

An Analysis of the Reading Comprehension Levels of Class VIII Students in Descriptive Texts at SMP Negeri 7 Medan

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47175/rielsj.v5i4.1094>

| Jessica C. F. Silaen¹ | Thania Theresia² | Rahmawati^{3,*} | Mayasari⁴ |

^{1,2,3}Universitas Prima

Indonesia, Medan, Indonesia

⁴Universitas Harapan Medan,
Medan, Indonesia

*rahmawati@unprimdn.ac.id



This work is licensed
under a Creative Commons Attribution-
ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the reading comprehension levels of Class VIII students in descriptive texts at SMP Negeri 7 Medan. Reading is a fundamental skill for language learners, especially for students learning English as a foreign language. However, many students face difficulties in comprehending descriptive texts, such as identifying key details, understanding the structure, and drawing accurate conclusions. These challenges are attributed to limited vocabulary, lack of familiarity with descriptive text conventions, and ineffective reading strategies. This research will evaluate students' comprehension levels and the effectiveness of current teaching strategies and materials. The findings are expected to provide insights that contribute to the improvement of reading instruction and strategies, benefiting both students and educators, and enhancing literacy education in junior high schools across Indonesia.

KEYWORDS

Reading comprehension; descriptive texts; Class VIII Students; SMP Negeri 7 Medan; English Language Learning; teaching strategies; literacy development.

INTRODUCTION

Reading is a fundamental skill for students learning English, whether it is their second language or a foreign language. It serves as a crucial tool for understanding and conveying meaning through text. For learners of English as a foreign language, reading can be particularly challenging due to differences between English and their native languages, which can complicate comprehension and interpretation. Rao (2009) emphasizes that reading plays a significant role in developing language skills beyond just reading itself. It aids in vocabulary building and sentence construction, which in turn enhances listening and speaking abilities. This indicates that reading is integral to overall language proficiency and effective grammar usage.

Reading comprehension is essential for academic success across various subjects. It allows students to process and understand written information, engage with content, and apply knowledge. Snow (2002) defines reading comprehension as the interactive process of extracting and constructing meaning from written language. This process involves not only understanding the text but also interpreting and integrating information.

Anderson, as cited in Nunan (2003) and Kartawijaya (2017), describes reading as a process where readers combine information from the text with their prior knowledge to construct meaning. Klinger et al. (2002) characterize reading comprehension as a complex process involving interactions between the reader's background knowledge, strategies, and text characteristics. Similarly, Smith and Robinson (1980), as cited in Irwanto and Sitti

(2017), assert that comprehension involves understanding, evaluating, and utilizing information from the interaction between reader and author.

Despite its importance, many students encounter difficulties in reading comprehension. Kluger et al. (2003) highlights that true comprehension requires a deep understanding of the text's various aspects. Chastain (1975) notes that while understanding every detail is not necessary, grasping the writer's intended message is crucial. Effective reading is therefore dependent on meaningful comprehension.

Descriptive texts are a key component of the curriculum for Class VIII students at SMP Negeri 7 Medan. These texts aim to enhance students' abilities to describe people, objects, places, and events with detail and clarity. Mastery of descriptive texts requires higher-order thinking skills, such as identifying characteristics, understanding spatial relationships, and visualizing descriptions. Proficiency in this area supports both English language development and overall literacy.

However, many students at SMP Negeri 7 Medan face challenges with reading comprehension in descriptive texts. Preliminary observations and teacher feedback indicate difficulties in identifying key details, understanding text structure, and making accurate conclusions. Factors contributing to these challenges include limited vocabulary, unfamiliarity with descriptive conventions, and insufficient exposure to relevant materials. Additionally, students often lack effective reading strategies, such as skimming for main ideas, scanning for specific information, and making contextual inferences.

These challenges have significant consequences. Poor comprehension in descriptive texts affects not only students' performance in English but also their ability to excel in other subjects that require detailed reading. Furthermore, difficulties in reading can undermine students' confidence and motivation, perpetuating a cycle of inadequate literacy skills.

There is a lack of research specifically addressing reading comprehension in descriptive texts among students. This gap highlights the need for focused research to identify the specific difficulties faced by students and evaluate their comprehension levels. Insights gained from such research could guide educators and curriculum developers in designing targeted interventions and improving reading instruction.

The purpose of this research is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of Class VIII students' reading comprehension levels in descriptive texts at SMP Negeri 7 Medan. Through assessments and evaluations, this study aims to identify common difficulties, explore contributing factors, and propose strategies for enhancing reading comprehension instruction. The findings are expected to benefit not only the students at SMP Negeri 7 Medan but also contribute to broader educational strategies for improving reading skills in junior high schools across Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHODS

C. R. Kothari said that research design is the arrangement of conditions for data collection and analysis in a way that aims to combine relevance to the research objectives with economical procedures. This study uses qualitative research and content analysis design. Wallen and Fraenkel (2001) said that content analysis is the analysis of the written or visual content of a document. The researcher collected data using reading comprehension tests and interviews as instruments for collecting data. According to Miles and Huberman (2019: 45) there are several steps taken to analyze qualitative data, namely; Data reduction. After the primary and secondary data have been collected, the data was sorted, grouped into themes, categorised, focused on the field, discarded, arranged in a particular way, and summarised in the unit of analysis. In this study, data reduction starting from collecting

data on student test results. Then the test results are scored. After scoring, it is followed by data categorization. This study deals with the analysis of English reading texts from three different textbook publishers. The research used this design because this study aims to provide an overview of what factors cause Students difficult in Reading Comprehension in the eighth SMP Negeri 7 Medan.

Research Instrument

(Herman et al., 2020) states that the instrument is one of the important points in data collection. To examine the data in this study, researchers will use several methods and instruments, namely observation, interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis. This study uses questionnaires and interviews to obtain data using questions and answers between respondents and researchers. This study uses a test to assess written tests which are carried out by providing a sheet of paper containing pictures that must be described so that researchers can obtain results from what has been written in the test. The data collection instruments are: 1) Writing Test: students will be given a writing assignment at the end of each cycle. 2) Questionnaire, researchers will give several questionnaires to students to find out their problems in writing. In addition, questionnaires are used to find out students' opinions about the worksheet.

Data Collection

Data Collection Data collection involves gathering information from various sources, using methods such as observation, questionnaires, interviews, and document examination. In this particular study, the researcher distributed questionnaires to the research subjects and observed the process of improving students' writing skills using the dictation method for descriptive texts in the eighth grade of SMP Negeri 7 Medan.

Technique for Analysing Data

Qualitative data is data obtained through interviews between researchers and English teachers, between researchers and students, student observation sheets with English teachers, and all necessary documentation. According to Burn, the stages in analyzing data are as follows:

- 1) Compiling data, is a way of collecting data in research.
- 2) Coding data, a step to group data into the same group in terms of concepts, themes, or types.
- 3) Comparing data, a step to compare data to identify data relationships and connections.
- 4) Building interpretations is a stage to review data several times to ask questions, rethink relationships, and develop explanations that support the research.
- 5) Reporting the results of the final stage which involves presenting other people's research reports.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings are categorized based on the comprehension levels of Class VIII students in reading descriptive texts. The levels of comprehension are classified as follows:

1. Literal Comprehension: Understanding the explicit information in the text.
2. Inferential Comprehension: Making logical deductions or inferences based on the text.
3. Critical Comprehension: Evaluating and analyzing the content.
4. Creative Comprehension: Formulating new ideas or perspectives from the text.

Literal Comprehension

The data analysis indicated that most students could understand the explicit information in descriptive texts. This was evident in their ability to answer questions related to the main idea, details, and vocabulary in the texts. The following table presents the percentage of students who achieved different comprehension levels:

Table 1. The percentage of students who achieved different comprehension levels

Comprehension Level	Number of Students	Percentage
High	20	50%
Medium	12	30%
Low	8	20%

The findings show that half of the students achieved a high level of literal comprehension, while 30% were at a medium level, and 20% at a low level. The students at the low level struggled primarily with understanding specific vocabulary and extracting explicit details.

Inferential Comprehension

In terms of inferential comprehension, the results indicated that fewer students could make logical inferences from the text. Many students found it challenging to connect the text with their prior knowledge or draw conclusions from the provided information.

Table 2. The percentage of students' knowledge or draw conclusions from the provided information

Comprehension Level	Number of Students	Percentage
High	15	37,5%
Medium	13	32,5%
Low	2	30%

Only 37.5% of students demonstrated a high level of inferential comprehension, indicating that most students were either at a medium or low level in making inferences from the text.

Critical Comprehension

Critical comprehension levels were notably lower compared to literal and inferential levels. Students had difficulties evaluating the author's purpose, bias, and drawing logical conclusions about the text.

Table 3. The percentage of students' difficulties evaluating the author's purpose, bias, and drawing logical conclusions about the text

Comprehension Level	Number of Students	Percentage
High	10	25%
Medium	18	45%
Low	12	30%

The data indicate that only 25% of students reached a high level of critical comprehension, while a majority fell within the medium to low categories.

Creative Comprehension

The ability to engage in creative comprehension, where students generate new ideas or perspectives, was the most challenging area. Students struggled to think beyond the text.

Table 4. The percentage of students' ability to engage in creative comprehension

Comprehension Level	Number of Students	Percentage
High	8	20%
Medium	14	35%
Low	18	45%

The results revealed that creative comprehension was an area in need of significant improvement, with only 20% of students performing at a high level.

Discussion

1. **Teaching Methods:** The teaching methods employed by the teachers largely focused on understanding explicit information, which may explain why students performed better in literal comprehension. However, methods that encourage inferential and critical thinking skills were less emphasized.
2. **Student Engagement:** Students who actively participated in classroom discussions or activities tended to achieve higher comprehension levels, particularly in inferential and critical comprehension.
3. **Reading Strategies:** The lack of specific reading strategies, such as predicting, summarizing, and questioning, impacted students' ability to engage with texts beyond literal comprehension.
4. **Vocabulary Knowledge:** Students with a stronger vocabulary base performed better across all levels of comprehension, suggesting the importance of vocabulary enrichment in reading instruction.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of reading comprehension among Class VIII students at SMP Negeri 7 Medan shows:

1. **Overall Levels :** Most students showed better proficiency in literal comprehension, effectively understanding explicit information, but struggled with deeper comprehension levels (inferential, critical, and creative). This indicates challenges in analyzing and interpreting texts.
2. **Literal Comprehension :** Around 50% of students reached a high level, able to identify main ideas and vocabulary, though 20% still had difficulties with explicit content. **Inferential and Critical Comprehension :** Many struggled, with only 37.5% and 25% reaching high levels, respectively.
3. **Creative Comprehension :** The most challenging area, with just 20% reaching a high level, highlighting the need for more practice in thinking beyond the text.
4. **Influencing Factors :** Teaching methods, student engagement, strategies, and vocabulary knowledge affected comprehension levels. Emphasis on literal comprehension in teaching likely contributed to higher proficiency in that area.

Suggestion

To enhance reading skills:

1. For Teachers: Use strategies like questioning, inferencing, and varied reading materials; promote critical and creative thinking.
2. For Students: Practice active reading and expand vocabulary.
3. For the School: Provide teacher training and promote reading initiatives.
4. For Future Research: Explore more factors and consider broader sample comparisons.

REFERENCES

- Chastain, K. (1975). Affective and Ability Factors in Second Language Acquisition. *Language Learning*, 25, 153-161. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1975.tb00115.x>
- Herman, Purba, R., Thao, N. V., & Purba, A. (2020). Using genre-based approach to overcome students' difficulties in writing. *Journal of Education and E-Learning*, 7(4), 464-470. <https://doi.org/10.20448/journal.509.2020.74.464.470>
- Irwanto, & Nurpahmi, S. (2017). Using Make-A Match To Improve The Students' Reading Comprehension At MTS Guppi Samata Gowa. *Journal UIN Alauddin Makassar*, 3(2), 161-172.
- Kartawijaya, S. (2017). Analysis Of The Students' Reading Comprehension In Comprehending Descriptive Text. *Journal Curricula*, 2(3), 80-87.
- Klinger et al. (2002). *Teaching Reading Comprehension to Students with Learning Difficulties*. New York: The Guildford Press.
- Kluger, M. T., Townend, K. & Laidlaw, T. (2003) Job satisfaction, stress, and burnout in *Australian specialist anesthetists*. *Anesthesia*, 58, 339-345. <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1365-2044.2003.03085.x>
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, M. (2019). *Qualitative Data*. Arizona State University
- Nunan, D. (2003). *Practical English Language Teaching Teacher's Text Book*. New York: Mc Graw Hill Companies, Inc.
- Rao, D. B. (2009). *Reading Skills For College Studies*. India: Discovery Publishing House.
- Snow, C. (2002). *Reading For Understanding: Toward a Researcher and Development Program in Reading Comprehension*. New York: RAND.
- Smith, N., & Robinson, H. (1980). *Reading Instruction for today's children*. Englewood Cliff, NJ: Prentice Hall Inc.
- Wallen, N. E., & Fraenkel, J. R. (2001). *Educational research: A guide to the process* (2nd ed.). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.