

## STUDENTS' ABILITY AND DIFFICULTIES IN READING COMPREHENSION

Yelni Erniyati<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Lecturer of English Department Study Program of IAIN Kerinci  
Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Kerinci

Jl. Kapten Muradi, Kecamatan Sungai Liuk, Kota Sungai Penuh, Jambi, 37112,

Phone: (+62748) 21065, Indonesia.

e-mail: yelnierniyati1@gmail.com

**Abstract:** *Reading is a process of comprehending a written language or text. Students can get knowledge and improve their writing, speaking and listening skills. Ideally, students should comprehend what they are reading as well as be able to comprehend the content they are reading. In fact, the researcher realizes that some students are still struggling to understand or comprehend the text. This include issues with recognizing the text's information, main idea, and topic; figuring out the meaning of words that are referred to or have similar meanings; and figuring out the theme or purpose of the text. In this research, the researcher employed descriptive research. The aimed of this research to describe students' ability and difficulties in reading comprehension at the fourth semester student of English Department at IAIN Kerinci. it consisted of 22 students. In collecting the data, the researcher employed reading comprehension test in term of essay that consisted of five questions related to main idea, topic, supporting detail, inference and social function of the text to 22 students. The data gotten revealed that the ability of students in reading comprehension was in sufficient category namely 12 students who were got this category and it was higher than students who were in very good (2 students) or good (5 students) category. Meanwhile, regarding to the ability of students in reading comprehension, the data revealed that most of the students have difficulty in identifying main idea (44.33) in fail category and topic of the text (54.55) in poor category.*

**Keywords:** *reading, comprehension, ability, difficulties, students.*

### INTRODUCTION

There are four core English skills that students must master during the learning process (Harmer, 2007b). These skills include reading, listening, writing, and speaking. All basic English skills are equally vital in helping students master the language.

However, reading has long been viewed as an essential skill that can help children master the other skills (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). This argument is supported by Krashen and Brown (2007), Mcdonough and Shaw (1993) Snow et al. (1998), who all agree that reading can have a positive impact on

students' other language aspects while also preparing them for the social and economic aspects that they will encounter in society. According to Troyer et al. (2018), reading is a process of comprehending a written language or text. Students can get knowledge and improve their writing, speaking and listening skills through reading activities, because it can acquire vocabulary, grammar, and discourse markers (Ambarini et al., 2018; Rohmah, 2018). Reading can increase students' knowledge gradually and it may develop other language skills are such as listening, speaking, and writing. furthermore, the knowledge and experience gained from reading can make develop intellectual abilities (Aziz et al., 2019).

Readers should have a specific goal in their minds before they engage with text (Lail, 2020). Reading for pleasure or interest, obtaining specific information from a text, and obtaining the general information from a text are the three categories of reading goals, according to (Hidayat (2017), they should have good vocabulary, grammar, and strategies to understand the texts. Therefore, comprehension is necessary for reading. It is the process

of transferring the ideas from texts to readers' mind, or process in which students understand and interpret message from the written words. Better comprehension of reading text can help the students meet the goals of reading, otherwise they will not be able to acquire knowledge after reading (Indrayadi et al., 2020).

Furthermore, reading comprehension classes should make it possible for the students to comprehend the reading material that is presented to them in written form. This means that comprehension serves as a tool in understanding the text content. In addition, ideally students should comprehend what they are reading as well as be able to comprehend the content they are reading. In fact, the researcher realizes that some students are still struggling to understand or comprehend the text. This include issues with recognizing the text's information, main idea, and topic; figuring out the meaning of words that are referred to or have similar meanings; and figuring out the theme or purpose of the text.

Moreover, several studies have investigated about the difficulties encountered by students in reading

comprehension. One of the studies was done by Idayanti (2021). Her study aimed to determine the difficulties faced by ninth-grade students of SMP Muhammadiyah Al-Amin Sorong City in reading comprehension. The study revealed that the students struggled with four main difficulties: identifying the main idea in a reading text, comprehending vocabulary, understanding the content and meaning of the text, and recognizing important details, the second by Putri (2020). The study explored the difficulties in comprehending reading among grade nine students at MTs in Medan. The study found that the difficulties faced by the students included understanding vocabulary, making inferences, recognizing details, and limited grammar skills. The last study by Septia et al., (2022) investigated the difficulties in comprehending reading faced by students in a public high school in Bangka. The results indicated that the students had difficulties in answering vocabulary questions and main idea questions and making inferences.

These issues also affected by the fourth semester of English department students at IAIN Kerinci.

Based on the initial interviews with a few students, the researcher found that they experienced the previously mentioned reading difficulties and reading is challenging since they need to have good vocabulary. Although numerous studies have explored the importance of reading and its role in language acquisition, limited research has been conducted focusing specifically on students' reading comprehension difficulties at the tertiary level, particularly in English departments at Islamic higher education institutions such as IAIN Kerinci. Most existing literature emphasizes the general benefits of reading or focuses on secondary education settings. There is a lack of empirical studies that examine the actual types of comprehension difficulties faced by university students and the factors that contribute to these challenges, such as vocabulary limitations, decoding problems, or lack of strategic reading skills. In line with those facts, the researcher is eager to investigate students' reading comprehension ability and difficulties.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

### **Related Theory**

#### **The Nature of Reading Comprehension**

Reading is useful for language acquisition (Harmer, 2007a). In order to read, a student must be able to decode printed words and understand what they have read. Reading is a set of skill that include making sense and obtaining meaning from the printed words (Linse & Nunan, 2005). This indicates that reading is a set of skills that require both the capacity to decode (sound out) the printed words and comprehension in order to determine or find out and make sense and meaning from the printed words.

Furthermore, according to Pang et al. (2003), reading is about comprehending written materials. Both perception and thinking are involved in this complex activity. Word recognition and comprehension are two interrelated processes that make up reading. The technique of recognizing how written symbols match spoken words is known as word recognition. Meanwhile, making understanding of words, sentences and related text is the process of comprehension. In order to comprehend written material, readers usually draw on their prior knowledge,

vocabulary, grammatical understanding, text experience, and other technique to help them understand written text. Reading without comprehension is nonsense and useless. The ability of the mind to comprehend the concepts that are grasped or the process of transferring concepts from reading the text to the reader's mind in order to have a comprehension is related to reading comprehension. Burnes and Page (1991) point out that comprehension is not distinct skills but involves the relationship between the students' knowledge and organization of that knowledge as it relates to proposed by Piaget, comprehension is a process involving combination of information onto students' existing knowledge. The students' prior knowledge is important in comprehending a reading text. The ability to comprehend the concepts and details in reading texts is known as reading comprehension. After reading the written material, the reader must comprehend its meaning.

According to Lems (2011), reading comprehension is the ability to construct meaning from a given written text. Reading comprehension is not a static competency; it varies according

to the purposes for reading and the text that is involved. When the prerequisite skills are in place, reading becomes an evolving interaction between the text and the background knowledge of the reader. Klingner et al. (2007) also inform that “reading comprehension is the process of constructing meaning by coordinating a number of complex processes that include word reading, word and world knowledge, and fluency”. Reading is therefore a process of comprehending textual materials. Each text passage must give the reader a sense of knowledge and comprehension in order for them to succeed in reading comprehension. In addition, in order to understand each sentence, paragraph, and each passage, the reader must be able to create her thought and perceptions. Based the explanation above, the researcher concludes that reading comprehension is an activity that understand or decode the written word in order to get the meaning of the text.

### **Indicators of Reading Comprehension**

In reading comprehension, the reader engages in a process to better understand and comprehend the content. According to Anderson

(2003), reading comprehension requires the following understanding: Identifying the main idea, following the text's technique, gaining impact, drawing inferences, and seeing the writer's intention. Similarly, Brown (2004:64) describes the reading aspects as follows:

Identifying topics;

The topic is the only thing that a text is about. When determining the topic, the reader concentrates on the overall subject of reading.

Identifying the Main Idea

Finding the key idea in a literature requires understanding what the author means with the text. An effective reader understands not just the concepts but also their relative importance as represented by the authors.

Identifying Detail

Once the reader has identified the primary idea, they must grasp a paragraph in greater detail. Details are employed to support, clarify, and explain the central idea. Details can be words, phrases, or statements that are explained in the text.

*Identifying pronoun references*

Recognizing reference to words, will help the reader comprehend the reading passage.

*Determine the meaning of words in context.*

Reading relies heavily on vocabulary. Reading allows most readers to expand their vocabulary. Understanding the vocabulary in context will help the reader understand the content more easily.

*Determining explicit and implicit meaning.*

Explicit meaning is defined as meaning that is explicitly stated in the reading text, whereas implicit meaning is meaning that is not expressly mentioned in the reading text. To comprehend the suggested meaning in a document, the reader may look for the term connotation.

In addition, in a text, students should be able to understand the social function of the text; the purpose it serves, such as to inform, or present a point of view. Furthermore, in this research, the researcher focused on students' ability on main idea, topic, inference, detail information and social function of the text.

## METHODOLOGY OF STUDY

In this research, the researcher employed descriptive research. The research took place at the fourth semester students of English department of IAIN Kerinci. it consisted of 22 students. In collecting the data, the researcher employed reading comprehension test in form of essay. The students were asked to answer the questions given based on the text given. The total of the questions were five questions related to main idea, topic, detail information, inference and social function of the text. In analyzing the data obtained from reading comprehension test, the researcher scored based on Klingner et al.'s rubric (2007).

Table1. Scoring Rubric for Reading Comprehension

Point	Criteria
0	No response
10	An inaccurate and incomplete
20	Some information is accurate and some is inaccurate, the response is sketchy
30	Information is generally accurate and complete, but not well developed
40	Response is complete and accurate

In determining student's final score, the researcher used the following formula:

$$\text{Student's score} = \frac{\text{score obtained}}{\text{Maximum score}} \times 100$$

After counting the students' score, the gotten score was compared to IAIN Kerinci standard score of

achievement of to determine their achievement, as the following:

Table 2. Standard Score of Achievement

Score's Range	Grade	Classification
80-100	A	Very good
70-79	B	Good
60-69	C	Sufficient
50-59	D	Poor
0-49	E	Fail

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In collecting the data, the researcher employed reading comprehension test to 22 students of the fourth semester. It consisted of essay reading test. The students were After analyzed the gotten data; the researcher found the students' score in reading comprehension that could be seen in the following table 3.

Table 3. Students' Reading Achievement Score

Students' number	Scores	Classification
1	60	Poor
2	80	Very Good
3	55	Poor
4	65	Sufficient
5	65	Sufficient
6	75	Good
7	70	Good
8	65	Sufficient
9	80	Very Good
10	75	Good
11	50	Poor
12	70	Good
13	65	Sufficient
14	60	Sufficient
15	55	Poor
16	65	Sufficient
17	70	Good
18	60	Sufficient
19	65	Sufficient
20	60	Poor
21	60	Sufficient
22	65	Sufficient
Total score	1435	
Mean	65.23	

Regarding to the table above, it could be seen that the highest score was 80 and the lowest score was 50. There were two students who got 80 in very good category and one student who got 50 in poor category. The students' reading comprehension classification ability could be seen in the following table 4;

Table 4. Students' Reading Achievement Classification

Score's range	Frequency	Classifications
80-100	2	Very good
70-79	5	Good
60-69	12	Sufficient
50-59	3	Poor
0-49	0	Fail

From the table 4, the data revealed that overall, there were 2 students who were in very good category, 5 students who were in good category. Moreover, there were 12 students in sufficient category and only 3 students who were in poor category. From the data in table 4, it could be seen that the students who got sufficient category was higher than students who got very good or good category. Furthermore, related to the detail comprehension ability of the students in comprehending the text about main idea, topic, detail information, inference and social function of the text could be seen in the following table:

Table 5. Students' Ability In Comprehending The Text

Indicators	Percentage	Classifications
Identifying the main idea	44.32	Fail
Identifying the topic	54.55	Poor
Identifying the detail information	78.41	Good
Finding the inference	69.32	Sufficient
Identifying social function of the text	79,55	Good

Based on the data above, it could be seen that the highest score was in identifying social function of the text, it means that students were in good category in this indicator. The students show good ability (79.55%) in identifying the social function of the text given. Meanwhile, the lowest score (44.32%) was in identifying the main idea. It was in fail category. The percentage of score revealed that the students were difficult in identifying the main idea in the text given. Furthermore, the data showed that students have more difficulties in comprehend the reading text in terms of identifying the main idea, topic, and inference. The finding is related to those several studies have previously been undertaken that address the students' reading comprehension difficulties. Al-Jarrah and Ismail (2018), Ganie and Rangkuti (2018),

Nurjannah (2018), Puspita (2017), Samad et al. (2017), and Sari (2017) all carried out these studies. The studies looked into reading comprehension problems and difficulties in learning English. The findings revealed that students mostly have difficulties due to their lack of vocabularies. Students also find it hard to determine main idea and find specific information in the texts. Moreover, another related finding is study by Hidayati (2018), who found that finding main idea was the most difficult aspect for the first-grade students at SMA N 1 Darussalam.

On the other hand, the data on table 5 showed that the students have good ability in identifying the detail information and social function of the text. This finding is also related to the data gotten by Sari (2017), the study revealed that finding specific information was not categorized difficult for seventh grade of MTs N Mlinjon Klaten students. Students' percentage difficulty in finding specific information was 33.78% which indicated that most of the students did not have difficulty in finding specific information. Meanwhile related to finding the social function of the text, the data on table 5 have different result



with the study conducted by Khattamimma (2021), who found that 50% students did not understand the social function of recount text.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

### Conclusions

Based on the result of this research, it can be concluded that the ability of fourth semester of English department students of IAIN Kerinci in reading comprehension was in sufficient category namely 12 students who were got this category and it was higher than students who were in very good or good category. Meanwhile, regarding to the ability of students in reading comprehension, the data revealed that most of the students have difficulty in identifying main idea (44.32%) and topic of the text (54.55%).

### Suggestion

The researcher suggests to the lecturers who teach reading comprehension classes to use various teaching strategies or approaches or use various kinds of teaching media to make students understand about main idea, topic sentence and inference in order to improve the ability of the

students to comprehend the text. Furthermore, the students are suggested to read many kinds of texts in order to make them understood more about the information included in text.

## REFERENCES

- Al-Jarrah, H., & Ismail, N. S. B. (2018). Reading Comprehension Difficulties Among EFL Learners in Higher Learning Institutions. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 8(7), 32–41. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v8n7p32>
- Ambarini, R., Sumardiyani, L., & Wardoyo, S. L. (2018). PACA (Predicting And Confirming Activity) Reading Strategies to Promote Students' Teaching Strategy in TEFL 1 Class. *Celt: A Journal of Culture, English Language Teaching & Literature*, 18(1), 42. <https://doi.org/10.24167/celt.v18i2.893>
- Anderson, N. (2003). Reading: Practical English Language Teaching. In *New York: McGraw Hill*.
- Aziz, Z. A., Nasir, C., & Ramazani, R. (2019). Applying Metacognitive Strategies in Comprehending English Reading Texts. *Celt: A Journal of Culture, English Language Teaching & Literature*, 19(1), 138. <https://doi.org/10.24167/celt.v19i1.1863>

- Burnes, D., & Page, G. (1991). *Insight and Strategies for Teaching Reading*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanich Group. Pty Limited.
- Fuchs, L. S., & Fuchs, D. (2006). A framework for building capacity for responsiveness to intervention. *School Psychology Review*, 35(4), 621–626.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02796015.2006.12087966>
- Ganie, R. D., & Rangkuti, R. (2018). Reading Comprehension Problems on English Texts Faced By High School Students in Medan. *KnE Social Sciences*, 684–694.  
<https://doi.org/10.18502/kss.v3i1.9.4896>
- Harmer, J. (2007a). *How To Teach English*. Essex: Pearson Education.
- Harmer, J. (2007b). *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. England: Pearson Education.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/57.4.401>
- Hidayat, N. (2017). Developing E-Reading Materials for Students at Grade Seven. *JEES (Journal of English Educators Society)*, 2(1), 33–44.  
<https://doi.org/10.21070/jees.v2i1.676>
- Hidayati, D. (2018). Students Difficulties in Reading Comprehension At the First Grade of SMAN 1 Darussalam Aceh Besar. Ar-Raniry State Islamic University. *Students Difficulties in Reading Comprehension At*.
- Idayanti. (2021). The analysis of students' difficulties in comprehension English reading text at smp muhammadiyah al-amin sorong city. *Transcript: Review of English Teaching Learning*, 3(1), 1–29.
- Indrayadi, T., Kamil, D., Helty, Yusuf, M., Novetra, J., & Sasferi, N. (2020). The effect of contextual teaching and learning on reading motivation. *International Journal of Scientific and Technology Research*, 9(2), 4111–4118.
- Khattamimma, A. (2021). The Students' Ability in Reading Comprehension of Recount Text. *National Seminar of Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris (NSPBI 2021)*, 69–74.  
<https://doi.org/10.35307/saltel.v2i2.30>
- Klingner, K. J., Vaughn, S., & Boardman, A. (2007). Teaching reading comprehension to students with learning difficulties. In *New York: The Guilford Press*.
- Krashen, S. D., & Brown, C. L. (2007). What is academic language proficiency? *STETS Language and Communication Review*, 6(1), 1–4.  
[http://www.sdkrashen.com/articles/Krashen\\_Brown\\_ALP.pdf](http://www.sdkrashen.com/articles/Krashen_Brown_ALP.pdf)
- Lail, H. (2020). Answering Reading Texts on English Tryout Test Based on the 12Th Grade Students' Strategies At Sma Negeri1 Kuripan Lombok Barat. *Journal of Languages and*

- Language Teaching*, 7(1), 3.  
<https://doi.org/10.33394/jollt.v7i1.1434>
- Lems, R. (2011). Teaching English to Language Learners. New York: A Division Publishing. In *New York: A Division Publishing*.  
[http://scioteca.caf.com/bitstream/handle/123456789/1091/RED2017-Eng-8ene.pdf?sequence=12&isAllowed=y%0Ahttp://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.regsciurbeco.2008.06.005%0Ahttps://www.researchgate.net/publication/305320484\\_SISTEM\\_PEMBELAJARAN\\_TERPUSAT\\_STRATEGI\\_MELESTARI](http://scioteca.caf.com/bitstream/handle/123456789/1091/RED2017-Eng-8ene.pdf?sequence=12&isAllowed=y%0Ahttp://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.regsciurbeco.2008.06.005%0Ahttps://www.researchgate.net/publication/305320484_SISTEM_PEMBELAJARAN_TERPUSAT_STRATEGI_MELESTARI)
- Linse, C. T., & Nunan, D. (2005). Practical English Language Teaching: Young Learners. In *New York: McGraw-Hill*.  
<https://doi.org/10.61508/refl.v15i0.114221>
- Mcdonough, J., & Shaw, C. (1993). Materials and Methods in ELT. *Blackwell*.  
[http://scioteca.caf.com/bitstream/handle/123456789/1091/RED2017-Eng-8ene.pdf?sequence=12&isAllowed=y%0Ahttp://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.regsciurbeco.2008.06.005%0Ahttps://www.researchgate.net/publication/305320484\\_SISTEM\\_PEMBELAJARAN\\_TERPUSAT\\_STRATEGI\\_MELESTARI](http://scioteca.caf.com/bitstream/handle/123456789/1091/RED2017-Eng-8ene.pdf?sequence=12&isAllowed=y%0Ahttp://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.regsciurbeco.2008.06.005%0Ahttps://www.researchgate.net/publication/305320484_SISTEM_PEMBELAJARAN_TERPUSAT_STRATEGI_MELESTARI)
- Nurjannah, R. L. (2018). The Analysis on Students' Difficulties in Doing Reading Comprehension Final Test. *Metathesis: Journal of English Language, Literature, and Teaching*, 2(2), 253–264.  
<https://doi.org/10.31002/metathesis.v2i2.958>
- Pang, E. S., Muaka, A., Bernhardt, E. B., & Kamil, M. L. (2003). Teaching Reading. *Geneva: International Bureau of Education Publication, Inc.*  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/s0267190500003512>
- Puspita, A. (2017). Students' Difficulties in Comprehending English Reading Text at Second Grade Students of SMA N 2 Metro. University Of Lampung.
- Putri, S. S. (2020). An analysis of the students difficulties in reading comprehension at MTS Al Mahrus Medan [Undergraduate thesis]. Islamic University of North Sumatera Medan.
- Rohmah, H. (2018). The Implementation of Herringbone Technique in Reading Comprehension at Second Semester of Non-English Department. *A Journal of Culture*, 18(1), 64–78.  
<https://doi.org/10.24167/celt.v18i1;>
- Samad, I. A., Jannah, M., & Fitriani, S. S. (2017). Efl students' strategies dealing with common difficulties in toefl reading comprehension section. *International Journal of Language Education*, 1(1), 29–36.  
<https://doi.org/10.26858/ijole.v1i1.2869>
- Sari, Y. K. (2017). An Analysis of Students' Difficulties in Comprehending English Reading Text on the MTS Negeri Mlinjon Klaten in Academic Year 2016/2017. *State Islamic Institute*

*of Surakarta.*

Septia, N. W., Indrawati, I., Juriana, J.,  
& Rudini, R. (2022). An analysis  
of students' difficulties in reading  
comprehension. *EEdJ: English  
Education Journal*, 2(1), 11–22.  
[https://doi.org/10.32923/eedj.v2i1  
.2519](https://doi.org/10.32923/eedj.v2i1.2519)

Snow, C. E., Burns, S. M., & Griffin,  
P. (1998). Preventing reading  
difficulties in young children:  
Committee on the Prevention of  
Reading Difficulties in Young  
Children. In *National Academy  
Press: Washington DC* (Vol. 25,  
Issue 1).  
[www.nap.edu/readingroom/books  
/prdyc/](http://www.nap.edu/readingroom/books/prdyc/)

Troyer, M., Kim, J. S., Hale, E.,  
Wantchekon, K. A., &  
Armstrong, C. (2018). Relations  
among intrinsic and extrinsic  
reading motivation, reading  
amount, and comprehension: a  
conceptual replication. *Reading  
and Writing*, 32(5), 1197–1218.  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/s11145-  
018-9907-9](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11145-018-9907-9)