

AN ANALYSIS OF TENTH-GRADE STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION DIFFICULTIES IN NARRATIVE TEXTS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menyelidiki kesulitan pemahaman bacaan yang dialami oleh siswa kelas sepuluh dalam memahami teks naratif di sebuah sekolah menengah atas negeri. Pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif digunakan untuk memperoleh pemahaman mendalam tentang tantangan siswa dan faktor-faktor yang berkontribusi terhadap kesulitan tersebut. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas, analisis respons bacaan tertulis siswa, dan wawancara semi-terstruktur. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa siswa menghadapi beberapa masalah yang berulang, termasuk pengetahuan kosakata yang terbatas, kesulitan mengidentifikasi ide utama dan nilai-nilai moral, tantangan dalam membuat kesimpulan, kebingungan mengenai struktur teks naratif, dan motivasi rendah untuk membaca teks bahasa Inggris. Kesulitan-kesulitan ini dipengaruhi oleh faktor linguistik dan psikologis, serta oleh paparan yang terbatas terhadap strategi membaca yang efektif. Studi ini menyoroti pentingnya pengajaran kosakata yang eksplisit, kegiatan membaca terbimbing, dan strategi pengajaran interaktif untuk mendukung pemahaman siswa terhadap teks naratif. Hasil penelitian ini diharapkan dapat memberikan wawasan pedagogis bagi guru bahasa Inggris dalam mengatasi kesulitan pemahaman bacaan siswa di kelas EFL.

Kata kunci: pemahaman bacaan, teks naratif, studi kualitatif, kesulitan siswa, sekolah menengah atas

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the reading comprehension difficulties experienced by tenth-grade students in understanding narrative texts at a public senior high school. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed to gain an in-depth understanding of students' challenges and the factors contributing to those difficulties. Data were collected through classroom observations, analysis of students' written reading responses, and semi-structured interviews. The findings reveal that students encounter several recurring problems, including limited vocabulary knowledge, difficulty identifying main ideas and moral values, challenges in making inferences, confusion regarding narrative text structure, and low motivation to read English texts. These difficulties are influenced by both linguistic and psychological factors, as well as by limited exposure to effective reading strategies. The study highlights the importance of explicit vocabulary instruction, guided reading activities, and interactive teaching strategies to support students' comprehension of narrative texts. The results of this research are expected to provide pedagogical insights for English teachers in addressing students' reading comprehension difficulties in EFL classrooms.

Keyword: reading comprehension, narrative text, qualitative study, students' difficulties, senior high school

INTRODUCTION

In the twenty-first century, English has become a global language that plays a crucial role in education, technology, and international communication. As a result, English proficiency is an essential skill for students to participate effectively in the global era. Among the four fundamental language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—reading is often regarded as the most important because it serves as the primary

means of accessing information and academic knowledge. Reading comprehension, however, is not a simple process of decoding words; it involves actively constructing meaning by integrating textual information with prior knowledge, experiences, and cognitive strategies (Snow, 2002).

In the Indonesian context, English is taught as a foreign language (EFL), which presents considerable challenges for learners. Indonesian students are required to learn English after

mastering their mother tongue, and the differences in vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure between Bahasa Indonesia and English often hinder comprehension. Previous studies have indicated that many Indonesian students struggle to understand English texts despite years of formal instruction (Khalif Rizqon et al., 2021). These challenges are reflected in national literacy assessments, which consistently show that students' reading literacy levels remain relatively low, particularly in comprehending foreign language texts.

One of the text types that students are required to master at the senior high school level is narrative text. Narrative texts aim to entertain readers by presenting a sequence of events involving characters, conflicts, and resolutions. To comprehend narrative texts effectively, students must be able to recognize generic structures such as orientation, complication, and resolution, as well as interpret moral values and implicit meanings. However, classroom realities indicate that many students find narrative texts difficult to understand. Students often struggle to identify key story elements, follow the sequence of events, and interpret the underlying messages of the text.

Previous research has documented various difficulties faced by EFL learners in reading narrative texts. Limited vocabulary knowledge is frequently reported as a major obstacle, as unfamiliar words disrupt students' comprehension and reading fluency (Zebua et al., 2022). In addition, students often experience difficulty making inferences and identifying main ideas, which are essential higher-order reading skills (Laia et al., 2024). Confusion regarding text structure and a lack of effective reading strategies further exacerbate these problems (Farihah et al., 2023).

Beyond linguistic challenges, psychological factors also play a significant role in students' reading difficulties. Several studies have found that low motivation, lack of confidence, and anxiety negatively affect students' engagement in reading activities (Rudiawan & Jupri, 2020). These affective factors often lead students to become passive readers who rely heavily on external assistance rather than developing independent reading strategies.

Although various instructional strategies have been proposed to improve students' reading

comprehension, difficulties in understanding narrative texts persist, particularly in public senior high schools with limited resources. Therefore, there is a need for a qualitative investigation that explores students' reading comprehension difficulties in depth and examines the underlying factors contributing to these challenges. This study aims to address this gap by exploring the reading comprehension problems faced by tenth-grade students when engaging with narrative texts.

Accordingly, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What reading comprehension difficulties do tenth-grade students experience when reading narrative texts?
2. What factors contribute to these reading comprehension difficulties?

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to thoroughly investigate the reading comprehension difficulties encountered by tenth-grade students in narrative texts. This methodological approach was selected to provide a comprehensive and naturalistic description of the learning phenomena, prioritizing a deep understanding of the students' challenges rather than merely presenting statistical generalizations. The participants involved in this study were 20 tenth-grade students from a public Senior High School. The selection of these participants was conducted using a purposive sampling technique, which allowed the researcher to deliberately choose subjects representing a diverse range of reading proficiency levels to ensure the data captured the complexity of the problems faced in the classroom.

To ensure the validity and depth of the data, the researcher utilized three distinct data collection instruments: 1) a reading comprehension test focusing on narrative texts was administered to measure students' proficiency and identify specific areas of difficulty, such as identifying main ideas or making inferences; 2) classroom observations were conducted during reading sessions to monitor

Students' real-time interactions with the texts and their level of engagement; and 3) semi-structured interviews were carried out to elicit detailed personal perspectives from the students

regarding the internal and external factors contributing to their reading difficulties.

The collected data were subsequently analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of three concurrent flows of activity. The process began with data condensation, where the raw data were selected, focused, and simplified to categorize specific errors found in students' reading. This was followed by data display, where the organized information was presented in narrative text and tables to reveal patterns of difficulty. Finally, the analysis concluded with conclusion drawing and verification to determine the underlying causes of the comprehension problems. To guarantee the trustworthiness of the study, methodological triangulation was applied by cross-referencing findings from the test scores, observation notes, and interview transcripts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that tenth-grade students experience a range of difficulties when comprehending narrative texts. These difficulties emerge from both linguistic and psychological factors and are closely related to students' reading behavior and classroom learning experiences. Based on the analysis of classroom observations, students' written reading responses, and interview data, several dominant themes were identified.

Limited Vocabulary Knowledge

One of the most prominent difficulties faced by students was limited vocabulary knowledge. Observation and interview data revealed that students frequently encountered unfamiliar words while reading narrative texts, which disrupted their comprehension and caused them to lose focus. Many students reported that they relied heavily on dictionaries or peer assistance when encountering difficult words. This reliance often interrupted the reading process and prevented students from understanding the text as a whole. This finding is consistent with previous studies indicating that insufficient vocabulary knowledge significantly hinders students' ability to comprehend narrative texts (Zebua et al., 2022).

Difficulties in Making Inferences and Determining Main Ideas

Students demonstrated significant difficulty in making inferences and determining the main idea of the narrative texts. Many students could answer literal questions but failed when asked to interpret the moral value or the implicit meaning of the story. This supports the study by Laia et al. (2024), which reported that making inferences was the highest difficulty faced by students, with a percentage of 63.7%. Students struggle to conclude moral lessons and require more time to analyze texts (Fawaid et al., 2024).

Confusion Regarding Narrative Text Structure

Another major difficulty identified in this study was students' inability to make inferences and determine the main ideas of narrative texts. Analysis of students' written responses showed that while students could answer questions related to explicit information, they struggled to interpret implicit meanings, such as moral values or characters' motivations. Interview data further revealed that students found it difficult to "read between the lines" and often expected all information to be stated directly in the text. This difficulty aligns with previous research suggesting that inferential comprehension is one of the most challenging aspects of reading for EFL learners (Laia et al., 2024).

In addition to linguistic difficulties, psychological factors played a significant role in students' reading comprehension problems. Interview results revealed that many students lacked motivation to read English texts, particularly longer narrative passages. Students expressed feelings of boredom, anxiety, and low confidence when reading English, which led them to avoid active participation in reading activities. Classroom observations confirmed that students often appeared passive and hesitant during reading sessions. These findings are consistent with Rudiawan and Jupri (2020), who found that low confidence and motivation negatively affect students' reading engagement.

Limited Use of Reading Strategies

The observation data further revealed that students rarely applied effective reading strategies such as skimming, scanning, or contextual guessing. When encountering difficulties, students

tended to stop reading or seek immediate help rather than attempting to solve the problem independently. This lack of strategic reading behavior suggests that students have limited exposure to guided reading strategies in the classroom. The absence of interactive activities such as story mapping or retelling further contributed to students' difficulty in visualizing narrative events and understanding text structure.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the reading comprehension difficulties experienced by tenth-grade students in narrative texts are complex and multifaceted. The findings reveal that students' problems stem from a combination of linguistic limitations—particularly limited vocabulary knowledge, difficulty making inferences, and confusion regarding narrative text structure—and psychological factors such as low motivation and lack of confidence. These factors interact with one another, creating a cycle that inhibits students' active engagement in reading and prevents the development of effective reading strategies.

The study suggests several pedagogical implications for English language teaching. Teachers are encouraged to provide explicit vocabulary instruction prior to reading activities to reduce students' cognitive load during comprehension. In addition, the use of guided reading strategies such as story mapping, retelling, and structured questioning can help students understand narrative structure and develop inferential skills. To address motivational issues, teachers should incorporate engaging and interactive learning media that encourage active participation and reduce anxiety during reading activities.

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