
Students' Ability in Reading Narrative Text at The Eleventh Grade of SMAN 1 Masbagik in Academic Year 2023/2024

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Abstract: This study aim to analyze the ability of grade XI students at SMAN 1 Masbagik in reading narrative text. It is descriptive qualitative design. The participants in this study were 19 students from class XI-F7. The data were collected using a reading test and a questionnaire. The data obtained from the reading test were analyzed and calculated to determine the final score and identify the most difficult aspects of reading. Meanwhile, the data from the questionnaire were analyzed by reducing the data, displaying, and drawing conclusions. The results of this study indicate that out of 19 students, only three students scored in the very high category, six students scored high, three students scored medium, four students scored low, and three students scored very low. In addition, making inferences emerged as the most challenging reading aspect. Through an analysis of questionnaire responses, two prominent obstacles were identified: limited vocabulary knowledge and cognitive load. Many students faced difficulties in deciphering individual word meanings, thereby impeding their overall comprehension of texts. This study highlights the imperative for targeted strategies aimed at addressing these challenges to improve reading proficiency and academic achievement among students.

Keywords: Reading Comprehension, Narrative Text, Vocabulary Knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

In the field of English education, the ability to read is a fundamental and essential skill. It involves a range of skills and cognitive processes that enable a person to make meaning from written words, sentences, and passages. According to Sachran (2022), Reading is a fundamental skill essential for mastering English. Through reading, students acquire information and gain new knowledge, enhancing their learning experience. Therefore, it is important for students to understand and apply effective reading strategies to improve their reading abilities. In current senior high school education, the primary objective of teaching reading is to cultivate students' reading comprehension skills. However, students often fall short of meeting these curriculum expectations and exhibit lower levels of reading comprehension. Aligned with the eleventh-grade senior high school basic competence in 2013, students are anticipated to comprehend the social function, text structure, and language features across various text types, one of which is narrative text. Narrative is a text

that tells a story, designed to entertain the audience. Narrative can be factual or imaginary mysteries such as fables, adventure stories, fairy tales, and novels, myths and legends (Anderson & Anderson, 1998). Narrative text is a type of text which aimed to tell the readers a story. Also, narrative text shows a view of the world that used to amuse and entertain the readers (Dirgeyasa, 2016).

In Indonesia, where English is considered a foreign language, students currently face challenges in comprehending reading texts due to difficulties in correctly identifying and recognizing words. Teaching English should be engaging, innovative, and enjoyable for learners at all levels to enhance their proficiency in the language (Sujana, 2012). However, the students' reading skills remain low, and this is evident from their ongoing struggles to effectively comprehend reading materials. Students should be trained not only in academic tasks such as note-taking, summarizing, retelling, paraphrasing, and evaluating texts but also in the more crucial skill of learning how to learn in academic reading (Sujana, 2006). Literacy should be the primary

concern of the teachers in any education levels. Literacy can be defined as the ability to read and write. In a broad picture, literacy might be referred to the ability of comprehending or accessing information through reading and expressing it through writing (Thohir et al., 2020). Furthermore, reading comprehension is the skill of understanding and accurately interpreting information in a text. Reading without comprehension is meaningless and ineffective, as the two are intrinsically linked and inseparable. Therefore, reading comprehension is the core of the reading process, involving grasping the meaning of the text (Grabe and Stoller, 2002). The students need guidance in developing strategies that can be applied before, during, and after reading text (Vaughn, 2003).

Based on the preliminary study at SMAN 1 Masbagik, the teacher revealed that students still have difficulties in reading comprehension. One of the causes is their lack of vocabulary and interest in learning. As a result, the students do not understand the content of the text they are reading. In addition, the students remained confused and struggled to understand when given reading texts by the teacher. They are also reluctant to read long passages and admit that unfamiliar vocabulary further complicates their ability to understand the text.

METHOD

This study used qualitative research with descriptive research type. Sugiyono (2008), says that the qualitative method was used to examine natural objects and emphasize meaning or purpose. There were 19 students from class XI-F7 who participated in this study and the data were collected using a reading test and a questionnaire. In this study, the students' reading ability were determined by analyzing and calculating the results of their reading tests. The questions that were difficult for the students were identified by dividing the items based on their types and measuring the percentage of each question type. The average percentage of incorrect answers was measured using the mean score, and the difficulty index was interpreted using the value of difficulty classification.. For the analysis questionnaire, the process began with data reduction, continued with displaying the results in a clear and understandable format, and ended with drawing conclusions.

Table 1. Scoring Classification of The Students' Reading Ability

No	Interval Score	Classification
1	85-100	Very High
2	69-84	High
3	52-68	Moderate
4	36-51	Low
5	20-35	Very Low

(Adopted from Sugiyono, 2008)

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

In this study, the instruments used to collect data consisted of reading tests and questionnaires. The findings of this study show students' ability in reading narrative texts and students' difficulties in comprehending English reading texts.

The Students' Ability in Reading Narrative Text

The following table presented the frequency of the students correct answer and score in reading test.

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

No	Correct Answer	Frequency	Score	Category
1	13	3	86,6	Very High
2	12	2	80	High
3	11	4	73,3	High
4	10	2	66,6	Moderate
5	8	1	53,3	Moderate
6	7	2	46,6	Low
7	5	2	33,3	Low
8	4	1	26,6	Very Low
9	2	2	13,3	Very Low

It can be seen from the table that the students' class XI-F7 of SMAN 1 Masbagik could not answer all of questions correctly. It was found that only three students achieved scores in the very high category, six students obtained high scores, three students obtained moderate scores, four students obtained low scores, and three students obtained very low scores. This indicates that students' ability in reading narrative text in class XI-F7 was still low.

The Most Difficult Reading Aspect

To clarify the distribution of the percentage level of difficulty for reading text items, the researcher presents the data in the following graph.

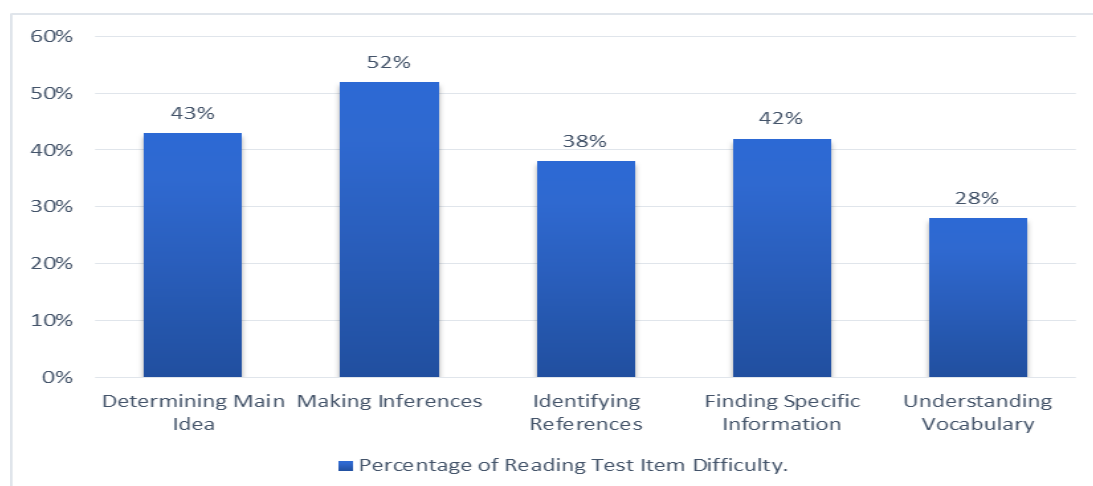


Figure 1. Percentage of reading test item difficulty

Based on the graph above, we can see that four types of questions are classified as fair, with a percentage of good items exceeding 31%. These question types include reading to identify the main idea, making inferences, locating references, and finding specific information. However, when viewed from the percentage, the most difficult aspect of the five aspects of reading is making inferences, which constitutes 52%. Meanwhile, understanding vocabulary was considered an easy item type with a percentage of 28%.

The Student's Difficulties in Comprehending Reading Text

The questionnaire is one of data collection methods in this study. The purpose of questionnaire is to identify the students' difficulties in comprehending English reading texts. In the process of administering the questionnaire, the researcher allocated 20 minutes for the students to complete it. The researcher then guided the students on how to answer the questions and advised them to select the answers that best reflected their opinions.

From the analysis of the open-ended questionnaire, it appears that all of the students have difficulties in comprehending English texts. The open-ended questionnaire findings showed that each student faced challenges in vocabulary

comprehension and cognitive load. This can be seen from each student's response to the open-ended questions. The following is one of the students' responses: "Because it is difficult to understand the meaning of each word and lack of knowledge of English" Student Z. Without adequate vocabulary, students often struggle to comprehend the overall meaning of the text, hindering their understanding of the content presented. Similarly, student F stated, "I have difficulty understanding English texts because the meaning and sentences are different". This response indicates that they may find it challenging to grasp the connections between words in a sentence or comprehend the overall structure of sentences. This difficulty could stem from various factors such as language barriers, unfamiliarity with English grammar rules, or cognitive processing issues. Understanding these challenges can help educators tailor their teaching methods to better support students in improving their language skills.

Further, the findings from closed-ended questions, the analysis process includes steps such as calculating the frequency of answers for each option and calculating the percentage to draw conclusions based on the analysis results. The following are the results of the analysis of the closed-ended questionnaire:

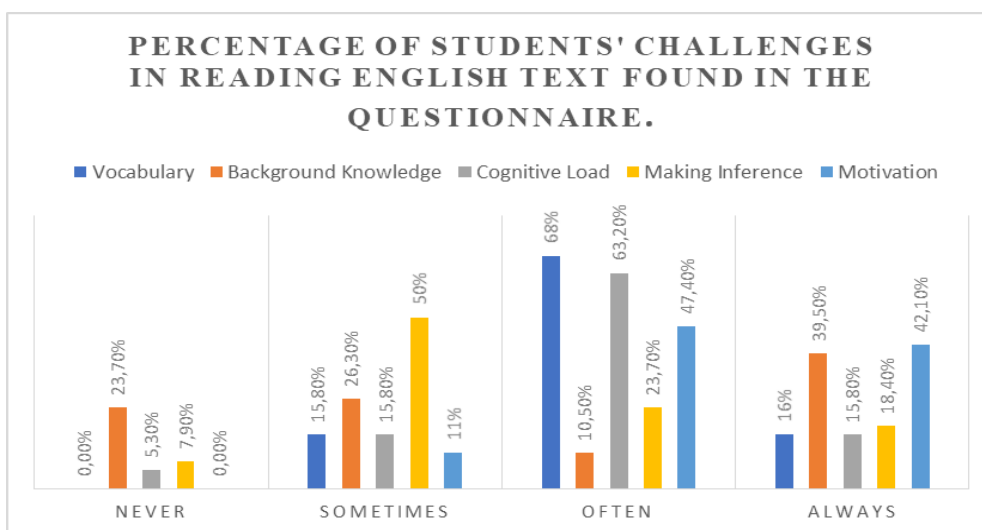


Figure 2. Percentage of students' challenges in reading English text found in the questionnaire

The data in the chart shows that students face notable challenges when reading English texts, particularly in vocabulary knowledge and cognitive load. While no students reported never struggling with vocabulary, 15.8% sometimes experienced difficulties, and a majority (68%) often faced challenges, with 16% always encountering issues. This indicates a significant struggle with understanding English vocabulary among the students. Regarding background knowledge, there is a wide variation in confidence levels, with 39.5% always feeling sufficiently prepared, 26.3% sometimes, and 23.7% never. Cognitive load is another significant issue, with 63.2% often experiencing it, 15.8% sometimes, 15.8% always, and only 5.3% never feeling overwhelmed. This suggests that many students find English texts cognitively demanding. When it comes to inferencing and making connections, 50% sometimes engage in these activities, while smaller percentages do so often (23.7%) or always (18.4%), indicating variability in the use of these skills. Despite these challenges, motivation and engagement levels are high, with 42.1% always feeling motivated and 47.4% often feeling engaged. These findings highlight the need for strategies to improve vocabulary comprehension and manage cognitive load to enhance the reading experience for these students.

Discussion

The ability of eleventh-grade students at SMAN 1 Masbagik to read narrative texts is concerning, with most students demonstrating poor reading comprehension skills. Among 19

students, only three scored very high, while others fell into high, medium, low, and very low categories. This issue is significant as it affects performance across various subjects and can impact long-term academic and professional success. According to Pang et al. (2003), reading comprehension involves making sense of words, sentences, and connected texts. By identifying root causes and implementing effective strategies, students' outcomes can improve. The scoring data shows a range of academic performance, from very high to very low scores. While some students have a strong grasp of the material, others struggle. Targeted support and interventions, such as enrichment for high-performing students and remedial help for those struggling, are crucial. For less successful readers McNamara (2009) suggests six reading comprehension strategies: comprehension monitoring, paraphrasing, elaboration, logic or common sense, predictions and bridging. Regular assessments and collaboration among teachers, administrators, and parents are essential for monitoring progress and developing strategies to promote academic achievement and equity.

The difficulty of making inferences underscores the need for enhanced instructional focus on developing inferential skills. As Kopitski (2007) noted, combining textual clues with background knowledge is crucial for making inferences. This process requires a deeper understanding and critical thinking, as students must draw conclusions based on implicit information. Therefore, targeted instruction and practice in making inferences are essential.

Conversely, understanding vocabulary was perceived as an easier task for students. This suggests that vocabulary comprehension, within the context of a passage, poses less of a challenge. However, recognizing the foundational role of vocabulary comprehension in overall reading proficiency is vital.

On the other hand, the findings from the open-ended questionnaire revealed two significant challenges faced by students: vocabulary knowledge and cognitive load. Many students struggled with understanding individual word meanings, which impeded their overall text comprehension. Language barriers and knowledge gaps were major contributors to this difficulty. To address these issues, educators could implement targeted vocabulary instruction, promote contextual learning, and provide resources like word banks and dictionaries. Additionally, students faced difficulties with sentence structure, possibly due to grammar challenges or cognitive processing issues. Strategies such as explicit instruction, modeling, and visual aids could help reduce cognitive load and improve comprehension. The close-ended questionnaire findings identified several problems in reading comprehension among class XI-F7 students. By tailoring teaching methods to address vocabulary and cognitive challenges, educators can empower students to overcome language barriers and cognitive hurdles, fostering improved English language skills and comprehension.

Meanwhile, learning vocabulary is a critical component of reading success. A strong vocabulary will improve comprehension, enable more effective communication, and promote a deeper understanding of the text. According to Akdogan (2017), this challenge requires constant effort and adaptation to ensure that vocabulary acquisition is effective and engaging. Both teachers and students must be proactive in their approaches to vocabulary learning to overcome the difficulties inherent in the process. Vocabulary knowledge is closely intertwined with reading comprehension. When students encounter unfamiliar words while reading, it can disrupt their understanding of the text and impede their ability to make meaning from what they read. This can create a cycle where limited vocabulary leads to difficulties in comprehension, which in turn inhibits vocabulary growth. As Willingham (2007) said, limited vocabulary can hinder understanding, as readers may struggle to grasp the meaning of unfamiliar words or phrases

within a text. Students who have limited exposure to English outside of the classroom may struggle with vocabulary acquisition. Vocabulary knowledge is crucial at all grade levels, but it becomes especially important in reading instruction as students develop and explore less familiar subjects that come with specialized vocabularies (Leu and Kinzer, 1987). Without regular practice and immersion in English-speaking environments, it's challenging for students to expand their vocabulary naturally. To address this issue, educators must implement multifaceted approaches, including explicit vocabulary instruction, contextual learning, diverse reading materials, collaborative learning environments, and targeted support for English language learners. By adopting these strategies, educators can empower students to overcome vocabulary struggles and develop the necessary skills to become confident and proficient readers in English.

Concerning students' background knowledge and confidence levels in reading English texts reveals a diverse array of experiences and perspectives. While many students' feel consistently prepared to comprehend English texts, a significant portion struggles with adequate readiness. Confidence levels vary widely among students', influenced by factors such as text complexity, familiarity with the subject matter, and proficiency in English. A smaller, notable segment exhibits high confidence, likely due to advanced language skills or extensive relevant knowledge. Inferencing is the process by which a reader integrates information from the text with background knowledge to fill in details and links not explicitly stated in the text (McNamara & Magliano, 2009). This cognitive process is crucial for comprehension, allowing readers to understand nuances and implicit meanings within a text, thus enhancing overall understanding and retention. However, these findings underscore the importance of recognizing the diverse backgrounds and experiences of individuals when assessing their confidence and proficiency in reading English texts. Tailored interventions and support mechanisms may be necessary to address the needs of different groups within the population, such as providing language assistance for those with lower proficiency levels or offering advanced reading materials for individuals with higher levels of background knowledge. Inferencing is the process by which a reader

integrates information from the text with background knowledge to fill in details and links not explicitly stated in the text (McNamara & Magliano, 2009). This cognitive process is crucial for comprehension, allowing readers to understand nuances and implicit meanings within a text, thus enhancing overall understanding and retention. Readers with more prior knowledge on a topic are better equipped to understand and make connections with the information presented in the text (Willingham, 2007).

Similarly, the problem of cognitive load during English text reading, indicating challenges for many individuals. These difficulties stem from factors like text complexity and unfamiliar vocabulary. The majority of students' frequently experience cognitive load, suggesting a need for improved reading comprehension strategies. This underscores the complexity of managing cognitive load, influenced by various factors including individual abilities and reading habits. For readers with limited background knowledge, Kintsch (2009) theorized that integrating the text base with any available knowledge can be so effortful that it overloads working memory and leads to comprehension breakdown. This occurs because the cognitive load required to connect new information with minimal prior knowledge can overwhelm the reader's mental resources, impeding their ability to understand and retain the material effectively. As Willingham (2007) said that complex sentence structures, unfamiliar vocabulary, or dense texts can increase cognitive load and make comprehension more challenging. These findings emphasize the ongoing need for more effective approaches to alleviate cognitive challenges and improve the reading experience. Moreover, addressing cognitive load in reading English texts is crucial for promoting literacy development and fostering a positive reading experience. By identifying effective strategies to manage cognitive challenges, educators and researchers can contribute to enhancing reading comprehension outcomes and promoting lifelong learning.

Furthermore, the research findings reveal that many students demonstrate an awareness of and proficiency in inferencing and making connections while reading English texts. This suggests a widespread tendency among individuals to utilize these skills for comprehension. A notable subset of students frequently engages in these activities, indicating confidence and proficiency in drawing

conclusions and synthesizing information. Conversely, a smaller percentage never engage in such processes, implying that most individuals possess at least some level of awareness or ability in these areas. However, potential barriers such as limited prior knowledge or language proficiency may hinder effective skill utilization for some individuals. Willingham (2007) explains that comprehension involves more than just decoding words; it requires readers to draw inferences, make connections, and fill in gaps to create a coherent understanding of the text. These findings highlight the importance of fostering inferencing and connection-making skills among readers to enhance comprehension and critical thinking abilities. Educators and instructional designers can leverage various strategies and techniques to support the development of these skills, such as providing explicit instruction, offering scaffolded practice activities, and promoting metacognitive awareness.

On the other hand, there was a very positive outlook towards motivation and engagement in reading English texts among the students. The findings align with Willingham's (2007) assertion that motivated and engaged readers are more likely to comprehend and retain information effectively. Additionally, Thohir (2017) emphasizes the teacher's role in maintaining student interest and motivation, highlighting the importance of motivation in language learning success. Educators can further enhance motivation and engagement by incorporating diverse and culturally relevant reading materials, offering choices in reading selections, and fostering a supportive reading culture in educational settings.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it is evident that students faced notable challenges in reading narrative texts in English. The data reveals that a significant portion of students perform poorly, with most falling into the low and very low score categories. This performance gap underscores a critical need for enhanced instructional strategies. The analysis highlights that making inferences is particularly challenging for students, even though it was initially considered a "fair" question type. This difficulty suggests that inferential skills are underdeveloped and necessitates a focus on targeted instruction to improve these crucial aspects of reading

comprehension. Furthermore, two key factors contributing to students' struggles have been identified: vocabulary knowledge and cognitive load. Limited vocabulary and high cognitive load impede students' ability to understand and interpret texts effectively. Thus, it is necessary for teachers to provide vocabulary enrichment programs and strategies in managing cognitive load, which can significantly help students in improving their reading ability.

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