

FACTORS AFFECTING EFL STUDENTS' DIFFICULTY IN READING COMPREHENSION

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Abstract

This study aims to discover the internal factors affecting EFL students' difficulty in reading comprehension. The research participants in this study were five English Foreign Language (EFL) students who could not achieve the grade standard in a Reading class at the English Language Education Program (ELEP) in a small town in Central Java. The Interviews were used as the instruments to collect the data. In the interview, 5 participants were asked about the internal factors that affected students' difficulties in reading comprehension. The thematic analysis revealed that students' difficulty in reading comprehension is affected by two primary internal factors. The first factor pertains to students' ability, encompassing their grammatical and vocabulary knowledge in English. The second factor encompasses students' perceptions including feelings of interest, boredom, anxiety, sickness, and personal problems.

Keywords: EFL, Internal Factors, Reading Comprehension

INTRODUCTION

Reading is one aspect of language skills that is essential for students in learning English. According to Tarigan (as cited in Sholihah, 2017), reading is a process conducted and used by readers to obtain messages to be conveyed by the author through the media words or written language. It means that by reading, the students can get a lot of information they found, such as in journal articles, textbooks, and social media. It can also increase the reader's knowledge. In the reading process, comprehending a text is very important to help the students understand what the text read and connect the author's ideas to what they already know. However, since English in Indonesia is a foreign language, some students at the university level still have difficulty comprehending English reading texts adapted from journal articles and textbooks.

Therefore, to find out the factor, the researcher is interested in exploring particularly the internal factors that affect students' difficulties in reading comprehension difficulties. Thus, this study will answer the question: What are the internal factors affecting students' difficulty in reading comprehension?

Grabe and Stoller (as cited in Hidayati, 2018) stated that reading comprehension is the ability to understand the information in a text and interpret it appropriately what is meant by the text. This implies that reading comprehension is an individual's capability to comprehend the information in a text and interpret the meaning of the text correctly. Furthermore, reading comprehension refers to how the reader can connect the idea in the text to what they already know, and by comprehending the text, the reader can understand what they read well. Thus, the researcher concludes that reading comprehension is the

process of getting the meaning and gaining an understanding of what is explained by the writer in a text.

Many studies conducted the study on reading comprehension difficulties among students. Al-Jarrah et al. (2018) found that most students experience difficulties in comprehending the English Text. The lack of vocabulary knowledge was recognized as one of the difficulties that the students faced in comprehending the English texts (Chawwang, 2008). It means that reading activities can be difficult for students who lack vocabulary knowledge and it makes the students find it difficult to comprehend the text they read in English since the vocabulary used in the text is not familiar for them to understand. Consequently, students devoid of a rich vocabulary knowledge find it difficult to grasp the meaning of the texts they peruse. While a great deal of research has been directed at finding reading comprehension difficulties faced by students in general, it is still rare to only focus on internal factors such as students' ability and students perception. Thus, this research focuses more on finding out these internal factors.

The success of students in learning English, especially in reading activities, is shaped by many influencing factors. These factors can come from within and outside students. According to Anisa and Arifmiboy (2021), who state that the success of learning English activity is influenced by many factors which occur before or during the process of the activity. Some factors come from the students' surroundings and some others are from the students themselves such as motivation, interest, etc. Kahayanto himself writes (as cited in Shehu, 2015) that this factor is usually known as a personal factor because the factor exists inside the reader. Kahayanto (2005) insists that the internal factor is a factor that comes from the person himself without the influence of other people, including a person's ability. Therefore, internal factors can also have a positive impact and assist students in achieving their goals in the learning process, especially in reading activities. In contrast, the external factor comes from outside a person. This factor includes the surrounding environment, such as family, teacher, school, peer, and society. As mentioned in Galakjani and Sabouri (as cited in Taladngoen, 2020), reading under a supportive environment with enough light, mild temperature, and tranquility will make the learners concentrate more on their reading tasks. In other words, the external factor can also have a positive impact on students in achieving their reading goals.

According to Taladngoen et al., (2020), the first internal factor that affects students' difficulty in reading comprehension is the ability, which covers learners' linguistic knowledge of English, such as grammatical and vocabulary knowledge. In other words, students with good linguistic knowledge tend to read and understand the reading material well since the students can use their knowledge to find the meaning of the texts they read. Instead, students who have low reading skills tend to find it difficult to read the text since their linguistic knowledge is not good enough. Another internal factor that affects students' difficulty in reading comprehension is learners' perceptions. Learners' perceptions include feelings of interest, boredom, anxiety, sickness, and discomfort due to personal problems. This means that students' perceptions can also affect students to comprehend the text easily and it can also help the students to achieve their goals in reading activity. Therefore, students who still face those feelings in reading find it difficult to comprehend the text they read and get poor results in achieving their reading goals. This means that both internal factors can impact students, particularly in the reading activity.

Taladngoen et al. (2020) also found that the external factors that affect students' difficulties in reading comprehension include the teacher's influence, family influence, and environment. It can be said that those external factors have an impact on the students in reading activities. In addition, the student's achievements in reading comprehension sometimes can also depend on the teacher's influence, for instance, lack of motivation from the teacher. Furthermore, a lack of family support can also make the students not interested in reading activities since the family is the closest person to them. In other words, their parents play a crucial role in actively reminding and encouraging their children to partake in reading activities. Lastly, the uncomfortable circumstance that comes to the students can also affect students' understanding of the material they read. This research is expected to determine the internal factors that affect EFL students' difficulty in reading comprehension. Ultimately, the results of this research can contribute to improving EFL students' reading comprehension skills.

METHOD

This research was conducted to explore the internal factors that affect EFL students' difficulty in reading comprehension. To achieve this objective, the researcher approached the study qualitatively. In this research, the researcher selected five EFL students from a university in a small town of Central Java who did not meet the grade standard in reading class.

To collect the research data, the researcher used semi-structured interviews as the instruments of data collection. Then, the researcher transcribed all the required data from the interview. Thematic Analysis was used to analyze the data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study were discussed in the following section. The section was divided into two main parts: (1) The first, the internal factor that affects students' difficulty in reading comprehension, the student's ability, which covers learners' grammatical and vocabulary knowledge. (2) The second, the internal factor, which cover learners' perceptions toward themselves include; feelings of interest, boredom, anxiety, sickness, and discomfort due to personal problems.

Internal Factor

The internal factors found to affect the student's reading comprehension is the students' knowledge of vocabulary and grammar. The finding is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Student's Ability

Student's linguistic knowledge	Participant
Grammatical	Student 5
Vocabulary	Student 1,2,3,4,5

In Table 1, most students faced difficulties in reading comprehension which was affected by vocabulary knowledge, and only one student whose difficulty affected by grammatical knowledge.

Grammatical Knowledge

The results in the table above showed that the first internal factor that affects EFL students' difficulty in reading comprehension is the students' ability in grammatical knowledge. Based on the results of the five participants, the researcher found that one student still had difficulty in understanding the text she was reading because she has low grammatical knowledge. As a result, she finds it difficult when reading a text in English which the sentence uses grammar patterns that she did not understand and made her difficult to understand its meaning. As she confessed during the interview:

- Interviewer : Okay, the first question is how many types of texts that you read in English?
 Student 5 : *Teks bahasa Inggris yang pernah saya adalah News, Iklan dan Journal Article.*
 Interviewer : What difficulties did you face in reading the text? Do you have any experience?
 Student 5 : *Iya, waktu saya mengambil kelas Critical Reading, saya pernah merasa kesulitan memahami teks yang saya baca apalagi kalau di dalam teks tersebut menggunakan pola grammar yang kurang saya pahami, saya kadang kurang mengerti maksud dari teks tersebut.*

Based on the results of the interview presented above, student 5 read several types of text in English such as news, advertisements, and journal articles, and found them difficult to understand. This due to the grammatical patterns that she did not understand which lead her to have difficulty in understanding the meaning.

In the same line, Satriani (2018) states that since English in our country is a foreign language, there is a possibility that English students may have difficulties in understanding the texts they read. It means that English language is a language that is not too familiar to EFL students, especially students in Indonesia. Furthermore, Kahsay and Payne (as cited in Tania, 2023) found that many EFL students struggle to understand grammar, especially when they learn about tenses and change the sentence structure from Indonesian to English. Hence, the students in this research tend to have difficulty understanding the English reading texts they read because their level of grammar knowledge is still lacking.

Vocabulary Knowledge

Other than grammatical knowledge, the researcher also found that lack of vocabulary knowledge in English is also one of the internal factors that affect students in understanding the English reading material. Referring to the results of the interview, all research participants experienced similar difficulties of vocabulary knowledge. Most of them faced difficulties when reading many types of materials in English because they are not familiar to the vocabularies in the text and make them difficult to understand the meaning. This is supported by the result of the interview below.

- Interviewer : Okay, the first question is how many types of texts that you read in English?
 Student 4 : *I think three, the first one is News and the second one is a Journal article and the last one is about Politic.*
 Interviewer : When you read the three types of text you mentioned earlier what difficulties did you face in reading the text?
 Student 4 : *Kesulitan yang saya alami pada saat membaca teks tersebut adalah ketika menemukan kosakata baru karena kan dari news, journal article maupun*

politic kosakata yang digunakan di masing masing teks itu berbeda beda level nya jadi membuat saya merasa kesulitan dalam memahami beberapa bahan bacaan tersebut.

Based on the interview above, the students have difficulty in understanding the text because the level of difficulty in each text is different, especially the vocabulary. According to Surmanov and Azimova (2020), vocabulary learning is an essential part in foreign language learning as the meanings of new words are very often emphasized, whether in books or in classrooms. This means that vocabulary knowledge also has an important role in helping students in reading comprehension. However, student 4 stated that reading these three types of English texts; news, journal articles, and texts about politics was quite difficult to understand because it has different levels of difficulty, thus the student could not understand properly.

Fakhrudin (2005) also conducted similar research and the findings showed that the factors made the students have difficulties in understanding English reading texts include a lack of vocabulary knowledge. It means that low vocabulary knowledge can affect students' reading process, so they tend to find it quite difficult. In line with that result, the students in this research also faced difficulties in reading English texts because lacking vocabulary knowledge.

External Factor

After discussing about student's linguistic knowledge, the second point to be discussed is students' perception. This perception includes their feelings of interest, boredom, anxiety, sickness, and discomfort due to personal problems. The result found in this study as follows.

Table 2 Student's Perception

Student's Feelings	Participant
Interest	Student 1,2,3,4,5
Boredom	Student 1,2,3,4,5
Anxiety	Student 1,2,3,4,5
Sickness	Student 1,2,3,4,5
Personal problem	Student 1,2,3

In Table 2, almost all students in this research faced difficulties in reading comprehension affected by their interest, boredom, anxiety, and sickness, and only three students were uncomfortable due to personal problems.

Interest

The table above presents findings on the second internal factor that affects EFL students' difficulty in reading comprehension. The second internal factor is the student's perception which includes feelings of interest, boredom, anxiety, sickness, and personal problems. The study revealed that among the participants, five students encountered challenges in understanding an English passage due to their lack of interest in reading, particularly when the text was of a type they disliked, such as Journal Articles. Consequently, it makes them harder to grasp the sentences' meanings since they are

unfamiliar with the vocabulary used in the text. This is supported by the result of the interview the researcher conducted.

Interviewer : Based on several types of text that you mentioned earlier, which ones did you find the least interesting while reading?

Student 5 : *Menurut saya jenis bacaan yang kurang menarik bagi saya pada saat saya membaca nya adalah Journal Article karena teks yang ada di dalam Journal Article itu lebih panjang dan kosakata yang digunakan juga kadang tidak terlalu familiar bagi saya jadi membuat saya merasa kesulitan untuk terus membaca dan memahaminya.*

The results of the conducted interview revealed that students encountered difficulties in comprehending the text they read especially when reading the genre of the text that fails their interest. The lack of engagement with such text stems from their lengthy nature of the texts and the presence of unfamiliar vocabulary, both of which hinder their comprehension in reading.

In the same line, Khairuddin (2013) also found in his research entitled “ A Study of Students’ Reading Interests in a Second Language” that the students have relatively low interest in reading English materials and that there is a significant difference between male and female students. The result of this research is different from previous research conducted by Khairuddin (2013) because this research did not focus on gender. Hence, the researcher concluded that the students who have low interest in reading English text tended to find it difficult when they were required to read a genre of text that did not interest them.

Boredom

The second perception found in this study was a feeling of boredom. Based on the result of this study, the researcher found that most of the participants felt bored when they read texts that did not interest them. They tend to not continue the reading when the passages are quite difficult to understand and makes them feel bored. This is supported by the result of the interview the researcher conducted.

Interviewer : How did you feel when you read the type of text that did not interest you?

Student 3 : *Berdasarkan pengalaman saya, kalau membaca teks journal article itu cenderung membuat saya merasa bosan karena terlalu banyak tulisan dan vocabulary yang baru bagi saya sehingga pada saat saya membaca teks tersebut saya juga merasa kesulitan untuk memahami makna nya.*

Based on the results of the interview that the researcher conducted with the students, it showed that students tend to feel bored when reading a type of text they do not like. Furthermore, they said that texts with long sentences and unfamiliar vocabulary make them feel bored reading. Kruk (2021) also conducted similar research, the findings found that boredom can severely impede the learning process, including the process of learning a foreign/second language. In the same line, the participants in this study also faced boredom, particularly in reading activities. They tended to feel bored when reading English text that did not interest them, thus made them less efficient and enjoyable in reading.

Anxiety

The third internal factor of students' perception that the researcher found in this study was feelings of anxiety. Based on the result of this study, the researcher found that almost all participants felt anxious when they read English texts, particularly in class. This finding is supported by the interview results.

Interviewer : How did you feel when the lecturer asked you to read and explain the meaning of a sentence in the class? Do you have any experience, could you tell me?

Student 2 : *I felt afraid when the lecturer asks me to explained the meaning of the sentence I read in class, saya juga merasa gugup dan khawatir ketika membaca di depan kelas apalagi di depan banyak orang, karena takut apa yang saya sampaikan itu salah dan tidak sesuai dengan apa yang ada di dalam teks tersebut.*

The anxiety they experienced was like feeling nervous and afraid when reading English text in front of the class. Aina & Wijayati as cited in Mardianti et al., (2021) considered that language anxiety causes students to worry while learning the target language. In other words, the conversation above also showed that the students feel worried and afraid of making errors while reading English texts in class. Most of them experienced worry and fear in reading the text in front of the class because they were afraid that what they conveyed was not appropriate with the true meaning of the text and that can increase their anxiety in reading.

Aisyah (2017) conducted similar research with this study, in her research, she found that most of the students perceived anxiety in reading caused by fear of making errors and worry about reading. Furthermore, Habibian et al., (2015) found that students with low anxiety exhibited high scores in reading comprehension. In this research, the researcher also found that almost all of the students experienced anxiety in reading such as feeling afraid of making errors and worried about reading in front of the class. Those feelings can make them feel anxious in reading English texts.

Sickness

The fourth internal factor of students' perception that the researcher found in this study was the feeling of sickness. The result showed that almost all of the students faced difficulties in comprehending the text when they felt sick. The findings of this study show that the students tend not to focus on what they read and have less concentration. Hence it affected their understanding of reading. This is supported by the result of the interview the researcher conducted with the students.

Interviewer : When you were sick, did you have difficulty understanding the text you read? Do you have any experience? Would you mind telling me?

Student 3 : *Berdasarkan pengalaman yang pernah saya alami, ketika sakit saya sering merasa pusing dan kurang konsentrasi apalagi kalau lagi membaca teks dalam bahasa Inggris dan itu juga membuat saya merasa kurang fokus dan kesulitan untuk memahami bacaan yang saya baca karena kondisi tubuh yang kurang sehat.*

The result of the interview above indicated that the students found it quite difficult to understand the meaning of the texts they read when they were sick. It is also evidenced

through their experience, particularly when they experience sickness, they tend to feel dizzy and lack concentration in reading.

The result of this research is different of Taladngoen et al., (2020) because in his study the sickness does not affect the student's reading comprehension. However, the findings of this research found that all of the students were struggling in reading and it was caused by feelings of sickness. In addition, the feeling of sickness that the students experienced made it quite difficult for them to read and understand the meaning of the text successfully.

Personal Problems

The last internal factor of students' perception was the personal problem. The collected data highlighted that some of the students encountered difficulties in reading comprehension and it was caused by personal problems they have. The research findings unequivocally led to the conclusion that these personal problems significantly made the students are quite difficult to understand the English texts they read. This was evidenced by the result of the interview.

Interviewer : When you had a personal problem, did you have difficulty understanding the text you read? Do you have any experience? Can you share it with me?

Student 2 : *Berdasarkan pengalaman yang pernah saya alami, waktu itu saya pernah membaca teks bahasa inggris dan situasinya saat itu saya juga sedang ada masalah pribadi. Akhirnya saya enggak konsentration dalam membaca dan memahami isi teks yang saya baca. Karena fokusnya terbagi sama dua, dimana saya harus membaca dan di sisi lain saya juga harus memikirkan masalah pribadi tersebut. Jadi akhirnya saya tidak konsentration dalam membaca dan memahami isi teks tersebut.*

From the results of the interview, students face difficulties in understanding the texts they read especially when they are experiencing personal problems. It turns out that the personal problems faced by students can divert their attention from reading texts in depth because their focus is divided between doing reading assignments and responding to personal problems they were facing.

In contrast, Taladngoen et al., (2020) found that personal problems do not affect students' difficulty in reading comprehension at all. However, this study found that personal problem is one of the internal factors that affect the student's reading comprehension. The researcher's findings from the conducted data revealed that certain participants experienced difficulties in understanding the texts due to personal problems they were dealing with. Overall, the researcher concluded that these factors could hinder students' comprehension of reading.

CONCLUSION

This research concludes two internal factors affecting students' reading comprehension difficulty. First, the internal factor is the students' ability, which covers learners' linguistic knowledge of English, such as grammatical and vocabulary knowledge. Furthermore, most of the students tended to have difficulty in vocabulary rather than in grammatical knowledge. Second, the external factor is learners' perceptions of themselves which covers their interest, feeling boredom, anxiety, sickness, and

discomfort due to personal problems. Most dominant factors affecting their reading difficulties are the reading interest, feeling boredom, anxiety, and when they are in ill condition. Thus, further research should focus on external factors to investigate the student's difficulties in reading comprehension more diverse.

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