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**Students Difficulties' Effects on Academic Reading  
(A Study at Basic Reading English Language and Culture Students  
of University Widya Dharma Pontianak)**

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**Abstract**

*The purpose of this study was to determine the reading problems that affect students' academic achievement. Reading is one of the most common ways to acquire knowledge. Reading comprehension is a skill that can help students in learning process. In fact, many students in basic reading classes have difficulties with reading comprehension. This study uses a descriptive qualitative method, with 67 students from the morning and evening Basic Reading class of the English Language and Culture Study Program participating through purposive sampling. The data collected by administering the questionnaires were then analyzed to determine the types of problems that the students had in reading comprehension. The questionnaires were used to collect data, which was then examined descriptively to determine the types of reading comprehension challenges experienced by students. According to the findings, the most difficult reading tasks for students are distinguishing between main ideas and supporting details, determining the main idea between paragraphs, identifying the topic of texts from other cultures, relating topic and background knowledge, understanding vocabulary, and interpreting the text. Based on these findings, a variety of reading strategies should be implemented to identify and address these barriers to reading comprehension.*

**Key Words:** *Reading difficulties, Academic Reading, Reading comprehension.*

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**Introduction**

Reading, according to Wixon, Peters, Weber, and Roeber (1987), is the dynamic interaction between the reader, the text, and the context of the reading situation. Reading requires visual motor skills as well as the cerebral perception of symbols. It is often divided into two parts: "reading the words," also known as decoding, and "understanding what is read," also known as comprehension (Cooper, Warnoke, & Shipman, 1988; Samuels, 1988). This study attempted to apply Manzo & Manzo's (1993) definition of reading as the process of concurrently reading the lines, reading between the lines, and reading beyond the lines. "Reading between the lines" is the process of deciphering words to reassemble the author's main message. "Reading between the lines" is the process of making inferences in an attempt to recreate the author's implied messages. This necessitates a comprehension of the intrinsic logic of the facts provided, as well as an understanding of connotative and figurative language. "Reading beyond the lines" is the process of evaluating the significance of the author's message and constructively applying it to other areas of knowledge and experience.

Higher-class students with minor disabilities commonly struggle with vocabulary, word recognition, reading comprehension, and reading rate. Reading appears to influence academic success in all courses as well as vocational demands and possibilities (Feagans, 1983; Hallahan, Kauffman, & Liroyd, 1985). Mercer (1987) distinguishes various forms of reading issues encountered by students, including reading habits, word recognition errors, comprehension errors, and other symptoms. Smith et al. (1985) also highlight numerous frequent issues that some students with reading impairments face. These include deleting letters, syllables, or phrases, introducing extra letters, words, or sounds, substituting words that appear or sound

similar, mispronouncing words, repeating words, and applying incorrect intonation during oral reading. Many children, adolescents, and adults in North America and around the world suffer from reading difficulty. Individuals who do not learn to read can be a source of concern for educators, parents, clinicians, and the whole society. Every instructor is responsible for understanding and assisting their failing and disgruntled students. Reading teachers, elementary classroom teachers, special education teachers, and secondary school instructors must possess knowledge about the assessment and treatment of reading difficulties (Richet, List, & Lerner, 1989).

According to some research, about 80% of children with learning difficulties have a primary educational challenge with reading. These difficulties have impacted significantly to grasp other courses in school. According to Richet et al. (1989), poor reading ability is the main cause of school failure, resulting in low self-esteem and serious emotional overtones. Furthermore, reading difficulties prohibit people from achieving their intended job goals and deprive them of the opportunity to read for pleasure and enjoyment. Reading difficulties are the leading reason of school failure (Carmine, Silbert, & Kameenui, 1979). They further state that failing to read might lead to disobedience, anxiety, and a lack of drive. Lerner (2006) asserts that reading experiences have a big influence on self-image and feelings.

Reading skill is one of the most essential aspects of English language education and learning in Indonesia. Teachers teach English reading skills at least two levels: beginning and reading comprehension. The beginning level is the first level of reading instruction in which teachers introduce students to orthographic writing in the form of distinct alphabetical ordering. Teachers usually teach pupils some basic English vocabulary at this time to contextualize the phonemic understanding of the alphabet. The higher degree of reading skills is English reading comprehension. Students should be able to apply their cognitive skills to understand the linked conditions between written and oral communication, even if both communication modes are fundamentally different (Oakhill, Cain, & Elbro, 2015). As previously said, the writer seeks to explore the reading comprehension difficulties encountered by English learners in Indonesia. Therefore, the writer sought to identify and establish the effects of students' reading difficulties on academic performance and social-emotional adjustment in the first semester of Basic Reading class English Language and Culture study program at Widya Dharma University.

For the study, the following research questions were developed:

1. What are the implications of reading challenges on academic performance in students?
2. What strategies can be employed to reduce student comprehension errors?

## **Theoretical Review**

### **Reading Difficulties**

Mastering reading requires the reader to interact with the text. To understand the writer's point of view, the reader must first decode the meaning of the written words. According to Rivers (1981), "*reading is the most important activity in any language class, not only as a source of information and a pleasurable action, interaction, exercise, behavior, operation, function, occurrence, event, task, participation, movement, interactions, behaviour, involvement, pursuits, physical movement, intensity, expression, condition, concentration, engagement, consumption, sedentary behavior, but also as a means of consolidating and extending one's own knowledge of the language.*" (p. 147) Readers must use prior knowledge while reading to construct meaning. Goodman (1973) states that the learner interacts with a message encoded by the writer. He focuses on his total prior experience and concepts, as well as the language competence he has acquired. (p. 162).

Adolescents with mild impairments often experience difficulties with vocabulary, word recognition, reading comprehension, and reading rate (Feagans, 1983; Hallahan, Kauffman, & Lloyd, 1985). Reading challenges can arise from various causes, making it a complex process

(Kaluger & Kolson, 1978; Kirk et al., 1978). Bond, Tinkel, and Wasson (1979) classify the most common reading difficulties as: incorrect word identification and recognition, inappropriate directional habits, deficiencies in basic comprehension abilities, limited special comprehension abilities (such as the inability to discover and remember specific data), impairments in the capacity to adapt to the reading needs of content sectors, comprehension rate, and poor oral reading.

Reading challenges occur in children and adolescents who experience with the form, content, and function of language. Form encompasses phonologic, morphologic, and syntactic abilities. Semantics, vocabulary, and word relationships are examples of content. The ability of a pupil to use a language for pragmatic social reasons is referred to as function. Through the research conducted by Adams (1990), Snow, Burns, and Graffins (1998) linked phonological awareness to skilled reading. Numerous forms of reading challenges are commonly observed among pupils, regardless of the circumstances associated with the reading disability. These include issues with reading habits, word recognition difficulties, comprehension faults, and other symptoms (Mercer, 1987). Smith (1988) identifies many common issues that some students with reading impairments face. These include missing letters, syllables, or phrases, inserting extra letters, words, or sounds, substituting words that appear or sound similar, mispronouncing words, inverting words or syllables, transposing letters or words, repeating words, or employing incorrect intonation during oral reading.

### **Students' Academic Performance and Comprehension Errors**

Reading difficulties are the leading cause of school failure (Carmine, Silbet, & Kameenui, 1997). According to Mercer and Mercer (2001), between 10% to 15% of school-age students experience reading challenges. Teachers should be able to recognize a student's problems, particularly those linked to reading, from a holistic perspective in order to assist such a learner in managing academically in school (Dreikrurs, Gronwall, & Peper, 1998). Lerner (2006) also highlights that rather than using the wait-and-fail strategy, instructors should detect children with reading challenges early and provide appropriate early treatments (Lerner, 2006).

### **Strategies for Improving Reading Comprehension**

Based on the National Reading Panel's findings of 2000 recognized numerous interventions for boosting reading comprehension that have a solid scientific basis (Lerner, 2006, including:

1. Monitoring comprehension where students learn how to be conscious of their understanding of the content. Reading skills are learned collaboratively by students. Use of visual and semantic organizers, including story maps: Students create graphic representations of the materials to aid comprehension.
2. Question answering is where students respond to teacher-posed questions and receive rapid feedback.
3. Question generation which is when the students pose questions to themselves regarding various aspects of the story.
4. Structure of story, where students are taught how to use tale structure to help them recall story content and answer questions about what they have read.
5. Summary where students are taught to synthesize concepts, come up with ideas, and draw generalizations from the information in the text.

Some research indicates that grammatical knowledge plays a significant impact on reading comprehension. English foreign learners' comprehension of text depends on their level of grammar expertise. Students with poor grammatical skills struggle with reading comprehension. As a result, EFL students must be familiar with grammar in order to understand the meaning of passage expressions. Studies have shown that there is a link between grammatical knowledge and reading comprehension. The grammar level of EFL

learners is an important factor in producing well-written documents. Similarly, Haarman (1988) discovered robust links between grammatical expertise and reading comprehension. Bernhardt (2000) also observed that English Foreigner learners' reading ability is largely dependent on their grammatical knowledge.

### **Methodology**

In this research, a descriptive qualitative method was utilized to characterize the phenomena and characteristics that are specific to the event that occurred.(Nasaji, 2015). This study aims to provide a comprehensive and accurate description of students' issues with reading comprehension. Purposive sampling is used to select participants for the study based on the research purpose. The participants were first-year students in the Morning and Evening Basic Reading class of Widya Dharma Pontianak University's English Language and Culture study Program. There are 67 students who participated in this study.

The first technique was observing two Basic Reading classes in order to determine the student's reading issues. The next stage was to evaluate the literature as references in order to select the most acceptable theories about reading challenges and strategies. After that, specify the pupils' reading problems in order to organize the suitable instrument for data collection. As a descriptive qualitative method, the study instrument was a questionnaire adapted from Richard's work that addressed students' challenges with reading comprehension. It is divided into two primary points: the difficulties that respondents frequently face, and the techniques utilized in reading activities.

There were 10 close-ended questions about some difficulties in reading activity, namely: comprehension reading instruction, distinguishing main idea and supporting details, getting the main idea between paragraphs, understanding vocabulary, determining the meaning of tricky words, inferring a conclusion from reading a text, identifying the text's topic from various cultural perspectives, relating topics and background knowledge, using personal language in note-taking, keeping focus and concentration when reading; with 3 close-ended questions about reading strategies (Richards, 2001). They determine the meaning by guessing, using dictionary and context clues, and skimming or scanning to acquire the substance of the material. This questionnaire sought to discover students' perspectives on the reading challenges that will be examined.

The writer prepared four alternatives for adverbs with undetermined frequency: frequently, sometimes, seldom, and never. The participant selected only one of them based on the kids' experience and attitudes concerning the assertions about reading challenges and reading techniques and the responses were reported as percentages. The data was evaluated qualitatively by summarizing the percentage of students who responded to how frequently they encountered reading challenges and what reading methods they employed for reading comprehension. By examining the data, it is possible to determine which pupils have similar challenges with reading comprehension.

### **Findings and Discussion**

Based on table 1, 20.6% of students frequently suffer difficulties in reading comprehension, while 18.1% of students seldom encounter difficulties with the issue. But just 0% of students have never had difficulty with reading comprehension, whereas 61.3% of students have encountered this problem at least once.

On issue number two of the information, 13.1% of participants rarely have difficulty distinguishing between primary ideas and supporting information, and there are still 4.5% who have never difficulty in distinguishing between primary ideas and supporting information. 33.5% of respondents reported difficulty distinguishing between primary ideas and supporting information. In the meantime, 48.9% of the students have found difficulty with this problem.

Based on the surveys distributed to students, the findings are reflected in the table 1 below.

**Table 1 Percentage of Students' Difficulties in Academic Reading**

No	Difficulties	Frequently	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
1	Comprehension Reading Instruction	20.6	61.3	18.1	0
2	Distinguishing main ideas and supporting information.	33.5	48.9	13.1	4.5
3	Getting the main idea between paragraphs	22.6	58.1	13.9	5.4
4	Understanding vocabulary	19.6	53.8	24.5	2.1
5	Determining the meaning of tricky words	37.8	41.5	19.6	1.1
6	Inferring a conclusion from reading a text	35.9	43.7	14.6	5.8
7	Identifying the text's topic from various cultural perspectives	30.2	54.5	12.9	2.4
8	Relating topics and background knowledge	18.7	61.2	15.7	4.4
9	Using personal language in notetaking	16.5	52.9	28.4	2.2
10	Keeping focus and concentration when reading	17.6	46.7	31.5	4.2

Based on the difficulty of number 3, 22.6% of readers found it difficult to get the main idea between paragraphs. Meanwhile, 5.4% of them have never encountered such difficulties. For the next issue, 19.6% of students reported trouble understanding language when reading the text. On the other hand, 2.1% of students have never experienced such a problem

Moreover, information number 5 displays statistics on the difficulty encountered by respondents in determining the meaning of tricky words. 41.5% of respondents sometimes difficult in this problem and frequently 37.8% found the difficulties, meanwhile there still 1.1% of them never found difficulties in this issue. For issue number 6, there were 5.8% that never had difficulty inferring a conclusion from a text, but still 35.9% often found it difficult for this problem. Furthermore, on the data number 7, 54.5% often found difficulties when the topics of the texts are from various cultures. There are 2.4% of students who have never had this problem, while 30.2% have had it frequently.

For the difficult issue number 8, the majority of them, 61.2%, have difficulty with reading comprehension topics and background knowledge, whereas 4.4% have rarely encountered such a problem. Next, difficulty number 9 indicates that 16.5 % of students frequently struggled to use personal language in note-taking. The majority of them, or 52.9% of respondents, has experienced this problem at some point. While 28.4% of students rarely has this problem, only 2.2 % had never faced it.

The last data point, or data number 10, depicts the percentage of pupils that encountered a problem while keeping focus and concentration when reading. There are 31.5% of students who frequently encounter this problem, while 17.6% of students rarely encounter concentration. Furthermore, 4.2% have never experienced this type of difficulty. There are other discoveries about reading strategies that students utilized to help them understand the information in the book. In reading comprehension, readers use some tactics to extract meaning or infer information from the text. The results are displayed in the following table 2.

**Table 2. Percentage of Students' Reading Strategies**

No	Difficulties	Frequently	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
1	Guessing the meaning of text	51,7	34.8	13,5	0
2	Dictionary usage and context clues.	44,3	33.3	18.9	3,5
3	Skimming and scanning	45,6	30.8	18.5	5,1

Data number 1 in the table shows the number of students who utilize the method of guessing or predicting the meaning in reading comprehension. By looking at the number of students who have never guessed the word, it may be concluded that all students obtain the meaning by prediction. The majority, 51.7 %, attempted to guess the meaning of the reading text on a regular basis; 34.8% did so on occasion; and the remaining 13.5% rarely identified the meaning by predicting words or sentences.

The next data indicates the number of students who frequently used dictionaries and context clues in reading comprehension, which is 44.3%. In contrast, 3.50% of students never used a dictionary and context clues in reading comprehension. Furthermore, 13.3% of students infrequently used this method. As seen in data numbers, 3.45% of students frequently utilized skimming and scanning to grasp the material. 5.1% of students have never used this method, while 18.5% have used it very occasionally.

### Conclusion

According to the findings and discussions, the most difficult reading tasks for students are distinguishing between main ideas and supporting details, determining the main idea between paragraphs, identifying the topic of the texts from other cultures, relating topic and background knowledge, understanding vocabulary, and inferring the text. Furthermore, students frequently use three reading strategies: guessing the meaning of words, using dictionary and context clues, and skimming and scanning to get information from texts. Teaching reading comprehension is difficult since reading materials cover a wide range of topics, and readers must explain the writers' intentions. This research has implications for higher education practitioners seeking to assist students' comprehension during academic reading activities. Higher education institutions should explore providing students with options to participate in matriculation classes to prepare them for the academic environment at the university level.

Students should be taught academic reading and writing methods from the start of their studies. Smaller group tutorial lessons are also required to be completed after class or on a separate timetable from reading classes. Modules should be provided in an organized manner to gradually improve students' enthusiasm and confidence in academic reading, progressing from simple to more advanced content. Thus, these steps are applied in basic and secondary schools, and they appear to be lacking in higher education (Miller & Merdian, 2020). Higher education institutions should construct reading modules to help students strengthen their reading skills gradually. Finally, lecturers should encourage their students to read more.

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