

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Reading is one of the language skills used in English learning, especially at the primary school level (Stevens et al., 2024). In language learning, reading is understood as the activity of pronouncing written words, the process of understanding, interpreting, and constructing meaning from the text being read (Peristeri et al., 2025b). Good reading skills help students' acquire information, expand their knowledge, and support their academic success in various subjects. Reading comprehension is an important competency that needs to be developed early in young learners in primary school (Taye & Lodebo, 2026).

In primary school English learning, reading comprehension skills help students' understand simple texts at their developmental level. Based on the Merdeka Curriculum, primary school English learning emphasizes the development of students' basic literacy skills, including the ability to understand simple texts, recognize important information, and connect the meaning of the text to everyday life (Gao et al., 2026). This demonstrates that reading comprehension is one of the goals of primary school English learning. Students' are expected to be able to read mechanically, understand the content of the reading, find the main idea, understand vocabulary, and answer questions based on the text they read (Kanniainen et al., 2021).

In learning English in elementary school, reading comprehension aims to help students' not only be able to read words or sentences in English, but students' also to understand the information contained in the text. Through reading comprehension, students' are expected to develop basic literacy skills, such as understanding the meaning of vocabulary, finding important information, identifying key ideas, and connecting the information in the text to their lives. This ability is the basis for students' to use English as a means of acquiring knowledge and supporting the learning process at the next level of education.

Reading comprehension skills are important for young learners because primary school students' are in the transition stage from learning to read to reading to learn (Franchi et al., 2023). At this stage, students' begin to use reading skills to obtain information and understand other learning materials. In this study, young learners refer to fourth-grade primary school students' aged around 9–10 years. Fourth-grade students' were chosen because at this level, students' begin to experience the transition from learning to read to reading to learn, making reading comprehension skills very important to support the learning process. Primary school students' in this age range are still categorized as young learners because they are still in the basic cognitive and language development stage in learning English as a foreign language. According to Kilim & Prior (2025), reading comprehension is a simultaneous process of extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and engagement with written language. Therefore, student success in reading comprehension will significantly impact their academic development in subsequent stages of education. Students' with good reading comprehension skills find it easier to understand subject matter, while students' who have difficulty with reading comprehension will face obstacles in the learning process.

Although reading comprehension is a crucial skill in learning English, many primary school students' have difficulty understanding English reading texts. These difficulties can be seen when students' have difficulty grasping vocabulary, identifying main ideas, drawing conclusions, or answering questions based on the text content. In some cases, students' are able to read texts fluently but are unable to grasp the meaning of the text. This indicates that students' decoding skills have not yet been fully developed, leading to in-depth reading comprehension.

Empirical studies have shown that reading comprehension difficulties remain a common problem among young learners. Research conducted by Chon & Kim (2019) found that low reading motivation leads to decreased student engagement in reading activities, which in turn impacts students' low reading comprehension skills. Research by Mertadi et al., (2024) shows that reading comprehension difficulties in students' are influenced by various factors, such as psychological, intellectual, physiological, and environmental factors. These factors cause students' to experience obstacles in

understanding reading content and impact low student learning outcomes. In addition to psychological and environmental factors, limited vocabulary mastery is also a major cause of low reading comprehension skills in elementary school students’.

According to Roelofs et al., (2026) vocabulary mastery is related to the ability to comprehend text because students’ need to understand the meaning of words to build an understanding of the content of the reading. Students’ with limited vocabulary will have difficulty understanding important information in the text. Lack of interest in reading and low motivation to learn also affect student ability to comprehend reading. Larsen & Erbeli (2026) explain that reading motivation plays a role in increasing student engagement in reading activities and helping students’ understand the content of the text more effectively.

Reading comprehension difficulties can also be influenced by instructional factors or the learning process implemented in the classroom. Inadequately varied reading strategies can lead to students’ being less active and engaged in the process of understanding texts (Hin et al., 2026). In primary school reading instruction, teachers play a role in helping students’ develop reading comprehension skills through the use of learning strategies appropriate to the characteristics of young learners. The use of visual media, shared reading, guided reading, and interactive reading activities can help students’ better understand text content. However, if learning strategies fail to accommodate student needs, reading comprehension difficulties may persist. However, the achievement of students’ reading skills has not been fulfilled even though reading comprehension has an important purpose in learning English in elementary school. There are still students’ who still have difficulties in reading comprehension of English texts so that the goal of learning to read has not been achieved.

Although previous studies have identified various factors contributing to students’ reading comprehension difficulties, these studies have mostly examined individual factors separately, such as vocabulary mastery, reading motivation, psychological aspects, or instructional factors. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of how these factors interact and contribute to reading comprehension difficulties among young learners is still limited. Furthermore, previous studies have

been conducted in various educational contexts and learner levels, while research focusing specifically on fourth-grade primary school students' in Indonesian EFL contexts remains limited. Thus, further research is needed to explore the causes of reading comprehension difficulties based on the actual classroom context of young learners.

Based on the results of a preliminary study conducted through classroom observations and informal interviews with English teachers at Dynata School, it was found that several fourth-grade students' still experienced difficulties in comprehension English reading texts. These difficulties included difficulty understanding vocabulary, determining main ideas, comprehension detailed information, and answering questions based on the reading content. Furthermore, several students' appeared less active and less motivated during reading activities. Teachers have implemented several reading learning strategies, such as using pictures, shared reading, and asking comprehension questions after reading. However, these strategies have not yet fully helped all students' understand the content of the reading optimally. This has resulted in some students' still showing low reading comprehension skills and having difficulty participating in text-based learning activities.

The preliminary study findings indicate that reading comprehension difficulties among young learners are influenced by various interrelated factors that require deeper investigation. Although previous studies have discussed factors affecting reading comprehension difficulties, the findings may not fully represent the actual classroom conditions experienced by students' in different educational contexts. In particular, limited studies have explored the causes of reading comprehension difficulties among fourth-grade primary school students' in Indonesian EFL settings by considering students' learning experiences, classroom situations, and teacher perspectives. Therefore, this study attempts to provide a more contextual understanding of the factors contributing to reading comprehension difficulties through classroom observations and teacher interviews.

Based on the description, this research is important to analyze the causes of reading comprehension difficulties in young learners in primary schools. This

research is expected to provide an understanding of various internal and external causes that influence student reading comprehension abilities. The results of this study are expected to help teachers understand the difficulties experienced by students' and serve as considerations in designing more effective reading learning strategies according to the characteristics of young learners. Therefore, this research was conducted with the title "Analyzing the Causes of Reading Comprehension Difficulties Among Young Learners in Primary School."

1.2 Identification of problems

Based on the preliminary observation and informal interview conducted with the English teacher, several Grade 4 students' still experienced difficulties in understanding English reading texts. The students' showed low participation during reading activities and had difficulties in identifying main ideas, understanding vocabulary, and answering comprehension questions.

1.3 Limitation of the Study

Based on the identification of the problems mentioned above, this study is limited to investigating the factors causing reading comprehension difficulties among fourth-grade students' at Dynata School. This study focuses only on students' difficulties in understanding English reading texts and the factors contributing to these difficulties, including linguistic, cognitive, psychological, environmental, and instructional factors. This study does not examine other English skills, such as speaking, listening, and writing, nor does it investigate intervention strategies to overcome students' reading comprehension difficulties.

1.4 Research Questions

Based on the background, the research questions can be formulated as follows:

1. What are the causes of reading comprehension difficulties among Grade 4 young learners in primary school?

1.5 Research purposes

The purpose of this study is to investigate the reading comprehension difficulties among Grade 4 young learners in primary school students'.

1.6 Significance of research

1.6.1 Theoretical Benefits

The results of this study are expected to provide an overview of the development of studies in the field of reading in elementary education. The results of this study can also be a reference for further research to continue to develop studies on the causes of students' difficulties in reading comprehension.

1.6.2 Practical Benefits

This study is expected to be a reference for teachers to understand the various factors that cause students' to have difficulty in reading comprehension. Thus, teachers can design more appropriate and responsive learning strategies and methods to meet students' needs. In addition, the results of this study are also expected to be the basis for consideration in designing policies or programs to improve literacy at the elementary school level.

