

## **The Students' Difficulties in Reading Comprehension at The Second Semester of English Department at Batanghari University**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study focuses on the difficulties faced by the second semester students of Batanghari University in reading comprehension. The purposes of the study were to find out the difficulties faced by the second semester students Batanghari University and to find out the factors of difficulties in reading comprehension. The method applied was descriptive quantitative, where the test and questionnaire were used as the instrument data collection methods. The test consisted of 15 question items divided into three kinds of test and 20 questionnaires, which were descriptive text, narrative text and recount text. Index difficulty and percentage were used to analyze the data. The result of the test showed that the majority of the second semester of Batanghari University found difficulties including answering main idea, making inference, and locating reference questions. The most difficult aspect that encountered by the second semester students of Batanghari University was finding main idea questions, because the located main idea was difficult to find. In addition, based on the students' responses in questionnaire, they mostly got difficulties in understanding vocabulary, background of knowledge, the difficulty in understanding long sentences, lack of working memory, less motivation/attention to learning reading, lack of knowledge of strategies in reading comprehension.

**Keyword:** Students Difficulties, Reading Comprehension.

### **INTRODUCTION**

In teaching learning process students are expected not only can read the text but also understand, write down the main idea of the text or answer the question based on the text. According to Nunan (2003:68), reading is a fluent process of readers combining information from a text and their own background knowledge to build meaning. Students must master four skills in learning English, one of them is reading. Reading is one of the most important skills that must be mastered

many things by reading. As Grellet (1999: 4), states there are two main points reason to read: read for pleasure and read for information (in order find out something or do something with the reader information get). After this statement, students will get a lot of information about everything they did not know or saw before by reading.

English reading texts must be known and completed by students and teachers because understanding the reading text is important skills and as indicators of achievement in reading that must be achieved by students. If students have difficulty understanding the text, it will happen influence their studies. As Oberholzer (2005), states that "reading difficulties can have an increasingly negative effect on school work and college students Education, because reading requirements become bigger and wider. "Therefore, researchers believe that it is important to conduct research based on this a topic assuming that each student might have different difficulties within understand English reading texts.

Prior to conducting this research, the researcher was undertaking teaching practice (*praktek pengalaman lapangan/PPL*) in senior high school in 2019. The researcher found that the students' not been able to read English text

Difficulties in understanding

properly and correctly. There are some factors that make reading is not easy for some students. The students may not have such motivation to read because the text is not interesting and sometimes the text is too long. The students also unfamiliar with the word used in the text or they lacking of vocabularies. But the main factor that caused students' uninteresting in reading strategy of teaching reading that is used to teach them is not appropriate to their need. Sometimes teachers assume that the students' reading comprehension will develop naturally without any teaching strategies. Thus, the teacher should know how to overcome the problems in order to improve the students' reading comprehension.

By knowing student difficulties, it will be so help teachers to find the right teaching methods to help students improve their ability to read. The aspects to be analyzed are five aspects of reading understanding by Nuttal (1982). They determine the main idea, find specific information, make conclusions, identify references, and understand the meaning of words.

### **READING COMPREHENSION**

In reading comprehension, Boroughs (2017:1) the problem in learning reading comprehension can be caused several things. A reader's background knowledge about what he is reading is one of the most critical factors in determining whether a student will understand what he many things by reading. As Grellet (1999: 4), states there are two main points reason to read: read for pleasure and read for information (in order find out something or do something with the reader information get). After this statement, students will get a lot of information about everything they did not know or saw before by reading.

Difficulties in understanding English reading texts must be known and completed by students and teachers because understanding the reading text is important skills and as indicators of achievement in reading that must be achieved by students. If students have difficulty understanding the text, it will happen influence their studies.

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### **TYPES OF READING**

According to Boroughs (2007:10), there are two types of reading. They are:

1. Verbal Reading/ Sub-vocalization
2. Its reading very slowly either saying the words out loud or atleast with a voice in your head. Comprehension Reading

It means reading with ability to understand what has been read. Reading comprehension can be grouped in to three kinds, those are:

- a. Intensive Reading

Its reading lin shorter text in order to extract specific information. It includes very close accurate reading for detail. Example of intensive reading are: a

bookkeeping report, an insurance claim, a contract.

b. Extensive Reading

It is reading longer text to obtain a general understanding of a subject. In extensive reading, do not worry if you do not understand each word. Example of extensive reading: a novel, megazines articles.

c. Study Reading

It is reading with thinking about what is being read so that it is understood and can be recalled. It needs to be worked at, with the time for reflection, though, analysis, criticism, comparison, evaluated and the whole summarized.

**MODEL OF READING**

Richards (2001: 18) stated there are main models of how reading occurs that is:

1. Bottom up theory

This theory argues that the reader constructs the text from the smallest units (they are letters to words to phrases, to sentence, etc.) and that the process of constructing the text from those smallest units become so automatically that readers are not aware of how it operates.

2. Top down theory

This theory argues that the reader bring a great deal of knowledge, expectation, assumptions, and questions to the text and, given a basic understanding of the vocabulary, they continue to read as long as the text confirm their expectation. The top down theory school of the reading theory argue that readers fit the text into knowledge (cultural, syntactic, linguistic, historical) they already proses, then check back when new or unexpected information appears.

3. Interactive school

This the theory that bottom up theory and top down theory process occur in same time. These theorists describe a process that moves both bottoms up theory and top down depending on the type text as well as on the reader's background knowledge, language proficiency level, motivation, strategy use, and culturally shaped beliefs about the reading.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The design of the research is descriptive quantitative. Gay (1992:218), state that descriptive method involves collecting data in order to test hypothesis or answer question concerning the existing status of the subject of the study. This research had quantitative data. The quantitative data were the percentage of students' responses towards the questionnaires. In this case, the researcher was intended to identify students' difficulties in reading comprehension at Batanghari University Jambi. The population of this research involved all students of second semester English department at Batanghari University Jambi. There are two classes of second semester, A1 and A2. The researcher used purposive sampling to select the sample. It was done to make the researcher easier to describe the problem occur because the smaller amount of the samples. To collect the significant data for this research, the researcher gave reading test. This test aimed to know what the real difficulties affecting reading ability of students at Batanghari University. The reading test was in form of multiple choice questions and essay questions. A questionnaire is a list of written questions that should be answered in order to get information or facts form respondents (Suratno, 2010:10). This questionnaire will help the researcher to find the difficulties faced by students' in reading comprehension.

**Table 1**  
**Rubric Specification of Test**

No	Kinds of text	kinds of questions	Number of itmes
1.	Narrative text	Multiple choice	1,2,3,4,5
2.	Descriptive text	Multiple choice	6,7,8,9,10
3.	Report text	Essay	11,12,13,14,15

(source:UNAS 2008)

**Table 2**  
**The questionnaire indicators and problems**

Variable	Indicators	Problems	Number of item
Reading problems	Background knowledge	There is no background of knowledge about the topic of the text.	1,11,12
	Vocabulary	Lack vocabulary understood text.	2,3,4
	Sentence comprehension	Difficult text.	5,6,13
	Working memory	Weak	7,14,15
	Attention/motivation in reading	Difficult to pay attention of the text/low motivation reading.	8,9,16,17,18
	Knowledge structure	There is no knowledge about text structure.	10,19,20

(source: Borough, 2007:1)

In analysis data, the researcher did some steps, namely: 1) The researcher collected all the data from the questionnaire and reading test. 2) The data from the questionnaires were presented in the form of percentage by

dividing the number of the students who experience the condition by the total number of the students and then multiplying the answer by 100. 3) The data were summarized. 4) Conclusions were drawn based on the result of analysis.

### FINDINGS

The result of the test showed that the majority of the second semester of Batanghari University found difficulties including answering main idea, making inference, and locating reference questions. The most difficult aspect that encountered by the second semester students of Batanghari University was finding main idea questions, because the located main idea was difficult to find. In addition, based on the students' responses in questionnaire, they mostly got difficulties in understanding vocabulary, background of knowledge, the difficulty in understanding long sentences, lack of working memory, less motivation/attention to learning reading, lack of knowledge of strategies in reading comprehension.

The researcher asked the students to answer the questionnaire directly to find out their problems in learning reading. Based on the result taken from the questionnaire, there are two dominant difficulties that the students faced in reading comprehension. They are problems in working memory and motivation. For questions number 8, there are 80% of students answer yes. It means that they were lack of English vocabularies. Therefore, it made them anxious to learn reading. For questions number 5 and 6, 80% of students answer yes. It means that the texts which consist of long and difficult sentences made problem for the students in learning English. They were difficult to understand the text since the sentences are too long. In addition, long text affected to the students' motivation in learning reading. The students became less motivated to read because they were afraid with the long and difficult text.

Further, the reading test was given by the researcher to the students on March 2020. This test was aimed to know the student ability in reading skill. The data were taken from reading test is shown in

table 4.2.

**Table 3**  
**The Reading Test Result**

No	Students' Name	Score			Mean Score	Classified
		Text 1	Text 2	Text 3		
1	Student 1	100	60	100	86.6	Very high
2	Student 2	0	40	100	46.6	Very low
3	Student 3	80	20	60	53.3	Low
4	Student 4	80	80	60	73.3	High
5	Student 5	40	40	100	60	Moderate
6	Student 6	20	20	0	13.3	Very low
7	Student 7	80	80	100	86.6	Very high
8	Student 8	40	80	60	60	Moderate
9	Student 9	80	60	80	73.3	High
10	Student 10	40	80	60	60	moderate
11	Student 11	60	40	60	53.3	Low
12	Student 12	80	40	80	66.6	Moderate
13	Student 13	80	100	80	86.6	Very high
14	Student 14	80	40	60	60	Moderate
15	Student 15	100	80	100	93.3	Very high
<b>Total</b>		<b>960</b>	<b>860</b>	<b>1.140</b>		
<b>Mean</b>		<b>64</b>	<b>57.3</b>	<b>76</b>		

In the table above it can be concluded that in text 1 there are 75% of students who get high grades. it means that the second semester students have no difficulty when answering descriptive text. And text two there are 50% of students who get high grades. It means that the students has difficulty when answering narrative text. The last text three 95% of students who get high grades. It means that the students of second semester has no difficulty to answering the recount text.

From the table above, it can be seen that most of students got moderate score in reading after three times of test. In the first test by using text 1 about narrative text, the mean score of all students 64. It did not change a lot in the second test by using text 2 about descriptive text, the students' mean score 57.3 in level low. However, their mean score increased in the third test by using the text 3 about report text, their mean score became 76. The comparison of score of the students' in three times of the test can be seen in table 4.

**Table 4**  
**The Score Comparison**

No	Reading Test	Mean Score	Classified
1.	Text 1	64	Moderate
2.	Text 2	57.3	Low
3.	Text 3	76	High

## DISCUSIONS

Based on the result of the reading test, it can be seen that at the second test the students got low score. It was because the students were given descriptive text with the the long sentence and more complex vocabularies. The students said that they felt difficult to answer the questions. Even though they are given choices for the answer but they are difficult to translate the difficult vocabularies and to comprehend the sentences. In the first test, their scores are getting better become moderate level. The researcher gave the narrative text with less complex sentences. In the last test the reseacher gave the simple test to the students. Reseacher gave the paragraphs with low sentences comprehension. So that the students can understand the paragraphs well and can answer the questions better.

In addition, to find out the problems by using questionnaire, the students were asked to put their answer on questionnaire which having two options yes and no. The problems are classified into six categories. They are background of knowledge, vocabularies, sentence comprehension, working memory, attention/motivation in reading, knowledge about text structure.

### Background of Knowledge

In a questions number 1,11 and 12 about background of knowledge. In questions number 1 there are 12 students answered yes and 3 answered no, questions number 11 there are 8 students answered yes and 7 students answered no and the last number 12 there are 11 students answered yes and 4 students answered no. It means, there are many students who difficult to understand the background of knowledge as seen in the table below.

No	Pertanyaan (Questions)	Yes	No
1	Saya mengalami kesulitan memahami teks bacaan karena tidak memiliki latar belakang pengetahuan tentang teks.	12 (80%)	3 (20%)
1	Saya mengalami kesulitan untuk mengerti isi teks karena tidak bisa menentukan latar belakang dari teks bacaan.	8 (53,3 %)	7 (46,6 %)
1	Saya tidak suka memahami latar belakang teks pada setiap teks bacaan.	11 (73,3 %)	4 (26,6 %)

The result show that in questions number 1,11,12 about knowledge background, students dominant answer yes. It means that background of knowledge big difficulties for the students in learning reading. Without background of knowledge the students can still comprehend the text well and answer the questions correctly. However, the text which related with the students' background knowledge was needed in order the students can correlate their prior knowledge of the text with the text that they read.

**Vocabulary**

In a questions number 2,3 and 4 about vocabulary. In questions number 2 there are 8 students answered yes and 7 answered no, questions number 3 there also are 8 students answered yes and 7 students answered no and the last number 4 there are 9 students answered yes and 6 students answered no. It means, there are many students who do not understand the vocabulary in each text as seen in the table below.

No	Pertanyaan (Questions)	Yes	No
2.	Saya mengalami kesulitan memahami teks bacaan karena saya tidak menguasai banyak kosa kata dalam Bahasa Inggris.	8 (53,3 %)	7 (46,6 %)
3.	Saya mengalami kesulitan memahami teks bacaan karena menemukan banyak kosakata yang sulit saya pahami.	8 (53,3 %)	7 (46,6 %)
4.	Saya tidak bisa mengartikan kosakata yang terdapat dalam bacaan.	9 (60%)	6 (40%)

For questions number 2 and 3, there are 53.3% of students wgo answered yes and 46.6% answered no. From the result, it can be seen that in learning English, the students really need the vocabularies. If they have lack vocabularies it made them difficult to understand the meaning of the text.

In questions number 4, there are 6 students answered no and the rest answered yes. The students can not translate the vocabularies because it might be the vocabularies are difficult or they saldom heard or even because they do not have dictionary to translate the vocabularies. The vocabulary problems can be serious problems since learning English depends on the vocabularies.

1. Sentence Comprehension

In a questions number 5,6 and 13 about sentence comprehension. In questions number 5 there are 12 students answered yes and 3

answered no, questions number 6 there are 12 students answered yes and 3 students answered no and the last number 13 there are 10 students answered yes and 5 students answered no. It means, there are many students who difficult to understand the sentence comprehension as seen in the table below.

No	Pertanyaan (Questions)	Yes	No
5.	Saya tidak bisa memahami kalimat kalimat dalam teks bacaan.	12 (80%)	3 (20%)
6.	Saya tidak bisa memahami isi teks bacaan karena kalimat kalimat dalam teks terlalu panjang.	12 (80%)	3 (20%)
13.	Saya sulit dalam memahami inti dan kalimat dalam setiap teks bacaan.	10 (66,6 %)	5 (33,3 %)

For questions number 5 and 6, 80% of student total number answered yes. They realized that the long and difficult sentences in a text made them anxious to read. The text should be suitable with the need of the students. It might be not too long or too difficult. As Harmer (2003:203) said that on the text with longer sentences and longer words will be more difficult to understand than those with shorter ones. The students seem reluctant to read the longer text because it will be difficult for them to understand.

Working Memory

In a questions number 7,14 and 15 about working memory. In questions number 7 there are 2 students answered yes and 13 answered no, questions number 14 there are 4 students answered yes and 11 students answered no and the last number 15 there are 12 students answered yes and 3 students answered no. It means, there are many students who difficult to remmember reading texts as seen in the table below.

No	Pertanyaan (Questions)	Yes	No
7.	Saya memiliki daya ingat yang lemah saat belajar reading.	2 (13,3 %)	13 (86,6 %)
14.	Saya tidak bisa mengingat isi teks hanya dalam sekali baca.	4 (26,6 %)	11 (73,3 %)
15.	Saya tidak mampu mengingat isi teks bacaan dalam waktu lama.	12 (80%)	3 (20%)

In the working memory the students do not feel difficult because they can remmember the text but in questions number 15, 80% students answer yes. It means the students can not remmember the text in a long term.

3. Knowledge of Generic Structure

In a questions number 10,19 and 20 about knowledge generic structure. In questions number 10 there are 9 students answered yes and 6 answered no, questions number 19 there are 9 students answered yes and 6 students answered no and the last number 20 there are 9 students answered yes and 6 students answered no. It means, there are many students who difficult to understand the knowledge generic structure as seen in the table below.

No	Pertanyaan (Questions)	Yes	No
10.	Saya sulit memahami isi teks bacaan karena saya tidak memahami generic structure dari teks bacaan.	9 (60%)	6 (40%)
19.	Saya tidak terlalu mengerti tentang generic structure bacaan yang saya baca.	9 (60%)	6 (40%)
20.	Saya membaca teks saya tidak terlalu terfokus terhadap generic structure dalam teks bacaan.	9 (60%)	6 (40%)

For the questions number 10,19,20 60% students answered yes and 40% answered no. It means the students felt difficult to determine the knowledge of generic structure in a text.

#### 4. Attention/Motivation in Reading

In a questions number 8,9,16,17 and 18 attention and motivation. In questions number 9 and 18 there are 13 students answered yes and 2 answered no, questions number 8 there are 12 students answered yes and 3 students answered no and number 16 there are 9 students answered yes and 6 students answered no the last number 17 there are 8 students answered yes and 7 students answered no. It means, there are many students who lack of attention and motivation in learning reading as seen in the table below.

No	Pertanyaan (Questions)	Yes	No
8.	Saya tidak bisa fokus terhadap bacaan yang saya baca.	12 (80%)	3 (20%)
9.	Saya tidak memiliki motivasi dalam membaca teks.	13 (86,6%)	2 (13,3%)
16.	Fokus saya mudah terpecah saat saya membaca teks terutama English teks.	9 (60%)	6 (40%)
17.	Saya hanya gampang fokus terhadap teks bacaan yang tidak berbahasa inggris.	8 (53,3%)	7 (46,6%)
18.	Saya tidak termotivasi saat membaca terutama dalam membaca teks bahasa inggris.	13 (86,6%)	2 (13,3%)

For questions number 8,9,16,17,18 are dominant the students answered yes. They felt that motivation and attention are also problems in reading. They said that when the first time they saw the length of the text, they would feel motivated or not in reading text. If the text is too long, they would be less motivated to read the text.

## CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings and discussion of this research, it can be concluded there are some difficulties faced by the students in reading comprehension. The main problem for them are sentences comprehension. The students are still difficult to understand the sentences because sometimes the text are too long. The students did not have good comprehension in reading too long text because they cannot get the meaning of the sentences. The comprehension of the sentences is influenced by the lacking of vocabularies. The less they have vocabularies the less they understand the text. The lacking of vocabularies is the second difficulties in

reading comprehension. The other difficulties faced by the students are attention and motivation of the students to read. When the students look at the long text, it made them discouraged to read and comprehend the text. The last difficulties faced by the students in reading comprehension are background of the knowledge, working memory and understanding of generic structure of the text. There is one student who has the highest score of 93.3 and one student who has the lowest score of 13.3.

Based on the conclusion above, the researcher gave some suggestion as follow:

1. It is better for the lecturer to use suitable technique in teaching reading. The lecturer should try to find the technique which is suitable with the reading activity.
2. It is recommended for the lecturer to find the reading text which is suitable with the students need. Find the texts which are not too long either too short encourage and motivate the students to read.
3. It is suggested for the students to increase their willingness to read many kinds of text. Enjoy all kinds of text and try to understand them.
4. And for the last,for the further researcher. Try to find otherd problem that face by the students that come from the student ability in different semester and with different kind of text. So that, the researcher can find more problems that are faced by the students in learning reading.

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