Reading Comprehension Skills in EFL Students: Obstacles and Solutions in Semesters 2 and 4 at PSDKU ARU

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Abstract
This study explores reading comprehension skills among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, identifying obstacles and solutions specific to students in semesters two and four of the English Education Study Program at PSDKU ARU. The research involved 22 participants from the 2022-2023 academic year. Data were gathered through questionnaires and interviews, both of which were administered to the students. The purpose was to identify the challenges these students face in their reading comprehension and to examine the strategies employed by lecturers to address these issues. By highlighting the main obstacles and the corresponding solutions, this study aims to enhance understanding and provide insights into improving EFL students' reading comprehension skills.

Keywords: *Reading comprehension, obstacles in students' reading comprehension, solutions given by lecturers, solving students' obstacles*

INTRODUCTION

Reading is a fundamental skill in language learning that is closely related to writing, speaking, and listening skills. Strong reading abilities are crucial for improving students' English proficiency. The reading process involves an interaction between the reader and the text to obtain the information and message conveyed by the writer. As explained by Barigan (2015), reading is a process used by readers to acquire messages through words or written language. Additionally, reading serves as a means to gain knowledge, communicate, and share ideas.

Reading is not only about acquiring information but also about expanding students' knowledge and skills. Reinterning (2019) states that reading offers many benefits, such as increasing knowledge, uncovering new information, enhancing concentration, and serving as a source of entertainment. In the context of learning, reading also helps students build critical thinking skills. Furthermore, reading is one of the main ways for students to acquire knowledge in school, and strong reading skills are necessary for them to learn effectively.

Reading skills are closely related to reading comprehension. Reading comprehension is the ability to understand the text being read. However, students often face difficulties in understanding

texts due to factors such as limited vocabulary, grammar issues, pronunciation, as well as lack of motivation and confidence. Based on the experiences and interviews with second and fourth-semester students, it was found that many students struggle to comprehend English texts. Therefore, this study aims to identify the obstacles students face in reading comprehension and propose solutions to address these issues.

Some of the main obstacles identified in reading comprehension include insufficient vocabulary, grammar problems, poor pronunciation, and lack of motivation and self-confidence. These obstacles can prevent students from fully understanding the text. Therefore, this study is important in helping students overcome these challenges so that they can read and understand English texts more effectively in the future.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading is a complex cognitive process that goes beyond simply decoding symbols to derive meaning. It is a fundamental skill for learning and understanding written language, engaging both the eyes and the brain in interpreting text. Snowling & Hulme (2021) define reading as the process of decoding words and attributing meaning to the text, emphasizing the importance of oral language skills as a foundation for developing reading abilities. Similarly, Wolf & Gottwald (2020) argue that reading involves more than understanding words; it requires higher-level information processing to connect the ideas in the text with existing knowledge. They also highlight the growing importance of digital literacy in reading in the modern era. Cain (2022) views reading as a cognitive activity with two main components: decoding and comprehension. Cain stresses that both components must be developed simultaneously for students to become effective readers. Overall, these experts agree that reading is a multifaceted process involving cognitive, linguistic, and emotional skills, all of which must be developed in balance to enable readers to understand texts effectively and efficiently.

Reading comprehension is the ability to understand, interpret, and derive meaning from written text. It goes beyond decoding words, requiring the reader to connect new information to prior knowledge, make inferences, and critically analyze the content to fully grasp the author's intended message. Kintsch (2021) describes reading comprehension as an interactive process between the reader and the text, where the reader constructs a mental model of the information presented. He emphasizes the importance of integrating new information with existing knowledge to achieve deep understanding. Van den Broek (2021) adds that reading comprehension involves a series of complex cognitive processes, including word recognition, making inferences, monitoring comprehension, and drawing conclusions. Effective comprehension requires a balance between automatic skills, such as decoding, and higher-level cognitive abilities. Overall, experts agree that reading comprehension is a multifaceted process that involves not only decoding but also higher-order cognitive skills, such as inference, critical thinking, and the use of strategies to connect new information to prior knowledge.

Obstacles in reading comprehension

Reading comprehension can be hindered by various factors that affect a student's ability to understand and engage with texts. These obstacles include grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, motivation, and confidence. Below is a summary of the key barriers to reading comprehension as discussed by researchers.

1. **Grammar**

   Grammar plays a critical role in understanding the structure of sentences and the relationships between ideas within a text. Poor grammar skills can lead to misunderstandings, particularly with complex or compound sentences. McNamara & Magliano (2022) emphasize that an inadequate grasp of grammar limits a reader's ability to interpret text structure and the nuances of meaning, which is essential in academic or complex reading. Without mastering grammar, students may misinterpret sentence relationships and fail to fully understand the content of the text.

2. **Vocabulary**

   A limited vocabulary is a major barrier to reading comprehension. Students may struggle with unfamiliar words, which can prevent them from grasping the overall meaning of sentences or texts. Duke & Cartwright (2020) note that vocabulary limitations complicate the understanding of complex texts. When students do not know the meaning of certain words or cannot grasp the subtle nuances of word usage in different contexts, they may fail to make connections and interpret the text accurately, leading to comprehension difficulties.

3. **Pronunciation**

   Pronunciation errors can negatively impact reading comprehension, especially in texts that require accurate oral reading. Gonzales & Perez (2022) argue that incorrect pronunciation can cause students to misinterpret words and phrases, affecting their overall understanding of the text. If students struggle with pronunciation, they may not recognize words in context, further hindering their ability to comprehend the material.

4. **Lack of Motivation**

   Motivation is a critical factor in reading comprehension. Students who lack motivation may avoid reading altogether, leading to underdeveloped reading skills. Guthrie & Wigfield (2022) suggest that motivation is influenced by the relevance and interest of the reading material. When texts are seen as uninteresting or disconnected from students' lives, their motivation to engage with the material decreases, which in turn affects their comprehension and overall reading development.

5. **Lack of Confidence**

   Confidence plays a significant role in students' ability to engage with and understand texts. When students lack confidence in their reading abilities, they may avoid reading or struggle to comprehend even simple texts. Schunk & Zimmerman (2021) explain that a student's self-confidence in reading is influenced by previous experiences positive experiences can boost confidence, while negative experiences can diminish motivation.

METHODS

Participant, Location and Procedure

In this research, the students in the English education study program, semesters 2, are 12 students and semester 4 are 8 students at PSDKU ARU are included as participants. They are registered as students. The subject material is extensive reading and academic reading for the 2022 and 2023 academic year. The role of the lecturer is a facilitator who helps students if there are problems in students reading comprehension.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

In collecting the data, the researchers used two main instruments namely Questionnaire and Interview. According to Sugiono (2013), questionnaires are an efficient data collection technique if the researcher knows exactly the variables to be measured and knows what is expected from respondents. There are five alternative answers that respondents can choose namely strongly agree (SS), agree (S), neutral (N), disagree (TS), and strongly disagree (STS). For qualitative analysis, the answer is a score that can be given. According to Sugiono (2013). Distributing the Questionnaire and Interview, which happened after the research from the teacher allowed us to conduct a study on the EFL Students in semesters 2 and 4 at PSDKU ARU. It took 3 days to distribute the questionnaire, and the researcher guided the students in giving their responses to each item's question. After all the questions had been answered by the students the research continued with interviews with some students to support the result of the questionnaire the researcher guided the students in giving their responses for each question item.

Data Analysis Technique Quantitative

In analyzing the result of the questionnaire, the researcher used a formula by Sugiono (2005) in Indarted (2012) as follows:

$$\frac{f}{n} \; x \;\; 100\%$$

f   : answer frequently
n   : amount of respondents
100% : constant number

Data Analysis Technique Qualitative

In this study, the researchers use qualitative methods to analyze the data obtained from research on obstacles to reading comprehension among EFL students in semesters 2 and 4 at PSDKU ARU. According to Reswell (in Daman Satori & Aan KO Mariah, 2017,) which states that the definition of qualitative research method is a process of inquiry (questioning/investigation) regarding the understanding of something to obtain data, information, and texts of respondents' views

FINDINGS

Research findings on students' obstacles and solutions in reading comprehension

The findings of the research conducted through a questionnaire and interview were to obtain students' perceptions of their obstacles in reading comprehension: Grammar, Vocabulary, pronunciation, lack of motivation to read, and lack of confidence to read and the solution given by their lecturers to solve their obstacles in reading comprehension.

The table Results of the Questionnaire

NO	Statement	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	Pengetahuan tata Bahasa saya rendah sehingga saya sulit memahami bacaan	2	9,09 %	6	27,27 %	10	45,45 %	3	13,63 %	1	4,54%

No		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
2	Saya tidak perna berusaha meningkatkan kemampuan tata bahasa inggris saya karena menurut saya tata Bahasa inggris sulit	-	-	-	-	4	18,18 %	11	50 %	7	31,81 %
3	Saya tidak memahami bacaan karena kosakata saya kurang	-		9	40,90 %	9	40,90 %	4	18,18 %	-	-
4	Saya tidak perna berusaha untuk menambah kosakata sehingga saya tetap sulit memahami bacaan	-	-	2	9,09%	3	13,63 %	9	40,90 %	8	36,36 %
5	Kemampuan pengucapan/pronuncitation saya kurang baik sehingga saya malu jika diminta membaca nyaring di kelas	2	9,09 %	3	13,63 %	8	36,36 %	6	27,27 %	3	13,63 %
6	Saya tidak perna berusaha meningkatkan kemampuan pengucapan pronuncitation saya	-	-	-	-	1	4,54%	12	54,54 %	9	40,90 %
7	Saya jarang membaca karena motivasi saya rendah	-	-	-	-	6	27,27 %	9	40,90 %	7	31,81 %
8	Saya tidak tauh bagaimana caranya meningkatkan motivasi membaca	1	4,54 %	2	9,09%	4	18,18 %	9	40,90 %	6	27,27 %
9	Saya tidak percaya diri saat membaca	-	-	3	13,63 %	3	13,63 %	1	50%	6	27,27 %
10	Saya tidak tauh bagaimana caranya meningkatkan rasa percaya diri untuk membaca	1	4,54 %	5	22,72 %	7	31,81 %	6	27,27 %	4	18,18 %

The result of the Interview

Based on the results of interview number 1, it can be concluded that students in semesters 2 and 4 said it is essential to improve reading comprehension. Some students said that it is very important to improve their reading skills because they are future English teachers in the future. There are some students also said that it is very important to improve their reading ability because by reading they can understand the reading in text properly and correctly but there are some students also said that when improving reading ability, they can improve their pronunciation ability. The students also said that it is important to improve reading skills because it can improve grammar skills and increase their vocabulary and can make exercises given by the course lecturer.

Based on the results of interview number 2, it can be concluded that students in semesters 2 and 4 face various obstacles when understanding English texts. Thirteen students mentioned that their main difficulty is a lack of vocabulary, which makes it hard for them to comprehend English texts. The next challenge identified is a lack of pronunciation skills, reported by 2 students, which prevents them from understanding the text properly. Additionally, students noted that long texts are another obstacle to understanding. The length of the text makes it difficult for them to grasp the information conveyed. Other challenges include grammar, which hinders comprehension for 2 students, and a lack of self-confidence when reading, which was mentioned by 1 student as a barrier to understanding the material. Lastly, 2 students pointed out that IELTS texts pose a particular challenge in terms of reading comprehension.

Based on the results of the interviews, it can be concluded that students in semesters 2 and 4 received various strategies from their lecturers to enhance their reading comprehension skills. These strategies included listening to music and watching English movies with subtitles (mentioned by 5 students), wrap-up (3 students), click and clunk (2 students), CSR (1 student), summarizing (4 students), diligent reading to understand the content (5 students), and focusing on keywords (2 students). Students reported that the strategies provided by their lecturers were easy to apply and significantly helped improve their reading comprehension skills. Overall, the strategies were considered helpful and effective in enhancing their understanding of English texts.

Based on the results of the interview, it can be concluded that students in semesters 2 and 4 receive various assignments from their lecturers and apply the strategies provided. A. The assignments given by their lecturers include: 13 students reported receiving short story assignments, 5 students were assigned to make conclusions and complete sentences, 2 students received assignments involving TOEFL preparation, science articles, and literature, and 1 student had to work on a text and poster. Another student mentioned an assignment involving reading a text and answering questions. B. Students not only used the strategies provided by their lecturers but also applied other strategies on their own to aid their learning.

Based on these results it can be concluded that students in semesters 2 and 4 when they find a new word or have difficulty in understanding the reading then they use the application to translate the sentence as 10 students when they find a new word in reading, they look for a translation using Google translate to understand the word. But there are 4 students who when they find a new word they try to understand the meaning of the word and there are 8 students who when they find a new word in reading, they will use a dictionary to find the meaning of the word.

Based on the responses from semester 2 and 4 students, the following conclusions can be made: a. **Early English Education:** Few students had the opportunity to learn English during elementary school, and many did not have English subjects at that time. They started learning English in junior high school and high school. However, some students, especially those from remote villages, did not have access to English education due to the absence of English teachers in their schools. b. **Reading Comprehension Challenges:** Throughout their schooling, students identified reading comprehension as one of the major challenges in learning English. They often struggled to understand English texts when asked to read them. **c**. **Teacher Support:** When facing difficulties in reading comprehension, English teachers provided solutions and support, especially focusing on the reading comprehension process to help them improve.d. **Effectiveness of Strategies:** Students reported that the strategies provided by their lecturers were helpful in improving their reading comprehension skills. **e. English Courses:** Some students attended English courses outside of school, while others never had the opportunity to do so. **f. Lack of Strategy Instruction in English Courses:** Among those who attended English courses, several

students mentioned that they were not given specific strategies by their tutors to help improve their reading comprehension skills.

Based on these results, it can be concluded that there are several final assignments given by lecturers but there are also those who say that they have not received final assignments from their course lecturers. a. 8 students from semester 2 said that the final assignment given by the course lecturer was a short story and 9 students from semester 4 got a final assignment from their lecturer that they worked on an exercise with see keywords and there were 5 students said that they had not received the final assignment from the course lecturer. b. 10 students said that they used the strategy given by their course lecturer to work on the assignment given by the lecturer such as seeing keywords in the text or exercise, but 12 students said that they used other strategies to create or work on the exercise.

Based on the above results, it can be concluded that: a. Students of semesters 2 and 4 often read English texts at home without being asked by lecturers and the types of texts they read are 20 students often read English texts such as poetry, short stories, and novels and 1 student often reads motivational words in the internet and books and there is 1 student also often hears English songs. b. The duration when they read is 5 minutes to 2 hours c. They said that their habit of reading outside of class hours helped improve their reading skills.

Based on these results, it can be concluded that students in semesters 2 and 4 have the effort to improve their grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, motivation, and confidence to improve their reading comprehension skills in various ways that they do to succeed in their reading comprehension process.

Based on these results, it can be concluded that there are several other sources such as applications used to help students in semesters 2 and 4 understand the reading or words in their texts, namely as follows: There are several sources that they use to improve their reading comprehension skills, the first is that there are several students who use a dictionary application then there are also those who use YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. Some students use online novels, chat GPT on the website, Duolingo Google translate but some students use additional applications such as Google Speak, and Elsa Speak fast on their respective mobile phones.

DISCUSSION
The results of the Questionnaire about obstacles in reading comprehension
Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the first statement about a lack of understanding of grammar does not represent a significant barrier to reading comprehension. The second statement suggests that students in semesters 2 and 4 struggle with understanding texts due to insufficient vocabulary. The third claim highlights that students often avoid reading aloud due to poor pronunciation, and while some try to improve their pronunciation, others lack motivation. Some students are aware of strategies to increase motivation, while others are not. The study also reveals that while some students are confident in their reading abilities, others struggle with self-confidence. Therefore, students are encouraged to seek ways to improve both their confidence and reading skills.

The results of these interviews about obstacles and solutions in reading comprehension
Based on the interviews, students in the second and fourth semesters face several key challenges in reading comprehension, including grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, reading motivation, and lack of confidence. Hamra and Satriani (2010) note that limited vocabulary is a significant factor hindering reading comprehension, as students struggle to understand complex

texts, leading to diminished motivation. Jayanti (2016) similarly highlights that vocabulary, lack of motivation, low self-confidence, and ineffective strategies contribute to difficulties in reading comprehension among Indonesian students. These challenges can result in lower academic achievement, difficulty in problem-solving, and barriers to future success. However, despite these obstacles, course lecturers provide various strategies to support students, such as reading enjoyable and accessible texts, summarizing readings, focusing on keywords, and using techniques like "wrap up," "CSR," "Click and Clunk." Additional methods, such as watching English-language movies with subtitles and expanding vocabulary, are also encouraged to help students overcome their reading comprehension challenges and improve their skills.

CONCLUSION

One of the primary obstacles to reading comprehension is limited vocabulary, as many students struggle to understand unfamiliar words, which hinders their ability to grasp the full meaning of a text. This lack of vocabulary not only slows down the comprehension process but also reduces reading fluency. Complex grammar structures present another significant barrier, as students often find it challenging to interpret sentences with complicated grammatical elements that are uncommon in spoken language, particularly when dealing with long or intricate sentences. While pronunciation does not always directly affect reading comprehension, many students feel insecure when reading aloud due to difficulties with pronunciation, especially in foreign languages. This insecurity often causes them to focus more on pronouncing words correctly than on understanding the text's content, thereby affecting their reading fluency. Low motivation is another key factor, as many students perceive reading as difficult or uninteresting, especially when the material seems too challenging or irrelevant to their interests. This lack of motivation leads to infrequent reading practice, which hampers the development of their reading skills. Additionally, some students struggle with a lack of confidence, particularly when asked to read in front of others. The fear of making mistakes or being ridiculed by peers often discourages them from fully engaging in reading activities, making them passive learners and reluctant participants in classroom exercises. These obstacles collectively impact the students' overall reading comprehension and fluency.

To overcome obstacles in reading comprehension, a holistic approach is essential, targeting improvements in vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, motivation, and self-confidence. Lecturers have recommended various strategies, including reading enjoyable and accessible books, practicing reading diligently, summarizing texts, identifying and focusing on keywords, and employing techniques like Wrap Up, Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR), and Click and Clunk. Additional methods include taking notes on key information, watching English-language movies with subtitles, and actively expanding vocabulary to enhance comprehension skills.

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