

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter analyses the background, questions, objectives, significance, scope and framework of the research.

A. Background of the Study

Reading comprehension has become a significant topic for generations since many researchers have investigated the issue related to this subject. Reading comprehension can be defined as an activity to critically comprehend and analyze a complex text as it becomes essential for students' academic skills (Li et al., 2016). By comprehending a text, the students are supposed to understand the text's meaning and purpose. The statement is supported by Woolley (2011) that reading comprehension is a process of figuring out the meaning of a text. Additionally, when it comes to the university level, the students are expected to have reading comprehension skills.

Since reading comprehension is an inseparable part of college subjects, the students are supposed to analyze, understand, and interpret what they read. Durkin (1993) mentions reading as a process when the interactions between the text and the reader occur. The process is through the dynamic interaction of the readers' prior knowledge, the information inferred in the written text, and the reading situation to construct the meaning. Without being able to pass the reading comprehension process, the reader would serve no purpose.

However, the process of reading comprehension cannot be accomplished immediately since English is not the first language for EFL students. The students may have reading complexities when it turns into a reading comprehension activity. According to the previous research, the complexities of reading comprehension refer to reading difficulty or poor basic skills to comprehend a reading context. Powell-Smith (2020) justifies the types and problem-solving of complexities in reading comprehension, such as reading fluency, vocabulary, syntax and grammar, morphological awareness, and story coherence. Sasmita

(2012) explains that the difficulties that influenced the students in understanding English reading texts are related to the problems in vocabulary, grammar knowledge, and reading interest.

In addition, the complexities of reading comprehension can be produced by several issues. Based on the related research, the students may have different factors that lead to reading comprehension problems but mainly due to internal and external factors. The internal factors can be caused by the lack of motivation, learner's background of knowledge, and language skills acquisition (Melandita, 2019). Meanwhile, the external factors come from the lack of reading strategies in reading class, the school environment, lack of learning media, and the house environment; parents ignore the student's reading skills (Hidayati, 2018). The complexities factors of reading comprehension will affect the students' reading skills. Oberholzer (2005) expresses that reading complexities can negatively impact the students' performance in tertiary education as reading requirements become greater and more extensive.

Related studies have been reporting similar topics regarding the complexities of reading comprehension and the factors encountered in the reading problems. Satriani (2018) examines the reading comprehension difficulties due to the lack of motivation in reading habits and the issue of reading a long text. Following this, Babu (2020) studies the analysis of students' difficulties in determining specific information, such as inferring and referring, which highly contributed to their reading problems.

Nevertheless, this research differs from the prior studies because it explores the complexities of reading comprehension by applying Powell-Smith's framework, which has never been studied on this research site. It also focuses on the internal and external factors of linguistics skills, students' interests, and the learning environment experienced by the EFL students in tertiary education that highly contribute to their reading complexities.

B. Research Question

Based on the background constructed above, some questions emerge to identify as follows:

1. What kind of complexities that EFL students face in reading comprehension?
2. What internal and external factors do contribute to EFL students' reading complexities?

C. Research Purpose

Related to the questions arranged above, the purposes of this research are as follows:

1. To identify the types of reading comprehension complexities faced by EFL students.
2. To investigate the internal and external factors contributing to EFL students' reading complexities.

D. Research Significance

Theoretically, the finding of this research elicits the complexities of reading comprehension experienced by college students. The research findings can also be used as a reference or information for further research in the same field. Practically, the results of this study are presented to extend information concerning the issues of reading comprehension and the underlying factors of reading complexities that can be applied in reading classes. These research significances are also provided for:

1. College students: This research is expected to give a detailed analysis of reading complexities to raise the interest in reading comprehension and how to deal with reading issues and their factors.
2. English lecturers: This research is supposed to contribute to English lecturers in teaching reading comprehension so that in the future, the lecturers can analyze any reading comprehension problems based on this

research topic and overcome the complexities by investigating its factors and types.

E. Research Scope

To examine the study, the findings will be limited to the types and factors of reading complexities experienced by college students in the third semester. This research also explores the case study of reading complexities by applying the framework of Powell-Smith (2020) regarding the complex nature of reading comprehension. The framework will be used to deepen the variables of this research topic.

F. Conceptual Framework

Reading comprehension can be defined as an activity when the readers have a bridge that connects their knowledge and the reading text to build comprehension. Snowball (2005) highlights reading comprehension as the construction of meaning by interacting with a text through the mixture of prior knowledge and former experience to get information within the text. Harmer (2007) assumes that reading comprehension will improve people's knowledge because the more they read, the more they gain knowledge. In other words, reading comprehension refers to the skill of interpreting the knowledge of transcription and grasping any ideas stated in the text.

Additionally, reading comprehension is a fundamental element of language learning that makes people comprehend the subject and meaning of the text. This reading activity allows the readers to explore new knowledge and seek out the information within a specific topic in the text. However, many college students have reading problems due to various complexities that are commonly found in the students' reading skills. Grabe and Stoller (2011) delineate that reading difficulties appear due to the inefficient operation of lower-level and higher-level comprehension processes. Lovett et al. (2000) quote that those reading difficulties are presented as individuals' inability to grow fast and context-free word identification skills. In other words, reading difficulties can be caused

by poor reading comprehension without analyzing the title or predicting what is stated in the text (Sianturi et al., 2020).

The complexities of reading comprehension come from various backgrounds. Powell-Smith (2020) describes the reading comprehension difficulties as the complex nature of reading comprehension. The researcher sheds light on some of the reasons students experience reading comprehension difficulties, including poor basic skills in phonemic awareness and decoding. While these basic skills may impede reading development, students may exhibit reading comprehension problems for reasons beyond these, such as vocabulary and higher-order language skills (e.g., figurative language). Those complexities appear due to the inability to comprehend reading fluency, vocabulary, syntax and grammar, morphological awareness, and story coherence/text structure awareness.

Moreover, there must be reasons and factors behind this phenomenon. Although every individual has different factors contributing to their reading problems, the issues are dominated by external and internal factors. According to Taladngoen et al. (2020), the factors affecting tertiary students' reading comprehension abilities are internal factors with students' linguistic knowledge and perception and external factors with teacher influence, family influence, and environment. Satriani (2018) specifies four external indicators that influence the students' reading comprehension difficulties; low reading habits, complex reading material, low skills of reading, and low strategy or technique of reading. Furthermore, the research conducted by Melandita (2019) also investigates the internal and external factors of reading comprehension problems due to the lack of prior knowledge, motivation, inefficient reading process, poor reading strategies, and kind of texts.

The figure below portrays the research scheme by showing the types of reading complexities and the underlying factors experienced by university students in the third semester.

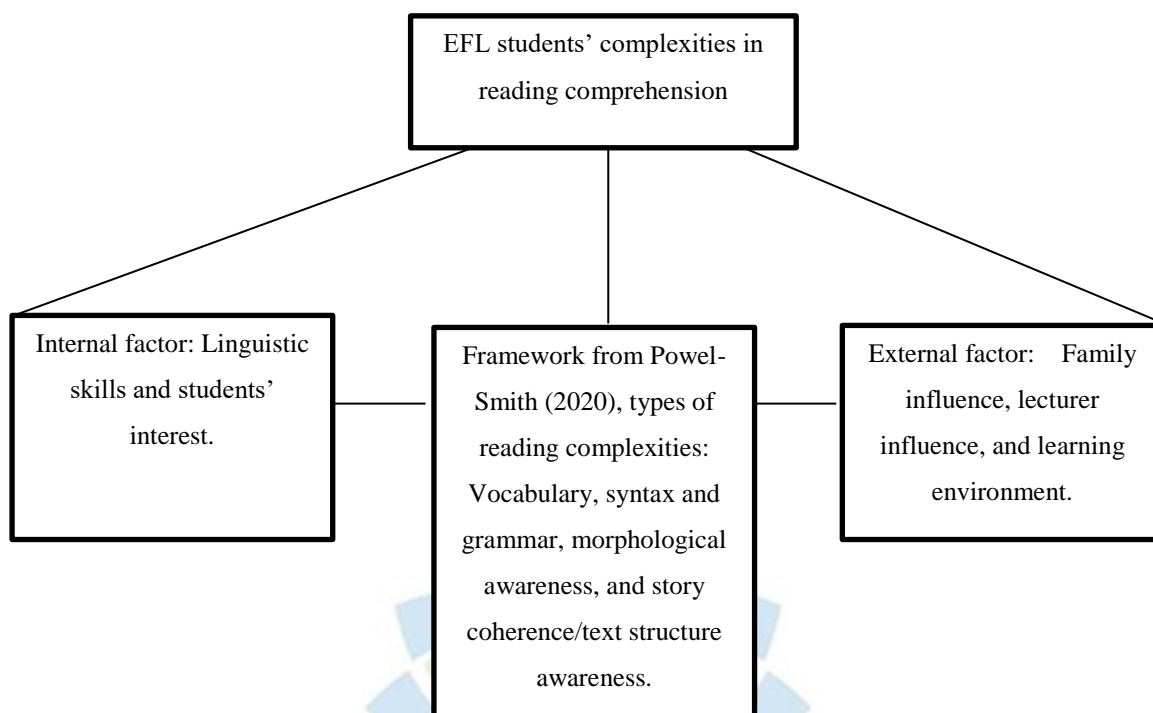


Figure 1.1 Research Scheme
The scheme is adapted from Taladngoan et al. (2020) and Powell-Smith (2020)

G. Previous Study

Several studies have investigated the difficulties in reading comprehension that have been examined for years. The early research taken by Albader (2007) related to reading difficulties faced by the students was due to a second or foreign language since it had some linguistic aspects; grammar (syntax), pronunciation (phonetics), and meaning of words (semantics). The following research was studied by Babu (2020) regarding the analysis of students' difficulties in reading comprehension; particularly, difficulty determining specific information, such as inferring and referring, affected their reading problems.

Melandita (2019) applied a study on reading difficulties and elicited the five main categories of reading problems; language knowledge, learner's background, motivation, lack of reading strategies, and reading process. The findings showed that the respondents perceived overall difficulties in reading comprehension, but most admitted that less reading motivation was the biggest obstacle since they did not understand English.

Qarqez and Rashid (2017) regarding EFL reading comprehension difficulties students face at a university in Jordan. The study revealed that most participants read English in any media for pleasure and to enrich their vocabulary. This study was not limited to getting knowledge but was based on the participants' preference for reading. The findings revealed the difficulties of pronunciation, ambiguous words, new words, reading aloud, and the meaning of the words. The researchers found that university students experience reading problems because of lack of time, reading habits, difficulty with reading skills, and the difficulty of the kind of texts. Additionally, the word meanings became the highest reading issue, among other aspects.

Safura and Helmanda (2020) proposed that vocabulary problems influenced students' reading difficulties in understanding the context or finding the main idea. The causes of these reading issues were the low motivation for reading, the lack of reading strategies, and the monotonous atmosphere of reading class. Furthermore, to solve the difficulties in understanding the main idea, they tried to dive into reading comprehension lessons by practicing in the classroom, having a solid study group, and asking the lecturer to assist them in applying the appropriate and exciting methods.

Moreover, Verdiansyah et al. (2020) conducted a study to examine text complexity in English reading. The primary purpose of this study was to investigate lexical and syntactical complexity. Two English textbooks of grades 10 and 12 of Indonesian senior high schools were assessed. The findings revealed that between grade 10 and grade 12, the complexity of lexical and syntactic aspects showed no difference. However, texts in grade 10 tended to produce more consistent syntactic constructions than grade 12 significantly. Therefore, the research suggested that grade 12 should be revised to meet reading texts based on the students' levels relating to the character of sophistication of language complexity. This research did not mention any factors behind text complexity in English reading, but it was still concerned with one of the reading complexities faced by EFL students.

Marpaung and Sihombing (2021) evaluated the complexity of reading comprehension processes. This research explored the reading problems based on the readers' perspectives, text complexity, and cognitive processes. In this study, the readers' perspectives were divided into good and poor readers to see the differences and characteristics when reading. Then, it analyzed the readers' perspectives influenced by environmental and family factors, cognition, metacognition, motivation, comprehension skills, and reading interest. Each type showed its distinctive characters for good and poor readers. In addition, text complexity appeared due to the various genres, formats, and degree of difficulties that make the readers unable to comprehend specific texts. The last was the cognitive process experienced by the early, second, and third-current generations.

The following research regarding the reading problems and their causes was conducted by Suwanaroa (2021). This research identified college students' reading problems in the second, third, and fourth years. The research was investigated by applying questionnaires related to understanding, personal experience, vocabulary, and grammar problems. Meanwhile, the factors mentioned in this research were students' attitudes, family support, teaching, and learning in the classroom. Each grade presented different percentages in reading problems and their factors, but most participants agreed that those vocabulary problems and students' attitudes toward reading became obstacles in reading comprehension activities.

To perceive differences from the previous research, the gap in this study is the complexities of reading comprehension based on the framework from Powell-Smith (2020) regarding the complex nature of reading comprehension. This framework has never been conducted on this research site, and some past research focuses on high school student, yet this study examines the college students. It sheds light on specific aspects in every language components which differs from other related studies. This study also elicits the factors that contribute to their problems in reading comprehension based on the linguistic skills, students' interests, family influence, lecture influence, and the learning environment experienced by the English learners at the university level.