulary, phrase, pronunciation, and mining of text. So, learning reading comprehension was extremely beneficial for English learner in level of undergraduate students. That

perceptions relate with the previous study (Khusniyah & Lustyantje, 2017; Pathan, 2019) assumed that, by learning reading comprehension could increase the students ability in reading skill also the background knowledge could significantly developed based on their learning process.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

As previously describe, this present study was set out to answer the research question about the students' views difficulties of undergraduate English education students' on reading comprehension in reading class. Overall, after performing careful analyses on the data gathered from the interview, it was clear that the findings provide strong indications that the participants admitted that they improved content knowledge of reading comprehension, increase their vocabulary, phrase, pronunciation, and mining of text after learning reading comprehension. In the aspect of difficulties the student felt difficult in various aspects such as the meaning of word of sentence, background knowledge, academic vocabulary, and finding of topic on text.

To be more specific, they mostly thought that it could generate positive effects on classroom dynamics, generating the students' interest and concentration, as well as learning performance. However, notable inherent limitations should be taken into considerations as well. First, the participants voluntarily involved in this study were very limited (n = 7). Hence, there is an essential requirement to carry out large-scale research.

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