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JURNAL

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IDENTIFYING FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO STUDENTS' OBSTACLES IN UNDERSTANDING READING DESCRIPTIVE TEXT

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Abstract: This study aimed to analyze the students' obstacles in understanding reading descriptive text since there were many problems that the students encounter in understanding reading text. The method used in this study was a descriptive quantitative through test and questionnaire as data collection instruments. The questionnaire consisted of items to gain the students' responses towards 3 categories of students' difficulties factors in reading, namely: learners' background, teaching technique, and learners' environment. Seventeen first-grade students in a senior high school in Aceh Besar were involved as participants. The result of students' reading comprehension test showed that 86,6 % of students were not able to identify references in the text, and 70,6 % of students found difficulty in making inferences in the text. The result of the questionnaire further showed that 71,9% of students agreed toward a lack of interest in reading descriptive text, and 73,5% of students agreed that students' background knowledge affects their reading comprehension, especially in reading descriptive text. It can be concluded that most of the students found difficulty in identifying and making references in the text, whereas the questionnaire result showed that most of the students lack of background knowledge and interest in reading descriptive text.

Keywords : reading comprehension, teaching reading, EFL learners, reading difficulty

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis hambatan siswa dalam memahami membaca teks deskriptif karena banyak masalah yang dihadapi siswa dalam memahami teks bacaan. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah deskriptif kuantitatif melalui tes dan angket sebagai instrumen pengumpulan data. Kuesioner terdiri dari item-item untuk mendapatkan tanggapan siswa terhadap 3 kategori faktor kesulitan siswa dalam membaca, yaitu: latar belakang siswa, teknik mengajar, dan lingkungan siswa. Tujuh belas siswa kelas satu SMA di Aceh Besar terlibat sebagai peserta. Hasil tes pemahaman membaca siswa menunjukkan bahwa 86,6% siswa tidak mampu mengidentifikasi referensi dalam teks, dan 70,6% siswa kesulitan membuat kesimpulan dalam teks. Hasil angket lebih lanjut menunjukkan bahwa 71,9% siswa setuju terhadap kurangnya minat membaca teks deskriptif, dan 73,5% siswa setuju bahwa latar belakang pengetahuan siswa memengaruhi pemahaman bacaan mereka, terutama dalam membaca teks deskriptif. Dapat disimpulkan bahwa sebagian besar siswa mengalami kesulitan dalam mengidentifikasi dan membuat referensi dalam teks, sedangkan hasil angket menunjukkan bahwa sebagian besar siswa kurang memiliki latar belakang pengetahuan dan minat membaca teks deskriptif.

Kata kunci : Membaca, mengajar membaca, siswa EFL, kesulitan membaca.

INTRODUCTION

Reading is a key skill that should be trained to

improve students' competency in learning foreign languages. Nunan (2003) stated that reading is critical for English language learners because it may

broaden their knowledge, vocabulary, and information, as well as provide them through understanding of the material.

Furthermore, Sookchotirat (2005) suggested that reading skill is the most important skill as it is the basis of all the success in one's life. Good readers can gain more knowledge of any kind from reading. Reading makes the reader more knowledgeable, have wider perspectives and vision.

Therefore, the importance of teaching reading is to build the ability and knowledge of students to understand the reading material. Such as the ability to read various texts in English, ability to adjust reading styles according to the purpose of reading (i.e. skimming, scanning), and ability to have critical perspective on the content of the texts (Hedge, 2003, as cited in Alyousef, 2005).

Nowadays, at senior high school, teaching reading is designed to develop students' skill in reading comprehension. Referring to the standard competence of Senior High School Curriculum, especially in reading for first-grade students, they are expected to be able to understand short functional text, especially Descriptive text.

However, based on a preliminary study which was conducted by authors from September 2021 to January 2022, the students do not achieve the curriculum expectation. It showed that most students found difficulties in understanding a reading text. These difficulties included determining the main idea in the text, identifying references, specific information, and making inferences.

In line with this fact, Sloat et al., (2007) argue that the failure of achieving the reading comprehension objectives during the students' primary grades will lead them to have lack of reading ability. This includes lack of vocabulary, difficulties in the academic field, and difficulties in mastering English in general.

Hence, the authors intend to explore what difficulties are experienced by students during the reading process and factors that cause difficulty in reading.

Furthermore, to support the issue raised in this study, a similar study was also conducted by Nurvita (2022), this study analyzes students' difficulties in understanding Descriptive text through interviews and student work to obtain data. The result showed that some students did not understand descriptive text in certain parts, such as determining the main idea, understanding vocabulary, determining conclusions and looking for certain information in the descriptive text.

In addition, Asriani (2021), conducted the study to find out the students' difficulties in understanding reading descriptive text faced by eighth-grade students of SMP Negeri 2 Barumon Tengah. Tests and interviews were used to collect the data. The results of this research indicated the average score of students in understanding the reading descriptive text is 31.87%. The percentage of errors in the main idea is 22.93%, errors in specific information 15.60%, errors in vocabulary 26.60%, wrong reference 19,27%, and wrong conclusion 15,60%.

Based on the previous explanation, this research tried to answer the following questions:

“What are the students’ obstacles in understanding the descriptive text?” it was expected that the result of this study can benefit educators to address reading comprehension deficits effectively.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading Comprehension

According to Dalman (2013), reading is an activity or cognitive process that seeks to find various information contained in writing, this means that reading is a thought process to understand the content of the text reading. Rahman (2017) has described some steps of reading comprehension ability one of them was to familiarize students to read and provide interesting and varied readings.

In addition, teaching the students about the context of reading will help them be more confident and strategic in their reading (Masykuri 2014). Unfortunately for many students, choosing effective strategies does not come automatically. Often, students who have difficulty reading simply browse or skim through texts without a specific strategy in mind because they do not have a clear reason for reading. When situations arise in which they need to search for specific information or meaning. They may also feel frustrated and overwhelmed by the demands of the different reading contexts.

Essential skill of reading comprehension

Reading comprehension is a reading activity that seeks to understand the contents of the reading and the text as a whole. A person is said to understand reading well if he can capture the meaning of words and expressions used by the author. There are some essential aspects regards as difficulties that students encounter in understanding the text, those are the main Idea, specific

information, inference and identifying reference.

Main Idea

The main idea is the central point or thought the author wants to communicate to readers, another definition is a statement that tells the author’s point about the topic. The main idea provides the message of a given paragraph or the argument that is being made about the topic. The statement of the main idea is topic sentences, topic sentences are usually in the first sentence of the paragraph, but not always. They may also be located within the paragraph or at the end of the paragraph. They may even appear twice at the beginning and the end (Bafadhhal & Utami, 2021).

Specific Information

According to Bafadhhal and Utami (2021), specific information is supporting information that develops a topic sentence by including definitions, examples, comparisons, facts, analogies, statistics, etc.

Inference

As stated by Fattuhillah (2019), inference is the ability to process written information and understand the underlying meaning of the text. This information is then used to infer or determine the deeper meaning that is not explicitly stated. The inference is drawing conclusions based on information that has been implied rather than directly stated and is an essential skill in reading comprehension. People make inferences every day, both in oral and written communication. Without inference words, we would treat what we hear or read in a very literal sense; inferring is reading between the lines and making assumptions based on smaller details. Drawing inferences are also essential for understanding the world around

us. Without them, the students would not be able to understand much at all. According to Irene (2015), there are two types of inference:

1. Inductive. Inductive is the process by which we use general beliefs we have about the world to create beliefs about our particular experiences or about what to expect in the future.
2. Deductive. Deductive inferences arrived at through deduction (deductive reasoning), can guarantee truth because they focus on the structure of arguments. A good deductive inference is called a valid inference, meaning its structure guarantees the truth of its conclusion given the truth of the premises.

Identifying Reference

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 should find the word the refer to information in the text.

The purpose of reading

The purpose of reading is to connect the ideas on the page to what already know. The main purpose of reading is to find and obtain information, including content, and understand the meaning of reading. According to Rahim (2008), the purpose of reading includes: 1) pleasure, 2) perfect reading aloud, 3) using certain strategies, 4) updating knowledge about a topic, 5) linking new information with information already known, 6) obtaining information for oral or written reports, 7) confirm or reject predictions, 8) display an experiment or apply information obtained from a text in some other way and learn about the structure

of the text, 9) answer specific questions.

Descriptive text

Anderson (2003) stated that descriptive text means one type of English text which contains a detailed description or picture of an object. Usually, the objects described can be inanimate objects, places, as well as humans and other living things. An example of a descriptive text could be a text that tells a tourist place or about our pets. The purpose of writing a descriptive text is to describe and reveal a particular person, place, or thing. This type of text is used to describe people, places or things in such a way that an image is formed in the mind or the reader. In general, descriptive texts are imaginary, more precisely unreal or in the form of the imagination of the author and the function of this descriptive text is to entertain the readers.

Furthermore, descriptive text is a collection of paragraphs about a particular object or place. A descriptive text tells the readers what something is like. The writer is trying to help the readers imagine or 'see' a person, place or thing. There are three components of descriptive text; communicative purposes, generic structure and language features (Jayanti, 2019).

Reading obstacle

Reading obstacle is the problems of predicting and understanding plans in reading activities. Westwood, (2001), mentioned there were three factors contribute to students' difficulty in learning to read, some factors are: The learner's background, the teaching technique, and the learner environment.

1. Learners' Background

Wright et al., (2006) the learners background

means something which comes from the learners themselves. It was related to the learner attitude toward reading, such as interest and motivation in reading and the background knowledge that the learners have known before.

2. Interest and Motivation

Students must interest when in study something because this is important for students will be excited for the material in the learning process. Motivation is one of the most important factors is second language acquisition. Students who have low motivation in learning will make their achievement low because motivation is an essential factor to make teaching and learning process more effective and efficient. Frimasary., Syahrial, (2018)

3. Learner's prior knowledge

Learner's prior knowledge is the student's activity what they already know and building initial knowledge that they need in order to access information for reading text. Students background knowledge and experiences can illuminate the reading but should not replace attention to the text itself. Therefore, it needs to active students' prior knowledge and build further prior knowledge in preparation for new learning before reading activities.

4. Teaching Technique

Teaching technique is very important in the learning process. The teacher must have strategy in teaching technique. It means that the teacher careful in choosing the technique to teach because it is related to the students understanding the material, especially for teaching reading.

5. Learners Environment

According to Iman (2016), there are two influences in learner's environment. The first is

school and home condition. The most important about condition of school for students. School achievement, which is complete equipment, facilities can help the learning process. The second is home condition. The school which has lack of learning media such as English book will influence the students' learning difficulties in reading. It means learning reading process become ineffective in students understanding about the material.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is descriptive research. As stated by Moleong, (1998). It is one type of research which purposed to present a complete picture of social reality, by describing several variables related to the problem and the study between the phenomena being tested. this research was conducted quantitively by using questionnaire and test as data collection. The population of this study were all students of first grade at SMAN 1 Kuta Baro, Aceh Besar in the year 2022/2023. The total population were 27 students. They were divided into two classes, X IPA consisting of 17 students and X IPS consisting of 10 students. The samples of this study are 17 students of class X IPA at SMAN 1 Kuta Baro.

The test and questionnaire are used as the main instruments for the data collection.

1. Test

Multiple-choice forms based on indicators of students' difficulties in understanding descriptive text were used in this test. It consists of 10 multiple-choice questions. Each question had 4 choices, namely Main Idea, Specific Information, Making Inferences and Identifying References. The table below showed the indicators of test.

Table 1. Reading test on descriptive text.

No	Indicator	Items	Total Items	Score
1	Students are difficult to determine the main idea	1,2	2	34
2	Students are difficult to find the specific information	5,6,9	3	51
3	Students are difficult to make inferences	3,4	2	34
4	Students are difficult to identify references	7,8,10	3	51
Total			10	

The table adopted from Azhari, (2020)

2. Questionnaire

Questionnaire was distributed to all of the first-graduate students in academic year 2022/2023. The questionnaire addressed ten items or questions related to reading difficulties faced by students in understanding English descriptive text. In this research the authors used closed questions which are consisted of 10 items in form of yes/no questions which focused on learners' background, teaching technique, and learner's environment.

Table 2. The students' difficulties factors in reading descriptive text

No.	Reading Difficulties	Item Number
1	Learners' Background	1,7
	a. Interest	3,10
	b. Motivation	5,8
2	Teaching Technique	2,4
3	Learners' Environment	6,9

The table adopted from (Azhari, 2020)

In collecting the data, the test and

questionnaire were used as the main instruments. In the test, the students were asked to answer 10 questions (multiple choice form) in a descriptive paragraph. This test aimed at discovering students' difficulty in understanding the reading text in English. The second phase, A questionnaire was distributed to get the students' perceptions towards reading difficulties faced by students in understanding English descriptive text. It consisted of 10 closed-ended questions which focused on learners' background, teaching technique, and learners' environment.

In this research, the authors classified the type of difficulty in reading descriptive text through identification of difficulties, classification of difficulties, and description of difficulties. The collected data has analyzed by using percentage. The students reading comprehension scores obtained from the test were computed quantitatively.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Analysis of Reading Comprehension Test

The authors gave the test in form of multiple-choice questions to find out students' difficulties in reading descriptive text. The test consists of one descriptive text with ten multiple choice questions. The table below showed the result of reading comprehension test:

Table 3. Result of reading comprehension test.

No	Classification	Frequency	Score	Percentage
1	Identifying Reference	35	51	86,6 %
2	Making Inference	24	34	70,6 %
3	Determining Main Idea	21	34	61,8 %
4	Specific Information	26	51	51 %

The table above showed the result of students' reading comprehension test. The data showed that 86,6 % of students were not able to identify reference in the text, 70,6 % students found difficulty in making inference in the text, 61,8 % students were difficult to determine main idea and 51% students were difficult to find the specific information in the text. These numbers illustrate that most of the students having trouble identifying reference word and making inference in the descriptive text. In order to comprehend reading text successfully, it is necessary to understand how the sentence are related. So that, the students need to know how to identify the cohesive relationship between sentences, and recognize the words and phrases that refers to same idea. This is one of competence that the students should mastered to grasp their understanding in reading specially in reading descriptive text.

The Result of the Analysis of Questionnaire.

The data obtained from questionnaire were analyzed in order to know the students' response about the students' difficulties factor in reading descriptive text. The questionnaire consists of ten questions covers: Students' Interest, Students' Motivation, Students' Background Knowledge, Teacher's Teaching Technique and Students' Environment.

Table 4. Students' difficulties factors in reading descriptive text.

No.	Perception	Yes	No
1	Students' Interest	71,9%	38,2%
2	Students' Motivation	26,4%	73,5%
3	Students' Background Knowledge	73,5%	26,4%
4	Teaching Technique	20,5%	79,4%

5	Students' Environments	55,9%	44,1%
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Table 4. shows the results of the questionnaire which asked about the students' difficulties factors in reading descriptive text.

Based on the result of questionnaire's analysis, it was found that 71,9% students agreed toward lack of interest in reading descriptive text, Furthermore, the second category was students' background knowledge. It was found that 73,5% students agreed that students' background knowledge influenced their reading comprehension. In addition, students' environments also affected them to comprehend the reading text. It was showed that 55,9% students agreed. It can be concluded that most of the students lack of background knowledge and interest in reading descriptive text.

In line with this finding, another research by Bafadhal, Utami, (2021) found that that students' obstacles were not only in reading comprehension items like determining idea, understanding vocabulary, making inferences, detailed information but also in media used to teach reading comprehension.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

After analyzing the data, there are two main conclusions which are discussed concerning the result of the study, first, the result of students' reading comprehension test showed that 86,6 % of students were not able to identify references in the text, and 70,6 % of students found difficulty in making inferences in the text. 61,8 % students were difficult to determine main idea and 51% students were difficult to find the specific information in the text. It is clear that most of the students found difficulty in identifying reference and making

inferences in the text.

Second, in term of questionnaire's result, in this section, the questionnaire consisted of items to gain the students' responses towards 3 categories of students' difficulties factors in reading, namely: learners' background, teaching technique, and learners' environment. The result showed that 71,9% students agreed toward lack of interest in reading descriptive text. Furthermore, the second category was students' background knowledge. It was found that 73,5% students agreed that students' background knowledge influenced their reading comprehension especially in reading descriptive text. In addition, students' environments also affected them to comprehend the reading text. It was showed that 55,9% students agreed. It can be concluded that most of the students lack of background knowledge and interest in reading descriptive. Therefore, background knowledge is a critical component in determining a students' success in reading comprehension. When students have more information on a topic, the easier it is for the students to read, recall, and understand the reading material.

Suggestion

Based on the conclusion above, the writers recommend the English teachers to train their students who having trouble in identifying reference in the text through locating reference words in the text, underline the reference words, supplying missing reference words in a text, drawing the students' attention to several example, and asking them to explain the reference. Those activities stimulate students to broaden their understanding in reading a text.

Furthermore, as we consider that comprehension is closely correlated to a student's background knowledge. English teachers can effectively build students' background knowledge in teaching reading through ask students to make connection to find out exactly what they know about the topic, teach word in categories, use contrast and comparisons, and use analogies. In addition, implementing daily independent reading time is an effective way to organically increase students' background knowledge.

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