

The Analysis of Difficulties in Reading Descriptive Text Encountered by Seventh-grade Students of SMP Negeri 7 Kupang in the Academic Year 2023/2024

Melisha Rame ^{a,1,*}

Laurensius Kian Bera ^{b,2}

Zantty O. Padahana ^{c,3}

^{a,b,c}English Education Study Program, Nusa Cendana University, Kupang, Indonesia

¹melisharame18@gmail.com

²laurensiuskianbera@yahoo.co.id

³zantty@staff.undana.ac.id

KEYWORDS

Descriptive Text,
Reading,
Reading Difficulties.

ABSTRACT

This research aims to find out types of difficulties in reading comprehension of descriptive text and to find out the causes of difficulties in reading comprehension of descriptive text encountered by seventh-grade students of SMP negeri 7 Kupang. The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative and the data source of this research are 30 seventh-grade students in class A. The researcher used test-like assignment and interview to collect data. The researcher analyzed the data by using descriptive qualitative techniques (identification, description, and conclusion). The researcher found students have difficulty in understanding main idea with a total of 71 incorrect answers out of 120 answers (59,17%). Difficulty in locating reference with a total of 88 incorrect answers out of 120 answers (73,3%). Difficulty in understanding vocabulary with a total of 82 incorrect answers out of 120 answers (70%). Then, difficulty in making inference with a total of 81 incorrect answers out of 120 answers (66,7%) and difficulty in finding detailed information with a total of 80 incorrect answers out of 120 answers (66,7%). Besides, the researcher found causes of difficulties in reading comprehension of descriptive text because of internal factor namely students have no interest in learning English, lack of English learning experience, lack of ability to read English texts, lack of vocabulary, low prior knowledge, did not know structure of descriptive text and external factor namely lack of teaching techniques, less supportive home, school environment. It is recommended that students should be self-aware of the value of reading comprehension and motivated to pursue it. teacher should come up with more creative ways to teach reading. Teacher should be diligent in going to class to teach.

How to cite: Rame, M., Kian Bera. L., Padahana, Z.O. (2025) The Analysis of Difficulties in Reading Descriptive Text Encountered by Seventh-grade Students of SMP Negeri 7 Kupang in the Academic Year 2023/2024. SPARKLE Journal of Language, Education and Culture, 6 (1) 63-69.

INTRODUCTION

English is playing a significant role in a globalization era nowadays. It becomes the most spoken language in the world after the mother tongue. Globalization made the use of English becomes wider. The ability to speak, to write, to listen and to read in English has been one of the essential benchmark skills in the professional world (Berlinda, 2017). If someone cannot master these four skills, he is hardly competing in this globalization. English in schools is designed to help students master the basic skills of language and expanding their knowledge more about English itself and other benefits that can be gained by mastering it (Kemdikbud, 2022). Reading is one of the four language skills taught in English class besides speaking, listening, and writing. Reading in the teaching and learning process is categorized as a receptive skill. It means student do not need to produce English while reading, yet, they only act as the recipient of the information in the text. That is why comprehension is referred as the main purpose of reading. Despite comprehension plays an important role in reading, comprehending English text is still considered as a difficult aspect for most students in schools even though they have been learning English for years. It is proven by the previous researches about reading comprehension difficulty. One of those researches was conducted by Larasati, (2019) where the researcher presented the data of difficulties in comprehending English reading text. The results of the research showed that students still had difficulties in identifying main idea, in understanding vocabulary, making inference, and in identifying detail information in text. The described phenomenon above is also discovered in SMP Negeri 7 Kupang. Based on researcher's teaching practice experience in this school, the researcher found that students often struggle to understand English text because they are not interested in learning

the language. They claimed that English pronunciation was different from Indonesian, this made them did not enjoy reading English materials if they received an English homework. The researcher believed that lack of vocabulary influenced them to have less motivation in learning English, difficulty identifying important details, difficulty assembling information sequentially, and difficulty understanding the context and background of the text. In addition, students' tendency to use google translate to translate the whole text decrease their initiative to learn independently in understanding English text. That is why the researcher interest to conduct the research under the title: **"The Analysis of Difficulties in Reading Descriptive Text Encountered by Seventh-grade Students of SMP Negeri 7 Kupang in the Academic Year 2023/2024"**

METHOD

The researcher used the descriptive qualitative method in this research. The researcher considers this method is appropriate to describe difficulties and causes of difficulties explicitly encountered by seventh grade students in descriptive text reading comprehension. The researcher chose SMP Negeri 7 Kupang which is located in Jl. BTN-Kolhua, Maulafa Distict, Kupang city, East Nusa Tenggara province as the location of research. In order to gain the data, the researcher used test-like assignment and interview to collect the data. After collecting the data, the researcher analyzed it by using descriptive qualitative technique with the following procedures: Step one is Identification. Firstly, the researcher analyzed the result of the test to determine difficulties faced by students in comprehending descriptive text. In which aspect students face difficulties in comprehending the content of the descriptive text (determining main idea, locating reference, understanding vocabulary, making inference and detail information). Secondly, the researcher analyzed the result of the interview to identify and determine causes of difficulties faced by student in descriptive text reading comprehension. Step two is Description. The researcher described the data to make the result of the research clear, readable, and understandable. Step three is Conclusion, the researcher concluded the result of this research and she would present it in the form of narrative.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The researcher identified difficulties faced by students based on their incorrect answers of the test and classified difficulties into each aspect of reading comprehension difficulty such as determining idea, understanding vocabulary, locating references, making inferences, and detailed information where each aspect consist of 4 questions. The researcher used this formula in order to draw the percentage of each error.

$$\frac{\text{Number of students' errors}}{\text{Total of Errors}} \times 100\%$$

Students	Total Items of the question	Aspects of Reading Comprehension Difficulty					Total of incorrect answer
		Difficulty in Determining Main Idea (1,2,3,4)	Difficulty in Locating Reference (5,6,7,8)	Difficulty in Understanding Vocabulary (9,10,11,12)	Difficulty in Making Inference (13,14,15,16)	Difficulty in Finding Detail Information (17,18,19,20)	
S1	20	1	3	4	2	2	12
S2	20	1	4	3	3	3	14
S3	20	4	3	3	3	4	17
S4	20	3	4	2	2	3	14
S5	20	2	3	2	1	3	11

S6	20	1	3	1	3	3	11
S7	20	4	3	3	2	2	14
S8	20	3	3	2	2	2	14
S9	20	1	4	3	4	3	15
S10	20	2	3	2	2	4	13
S11	20	2	4	2	3	2	13
S12	20	3	4	4	3	4	18
S13	20	3	1	4	4	3	15
S14	20	2	2	4	1	4	13
S15	20	2	3	4	4	2	15
S16	20	3	3	4	3	2	15
S17	20	3	3	2	3	3	14
S18	20	3	4	2	3	3	15
S19	20	3	4	2	3	2	14
S20	20	2	1	3	2	4	12
S21	20	2	4	3	3	2	14
S22	20	2	2	1	2	2	9
S23	20	2	3	2	4	2	13
S24	20	2	4	4	3	1	14
S25	20	2	2	3	3	1	11
S26	20	1	3	4	2	2	12
S27	20	2	2	2	2	2	10
S28	20	4	2	1	3	2	12
S29	20	3	3	3	2	4	15
S30	20	3	2	2	2	4	13
Total 20		71	88	84	80	80	400
Percentage		59,17%	73,3%	70%	66,7%	66,7%	

The researcher found that there were five types of reading comprehension difficulties experienced by students and all seventh-grade students have difficulties in those five aspects, even though in different number of errors made. It is expected that there would be 120 numbers of errors all students would gain if all of them were not able to answer questions correctly. Based on the data, students' difficulty in understanding main idea was measured as 71 incorrect answers out of 120 answers (59,17%). Next, difficulty in locating reference with a total of 88 incorrect answers out of 120 answers (73,3%). Difficulty in understanding vocabulary with a total of 84 incorrect answers out of 120 answers (70%). Then, difficulty in making inference with a total of 80 incorrect answers out of 120 answers (66,7%) and difficulty in finding detailed information with a total of 80 incorrect answers out of 120 answers (66,7%). The researcher found causes of difficulties in reading comprehension of descriptive text encountered by seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 7 Kupang, are students have no interest in learning English, lack of English learning experience, lack of ability to read English texts, difficulty understanding the meaning of texts, low prior knowledge,

did not know structure of descriptive text, lack of teaching techniques, less supportive home, school environment and lack of vocabulary.

Discussion

In this part, the researcher is going to describe further causes of students' difficulties in reading comprehension of descriptive text. Based on the research findings of students' difficulties in reading comprehension of descriptive text from test and interview, the researcher found several difficulties and factor of causing faced by the students. There are some problems of difficulties faced by students such as:

a. Students have no interest in learning English

To understand a text, it is necessary to identify the main idea, because main idea is sentences that forms the of explanatory sentences or developer sentences in a paragraph. The factor that affects students' difficulty in understand determining main idea is not interested in learning English. From the result of interview, two in six students had difficult experiences while learning English at school and do not like learning English.

The researcher: *How was your experience of learning English at school?*

Student 3: *"just normal"*

Student 9: *"don't really like and I don't like learning English".*

Student 12: *"Fun"*

Student 22: *"difficult, I didn't understand".*

Student 25: *"Hesitant, afraid of misreading"*

Student 27: *"It's fun, because English is a foreign language so it's fun to learn English"*

Having a difficult experience in learning English also makes students dislike learning English. Do not really like of learning English can cause students to be indifferent and get less than optimal understanding. As a result, students only read the text superficially without really trying to understand its meaning deeply. Limited vocabulary also makes it difficult for students to understand the overall meaning of the text, including identifying the main idea. Westwood (2008) stated lack of interest in learning can hinder students' efforts in enriching English vocabulary.

b. Low a Prior Knowledge

The factor that affects students' difficulty in locating reference was low a prior knowledge. It can be seen from results of interview gained from six students.

The researcher: *Do you often read English texts outside of schoolwork?*

Student 3: *"I don't often, except at the tutoring center".*

Student 9: *"No, I don't".*

Student 12: *"No, I don't".*

Student 22: *"No, I don't".*

Student 25: *"No, I don't".*

Student 27: *"No, I don't".*

These make it difficult for them to understand the reference of the text. All students do not often to read English text. While reading can help students become familiar with new vocabulary and improve their comprehension. The more students read, the more words they will learn. Little reading experience can lead to difficulty in determining main ideas and topic in the text, which is turn affects the ability to find relevant references.

c. Lack of teaching technique

The factor that affects students' difficulty in understanding vocabulary was lack of teaching techniques. It can be seen from results of interview gained from six students.

The researcher: *How does the teacher teach reading in class?*

Student 3: *"usually the teacher reads first and then we follow".*

Student 9: *"usually the teacher reads first in English and we follow".*

Student 12: *"the teacher speaks in English and then translates into Indonesian".* Student 22: *"the teacher explains the sentences one by one or she gives us an English sentence and we find the meaning of the sentences".*

Student 25: *"the teacher explains in Indonesian and then English".*

Student 27: *"teacher reads and then we follow".*

Based on the results of interview above, six students said that teacher usually does reading first and then students follow. This way of teaching is commonly conveyed by teachers in order to exercise

students' ability in pronouncing English words. However, without involving the students to interact with the text, students would not be able to read and understand the text well. This leads to lack of active engagement, lack of contextual understanding and limited vocabulary. "Teacher explained in Indonesian and then English". Learning that only focus on identifying words without explaining their functions can cause students not to understand each vocabulary well. A lack of teaching techniques also can result in poor comprehension of the text by students, so it is important for teachers to implement a variety of effective teaching strategies and methods in the classroom. It is proven by one of the previous studies. Larasati (2019) explained the factors that cause students to have difficulty understanding English text, one of which is due to lack of use of reading strategies in the teaching and learning process. This research showed that students who have difficulty in understanding vocabulary had a strong influence on the success of vocabulary acquisition.

d. Unsupportive environment

The next difficulties faced by students in reading descriptive text is difficulty in determining detailed information. The factor that affects this issue according to the data of interviewing five students, was unsupportive environment.

The researcher: *How is the classroom atmosphere during reading lessons?*

Student 3: *"very noisy"*.

Student 9: *"noisy"*.

Student 12: *"sometimes it's noisy. If the teacher has reprimanded it, it's quiet for a while, but if it's noisy again, she let it go"*.

Student 22: *"my friends make a lot of noise, so I can't concentrate. Even though the teacher reprimand them, they only quit for a while"*.

Student 27: *"it was fun, and sometimes it's noisy"*.

Based on the results of the interview there were five out of six students who said the atmosphere during reading lesson was noisy. So that when students took the test, they did not understand how to find detailed information in the text. A noisy classroom atmosphere can make students not concentrate on learning and causes students to lose focus so they have difficulty understanding the content of the meaning. Beside classroom environment, unsupportive home environment factors also affect students' difficulties in understanding texts. It can be seen from result of interview gained by a student.

The researcher: *Does your family support you in learning English? What form does it take?*

Student 9: *"no, they don't, it's like my parents don't want me to learn English"*.

Student 25: *"my family support me, my mom told me to take a lesson, but I didn't want to. Because I don't like learning English"*.

Parental involvement and home atmosphere affect students' development in understanding text. Based on result of students' interview above, student 9 said that her parents did not support to learn English because they did not want her to learn English. Student 25 said that her family support but she did not want to take a lesson because she does not like. Student lack interest and enthusiasm for learning English. When students do not perceive their parents' concern and interest in English, they are less encouraging to learn with enthusiasm. This is why students do not understand how to find detailed information from a text.

Causes of Difficulties

The cause of student difficulty in determining main idea, locating reference and so on is students have no interest in learning English. It is the main factor that affects students' motivation in understanding descriptive text. Students who are uninterested in learning English tend to be less actively involved in the learning process, including when read a text. It supports by Garden's (1985) theory that stated motivation and interest in learning play a significant role in the success of language learning, including in mastering foreign language texts. When students lack interest, they tend not to focus and do not try their best in understanding the text, so difficulties in the aspects of text comprehension arise. It can be said that students not interested in learning English is a factor that cause students to have difficulty understand a descriptive text, determining main idea and so on.

Student difficulty in understand descriptive text is because lack of English learning experience. This can lead to students to be less familiar with English in general and descriptive text in particular. This is in line with the

findings of Abdullah (2017) which stated that prior knowledge strongly influences students' ability to understand reading. Students who have more learning experiences usually have lot of vocabulary or tend to have a richer knowledge structure which makes it easier for them to relate the new information to existing knowledge, so understanding becomes easier and deeper. It can be said that lack of English learning experience is a factor that cause students difficulty understand locating references and so on.

Prior knowledge is very important in the process of understanding the text. The cause of student difficulty is low prior knowledge. Students who lack prior knowledge will have difficulty in connecting new information with what is already known, resulting in limited text comprehension. This is supported by Westwood's theory that stated the prior knowledge of students has an important role in students' reading achievement. So, students lacking prior knowledge. As a result, students who lack prior knowledge when taking the test, cannot understand the text.

The cause of student difficulty in understanding descriptive text is lack of teaching technique. This research found that the lack of teaching techniques that caused students to not know the structure of descriptive text causes students to have difficulties in understanding descriptive text, such as difficulty recognizing details, difficulty making inferences and so on. Students' ignorance of descriptive text structure indicates that the teaching provided has not been effective in instilling an understanding of text structure. Lacks emphasis on understanding text structure can hinder students' ability to understand English texts. In addition, teaching techniques that are less varied and uninteresting can also reduce students' interest and motivation in learning, thus negatively affecting their understanding. This proven by Westwood's theory that one of the factors that cause students to have difficulty understanding texts is teaching technique thus, this research supports Westwood's theory that cause of students' difficulties in understanding text is lack of teaching technique. The findings of Adauwiyah (2023) showed inadequate use of reading strategies in teaching and learning process is external factor in understanding descriptive text. It can be said that lack of teaching technique is a factor that cause students to have difficulty understand the text.

Environmental factors also play an important role in students' learning success. Support from family and school can increase students' motivation and opportunities to practice English more intensively. This research found that the school and home environment caused students to have difficulty understanding the text. This is in line with the findings of Larasati (2019) where the result of her research showed that school did not provide enough reading material meanwhile this research the school provide reading material but the classroom atmosphere is noisy so students cannot concentrate while learning. It is supported by Westwood's theory that stated students who live in an environment that supports reading activities benefit indirectly from their environment. As a result, students who live in an environment that does not support reading activities have difficulty in comprehending descriptive text. In Larasati's research student did not have enough motivation from their parents this research found some students have motivation but they do not like learning English, and some of them, their parents do not support to learn English. When this support is lacking, students tend to have difficulties in developing their language skills, including in understanding descriptive texts, but if there is support from their parents but there is no interest or willingness to learn then, it will hinder understanding descriptive text. It can be said that unsupportive school and home environment is a factor that cause students to have difficulty understand the text.

CONCLUSION

Based on researcher findings and discussion, the researcher concludes that students faced difficulties in all aspects of reading comprehension. They have difficulty in understanding main idea with a total of 71 incorrect answers out of 120 answers (59,17%). Next, difficulty in locating reference with a total of 88 incorrect answers out of 120 answers (73,3%). Difficulty in understanding vocabulary with a total of 82 incorrect answers out of 120 answers (70%). Then, difficulty in making inference with a total of 81 incorrect answers out of 120 answers (66,7%) and difficulty in finding detailed information with a total of 80 incorrect answers out of 120 answers (66,7%). The researcher found causes of difficulties in reading comprehension of descriptive text encountered by seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 7 Kupang, are students have no interest in learning English, lack of English learning experience, lack of ability to read English texts, difficulty understanding the meaning of texts, low prior knowledge, did not know structure of descriptive text, lack of teaching techniques, less supportive home, school environment and lack of vocabulary.

The researcher would also like to recommend some suggestions such as, for students, they should be self-aware of the value of reading comprehension and motivated to pursue it. For teachers, they should come up with more creative ways to teach reading and should be diligent in teaching in the classroom. For other researchers, if they want to analyse strategies or methods to overcome the difficulties faced by students in understanding reading, may use this research as a source to analyse the data.

REFERENCES

- Abdullah, H., Gushendra, R., & Yonantha, F. (2017). "The Influence of Prior Knowledge on Students' Listening and Reading Comprehension". *Indonesian Journal of English Education*, 4, 1-15.
- Berlinda, M. (2017, August). "Role Playing Activity in English for business Class for Non-English Study Program". (pages 44).
- Garden, C. R. (1985). *Social Psychology and Second Language Learning: The Role of Attitudes and Motivation*. London.
- Kemdikbud. (2022). *guru.kemdikbud.go.id*. Retrieved September 18th, 2024, from Merdeka Mengajar: <https://guru.kemdikbud.go.id/>
- Larasati, D. (2019, October 7). "An Analysis of Difficulties in Comprehending English Reading text at the Eleventh grade Students of MA LAB UIN-SU Medan". *Bahasa dan Sastra.*, (p4). Retrieved from <http://repository.uinsu.ac.id/id/eprint/7882>
- Larasati, D. (2019, October 7). "An Analysis of Difficulties in Comprehending English Reading Text at the Eleventh grade Students of MA LAB UIN-SU Medan". *Bahasa dan Sastra.*, (p1-26). Retrieved from <http://repository.uinsu.ac.id/id/eprint/7882>
- Westwood, P. S. (2008). *What Teachers Need To Know about Reading and Writing Difficulties*. Australia: ACER Press.