The Students' Difficulties in Understanding English Text in the Covid-19 Pandemic Era

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Abstract. This article explores the difficulties of the students in reading English texts in learning at the Covid-19 Pandemic Era and the efforts done by the English teachers. The research has been done by using a qualitative approach by using reading tests and interviews as the instruments of research. The data that have been obtained were analyzed by reading, grouping, coding, and interpreting. Based on the result, it was found that the students have difficulties in determining idea, understanding vocabulary, finding detail information, and making inferences. There are some teacher's efforts to solve of students' difficulties in reading comprehension. They are: explaining more detail, giving new vocabulary, and not allowing the students to speak Arabic language when studying English. The dominant factor that made students difficult in reading English text is that they usually speak Arabic language in classroom. Based on the findings it can be stated that the students had difficulties in understanding English texts, even though they studied English in the pandemic era. However, the teachers had tried to minimize the difficulties by giving more explanation and example to get the information from the text. It is suggested that the teachers in boarding school must give more interesting model to teach the students reading, and also giving the students authentic reading materials to make them being easier to get the ideas from the text.

Keywords: reading difficulties · reading comprehension · pandemic era

1 Introduction

English is learned by Indonesian students as a foreign language. As a foreign language, the students got many difficulties in learning it. Students' difficulties are defined as problems held by the students who did not comprehend the material in their learning process in the classrooms, it made them get bad or low in their ability to master the learning.

There are many factors that make students get difficulties: the students' background knowledge, teaching method, the environment of learning, and the working relationship between teacher and student [1]. Further, the difficulties of students in reading text well arise from internal and external factors. The internal factors can be such as; vocabulary,

pronunciation and acquiring, talent, interest, motivation, mental health, [2], linguistics knowledge, and perceptions [3]. Further, the external factors that make the students are getting difficult in reading comprehension are teacher's influence, family influence, environmental influence [3], reading materials, teachers, and questioning strategies [4]. The factors can influence the students' ability to understand the English text they read.

When the readers read, they need to comprehend to achieve the meaning and information conveyed by the authors. It can be caused by the language system of English being different from the students' own language. Reading is the ability to draw meaning from the printed page and interpret this information appropriately. Chen stated that reading is as a very complex process that needs the readers' activeness to be participated in conveying meaning [5]. Further, reading can also be said a process of interaction and communication between readers and texts [6]. In addition, Hung and Ngan defined reading is as basic skill that can increase students' vocabulary, speaking and writing, and finally can help them to master their target language [7]. So, it can be stated that reading as a process to communicate and interact between students as readers with the authors who write the texts to get understanding for what is reading.

When we read we comprehend because the core of reading is comprehension. Comprehension is the ability in understanding about something, for example a language or text [8]. Brassell and Rasinski said that reading comprehension is the ability to gain information from written text and do something with it in a way that demonstrates knowledge or understanding of that information [9]. Reading comprehension can be also defined as the ability to extract the required information from a written text and interpret this information properly [10]. It is a complex task, which requires the orchestration of many different cognitive skills and abilities.

While interviewing to the English teacher in MAS Baharuddin, the teachers said that most of students cannot read English text correctly especially the students at grade XI. They got some difficulties when they read English text; most of them got difficulties in vocabulary and pronunciations. The dominant factor made students difficult in studying English and read the English text is the habitual of the students to use mostly Arabic than English in their daily classroom interaction. Because they are the *boarding school*'s students, Arabic becomes their daily communication.

The purpose of reading can be for confirming expectations, communicating tasks, extracting specific information, reading for general understanding, reading for getting detailed information, reading for evaluating, reading for criticizing, and reading for getting examination [11, 12]. Some of them can be for entertainment and for taking test [13]. For the purposes of reading, the readers are free to find what materials they read and the condition to gain the purposes of reading itself.

Reading difficulties may occur to some students, not only they who learn in a general school but also in *boarding school.* There are many difficulties of the readers in understanding English text, as: limitation in vocabularies, difficult to activate their background knowledge or schemata while reading, did not able to find main ideas and supporting paragraph, lack of practice, having limited knowledge of genre contribute to their weaknesses in reading, lack of grammar ability, lack of motivation, and lack of interest [14–16]. Another difficulties of the students in reading are related with grammar, point of view, majority of words, meaning of each sentence, moral value, information finding, and

plot [17]. The problems can be occurred when the teachers did not use good strategies, methods, or techniques when they teach reading [18–20]. Because many problems and difficulties happen when reading, this research explores whether the students in Islamic Senior High School Baharuddin as a boarding school had the problems and difficulties as found by the others.

This study was to explore the students' reading English text in the Covid-19 pandemic era where this virus still spread and bothered the process of learning. Covid-19 has given the impacts to the process of learning English in MAS Baharuddin South Tapanuli, especially in reading English text. So, this research was to investigate the students' difficulties in reading English texts of the grade XI MAS Baharuddin. e

2   Research Methodology

The study was conducted by using a qualitative design. Technique of collecting the data were through a reading test and an interview. The location of the research was at MAS Baharuddin South Tapanuli. The participants of this research were 22 students at grade XI and one English teacher. The data that have been obtained were analyzed through qualitative ways. They are done by reading, grouping, coding, and providing the interpretation.

3   Result and Discussion

The students' difficulties in reading English text at MAS Baharuddin were found form reading test that have been given to the students. From 22 students from eleventh grade students of MAS Baharuddin, it was found that they have difficulties in reading English texts. The writer draws up the result of calculation into table and converting them into percentage. Below is the table of difficulties in reading comprehending made by each student of class XI-Agama in MAS Baharuddin. The difficulties are seen in Table 1.

The indicators of reading comprehension that have been evaluated were about finding main ideas, understanding vocabulary, getting detail, and making inferences. From the table, it is seen that there were 95 difficulties of the students in comprehending English texts. In determining main idea, the students got 29 (30.52%) difficulties. In understanding vocabulary, they had 17 (17.90%) difficulties, while in getting detail information they got 24 (25,27%) difficulties. In making inferences, they got 25 (26.31%) difficulties.

From the data above, it is known that the difficulties of the students in comprehending English text are in determining main idea, it is for 30.52% of the students. The students got less difficulties in vocabulary mastery; it means that what have been talked by the teachers before that the most students got dominant problems in vocabulary are not proved, however, in answering the reading test, they can solve the problems in vocabulary more than the others indicators.

In finding main ideas, there were 20 from 22 students who had mistaken to give the answers for the questions number 1, while for the question number 2, there were 9 students who incorrectly answered the test. From 22 students who had difficulties in finding main idea, 8 students did the same thing for both of the items; they had incorrect answers.

Table 1. The calculation of students' difficulties based on indicators

No	Students' Initial Name	Determining Main Idea	Understanding vocabulary	Detail Information	Making Inference
1	AH	2	0	1	1
2	OSD	1	2	0	2
3	MR	2	2	2	1
4	ML	1	0	0	0
5	KH	1	1	1	0
6	RH	1	0	2	1
7	RNS	1	1	1	1
8	FMA	2	1	2	2
9	KML	1	2	2	1
10	YL	1	1	0	2
11	AR	1	0	1	2
12	NA	1	0	1	1
13	FS	2	1	2	1
14	MY	1	1	0	0
15	NS	2	2	2	1
16	CB	0	0	0	1
17	RL	2	1	0	2
18	PMH	1	0	1	0
19	MA	2	2	2	1
20	PR	1	0	2	2
21	WN	1	0	1	1
22	EA	2	0	1	2
The total of each difficulty		**29**	**17**	**24**	**25**
The total of all difficulties		**95**			

For their vocabulary questions, 8 students answered by wrong choices for the first number of vocabulary questions and 9 students for the third number of vocabulary questions, however in the second number of questions they answered correctly, and two students had mistaken in two vocabulary questions.

In finding detail information, 25.27% got mistakes in answering the items of questions. From 3 questions available at this indicator, the first question was answered by the students correctly, however for the next and the last question most students got problems. They could not answer them correctly. 8 students were wrong and for the last questions

there were 13 students did it. It seems that the students are still making mistakes of getting difficult to get the detail information from the English text they read.

For the last indicator, it is making inference. The difficulty was 26.31%, where 16 students were wrong for the first question, and 10 students had difficulties in the questions of making inference number 2. So, it can be said that the students are still unable to recognize the inferences from the texts.

Based on these results in whole, it can be said that the students were still getting problems in finding the ideas from the texts. As found by many researchers before, that the students were still found many difficulties in reading English text [14, 22–24]. The difficulties of the students improved because the situation of Covid-19 era, because there were many problems faced, such as limited era, limited access or limited motivation\in teaching and also about the internet condition [25–27]. Although in *boarding school* the students studied as usual, however the Covid-19 era also gave effect to their teaching and learning process because not all teachers could come to teach them.

Further, the teachers had some solution to handle these problems or difficulties, such as teaching and training the students more about how to locate main idea is, giving the students many English vocabularies to be remembered, suggesting students to have more reading activities.

Something that current information for the reader is that in this article described about the students' difficulties in reading English text at MAS students in *Boarding school Baharuddin* where the students were not getting free from the activities of schooling. However, this condition was not supported them to do best learning process in English because there are the limited time to the teachers who did not live in *boarding school*, so they could not come to the school. So, the teachers must also teach the students by giving the materials only, and the students learned by themselves. Although facing this condition, the teachers have given the solution to the students when the time for coming to the boarding school can be fulfilled by them.

4   Conclusion

It is clear from the results and conversation that the students have difficulties in determining idea, understanding vocabulary, finding detail information, and making inferences. Due to the Covid-19 era's various issues, including restricted time, limited access, and poor enthusiasm for teaching, as well as the state of the internet, the students' challenges have improved.

Authors' Contributions.   The authors have many contribution such as to support the data, to help in analysing the data, and to help in finishing this paper.

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