Students' Difficulties in Reading Comprehension at Junior High School Level

by John Pahamzah

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Abstract
This research focuses on the difficulties faced by the first grade students of Junior High School Level in reading comprehension. The objectives of the research were to find out the difficulties faced by the first grade students of Junior High School 2 Serang City and the factors of difficulties in reading comprehension. Descriptive quantitative was applied as the method in this research, where the test and questionnaire were used as the instruments of the data. The test consisted of 20 items of question divided into five types of questions, which were main idea, detail information, making inferences, locating reference and vocabulary. Index difficulty and percentage were used to analyze the data. The result of the test showed that the majority of first grade students of Junior High School 2 Serang City found difficulties including answering main idea, making inference, and locating reference questions. The most difficult aspect faced by the students of Junior High School 2 Serang City was finding main idea questions, because the located main idea was difficult to find. Moreover, based on the students' responses in questionnaire, they mostly got difficulties in understanding vocabulary, poor mastery of grammar, the difficulty in understanding long sentences, lack of knowledge of strategies in reading skill.

Keywords: Students' difficulties; reading comprehension; teaching and learning EFL.

INTRODUCTION

Reading, as one of the basic English skills, is closely related to other skills such as writing, speaking and listening. In addition, the reading materials are needed to be understood well by the students to achieve the goal in teaching-learning process. Grabe and Stoller (2002) stated that reading can be taught as a way to draw information from text and to form an interpretation of that information. It means that reading is also a gateway for students to get information and knowledge in educational process.

In comprehending a text, Nuttal (1982) mentioned that there are five aspects of reading comprehension which the students should understand in comprehending a text well, such as determining main idea, finding specific information, making inference, identifying reference, and understanding the meaning of words or detail information. These aspects are regarded as difficulties that the students encounter in comprehending the text.

At Junior High School, teaching reading intends to develop students' skill in reading comprehension. All schools implement a curriculum which is relevant to the needs of their specific students. Based on the basic competence in 2013 curriculum of the first grade junior high school, the students are expected to comprehend social function, generic structures, and language features in reading text (descriptive, narrative, recount text, and so on) in oral and written form. However, in a real situation, the students have not achieved the curriculum expectation and have low ability in reading comprehension. Obviously, text such as English magazines, newspaper and article as an authentic material has the important role such as improving students reading ability and their knowledge of current issues. But it is not easy to be read for students and to comprehend.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Reading Comprehension

Pang et al. (2003) stated that "reading is about understanding written texts and comprehension is the process of making sense of words, sentences and connected text". Reading comprehension involves both perception and thought. Readers will use background of knowledge, vocabulary, grammatical knowledge, and other strategies to help them to understand a written text.

Reading is a process of communication between the writer and the reader. The writer has a message such feeling, facts, ideas, and arguments they want to share. Then, the writer puts the message into the words. So, reading is a way in which something interpreted or understood. Reading does not only mean to understand the words or the grammar. It is not just translating but reading is thinking, in order to read well in English reading material text, and the reader must think what the text means.

Reading Comprehension Strategies

Nuttal (1982) classifies reading strategies into four types. Those are skimming, scanning, extensive and intensive readings. Firstly, skimming is a useful skill to be applied in reading. Grellet (1999) stated that "skimming means glance rapidly over a text to get the gist of it". It means skimming is used to build students confidence and an understanding that it is possible to gain meaning without reading every word in a text. Secondly, "scanning means glancing rapidly through a text to search for a specific piece of information" (Grellet, 1981). It means that scanning is the ability to read a text quickly in order to find specific information that is needed like a date, a figure, or a name and ignore over all unimportant information. Thirdly, Brown (2001) said that "extensive reading is carried out to achieve a general understanding of a text". In extensive reading, the readers usually face a longer text. In reading, the

readers need a total understanding of writing. Finally, intensive reading is reading for detail. It usually has a shorter text. A reader usually wants to get some specific information. Macleod (2011) stated that:

> Intensive reading exercises may include looking at main ideas versus details, understanding of what the text implies, making inferences, looking at the order of information and how it affects the message, identifying words that connect one idea to another and identifying words that indicate change from one section to another. Macleod (2011).

Reading Comprehension Aspects

Nuttal (1982) said "there are five aspects of reading comprehension which the students should comprehend a text well, such as determining main idea, locating reference, making inference, detail information, and the understanding vocabulary". These aspects are regards as difficulties that the students encounter in comprehending the text.

Longan (2002), said that "finding main idea is a key to understand a paragraph or short selection". "The main idea is usually located in a sentence, it is usually the first sentence but it can be in the middle or in the last sentence" (Vener, 2002). Therefore, this can make the main idea more difficult to find. The students may get confused to see what the main idea of a passage is, and where the main idea is located.

Reference is antecedent of a pronoun. "The antecedent is a word or phrase to which a pronoun refers" (Sharpe, 2005). In identifying reference, the students are expected to understand for what the pronouns in the sentences are used such as the pronouns that are used to show people, place, or situation.

"Context helps students making a general prediction about the meaning" (Sharpe, 2005). It means that making prediction from the context will help students understand the meaning of a passage without stopping looks up every new word in a dictionary. In fact, one of the problems readers have difficulties in understanding material is that they have lack of vocabularies.

Kopitski (2007) stated that "readers need to practice combining clues from the text with their background knowledge in order to make inferences". It means that the clues in the text will help students to build assumption and draw conclusion. So they can answer the questions. Therefore, sometimes the students are difficult to find the conclusion of the text because the meaning of the statement is not written on the text.

The last type of question that is usually found in reading test is detail question or information. This question used to check students ability to understand material that is directly stated in the text. In understanding and answering detail question, the students can use scanning strategy. In addition, to find out the answer of detail question, the reader can note or underline the key word in the question, and then scan the passage for that words' synonym.

Reading Comprehension Challenges

"Difficulty is something that complicated to do" (Richard 2007). It will be seen from students' mistake or error learning process. In fact, many junior high school students often find the difficulties in reading comprehension. These difficulties result the student's poor performance in reading test. Thus, from these factors arise some difficulties in reading comprehension.

Factors difficulties that faced by students divided into external and internal. "Internal factor includes physics, intellectual, and psychological. While external factors include family and school environments" (Rahim, 2006). Fajar (2009) said that"

> There are some internal factors that influence the students in reading comprehension that are generally found by the reader during reading, namely; difficulty in understanding long sentence and text, difficulty that is caused by limited background knowledge, difficulty in using reading strategies and difficulty in concentration. (Fajar, 2009)

Concept of Reading Comprehension at Junior High School

Nowadays, at junior high school, teaching reading intends to develop students' skill in reading comprehension. Based on the basic competence of 2013 curriculum of the first grade junior high school, the students are expected to comprehend social function, generic structures, and language features in reading descriptive, narrative, recount texts, expository texts and so on in oral and written form. However, in a real situation, the students have not achieved the curriculum expectation and have lower ability in reading comprehension. In addition, to overcome the difficulties of students in reading, teachers must first find out or know what difficulties experienced by students during the reading process and factors that cause difficulty in reading.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Descriptive quantitative was used as the methods of this research. The population of this research was the first grade of Junior High School 2 Serang City. 7H class which consisted of 19 students were used as the total sampling.

Research Instruments

In order to collect the data, some instruments were used as follow:
a. Test

The researcher gave reading test to the students in the form of google form to measure the students' comprehensibility in reading. By giving the reading test, the researcher tried to find out whether the students can answer the test well or not. The right and the wrong answer from the students were used as an indicator whether the students find the difficulties or not. In order to get the data, the writer adopted two text from the students' text book "English on Sky". The researcher conducted a test which consists of 10 multiple choice questions in two cycle. The researcher also used five aspects of reading comprehension in this test. The five aspects of reading comprehension were

determining main idea, making inference, identifying reference, finding specific information, and the understanding meaning of words or vocabulary.

b. Questionnaire

Spreading questionnaire to the students through google form was a way to get more concrete data students' factors difficulty in reading comprehension. Questionnaire was one of the ways to know the factor difficulties faced by students in reading comprehension. In this case, the form of questionnaire was closed with the alternative answer that would be chosen by the students.

Data Analysis

a. The analysis of the Test

First, the result of the students' test by using the scale that used by Arikunto (1989):

$$S = \frac{R}{N} \times 100\%$$

Where,

S = Correct Percentage
R = Correct answers
N = Total Questions

The index of difficulty of the question items using analysis of difficulty index adopted in Arikunto (2008):

$$P = \frac{B}{JS}$$

Where,

P = Proportion or index of difficulty
B = Number of the students who answer the item correctly
JS = The total number of the students

And the interpretation for index of difficulty was classified as follow:

The Classification of P Value:

Interval	Classification
$0 - 30$	Easy
$31 - 70$	Fair
$71 - 100$	Difficult

The measurement of percentage to know the percent of difficult item of each question types. It used the following formula as Sudijino (2001: 40):

$$P = \frac{F}{N} \times 100\%$$

Where,

P = Proportion or index of difficulty
F = Number of the students who answer the item incorrect
N = The total number of the students

The average percentages of incorrect answer by using measurement of the mean:

$$A = \frac{\sum p}{N}$$

Where,

A = Average

∑p = The total percentage of incorrectness
N   = The total of the students

b. The analysis of questionnaire

In this case, the form of questionnaire was closed with the alternative answer that would be chosen by the students. Students chose only the best answer which are suitable to themselves. Questionnaire contained 8 questions that need to be responded correctly by the students. To analyze the questionnaire, the researcher used the following formula as Sudjono (2001: 43):

$$P = \frac{F}{N} \times 100\%$$

Where,

P = Percentage
F = Frequency
N = The total number of the respondents

RESULTS

The Analysis of the Test

Finding of the research conducted by the researcher focuses in the difficulties faced by the students in reading comprehension. The following table presents the frequency of the students' correct answer and score in reading comprehension test.

Table 1. The Frequency of the Students' Correct Answer and Score of Reading Comprehension Text

No	Correct answer	Frequency	Score
1	17	2	89
2	15	4	79
3	14	3	74
4	13	5	68
5	12	2	63
6	10	2	52
7	9	1	47
Mean score			**70**

The lowest score of the minimum criteria of completeness (KKM) is 72 and highest score is 100. It means only six students achieved the KKM score; two of students got 89 and four of students got 79. Therefore, based on the explanation above, it can be stated that the students' reading skill is still low.

The Students' Difficulty in Answering Main Idea Questions

The writer created four questions for finding main ideas of the passages. The question items for getting the main idea are questions 6, 9, 1 and 4.

Table 2. The Calculation of the Percentage of Difficult in Answering Main Idea Questions

No	Question items' number	The number of incorrect answer	Percentage of difficulty per question item (%)	The percentage of reading for main idea difficulty
1	6	16	84%	74%
2	9	14	73%	
3	1	12	63%	
4	4	15	78%	

Based on the calculation of percentage of difficult, it found that the difficult item percentage for this type of question only 74% out of four questions items. It means that the questions are categorized difficult for students in answering main idea questions.

The Students' Difficulty in Answering Locating Referency Questions

For locating reference questions, there are four questions. The questions items for locating reference appeared in question 4, 8, 3 and 5. For detail, it is at the following table.

Table 3. The Calculation of the Percentage of Difficult in Answering Locating reference Questions

No	Question items' number	The number of incorrect answer	Percentage of difficulty per question item (%)	The percentage of reading for locating reference difficulty
1	4	11	58%	71%
2	8	14	74%	
3	3	14	74%	
4	5	15	78%	

Based on the table above, the difficulty item percentage that the students have for locating reference is 71% of four question items. It can be concluded that the questions are difficult for students in answering locating references.

The Students' Difficulty in Answering Vocabulary Questions

For the calculation of percentage of difficulty for understanding vocabulary questions, the result is presented in the following table.

Table 4. The Calculation of the Percentage of Difficult in Answering vocabulary Questions

No	Question items' number	The number of incorrect answer	Percentage of difficulty per question item (%)	The percentage of reading for understanding vocabulary difficulty
1	2	6	31%	37%
2	7	8	42%	
3	8	4	21%	
4	10	11	57%	

In short, it is 37% of difficulty faced by the students in understanding vocabulary of reading comprehension. It can be concluded that the questions are categorized fair questions for students in answering vocabulary questions.

The Students' Difficulty in Answering Making Inference Questions

The question items number for making inference appeared in question 1, 5, 6 and 9. The following table presents the difficult item percentage for making inference questions.

Table 5. The Calculation of the Percentage of Difficult in Answering Making inference Questions

No	Question items' number	The number of incorrect answer	Percentage of difficulty per question item (%)	The percentage of reading for making inference difficulty
1	1	12	63%	56%
2	5	14	73%	
3	6	10	52%	
4	9	7	36%	

Moreover, the percentage of difficult item for this types is 56% of four question items. It means that the question is categorized fair. It can be concluded that the students have fair level of difficulty in answering making inferences questions.

The Students' Difficulty in Answering Detail Information Questions

For detail information, there are four questions provided by the researcher (question 3, 10, 2, and 7). The following table provides the percentage of difficulty item for detail information questions.

Table 6. The Calculation of the Percentage of Difficult in Answering Detail Information Questions

No	Question items' number	The number of incorrect answer	Percentage of difficulty per question item (%)	The percentage of reading for detail information difficulty
1	3	3	15%	9%
2	10	1	5%	
3	2	2	10%	
4	7	1	5%	

Furthermore, the calculation of the percentage of difficult item that the students have for detail information questions is 9% of four question items. It means that the students do not have a lot difficulties in answering detail information questions.

The Analysis of Questionnaire

The purpose of questionnaire is to find out the factors difficulties faced by students in reading comprehension at the first grade of Junior High School 2 Serang Ciry. In the process of giving questionnaire to the students, the researcher provided

20 minutes to answer it. Then, the writer guided the students how to answer the questions and suggested them to choose the suitable answer based on their opinion. In analyzing the data, the writer used frequency distribution formula. The result can be seen in the table below.

Table 7. Students' understanding about vocabulary of the text

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Always	0	0%
Often	16	84%
Seldom	3	16%
Never	0	0%
	19	100%

It means that it is categorized difficult for the students in understanding vocabulary of the text. However, none of them answered always and never. It can be concluded that the most students have problem in understanding vocabulary of text.

Table 8. Students' understanding about the intent of the text

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Always	15	79%
Often	0	0%
Seldom	4	21%
Never	0	0%
	19	100%

It means that it is categorized easy for students in understanding the intent of the text. However, none of the students chose never. It can be concluded that the students have difficulty in understanding the intent of the text.

Table 9. Students' difficulty in concentration of the text

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Always	15	79%
Often	4	21%
Seldom	0	0%
Never	0	0%
	19	100%

It means that it is categorized easy for students in concentration of the text. However, none of the students chose "seldom" or "never". It can be concluded that all of the students have difficulty in concentration of the text.

Table 10. Students' understanding about the strategies of reading text

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Always	0	0%
Often	2	11%
Seldom	0	0%
Never	17	89%
	19	100%

It means that it is easy for some students to understand strategies of reading text. However, none of the students answered "seldom" or "always". From this

result, it can be concluded that the students have difficulty in understanding the strategies of reading text.

Table 11. Students' difficulty in determining main idea of the text

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Always	18	95%
Often	1	5%
Seldom	0	0%
Never	0	0%
	19	**100%**

It means that it is categorized easy for students in determining main idea of the text. However, none of the students chose "seldom" or "never". It can be concluded that most of the students have difficulty in determine main idea of the text.

Table 12. Students' understanding of grammatical structure of the text

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Always	0	0%
Often	3	16%
Seldom	0	0%
Never	16	84%
	19	**100%**

It means that the students pretending that it is easy for students in understanding grammatical structure of the text. However, none of them answered always and seldom. It can be concluded that the most students have problem in understanding grammatical structure of the text.

Table 13. Students' understanding about the context of the text

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Always	0	0%
Often	4	21%
Seldom	15	79%
Never	0	0%
	19	**100%**

It means that it is categorized as easy for students in understanding the context of the text. However, none of the students answered "seldom" or "never". From this result, it means that the students who have difficulty in understanding the contexts of the text.

Table 14. Students' difficulty in determining inferences of the text

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Always	16	84%
Often	3	16%
Seldom	0	0%
Never	0	0%
	19	**100%**

It means that it is easy for students in determining inferences of the text. However, none of them answered "seldom" and "never". It can be concluded that the most students have difficulty in determining inferences of the text.

DISCUSSION

The result of the test to 19 of the first grade students of Junior High School 2 Serang City showed that the students have difficulty in answering the reading comprehension test. In general, from the result of the students' test score only two students could answer correctly 17 question items of 20 question items with the test score of 89.4. Meanwhile, most of the students got the score below 56%. Therefore, the students' mean score is only 70.

Moreover, based on the calculation of index difficulty of each question item, it is found that there are 5 question items categorized as easy question, 7 question items categorized as fair questions and 8 questions items categorized as difficult questions. Specifically, the calculation of index difficulty showed that the test item number 5, 6, 8, 9, 1, 3, 4, and 5 are categorized as difficult question for the students. Then, some students from 40 students could answer these questions correctly. Only twenty students could answer question number 5, 8, 9, and 13. Only 10 students could answered the item number 6 correctly. Moreover, 6 students could answer number 1, 4, and 5. The question number 6 is categorized as the most difficult question with the index of difficulty 0.15 as only 4 students could answer this question correctly.

The question item number 1, 5, 6, and 9 are making inference questions. The students found difficulty to answer this type of question as the percentage of difficulty item for this question is 56%. The students need to look and use context clue in the passage since the answer of making inference question is not directly stated within the passage in order the students could answer the inference question correctly.

Furthermore, for main idea questions, most of the question items of this type are considered as difficult question for the students. Moreover, the percentage of difficulty item of this type is 74%. Based on the percentage of all difficulty item, main idea question is the most difficult question for the students.

The test item number 4, 8, 3 and 5 are locating reference questions. Three question items of four questions are categorized difficult question. Those item number 8, 3 and 5. Locating reference question is considered as difficult question for the students since the percentage of difficulty item for this question is 71%.

Meanwhile, vocabulary questions and detail information question are not considered as difficult question because the percentage of difficulty item this questions is below 37%. For vocabulary questions, the percentage of difficult item is 37% since only one question of four question items is categorized difficult question for the students. For detail question, four question items are categorized easy question for the students. Therefore, the percentage of difficulty item for detail information question is 9%.

From the discussion above, some difficulties faced by the first grade students of Junior High School 2 Serang City in reading comprehension test are difficulty in answering main idea questions, difficulty in answering making inference, and difficulty in answering locating reference questions. The most difficult aspect

encountered by the first grade students in reading comprehension is finding main idea questions, because the located of main idea it is difficult to find.

The researcher also concluded that there are some factors that influence the students in comprehending English text. First, the students are difficult to know grammatical of sentence like using subject pronoun, object pronoun, and possessive pronoun of sentences in the text. Second, the students are difficult to understand long sentences, it made the students difficult to concentrate. Third, the lack of knowledge about the strategies of reading comprehension make imped the students in understanding about the material.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion, it can be concluded that the students' difficulties were related to the question types of reading comprehension test. After analyzing the data gained from the test, the writer concluded that the first grade students of Junior High School 2 Serang City have difficulties in answering reading comprehension test. From five types of reading comprehension question, three types of them are categorized as difficult question types for the students.

The difficulties faced by the students are difficulty in answering main idea questions (74%), making inferences questions (56%), and locating reference questions (71%). Therefore, the most difficult aspect faced by the first grade students is reading for making inferences questions with (74%). As the result, most of the students had difficulty in achieving the standard grade for reading comprehension test. This can be seen from the mean score of the students (70) for reading comprehension test.

This research also provided reasons factors why the students faced difficulties with these questions. Mostly, the students failed in the reading comprehension tests because of poor vocabulary, poor mastery of grammar, difficult to understand long sentences and text, and lack of knowledge about strategies of reading comprehension.

Moreover, the researcher tries to formulate some reccomendations for future researchers who wanted to conduct some topic. For future researchers, they should consider the time to conduct this research. It needed in order to get the maximum result in calculating both the students' test and questionnaire.

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FINAL GRADE

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GENERAL COMMENTS

Instructor