



An Analysis of Students' Reading Comprehension of English Fable Texts: A Study of Eighth-Grade Students

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026-04-07 Revised: 2026-05-19 Accepted: 2026-08-08 Keywords: reading comprehension, vocabulary mastery, word recognition, fable texts, junior highschool DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v14i1.9228 Corresponding Author: Hilmiah Lana hilmiah lana80@gmail.com English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Letters and Culture, Universitas Negeri Gorontalo	<i>This study analyzed the reading comprehension ability of eighth-grade students in understanding English fable texts, with particular emphasis on vocabulary mastery and word recognition. Previous studies on narrative text comprehension have generally focused on broader reading skills, while limited research specifically investigates how vocabulary mastery and word recognition influence students' comprehension of English fable texts in Indonesian EFL contexts. The research employed an explanatory sequential mixed-method design. Quantitative data were obtained through a reading comprehension test consisting of 50 multiple-choice items administered to 73 students at SMP Negeri 3 Telaga, while qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with nine selected students representing different achievement levels. The quantitative findings indicated that students' overall reading comprehension ability was categorized as low to moderate, with a mean score of 58.4. Approximately 61% of students were classified in the low category, while 39% were categorized as moderate achievers based on predetermined score classifications. The weakest performance was found in plot comprehension, character analysis, and language features. Qualitative findings revealed that limited vocabulary mastery and weak word recognition were the primary factors hindering students' comprehension, causing difficulties in constructing meaning, identifying story elements, and interpreting implicit information. The study concludes that vocabulary and word recognition play a crucial role in students' comprehension of English fable texts and should be prioritized in reading</i>

instruction at the junior high school level. This study contributes empirical evidence on how vocabulary mastery and word recognition influence students' comprehension of fable texts in Indonesian EFL contexts.

1. Introduction

Fable texts were selected in this study because they are one of the narrative genres taught in the eighth grade under the Merdeka Curriculum. Compared with other narrative genres, fables provide simpler plot structures, clear moral values, and familiar animal characters that are considered suitable for junior high school learners. In addition, fables support character education and the development of the Pancasila Student Profile emphasized in Indonesian education.

Although several previous studies have discussed students' difficulties in reading narrative texts, most of them focused generally on reading comprehension without specifically examining how vocabulary mastery and word recognition influence students' understanding of English fable texts. Furthermore, limited studies have employed a mixed-method approach to investigate both students' comprehension performance and the underlying factors affecting comprehension in Indonesian EFL junior high school contexts. Therefore, this study attempts to fill this gap by analyzing students' reading comprehension ability and identifying the dominant linguistic factors influencing comprehension.

Based on the background above, the research questions of this study are formulated as follows:

1. How is the reading comprehension ability of eighth-grade students in understanding English fable texts?
2. What factors influence students' comprehension, particularly vocabulary mastery and word recognition?

2. Method

Before being administered, the reading comprehension test was validated through expert judgment involving two English education lecturers and one English teacher. A pilot test was also conducted to examine the reliability of the instrument using Cronbach's Alpha, which indicated that the test had acceptable reliability for measuring students' reading comprehension ability.

The reading comprehension test measured five aspects of comprehension, namely plot, character, theme, moral value, and language features. Example items included identifying the main conflict of the story, recognizing character traits, determining the moral message, and interpreting vocabulary used in the text.

Students' achievement levels were classified based on the following score ranges: • High : 80–100 • Moderate : 60–79 • Low : Below 60

For qualitative analysis, interview data were analyzed through thematic

analysis procedures consisting of data reduction, coding, categorization, data display, and conclusion drawing. The researcher identified recurring themes related to vocabulary difficulties, word recognition problems, reading fluency, and comprehension strategies.

Ethical considerations were also implemented in this study. Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the school, while students participated voluntarily. The confidentiality of participants' identities and responses was maintained throughout the research process.

3. Result

Quantitative Results

The descriptive statistical analysis showed that students' overall reading comprehension ability was categorized as low to moderate, with a mean score of 58.4. Out of 73 students, 45 students (61%) were classified in the low category, while 28 students (39%) were categorized as moderate achievers. No students reached the high achievement category.

The weakest areas were character analysis and language features, while students performed relatively better in identifying explicit themes and moral values. These findings indicate that students experienced greater difficulty in understanding implicit meaning compared with explicit information presented directly in the text.

Qualitative Results

The interview findings revealed several dominant themes affecting students' comprehension:

- Limited vocabulary mastery
- Difficulty recognizing unfamiliar words
- Slow reading fluency
- Dependence on word-by-word translation

One student stated that: "I often stop reading because there are many words I do not understand, so I lose the meaning of the story."

High-achieving students tended to use contextual guessing strategies and could identify story elements more effectively, while low-achieving students relied heavily on dictionaries and translation.

4. Discussion

The findings suggest that students' comprehension difficulties were not only caused by limited vocabulary size but also by inefficient word recognition processes. Students who struggled to recognize words automatically tended to allocate excessive cognitive effort to decoding, leaving limited cognitive resources available for higher-level comprehension processes such as inference-making and character interpretation. This explains why students performed relatively better

on explicit comprehension tasks than implicit comprehension tasks.

Limitations

This study was limited to one junior high school and involved a relatively small sample size. In addition, the study relied mainly on multiple-choice tests, which may not fully capture students' deeper comprehension abilities. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized broadly to all Indonesian EFL contexts.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies are recommended to involve larger and more diverse participant groups from different schools and regions. Researchers may also employ additional assessment methods such as think-aloud protocols, open-ended comprehension tasks, or digital reading assessments to obtain deeper insights into students' reading comprehension processes.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings imply that English teachers should implement explicit vocabulary scaffolding and repeated reading activities to strengthen students' word recognition and reading fluency. Teachers are also encouraged to integrate contextual vocabulary instruction, morphological awareness training, and guided reading strategies into classroom practice. In addition, teacher training programs should emphasize effective approaches to teaching narrative texts and developing students' vocabulary knowledge in EFL classrooms.

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