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## INVESTIGATING READING COMPREHENSION PROBLEMS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

By

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**Abstract:** *This study investigated the reading comprehension problems experienced by sixth-grade students in English language learning at SD Negeri Sanggarwinaya. The research was conducted because many students had difficulty understanding English texts, particularly in identifying main ideas, distinguishing supporting details, understanding vocabulary, and making inferences. The objective of the study was to identify the problems faced by students and the factors influencing their reading comprehension ability. This research employed a qualitative case study design. The participants consisted of ten sixth-grade students and one English teacher. Data were collected through classroom observation, interviews, documentation, and a reflective journal, then analyzed through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings showed that students experienced significant difficulties in understanding unfamiliar vocabulary, identifying the main idea of a paragraph, and comprehending the overall meaning of a text. In addition, students tended to read word by word and rarely applied reading strategies such as skimming and scanning. The study also found that low motivation, limited vocabulary exposure, inadequate family support, and teacher-centered instructional practices contributed to students' reading comprehension problems. Therefore, improving reading strategies, motivation, and instructional support is necessary to enhance students' English reading comprehension*

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## INTRODUCTION

Reading ability is one of the most important skills for students because it supports academic success in almost all subjects. Reading is not only the process of recognizing words, but also understanding meaning, analyzing information, and connecting the text with prior knowledge. In English language learning at the elementary school level, reading becomes more challenging because students must understand unfamiliar vocabulary, sentence

structures, and cultural contexts. Therefore, students need effective reading strategies so that they can understand English texts more easily.

Preliminary observations at SD Negeri Sanggarwinaya showed that sixth-grade students experienced several difficulties in understanding English texts. Many students had problems identifying the main idea and distinguishing it from supporting details. They often focused only on individual words and could not understand the overall meaning of the text, especially when they encountered unfamiliar vocabulary or complex sentences. In addition, students were not familiar with reading strategies such as skimming and scanning. Teachers also tended to focus more on pronunciation than on comprehension, so students often answered questions by guessing instead of truly understanding the text.

Another problem found was that students had difficulty connecting the content of English texts with their own experiences or prior knowledge. Many of them were unable to make simple inferences or understand implicit meanings in the text. As a result, students tended to read literally and struggled to understand idioms or expressions that required contextual understanding. Besides these cognitive difficulties, students also showed low motivation to read English texts because they considered them too difficult and uninteresting. The limited variety of reading materials and the lack of discussion activities made students less engaged in reading.

Although many previous studies have discussed reading comprehension problems, there is still limited research focusing specifically on sixth-grade students at SD Negeri Sanggarwinaya. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the reading comprehension problems experienced by these students and the factors that influence them. The novelty of this research lies in its qualitative exploration of the relationship between students' cognitive difficulties, reading strategies, motivation, and classroom teaching practices in a real elementary school context.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the English reading comprehension problems experienced by sixth-grade students at SD Negeri Sanggarwinaya. The research was conducted at SD Negeri Sanggarwinaya, Subang Regency, from September to October 2025. The population consisted of all students at the school, while the sample was limited to sixth-grade students because they were the focus of the study. The study used primary data obtained through observation and interviews. The research instruments included a students' learning activity observation sheet, interview guides for the teacher and students, a reflective journal, and documentation. Observation was used to examine students' activeness, comprehension, vocabulary mastery, and ability to identify the main idea during English learning activities. Interviews were conducted with one English teacher and ten sixth-grade students to explore more deeply the reading difficulties they experienced. In addition, a literature study was used to provide theoretical support and compare the findings with previous studies.

The data were collected through observation, interviews, and literature study. Observation was conducted at the beginning of the research by directly observing the classroom learning process and the students' conditions. After that, in-depth interviews were carried out to obtain information about the factors affecting students' reading

comprehension, such as vocabulary mastery, reading strategies, motivation, and support from teachers and families. The collected data were then analyzed using Sugiyono’s interactive analysis model, which consists of three stages. The first stage was data reduction, in which the researcher selected, simplified, grouped, and focused only on the relevant data. The second stage was data presentation, in which the data were organized and described systematically to make them easier to understand. The final stage was conclusion drawing and verification, in which the researcher interpreted the findings and ensured that the conclusions were consistent with the data obtained in the field.

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The following are some findings from the results of interviews conducted with teachers and students:

Table 1. Research Findings

No.	Quotation from Interview	Explanation
1.	“Mereka paling sering kesulitan memahami kosakata baru dan membedakan ide pokok dengan informasi pendukung.” (Guru)	Indicates major reading problems: limited vocabulary and difficulty identifying main ideas.
2.	“Saya kurang suka membaca bahasa Inggris karena banyak kata yang tidak saya mengerti.” (Siswa)	Shows lack of motivation influenced by vocabulary limitations.
3.	“Saya sering bingung kalau menjawab pertanyaan karena tidak paham semua isi teks.” (Siswa)	Demonstrates difficulty constructing overall meaning from the text.
4.	“Motivasi siswa banyak yang rendah karena teks dirasa terlalu sulit.” (Guru)	Motivation becomes a significant factor affecting comprehension.
5.	“Kadang saya menggunakan gambar atau video, tapi belum rutin.” (Guru)	Limited learning media influences students’ ability to comprehend texts.
6.	“Biasanya saya bertanya ke guru atau menebak dari gambar.” (Siswa)	Shows reliance on teacher support and lack of independent reading strategies.

**Problems Faced by Students**

The findings indicate that the greatest reading comprehension problem among sixth-grade students is limited vocabulary mastery. Students often fail to understand the meaning of words, making it difficult for them to understand sentences and the overall text. As a result, they struggle to answer comprehension questions and depend heavily on the teacher for explanations. This confirms that vocabulary is the foundation of reading comprehension and strongly influences students’ ability to understand English texts.

Another major difficulty is identifying the main idea of a text. Many students focus only on individual words or sentences instead of understanding the text as a whole. Consequently, they cannot distinguish between the main idea and supporting details. Their reading also tends to remain at a literal level because they have not yet developed inferential

skills such as drawing conclusions, making generalizations, or understanding implied meanings.

Reading fluency and motivation also contribute to students' comprehension problems. Students who read slowly and stop frequently to decode unfamiliar words often lose track of the meaning of the text. In addition, repeated difficulties in reading English texts make students feel frustrated and less motivated to practice. Low motivation is further influenced by unfamiliar topics and the lack of interesting reading materials, causing students to become disengaged from reading activities.

Furthermore, students have weak independent reading skills because they rarely use strategies such as predicting, summarizing, or guessing meaning from context. Instead, they rely on the teacher whenever they face difficulties. Environmental factors, such as limited support at home and lack of access to English reading materials, also reduce students' opportunities to improve. Finally, the study suggests that reading strategy instruction in the classroom is still limited, which prevents students from developing stronger comprehension skills.

### **Factors Affecting Reading Comprehension**

Vocabulary is one of the most important factors affecting students' reading comprehension. Students with limited vocabulary cannot fully understand sentences or connect ideas within a text, resulting in incomplete comprehension. The findings show that both the teacher and students viewed vocabulary as the main barrier to understanding English texts. This demonstrates that vocabulary knowledge is essential because it forms the basis for interpreting meaning while reading.

Cognitive factors, especially the use of reading strategies, also strongly influence comprehension. Many students do not use strategies such as skimming, scanning, summarizing, or making inferences when they read. Instead, they tend to read word by word and rely on the teacher for help. As a result, they find it difficult to regulate their own understanding and become less independent readers. The lack of strategy instruction in the classroom further limits their ability to comprehend texts effectively.

Motivation and interest are also important factors. Many students believe that English texts are too difficult, which reduces their confidence and willingness to read. When students feel bored, anxious, or afraid of making mistakes, they participate less in reading activities and have fewer opportunities to improve. In addition, the classroom atmosphere and peer influence can either support or hinder comprehension. Students who feel comfortable and confident are more likely to engage actively and develop better reading skills.

Environmental and instructional factors also contribute to students' reading difficulties. Some students receive little support at home and rarely read outside the classroom, slowing their progress. Limited teaching resources, such as the infrequent use of technology and visual media, make reading lessons less engaging and harder to understand. Furthermore, limited class time and traditional teaching methods reduce opportunities for students to practice reading strategies and build stronger comprehension skills.

### **CONCLUSION**

The findings show that students experience major reading comprehension problems, especially limited vocabulary, difficulty identifying main ideas, distinguishing details, and

making inferences. Their word-by-word reading causes only literal understanding and makes them confused when answering comprehension questions.

Students' reading comprehension is influenced by internal factors, such as low vocabulary, motivation, confidence, and limited reading strategies, as well as external factors, including teaching methods, lack of media and technology, limited family support, and insufficient reading practice at home.

### Suggestions

Schools should improve students' reading comprehension by providing more reading materials, technology, and literacy programs, while also training teachers to use interactive and strategy-based instruction. Future researchers are encouraged to use broader methods, larger participants, and different settings to explore students' reading difficulties and examine the effectiveness of reading strategies, technology, and multimedia in improving comprehension.

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