

Junior High School Students' Difficulties in Reading English Texts

¹Khafidhoh, ²Novia Nurul Hikmah Abdullah

Email : ¹khafidhoh@pbi.uad.ac.id, ²novia1800004097@webmail.uad.ac.id

^{1,2}Universitas Ahmad Dahlan

ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received: September 12, 2022

Revised: September 26, 2022

Accepted: September 30, 2022

Keywords

difficulties

reading text

students' perception

ABSTRACT

In learning English, students are directed to have skills in reading English texts because students can understand the information through reading. This study investigates the students' perception of the factors causing the students to have difficulties in reading English texts and the strategies the students use to overcome the difficulties in reading English texts. This research belongs to descriptive qualitative research, and the research data sources are interviews and questionnaires. The data were taken from the student in 8th grade of SMP Negeri 1 Bungku. There were 15 students answered the questionnaire, but only 13 joined the interview. The data were analyzed by reducing data, displaying data, and drawing conclusions. The results of this study indicate that the students' perception of the students' difficulties in reading English text includes the lack of motivation from the teacher to improve the students' reading skills and the lack of the students' vocabulary and pronunciation. Moreover, the strategies the students used to overcome their difficulties were taking notes of some important points in the text and the newly acquired vocabulary, translating them using google translate, and practicing them with friends.

This is an open access article under the [CC-BY-SA](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/) license.



Introduction

Learning English means the process of mastering English reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Mastering English reading is highly needed in this era. For example, when we access the internet and want to reply to a message related to English, we need to be careful in reading the text to give the appropriate answer. Through reading, students can get a lot of information, increase their knowledge, and know how to read English texts effectively. According to Rachman (2018), reading requires a high level of understanding. The students must understand the content of the reading text. Moreover, based on Curriculum 13, the students must master the four English skills to apply these skills in real life to interact with their environment. Besides, English is also one of the subjects tested in the national final exam, where most of the items are reading comprehension tests.

Reading is an activity to get information about something, so teachers need to improve their

students' English skills. The primary purpose of teaching English in junior high and high school is to improve reading comprehension, and students who graduate from high school must have good reading comprehension. According to Sangia (2014) reading is one of skill in the language that needs to be considered. Skilled reading makes students better understand all the material taught. This indicates that the subjects read in the field of Indonesian studies should receive greater attention. Meanwhile according to Grabe & Stoller (2002) reading is a process to get information to improve knowledge. When people are reading, they are also communicating. In reading, there is an interaction between reader and writer. According to Mubarok (2016), teachers should apply suitable and appropriate strategies to stimulate the students to be active and get engaged in the instructional process of teaching reading. There are various strategies to use, but it should be appropriate to the conditions and learning environment of the students. In a literate society, most normal children learn to read by the age of five or six, and some even earlier. Since English in Indonesia is a foreign language, the students who are just starting to learn English may have difficulty understanding reading texts, perhaps, due to incorrect word identification and recognition, specifically limited comprehension skills or poor oral reading. Therefore, the researchers wanted to know the students' perceptions related to the factors causing the students to have difficulties in reading English texts and the strategies the students use to overcome the difficulties in reading English texts.

Related to the study's objectives, two sides of voices can be revealed: the teachers' and the students' voices. However, the researchers decided to accommodate the students' voices since the students have played a crucial role in teaching and learning in recent times. That is why investigating the students' voice about the research objectives is highly needed to know their perception.

Perception is the process of human thinking about a phenomenon after they get a sensation from the surrounding environment, as well as the process of receiving, distinguishing, and giving meaning to the stimuli received by the senses. Thus, it can provide conclusions and interpretations of certain objects that are observed. Perception means observing a person's environment using five senses, so that one will be aware of everything in the environment. According to Asrori (2009), perception is an individual's process of interpreting, organizing, and giving meaning to stimulate that comes from the environment of individual beings, which results from the learning process and experience. Thus, perception is derived from our experience and stimulated by the mind.

Meanwhile, according to Slameto (2010), perception is a process related to the entry of messages and information into the human brain. It means perception is the recognition achieved by exchanging messages or information with others through friendship or perhaps through experienced talking to each other. On the other hand, Devito (2011) pointed out that perception is the process of becoming aware of many stimuli that affect our senses. It means that perception is

an event in consciousness that the five human senses can influence through human relationships between people. Therefore, it is obtained from the surrounding environment, friends, and events that are still up to now. So, it can be concluded that perception is a human thought or idea based on what is obtained from the environment of living things and experiences that have been experienced before.

In teaching English, the teachers should manage the instructional system well. They should be creative, so they can handle the class with interesting techniques. Brown (1994) stated that teaching is making the students understand something new through several activities. The interesting technique will lead the student to a comfortable learning atmosphere and enable them to focus on the instructional process. Moreover, the teachers should also motivate the students to learn through fun learning activities, which can prevent the students from thinking that English is difficult to learn.

As mentioned earlier, reading is one of the basic skills in language learning. It is impossible to separate from other language learning skills besides writing, namely speaking and listening. Those skills must all be learned with the learner's English. Reading skills can help improve other language skills. Generally, reading skills develop in a society with a literary taste because it can develop understanding and enrich vocabulary. According to Elizabeth (as cited in Irawan, 2010), reading is the process of constructing meaning from print and other symbols. Reading involves not just the print and the illustrations but also readers bringing their knowledge of the world and their past experiences to the process.

Five previous studies investigating the students' reading problems have little in common. The first study by Saraswati et al. (2021) determined the reading comprehension difficulties of eighth-grade students at one of the junior high schools in Tegallalang. The differences between that study and this study are the number of participants (that study invited more participants than this study) and the use of research method (that study used a quantitative method while this study used a qualitative method). The second study was conducted by Sari et al. (2020), employing survey research with a questionnaire as the only data collection instrument used, while this study used a descriptive qualitative research design with two instruments, questionnaire and interview guidelines. The third study was conducted by Safura & Helmanda (2020), analyzing difficulties faced by students in mastering reading texts, especially finding and understanding the main ideas. The difference between that research and this research is the types of questionnaires used. That research distributed 2 types of questionnaires, namely open and close-ended questionnaires, while this research only used close-ended questionnaires as the instrument to support the findings from the interview. The fourth study was conducted by Satin et al. (2018), analyzing students' perceptions and motivations towards digital text in learning reading. Researchers use case studies as research design, especially revealing students' perceptions and knowing students' motivation

towards the use of digital texts in learning to read. The study used observation, interviews and questionnaires to collect data, while in this study only 2 instruments were used. The fifth study was conducted by Kubela et al. (2022), this study identifies the types of students' reading strategies, challenges during the implementation of these strategies and solutions in maximizing the implementation of these strategies. The difference between that study and this study are the number of participants ((that study invited more participants than this study) and the research method (that study used survey research while this study used a qualitative method).

This research was conducted to know the factors causing the students to have difficulties in reading English texts and how they deal with their difficulties in reading English texts. The information is significantly needed to decide the best treatment for reading activities in class so that the learning objectives can be reached well.

Method

This research used descriptive qualitative research methods. According to Moleong (2021), descriptive research is designed to obtain the real information about the current status of the phenomenon. This research was conducted by inviting the students of SMPN 1 Bungku as the research subjects. The researchers only focused on capturing the students' perception of the factors causing the students' difficulties in reading English texts and what strategies they use to overcome the difficulties. The research subjects joining this study were 13 students from eight-grade of SMP Negeri 1 Bungku who were chosen randomly.

To collect the data, the researchers used questionnaires and interview guidelines. The research instrument consists of a series of questions to collect information from the research subjects. The questionnaire was used as a reinforcing instrument consisting of 5 items to find out students who have difficulty in reading English, while the interview was used as the core or the main instrument. To collect the data, the researchers used the Zoom Meeting or Google Meet application to communicate and retrieve the data from the interview results. In this study, the data analysis covered data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions and verification.

Discussion

This section discusses data obtained from interviews and questionnaires posed to the research subjects. The open-ended questions allow discussion with them in the form of a simple question and answer related to the factors causing the students to have difficulties in reading English texts and the strategies they use to overcome the difficulties in reading English texts.

During the research, the researchers asked all students the same questions to assess their perception of the difficulty of reading English texts. The researchers analyzed the data according to the research context, which provided general questions to be answered by all students. The

following are the results of filling out the questionnaire and interviews related to students' perceptions.

1. Factors Causing the Difficulties

a. Factors Causing the Difficulties

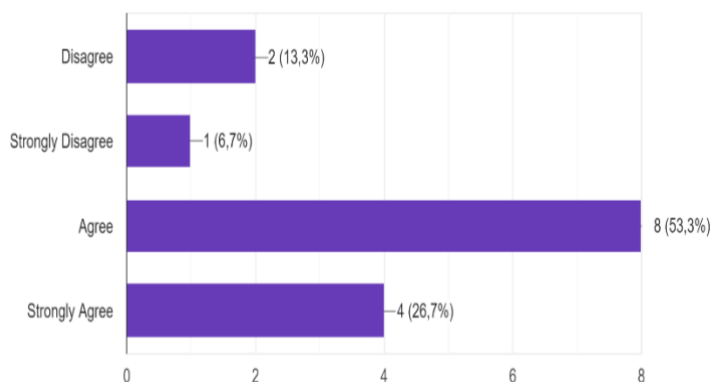


Fig. 1: Factors causing the difficulties

Based on Figure 1, it can be seen that the questionnaire results showed that 53, 3% of the students agree and 26, 7% strongly agree that they have difficulty in reading English texts. Their opinions are also supported by their statements in the interview as follows.

“NS: *Kesulitan saya yaitu dalam cara penyebutan membaca kosa kata, kurang menguasai kosa kata, sehingga saya kadang menemukan kosa kata yang baru saya ketahui, sejujurnya saya juga kurang motivasi dalam belajar bahasa asing khususnya belajar bahasa inggris*” [my difficulty is in how to pronounce vocabulary, I don't master vocabulary so sometimes I find new vocabulary that I know, to be honest I also lack motivation in learning foreign languages, especially learning English].

The statement was also supported by the other student as follows.

“AAS: *saya sendiri juga belum memiliki strategi membaca yang tepat jadi itu mungkin sangat berpengaruh, dan kosa kata yang saya hafalkan juga masih kurang jadi untuk mengartikan sebuah teks terbilang masih sulit*” [I also don't have the right reading strategy so that might be very influential, and the vocabulary that I memorize is also still lacking so interpreting a text is still difficult.]

Then, NRR also said something about it.

“NNR: *Tidak ada pemahaman materi terhadap pentingnya belajar bahasa inggris.*” [There is no material understanding of the importance of learning English.]

Meanwhile, 13.3% of students chose not to agree and 6.7% answered strongly disagree without any reason.

b. Finding Difficult Words

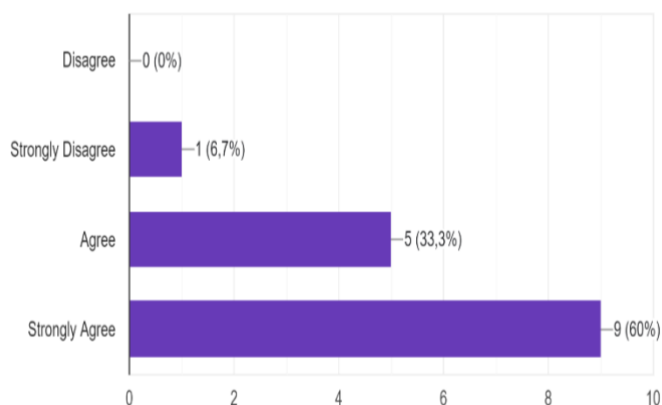


Fig. 2: Finding difficult words

Based on [Figure 2](#), it can be seen that the results of the questionnaire show that 60% of students strongly agree and 33.3% agree with the statement. The opinions are also supported by their statements during the interview session. When they were asked, “What is the thing that makes you often find a difficult word in reading English text?”, some students who answered strongly agreed, such as NS, said as follows.

“NS: *mungkin karena belum terbiasa juga dan karena sehari hari menggunakan bahasa indonesia jadi ketika membaca suatu kata atau kalimat dalam bahasa inggris bingung cara bacanya bagaimana*” [maybe because I'm not used to it and because I use Indonesian everyday so when reading a word or sentence in English you are confused about how to read it.]

In addition, according to MFA:

“MFA: *Grammar. Karena kita harus memahami kata lampau, yang sedang terjadi dan yang akan terjadi*” [grammar. Because we have to understand the past, what is happening and what will happen.]

Meanwhile, the student who chose “agree” (TL) said that:

“TL: *kadang pada saat membaca ada kata yang familiar dan baru saya ketahui pada saat itu, jadi saya harus mencari tahu apasih arti dari kata tersebut*” [sometimes when reading there are words that are familiar and I only knew at that time, so I had to find out what the words meant.]

The statement was added by informant NU as follows.

“NU: perbedaan antara SPOK dalam bahasa inggris dan bahasa indonesia membuat saya kesulitan dalam menentukan pola teks” [the difference between SPOK in English and Indonesian makes it difficult for me to determine the pattern of the text.]

Meanwhile, 6.7% of students choosing not to agree found some reasons for the difficult words.

“ZUN: dikarenakan ibu saya guru bahasa inggris jadi saya lebih mudah untuk menanyakan apa yang membuat saya kesulitan dan menjadikan saya lebih memahami dengan cepat pembelajaran dikelas” [because my mother is an English teacher so it's easier for me to ask what makes me difficult and make me understand more quickly in class]

Then, according to informant AT,

“AT: Menurut saya membaca teks bahasa inggris sangat menyenangkan dan sudah menjadi kebiasaan saya dalam membaca buku bahasa inggris dirumah” [I think reading English texts is very fun and has become my habit in reading English books at home.]

c. Challenges Faced by Students

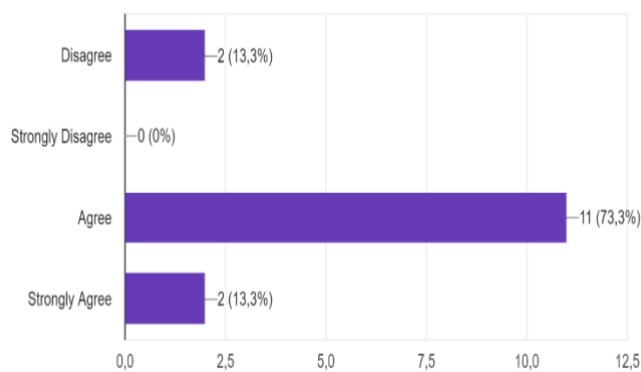


Fig. 3: Challenges faced by students

Based on Figure 3, it can be seen that the results of the questionnaire showed that 73.3% of the students strongly agreed, and another 13.3% chose to agree regarding the challenges faced in reading English texts. Moreover, the supporting data from the interview were as follows.

“NH: apabila saya membaca teks bahasa inggris didepan kelas saya menjadi gugup dan merasa tidak percaya diri, karena takut akan menjadi bahan olok-olokan teman sekelas apabila saya melakukan kesalahan” [when I read an

English text in front of the class I get nervous and feel insecure, for fear of being made fun of by my classmates if I make a mistake.]

In addition, according to informant ADK,

“ADK: sejujurnya tantangannya juga membutuhkan waktu dalam memahami isi teks apalagi lagi pada saat jam pelajaran, karena kita juga harus mencari arti dari kata atau kalimat yang ada pada teks tersebut, dan bisa terbilang sulit juga dalam beradaptasi karena dilingkungan sekitar terbiasa menggunakan bahasa Indonesia” [to be honest, the challenge also takes time to understand the content of the text, especially during class, because we also have to find the meaning of the words or sentences in the text, and it can be difficult to adapt because the environment around us is accustomed to using Indonesian.]

Based on the results of the questionnaire and interviews conducted, several factors cause the students to have difficulty in reading English texts. What causes students' difficulties in reading English texts is that they have more difficulty pronouncing vocabulary and lack mastery of vocabulary, so they often find new vocabulary they know; as a result, they face many difficulties in understanding the content of the text. Lack of motivation from them is also one of the factors. In addition, some students do not have the appropriate learning strategies, which are very influential. Some students also experience a lack of confidence when reading English texts because they are afraid that they will be ridiculed by classmates if they make mistakes in reading a word or sentence that is not in accordance with the way it is pronounced.

This research is almost the same as the research conducted by (Nurjanah, 2018) that there are several factors that cause the students to have difficulty in reading English texts, including (1) vocabulary, (2) determining the main idea, (3) the difference between the written form and spoken form in English, and (4) wrong pronunciation is often caused by lack of sound similarity between English and students' mother tongue.

In this case, the factor causing the students' difficulties in reading English texts also comes from the student environment. One of the students said that he does not use English for daily communication since he uses Indonesian. So, when he reads a word or sentence in English, he gets confused about how to read it. This is also revealed in the previous research (Sapitri et al., 2022) that the environmental factors are also very influential for students in learning English texts, namely the home and school environment. Meanwhile according to research conducted by (Rohimah, 2021) Two factors contribute to reading difficulties, internal and external. Internal factors can be seen from the physical point of view of students. Physical weakness can

affect reading difficulties. External factors that affect students' reading difficulties are social environmental factors and the most influential is the role of parents who send their children to read at home. Parents who do not participate in the reading development of their students weaken the reading ability of their students.

2. The Strategies to Overcome the Difficulties

a. Techniques in Understanding English Reading Texts

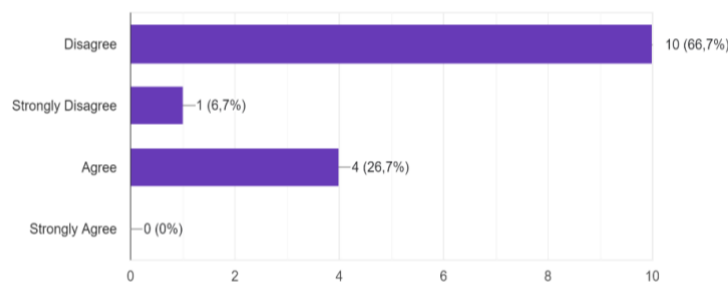


Fig. 4: Techniques in understanding English reading texts

Based on [Figure 4](#), it can be seen that 66,7% of students disagreed, and 6.7% of students strongly disagreed that they knew or mastered the techniques in understanding reading English texts. The opinions were supported by the findings in the interview as follows.

“NRR: *susahnya mengetahui teknik teknik membuat saya pusing sendiri*”
[the difficulty of knowing the techniques makes me dizzy.]

Then, it was added by AD.

“AD: *Kurangnya bimbingan untuk mempelajari teknik tekniknya*” [lack of guidance to learn the techniques.]

Besides that, there were 26.7% of students answered “agree” regarding knowing or mastering techniques in reading English texts for some reason, and here is the supporting data from the interview.

“N: *menurut saya dengan menemukan waktu membaca luang dan mengumpulkan informasi yang ingin kita dapatakan pada suatu teks bahasa inggris saya rasa sudah termasuk dalam teknik memahami suatu bacaan*” [In my opinion, by finding time to read opportunities and collecting the information we want to get in an English text, I think it is included in the technique of understanding a reading]

Then, according to ZUN,

“ZUN: *Banyaknya praktek dirumah bersama orang tua saya membuat saya mudah menguasai teknik teknik dalam memahami bacaan teks bahasa*

inggris” [a lot of practice at home with my parents makes it easy for me to master technical techniques in understanding reading English texts.]

b. Strategies for Overcoming Difficulties

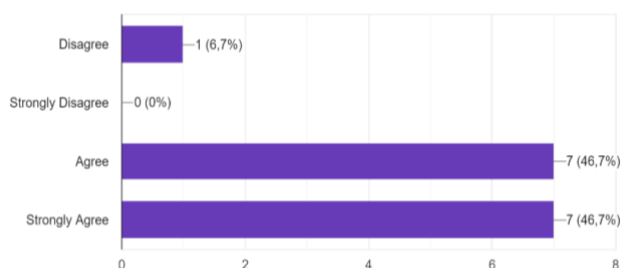


Fig. 5: Strategies in overcoming difficulties

Based on Figure 5, it can be seen that the results of the questionnaire showed that 46.7% students answered “agree” and “strongly agree” regarding the students having strategies in reading English texts. In the interview session with students, the researchers asked the students to explain the strategies they use to deal with the difficulties in reading English texts. Here is the sample of the data.

“NH: dengan cara membaca secara efektif. Kemudian setelah membaca, mencatat poin poin penting dan biasanya saya mencatat di note atau dibukut tulis apabila saya menemukan kosa kata yang baru” [by reading effectively. Then after reading, write down important points and usually I take notes or write in a notebook when I find new vocabulary.]

Meanwhile, according to informant AA,

“Dengan cara memindahkan teks bahasa inggris ke google translate agar lebih cepat dan praktis” [by moving the English text to google translate to make it faster and more practical.]

Moreover, 6.7% of students disagreed and the reasons expressed by AJD are as follows.

“AJD: karena saya tidak terfokus dalam pembelajaran bahasa inggris membuat saya tidak terlalu mencari strategi” [because I am not focused on learning English, I don't really look for strategies.]

Then, according to AMD,

“AMD: Saya tidak tau bagaimana cara mencari strategi dan saya tidak terlalu menyukainya” [I don't know how to figure out the strategy and I don't really like it.]

The results obtained based on the results of questionnaires and interviews that the students' strategies in overcoming difficulties in reading English texts were by recording some

important points that exist and recording new words that have just been obtained so that in the future they do not find any difficulty in understanding these words or sentences, and after that, they will translate what they have noted by using google translate and then practice it with friends. Recording some important points in an English text helps them reveal hidden information. However, some students answered in the interview that they use Google Translate to make it faster and easier. In addition, asking the teacher is a sufficient strategy when getting difficulty in reading English texts.

In this case, according to Eka Sari (2021), in this modern era, the right strategy to deal with difficulties in reading English texts is by memorizing vocabulary, reading English articles or essays, listening to podcasts, memorizing verb forms a lot, and learning seriously and increasing self-confidence. Moreover, to increase confidence by directly practicing speaking face to face with friends, the easiest way to learn vocabulary is by watching movies using subtitles. Meanwhile according to (Lestari et al., 2020) there were 7 strategies used by the students. There were comprehension monitoring, predicting, generating and asking question, activating and using background knowledge, making inferences, summarizing, and visualizing. The most dominant used by students was comprehension monitoring.

Conclusion

To sum up, there are two main points to discuss in this study. First, factors causing the students' difficulties in English reading include the lack of motivation from the teacher to improve the students' reading skills and the lack of the students' vocabulary and pronunciation. The last, the strategies to overcome their difficulties were taking note down some important points in the text and the newly acquired vocabulary, then translating them using google translate, and practicing them with friends.

The researchers experienced some difficulties in conducting the research, especially in the interview session. Because the researcher and participants were hindered by a very long distance, the researcher decided to interview the participants through google meet. Of the fifteen students who filled out the questionnaire, only thirteen students were able to attend the interview session due to unstable internet connections in the area. Moreover, during the interview process, several participants were sometimes late in responding to the questions, even though some did not respond, so the researcher had to ask questions to other respondents. As for further studies, it is significantly necessary to use the appropriate platform to collect the data so that the comprehensive data can be reached well. Especially for the online mode, the researcher should ensure that the internet connection is good enough to collect the data. Moreover, since recently

we are no longer in the emergency condition caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, it will be better to collect the data through offline mode.

REFERENCES

- Asrori, M. (2009). *Psikologi pembelajaran*. Bandung: CV Wacana Prima.
- Brown, H. D. (1994). *Principles of language learning and teaching*. New Jersey: Practice Hall.
- Devito, J. A. (2011). *Komunikasi antar manusia*. Pamulang-Tangerang Selatan: Karisma Publishing Group
- Sari, Z. E. (2021). *Difficulties and strategies in learning English: An analysis of students from English and non-English education department in Indonesia*.
- Grabe, William., & Stoller, F. L. (2002). *Teaching and researching reading*. Longman.
- Irawan, A. (2010). *The factors that cause student's difficulties in comprehending the English reading text of the eight year students of The State Junior High School 1 of Pagaram*. The University of PGRI Palembang, Palembang.
- Kubela, S., Que, S. R., & Patty, J. (2022). Students Perception about Learning Strategies in Reading English Text: Challenges and Solutions at Senior High School Students at Aru Island. *MATAI International Journal of Language Education*, 2(2), 11–22. <https://doi.org/10.30598/matai.v2i2.5943>
- Lestari, T., Muljanto, S., & Hamzah, A. (2020). An analysis of students' difficulties in reading comprehension. In *English Education and Applied Linguistics (EEAL) Journal*, Vol. 43(1).
- Moleong, L. J. (2021). *Metodologi penelitian kualitatif*. PT Remaja Rosdakarya. Bambang Prasetyo dan Lina Miftahul Jannah, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif*, Jakarta: PT Raja Grafindo Persada
- Mubarok, H. (2016). English for young learners teachers' strategy in teaching reading. *Journal Lensa: Kajian Kebahasaan, Kesusastaan, dan Budaya*, 6(1).
- N.K.R. Saraswati., P.E. Dambayana., N.P.A. Pratiwi. (2021). An analysis of students' reading comprehension difficulties of eight grade student. *Jurnal IKA Undiksha*, 19(1).
- Nurjanah, R. L. (2018). The analysis on students' difficulties in doing reading comprehension final test. *Metathesis: Journal of English Language Literature and Teaching*, 2(2), 253–264. <https://doi.org/10.31002/metathesis>
- Rachman, D. (2018). Students' interest in learning English and reading understanding ability using story texts. *JELE (Journal of English Language and Education)*, 4(1), 37. <https://doi.org/10.26486/jele.v4i1.428>
- Rohimah, S. (2021). Reading difficulties and factors affecting reading difficulties of students of grade 1 elementary school. *LADU: Journal of Languages and Education*, 1(5), 189–195. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>
- Safura, S., & Helmanda, C. M. (2020). The analysis of English department students' difficulties in mastering reading text at Muhammadiyah Aceh University. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Studies*, 2(4). <https://doi.org/10.29103/ijevs.v2i4.2200>
- Sangia, R. (2014). *The Process and Purpose of Reading*. 10.17605/OSF.IO/ZQG6P.
- Sapitri, A., Supiatman, L., & Nasution, S. M. (2022). Analysis on students' difficulties in reading comprehension report text. 5(4), 203–208.
- Sari, G.S., Santiastuti, A., & Wahjuningsih, E. (2020). Student' perception on reading comprehension problem in narative text. *LLT Journal: A Journal on Language and Language Learning*, 23(2)

Satin, M. S., Ilyas, R., & Rofi, A. (2018). Students' perception and motivation towards digital text in learning reading. *Journal of English Language Learning (JELL)*, 2(1), 16–29.

Slameto. (2010). *Belajar dan faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhinya*. Jakarta: PT. Rineka Cipta Subadi