

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of The Research

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 Johnson (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. Townend (2003) highlights that true comprehension requires a deep understanding of the text's various aspects. Chastain (1976) 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.

1.2 Research Problems

Based on the identification and analysis of the problems described above, the formulation of the problems in this study are :

1. What is the current level of reading comprehension among Class VIII students at SMP Negeri 7 Medan when engaging with descriptive texts?
2. How effective are current instructional strategies and resources in improving students' reading comprehension of descriptive texts?

1.3 Objective of The Research

The purpose of this research is to:

1. To Identify Specific Areas of Difficulty in Comprehending Descriptive Texts
2. To Evaluate the Effectiveness of Current Instructional Strategies and Resources

1.4 Limitation of The Research

1. Sample Size and Generalizability

The study focuses exclusively on Class VIII students at a single school (SMP Negeri 7 Medan), which may not represent the broader population of students across different schools or regions

2. Limited Scope of Text Types

The research is limited to descriptive texts only, and does not encompass other text genres or types that may also impact reading comprehension.

3. Measurement Tools and Accuracy

The study relies on specific assessment tools and evaluation methods to gauge reading comprehension levels, which may have limitations in accurately capturing all dimensions of comprehension.

1.5 Significant of The Research In this study are :

1. Theoretical Benefits

Theory Development in Reading Comprehension: This research can enrich existing theories about reading comprehension, especially in descriptive texts.

Contribution to Literacy Pedagogy: This research will provide new insights into literacy teaching approaches, especially in developing reading comprehension skills at the secondary education level.

Reference for Further Studies: The results of this study can be a basis or reference for further research exploring reading comprehension or more effective teaching methods in various school contexts.

2. Practical Benefits

a. For Researchers

Better Understanding of Reading Difficulties: This research provides empirical data on middle school students' reading comprehension levels, which can be used by other researchers to develop interventions or follow-up studies in the field of literacy education.

b. For Learners

Improve Reading Skills: This research may provide insights that help students improve their skills in comprehending descriptive text through more specific feedback.

Identify Challenges: Students can recognize which aspects of reading descriptive text are more difficult to understand, so they can focus more on improving in those areas.

c. For Teachers

More Effective Teaching Strategies: Teachers can use the results of this research to identify more effective teaching strategies in helping students understand descriptive texts.

d. For Schools

Curriculum Improvement: Schools can use the results of this research to review and improve literacy curricula, ensuring that the teaching approaches used are appropriate to students' needs in improving reading comprehension skills.