

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

It is notable that English has been internationally used as a means of communication despite of the speakers' background differences. This makes English mastery becomes something that is highly expected in the society. Altbach (2007) agrees that the significant role of English has made it applied as the main international academic language in many countries. Realizing this fact, the government of Indonesia has also established English as one of the subjects taught as a foreign language starting from kindergarten to the senior high school level. There are four basic skills in English that must be mastered by the students through the learning process (Harmer, 2007). Those skills are reading, listening, writing, and also speaking.

All of the basic skills in English are equally important in supporting the students' English mastery. However, reading has always been seen as a fundamental skill that could assist the students in mastering the other skills (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). This argument is supported by McDonough & Shaw (1993), Snow, *et al.*, (1998), and Krashen & Brown (2007) who all agree that reading could give positive influence on students' other language aspects, as well as prepares them with the social and economic aspects that they are going to meet in the society. Through reading, students can build their vocabularies and create a continuing language learning (Ahmadi, 2016). This makes reading becomes a major concern in education since it involves a complex

process of obtaining information through comprehending text (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

Reading comprehension is not merely a process of recognizing and understanding words and their meanings. It involves a more complex cognitive process where students could understand the meaning of written language, link it to their prior knowledge, and build up a mental representation of the information that they have read (Keenan, *et al.*, 2008; Takaloo & Ahmadi, 2017). Sloat *et al.*, (2007) argue that the failure of achieving the reading comprehension objectives during the students' primary grades will lead them to have lack of reading ability. This includes lack of vocabularies, difficulties in academic field, and difficulties in mastering English in general. Therefore, reading comprehension needs to be given more attention, particularly in EFL classes (Robinson, *et al.*, 2019).

The indicators that denote the success of students' reading comprehension are their ability to respond and convert the information that is presented in the text. This is the reason why students are often tested through a test with a list of reading texts where they are asked to answer some questions related to the texts. Nuttal (1982) suggests that there are five reading aspects that must be mastered by the students. They must be able to determine the main idea of the text, find specific information provided in the text, make reference, identify reference, and understand the meaning of word or detailed information. Koda (2005) provides further aspects of reading by categorizing decoding, vocabulary knowledge, syntactic processing, text-structure knowledge, main idea detection, background knowledge, and comprehension

strategies as the aspects of reading comprehension. In Indonesia, reading is suggested to be mastered by students as written on the Decree of Education and Cultural Ministry No. 061/U/1993.

Students are expected to master reading by achieving the competency standard and basic competency which are established based on the curriculum 2013. The 2013 curriculum comprises four core competencies (CCs), which consecutively cover religiosity, sociality, knowledge and knowledge application. As in basic competency, students are expected to understand, apply, and analyze the social function, text structure, meaning, and the language feature of the text as well as to apply and analyze those four criteria in order to be able to understand the text as well as to pass the standard score. A study conducted by Kasper, *et al.*, (2018) suggests that students need to at least comprehend 90% of the vocabulary in the text in order to comprehend it. If the amount of vocabulary comprehension is inadequate, then the students' reading comprehension can be negatively affected (Mckee, 2014).

Unfortunately, since English is taught as a foreign language in Indonesia, students have higher possibilities of facing difficulties in comprehending reading text. Students are also not regularly exposed to the language, which makes it harder for them to master it in a short period of time and further leads them to have limited vocabularies. Moreover, when it comes to their reading motivation, the students' reading motivation in Indonesia can be considered low. This is proven by a survey conducted by Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2018 that was released in 2019.

The survey shows that the students' reading ability in Indonesia is considered very low since it sits on the 72th position out of 77 surveyed countries.

Joseph (2001) and Rohmatillah (2014) reveal the main problems of reading that often faced by students whose first language is not English. These problems include difficulty in understanding and deriving meaning from text, making inferences, identifying and understanding vocabulary and sentence structure, and understanding the context of words in the text. These problems can appear worse for students in Indonesia as their first language has different sentence structure, form, sound, and vocabulary spelling, when being compared to English. Silfia *et al.*, (2016) also found that most students still have difficulties in reading especially in terms of identifying the topic, main idea, vocabulary meaning, reference and inference, communicative purpose, generic structure, and language feature of the text. Meanwhile, a study conducted by Qrquez & Rashid (2017) found that students in Yarmouk University faced the difficulties of reading comprehension in terms of ambiguous words, and unfamiliar vocabulary found in the text. This will for sure leads them to difficulties in comprehending the reading text, which can result retardation in mastering the other basic skills in English.

Considering the importance of reading skill in facilitating the students' English mastery, then the difficulties faced by the students in comprehending English reading text must be identified. By identifying the difficulties, the teachers will be able to design a suitable reading strategy that could assist the students in improving their reading comprehension (Oberholzer, 2005). Therefore, this study arose to analyze the students' reading comprehension

difficulties. Considering the statement from Sloah *et al.*, (2007) who argue that students' reading comprehension in their primary grades is highly important to be achieved to build up their reading ability, this study took the eighth grade Junior High School students as the subject of the study. Further, the study was conducted at SMP Negeri 4 Tegalalang. It was conducted on November 6th, 2020 in academic year 2020/2021.

Eighth grade students have learnt about various kinds of texts since they were in the seventh grade. Since students' reading comprehension difficulties was investigated through text, it was important to make sure that they have learnt the texts that were being tested. Therefore, the eighth grade students were chosen as the population of the study and the texts were taken from the seventh grade's curriculum. Further, SMP Negeri 4 Tegalalang was chosen as their students' reading comprehension difficulties were still unknown and it was known that the students' achievement for English subject was low indicating that they have difficulties in comprehending text which was based on the pre-observation data. Moreover, the school's average score of national examination for the past four academic years from 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019 also indicated that the students seems to have problems in reading as the average national examination scores put the school on the 21st position out of 22 public junior high schools in Gianyar Regency, Bali (*Puspendik Kemendikbud*, 2019). The average national examination score indicated that there seems to be problems as the questions of English national examination test also consist of reading passages. The scores for English national examination got stuck among 38.13, 42.93, 46.24, 38.60 from 2016-

2019. The scores further emphasize the urgency to address the reading comprehension difficulties that are faced by the students so that their English mastery can be improved.

Several studies have been conducted previously which also discuss about the students' reading comprehension difficulties. These studies were conducted by Sari (2017), Puspita (2017), Samad (2017), Al-jarah (2018), Hidayati (2018), Nurjanah (2018), and Ganieet *al.*, (2018). The studies investigated the reading comprehension problems and difficulties faced by the students in learning English. The studies suggest that students mostly have difficulties due to their lack of vocabularies. Students also find it hard to find main idea and specific information in the texts. This study offered a novelty since this study was conducted in a SMP Negeri 4 Tegalalang that is located in Bali Province. The setting was chosen due to the school's students' reading comprehension difficulties that were still unknown and the low result of the English national examination scores. Therefore, it offered novelty in terms of setting. Besides, this study also gave novelty in terms of in collecting the data which was through online platform which used google form. Further, the population of the study were eighth grade Junior High School students. This study became more urgent to be done considering the aforementioned theories about the importance of having reading comprehension in supporting the students' English mastery as well as the related studies that have been conducted previously. It was urgent since the difficulties faced by the students must be address sooner in order to assist them with an appropriate reading strategy.

1.2 Identification of Problem

Reading is one of the important skills that must be mastered by students in order to master the language. However, most of the students still have difficulties in reading comprehension especially in terms of identifying topic, main idea, vocabulary meaning, reference and inference. Based on pre-observation that was done in SMP N 4 Tegallalang, it was known that the students' achievement for English subject was still low that indicating that they have difficulties in comprehending English subject. Moreover, the average national examination score for the past four academic years in SMP N 4 Tegallalang indicated that seemed to be problems. It indicated that the students must have problems in English subject especially in term of comprehending reading text.

1.3 Limitation of the Problem

Based on the identification of the problem explained previously, this study was limited on investigating and analyzing students' reading comprehension difficulties faced by eighth grade students at SMP N 4 Tegallalang. The participants were also limited in which it involves only students from the population. The last, the type of text that used in reading comprehension test was also limited in which this research focused on descriptive and narrative text as these texts are the ones that have been taught in the seventh grade, which would be familiar for the eighth grade students as the population of this study.

1.4 Research Problem

Based on the background of the study, problems identification, and problem limitation, the problem of this study could be formulated as follows;

- a. What are the reading comprehension difficulties faced by eighth grade students at SMP N 4 Tegalalang?

1.5 Research Objective

Based on the research problem, the research objectives could be presented as follows;

- a. Investigating the reading comprehension difficulties faced by eighth grade students at SMP N 4 Tegalalang

1.6 Significance of Study

1. Theoretically, this study was expected to give an overview of students' reading comprehension difficulties at SMP N 4 Tegalalang so that the difficulties could be addressed and further actions could be taken to solve them.
2. Practically, this study was expected to give positive significance to English teachers and other researcher.

- a. For English teachers

The result of this study could be used by teachers to design a suitable reading strategy that could assist the students in improving their reading comprehension and overcome their reading comprehension difficulties.

- b. For Other Researcher

This study could be used as a reference in conducting the same research or further research.