# TEACHER'S EFFORTS TO OVERCOME STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN READING COMPREHENSION

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**Abstract**
*Reading comprehension is one of the language skills that is learned by the students in senior high schools in Indonesia and is believed as the hardest English skill. The purpose of this research is to find out the reading comprehension difficulties faced by the students of MAN Model Banda Aceh and the teacher's efforts to overcome those problems. This research used descriptive qualitative method and the data collection was done by means of a written test and an interview. The written test was done to find out the difficulties faced by the students in reading comprehension which scoped into five categories namely finding main idea, factual information, vocabulary, reference and inference. Additionally, the result shows that the biggest problem faced by the students was finding main idea and the least problem was vocabulary. Furthermore, the interview was conducted to find out the teacher's efforts such as previewing, predicting, skimming, and scanning, guessing from the context and paraphrasing to assist the learners. The most common efforts made by the teacher to overcome the students' difficulties in reading comprehension were skimming and scanning, using contextual clue, and predicting.*

**Keywords:** *Reading, comprehension, EFL learners.*

## INTRODUCTION

Reading is one of the most important skills that should be mastered because if students cannot read well, the door towards the path of learning will most often be closed for them. In Indonesia, reading comprehension is one of reading component skills learned by senior high school students in the context of teaching English subject. Reading comprehension is the only reading skill to be evaluated in National Examination and also as one of the competencies that must be developed in the high school based on the new Curriculum 2013 (Depdiknas, 2013).

Reading comprehension is the interaction process of readers and building the meaning of text, the implementation of the knowledge and information found in the text (Pardo, 2004) as cited in Ellen (2006, p. 58). So, to master the reading comprehension well, the student should understand the text. According to King and Stanley (2009), as cited in Bahri (2014, p. 13), in mastering the reading text, there are five components that should be considered by the student in reading the text namely main idea, factual information, vocabulary, reference and inference. Based on the result of a preliminary research done by the researchers at MAN Model Banda Aceh, it was found that most of the students could not master all the components of reading comprehension and had difficulties in these. For instance, they had difficulty in finding main idea, understanding the purpose of the text, and guessing the vocabulary related to the text. According to Joseph (2005, p. 1172), not knowing meanings of concepts, not capturing factual information, not inferring about content, and not

forming relationships among content presented in text or in previous texts, are some difficulties in understanding the text.

The efforts that the teacher can make to help the students overcome the difficulties in reading comprehension are teaching and asking them to use some reading strategies. According to Duffy (2002) as cited in Ness (2011, p. 99), teaching reading strategies is an effort which can guide and help the student understand the text. Thus, the teacher has an important role in making some efforts to overcome the students' problems in mastering reading comprehension text. In fact, the assistance from the teacher will make it easier for the students to master the text. As a good teacher, helping the students is one of the best ways to improve their ability in learning reading comprehension. Duke, et al. (2011, p. 63), state that good teachers of reading comprehension will help their students evolve the usage of strategies by teaching them why, how, and when to apply certain strategies. There are many strategies that can be taught by the teacher to overcome students' difficulties. According to the National Capital Language Resource Center (2009, p. 1), the strategies which can help the student read effectively are previewing, predicting, skimming and scanning, guessing from context and paraphrasing.

From the elaborations above, therefore, the research questions were formulated as follows:
1.  What problems of reading comprehension are faced by the students of MAN Model Banda Aceh?
2.  What are the efforts made by the teacher of MAN Model Banda Aceh to solve the students' problems in reading comprehension?

**METHODS**

This study was conducted at MAN Model Banda Aceh, one of the popular Islamic senior high schools in the region. Descriptive qualitative was the method applied in this study.  In this research, there were two subjects involved. The first subject was 27 students which were chosen purposefully from grade XI MIA 2 of MAN Model Banda Aceh. The second subject was an English teacher of MAN Model Banda Aceh, who teaches grade XI. In addition, there were two objects in this study. The first is the problems faced by the students in reading comprehension. The second is the efforts made by the teacher to solve the students' problems in reading comprehension.

There were two instruments used in this study, namely written test and interview. The researchers gave the written test to the students' in order to find out the difficulties faced by the students in reading comprehension. The test consisted of 20 questions including 5 components of reading comprehension, namely main idea, factual information, vocabulary, reference, and inference. The time given to the students was 60 minutes. The questions were adopted from Urip (2013, p. 24). Moreover, the purpose of the interview was to know the strategies used by the teacher in solving the students' problems in reading comprehension. The questions of the interview were adopted from Cabaroglu and Yurdaisik (2008, p. 154) and asked in Bahasa Indonesia to the teacher. There were 8 questions in the interview. During the interview, the conversation was recorded by using a phone recorder.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

After giving the test to the students, the researchers classified the students' problems into five categories, namely finding main idea, factual information, vocabulary, reference and inference. Then, the researchers calculated the percentage of the students' difficulties in reading comprehension which is presented in Figure 1.

By and large, the result indicates that all students seem to have problems in all aspects of reading comprehension. The students' biggest problem in reading comprehension is finding main idea of the text (42 %), followed by reference (22 %). The third was factual information (16%). The fourth was inference (12 %) and the last was the vocabulary (8 %).
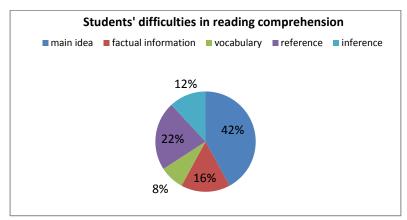
**Figure 1.** The percentage of students' problems in reading comprehension text.

Firstly, the result of written test shows that main idea was the biggest problem faced by the students in reading comprehension. To overcome this problem, the teacher made several efforts. The teacher said that in helping the students solve the problem of main idea, she asked them to do skimming, previewing and other strategies such as repeating. From the teacher's arguments, it seems that the teacher asked the students to preview while facing the main idea problem. This effort is supported by the National Capital Language Resource Center (2009, p. 1) and Gunning (2010, p. 1) who said that previewing would help the students recognize the main idea of the text and increase students' reading comprehension ability. Another strategy that can be used in solving main idea problem is skimming. It is also supported by the National Capital Language Resource Center (2009, p. 1), that stated that using skimming would help student find main idea of the text quickly. In addition, the teacher said that to solve the students in finding main idea is by asking them to do repeating. The teacher argued that by asking them to repeat reading the text, they would find it easier to find main idea. Furthermore, Pressley (2000) as cited in Ratna (2014, p. 4) said that "*Repetition strategy can be used by the student as they want to remember important point*".

Secondly, reference was the second problem faced by the students based on their written test result. In solving this problem, the teacher made some efforts which can help the students. She asked the students to use some strategies to solve the difficulty in reference in reading comprehension. First, the teacher asked the students to do scanning because scanning is a very useful strategy to find out the certain word at we need in the passage. The teacher's statement about scanning is also relevant with the effort suggested by the National Capital Language Resource Center (2009, p. 1), that scanning would assist the student in getting the needed information in a text. The second effort made by the teacher was guessing from context. Here, the teacher asked the students to look back to the specific sentences which are related to information needed by the students to find the reference word. In guessing from context, the students have to find the ideas in the text as clues to get the information needed (The National Capital Language Resource Center, 2009, p. 1).

The third problem the students had in reading comprehension was finding factual information. To overcome the obstacle in factual information, first she asked her students to scan the text to find the stated information needed. Next is to preview the text. This way, the students can recognize the factual information of the text more easily. The National Capital Language Resource Center (2009, p. 1) and Gunning (2010, p. 1) supported that the usage of previewing would give a beneficial help to the student in getting the information of the passage. Oxford (1990) as cited in Ratna (2014, p. 4) also stated that using repetition in reading the text will make the reader understand the information in the text well. The teacher also stated the same thing that asking the students to do repetition in reading may allow them to get the information that they need.

The fourth problem the students faced while mastering reading comprehension was inference. Regarding this issue, the first effort made by the teacher was asking them to paraphrase. The teacher believed that doing paraphrase or using their own words could help them understand the context of the text. The National Capital Language Resource Center (2009, p. 1) and Gunning (2010, p. 1) claimed that paraphrasing is one of the effective strategies in helping the student find out the

purpose of the content. The other effort made by the teacher was asking the students to preview the purpose of the text. By using previewing strategy, the students will get the purpose of the text in a more effective manner. According to the National Capital Language Resource Center (2009, p. 1), asking students some questions related to the text would offer them some information that can help them understand the content of the text. The teacher's statement was also related to Joseph (2005, p. 1172), who said that the students will have better understanding of the text when teacher is creating questions linked to the text during teaching reading comprehension. The last effort that the teacher made to help students overcome the difficulty in inference was asking them to use predicting in getting the content of the text. She believed that predicting would help the students get the purpose of the text even though this method could not guarantee the correctness of the text context. The usage of predicting would lead the students to guess the subject of the text (The National Capital Language Resource Center, 2009; Gunning, 2010).

Finally, the least problem the students faced was vocabulary. To deal with this problem, the teacher claimed that she asked the students to use the strategies, for instance guessing the meaning of vocabulary by using contextual clue of the text, predicting, and giving another word. The above efforts made by the teacher to solve the students' problem in vocabulary are similar to the study conducted by Al-Darasyeh (2014, p. 1112), who stated that giving students synonym and antonym and asking them to use the strategy related to contextual clues are some efforts that teacher makes in teaching vocabulary in reading comprehension.

Furthermore, the teacher believes that by using eliciting strategy, the students will master the reading comprehension skill more easily. Eliciting strategy is also known as R. A. R. E (Restate the question; Answer the question; Reasons given; and Examples from the text) strategy. Tac (2014, p. 1) says that, "*R.A.R.E. strategy is by restating the question, answering the question; reasoning given, and giving examples from the text*".

From all efforts that the teacher made, there are four of them that the teacher used most. The first is asking them to do skimming in which the students will read the entire text. Reading the text from the first paragraph until the final paragraph will help student understand the text well. The National Capital Language Resource Center (2009, p. 1) stated that skimming is a flexible strategy which can be used in different situations such as finding main idea and the text structure.

The second is asking the students to scan the text. This strategy is used only for several aims such as getting reference or factual information of the text. This is linked with the National Capital Language Resource Center (2009, p. 1), who said that scanning is speed reading activity used for finding specific information. Despite the fact that this strategy is only used for several activities, scanning is really helpful for getting specific information of the text without wasting much time.

The third is asking the students to guess by using contextual clue. Contextual clue is the most valuable strategy that can be taught to the students because this strategy only uses the information of the text. It is supported by the National Capital Language Resource Center (2009, p. 1). In addition, contextual clue can be used by the teacher to help the students overcome the problems in reading comprehension.

The last effort made by the teacher is asking the students to do predicting. This is linked with the suggested effort from the National Capital Language Resource Center (2009, p. 1), the usage of predicting is flexible that can be used for guessing the content, unknown words, and also the understanding of the text

**CONCLUSION**

From the research findings, it can be concluded that the students of grade XI MIA 2 MAN Model Banda Aceh still have difficulties in reading comprehension skill such as finding main idea, finding factual information, vocabulary, reference and inference. Among those problems, finding main idea became the biggest problem that the students had in reading comprehension. In order to overcome these problems, the teacher made some efforts. Among the efforts, the most common ones made by the teacher were skimming, scanning, guessing from context and predicting.

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