

AN ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF READING LITERACY IN NARRATIVE TEXTS AT SMAN 1 SIKUR

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Abstract: *This study investigates throughout how SMAN 1 Sikur perceive reading literacy in English narrative texts. Many students still struggle with vocabulary restrictions, reading anxiety, and poor confidence, which affect how they comprehend and interact with narrative texts, despite the fact that reading literacy is widely acknowledge as a crucial component of learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Ten purposefully chosen students from Grade XI Kesehatan 3 were given an open-ended questionnaire and classroom observations as part of a descriptive qualitative as a method. Thematic analysis revealed that students perceive narrative texts as meaningful for understanding plot, characters, and moral values; however, they also view them as challenging due to unfamiliar vocabulary, difficulty following the storyline, and reliance on translation tools. The study comes to the conclusion that enhancing students' reading literacy in narrative texts learning requires improvements in vocabulary assistance, training in metacognitive strategies, confidence-building, and scaffolded reading assignments.*

Keyword: *EFL learning, narrative texts, qualitative study, reading literacy, students perceptions*

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INTRODUCTION

Reading literacy plays a key role in English language development, especially when studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL). It is regarded globally as a vital aptitude for learning that allows students to develop skills and excel in a variety of subject areas. Reading literacy, according to definition by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2019), is the capacity to “understand, use, evaluate, reflect on, and engage with texts” with the aim to attain personal goals, develop one’s potential, and constructively participate in society. This definition highlights that reading Literacy is more than just a fundamental decoding ability; it is a critical cognitive foundation that supports educational readiness and critical thinking capacity in an increasingly driven by knowledge environment. However, in the Indonesian EFL context, many students continue to confront barriers to reading literacy development.

A major challenge noted by EFL learners is a lack of vocabulary knowledge, which has a substantial impact on their ability to grasp written materials. According to Algahtani (2015), vocabulary proficiency is essential for comprehension since a lack of vocabulary restrict students from identifying main topics, analyzing messages, and drawing inferences. Students who lack lexical comprehension frequently struggle to efficiently digest academic or real English texts. In addition to linguistic restrictions, affective issues such as anxiety also have an impact on reading performance. According to research conducted among Indonesian high school students, reading anxiety, which is defined as dread, stress, or nervousness when confronted

with English texts, might lower students' concentration and impair comprehending (Muhlis, 2022). The limitations come to light when students engage with narrative texts which are commonly taught in Indonesian school curriculum. Sari, Sanihastuti, and Wahjuningsih (2020) observed that students struggle with vocabulary, plot understanding, text structure, and making inferences when reading English narrative texts.

These difficulties also reflect national literacy issues. According to the World Bank (2020), Indonesian students commonly struggle with reading comprehension, especially when encountering novel terminology, implicit information, and complex reasoning. These local tendencies are consistent with the conditions found at SMAN 1 Sikur, where many students are hesitant to read longer narrative portions and lose concentration when presented with extended English text. Some students miss essential parts of the story, while others rely significantly on classmates or translations rather seeking to understand the material on their own. Such behaviors reflect a lack of reading desire and self-efficacy, both of which have a significant impact on students' reading literacy and engagement with English texts. According to Guthrie and Wigfield (2000), learners who believe they are competent readers are more likely to actively participate and keep engaged in reading tasks. Understanding these initial reactions can offer teachers with valuable insight and lead more effective and responsive reading instruction.

Given this context, the present investigation seeks to examine students' views of reading literacy in narrative texts at SMAN 1 Sikur. This study aims to provide a greater understanding of the factors that affect students' engagement with narrative texts by investigating their perspectives, reading experiences, and perceived barriers. The findings are intended to contribute to a better understanding of the school's reading literacy position, as well as provide useful implications for strengthening reading instruction in the EFL classroom.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive qualitative method to investigating students' perceptions of reading literacy in narrative texts. A qualitative descriptive approach was selected because it allows researchers to gather extensive descriptions of participants' experience, views, and perspectives in an essay and natural way (Sandelowski, 2000; Lambert & Lambert, 2012). This design is appropriate for educational research which seeks to explore how students view and interpret their learning processes.

The research carried out at SMAN 1 Sikur during the odd semester of the 2024/2025 academic year. The population was made up of 36 students from Grade XI Kesehatan 3. Ten students were chosen from this population using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is ideal in qualitative research because it allows the researcher to choose information-rich participants who can valuable insights relevant to the researcher topic (Patton, 2015; Creswell, 2012). Students in the top 1-10 academically were chosen because their frequent participation in learning activities was expected to help them communicate more reflective and detailed perspectives of reading competence.

Data were gathered using two main methods: classroom observations and an open-ended questionnaire issued via Google Forms. Initial observations were made during ordinary English classroom activities to gain an instinctive grasp of students' behaviours, problems, and engagement with narrative text. Following this, an open-ended questionnaire was utilized to acquire more detailed information about students' reading habits, perceived problems, techniques, confidence, and overall perceptions of reading literacy. Open-ended questions are

useful in qualitative data collecting because they allow students to freely express their options and provide comprehensive replies in their own terms (Lambert & Lambert, 2012).

The acquired data were assessed thematically using the well accepted methodologies described by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis was divided into several stages: familiarization with the data through repeated reading, generating initial codes, grouping codes into broader categories, identifying and reviewing emerging themes, defining and refining the themes, and finally creating clear narrative that captures the essence of students' perceptions. This method of analysis ensures that the interpretation is based on participants' real responses and allows the researcher to uncover repeating patterns relating to reading literacy, obstacles in narrative texts, self-efficacy, and comprehending strategies.

Prior to conducting the observations and distributing the questionnaire, permission was obtained from the English teacher and the school administration. Participants' confidentiality and anonymity were protected by excluding names and personal identifiers from the data.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

FINDINGS

The findings of this study, based on the replies of ten purposefully chosen students from class XI Kesehatan 3 at SMAN 1 Sikur, show a detailed picture of students' reading literacy and perceptions when engaged with English narrative texts. Student 1 (S1) said that he rarely reads English text since they are difficult to grasp and frequently contain foreign language. S1 depends significantly on Google Translate and rates their reading confidence as medium. Student 2 (S2), on the other hand, has better reading habits, reading English novels on a regular basis and displaying improved comprehension, although he still struggles with long or complex terms. Student 3 (S3) rarely reads English narrative literature and difficulties with vocabulary, sometimes relying on other for assistance owing to lack of confidence. Student 4 (S4) equally rarely reads English and finds extensive chapters difficult to understand. S4, who often utilizes translation tools when reading, identified the most obvious concerns as vocabulary challenges and a lack of self-confidence.

Student 5 (S5) does incidental reading, such as reading English information social media, but seldom reads large texts. S5 occasionally understands English text but frequently becomes confused when facing unfamiliar words and relies on teacher assistance for explanation. Student 6 (S6) enjoys reading stories but struggles to understand detailed information in the book, especially the character and plot development. Student 7 (S7) rarely reads English literature for fear of misunderstanding, and he expresses low confidence and reading anxiety. Student 8 (S8) reads English texts only for tasks and favours shorter sections, demonstrating low motivation and reading confidence. Student (S9) occasionally reads but usually gets confused with narrative plotlines and sequencing, making it difficult to follow story events and comprehend meaning. Finally, student 10 (S10) prefers reading short English stories since they are easier to understand, but is intimidated by lengthier narrative materials. (S10) has moderate confidence and believes that narrative reading aids comprehension of plot structure and moral lessons.

Several common themes developed among the ten participants. Most pupils had poor or irregular reading habits, with only one student (S2) demonstrating consistent English Reading engagement. The majority had moderate to low reading ability and described their understanding as inconsistent. The most often reported obstacle was vocabulary difficulty, which affected almost all students and had a substantial role in their inability to interpret

narrative texts. Many students failed to follow the plot of longer pieces, demonstrating deficiencies in comprehension stamina and inferential reasoning. Students tended to rely on surface-level strategies such as translation tools help from teachers and peers, with only one student indicating rereading as a deeper comprehension technique. Additionally, confidence levels were generally poor, with numerous pupils reporting nervousness or fear of misinterpreting English texts. Despite these difficulties, participants agreed that narrative text give valuable learning opportunities by assisting them in understanding plot, characters, and moral values. However, few vocabulary knowledge, low confidence, and insufficient reading experience continue to limit their overall reading literacy development.

1. Students' Reading Habits, Challenges, and Strategies in Understanding Narrative Texts

Overall, the qualitative analysis of the ten selected students (N=10) shows a consistent pattern of limited reading exposure, vocabulary issues, and reliance on surface-level methods. Most students reported reading English texts rarely and having difficulty understanding unfamiliar vocabulary, following the plot of lengthy sections, and staying focused while reading. Their responses also suggest that translation tools and instructor assistance are still the most commonly employed strategies, with only a few students performing more advanced techniques such as rereading inferring meaning from context. Table 1 highlights the distribution of individual student responses to reading habits, perceived challenges, confidence levels, and techniques for engaging with English narrative texts.

Table 1. Students' Responses and Thematic Analysis

Students Code	Reading Habits	Main Difficulties	Strategies Used	Confidence Level	Perception of Narrative Text	Emerging Themes
S1	Rarely reads English texts because they are difficult	Unfamiliar vocabulary ; difficulty understanding long texts	Google Translate	Moderate	Narrative text help understanding plot, but still difficult	Low reading habit; vocabulary difficulty; translation dependency
S2	Frequently reads English novels; consistent engagement	Complex/long vocabulary	Dictionary; rereading	Moderate high	Narrative help understand story events	Good reading habit; vocabulary challenge ; effective strategies

S3	Rarely reads narrative texts	Vocabulary limitation; difficulty understanding texts	Asking peers	Low	Narratives are useful but hard to follow	Low confidence; vocabulary difficulty
S4	Rarely reads narrative texts	Long texts; lack of vocabulary	Translation tools (Dictionary)	Low	Helps understand moral lessons	Low motivations; vocabulary difficulty; low self-efficacy
S5	Incidental reading (short texts on social media)	Confusion with new word	Asking teachers	Moderate	Narrative texts support comprehension when assisted	Weak reading habit; vocabulary difficulty
S6	Enjoys stories but rarely reads long texts	Difficulty understanding details (Character, plot)	Basic interpretation	Moderate-low	Narratives useful but challenging	Difficulty with plot; surface-level strategies
S7	Rarely reads due to fear of misunderstanding	Anxiety; vocabulary difficulty	Translation tools	Very low	Narratives contain messages but difficult	Reading anxiety; low self-efficacy
S8	Reads only for assignments	Difficulty with long texts	Translation tools	Low	Prefers short passages	Low motivation; surface strategy use
S9	Reads occasionally	Confusion with plot sequence and meaning	Dictionary/translate	Low	Hard understand storyline	Plot difficulty; vocabulary problem
S10	Likes short English stories	Difficulty with long narrative texts	Basic comprehension	Moderate	Helps understand moral values	Plot support; moderate confidence

2. Thematic Patterns of Students' Reading Literacy Difficulties and Engagement

A thematic analysis of students' written replies reveals several repeating themes about reading literacy, including lexical challenges, poor confidence, minimal interest, and insufficient understanding stamina. The most common theme among participants was

vocabulary difficulties, followed by worry or fear of misunderstanding, which reduced students' willingness to read longer texts. Furthermore, themes of low motivation and reliance on external aids, particularly translation programs, were continuously prevalent. Only a few pupils engaged in active reading habits like reviewing or summarizing information Table 2 shows the thematic patterns retrieved from student replies, as well as the frequency with which each theme appeared in the dataset.

Table 2. Cross-Theme Summary

Theme	Description based on All Students	Supporting Students
Vocabulary difficulty	Students struggle with unfamiliar word, causing misinterpretations	S1-S10
Weak/irregular reading habits	Most students rarely read English unless required	S1, S3, S4, S5, S7, S8, S9
Difficulty understanding long narrative texts	Students lose concentration and cannot follow plot/sequence	S3, S4, S6, S8, S9, S10
Dependence on translation tool/peers	Students rely on Google Translate, teachers, or peers	S1, S3, S4, S5, S7, S8, S9
Low reading confidence & anxiety	Students fear misunderstanding and feel insecure	S3, S4, S7, S8, S9
Positive perception of narratives	Students say narratives help with understanding plot and moral values	S1, S2, S4, S6, S10

3. Alignment Between Research Focus and Emergent Themes in Students' Reading Literacy

The themes identified in students' responses are closely related to the major subject of this study, namely perceptions of reading literacy in narrative texts. The findings show that students' poor vocabulary knowledge, low self-efficacy, and limited reading experience have a direct impact on their ability to understand narrative structure, identify primary ideas, and draw inferences-all of which are important components of reading literacy. Furthermore, these findings confirm earlier researcher indicating that cognitive and affective barriers greatly influence student involvement in EFL reading. Table 3 depicts the relationship between the research objectives and thematic data, indicating how each theme helps to understanding students' overall perspectives of reading literacy.

Table 3. Alignment Between Findings and Research Themes

Research Focus	Findings Evidence	Interpretation
Students' reading habits	Most students' show low/irregular reading exposure	Limited, engagement hinders reading literacy growth
Students' challenges in narrative texts	Vocabulary, plot understanding, and text length are major barrier	Reading difficulties align with national literacy issues

Students' reading strategies	Mostly rely on translation tools; few use comprehension strategies	Surface-level strategies indicate low metacognitive awareness
Students' confidence & motivation	Most students report fear, anxiety, or low confidence	Affective barriers strongly influence reading performance
Perceptions of narrative text usefulness	Students acknowledge benefits (plot, moral lessons)	Despite struggles, narratives hold learning potential

DISCUSSION

The study indicate that students' judgements of reading literacy in narrative texts are influenced by a variety of linguistic, passionate, motivating, and strategic elements. One of the most apparent concerns is that most participants do not read English on a regular basis. Student rarely engage with English texts outside of class, limiting their natural exposure to language and narrative frameworks. This is congruent with Mahirah's (2020) findings, which show that Indonesian EFL learners frequently regard English reading as a school requirement rather than a personal activity, resulting in little volunteer reading and poor literacy growth.

Although numerous students exhibited an interest in storytelling, many struggle to understand narrative literature in English. Students such as S6 and S10 expressed interest for reading bur struggled to understand elements such as story development and character interactions. This tendency is consistent with Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1982), which holds that learners grow most that learners grow most effectively when exposed to "comprehensible input." When narrative materials go beyond pupils' language and inferential ability, they become confused and disengaged. This mismatch in passion and ability explains why many participants found long, complex texts overwhelming.

Another common trend is students' dependency on translation tools, particularly Google Translate. Most pupils relied on direct word-for-word translation rather than metacognitive or global reading strategies. According to Mokhtari and Reichard (2020), skilled readers employ higher-level tactics such as comprehension monitoring, content prediction, and summarization. However, the students in this study used surface-level methods, indicating a bottom-up reading style. Anderson (2020) also observes that extensive working memory and impair the ability to generate meaning across phrases, which contributes to the difficulty many students expressed when following story plots.

Affective variables such as worry, fear of misunderstanding, and low confidence influenced students' reading behaviours. Students such as S3, S4, S7 and S8 expressed hesitancy, stress, or worry while reading English texts, discouraging them from engaging with longer portions. This supports Horwitz's (2020) findings that reading anxiety in EFL learners can dramatically diminish concentration and comprehension efficiency. Emotional obstacles also contributed to avoidance behaviour, with students opting to read only when required by assignments rather than for autonomous study.

Despite these challenges, pupils saw the instructional potential of narrative literature. Several participants stated that stories helped them learn moral lessons, grasp narrative structure, and make sense of character behaviour. This result supports Grabe's (2020) assertion that narrative reading requires higher-level interpretative skills such as making connections, grasping causality, and integrating information across the text. Students' difficulties in

mastering these skills suggest that limited vocabulary and confidence caused them to focus on decoding rather than interpreting.

Overall, the discussion shows that enhancing students' reading literacy in narrative text necessities a comprehensive educational approach. Strengthening vocabulary knowledge, increasing confidence, introducing metacognitive skills, and gradually increasing text difficulty are all necessary measures. Without addressing these interrelated elements, students are likely to continue to perceive narrative text as difficult, despite appreciating their educational value.

CONCLUSION

According to the researcher's findings, students at SMAN 1 Sikur perceive reading literacy in narrative texts as a result of a complicated interplay between language proficiency, motivation, self-assurance, and the application of reading strategies. While most students see narrative books as valuable learning resources, especially for comprehending themes, character actions, and moral ideals, they also view these works as difficult. Their inability to understand longer and more complicated narrative is mostly caused by a lack of vocabulary, irregular reading exposure, and low self-efficacy.

The data also demonstrate how students' perspectives are influenced by the tactics they use. Deeper interaction with the narrative structure is limited by the heavy reliance on translation tools and word-by-word decoding. These trend show that higher-level literacy skill like drawing conclusion, forming connections between concepts, and deciphering narrative aspects are not adequately supported by learners present reading strategies. Thus, the study emphasizes that enhancing vocabulary mastery, introducing metacognitive methods, boosting reading confidence, and offering scaffolded reading tasks that progressively increase in complexity are all necessary to improve students' reading proficiency. Improving these elements is crucial to creating more favourable mindsets and allowing students to interact with narrative texts in the EFL classroom more successfully.

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