

**ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (EFL)
UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN
READING COMPREHENSION
(A Study of Indonesian and Egyptian Students)**

A THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the Degree
of *Sarjana Pendidikan* in English Education



By :

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**ENGLISH EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND TEACHER TRAINING
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K.H. ABDURRAHMAN WAHID PEKALONGAN
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MOTTO

“For indeed, with hardship (will be) ease. Indeed with hardship (will be) ease.”

(Q.S. Al – Insyiroh: 5 - 6)

“The more you focus on what you want in your life, the faster it will become a reality.”

Roger Lee

“Do not be afraid to take your rights. Be brave.”

Hossam Mamdouh

“Do not be lazy to persue your happiness.”

Eva Listian

ABSTRAK

Comprehension merupakan aspek yang penting dalam setiap aktivitas membaca. Melalui *reading comprehension*, pembaca dapat memperoleh isi atau makna dari sebuah teks. Akan tetapi, banyak siswa yang mengalami masih kesulitan untuk memahami teks bahasa Inggris. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui kesulitan-kesulitan yang dihadapi mahasiswa EFL Indonesia dan Mesir dalam *reading comprehension* beserta faktor penyebabnya. Penelitian ini melibatkan dua mahasiswa EFL jurusan pendidikan bahasa Inggris semester lima. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah metode kualitatif dengan desain *narrative inquiry*. Untuk mengumpulkan data, peneliti menggunakan teknik *semi-structured interview*. Penelitian ini akan membantu mengembangkan teori Nuttall (2008) dan Alderson (2005) tentang jenis kesulitan dalam *reading comprehension* dan faktor penyebab kesulitan dan dalam *reading comprehension*. Analisis tematik dari Barkhuizen, Benson, dan Chik digunakan untuk menganalisis data. Hasil dari penelitian ini menyebutkan bahwa ada beberapa jenis kesulitan yang dihadapi oleh mahasiswa EFL dalam *reading comprehension*, antara lain; kesulitan dalam memahami arti kata, memahami kalimat panjang, menentukan main idea, dan membuat kesimpulan. Kesulitan tersebut dipicu oleh beberapa faktor sebagai berikut; kurangnya pengetahuan bahasa, motivasi, konsentrasi serta jenis teks yang panjang.

Kata kunci: *reading comprehension*, kesulitan siswa, faktor penyebab

ABSTRACT

Comprehension is an important aspect of every reading activity. Through reading comprehension, readers can understand the content or passage of a text. Nevertheless, many students still experience the difficulties in their English reading comprehension. This study aimed to reveal the Indonesian and Egyptian EFL university students' difficulties in reading comprehension as well as its causative factors. This study involved two EFL students who are majoring in English Education in semester five. This study used a qualitative method with a narrative inquiry design. To collect the data, the researcher implied a semi-structured interview. This study helped to develop the theory of Nuttall (2008) and Alderson (2005) about the difficulties in reading comprehension and the causative factors of difficulties in reading comprehension. Thematic analysis by Barkhuizen, Benson, and Chick was used to analyze the data. The result of this study showed that there were several difficulties faced by the Indonesian and Egyptian EFL university students in reading comprehension. They were namely difficulty in understanding word meaning, understanding long sentences, determining the main idea, and making the inference. The next finding reported the factors that caused the students' difficulties were namely lack of language knowledge, lack of interest, lack of concentration, and the length of the text.

Keywords: reading comprehension, students' difficulties, causative factors

PREFACE

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The writer

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the researcher explores the background of the study, formulation of problems, operational definitions, aims of the study, and significance of the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

Nowadays, English is known to be the first most learned language all over the world since it is considered the most commonly spoken language ((Bim in Tillayeva, 2020). It is not surprising since English has officially become an international language. As reported from the official website of *The Ethnologue*, there are 1.5 billion people in the world who speak this language in 2022 that includes those who speak it as a first language, second language, and foreign language. As a result, numerous countries place English as a compulsory subject nearly in all levels of education starting from Asian to Middle East countries.

As we have seen, reading is an activity that is full of benefits, so it is very important for human lives. Reading ability is a necessity because the dissemination of information and messages in this modern world is presented in written form. Therefore, it can only be understood through reading. Related to language learning, Krashen and Brown (in Qerqez and Ab Rashid, 2017) had a notion that reading is categorized as the most crucial skill since it can help students to raise their overall language proficiency. Furthermore, Rahim (2011) emphasized that the benefit of reading is making

the reader gain knowledge and insights which will further increase their intelligence, so they can be better to answer the challenges of life in the future. She also added that another benefit of reading is that it can make someone one step ahead of others. In other words, the success of one's life depends on one reading activity.

Reading comprehension is an interactive activity that connects three things including the reader, text and context. The skill of reading comprehension itself involves the ability to derive meaning from written text as what have stated by Silliman and Wilkinson in Herlina (2016). They pointed out that in general, the meaning of reading comprehension is an ability to acquire meaning from a written text. Through reading comprehension, readers are expected to gain understanding from the text that pertains to new vocabulary or information. In the context of language learning, reading comprehension is how students find information from a text. Whenever students just read loudly but can not understand the content of the text, it means they fail to achieve the goal of reading comprehension. To be good readers, students must be able to comprehend the meaning of a text they read. Therefore, the purpose of reading comprehension in learning is used to ensure that students comprehend the idea and meaning of the passage.

In the process of learning a language, there is a big possibility that students will experience difficulties and challenges. These can be the cause of less-than-optimal student outcomes in learning. It is a natural thing and

can happen to anyone including students who learn a second or foreign language. The difficulties in learning English are not only found at the primary, secondary, and tertiary, but they will also continue until the higher education level.

In Indonesia and Egypt, English is used as a foreign language which has been taught from early childhood education to higher education. English learning in university level is more complex. Therefore, there is big possibility for the students to have difficulties in learning English. A study of reading comprehension presented by Davoudi and Yousefi (2015). They found that in these skills, EFL students face a number of difficulties such as a lack of vocabulary and background knowledge. Other researchers added that problems in reading comprehension also deal with grammatical knowledge and poor reading strategies which is in fact a must to have because it is very important to minimize and solve the difficulties (Samad, Jannah, and Fitriani, 2017).

In reality, this also occurs to students who are in the English education department. Many of them still fail to read adequately in English. In addition, they can not understand what they read. In many cases, they also read more slowly, and they do not understand the meaning or information contained in the text that they read (Stranovska, Munkova, and Munk, 2014). It is not even infrequently those who are stuck with the difficult words in the text. In addition, they also feel difficult to find the main idea of the text. Moreover, it is also not a few who argue that reading, for any

purpose, requires a proper understanding of the meaning of each word in the text. Therefore, it can be concluded that comprehension is an aspect that must exist in every reading activity because it can boost reading skills, and it is absolutely useful for certain goals.

Based on the phenomena above, the researcher is interested to conduct a study entitled “English as a Foreign Language (EFL) University Students’ Difficulties in Reading Comprehension (A Study of Indonesian and Egyptian Students)”. This study focuses on the EFL university students’ difficulties in reading comprehension and its causative factors.

1.2 Formulation of the problem

Based on the background of study discussed above, the problems of this study are formulated as follows:

1. What are the Indonesian and Egyptian university students’ difficulties in reading comprehension?
2. What are the factors that cause the Indonesian and Egyptian university students’ difficulties in reading comprehension?

1.3 Operational definition

To avoid misunderstandings in interpreting the terms that are often raised in this study, the following are the terms defined by the researcher:

1. EFL students are those who learn English in counties where their people do not speak English at all as the main language (Iwai, 2011).
2. Students’ difficulties are concerned with a condition where students are hard to understand the learning process. As a result, the students

learning outcomes will be low because they lack an understanding of the material (Lenhard and Lenhard, 2013).

3. Reading comprehension is known as the process to build meaning by combining several complex processes that include the word, world knowledge, and fluency (Klingner in Nasrullah, 2018).

1.4 Aims of the Study

The aims of the study are listed as follows:

1. To reveal the Indonesian and Egyptian university students' difficulties in reading comprehension.
2. To reveal the factors that cause the Indonesian and Egyptian university students' difficulties in reading comprehension.

1.5 Significance of the study

The researcher assumes this study gives significance in three aspects as follows:

1. Theoretically, this study is expected to support the theory of Nuttal (2008) about kinds of difficulties in reading comprehension and Alderson (2005) about factors that cause difficulties in reading comprehension.
2. Empirically, this study is expected to provide an empirical overview of the kinds of difficulties and factors that cause them in reading comprehension employed by EFL Students. The findings of this study are expected to offer educators a framework for

responding to the difficulties in English reading comprehension.

3. Practically, the result of the study is expected to give benefit readers or other researchers as an additional reference, especially for those who are interested in doing a further study about the related study. In addition, this study also can be used as additional material for teachers in reading courses. Moreover, future researchers who are interested in doing a similar field can take this study as a previous study. The result also can be used as a solution to assist teachers in solving problems faced by students when teaching English, especially focusing on reading.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This chapter is divided into two main sections. The first section is the conclusion of the research findings that have been discussed above. The second section contains suggestions for university students, lecturers, and future researchers.

5.1 Summary of the Findings

In this part, the researcher provides a conclusion based on the result and discussion. Based on the explanations in the previous chapter, the researcher concludes that there are some difficulties faced by students in English reading comprehension. First, the Indonesian and Egyptian students are difficulty understanding the word's meaning. Poor vocabulary makes the students often confused and difficult to understand the meaning of the word in a text. Therefore, they can't understand the content of the text well. Second, students feel difficulty in understanding long sentences. Long sentences contain many words which may be unknown or unfamiliar to the students. It leads the students to get difficult to interpret long sentences. Third, students feel difficulty in determining the main idea. They are confused because they believe that all sentences are important and have the potential to be the main idea of the sentence and even the text. Fourth, students feel difficulty in making an inference. The student faces difficulty in making inferences because they can't completely comprehend the text due to the lack of vocabulary. Reading is perceived as being simpler when students are able to

draw conclusions

All the difficulties faced by students are caused by several factors. The first factor is the students' lack of language knowledge. The knowledge of vocabulary and grammar is the main key that is used in reading comprehension. The lack of vocabulary mastery and grammar is considered as the main cause of the students not comprehending English text. The second factor is the students' lack of motivation to reading. Based on the interview, the researcher found that the students have a low interest in reading. This is caused by both their dislike and their low vocabulary mastery. Besides that, the students also feel bored for not understanding the text well. The third factor is the students' lack of concentration. Concentration is very important in every reading activity. Concentration helps readers to get good comprehension. In this study, the students still feel difficult to focus on their reading because they get stuck in unknown words. The fourth factor is the length of the text. As the students get difficulty understanding long sentences, then the length of the text must be a cause. It is because the students find many unfamiliar words which they are more formal and academic. In addition, they also find that long text is more complex.

5.2 Recommendation

In this part, the researcher would like to make some recommendations for university students, English lecturers, and future researchers. First, university students should try to read English texts more

often and expand their vocabulary. Second, English lecturers should be aware of their students' difficulties with reading comprehension and create a solution to help them improve their reading skills. They should pay much more attention to their students' reading difficulties and figure out how to teach them while also motivating them to read and decrease their difficulties. Third, future researchers should expand the research by conducting a deep investigation and adding more references related to the difficulties in English reading comprehension and what factors cause the difficulties in order to assist students in minimizing the difficulties. It is also possible to increase the number of participants to obtain more detailed relevant information.

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