

Exploring Students' Difficulties in Comprehending the Analytical Exposition Text at MA NW Kotaraja

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Abstract

Reading comprehension is one of the essential skills that students need to master in learning English. However, many students still experience difficulties in comprehending analytical exposition texts. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the difficulties faced by eleventh-grade students in comprehending analytical exposition texts and the factors causing those difficulties at MA NW Kotaraja. This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design involving 20 eleventh-grade students. Data were collected through classroom observation, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews, with six students purposively selected for in-depth interviews to obtain more comprehensive information regarding their reading difficulties. The findings revealed that students experienced difficulties in identifying main ideas, finding specific information, understanding references, making inferences, comprehending unfamiliar vocabulary, and recognizing the generic structure of analytical exposition texts. These difficulties were influenced by internal factors, including limited vocabulary knowledge, low reading fluency, ineffective reading strategies, weak reasoning skills, low confidence, and concentration problems, as well as external factors, such as classroom conditions, teacher support, and instructional methods. The findings provide practical implications for English teachers by highlighting the need to integrate vocabulary development, explicit reading strategy instruction, text structure awareness, and critical reading activities into classroom practice to improve students' reading comprehension of analytical exposition texts.

Keywords: Reading Comprehension, Analytical Exposition Text, Students' Difficulties, Internal Factors, External Factors.

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Introduction

Reading comprehension occupies a central position in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning because it functions as the gateway through which students access academic knowledge and develop intellectual abilities. Language, as a medium of communication and knowledge transfer, plays a crucial role in educational contexts, where learning activities rely heavily on students' ability to understand written information. Without adequate reading comprehension, the process of teaching and learning cannot operate effectively, as students will struggle to grasp instructional content, academic texts, and learning resources written in English.

Reading comprehension is not simply the act of recognizing written words but a multidimensional cognitive process that requires readers to actively construct meaning from texts. Audina et al. (2020) emphasize that reading is a process of gaining knowledge, experience, and information from written texts, asserting that reading without understanding cannot be considered true reading. This perspective highlights that comprehension is the ultimate goal of reading activities. In line with this view, Grabe and Stoller (2011) argue that reading comprehension involves the interaction between lower-level processes, such as word recognition, vocabulary mastery, and sentence processing, and higher-level processes, including identifying ideas, making inferences, integrating information, and evaluating textual meaning. When these processes do not operate effectively, students are likely to experience reading difficulties that hinder their academic performance, Grabe and Stoller (2011).

In EFL contexts, these challenges are often intensified because students must process texts written in a foreign language with limited linguistic exposure. As a result, EFL learners frequently encounter difficulties in understanding texts that demand not only linguistic competence but also cognitive and analytical skills. Therefore, investigating reading comprehension in EFL settings becomes essential to understand how students process texts and why they encounter difficulties, particularly when dealing with complex genres.

Reading comprehension develops through several hierarchical levels that reflect the depth of readers' understanding. Harris and Sipay (1985) propose four levels of reading comprehension: literal, inferential, critical, and evaluative comprehension. These levels indicate that comprehension is not a single, static ability but a progressive process that requires increasingly sophisticated cognitive engagement, Harris and Sipay (1985).

Literal comprehension represents the foundational level, focusing on understanding information explicitly stated in the text, such as facts, details, and main ideas. At this level, readers identify surface meanings without interpreting deeper implications. Inferential comprehension requires readers to move beyond explicit information by combining textual clues with background knowledge to infer implied meanings, draw conclusions, and make predictions. This level demands logical reasoning and the ability to connect ideas across the text.

Critical comprehension involves a higher degree of cognitive engagement, where readers analyze the text by questioning the writer's arguments, examining the logic of ideas, and assessing the credibility of evidence. Evaluative comprehension, as the highest level, emphasizes readers' ability to make judgments about the overall quality, effectiveness, and persuasiveness of the text. Analytical exposition texts particularly require readers to operate at critical and evaluative levels because readers are expected to evaluate arguments and judge whether the writer's stance is supported by logical reasoning and evidence.

In addition to comprehension levels, effective reading comprehension is determined by mastery of several key aspects. Nuttall (1985), as cited in Negara (2016), identifies five essential aspects of reading comprehension: identifying the main idea, finding specific information, understanding references, making

inferences, and understanding vocabulary. These aspects function as practical indicators that reveal how well students comprehend a text.

Identifying the main idea allows readers to recognize the central message conveyed by the writer, which is crucial for understanding the overall purpose of the text. Finding specific information enables readers to locate relevant details according to their reading objectives. Understanding references is essential because referential words link ideas within and across sentences, contributing to textual coherence. Making inferences allows readers to interpret meanings that are implied rather than explicitly stated, requiring reasoning skills and background knowledge. Vocabulary comprehension plays a fundamental role because limited vocabulary knowledge can obstruct comprehension at both sentence and discourse levels. When students experience difficulties in these aspects, their comprehension of complex texts becomes fragmented and incomplete, (Nuttall, 1985, as cited in Negara, 2016).

Students' difficulties in reading comprehension refer to the obstacles that prevent learners from understanding written texts effectively. These difficulties are common among EFL learners due to limited linguistic competence and insufficient exposure to English texts. Grabe and Stoller (2011) explain that reading difficulties arise from the inefficient functioning of lower-level and higher-level comprehension processes. When students struggle with word recognition, vocabulary knowledge, or sentence processing, they may fail to construct meaning at higher levels, such as identifying main ideas or making inferences.

Analytical exposition texts pose additional challenges because they require readers to understand argumentative structures and logical reasoning. Students often struggle to identify the thesis statement, understand how arguments support the writer's stance, and recognize the reiteration that reinforces the thesis. These difficulties hinder students' ability to comprehend the communicative purpose of the text and engage critically with its content, Grabe and Stoller (2011).

Reading comprehension difficulties are influenced by both internal and external factors. Westwood (2008) states that reading difficulties stem from cognitive, linguistic, and contextual factors that affect students' ability to process texts. Internal factors include limited vocabulary knowledge, lack of reading fluency, unfamiliarity with the subject matter, difficulty level of the text, inadequate use of reading strategies, weak verbal reasoning, problems with information processing, and difficulties in retaining information after reading. These factors directly influence how students decode, interpret, and remember textual information.

External factors relate to the learning environment, including home and school contexts. Parental support, availability of reading materials, classroom atmosphere, teacher guidance, and instructional methods play a significant role in shaping students' reading development. An unsupportive environment or ineffective teaching practices may exacerbate students' reading difficulties, particularly when dealing with demanding genres such as analytical exposition texts.

Analytical exposition text is an argumentative genre that aims to persuade readers by presenting logical reasons and the writer's viewpoint. Gerot and Wignell

(1998) define analytical exposition as a text that attempts to convince readers that something is true, while Anderson (1997) explains that this text analyzes a topic and presents arguments to support the writer's opinion. Structurally, analytical exposition texts consist of three main components: thesis, arguments, and reiteration, each contributing to the persuasive purpose of the text.

Understanding analytical exposition texts requires readers to recognize text organization, interpret arguments, and evaluate reasoning. Due to its complex structure and language features, analytical exposition text is often perceived as difficult by EFL students, (Gerot & Wignell, 1998; Anderson, 1997). As a result, students frequently experience difficulties in comprehending both the content and structure of this genre, which justifies the need for in-depth investigation of students' reading difficulties in analytical exposition texts.

Although numerous studies have examined students' reading comprehension of analytical exposition texts, most have focused on measuring students' achievement or evaluating the effectiveness of reading strategies through quantitative approaches. Limited attention has been given to exploring students' actual difficulties in depth, particularly regarding reading comprehension aspects, comprehension levels, text structure, and the internal and external factors influencing reading difficulties within authentic classroom contexts. Therefore, this study aims to explore students' difficulties in comprehending analytical exposition texts using a qualitative descriptive approach. By examining students' experiences and perspectives, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of EFL reading difficulties and offer pedagogical implications for improving reading instruction.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore students' difficulties in comprehending analytical exposition texts. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of students' experiences, perceptions, and learning difficulties in a natural classroom context. Qualitative research focuses on interpreting social phenomena by examining participants' perspectives rather than quantifying variables (Creswell, 2007). As cited in the original study, qualitative inquiry enables researchers to build a holistic picture by analyzing words, reporting detailed participant views, and conducting research in real-life settings.

Specifically, this research adopted a descriptive qualitative approach, which aims to systematically describe phenomena as they occur in the field. Zahroh et al. (2025) emphasize that descriptive qualitative research seeks not only to identify what happens, but also to explain how and why a phenomenon occurs. In this study, the design was used to identify the types of reading comprehension difficulties experienced by students as well as the factors contributing to those difficulties when reading analytical exposition texts.

Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at MA NW Kotaraja during the 2026/2027 academic year. The participants consisted of 20 eleventh-grade students selected through purposive sampling because they met the criteria relevant to the objectives of this study. The inclusion criteria were: (1) students were enrolled in Grade XI, (2) they had learned analytical exposition text as part of the English curriculum, (3) they had participated in classroom reading activities involving analytical exposition texts, and (4) they were willing to participate voluntarily throughout the research process. These criteria ensured that all participants had sufficient learning experience to provide meaningful information regarding their difficulties in comprehending analytical exposition texts.

To obtain more in-depth information, six students representing different levels of reading comprehension difficulties were purposively selected for semi-structured interviews based on the questionnaire results and the teacher's recommendations. This selection enabled the researcher to explore diverse experiences and perspectives regarding the students' reading difficulties.

Data Collection Techniques and Instruments

Data were collected using three techniques: observation, questionnaires, and interviews. The use of multiple instruments aimed to obtain comprehensive data and strengthen the credibility of the findings through triangulation.

Classroom observation was conducted to capture students' learning behavior and difficulties during reading activities. Questionnaires were administered offline to gather students' responses related to their reading comprehension difficulties, including problems in identifying main ideas, understanding vocabulary, making inferences, and recognizing text structure. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain deeper insights into students' experiences and perspectives, as well as to support and clarify the questionnaire results.

Instrument Validation

Before the data collection process, the research instruments, including the observation checklist, questionnaire, and semi-structured interview guide, were reviewed through expert judgment by lecturers in English Language Education to ensure their content validity. The validation process focused on the relevance, clarity, and appropriateness of each item in relation to the research objectives and indicators of reading comprehension difficulties. Based on the reviewers' suggestions, several items were revised to improve wording clarity and eliminate ambiguity before the instruments were administered to the participants.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman (1992), which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction involved selecting and simplifying relevant information obtained from observations, questionnaires, and interviews. Data display was carried out by organizing the reduced data into descriptive narratives and tables to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusions were drawn by interpreting patterns and themes emerging from the data and verifying them against the collected evidence to ensure consistency and accuracy.

Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, this study applied four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was enhanced through data triangulation by comparing data obtained from observations, questionnaires, and interviews. Transferability was addressed by providing detailed descriptions of the research context and participants. Dependability was ensured by maintaining clear documentation of the research procedures, while confirmability was achieved by establishing an audit trail and minimizing researcher bias. As suggested by Anney (2015), triangulation plays a crucial role in strengthening credibility, dependability, and confirmability in qualitative research.

Result and Discussion

Students' Difficulties in Comprehending Analytical Exposition Texts

The findings of this study reveal that eleventh-grade students experienced various difficulties in comprehending analytical exposition texts. Data obtained from classroom observations, questionnaires, and interviews consistently indicate that students struggled with several aspects of reading comprehension, including identifying main ideas, locating specific information, understanding reference words, making inferences, comprehending vocabulary, processing long sentences, and recognizing the generic structure of analytical exposition texts.

Classroom observation showed that although most students paid attention to the teacher's explanation and participated in reading activities, many of them began to lose focus when encountering longer texts with unfamiliar vocabulary and complex sentence structures. Students tended to remain silent when they did not understand the text and relied heavily on the teacher's explanation rather than actively asking questions. Difficulties in identifying the main idea were frequently observed, as students often confused the main idea with supporting details. In addition, students required more time to locate specific information, frequently rereading the text before answering comprehension questions.

The questionnaire results further confirmed these findings. Vocabulary emerged as the most dominant difficulty, with 95% of students reporting that unfamiliar and difficult words hindered their understanding of analytical exposition texts. Similarly, 95% of students indicated difficulty in identifying the main idea, while 80% reported that long and complex sentence structures made reading more challenging. Difficulties were also reported in understanding the writer's arguments (75%), identifying the thesis statement (70%), locating specific information (70%), interpreting reference words (70%), understanding the reiteration or conclusion (65%), and making inferences (60%). These findings suggest that students faced challenges not only in understanding textual meaning but also in recognizing the organizational structure of analytical exposition texts.

Interview data provided deeper insights into these difficulties. Most participants explained that limited vocabulary mastery frequently interrupted their reading process, forcing them to pause and consult dictionaries or translation tools. While this strategy helped them understand individual words, it often caused them to lose focus on the overall meaning of the text. Several students admitted that after translating difficult words, they forgot information presented in earlier parts of the

text. This indicates that vocabulary limitations affected both lexical understanding and overall comprehension.

In addition, interviews revealed that students experienced low reading fluency, which slowed down the reading process and shifted their attention from understanding meaning to recognizing and pronouncing words. Many students also struggled to retain information after reading, making it difficult for them to understand the text as a whole or answer comprehension questions accurately. These findings demonstrate that students' difficulties extended beyond vocabulary issues to include problems in information processing and memory retention.

Table 1. Summary of Questionnaire Results on Students' Reading Comprehension Difficulties

Reading Comprehension Aspect	Percentage of Students Reporting Difficulty
Understanding unfamiliar vocabulary	95%
Identifying the main idea	95%
Understanding long and complex sentence structures	80%
Understanding the writer's arguments	75%
Identifying the thesis statement	70%
Finding specific information	70%
Understanding reference words	70%
Understanding the reiteration (conclusion)	65%
Making inferences	60%

Analysis of Reading Comprehension Aspects

A more detailed analysis of the questionnaire, observation, and interview findings demonstrates that students experienced varying degrees of difficulty across the major aspects of reading comprehension.

Main Idea. Identifying the main idea emerged as one of the greatest challenges, with 95% of students reporting difficulty. Classroom observations showed that many students confused the central idea with supporting details, indicating limited ability to distinguish essential information from supplementary explanations.

Specific Information. Approximately 70% of students experienced difficulty locating specific information. Many participants reread the same paragraphs several times before answering comprehension questions, suggesting inefficient reading strategies and limited scanning skills.

References. Difficulties in understanding reference words were reported by 70% of students. Interview findings revealed that students often failed to identify the antecedents of pronouns and other referential expressions, reducing textual coherence and overall comprehension.

Inferences. Making inferences was reported as difficult by 60% of students. Although this percentage was lower than other aspects, interviews indicated that inferential comprehension remained cognitively demanding because students lacked confidence in interpreting implied meanings and connecting ideas across paragraphs.

Vocabulary. Vocabulary represented the most dominant obstacle, with 95% of students reporting difficulty understanding unfamiliar words. Limited vocabulary knowledge frequently interrupted the reading process, forcing students to rely on dictionaries or translation tools and reducing their ability to comprehend the text holistically.

Difficulties in Inferential and Structural Comprehension

Another significant finding concerns students' difficulty in interpreting implied meanings and understanding the structure of analytical exposition texts. Both questionnaire and interview data revealed that many students felt uncertain when required to draw conclusions, interpret implicit information, or connect arguments across paragraphs. Students preferred information that was explicitly stated and lacked confidence when providing interpretative answers.

These findings support Nuttall's (1985) theory, which emphasizes that reading comprehension involves interconnected aspects, including identifying main ideas, making inferences, understanding references, and comprehending vocabulary. Weakness in one aspect, such as vocabulary knowledge, may negatively influence other aspects of comprehension. The present findings also align with Fitri and Rozimela (2020), who reported that inferential comprehension is one of the most challenging aspects for EFL students when reading analytical exposition texts.

However, this study provides additional insights by revealing affective factors underlying inferential difficulties. Interview data showed that students often doubted their own interpretations and hesitated to express their opinions due to fear of making mistakes. This lack of confidence limited their participation in classroom discussions and reduced opportunities for clarification, further hindering comprehension.

Students also demonstrated limited understanding of the generic structure of analytical exposition texts. Many participants reported confusion when distinguishing the thesis statement from supporting arguments because both sections contained the writer's opinions. Questionnaire data showed that 70% of students experienced difficulty identifying the thesis, while 75% struggled to understand the writer's arguments. As a result, students tended to perceive the text as a series of separate ideas rather than a logically connected argument, which affected their ability to identify the author's purpose and overall message.

Factors Influencing Students' Reading Difficulties

The findings indicate that students' difficulties in comprehending analytical exposition texts were influenced by a combination of internal and external factors. These results support Westwood's (2008) theory, which categorizes reading difficulties into learner-related and environmental factors.

Internal factors included limited vocabulary knowledge, low reading fluency, infrequent reading practice, ineffective reading strategies, limited familiarity with analytical exposition texts, weak reasoning skills, difficulty processing information, problems retaining information after reading, and low self-confidence. Questionnaire data revealed that 90% of students rarely applied effective reading strategies, while 80% reported limited reading practice outside the classroom. Many students also relied heavily on word-by-word translation strategies, which hindered their ability to construct meaning at the discourse level.

External factors were primarily related to the learning environment and instructional support. Questionnaire results showed that 80% of students believed

classroom conditions affected their concentration during reading activities, while 85% stated that the teacher's explanation influenced their understanding of analytical exposition texts. Interview data further revealed that noisy classroom environments reduced students' concentration, whereas clear explanations, guided reading, and supportive teacher assistance helped students understand the text more effectively.

These findings are consistent with Hutabarat and Zainil (2020), who found that reading difficulties were influenced by language ability, motivation, learning environment, and instructional support. However, the present study extends previous research by illustrating how these factors interact during the reading process. Students frequently forgot information from earlier paragraphs, struggled to integrate ideas across the text, and lacked confidence when interpreting implicit meanings, even when they initially understood the material.

Discussion Summary

Overall, the findings demonstrate that students' difficulties in comprehending analytical exposition texts are multifaceted, involving linguistic, cognitive, affective, and environmental dimensions. Vocabulary limitations, low reading fluency, ineffective strategies, and limited understanding of text structure interacted with classroom conditions and instructional practices to influence students' reading comprehension. These results reinforce the view that improving students' comprehension of analytical exposition texts requires comprehensive instructional approaches that address not only language proficiency but also reading strategies, critical thinking skills, confidence building, and supportive learning environments.

Practical Implication

From a pedagogical perspective, these findings provide practical implications for English teachers in designing reading instruction for analytical exposition texts. Teachers are encouraged to integrate explicit vocabulary instruction, guided identification of main ideas and text structure, inference-building activities, and reading strategy training into classroom practice. Collaborative discussions, questioning techniques, and scaffolded reading tasks may also help students develop critical comprehension and confidence when interpreting argumentative texts. Such instructional practices are expected to improve students' overall reading comprehension and their ability to analyze analytical exposition texts more effectively.

Research Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the study involved only 20 eleventh-grade students from a single school (MA NW Kotaraja), limiting the transferability of the findings to other educational contexts. Second, the study focused specifically on students' difficulties in comprehending analytical exposition texts; therefore, the findings may not represent reading comprehension difficulties across other text genres. Future studies are recommended to involve larger and more diverse samples from multiple schools and investigate additional text types to obtain a broader understanding of students' reading comprehension difficulties.

Conclusion

This study investigated the reading comprehension difficulties experienced by eleventh-grade students in understanding analytical exposition texts at MA NW Kotaraja and identified the factors contributing to those difficulties. The findings revealed that students encountered difficulties in identifying the main idea, locating specific information, understanding references, making inferences, comprehending unfamiliar vocabulary, and recognizing the generic structure of analytical exposition texts, including the thesis, arguments, and reiteration. Among these aspects, vocabulary and identifying the main idea emerged as the most dominant difficulties.

The study also demonstrated that students' reading comprehension difficulties were influenced by both internal and external factors. Internal factors included limited vocabulary knowledge, low reading fluency, inadequate reading strategies, weak reasoning skills, low confidence, and limited concentration. External factors comprised classroom learning conditions, teacher support, instructional methods, and the availability of learning resources. These findings indicate that reading comprehension difficulties are multidimensional and require instructional approaches that address both cognitive and environmental factors.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the existing literature on EFL reading comprehension by providing empirical evidence that difficulties in comprehending analytical exposition texts involve the interaction of linguistic knowledge, higher-order comprehension processes, and contextual learning factors. Furthermore, the findings extend previous studies by offering an in-depth qualitative description of students' reading comprehension difficulties within the context of an Indonesian Islamic senior high school, thereby enriching the understanding of reading comprehension challenges in EFL settings.

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