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ASSESSING THE LEVEL OF THE STUDENT'S READING COMPREHENSION ABILITIES AND THEIR DIFFICULTIES

by

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Abstract:

This study aimed to assess the student's reading comprehension level and the difficulties that the students faced in reading. The writer conducted this study at Senior High School 2 Pasuruan, especially the 11th-grade students in Language Programs. This study focused on the student's reading ability level and the difficulties that the students faced in reading. The writer used survey research designs in conducting this study. The participants of this study were 30 students. In collecting the data, the writer distributed closed-ended questionnaires, which consisted of 29 questions with a 4-point scale (always, sometimes, rarely, and never). The result showed that 47% of students faced many problems or difficulties understanding the reading text. While 37% of students sometimes found difficulties reading an English passage, 16% of the students who chose "rarely" indicated that the difficulty they faced was not challenging. In conclusion, it was found that many students still need help comprehending the text. The study implies that the influencing factors in reading must be addressed.

Keywords: reading comprehension, assessment, reading ability, reading difficulties

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menilai tingkat pemahaman bacaan siswa dan kesulitan yang dihadapi siswa dalam membaca. Penulis melakukan penelitian ini di SMA 2 Pasuruan, khususnya siswa kelas 11 Program Bahasa. Penelitian ini berfokus pada tingkat kemampuan membaca siswa dan kesulitan yang dihadapi siswa dalam membaca. Penulis menggunakan desain penelitian survei dalam melakukan penelitian ini. Peserta penelitian ini berjumlah 30 siswa. Dalam mengumpulkan data, penulis menyebarkan kuesioner tertutup, yang terdiri dari 29 pertanyaan dengan skala 4 poin. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa 47% siswa menghadapi banyak masalah atau kesulitan memahami teks bacaan. Sementara 37% siswa kadang-kadang menemukan kesulitan dalam membaca bagian bahasa Inggris, 16% dari siswa yang memilih "jarang" menunjukkan bahwa kesulitan yang mereka hadapi tidak benar-benar menantang bagi mereka. Kesimpulannya, ditemukan bahwa banyak siswa masih mengalami kesulitan memahami teks. Studi ini menyiratkan bahwa faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi dalam membaca harus ditangani.

Kata kunci: pemahaman bacaan, Asesmen, kemampuan membaca, kesulitan membaca

INTRODUCTION

Reading abilities are vital in today's society for gaining access to many media types and acquiring knowledge independently. It is hardly surprising, however, that schools place such a

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Rahmah & Mistar (2023)

strong emphasis on reading skills. Reading is a complicated activity that involves multiple functions of the eye, voice, and brain, such as perceiving, detecting, vocalizing, comprehending, and creating in the brain. The perception of lines, characters, and symbols is the first step in this process, regarding the attention focused on understanding words and phrases and selecting information that is of interest and required (Sağirli & Ateş, 2015). Once fundamental reading abilities are achieved, the emphasis changes to increase speed and comprehension to readily gather knowledge across all disciplines (Seifert & Paleczek, 2021). As a result, reading comprehension is an important skill to have.

However, reading comprehension is one of the most challenging tasks. Reading comprehension involves integrating numerous linguistic and cognitive processes but is not limited to word reading skills, working memory, inference production, comprehension monitoring, vocabulary, and prior knowledge (Elleman & Oslund, 2019). Reading comprehension is one area where this acknowledged lack of vocabulary knowledge has the potential to affect learners' academic progress. Laufer (1997) proposed that to grasp a text, learners need to access at least the 3.000 most common word families easily. Coxhead, Stevens, and Tinkle (2010) revealed that vocabulary is essential to reading. Students who need help understanding the vocabulary of the texts used in their classes sometimes fail to comprehend the compulsory classroom reading.

Reading comprehension assessments encompass approaches and procedures designed to demonstrate how well students can read, grasp, interpret, and evaluate various texts. Reading comprehension exercises can be added in EFL courses to determine how well students grasp a sound text. The goals of reading comprehension testing differ significantly. Similarly, assessment tools and activities can take a variety of forms. They are from state-wide "high stakes" assessments to district or school-wide paper and pencil silent reading tests, formal tests administered individually as part of diagnostic protocols, and dynamic qualitative assessments of how deeply an individual student understands a specific curriculum-related selection (Snyder et al., 2005). Assessment is regarded as one of the essential educational procedures in both teaching and learning. It is a set of techniques and approaches used in classrooms to assist teachers in precisely defining the needs and competencies of their students. In other words, it is an educational and instructional activity that requires acquiring information about learners to recognize their strengths and limitations accurately.

Rahmah & Mistar (2023)

Reading comprehension tasks can thus be included in EFL courses to determine how effectively students grasp a sound text. Indeed, reading comprehension assessment should be based on sensible criteria and practical measures.

Reading comprehension is the competence to analyze literature, grasp its meaning, and integrate it with the reader's knowledge. The competence to interpret text is impacted by readers' abilities and ability to process information (Yurko & Protsenko, 2022). According to Khasawneh (2021), reading comprehension also assists pupils in seeing the many meanings of the reading material and the capacity to analyze and evaluate. Reading comprehension abilities play a significant role in deciding a student's academic success or failure. The development of reading speed abilities for learners is vital in the early stages because pupils in these stages are expected to be able to read rapidly and to read to profit from new knowledge (Meisinger et al., 2010). Thus, reading is an essential skill that allows us to get more information and broaden our horizons and understanding.

Reading comprehension is one of the most complicated human activities. According to Elleman & Oslund (2019), reading theorists have needed help depicting reading comprehension in a complete and meaningful way. Many theoretical models have been presented in recent decades. Individual variations in these two components have been found to explain reading comprehension across various languages, though their relative connection fluctuates over time (Catts, 2018). Decoding is connected with reading comprehension earlier in development than linguistic ability, but once decoding is mastered, linguistic knowledge becomes a stronger predictor of reading comprehension (Adlof et al., 2006).

Based on Elleman & Oslund (2019), reading comprehension is one of the most challenging tasks which involves the integration of numerous linguistic and cognitive processes but is not limited to word reading skills, working memory, inference production, comprehension monitoring, vocabulary, and prior knowledge. In sum, we must struggle to comprehend the text by continuing to train ourselves to read and cultivate reading as our hobby.

Coxhead, Stevens, and Tinkle (2010) believed that vocabulary is essential to reading. Students who cannot master the vocabulary of the texts used in their classes sometimes fail to understand compulsory classroom reading. In the UK, EAL students need to be able to access at least 3.000 words. BasedLaufer (1997) proposed that learners should be able to retrieve at

Rahmah & Mistar (2023)

least the 3.000 most common word families automatically. The number of words necessary for EAL students to learn in a classroom where English is the language of instruction is higher than in other languages: According to Nation (2006), students need to know the first 8.000-to-9.000-word families in order to appreciate the sorts of literary books that EAL students are expected to interact within the classroom. This figure is relatively stable across various literary works and nonfiction books (Coxhead et al., 2010).

Vocabulary knowledge is also necessary for students to succeed in technical courses such as math and physics (Trakulphadetkrai et al., 2020). For example, Greene and Coxhead (2015) discovered that eighth-grade students would need a vocabulary of at least the first 7,000 words families to understand these texts after examining the range and frequency of words found in a corpus compiled from science textbooks used in middle-school classrooms in the United States. However, Stahl and Nagy (2006) found that explicit instruction has also been ruled out as a critical component in vocabulary acquisition. Children are only taught a fraction of the words needed to accumulate the 40,000 words that the average high school student is predicted to know. In understanding a reading text, one thing that we need to increase is our vocabulary mastery. To master vocabulary, we need to memorize some unfamiliar words by highlighting the unknown words, making a list, and practicing the new vocabulary we got by making a sentence or even a paragraph.

Reading fluency is the ability to scan a text accurately with a proper expression which refers to appropriate stop/pause and a good intonation when reading aloud. Grabe (2010) stated that a fluent reader could read correctly and quickly. Fluency is an important part of reading comprehension since it indicates the number of cognitive resources available for word decoding and recognition (Adlof et al., 2006). Perfetti and Stafura (2014) added that it is easier to integrate information when knowing familiar words that could help understand and comprehend the text. Aster (xxxx) claims that growth in subsequent reading comprehension is associated with improving word reading accuracy and efficiency and vocabulary knowledge (van der Kleij et al., 2022). Therefore, learners who regularly read for pleasure could enhance their reading ability and improve their vocabulary more than those who seldom read.

Based on Habib (2016), reading comprehension assessment involves several approaches and procedures designed to demonstrate how well students can read, grasp, interpret, and evaluate various sorts of texts. In this regard, particular reading comprehension exercises can be added in EFL courses to determine how effectively students can construct an

understanding of a sound text. He added that assessment determines how learners develop in their learning so that appropriate decisions may be made when creating and organizing classroom education. Assessment is an essential component of education, and a suitable classroom assessment is related to immediate learning (Carr & Harris, 2001). Many researchers and practitioners believe that most standardized reading comprehension tests must adequately capture the comprehension process (Muhassin et al., 2021). Researchers and educators should construct measures beyond the low-level abilities accessed by multiple choice questions and closed-ended items to give information about students' deeper processing of text and examine present measures (Elleman & Oslund, 2019).

A method can be used to assess reading comprehension, namely the Maze framework. The maze framework, frequently referenced and utilized in assessing reading comprehension, is another option for testing text comprehension. The maze process is a universal screening method for identifying poor readers. This method has undergone significant testing, particularly in English-speaking nations (Seifert & Paleczek, 2021). In such procedures, students must read a piece of a book silently within a specific time limit. A target word must be detected in the text every seventh word out of three offered words (2 distractors, one target word). The maze framework could impose a time constraint, and it is an effective method of assessing reading fluency or speed (Muijselaar et al., 2017). The maze framework can capture reading comprehension by reducing distractor difficulty (Conoyer et al., 2017). However, Dixon, Oxley, Gellert, & Nash (2012) said that some studies argued that the maze framework measured reading comprehension at the sentence level rather than the next level.

The study seeks to find two types of empirical evidence upon all theoretical and empirical reviews. Therefore, we set research questions.

1. What is the student's level of reading ability?
2. What types of difficulties do they encounter in reading?

METHOD

Design

The writer used descriptive quantitative, especially survey research designs in this study. The writer used a survey research design by distributing questionnaires about the students' difficulties in comprehending the text. Other than reading ability, the previous study has inspired the current study (Turmudi & Ratini, 2022). Thomas (2010) defines a survey as

Rahmah & Mistar (2023)

"a type of quantitative research concerned with sampling questionnaire, questionnaire design, and questionnaire administration" to gather information from the group/population under study and then analyze it to understand their behavior/characteristics (Thomas, 2010). However, the survey employs outline three basic tenets in survey research, namely, the survey is used to describe quantitatively a sectional aspect of a given population that involves studying the relationship, data are obtained from people in survey research methods, and the survey sample a part of the population that is later used to generalize the whole population (Vasantha & Harinarayana, 2016).

Participant

To assess the level of reading comprehension and the difficulties that the students faced in reading, the writer has purposively chosen the 11th grades students of Language Programs at Senior high school 2 Pasuruan as a subject. The students who participated in answering the questionnaires were 30 students. They were bound to learn English as a foreign language for 4 hours a week.

Instrument

We employed a questionnaire as a tool to gain data. The instrument uses 29 questions with closed-ended answers. Every answer was graded based on a 4-point scale (always, sometimes, rarely, and never). This instrument has also been used in the previous study so that the validity is unquestionable (Turmudi, 2015); however, the subject was different.

Data collection technique

There are some procedures for collecting the data. Firstly, the respondents were asked to rate themselves on a 4-point scale (always, sometimes, rarely, and never). Then the students were asked to complete a questionnaire depending on the circumstance that applied to them. The questionnaire responses give helpful information on difficulties comprehending the text, indicating unfamiliar words. Secondly, the writer measured the result quantitatively by using a pie chart. The researcher took seven students to be interviewed to get further information. Lastly, the writer described the result of the pie chart and took a conclusion.

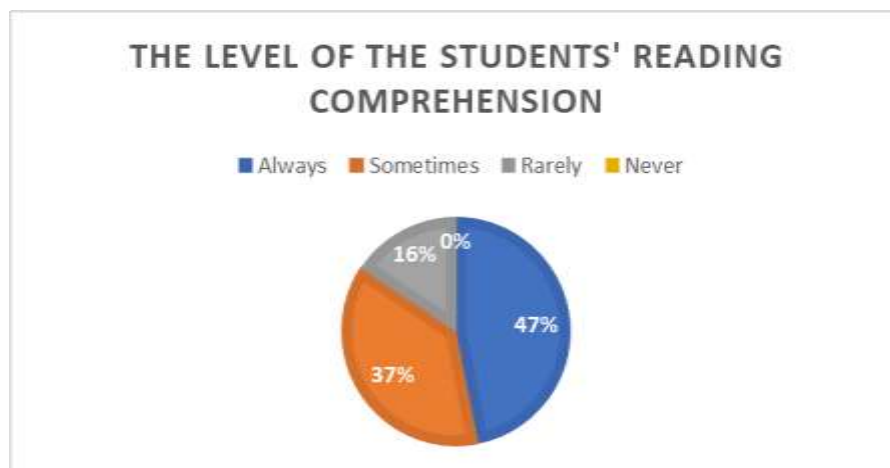
Data analysis technique

To know the students' understanding of reading a text, the writer prepared a closed-ended questionnaire about the difficulties that the students faced in reading comprehension.

The questionnaires consist of 29 with a 4-point scale (always, sometimes, rarely, and never). Thus, the data were an ordinal number. We then summarized and ranked the data to describe in the chart. We also employed a model of arranging citations offline using Mendeley Desktop (Turmudi, 2020). The whole application and data analysis model secure the issue of the validity of the findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

As a result, many students need help comprehending the text. One of the main problems is the need for more vocabulary that could obstruct them from understanding the context of the reading text. It also indicates that the students have limited reading skills, such as working memory, inference production, comprehension monitoring, and prior knowledge, or need to learn the topics. It was shown by the results of the questionnaires as follows.



Picture 1 pie chart of the student's reading comprehension

Based on the pie chart above showed that 47% of students faced many problems or difficulties in understanding the reading text. Some of the students needed help recognizing some unfamiliar words in the text, and they also needed to gain a piece of prior knowledge about the context. Those problems made them difficult to comprehend the content of the reading text. While 37% of students sometimes found difficulties in reading an English passage. It means that they also found the same problems, such as a lack of vocabulary, lack of prior knowledge, or lack of interest in the text genre. For the last, 16% of the students choose "rarely" which indicates that the level of difficulty that they faced is not really challenging for them. It means that those students could comprehend the text well.

Rahmah & Mistar (2023)

In conclusion, we can see from the result above that many students faced difficulties in comprehending the text. It indicates that the students face many problems, such as a lack of vocabulary, limited reading skills, working memory, inference production, comprehension monitoring, and need for prior knowledge. Those problems could interfere with the students' reading abilities.

Discussion

Based on the findings above, the results showed that many students still face difficulties in comprehending the text. It was proven by the results of interviewing the students, which will be described in the table below.

Table 1 The results of the Interview Session

Initial Name	Students Responses
RU	I found it challenging to understand the whole text because there were so many unfamiliar words.
JM	It is so hard to comprehend the text. I do not know some words, making it difficult to understand their meaning. I must look up the dictionary to get the meaning. However, sometimes it still needs to be clarified to get the content.
DA	I need help understanding the meaning, so it is challenging to know the meaning of the whole text, and I skip the words
	. LA I read the passage many times when the teacher asks me to read it. However, I understand half of it.

Based on the table above, the students face the same difficulties in comprehending the text. The students need help understanding the content of the text and the meaning of the unfamiliar words. The complexity of the words is referred to as orthographic and morphological, which might be more challenging and complex (Lawrence et al., 2022). It makes it easier to integrate information across a book so that a mental model may be developed to enhance understanding to know a large number of words that can be absorbed quickly (Perfetti & Stafura, 2014). Readers will be able to estimate the meaning of any unfamiliar words they come across owing to improved reading accuracy and comprehension, which will boost vocabulary development (van der Kleij et al., 2022).

On the other hand, another expert found that the learners had difficulty with reading fluency and accuracy, shown in transparent orthographies (Virinkoski et al., 2022). Smith, Snow, Serry, and Hammond (2021) claimed that reading comprehension had been extensively

Rahmah & Mistar (2023)

acknowledged and explored in the background knowledge, and it played an essential role in reading instruction. Therefore, those problems affected the students' comprehension. To comprehend the text, learners need to read more and note unfamiliar words, which will help them quickly memorize new words and understand the text.

Based on the result above, many students still need help comprehending the text. Of the 47% of students facing many difficulties in reading a text, they might have implemented the right strategy that suits them. Muhassin, Annisa, & Hidayati (2021) conducted a fix-up strategy in reading, and the result showed that it significantly could improve the student's reading ability. A fix-up strategy, or FUS, could assist the students in comprehending the text or phrases by rereading the context to find the missing terms (Muhassin et al., 2021). This strategy could help the students to discover difficult words (Yusuf et al., 2016).

Moreover, Mawaddah & Heriyawati (2022) claimed that one of the media that can be used to improve the student's comprehension is multimodal text or storyboard. It is a comic or a storyline picture. They found that media is beneficial to enhance the student's interest. In addition, Gufron and Nurdianingsih (2021) stated that the QAR strategy could help students to think and develop their metacognitive abilities. QAR, called as *Question-and-Answer strategy*, assist them in summarizing the text that has been read. It allowed the students to make some points to make finding the main idea and supporting sentences easier.

In sum, even though many students still face difficulties in comprehending the reading text, there is still a way to solve those problems. In overcoming those problems, we can conduct learning strategies or learning media that can support the students in improving their reading comprehension skills.

CONCLUSION & SUGESSTIONS

Conclusion

Some factors could influence the students' reading performance, such as lack of vocabulary, limited reading skills, working memory, inference production, comprehension monitoring, and do not have prior knowledge. The survey templates' results indicated that 47% of the students had difficulties comprehending the text. Therefore, it becomes a severe problem for successful reading comprehension assessment. Consequently, students must work hard to improve their reading skills. The students must also read more to increase their

Rahmah & Mistar (2023)

vocabulary knowledge and insight. Not only that, but the teacher also must recommend some tips to improve the student's reading ability skills by giving them some tips or strategies in reading. It could help them to improve their comprehension of reading text.

Limitation

The study is limited to a survey study using closed-ended questionnaires. The participants of this study were limited to 30 students who were out of theory. The output data were ordinal data ranked in percentage. Future studies may use both ordinal and qualitative data. The study employed a single data type and did not involve other instruments to enrich the validity of the data. Future studies may include interviews and observation instruments to confirm the gained data. In addition, the survey instrument still needs to be validated so that the validity and reliability are verified.

Implication

ELT teachers inevitably employ the survey study to explore potential problems or difficulties in reading before going beyond reading comprehension. Initial data from the survey can be scaffolded to further aspects of reading comprehension. The model applies to any level of students in the EFL context since English functions as a foreign language different from second language reading.

BIO-PROFILE

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