
**Non-EFL Students' Ability and Their Difficulties in Reading
Comprehension Test**

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Abstract

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This research describes the non-EFL students' ability and their difficulties in reading comprehension tests. This research is descriptive qualitative research. The analysis from Google Form response shows that the student's average is 20.15 from 50 points, the students' median is 18 from 50 points (correct answer) and the students' range is between 9 (lowest score) reading texts up to 40 (highest score). The students' problems in the reading test are about a number of questions, limited time in doing the test, unfamiliar and uninteresting topics of reading text, number of texts, number of paragraphs in the text, varied types of text-related questions, unfamiliar vocabularies, difficulty in understanding the meaning of the question and the content of the text, and difficulty in answering types of reading comprehension such as the main idea, reference, stated detail, unstated detail, vocabulary, conclusion/inference, etc. Both English teachers/lecturers and students must collaborate to answer these problems. English teachers/lecturers can evaluate the students' reading levels effectively, explain the reading method clearly, and implement an exciting strategy in teaching reading to stimulate the students to read texts. While students need to read regularly, choosing reading according to interest, reading various topics, and combining different methods in reading English.

Keywords:

non-EFL students, non-EFL students' ability, reading, reading comprehension

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INTRODUCTION

When learning a language, any language, we are not only required to communicate orally but also in writing. Of course, it's useless if we can only read the text in English fluently but don't know the meaning or content. Reading or reading is an English skill that is no less important than speaking, listening,

and writing skills. The reason is, that a person's reading ability can determine how well he can absorb the information he gets from written texts. Not only that, reading skills but also very useful in daily life, especially when we are looking for information in books or an English article. Therefore, we should not rule out reading skills.

Reading is essentially a process of building meaning from messages conveyed through written symbols. In the process, the reader integrates or relates information, and messages in writing with the knowledge or experience that the reader has (schemata). In the process of reading, the reader uses various skills including physical and mental skills. The constructive aspect of the reading process includes activities using visual sensory impressions and interpretation results together with background experiences to construct meaning. Building meaning from reading is an active process in reading. Readers not only absorb meaning by taking from the words seen with their eyes, but they also have to interact with the text through the information that is in the background knowledge that the reader has.

Reading is a complicated skill requiring the combination of several components (Rayner & Reichle, 2010). Reading is a complex activity requiring both perception and cognition. Word recognition and comprehension are interrelated components of the reading process (Pang et al., 2003; Urquhart, 2000). It is supported by Mckee (2012) that reading comprehension is a multi-faceted process with several elements. These factors consist of general language abilities, background information, comprehension methods, text knowledge, and working memory. Reading comprehension entails far more than a reader's responses to a text. (Klingner et al., 2015) explains that reading comprehension is a multicomponent, extremely complicated process including multiple interactions between readers and what they bring to the text (prior knowledge, method use) as well as text-specific elements (interest in text, understanding of text types).

Reading comprehension in learning English is often referred to as reading any genre of text. However, the two have slightly different meanings. Reading alone, or reading is an activity that we do to obtain information. So, reading is not only about reading aloud but also about how we as readers can find out the content contained in it. If we are then given questions related to the reading, it is hoped that we can answer them properly and correctly. Reading

comprehension is a continuation of reading activities again. Once we can understand the ideas contained in it, we should be able to translate the text and express it in our language. Thus, other people can also understand what is in the text through what we say to them.

Unfortunately, reading and understanding the text in English is not as easy as one might think (Fitria, 2022). This is a very natural thing for Indonesian people. English is not the first language we use every day. Several obstacles or difficulties are often experienced when studying the reading comprehension segment in English. Al-Jarrah & Ismail (2018) state that the challenges in reading comprehension encountered by students may have an impact on their English language ability and academic achievement. The first and most often experienced by students when learning to read in English is a problem with vocabulary (Fitria, 2023). Yes, we cannot know the whole idea of a text if we don't know the meaning of specific words. However, this should not make us give up and stop learning to read. Second, this is also not a strange thing. Sometimes, we are just lazy to read. When we see literature in a language that looks foreign, we tend to stop. Well, one of the keys to success in learning English reading comprehension is to be consistent and never give up.

Reading comprehension is a crucial aspect of second language acquisition. As a fundamental aspect of language learning, it is not a simple procedure (Shehu, 2015). Students sometimes remark that they do not comprehend a text; hence, they are unable to answer detailed questions. Reading is a search for information (Portillo, 2014). Newton et al. (2018) state that reading comprehension is a complex cognitive and contextually supported ability. It is also similar to Cartwright (2015) that reading comprehension requires an understanding of organization at several levels (e.g., grammar, sentence, paragraph, and text meaning). Different skills contribute to reading comprehension performance. These include word reading ability, vocabulary knowledge, syntactic skills, memory, and discourse-level

abilities including the capacity to draw inferences, text structure knowledge, and metacognitive skills (Oakhill et al., 2014). Reading comprehension may be expected at higher reading levels (Nuss, 2018). Understanding English texts quickly is not an easy thing to do for those who do not use English in their daily life. One of the reasons for this is the fact that every English text has a different level of complexity to master. It is the process of understanding English texts with a high level of complexity that tends to consume a lot of time and energy for the reader. Teachers have a big responsibility to motivate their students in reading.

There are several previous studies related to students' difficulty and problems in reading comprehension. First, Suryanto (2017) explains that existing reading problems are composed of cultural-based issues, English teaching and learning concerns, and social-contextual problems. Second, Soemantri (2011) states that students' problems in reading are reading speed: reading techniques, deficits in vocabulary acquisition, poor habits, regressing to read, slowing down when the sentence read is, and speeding up when the phrase read is the primary idea. Third, Lestari et al. (2017) state that difficulties students in reading are vocabulary, main concept, inference and reference, and detailed information. Besides, other difficulties include vocabulary, type of text and questions, reading strategy, and students' reading levels. Fourth, Satriani (2018) states that students struggle with reading because of a lack of motivation to read, difficulty in understanding reading material, inadequate reading ability, and the amount of time to read the content. Fifth, Nurjanah (2018) states that factors impact reading ability, such as vocabulary knowledge and learning experiences. Sixth, Ganie et al. (2019) students' difficulties in reading are rising from the student self (student's basic English skills, less fascination with the subject), problems from the teacher (approach during teaching and utilized unsuitable method), and external issues including material and environment problem. Seventh, Prihatini (2020) states that students had

difficulties in reading at multiple levels including literal comprehension, inferential comprehension, critical comprehension, and creative understanding. The other problems are inadequate instruction offered by the teacher, lack of students' attention, and vocabulary challenges. Eight, Matondang (2020) states that students' difficulty in reading is related to the main idea, language, topic in-depth, and inferences.

Both previous studies and this research show a similarity and differences point. The similarity is about the object or focus of the research. All previous studies discuss the student's difficulty or problem in reading during the teaching and learning process. But, this research focuses on the student's difficulties in reading comprehension tests. Here, the researcher wants to know the Non-EFL students' ability in reading comprehension and know their opinions or perception about reading comprehension tests. Therefore, the objective of this research is to know the students' ability and their opinions about reading comprehension tests.

METHOD

This research is descriptive and qualitative. According to Hesse-Biber (2016), qualitative research is a descriptively characterized research approach that employs qualitative data. However, a qualitative researcher might utilize numbers and percentages to highlight some of the most important qualitative themes developed through data collecting.

Tests and questionnaires are used for collecting data. The test (exam) is a method of collecting data that is carried out through questions that must be answered and responded to, or tasks that must be carried out by the subject being tested or examined (Abdillah et al., 2021). The type of test used multiple-choice questions. There are 50 questions as quizzes are given to students in the Google Form. The result of students' scores automatically appears in the Google Form responses. This research involves 20 Non-EFL students of ITB AAS Indonesia. To

know the student's opinions of the reading test, the researcher also collects data by using a questionnaire. Soewardikoen (2021) defines questionnaires are a way to obtain data in a relatively short time because, at the same time many people can be asked to fill in the written answer choices provided. Questionnaires can consist of both closed and open-ended questions (Katsirikou & Skiadas, 2010). In this research, the researcher uses closed-ended questions to make the respondents (students) choose the answer given.

In analyzing data, the researcher uses three steps of qualitative analysis as proposed by Miles et al. (2014). Data reduction is an analytical process to select, simplify, abstract and transform the data that appears. After the data is reduced,

the next step is to present the data so that it is well organized and arranged in the form of tables, graphs, or pictures. The next step is to draw conclusions based on the findings and analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This research is to know the students' ability and their opinions about reading comprehension tests. To know the students' ability in reading comprehension, the researcher uses an online test (multiple choice questions) in Google Forms. The result of students' scores is gotten from Google Form Response as stated below:

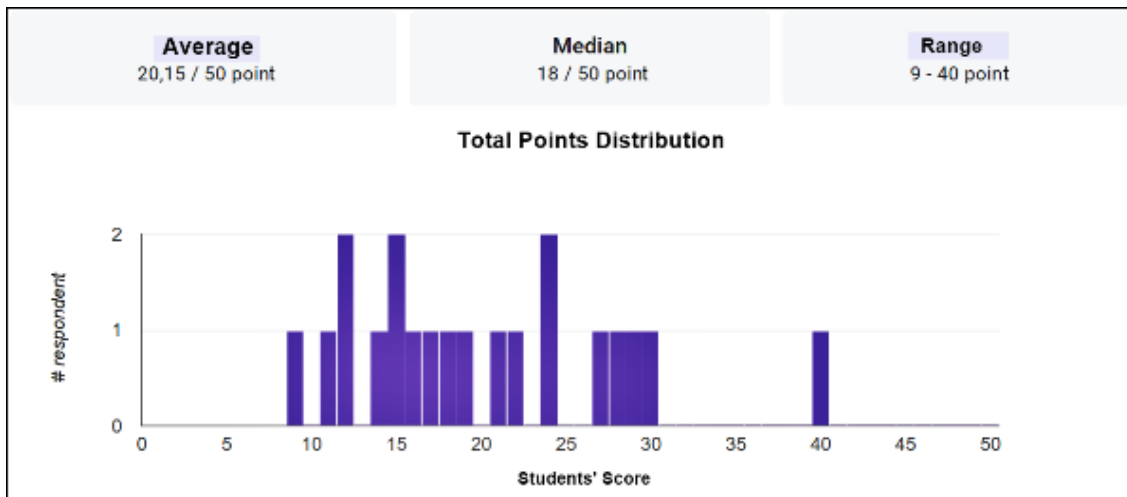


Figure 1. The Result of Students' Scores from Google Form Response

Based on figure 1 above shows the student's ability in reading comprehension viewed from their scores on reading tests. There are 20 respondents (students) involved in the testing. The students' average is 20.15 from 50 points, the students' median is 18 from 50 points and the students' range is between 9 (lowest

score) to 40 (highest score). The point here means the correct answer. It shows that there is 1 student gets 9 points, 1 student gets 9 points, 1 student gets 11 points, 2 students gets 12 points, 1 student gets 14 points, 2 students get 15 points, 1 student gets 16 points, 1 student gets 17 points, 1 student gets 18 points, 1 student gets 19 points, 1 student

gets 21 points, 1 student gets 22 points, 2 students get 24 points, 1 student gets 27 points, 1 student gets 28 points, 1 student gets 29 points, 1 student gets 30 points, and 1 student gets 40 points. It shows that the lowest students' correct answers are 9 points, and the highest students' correct answers are 40 points. After the researcher knows the students' scores, the researcher uses an online questionnaire using Google Forms to know the student's opinions about the reading comprehension test. The questionnaire result from Google Form responses can be seen below:

Table 1. Students' Difficulties in Reading Comprehension Test

No	Statements	Responses			
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	Too many questions (50 questions)	10 (50 %)	5 (25 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)
2.	The type of question is multiple choice	11 (55 %)	9 (45 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)
3.	Limited time (only 60 minutes) in doing the reading test	9 (45 %)	6 (30 %)	3 (15 %)	2 (10 %)
4.	The topic of the text is not familiar	9 (45 %)	9 (45 %)	2 (10 %)	0 (0 %)
5.	The topic of the text is not interesting	10 (50 %)	6 (30 %)	4 (20 %)	0 (0 %)
6.	The number of text topics is too much	9 (45 %)	7 (35 %)	4 (20 %)	0 (0 %)
7.	Too many the number of paragraphs in the text is	10 (50 %)	7 (35 %)	3 (15 %)	0 (0 %)
8.	Very varied types of text-related questions	10 (50 %)	10 (50 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)
9.	A lot of unfamiliar vocabulary in the text	10 (50 %)	9 (45 %)	1 (5 %)	0 (0 %)
10.	Difficulty in understanding the meaning of the question	10 (50 %)	7 (35 %)	3 (15 %)	0 (0 %)
11.	Difficulty in understanding the content of the text thoroughly	12 (60 %)	5 (25 %)	3 (15 %)	0 (0 %)
12.	Difficulty in answering types of reading comprehension such as the main idea, reference, stated detail, unstated detail, vocabulary, conclusion/inference, etc.	10 (50 %)	10 (50 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)
13.	Tend to interpret or translate each vocabulary when reading the text	9 (45 %)	10 (50 %)	1 (5 %)	0 (0 %)

Based on the table above, shows the students' difficulties with the reading comprehension tests. In the 1st statement, there are 10 students (50 %) who stated "strongly agree", 5 students (25 %) who state "agree", no student (0 %) who state "disagree" and no students (0 %) state "strongly disagree". It shows that most dominant students (50 %) strongly agree that too many questions (50 questions). In the 2nd statement, there are 11 students (55 %) stated "strongly agree", 9 students (45 %) stated "agree", no students (0 %) stated "disagree" and students (0 %) stated, "strongly disagree". It shows that most dominant students (55 %) strongly agree about the type of reading question in multiple-choice form. In the 3rd statement, there are 9 students (45 %) who state "strongly agree", 6 students (30 %) state "agree", 3 students (15 %) state "disagree" and 2 students (10 %) state "strongly disagree". It shows that most dominant students (45 %) strongly agree that they have

limited time (only 60 minutes) in doing the reading test.

In the 4th statement, there are 9 students (45 %) who state "strongly agree", 9 students (45 %) state "agree", 2 students (10 %) state "disagree" and 0 students (0 %) who state "strongly disagree". It shows that most dominant students (45 %) strongly agree and agree that the topic or reading text is not familiar. In the 5th statement, there 10 students (50 %) stated "strongly agree", 6 students (30 %) stated "agree", 4 students (20 %) stated "disagree" and no students (0 %) stated, "strongly disagree". It shows that most dominant students (50 %) strongly agree that the topic or reading text is not interesting. In the 6th statement, there are 9 students (9 %) who stated "strongly agree", 7 students (35 %) stated "agree", 4 students (20 %) stated "disagree" and no students (0 %) stated, "strongly disagree". It shows that most dominant students (50 %) strongly agree that several text

topics are too much. In the 7th statement, there are 10 students (50 %) who stated “strongly agree”, 7 students (35 %) stated “agree”, 3 students (15 %) stated “disagree” and no students (0 %) stated, “strongly disagree”. It shows that most dominant students (50 %) strongly agree that many the number of paragraphs in the text. In the 8th statement, there are 10 students (50 %) who state “strongly agree”, 10 students (50 %) stated “agree”, no students (0 %) stated “disagree” and no students (50 %) stated, “strongly disagree”. It shows that most dominant students (50 %) strongly agree that there are very varied types of text-related questions in reading. In the 9th statement, there are 10 students (50 %) who state “strongly agree”, 9 students (45 %) state “agree”, no students (0 %) state “disagree” and no students (0 %) state “strongly disagree”. It shows that most dominant students (50 %) strongly agree that a lot of unfamiliar vocabulary in the text

In the 10th statement, there are 10 students (50 %) who stated “strongly agree”, 7 students (35 %) stated “agree”, 3 students (15 %) stated “disagree” and no students (0 %) who state “strongly disagree”. It shows that most dominant students (50 %) have difficulty understanding the meaning of the question. In the 11th statement, there are 12 students (60 %) stated “strongly agree”, 5 students (25 %) stated “agree”, 3 students (15 %) stated “disagree” and no students (0 %) stated, “strongly disagree”. It shows that most dominant students (60 %) have difficulty understanding the content of the text thoroughly. In the 12th statement, there are 12 students (50 %) stated “strongly agree”, 10 students (50 %) stated “agree”, no students (0 %) stated “disagree” and no students (0 %) stated, “strongly disagree”. It shows that most dominant students (50 %) strongly agree and agree that they have difficulty in answering types of reading comprehension such as the main idea, reference, stated detail, unstated detail, vocabulary, conclusion/inference, etc. In the 13th statement, there are 9 students (45 %) stated “strongly agree”, 10 students (50 %) stated “agree”, 1 student (5 %) stated “disagree” and no students (0 %) stated, “strongly disagree”. It shows that most

dominant students (50 %) tend to interpret or translate each vocabulary when reading the text.

Discussion

The Non-EFL students’ ability in reading comprehension shows that the student’s average is 20.15 from 50 points, the students’ median is 18 from 50 points and the students’ range is between 9 (lowest score) to 40 (highest score). The point here means the correct answer. The students have difficulties with 1) too many questions (50 questions). 2) limited time (only 60 minutes) in doing the reading test. 3) the topic or reading text is not familiar. 4) the topic or reading text is not interesting. 5) several text topics are too much. 6) many the number of paragraphs in the text. 7) very varied types of text-related questions in reading. 8) a lot of unfamiliar vocabulary in the text. 9) difficulty in understanding the meaning of the question. 10) difficulty in understanding the content of the text thoroughly. 11) difficulty in answering types of reading comprehension such as the main idea, reference, stated detail, unstated detail, vocabulary, conclusion/inference, etc. 12) tending to interpret or translate each vocabulary when reading the text so it influences the time in reading texts.

These difficulties are in line with several previous studies above, for example, Lestari et al. (2017) that the difficulty of students in reading understanding is vocabulary, main concept, inference and reference, and detailed information. Moreover, the result from the interview with five students who got the lowest scores on the test and an English teacher who teaches the class indicates that the factors why the students face difficulties are the absence of extensive reading, inadequate vocabulary, type of text, type of questions, the absence of the use of reading strategy, and the uncertainty of students’ reading levels. Research from Matondang (2020) also in line with this research that students had difficulty discerning the main idea, comprehending language, describing the topic in-depth, and drawing inferences. The teacher’s efforts to address students’ difficulties with reading comprehension include elaborating on the text’s structure, how to locate the main idea,

how to formulate a conclusion, and identifying new vocabulary.

Reading learning is learning to read the text in English which is often felt by students to be boring. The saturation situation depends on how the teacher uses learning methods in the classroom. For the learning process to be active, a teacher must be creative in choosing new learning methods. Reading learning needs to be done effectively and efficiently, by paying attention to teaching principles including using teaching aids or teaching aids; paying attention to the differences in the individual abilities of students, and using a variety of teaching methods so that students can more easily understand information, understand the meaning of new vocabulary and equivalent words, and so on contained therein.

Teachers must be brave to try the way of teaching so far, there are lots of learning models that can be used for the learning process of this material, and teachers can easily obtain them, including through books, the internet, or better yet, directly share with colleagues so they can know how to apply these models are classed. Teachers also should not only rely on one source in learning. They must have many sources so that the material provided varies, not only from year to year. With a variety of reference sources, the learning process will develop. So that learning English, especially reading learning, becomes active, effective, and fun learning, it can be done in various ways.

Besides the teacher's way of teaching reading to the students, to answer the students' difficulties or problems in reading comprehension, both English teachers/lecturers and students must collaborate to solve it. For the students, they can do several ways, such as: First, reading regularly. Students' reading skills will not develop without reading. But as we already know that it takes several days of doing something consistently to form a habit. If it is possible, students should get used to reading every day or if not possible once a few days. Try in one day, they can set aside a little of our time to read, it can be within five minutes which then gradually increases to 20 to 30 minutes per day, depending

on the schedule on that day. By diligently reading we can digest and understand how the mindset of English speakers (native speakers). In addition, by diligently reading we can get used to reading more quickly, precisely, and confidently. Students can increase their vocabulary dictionary along with their understanding as well as the ability to discuss various topics.

Second, choosing reading according to interest. Students should read and sometimes they need to force themselves to read something informative or educational. However, students should start reading from the type or genre of writing that they like, it could be comics, romantic novels or even writing with lots of pictures that can help visualize the writing that students are reading. As much as possible make this habit of reading a pleasant thing, not a compulsion. If students do not like reading books, they can choose other reading options such as blog posts, articles in magazines, and online news, now there are many e-books and e-readers available and students can read anywhere and anytime in their spare time to read.

Third, reading various topics. After finding a reading topic that students enjoy, students can try searching for more writings and articles about that topic, and try to explore different topics so that our reading varies. This method will be useful for adding various kinds of vocabulary. In addition, by reading a variety of topics, students do not feel bored when learning how to read English properly and correctly, because they will have many variations of reading that we can choose from. The most important part is that students understand the essence of the texts they read. If they do not understand a word or two of a sentence but can get the gist of it, they can just guess what the word means, or try reading the next sentence and see if it helps. If when they read then they find a lot of words that they do not know the meaning of, it could be that the reading they choose has a high level of difficulty or level of understanding. They can choose the type of reading that is lighter and according to their level of understanding.

One effective way to learn how to read English is to combine different methods. For

example, reading a book while listening to an audio version of the book. If students want something extra, they can read, listen and say aloud what they are reading at the same time. When students read aloud, try to be in a quiet place, so they can focus. There are three advantages of this method, the first is that we focus more on absorbing information from the writings we read, because we use the senses of sight and hearing. Second, this method can help improve students' ability to learn and pronounce vocabulary. Reading aloud can improve understanding because it helps us absorb the words we are reading.

In increase reading in English. There is nothing wrong if from now on, students start reading more in English. In today's digital era, it is very easy to find English texts on various topics. Students can just open their cellphones, then look for reading reference sources such as articles or media in English. For beginners, students do not have to look for reference sources with difficult vocabulary that are often found on online news platforms. Students can look for articles that tend to be easier to understand. It is better if students look for articles that often appear in exam questions. For example, articles on topics such as natural sciences, social sciences, health, economics, transportation, education, and so on. However, it never hurts to read articles with topics that tend to be preferred, such as those related to music, movies, or even everything about favorite celebrities.

When students read, students can practice reading skills such as 1) Determining the purpose of reading. Before students start selecting and reading a reading text, they should first determine the purpose of their reading. This is done so that our reading activities are more effective. 2) Selecting Reading Text. After students already know what the purpose of their reading is, they can choose a reading text that suits their reading purpose. For example, if students want to find out about the latest news, they can choose newspapers or news articles on the internet as their reading text. 3). Choosing a reading technique. If they have found a reading text that suits their purpose, they can immediately

read it. The reading technique is based on the purpose of students' reading.

The reading technique will help students achieve their reading goals more easily and quickly. The techniques are: 1) Skimming. Skimming is reading quickly to find out the general picture written in the reading text. This technique is very useful especially when students are faced with very long reading texts. With skimming, they can find out the outline of the text without having to read the whole thing to save time. However, when students skim, they may miss important points or information. That is why they can use the skimming technique when they only want to know the outline of the reading and when they want to determine whether the reading is worth reading as a whole or not. 2) Scanning. The scanning technique is to find out specific information in a reading text. Just like skimming, scanning is also a speed-reading method. Some reading texts contain an index that lists some important keywords along with pages where information related to those keywords can be found in the text. To find certain information, we only need to look for keywords relevant to that information in the index.

CONCLUSION

The non-EFL students' ability in reading comprehension shows that the student's average is 20.15 from 50 points, the students' median is 18 from 50 points (correct answer) and the students' range is between 9 (lowest score) up to 40 (highest score). They have several difficulties with several questions, limited time, not familiar topic, not an interesting topic, number of text topics, number of paragraphs in the text, varied types of text-related questions, a lot of unfamiliar vocabulary, difficulty in understanding the meaning of the question, difficulty in understanding the content of the text thoroughly and difficulty in answering types of reading comprehension, and tend to interpret or translate each vocabulary in reading the text. Both English teachers/lecturers and students must collaborate to answer these problems.

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