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## Measuring English Abilities of Junior High School Students

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### Abstrak

Siswa sering mengalami permasalahan siswa dalam belajar bahasa Inggris disebabkan oleh kurangnya pengetahuan terhadap bahasa, kurangnya latihan komunikasi, dan rendahnya penguasaan kosakata yang secara keseluruhan menghambat kemampuan dan kepercayaan diri mereka. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengukur kemampuan siswa dalam menguasai bahasa Inggris. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah pendekatan kuantitatif deskriptif, yang dilakukan di SMP Negeri 3 Kuala Batee. Jumlah total peserta adalah 27 siswa, dan data dikumpulkan menggunakan tes dengan 50 pertanyaan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kemampuan siswa dalam menguasai bahasa Inggris diklasifikasikan ke dalam kategori tinggi, sedang, dan rendah. Kemampuan tinggi terlihat dalam penguasaan identifikasi ide pokok, pemahaman tujuan teks, dan pengenalan jenis teks. Kemampuan sedang teramati dalam keterampilan berbicara, mengidentifikasi detail pendukung dalam bacaan, referensi kata ganti, passive voice, dan makna kata. Kemampuan rendah tercatat dalam menyampaikan ucapan selamat dan harapan, memahami struktur dan genre teks, percakapan, simple past tense, pemahaman iklan, makna kata, serta penggunaan "to be" dan kata ganti. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa meskipun siswa memiliki pemahaman yang baik dalam beberapa aspek bahasa Inggris, masih terdapat kekurangan yang signifikan, terutama dalam aturan tata bahasa dan bahasa ekspresif. Siswa perlu mempelajari lebih lanjut tentang aturan tata bahasa Inggris karena area ini dikategorikan dalam kemampuan rendah, menunjukkan perlunya strategi pengajaran yang terfokus untuk mengatasi kekurangan ini dan meningkatkan keterampilan bahasa secara keseluruhan.

**Kata Kunci:** Mengukur, Kemampuan, Aspek Bahasa Inggris

### Abstract

*Students' problems in learning English often stem from a lack of exposure to the language, insufficient practice opportunities, and challenges with grammar and vocabulary, which collectively hinder their overall proficiency and confidence. The purpose of this study is to measure students' ability in mastering English. The method used in this study is a descriptive quantitative approach, conducted at SMP Negeri 3 Kuala Batee. The total number of participants was 27 students, and the data were collected using a test with 50 questions. The results of the study indicated that the students' ability in mastering English was classified into high, moderate, and low categories. High abilities were evident in mastering main idea identification, understanding text purposes, and recognizing text types. Moderate abilities were observed in conversational skills, identifying supporting details in reading, pronoun reference, passive voice, and word meanings. Low abilities were noted in expressing congratulations and hope, understanding text structure and genres, conversations, simple past tense, comprehension of advertisements, word meanings, and using "to be" and pronouns. These findings suggest that while students have a good grasp of certain aspects of English, significant gaps remain, particularly in grammatical rules and expressive language. The students should learn more about English grammatical rules because this area was categorized into low ability, indicating a need for targeted instructional strategies to address these deficiencies and improve overall language proficiency.*

**Keywords:** Measuring, Ability, English Aspects

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## INTRODUCTION

English is one of the subjects in the Indonesian curriculum that should be taught to students. It is not only proposed as a means of communication but also as a vital component in various academic disciplines (Rustamov et al., 2023.) Therefore, the current English curriculum aims to empower students to develop communication effectively and clearly. The curriculum also seeks to strengthen critical thinking and analytical skills by exposing students to texts and conversations (Mubaroq et al., 2024). This curriculum is structured to enhance students' proficiency in utilizing English across various skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing, as well as mastering language components such as vocabulary and grammar (Solikhah et al., 2019). In addition, the importance of English in the Indonesian education system has been steadily increasing, with curricula designed to enhance students' linguistic abilities and prepare them for higher education and competitive job markets (Hawanti, 2014).

English learning at the junior high school level is anchored in a learner-centric paradigm, emphasizing oral and written discourses or texts (Pajarwati et al., 2021). The acquisition of English language skills aims to enhance students' proficiency in diverse communication settings encountered in daily life. Text-based instruction effectively develops students' ability to utilize the language for different communicative purposes. This type of learning focuses on the practical application of language, encompassing both verbal and written communication. Consequently, genre-based learning is highly pertinent for implementation. In addition to this, language learning in junior high school is designed to provide experience for students in using English texts to understand and apply factual, conceptual, and procedural knowledge related to visible phenomena and events through speaking, listening, reading, and writing in the concrete realm. Minister of Education, Research and Technology, in his regulation number 22, year 2016, has underscored the purpose of using text in English class instruction is to develop the attitudes and character of students so that they implement learning activities in class and life activities in their social environment (Poedjiastutie et al., 2018)

In learning English, it covers both students' strengths and challenges in English mastery, which is crucial for improving teaching methods. Understanding students' ability allows teachers to tailor instruction to designing activities focusing on speaking for those strong in oral communication but weak in writing (Malik et al., 2021). Recognizing students' challenges, like grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation difficulties, enables teachers to provide targeted support through visual aids, interactive games, or peer tutoring, fostering a positive and inclusive classroom environment (Astuti et al., 2022.). This understanding also helps in refining teaching methods and creating a learning environment that supports all learners (Boy Jon et al., 2021). Hawanti (2014) stated that the importance of this analysis for enhancing educational strategies, boosting confidence, and addressing specific difficulties. Another study by Gu and Johnson (1996) noted students' proficiency in English. This analysis seeks to provide recommendations for enhancing English language instruction, thereby improving students' overall academic performance and readiness for future educational and English communication. Therefore, it is important to measure students' ability in mastering learning English.

Measuring students' ability in learning English involves assessing various aspects of their language skills to determine their proficiency levels (Oktaviani et al., 2017). This process typically includes evaluating their abilities in speaking, listening, reading, and writing, as well as their knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. The assessment can be conducted through different methods, such as standardized tests, quizzes, oral exams, essays, and performance tasks (Ali et al., 2023). The goal is to obtain a comprehensive understanding of each student's strengths and weaknesses in English, which can inform teaching strategies and help tailor instruction to meet individual learning needs.

The primary purpose of measuring students' ability in learning English is to gauge their proficiency and track their progress over time. This information is crucial for teachers to identify areas where students excel and where they may need additional support (Putra et al., 2020.). By understanding these aspects, educators can design targeted interventions and adjust their instructional methods to enhance learning outcomes. Additionally,

assessing students' English skills helps in setting realistic goals and expectations, motivating students to improve. It also provides valuable data for curriculum developers and policymakers to refine educational programs and ensure they are effectively addressing the linguistic needs of students.

The previous studies have examined the measurement of students' ability in learning English, revealing diverse findings. A study by (Kumayas et al., 2023) assessed high school students' English proficiency using standardized tests and found that students generally performed well in reading and listening but struggled with speaking and writing due to limited practice opportunities. In another study, conducted by Ariffin et al., (2021; Aziz et al., (2021); Widodo et al., (2021) students were evaluated through classroom assessments and oral exams, showing that while students were strong in basic vocabulary and comprehension, they faced challenges in grammar and sentence construction, indicating a need for more focused grammar instruction. Finally, Mohamad et al., (2023). investigated junior high school students' abilities using a combination of quizzes, essays, and oral presentations, revealing that students had a good grasp of everyday conversational English but had difficulties with academic language and complex grammatical structures. These studies highlight the importance of a balanced approach to English instruction that addresses all language skills and provides ample practice opportunities.

Based on the background of study, the researcher is highly interested to conduct similar research at SMP Negeri 3 Kuala Batee to figure out students' ability in mastering English.

## **METHOD**

This method employed descriptive quantitative because it seeks to know students' ability to master English. The respondents of this research were 27 ninth-grade students. The research procedure was carried out over the span of one month, beginning with the pre-research phase, where preliminary preparations, including interviews with teachers and students, were conducted to gather initial insights. This was followed by the development and validation of a 50-question test aimed at assessing students' English proficiency.

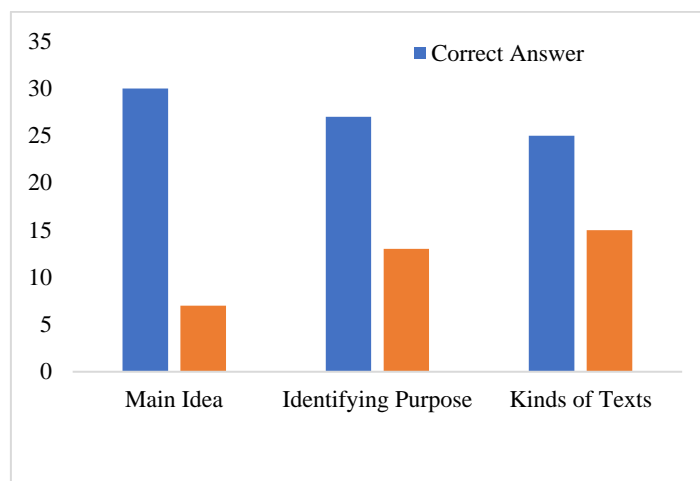
In collecting data, the researcher consulted English teachers to obtain the final exam papers and student scores. The researcher analyzed the indicators of each test items and assessed the validity of tests instrument based on the learning objectives and curriculum standards to ensure content validity. Additionally, the researcher evaluated students' English proficiency by calculating the average scores and summarizing the overall level of students' abilities. This process involves checking how well the test items measure what they are supposed to and ensuring that the results accurately reflect students' proficiency in English.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Research Findings**

The researchers analyzed the results of a semester examination consisting of 50 questions to know students' ability in English mastery. These questions are designed to evaluate various aspects of language skills: expressing congratulations, expressing hope, Understanding the main idea, supporting detail reading, the structure and genre of text, identifying purposes, conversation, the simple past tense, passive voice, pronoun references, advertisements comprehension, different kinds of advertisements, Word meaning, the verb "to be" and pronoun.

The data, as shown in the chart, provides a detailed overview of the student's performance in mastering various aspects of the English language. It shows the number of correct and incorrect answers for each skill area among 27 students. The analysis and discussion are as follows:

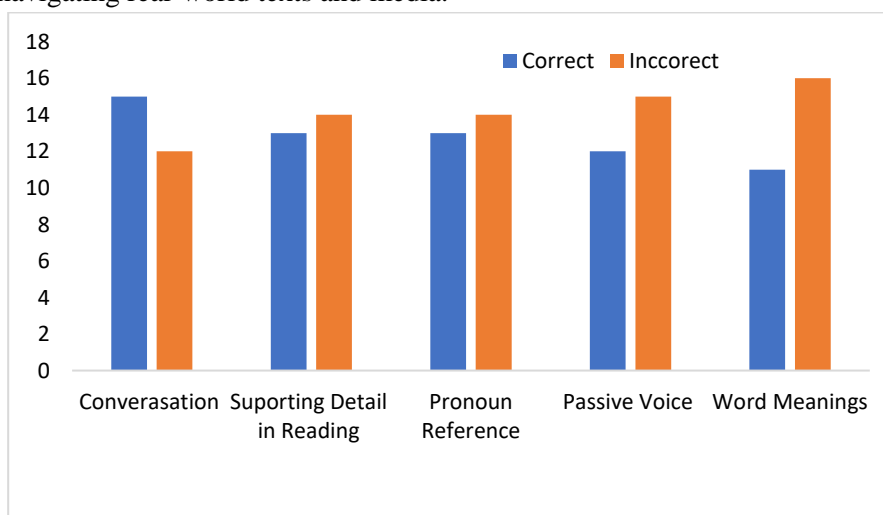


**Figure 1. Students' ability in English in the High category**

Students demonstrated strong proficiency in understanding the main idea and identifying text purposes. For the main idea, 20 students provided correct answers, while only seven were incorrect. This high success rate revealed that students can read comprehension skills, allowing them to quickly grasp a passage's main message or theme. This skill is crucial, as it forms the foundation for more complex analytical tasks and contributes to reading and understanding various subjects.

Similarly, for identifying the text's purpose, 20 students answered correctly, indicating they can discern whether a text aims to inform, persuade, or entertain. This skill requires critical thinking and understanding the author's intent, which is essential for interpreting and engaging with different texts.

In addition, students excelled in recognizing different kinds of advertisements, with 21 correct answers and only six incorrect ones. This likely reflects their familiarity with various media formats and ability to categorize and understand the characteristics of advertisements. This familiarity and contextual understanding are valuable for navigating real-world texts and media.



**Figure 2. Students' ability in English in the Moderate category**

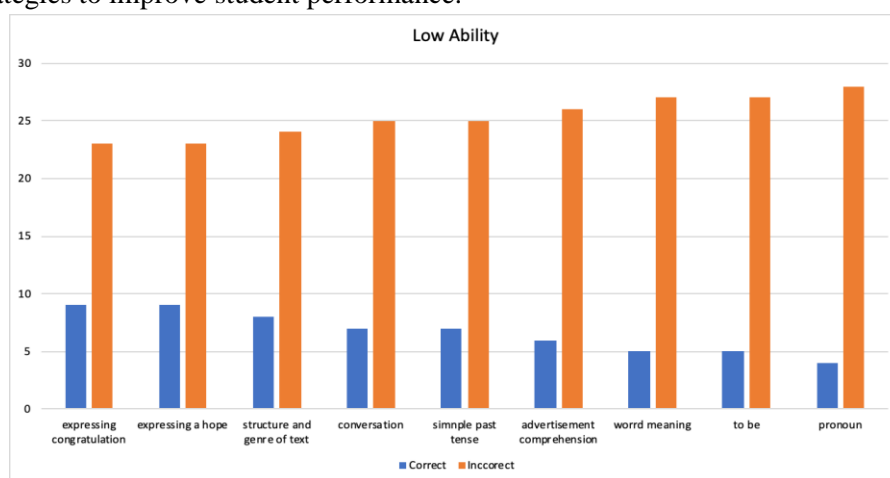
The data displayed the students' ability and weakness in English material in the category of moderate ability. It includes conversation, supporting detail in reading, pronoun reference, passive voice, and word meanings. In the area of Conversation, students demonstrated relatively strong performance, with a higher number of correct responses (16) compared to incorrect ones (12). This indicated that students have a moderate grasp of conversational skills but still make notable errors. Regarding Supporting Detail in Reading, the number of correct responses equals the number of incorrect ones, both standing at 14. This indicates that students are

equally likely to understand and miss key details in reading passages, pointing to an average level of competency in this area.

The Pronoun Reference category shows an equal number of correct and incorrect responses (13 each). This showed that some students understand pronoun usage, but an equal number struggle with it, indicating moderate ability. In the Passive Voice category, the number of incorrect responses (16) surpasses the number of correct ones (12). This highlights a significant challenge for students in correctly using the passive voice, suggesting a weaker understanding of this grammatical structure than in other areas.

Finally, students performed poorly in Word Meanings, with 16 incorrect responses compared to 12 correct ones. This indicates a considerable difficulty in understanding and correctly using vocabulary, making it one of the weaker areas for the students.

Overall, the data shows that while students have a moderate ability across these areas, specific challenges exist, particularly in understanding word meanings and using the passive voice. These areas may require targeted instructional strategies to improve student performance.



**Figure 3. Students' ability in English in the Low category**

The data showed students' performance across various language skills and correct and incorrect responses. The chart encompasses eight categories: expressing congratulation, expressing hope, structure, and genre of text, conversation, simple past tense, advertisement comprehension, word meaning, to be, and pronoun. In the category of Expressing Congratulation, students have a low level of correctness, with only nine correct responses compared to 25 incorrect ones. This indicated significant difficulty in using appropriate phrases and structures to convey congratulations.

Similarly, in the category of Expressing a Hope, students show a comparable struggle, with eight correct responses versus 24 incorrect ones. This implied challenges in articulating hopeful statements or wishes effectively. Students again display low proficiency in Structure and Genre of Text, with ten correct responses against 25 incorrect ones. This indicates a substantial gap in understanding and applying textual structures and genres.

In the area of Conversation, the performance remains weak, with seven correct responses compared to 25 incorrect ones. This indicates that students find engaging in basic conversational exchanges particularly challenging. For the Simple Past Tense, students also exhibit significant difficulties, achieving seven correct responses while making 25 incorrect ones. This highlights problems with correctly using past-tense verbs and constructing past-tense sentences.

The category of Advertisement Comprehension reveals similar struggles, with eight correct responses and 25 incorrect ones. This suggests difficulties in understanding and interpreting the content and language of advertisements. Word Meaning is another area of considerable challenge, with students making seven correct

responses and 25 incorrect ones. This demonstrates a lack of vocabulary knowledge and the ability to understand and use words correctly in context.

Students again show low proficiency in the To Be category, with eight correct responses versus 25 incorrect ones. This indicates difficulties in correctly using the verb "to be" in various contexts. The Pronoun category shows the weakest performance, with only six correct responses against 25 incorrect ones. This suggests significant issues with correctly using pronouns in sentences.

The data indicates that students possess a low ability across all assessed categories, with a consistently high number of incorrect responses compared to correct ones. This underscores a critical need for targeted interventions and instructional support to address these widespread challenges in language proficiency.

## **Discussion**

The study indicates that students are proficient in finding the main ideas within texts. This high success rate suggests that students possess effective reading comprehension skills, allowing them to grasp a passage's central message or theme quickly. According to (Toonder & Sawyer, 2021), identifying the main idea is fundamental to understanding and remembering information from texts, as it helps readers prioritize essential information over less critical details. This skill is crucial for academic success and real-world applications, where distilling key points from written material can enhance effective communication and decision-making.

However, challenges remain in consistently applying this skill across various contexts and text types. Previous research by Toonder et al., (2021) highlight that students may excel in finding main ideas in familiar or straightforward texts but often struggle with more complex or abstract material. This discrepancy suggests a need for targeted instructional strategies to help students transfer their main idea identification skills to a broader range of reading scenarios. Encouraging deeper engagement with diverse texts and providing practice with increasingly challenging material can help bridge this gap. By addressing these challenges, educators can further strengthen students' reading comprehension abilities, enabling them to become more proficient and confident readers.

The study indicates that students demonstrate significant strength in identifying the specific purpose of a text. With 20 students correctly discerning whether a text aims to inform, persuade, or entertain, they exhibit a strong ability to understand the author's intent. This skill is essential for critical reading and engagement with various texts, as it requires students to think beyond the surface level and consider the underlying motivations and goals of the writer. Such proficiency aligns with previous research by Siahaan et al., (2021), who emphasized that understanding the purpose of a text is a critical component of reading comprehension, as it helps readers navigate the material more effectively and apply appropriate reading strategies.

On the other hand, the "Low Ability" chart data reveals that students face challenges in identifying the kinds of texts and their specific structures and genres. Despite their strength in understanding text purposes, students struggle with recognizing and categorizing different text types, as evidenced by their low performance in structure and genre of text. This challenge is consistent with findings by Dabamona et al., (2021), who noted that students often need explicit instruction and practice in understanding text structures to improve their comprehension skills. Addressing this gap is crucial, as recognizing text types and structures enhances students' ability to predict and interpret content, leading to better overall comprehension and engagement with diverse reading materials. Therefore, while students excel in identifying text purposes, focused interventions are necessary to improve their ability to recognize and work with various text genres and structures.

The study reveals a nuanced picture of students' strengths and challenges in English, particularly in conversation, supporting detail in reading, pronoun reference, passive voice, and word meanings. In conversation, students show moderate ability, with 16 correct responses compared to 12 incorrect ones. This indicates a reasonable level of proficiency in basic conversational skills, but there is still significant room for improvement. Effective communication in English is crucial for students, as it enhances their ability to express ideas and boosts their confidence in engaging with peers and educators. Prior research by Dewi et al., (2022)

emphasize the importance of robust conversational skills, noting that conversational students tend to perform better in overall language acquisition due to increased practice and exposure.

Regarding supporting detail in reading, students exhibit an equal number of correct and incorrect responses, standing at 14. This balance suggests that while students can identify key details in texts, they often miss other crucial information. Discarding supporting details is vital for comprehensive reading comprehension, allowing students to understand and engage with the material fully. According to a study by Prwati et al., (2020), students' ability to identify supporting details correlates strongly with their reading proficiency and academic success. Thus, enhancing this skill is essential for improving their performance across various subjects.

Pronoun reference is another area where students demonstrate moderate proficiency, with 13 correct and 13 incorrect responses. This indicates a balanced yet insufficient understanding of correctly using pronouns in sentences. Effective use of pronouns is critical for clarity and coherence in writing and speaking. Apandi et al., (2022) found that students who struggle with pronoun reference often produce ambiguous or confusing sentences, which can hinder effective communication. Improving students' grasp of pronoun usage can significantly enhance their overall language clarity and precision.

In contrast, the passive voice and word meanings present more substantial challenges for students. There were 16 incorrect responses for the passive voice compared to 12 correct ones, highlighting a significant struggle with this grammatical structure. The passive voice is often challenging for learners due to its complex syntax and less frequent use in everyday conversation. Students' difficulties with the passive voice often stem from a lack of practice and understanding of its contextual use. Similarly, word meanings pose a considerable challenge, with 16 incorrect responses versus 12 correct ones. This indicates a lack of vocabulary knowledge, which is fundamental for all aspects of language learning. Expanding students' vocabulary is crucial, directly impacting their ability to comprehend and produce language effectively. Prior studies, including those by Apandi et al., (2022) emphasize that a rich vocabulary is essential for academic success and effective communication.

The study underscores the need for targeted instructional strategies to address these challenges while building on existing strengths. Enhancing conversational skills, improving the ability to identify supporting details, mastering pronoun reference, and overcoming difficulties with the passive voice and vocabulary are essential steps in fostering comprehensive English proficiency among students.

The analysis of students' strengths and challenges in the areas of Expressing Congratulation, Expressing Hope, Structure, and Genre of Text, Conversation, Simple Past Tense, Advertisement Comprehension, Word Meaning, To Be, and Pronoun reveals a complex picture of their English proficiency. This multifaceted understanding is crucial for developing targeted educational strategies that address specific weaknesses while leveraging strengths.

Students show significant challenges in the categories of Expressing Congratulation and Expressing Hope, with only 9 and 8 correct responses, respectively, out of 30. Such difficulties often stem from a lack of exposure to varied and contextually appropriate language models. Kerlis, (2022) stated that practice in real-life communicative scenarios can enhance students' proficiency in these areas. Students' performance in understanding the Structure and Genre of Text also indicates a substantial gap, with only ten correct answers, suggesting insufficient instruction on different text types and their conventions.

The Conversation and Simple Past Tense categories reveal further challenges, with only seven correct responses, indicating a need for more interactive and communicative practice. Errors in the simple past tense indicated a lack of foundational grammar instruction. Interestingly, students performed relatively better in Advertisement Comprehension, with eight correct responses, reflecting higher exposure to advertisements and media. However, significant challenges remain in Word Meaning, To Be, and Pronouns, with only 7, 8, and 6 correct responses, respectively. Limited vocabulary knowledge and fundamental gaps in grammar indicate a need for targeted grammar instruction and extensive practice. Overall, while students show strengths in comprehension skills related to identifying main ideas and text purposes, they face considerable challenges in

expressive language and grammar, necessitating a comprehensive approach to English instruction that emphasizes both exposure to varied texts and explicit, contextualized grammar teaching.

By addressing these identified weaknesses and building on their strengths, educators can help students develop a more rounded and robust proficiency in English, equipping them with the necessary skills for academic success and real-world communication. This research is limited by its small sample size and single-institution focus, which may not generalize to broader populations. Despite these limitations, the findings contribute to the understanding of English language learning in Indonesia, highlighting specific areas for instructional improvement and informing future curriculum development to better support students' linguistic abilities.

## CONCLUSION

Analyzing students' performance reveals a range of proficiency levels across different aspects of English language skills. Educators should focus on targeted grammar instruction for simple past tense and pronoun references to improve proficiency. Conversational practice and activities that simulate real-life interactions can help students become more fluent and confident speakers. Continuing to build on their strengths in understanding the main idea and text purposes while also focusing on extracting supporting details and specific purposes will help develop a more balanced and comprehensive mastery of the English language.

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