Exploring Students' Challenges in Reading English Short Stories: Insight and Solutions

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Abstrak

Berkurangnya antusiasme membaca di kalangan mahasiswa perguruan tinggi menimbulkan tantangan yang beragam dalam penelitian pendidikan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki rintangan yang dihadapi oleh mahasiswa pendidikan sastra ketika membaca cerita pendek berbahasa Inggris dari https://read.gov/aesop/ dan strategi mereka untuk mengatasi tantangan tersebut. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain deskriptif, penelitian ini menyajikan wawasan yang dikumpulkan dari 43 mahasiswa di salah satu Universitas Negeri di Indonesia. Selanjutnya, sebuah kuesioner diberikan untuk mengeksplorasi tantangan yang dihadapi selama proses pembelajaran dan mengukur apakah hambatan tersebut berdampak pada minat baca mereka. Temuan menunjukkan beberapa hambatan, seperti mengartikan bahasa figuratif, memahami kosakata yang tidak dikenal, dan bergulat dengan struktur tata bahasa yang kompleks. Selain itu, motivasi siswa untuk mengatasi tantangan dalam memahami cerita pendek bahasa Inggris dipengaruhi oleh pengetahuan mereka yang tidak memadai tentang kosakata bahasa Inggris, yang menghambat kemampuan mereka untuk membangun makna yang koheren. Temuan juga menunjukkan beberapa solusi guna menuntaskan kesulitan dalam membaca cerita pendek bahasa Inggris, seperti bertanya suatu makna kata kepada teman atau dosen dan menggunakan alat terjemahan untuk mengetahui arti kata yang belum diketahui. Berdasarkan hasil penelitian tersebut, dapat disimpulkan bahwa kesulitan yang timbul dari membaca cerita pendek bahasa inggris dapat dituntaskan dengan beragam solusi yang telah ditemukan.

Kata Kunci: tantangan membaca, cerpen Bahasa Inggris, bacaan akademik, Bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing, pemahaman membaca

Abstract

The declining enthusiasm for reading among university students poses diverse challenges in educational research. This study aims to investigate the barriers faced by literature education students when reading English short stories from https://read.gov/aesop/ and their strategies to overcome these challenges. Using a qualitative approach with a descriptive design, this study presents insights gathered from 43 students at one state university in Indonesia. Furthermore, a questionnaire was administered to explore the challenges faced during the learning process and measure whether those barriers impacted their reading interest. The findings indicate several barriers, such as deciphering figurative language, understanding unfamiliar vocabulary, and grappling with complex grammatical structures. In addition, students' motivation to overcome challenges in understanding English short stories was affected by their inadequate knowledge of English vocabulary, which hindered their ability to construct coherent meanings. The findings also show some solutions to overcome the difficulties in reading English short stories, such as asking friends or lecturers for word meanings and using translation tools to find out the meaning of unknown words. Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that the difficulties arising from reading English short stories can be resolved with various solutions that have been found.

Keyword: *reading challenges, English short story, academic reading, English as foreign language, reading comprehension*

INTRODUCTION

In the 20th century, marked by an overwhelming influx of global information, the significance of reading as a pivotal gateway to diverse knowledge and perspectives cannot be overstated (Clark & Rumbold, 2006). Despite this, higher education in Indonesia grapples with a notable absence of concerted efforts to instill robust reading habits among students, contributing to the country's distressingly low global literacy ranking, placing it second to last worldwide (Jalal et al., 2006). UNESCO's data underscores this challenge, revealing a mere 0.001% interest in reading among Indonesians, an alarming statistic that highlights the urgent need for comprehensive initiatives to rejuvenate the nation's reading and learning practices (Kominfo.go.id, 2023). This stark discrepancy in reading engagement signals a critical issue that demands immediate attention to foster a renewed enthusiasm for reading and elevate literacy levels in Indonesia.

When it comes to reading, people may face a number of common challenges, such as; Decoding issues, comprehension issues, fluency challenges, lack of interest or motivation, attention issues, and language barriers. Many obstacles impede many children's progress towards developing this reading ability. This study seeks to investigate this by focusing on identifying the main challenges that students face when reading English short stories. One of the most significant challenges students face when reading English short stories is a lack of knowledge of vocabulary and complex sentence structures. Another barrier is a lack of motivation and enthusiasm for reading. Because of limitations in the formal education curriculum, students often find it difficult to read with deep understanding. These factors have an important impact on how literate students become.

Research on challenges in reading is important to identify the barriers that readers face, from text comprehension to motivation. By understanding these problems, we can develop more effective learning strategies. Researchers assume that addressing reading challenges will improve literacy skills. Additionally, this research can explore the impact of current technology on reading and find ways to maximize its benefits. Overall, this research is expected to make a positive contribution to literacy development and reading learning. The same thing emerges from the results of research looked at the problems of EFL students in planning reading tests (Samiei & Ebadi, 2021) who explained that the challenges faced by students in reading comprehension vary from one another due to differences in the level of grammar and vocabulary, as well as the basic level of their thoughts about the given content.

The purpose of this research is to identify the challenges that literature students face when reading short stories in English, as well as their strategies for overcoming these challenges. In this study, there are two variables, namely English short stories and a questionnaire regarding the obstacles faced by literature students when reading short stories in English and their strategies to overcome these challenges. After the students read the English short stories, they will be given the questionnaire, and the data received will be analysed. Therefore, to ensure these objectives, this study was guided by two research questions: (1) What difficulties do students face when reading? (2) How do students solve their problems in reading?

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research, guided by Creswell's (2012) in (Ishtiaq, 2019), approach, investigated the challenges faced by Indonesian language and literature education students when reading English texts. The main focus was to understand students' perspectives on these challenges and potential solutions. Using a descriptive research design, this study aimed to shed light on the conditions of English reading difficulties faced by the students. Data collection involved administering an open-ended questionnaire to 43 participants, in line with previous studies (Hassan & Dweik, 2021; Nurmalasari & Haryudin, 2021a; Qrqez & Rashid, 2017). The research questionnaire was administered online via google form and conducted in the classroom. The questionnaires were completed after a 30-minute English short story reading task from https://read.gov/aesop/,

providing insights into the challenges faced. The findings were comprehensively transcribed to identify and understand students' difficulties and their strategies to overcome them during the English short story reading session, totalling approximately 150 minutes. This research aims to offer practical insights that can be applied in an educational context to enhance problem-solving solutions experienced while reading.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

From the results of this research, the biggest difficulty that students feel when reading English short stories is vocabulary or figurative language grammar that they do not understand. Moreover, the biggest solution to how students overcome their problems in reading is to ask friends or lecturers or use other translation apps to learn and understand more about reading.

This research data was collected by questionnaire to find the result of student difficulties when reading English short stories and how students solve their problems in reading. The students' difficulties must be analyzed by their experience while reading English short stories. Some of the data are most important to gain information about how students solve their problems in reading. The data collected from some of the English short stories related to what difficulties they faced, giving questionnaires to help the researcher know what solution to solve their problem in reading. In collecting data from the questionnaire, will answer the most difficulties when they read an English short story and data collecting of the questionnaire shows 11 numbers as their answer about difficulties when reading and solutions to solve their problem.

According to the findings of this research, the most significant influences on student difficulties is vocabulary or figurative language grammar that they do not understand. How students solve their problems in reading has a significant impact on ask friends or lecturers or use other translation apps to learn and understand more about reading. They continue to be curious and find out the meaning of the story. So that they understand and they can get the moral message conveyed by the author in the story. After collecting data, the following results are listed below.

What Difficulties Do Students Face When Reading (RQ1)

1. I have difficulty to understand the vocabulary in English short story
43 jawaban

Figure 1. Students Have Difficulty to Understand the Vocabulary in English Short Story

In the Figure 1, the majority of respondents, around 48.8%, showed strong disagreement with the statement that they had difficulty understanding vocabulary in English short stories. This indicates that most students find this aspect easy. Meanwhile, a minority group, comprising 30.2% of the respondents, agreed that they faced difficulties in understanding vocabulary in English short stories. A total of 4.7% of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement, while 20.9% of the respondents expressed their disagreement or that they did not consider it a significant problem. Thus, the overall majority of the respondents did not experience any difficulties. At the same time, a small proportion felt it or agreed with the statement.
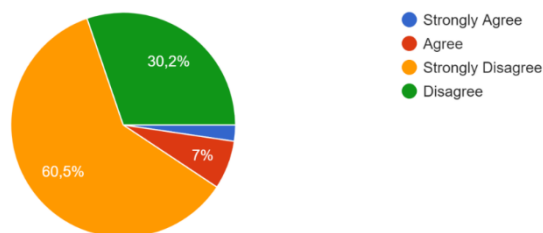
Figure 2. Students Have a Lack of Motivation or Passion in the English Short Story

Based on Figure 2, the responses of respondents regarding the lack of motivation or passion for reading English short stories, a majority of 60.5% showed strong disagreement with the statement. This indicates that most students do not feel a lack of motivation or passion when reading English short stories.

In contrast, about 30.2% of the respondents expressed their level of disagreement. Although about 7% of the respondents strongly agreed, the rest, who constituted a minority group, strongly agreed with the statement. Therefore, the majority of the respondents were less likely to experience motivation or arousal problems. At the same time, a small number of them recognised such challenges.
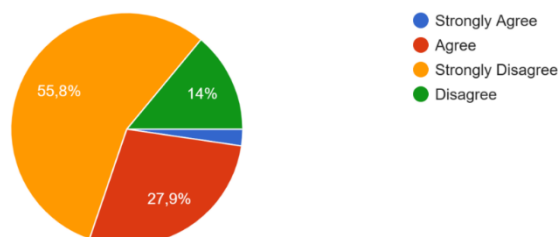

Figure 3. Students Have Difficulty Identifying Figurative Language in the Short Stories They Read

According to the Figure 3, the majority of respondents (55.8%) strongly disagreed with the statement. This demonstrates that the majority of students had no difficulty recognising the fictional language in the short story they had read. On the other hand, approximately 27.9% of the respondents agreed that they faced difficulties in identifying the fictitious language, creating a minority group that acknowledged difficulties in identifying the fictitious language. Meanwhile, approximately 14% of those polled indicated their level of disagreement. As a result, the vast majority felt confident in identifying fictitious languages. At the same time, a small percentage acknowledged difficulties in this regard.
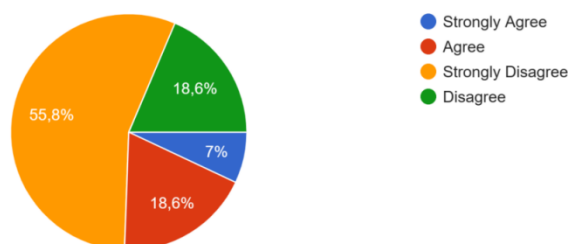

Figure 4. Students Have Difficulty to Understand the Grammar Structure in English Short Story

In the results of Figure 4, the majority of statements from respondents showed strong disagreement, reaching 55.8%. This illustrates that some students need help understanding grammatical structures in English short stories. On the other hand, there were 18.6% of respondents expressed disagreement that they did not have difficulties in understanding grammatical structures when reading English short stories and agreed that the respondents had difficulties in understanding grammatical structures when reading English short stories. However, on the other hand, there were 7% of respondents strongly agreed that they had difficulty understanding grammatical structures in English short stories.

5. I have difficulty to focus while reading English short story in the class
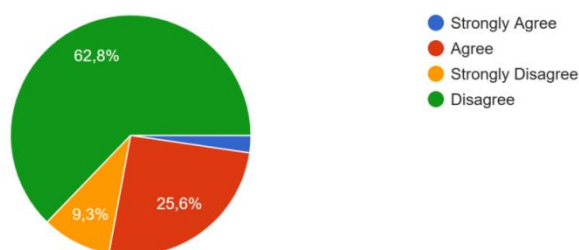
43 jawaban

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree

Figure 5. Students Have Difficulty to Focus While Reading English Short Story in The Class

Based on the Figure 5, the majority of respondents (62.8%) disagreed with the statement. The findings revealed that most students had no difficulty focusing when reading English short stories in class.

In contrast, approximately 25.6 percent agreed that maintaining concentration was difficult, forming a minority group that acknowledged the difficulty. Although 9.3 percent were more disagreeable, the vast majority felt that they could have done better at focusing when reading the English short story in class.

6. Unfamiliar words in the text makes me uninterested to read English short story
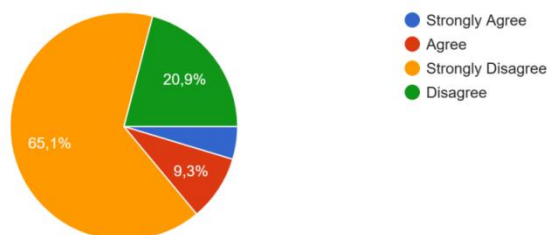
43 jawaban

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree

Figure 6. Unfamiliar Words in the Text Makes Students Uninterested to Read English Short Story

As can be seen from Figure 6, as many as 65.1% of the respondents expressed strong disagreement, indicating that some of the students did not feel that the unfamiliar vocabulary in the text made them not interested in reading English short stories. A total of 20.9% stated that they also disagreed, meaning that they did not feel that the unfamiliar vocabulary in the text made them uninterested in reading English short stories. However, on the other hand, 9.3% of respondents agreed that they felt that unfamiliar vocabulary made them uninterested in reading English short stories.

Furthermore, according to Figure 7, 74.4% of respondents indicated that they agreed and 7% strongly agreed with the statement. These findings show that the majority of students typically read-only novels they enjoy. Conversely, 16.3% of participants disagreed, suggesting that a minority of them did not limit their reading to novels that aligned with their tastes. While a small percentage of respondents were more willing to read books outside of their comfort zones, the majority of respondents generally tended to choose books based on their personal preferences, with only 7% expressing solid disagreements.
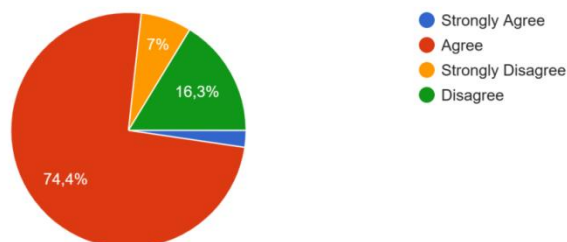
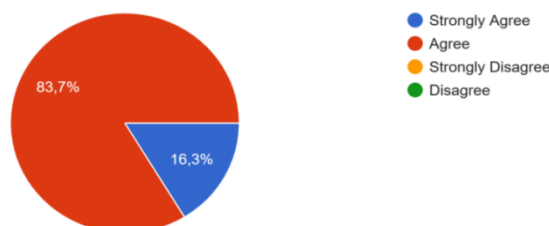**Figure 7. Students Only Read the Book that They Like**

Figure 8. Students Use Dictionary to Improve Their Reading Skills

According to Figure 8, 83.7% of students agreed with the statement, implying that students use dictionaries more frequently to improve their reading skills. Furthermore, 16.3% of students strongly agreed that they use dictionaries more to improve their reading skills.
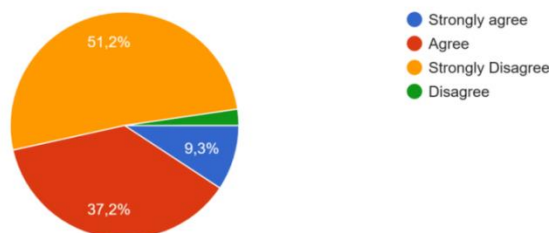

Figure 9. Students Need More Time when Reading English Short Story

It can be seen from Figure 9 that as many as 51.2% expressed strong disagreement with the statement, so it can be understood that some students do not need more time to read English short stories. However, 37.2% agree that students feel they need more time to read English short stories. A total of 9.3% of the respondents expressed strong agreement that students need more time when reading English short stories.

How Do Students Solve Their Problems in Reading? (RQ2)

Table 1. Student Challenges During Reading English Short Story

Questionnaire	Results	
	Respondent	**Answer**
10. Do you have more challenges during reading	30	There is vocabulary or figurative language grammar that they do not understand.

Questionnaire	Results	
	Respondent	**Answer**
English short stories? Please mention it!	13	No, I have not been challenged while reading English short stories. No, I do not.

From the Table 1, there are 30 answers regarding other challenges felt when reading English short stories. Namely, there is vocabulary or figurative language and grammar that they do not understand. However, 13 student respondents stated that they had no other challenges in reading English short stories.

Table 2. How Students Overcome Difficulties During Reading English Short Stories

Questionnaire	Result	
	Respondent	**Answer**
11. How do you overcome difficulties during reading English short stories?	15	Continue to be curious, find out the meaning of the story, and reread the short story.
	25	Ask friends or lecturers, or use another translation app to learn and understand more.
	3	Listening to English songs and English fairy tales, watching English movies, rewatching the scenes in the film

From the second questionnaire data above, 25 respondents revealed how they solve problems in reading by asking friends or lecturers or using other translation apps to learn and understand more. Furthermore, as many as 15 respondents revealed that they overcame problems in reading by continuing to be curious and, finding out the meaning of the story, and rereading the short story. On the other hand, respondents with a total of 3 each revealed the solution to overcome it by listening to English songs and English fairy tales, watching English movies, and re-watching the scenes in the film.

This research focuses on the difficulties and issues that students face when reading English short stories. The results of the survey show that several factors hinder students from reading English short stories. These factors are vocabulary or figurative language grammar that they do not understand in English short stories. The qualitative findings well supported the data results, as the difficulties and challenges students perceived in reading English short stories and how students solved their problems in reading English that students reported in the qualitative part of the study were very similar to those found in the questionnaire. The analysis of qualitative data revealed previously unknown challenges and difficulties such as the vocabulary, language figuration, and grammar.

According to the findings of this study, language barriers such as unfamiliar vocabulary, figurative language, and grammar cause difficulties and challenges in reading English short stories. Recognising these language barriers emphasises the significance of employing comprehensive language learning strategies. These linguistic barriers contribute to the complexities that students face when engaging with English short stories. According to Huang (1997) in the research conducted by Manihuruk (2020), another of the most difficult challenges students face when attempting to comprehend English textbooks is a lack of adequate vocabulary knowledge. A good vocabulary is essential for comprehending the material provided in English textbooks. Furthermore, adequate vocabulary serves as an important basis for the acquisition of enhanced reading skills, facilitating students to understand and comprehend texts more fluently. Therefore, efforts to improve and

expand students' vocabulary need to be a major focus in English learning strategies, so that students can overcome this major obstacle and improve their understanding of the subject matter. Gunning (2005) in Lisana et al. (2022) also discovered that one of the biggest challenges in reading comprehension is a need for more vocabulary knowledge.

According to research by Gunawan Tambunsaribu & Yusniaty Galingging (2021), it can be seen that it is challenging for students to learn/understand English grammar/structure material. Without learn more the vocabulary, it is so hard to accomplish any ability of language (Afzal, 2019). Furthermore, Nurmalasari & Haryudin (2021b), stated that The students feel confused with the grammar structure of the sentences. Lack of vocabulary seems to be one of the main factors reported in the literature according to Satriani (2018) said that Students' difficulties in reading comprehension involve aspects of vocabulary, grammar knowledge and interest in reading. This view suggests that reading challenges are not only limited to vocabulary comprehension, but also involve mastering grammatical structures and students' level of interest in the reading process. Therefore, a learning approach that includes developing vocabulary skills, grammar comprehension and stimulating students' interest in reading may be key in improving students' ability to comprehend English texts.

Despite all the difficulties and challenges experienced by students in reading English short stories, of course something is needed to help students overcome the difficulties and challenges of reading in English short stories. From the final data in the questionnaire, it was found that asking friends or lecturer or using other translation apps to learn and understand more can solve students' problems in reading English. According to House (2009) in Iftitah & Kuswardani (2021), translation is the process of rewriting a text in one's language. The scholars utilise Google Translate to solve their issues. Google Translate could be the solution to the human inability to master foreign languages. It is beneficial for users to translate foreign languages when they are challenging to comprehend. In the opinion of Pham et al. (2022), said Google Translate has a number of advantages for students, several problems such as erroneous grammar and semantics on a frequent basis have led to misunderstanding of original words.

This study involved participants in the form of one class of university students enrolled in a literary language course. Nonetheless, similar research can be conducted at the elementary or primary reading level. The level of difficulties and challenges students face in reading English short stories and the solutions they find can be the focus of future research. This will provide a deeper insight into the barriers faced by students in achieving good reading comprehension. Further research might involve elementary school students to determine the extent to which these challenges arise at the early stages of English language learning. As a result, teachers will have a better understanding of how to address these issues early on and create lesson plans that are appropriate for students' stages of development.

The approach of participation curriculum development arose from the significance of comprehending students' perspectives on reading challenges and preferred solutions. Teachers are able to involve students in developing teaching methods that reduce the barriers that students face. This can include creating curriculum resources that are better appropriate for the requirements of students, such as using materials from the daily lives of students. Using of technology as a tool for instruction can also be explored. To increase students' interest in reading English short stories in this digital age, technology-based learning applications, interactive games, or platforms for learning online can be integrated. More research can be done to determine how effective these technologies are at enhancing students' comprehension of the vocabulary, figurative language, and grammar in relation to short stories.

Furthermore, future research could broaden the scope to examine the role of psychological, social, and cultural aspects in overcome reading difficulties. Student motivation, parental support, and social factors on interest in reading could be fascinating research topics for future studies. It is also critical to consistently create and improve methods of teaching that can meet the needs of students. Interacting with teachers in professional

development and training can help assure that they have up-to-date expertise and understanding in dealing with students' reading difficulties. By exploring these aspects, future research can make a meaningful contribution to the development of English language education, particularly in reading skills. With a better understanding of the difficulties students face and effective solutions, teachers can provide better learning and support students' overall English language development.

CONCLUSION

The challenges students face when reading English short stories highlight the need for further development in reading activities within the education community. In this research, initially designed for broader purposes, students' difficulties in reading English short stories prove valuable for educational goals, including assessing reading abilities and identifying supportive media. Students find reading English short stories tedious due to lengthy texts and the need for improved vocabulary. The primary source of conflict in academic activities is the dominance of English in the Indonesian context, with students struggling with vocabulary, grammar complexity, pronunciation, and insufficient speaking and listening skills. The current study identifies students' main challenge in dominant English reading as needing assistance with understanding vocabulary, figurative language, and grammar. In conclusion, the study reveals that students' overall challenges in reading English short stories stem from unfamiliar vocabulary and figurative language. To overcome these difficulties, students turn to translation applications to enhance their understanding of vocabulary.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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