

# Reading Difficulties of EFL Students: A Case Study of First-Year Student of English Language Education FKIP UIR

**Yulianto, yulianto@edu.uir.ac.id, Riau Islamic University, Pekanbaru, Indonesia**  
**Marhamah, marhamah@edu.uir.ac.id, Riau Islamic University, Pekanbaru, Indonesia**

**Abstract.** Student skill of Reading or understanding text is considered one of four fundamental language skills, meaning EFL students have to obtain a good reading level. Actually, reading is not easy to master, since many students still carry out reading problems. The aim of this research is to examine reading difficulties that first-year students of English Language Education deal with and to identify students reading problems and the reasons behind their weaknesses in reading assignments. This research used the qualitative research method; it used to obtain data of reading comprehension difficulties faced by the first-year students of English Language Education FKIP UIR. As the research instrument, it used a questionnaire of seventeen multiple types of questions divided into four parts. The result of this research indicated that, based on the analysis, first-year students do not have fluent reading because students currently deal with various reading difficulties. It can be concluded that students must be provided with appropriate teaching strategies depending on learning styles and students' needs. Thus, the final product of this research is a book of reading for the first-year students of English language Education at FKIP-UIR.

Keywords: Reading comprehension, Reading difficulties, EFL students

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Reading is one of basic skill of learning new language. It cannot be separated from other skills of language such as writing, speaking and listening. Those skills must be learned altogether by English language students for better knowledge and understanding. Reading skills can help to improve other language skills. Generally, the skill of reading is developed in societies with literary taste, because it can lead to developing comprehension and enriching vocabulary. Reading as with other skills, is more enjoyable to do (Patel & Jain, 2018).

The comprehension of reading is a skill that is considered one of four fundamental language skills that EFL learner has to expertise (Küçükoğlu, 2013). It is not a simple skill since

many students have various reading problems. Most students who graduate from Senior High School lack proper English linguistic knowledge to read and understand slightly complex written text, especially texts related to English (Hafiz, 1989). Thus, students tend to make sentence errors, leading to misinterpreting the proper content of the texts. Moreover, students have poor sentence recognition and word relation, and even their vocabulary is not good. It mostly happens due to students' insufficient basic language (El-Koumy, 2004).

According to Harmer (Harmer, 2007) reading is a skill that is effective for language achievement. The more students read, the better they understand the reading text. Another opinion by Grellet (Grellet, 2004) is that reading is a regular process of assuming, and the opinion of an individual brings it to step further and is more important than the result he finds. In reading, the learner should understand how to use their knowledge to understand new aspects; it might be a new idea or simple text.

Oxford (2014) stated the definition of reading strategies concept as actions that make learning tasks easier, enjoyable, and more effective. The word strategy refers to the learning techniques that help students overcome the problems they often deal with reading.

In school, students have to understand the purpose of reading. Processing strategies are skills that help students to understand what they read (Brown, 2007). Thus, it is surprising that after six or eight years of education, from Primary School to Secondary School, most students still cannot read and comprehend English. The case happens in developing countries like Indonesia, the ability to read is seen as an obstacle to national development.

Students have various problems regarding their reading comprehension activity related to their proficiency level (Pani, 2004). Students with rich vocabulary will find reading comprehension easy, similar to those with good grammatical comprehension. Each student overcomes different difficulties from others because they have different needs in teaching methods and learning activities.

The demand for understanding reading comprehension difficulties among EFL becomes urgent. Thus, this study is a case study that deals with the reading issues of EFL students. To collect data, a group of questions is intended to first-year students of English Education FKIP UIR.

## **2. METHOD**

This research is a case study that was done qualitatively and quantitatively by using two research tools. Qualitative analysis is a descriptive analysis that consists of written analysis by the researcher and details, while quantitative analysis consists of numeric analysis (Sugiyono, 2016). A qualitative approach was used to gather data on reading comprehension issues of the first-year student of English Language Education FKIP UIR. In qualitative research, the researcher gathers, examines, and interprets data descriptively to catch certain parts of the topic (Henderson, 2011).

Subjects of this research consist of 40 (forty) students in the first year selected from classes A, B, C, and D at English Language Education FKIP UIR.

In this research, the questionnaire has a function as a research instrument, containing seventeen multiple types of questions divided into four parts. The first part is about information about students. The second part is about students' preferences. The third part is about the students' difficulties. And the last is about tests/assessments and students' preferences. The instrument has chosen because it does not need a long duration to be analyzed and include as a better way to gather data; which interviewer feels more confident, they justified questions without obtaining any authority from anyone, they give correct answers and open the opportunity to reveal their opinion in a more manageable way.

In order to obtain valid information, the questionnaire has written in English; it is because most of the students already have their proficiency level in English and it allows them to know every English written question.

Questionnaires for students will be distributed in the classroom. The researcher reads general instructions of the questionnaire before they answer the question. Besides, during the session of the student filling in the questionnaire, the researcher moved around the classroom to ensure that the student answered the questionnaire correctly. Moreover, after students make their answers, the researcher collects the entire questionnaires from the students.

Last, the submitted data will be analyzed using quantitative and qualitative research of students' questionnaires and interviews. During data analysis, the researcher will explain each question about the process of teaching on reading skill and its difficulties. The data was analyzed based on the answer to question. The questionnaire and interview result is valuable information to design a good reading book for first-year English language education students at FKIP UIR.

### **3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

#### **Student Questionnaire Analysis**

When students were asked about their capacity regarding their favorite comprehension, there were several different answers. Indeed, 40% of students prefer the listening skill, while 22.5 % choose writing as their favorite. For the reading skill, it was about 20% of students and the last, only 17.5% of students declared that their preference skill is speaking comprehension.

Basically, this question aims to understand whether students having a preference on reading skill or not, furthermore at this part, it can be pointed that students have enough motivation to read or not.

Most students (60%) prefer reading in Bahasa Indonesia because it is considered as their mother language - national language – or students know it better than any other language. Moreover, Bahasa is the national language that can be used in every part of the country. They can express themselves and their thoughts well by using bahasa. They can understand and have better communication. The students tend to feel that another foreign language is challenging to understand. 20% of participants who chose English language stated that English is an international communication method that almost everyone uses because it is simple and more manageable. Others stated that English is an essential language for them. 5% of students stated

that French is also an important language for students. Moreover, the remaining 15% choose Arabic.

The third question was addressed to students to observe whether English language is important for student or not. 72% of students stated that English is important. They stated that it will help them to access the internet, and it can be used almost for all domains. Therefore they have to learn English. The other mentions that they enjoy learning English language since English consider as a global language which will enrich their conventional knowledge.

Informants made another point that learning English helps them to understand more regarding English and Western cultures; moreover, it allows them to make a connection and communication with people around the world. Remained 28% informants said that they did not enjoy any English classes. They explain that it is hard because they could not enjoy how teachers taught in class. Several informants do not like studying English, mainly related to teacher.

When they were being asked regarding teaching instrument, 40% (highest number) of informant choose journals; while 36% informants choose books and 24% of informants prefer to read stories. The aim of this question is to understand what kind of materials students prefer to have.

Most of students (40%) explained about the aim of reading is to enlarge their knowledge, meanwhile (25%) explained that their objective of reading is to enrich their vocabulary level; there were 22.5% carrying the answer of reading has a purpose for students' academic studies, while the last (12.5%) claims that they read because they enjoyed it. This question was asked in order to understand what materials student like better.

There were 32% participants explained that while they read and there is a time happen when they did not understand the meaning. They try to translate the text source into their mother language (Indonesia), other 32% stated that they just continue to read even without any understanding, and 24% of participants explained that they prefer to use the dictionary. Furthermore, the rest 13% of participants choose rather to stop reading when they do not understand the text they read. Several student as participants make another point of how they will ask their teacher or other classmates whenever they find unknown word or ambiguity in text.

About 27.5% Informants acknowledge that they often face the problems of ambiguous words when they read and it caused some misunderstanding toward the whole text. While 17.5% informants claimed that they deal with the problems regarding the confusing words, like deceptive words. Only 17.5% informants answered that they have reading problem when they read aloud in classroom. Several students said while they read loudly in class, some of their classmates will laugh at them on the mistakes they made, because of this, reading aloud in class consider as an obstacle. There are also difficulties of pronunciation, with the percentage of 17.5%. The remaining 25% of informants got problem in syntactical or grammatical complexity. They did not familiar with several English sentences.

In this case, several students stated that they really do not follow the habit of English reading and have no interest in learning this language. Furthermore, some of them do not have any interest in reading which they claims that they often feel bored, especially regarding the discipline issues in class. They mentioned that reading program duration is quite long. Therefore there is no sufficient time to read in class. Among the reasons proposed by participants, most of

it happens because there is strict repetition which made them avoid reading material and move to other activities.

Regarding the main reasons for reading issues, 35% of students acknowledge that they lack linguistics knowledge. 22.5% of students stated that they do not follow by habit of reading, 7.5% of students considered the main reason of student reading issues happens due to the lack of duration and time, 12.5% of the answer related to reading issues on reading text. And the remained 22.5% agreed that the difficulty of reading is the reading skill itself.

Regarding linguistics knowledge of phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics, 37.5% of students have poor reading skill, while 37.5% of them have good reading skill and 17.5% are very poor. Last, the remaining 7.5% consider as very good at reading.

A significant number of students 7% stated that their duration of reading session is insufficient and only 30% say that their duration for reading consider as sufficient. Furthermore, based on the collected questionnaire, the results indicated that many aspects caused a great majority of students' difficulties on reading comprehension, and this is due to various causes.

### **Test/ assessment and students' activities preferences**

The evaluation stage was done after reading. It is important because it provides students with the opportunity to summarize the material, question, make any reflect, discuss and respond to text. After students finish their reading, there should be alternative activities that help them to analyze the concepts for broad understanding and organize the information for further knowledge.

Moreover, post-reading stage helps teacher to check students' reading achievement. Previously, it has been observed that most of students do not have well enough vocabulary, which prevents them from understanding the text. Therefore the following activities are suggested as below:

1. Complete the sentence
2. Filling the gap
3. True/false questions
4. Matching activities

### **The Data of Students' Questionnaire Interpretation**

The result concluded that from students' questionnaire, most of students 40% like the listening period better than (20%) prefer reading; these results was deduced from the answers of the first question. Moreover, majority of students 60% prefer reading Indonesian text.

Based on the obtained result of first question, most of students 72% prefer learning English by having different arguments, 40% of students prefer journals as the best reading material, 36% choose books better, while 24% prefer to read stories.

Based on the question regarding the purpose of reading, it is obtained that 40% students read in order to obtain general knowledge. The collected answer of question regarding how

student overcome the difficulties of reading indicated that all students use different way to understand sentence. In contrast, 32% of students claimed that they try to translate the text to Indonesia, 24% use dictionary as supporting instrument when they do not understand any words, while 13% tried to stop reading. The rest 32%, continue reading without any understanding. 27.5% of students from the entire results agreed that they have difficulties with ambiguous words, furthermore, majority of students 35% lack of linguistics knowledge. The result of question nine shows that 37.5% of students were good and poor in linguistics knowledge. The result of last question reveals that most of students 70% agreed that the duration of reading time consider as insufficient.

### **Students' Interview Analysis of skill**

When students were asked regarding the skill students enjoy the most, most of the students said that speaking skill is their favorite. Justifying that answer, it can be indicated that they like to express and give their opinions. However, some of the students have enough time to understand the meaning and to remember novel words, stated that reading skills as their favorite.

### **Teaching Materials that useful for Reading Comprehension**

Second question about materials used in reading comprehension, most of students suggest passages and texts is effective as media because it help students organize their work. Based on the other students, textbooks, visual aids and drawings regarded as helpful teaching materials. They add another suggestion that figures and textbooks are useful for teaching instrument because it help to introduce the topic.

### **Text Selection influence Reading Comprehension**

Most of students stated that choosing the right affect reading achievement which means, when students choose the right text, it will be easier to obtain it objectives, and students can choose the right texts related to their social, educational and affective backgrounds (Schmitt et al., 2011). Other students also agree to this opinion which text selection will relate to student vocabulary, structure and size. They said that the length of text should be considered as important as well as students' cultural background.

This is an essential point in order to make the reading process enjoyable and offer students pleasure. Students will become more interested and will organize a specific time for reading. Thus, a good text selection will improve students reading skill. In the following table, there are the differences between good and poor readers during the three reading phases:

	<b>Good or mature readers</b>	<b>Poor or immature readers</b>
Before Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge before reading.</li> <li>• Understand task and set purpose.</li> <li>• Choose appropriate strategies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading without preparation.</li> <li>• Reading without understand the reason.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read without considering how to approach the material</li> </ul>
During Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus attention</li> <li>• Anticipate and predict.</li> <li>• Use fix-up strategies when lack or understand new terms.</li> <li>• Use text structure to assist.</li> <li>• Organize and integrate new information.</li> </ul> <p>Self-monitor comprehension by :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowing comprehension is occurring.</li> <li>• Knowing what is being understood.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easily distracted.</li> <li>• Read to get done.</li> <li>• Do not know what to do when a lack of understanding occurs.</li> <li>• Do not recognize important vocabulary.</li> <li>• Do not see any organization.</li> <li>• Add on, rather than integrate new information.</li> <li>• Do not realize they do not understand.</li> </ul>
After Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflect on what was read.</li> <li>• Feel success is a result of effort.</li> <li>• Summarize major ideas.</li> <li>• Seek additional information outside sources.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stop reading and thinking.</li> <li>• Feel success is a result of luck</li> </ul>

**Table 1. The Difference between Good and Poor Readers** (Cook et al., 2013)

### **Students' way to improve their reading**

This part has revealed several different points of view which are written below:

- Dictionaries are important as supporting tools
- Pictures and Illustrations can be used to understand better.
- Text selection affects student reading achievement
- Synonyms, Collocations, Mimics/gestures can be added
- Equivalent
- Topic sentences should be well corrected
- The supporting sentence should be added

### **Students' Reading issues**

Most students have pronunciation as their difficulties and often meet ambiguous words as their reading obstacles. However, it is not only pronunciation difficulties. Several students also stated that the problem they carried out while reading was text length and new topics that students felt were unfamiliar.

### **Time Duration of Reading Comprehension**

On the problems regarding reading duration, almost all students acknowledge that the duration of reading session is needed to be sufficient, without any explanation.

### **Suggestions to Improve Students' Reading Achievement**

In order to improve students reading comprehension and obtain a good reading achievement, based on the analysis, several efforts could be done as below:

- Provide the short texts to read and summarize.
- Ask students to participate in some activities and report.
- Add more time for reading.
- Encourage students to read outside the classroom.
- Motivate students to develop reading habit by read short texts and simple passages.
- Urge students to read.
- Give a reward to students when they finish reading.
- Provide students with the appropriate textbook.
- Guide students reading

### **Students Interview Data Interpretation**

Students' interview obtained the result which reveals that students have various answers regarding their favorite session. Moreover, students prefer other teaching materials in reading sessions, focused on the students' needs and understanding, as it is obtained from the result of the answers to the second question. Furthermore, the answers of first question showed the same



agree opinion among students by the fact that text selection might affect student reading comprehension. Then, students started to reveal their interest about it since they state different ways to help them when they do not understand the material of reading. The results of students' interview showed that students make a list of a number of difficulties that they often deal during reading session.

Furthermore, students were given different opinion regarding reading issues. Based on the results, it reveals that student duration of comprehend reading session is sufficient which means that the students begin to show interest in improving their reading performances by using several techniques.

## **Discussion**

The purpose of this study is to examine several difficulties which may occur during reading session and indicates the reason of those difficulties. Thus, it will be easier to find some solutions and overcome those difficulties. This section tried to collect the entire finding and its relation with research questions, thus, based on the results, it will confirm whether hypotheses are fulfilled or not:

First Question regarding which problems do first-year students have while reading? The relevant hypothesis is that students may experience several language issues while reading English, such as ambiguous words and pronunciation difficulties. The study of students' questionnaire and interview reveal that students suffer from that kind of problem. Thus, it can be concluded that the first hypothesis is correct.

The second problem regarding the reason that made students reading difficulties, Hypothesis comes out of this problem related to the cause of those difficulties might relate to students' lack of reading as daily habit or difficulty of reading assignment. This hypothesis is correct. As the results of this question reveal that the main reasons that can cause reading difficulties is that students do not carry out the habit of reading because they are not used to reading any text unless in school or school material.

The third research question regarding text selection can affect reading comprehension and achievement. The hypothesis of this problem is: that the originality of text may affect students reading performances. The result showed that text length and students' reading level affect students' reading achievements; students have choose various sort of materials to read. Moreover, students choose the text as their personal options. Therefore, that result confirms first hypothesis.

The last problem regarding the suggestions to develop reading comprehension and achievement with the hypothesis of suggestions to read outside the classroom, choose more appropriate source depends on students' proficiency, encourage reading activities for enjoyable reason. The findings of students' interview have confirmed the hypothesis; moreover, there are suggestions to improve students' habitual reading habits, such as giving students motivation to develop reading habits by reading short texts, and guide student reading habits.

## **4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

The data analysis indicated that students in their first year cannot read fluently because they deal with several problems related to reading comprehension. The results revealed how EFL lecturers of students' reading comprehension achievement conclude that most of student lack of reading habit; students do not read often as their daily habit and this is happen due to globalization and under the use of Technology ICTs, this is the reason why the following parts present several suggestions and solutions in order to develop students' number of vocabulary, and to force into a better comprehension on reading.

As for students, to develop effective reading, there are multiple teaching methods exist which lecturers could try to use.

Lecturers' role will affect students' level, therefore lecturer have to teach depend on student needs. Lecturers should assist students and identify student reading purposes, then provide student by suitable reading materials consider on students' interest and their knowledge level. Students have to be provided with a good and correct teaching methods depend on learning styles and students' needs.

As for student, for better understanding and comprehension of reading, EFL students have to enrich their amount of vocabulary because words familiarity carries significant role in understanding the whole text. Thus, students can increase their vocabulary by developing reading habits and extensive reading; they have to consider reading as a long-term learning process. Another point that comes out is how students must obtain the ability to learn new words which they have never understand previously.

## References

- Brown, H. D. (2007). Teaching by Principles, Second Edition. In *Teaching by Principles An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy*.
- Cook, E., Kennedy, E., & McGuire, S. Y. (2013). Effect of teaching metacognitive learning strategies on performance in general chemistry courses. *Journal of Chemical Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1021/ed300686h>
- El-Koumy, A. S. A. (2004). Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language: A Comprehensive Approach. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2364862>
- Grellet, F. (2004). *Developing Reading Skills: A Practical Guide to Reading Comprehension Exercises*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hafiz, F. M. (1989). Extensive reading and the development of language skills. *ELT Journal*, 43(1), 4–13. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/43.1.4>
- Harmer, J. (2007). How to Teach English (Second Edition). *ELT Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccn029>
- Henderson, R. (2011). Doing qualitative research: a practical handbook. *Studies in Continuing Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0158037x.2011.609670>
- Küçükoğlu, H. (2013). Improving Reading Skills Through Effective Reading Strategies. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.01.113>
- Oxford University Press. (2014). *Oxford Dictionary Online*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/digital%2Bnative>

- Pani, S. (2004). Reading strategy instruction through mental modelling. *ELT Journal*, 58(4), 355–362. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/58.4.355>
- Patel, A., & Jain, S. (2018). Formalisms of Representing Knowledge. *Procedia Computer Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.procs.2017.12.070>
- Schmitt, N., Jiang, X., & Grabe, W. (2011). The Percentage of Words Known in a Text and Reading Comprehension. *Modern Language Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2011.01146.x>
- Sugiyono. (2016). Metode Penelitian dan Pengembangan (Research and Development/R&D). In *Bandung: Alfabeta*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drudis.2010.11.005>