

Students' Inferential Reading Comprehension of English Narrative Texts at a Junior High School in Karawang

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ABSTRACT

Inferential reading comprehension is a crucial aspect of reading because it enables students to grasp implied meanings and connect information beyond what is explicitly stated in the text. However, many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students struggle to draw conclusions when reading narrative texts. This study aims to investigate students' inferential reading comprehension skills and identify the factors that influence their understanding of English-language narrative texts. A qualitative case study design was employed, involving 32 eighth-grade students at a junior high school in Karawang, Indonesia. Data were collected through reading comprehension tests, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations. The findings indicate that 18 students (56.25%) were categorized as high-achieving students, 9 students (28.13%) as medium achieving students, and 5 students (15.62%) as low-achieving students. Students with higher achievement levels were generally able to utilize contextual cues and connect information within the text, whereas students with lower achievement levels relied more on explicit information and external support. This study also found that vocabulary proficiency and reading strategies are the internal factors that most strongly influence inferential reading comprehension. In addition, teaching methods, classroom atmosphere, and instructional materials were identified as important external factors. These findings suggest that English teachers should provide vocabulary support and explicit instruction on inference-making strategies to help students improve their inferential reading comprehension of narrative texts.

Keywords: Reading Comprehension, Inferential Comprehension, Narrative Text, Junior High School Students, EFL Learners

INTRODUCTION

Reading is one of the most important language skills that supports students' academic achievement and language development. Through reading, students acquire information, expand their vocabulary, and develop critical thinking skills.

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), reading plays a crucial role because it provides students with the opportunity to access language input and improve their comprehension of English-language texts. However, reading comprehension is not merely about recognizing words and understanding explicit information. Students are also expected to interpret implied meanings, draw conclusions, and connect ideas presented in a text.

One important aspect of reading comprehension is inferential reading comprehension. Inferential reading comprehension refers to the ability to understand information not directly stated in a text by using contextual clues, background knowledge, and logical reasoning. Students with strong inferential comprehension skills are able to identify relationships between events, understand characters' intentions, predict outcomes, and construct meaning beyond literal information. Consequently, inferential comprehension is considered a higher-order reading skill that requires active cognitive processing. Although this is important, many EFL students struggle to draw conclusions when reading English texts. Previous research indicates that limited vocabulary, inadequate reading strategies, and low self-confidence often hinder students' ability to understand the implied meaning in texts. A limited vocabulary can hinder students' ability to understand texts because comprehension requires effective interaction between language knowledge and the reading process (Nation, 2019). Students often focus only on literal information and have difficulty connecting ideas across different parts of the text. This challenge becomes even more apparent when students read narrative texts, which often require readers to infer the feelings, motivations, and events experienced by characters that are not explicitly stated.

Narrative texts are commonly taught in middle school because they contain meaningful stories that can engage students and support language learning. However, understanding narrative texts requires students to identify both explicit and implicit information. Therefore, investigating students' inferential reading comprehension in narrative texts is crucial for understanding how students process information and what factors influence their comprehension. Several studies have examined students' difficulties in understanding English narrative texts. Azral and Kher (2023) found that students often struggle to understand narrative texts due to limited vocabulary and challenges in identifying implied meaning. Similarly, Kusumahwati et al. (2022) reported that Indonesian EFL students often experience difficulties in reading comprehension due to limited vocabulary and inadequate reading strategies. Li and Gan (2022) further revealed that reading motivation, vocabulary knowledge, and self-regulated reading strategies significantly influence students' reading comprehension performance.

Although previous research has explored reading comprehension difficulties and factors influencing reading achievement, most of these studies have focused on general reading comprehension rather than inferential reading comprehension specifically. Furthermore, few studies have examined the level of inferential reading comprehension as well as the internal and external factors influencing

inferential comprehension among junior high school students in the context of English narrative texts. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by investigating students' inferential reading comprehension skills and the factors influencing their comprehension of English narrative texts. Accordingly, this study addressed the following research questions: (1) How are the students' inferential reading comprehension skills in understanding English narrative texts?; and (2) What internal and external factors influence students' inferential reading comprehension of English narrative texts?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous Related Study

Several previous studies have examined students' reading comprehension and their difficulties in understanding narrative texts. Azral and Kher (2023) found that students often struggle to understand narrative texts due to limited vocabulary and inadequate reading strategies. The study revealed that students frequently have difficulty interpreting information beyond the literal meaning, resulting in low comprehension performance. Similarly, Kusumahwati et al. (2022) investigated Indonesian EFL students' perceptions of reading comprehension difficulties and found that limited vocabulary, lack of motivation, and unfamiliar text content significantly affected students' comprehension. The researchers emphasized the importance of strategic reading instruction to improve students' reading performance. Another study conducted by Li and Gan (2022) examined the relationship between reading motivation, reading strategies, vocabulary knowledge, and reading comprehension. The findings indicate that vocabulary knowledge and self-regulated reading strategies are significant predictors of students' reading comprehension performance. This study highlights the role of cognitive and affective factors in successful reading comprehension. Although these studies have contributed to our understanding of reading comprehension difficulties, research specifically investigating students' inferential reading comprehension skills in narrative texts, as well as the internal and external factors influencing these skills among high school students, remains limited. Therefore, this study addresses this issue by focusing on inferential reading comprehension in narrative texts.

The Theory of Inferential Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension refers to the process of constructing meaning from written text through the interaction between the reader and the information in the text. According to Snow (2002), reading comprehension involves the extraction and construction of meaning through interaction and engagement with written language. Successful comprehension requires readers to integrate information in the text with prior knowledge and cognitive processes. Reading comprehension is a dynamic process that involves the interaction between information in a text, prior knowledge, and cognitive processes (Kendeou et al., 2020).

Inferential reading comprehension is a higher-order reading skill that involves understanding information that is implied, rather than explicitly stated in the text. Oakhill, Cain, and Elbro (2019) explain that inferential comprehension requires readers to connect ideas, identify relationships, draw conclusions, and interpret implied meaning based on textual evidence. Readers must actively use contextual clues and background knowledge to draw accurate conclusions. In narrative texts, inferential comprehension enables students to understand characters' intentions, predict events, identify causes and effects, and interpret moral messages. Therefore, inferential comprehension plays a crucial role in helping students achieve a deeper understanding of narrative texts.

Internal Factors Affecting Inferential Reading Comprehension

Several internal factors influence students' ability to comprehend texts that require reasoning. Vocabulary mastery is considered one of the most important factors because students need sufficient vocabulary knowledge to understand contextual meaning and implied information. A limited vocabulary can hinder students' ability to identify relationships between ideas and draw accurate conclusions from a text. Reading motivation also influences students' engagement in reading activities. Motivated students tend to actively participate in reading tasks and apply strategies to overcome comprehension difficulties. Conversely, students with low motivation may demonstrate limited effort when faced with challenging texts. Self-confidence influences students' willingness to participate in reading activities and express their understanding. Students with higher self-confidence tend to engage more actively in reading tasks, whereas those with lower self-confidence may hesitate to interpret and discuss the meaning of the text. Furthermore, reading strategies contribute significantly to inferential comprehension. Effective readers often use contextual clues, rereading, prediction, and information integration strategies to construct meaning from the text and understand implied information.

External Factors Affecting Inferential Reading Comprehension

External factors also influence students' reading comprehension skills. Teaching methods play a crucial role in developing students' ability to draw conclusions through clear guidance, vocabulary support, and opportunities for discussion. The classroom atmosphere can influence students' level of participation and self-confidence during reading activities. Additionally, learning materials that are appropriate for students' proficiency levels can enhance comprehension and encourage active engagement in reading activities.

METHOD

Design and Samples

This study employs a qualitative case study design to investigate students' inferential reading comprehension skills and the factors that influence their

understanding of English narrative texts. A qualitative case study is considered appropriate because it allows the researcher to explore students' inferential reading comprehension within a real-world classroom context. According to Yin (2018), case studies investigate contemporary phenomena in real-world contexts, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly defined.

The case in this study focuses on eighth-grade students' inferential reading comprehension of English narrative texts at a junior high school in Karawang, Indonesia. The participants consisted of 32 eighth-grade students who had studied narrative texts in their English classes. To gain deeper insights into the factors influencing students' inferential reading comprehension, six students were purposively selected for interviews based on their reading test results. Two students represented the high-achieving category, two represented the medium achieving category, and two represented the low-achieving category. This selection allowed the researcher to explore students' experiences and difficulties at various levels of inferential reading comprehension.

Instruments and Procedures

Three instruments were used in this study: a reading comprehension test, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations. The reading comprehension test consisted of 25 multiple-choice questions focused on implicit understanding of English narrative texts. The questions were designed to assess students' ability to identify implied meaning, connect information within the text, predict outcomes, and draw conclusions. Each correct answer is worth four points, resulting in a maximum score of 100. Based on their scores, students are categorized into high (80-100), medium (60-79), and low (below 60) levels of inferential reading comprehension. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six selected students representing different achievement levels. The interviews explored students' reading experiences, vocabulary mastery, reading motivation, self-confidence, and reading strategies. Each interview lasted approximately 10-15 minutes and was recorded in audio format for analysis.

One classroom observation was conducted during an English class focused on narrative texts. The observation examined teaching methods, classroom atmosphere, student participation, teacher guidance, and the learning materials used during the reading activity. Observation notes were recorded to identify external factors that influence students' inferential reading comprehension skills. The research procedure consisted of four stages: preparation, data collection, data analysis, and reporting. During the preparation stage, relevant literature was reviewed, and research instruments were developed. Data collection was conducted through reading tests, interviews, and classroom observations. The collected data was then analyzed and interpreted before being presented in the final report.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994), which consists of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results of the initial reading test were evaluated and used to classify students into high, medium, and low levels of inferential reading comprehension. These test results also served as the basis for selecting interview participants. Interview recordings were transcribed and coded according to themes related to internal factors, including vocabulary mastery, reading motivation, self-confidence, and reading strategies. Observation notes were coded and grouped into themes representing external factors, including teaching methods, classroom atmosphere, and learning materials. The categorized data is then presented in tables and descriptive narratives to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusions are drawn by identifying patterns and relationships among the data. To enhance the credibility of the findings, data triangulation is conducted by comparing information obtained from reading tests, interviews, and classroom observations.

Table 1. Coding Categories for Data Analysis

Data Source	Category	Indicator
Interview	Vocabulary Mastery	Difficulties understanding unfamiliar words
Interview	Reading Motivation	Interest and willingness to read
Interview	Reading Strategies	Use of contextual clues and inference-making
Observation	Teaching Method	Teacher guidance and instructional practices
Observation	Classroom Atmosphere	Student participation and interaction
Observation	Learning Materials	Use and suitability of narrative texts

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Students' Inferential Reading Comprehension Skills

The reading comprehension test revealed that students demonstrated varying levels of inferential reading comprehension when understanding English-language narrative texts. Based on their test scores, 18 students were classified as high achievers, 9 as medium achievers, and 5 as low achievers.

Table 2. Students' Inferential Reading Comprehension Levels

Category	Frequency	Percentage
High	18	56.25%
Medium	9	28.13%
Low	5	15.62%
Total	32	100%

Students were grouped into three categories based on their test scores: high (80-100), medium (60-79), and low (below 60). As shown in Table 2, more than half of the students 56.25% fell into the high category, while 28.13% were classified as students with medium achievement and 15.62% as students with low achievement. These findings indicate that the majority of students achieved a high level of inferential reading comprehension. Students in the high category were generally able to identify implied meanings, connect information across different parts of the text, and effectively utilize contextual clues. Meanwhile, students in the intermediate category demonstrated adequate inferential comprehension but still struggled when encountering unfamiliar vocabulary and complex contextual meanings. In contrast, students in the low category struggle to interpret implied information and rely heavily on explicit details presented in the text. These findings suggest that inferential reading comprehension requires more than just literal understanding. Students need to actively process textual information, connect ideas, and construct meaning from contextual cues. These findings support the view of Oakhill, Cain, and Elbro (2019), who argue that inferential comprehension involves integrating textual information and drawing conclusions beyond explicitly stated meanings.

Internal Factors Affecting Inferential Reading Comprehension

The interview results indicate that several internal factors influence students' inferential reading comprehension skills, including vocabulary mastery, reading motivation, self-confidence, and reading strategies. Vocabulary mastery emerged as one of the most influential factors affecting students' inferential reading comprehension skills. These findings are also supported by Apriliani et al. (2021), who found that vocabulary mastery plays an important role in students' reading comprehension because adequate vocabulary knowledge helps students understand the meaning of a text more effectively. Students with limited vocabulary knowledge struggle to understand contextual meaning and implied information. Consequently, they tend to rely on literal interpretations rather than a deeper understanding of narrative texts. Conversely, students with stronger vocabulary knowledge reported

fewer comprehension difficulties and were able to apply strategies such as translation and context-based inference to support their understanding.

These findings are supported by the students' responses during the interviews. A low-achieving student stated, "*Kadang gampang kadang susah, kalau banyak kata yang nggak ngerti jadi belibet bacanya*" (S31). Similarly, another student explained, "*Saya sering nemu kata yang nggak ngerti, kadang cara bacanya juga bingung*" (S32). These responses indicate that unfamiliar vocabulary limits students' ability to understand contextual meaning and infer implied information. These findings align with Yin and Yang (2021), who reported that vocabulary knowledge significantly contributes to reading comprehension achievement among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Adequate vocabulary mastery allows students to focus on meaning construction rather than merely decoding individual words.

Motivation to read and self-confidence were also found to influence students' inferential comprehension skills. Some students reported feeling nervous and afraid of making mistakes when reading English texts. Interestingly, some high-achieving students also expressed low self-confidence despite demonstrating strong inferential comprehension skills. Interview data also indicate that some students experience anxiety when reading English texts. One participant stated, "*Saya merasa deg-degan karena takut salah baca di depan teman-teman*" (S32). Interestingly, a high-achieving student also reported feeling a lack of confidence during reading activities despite earning high test scores. These findings suggest that reading achievement and self-confidence do not always develop in tandem.

One interesting finding from this study is that some high-achieving students reported low levels of self-confidence despite demonstrating strong inferential reading comprehension skills. This finding suggests that cognitive abilities and affective factors may not always develop at the same pace. Students may have adequate vocabulary knowledge and effective reading strategies, yet still experience anxiety when reading English texts or participating in classroom activities. Therefore, teachers should not assume that high-achieving students are always confident readers. Additional support and a positive classroom environment can help students participate more actively in reading activities. The importance of reading strategies in developing inferential comprehension is also supported by Samiei and Ebadi (2021), who found that learning support and strategic reading activities can improve students' ability to construct meaning from texts.

These findings suggest that reading achievement does not always align with students' levels of self-confidence. While self-confidence can support active participation in reading activities, inferential comprehension can also be influenced by cognitive factors such as vocabulary mastery and strategic reading behaviors. These results differ somewhat from those of Li and Gan (2022), who found that reading motivation positively contributes to reading achievement. These findings further reveal that students employ various reading strategies and draw diverse

conclusions. Low-performing students tend to rely on simple strategies such as looking at pictures, rereading, or skipping difficult passages. Students with medium performance begin to use guessing and matching strategies, while high-performing students demonstrate more advanced inferential behavior by utilizing contextual clues and connecting events within the text. The students also reported using various strategies to understand narrative texts. A low-achieving student explained, "*Biasanya saya lihat gambar biar kebayang ceritanya*" (S31), while a high-achieving student stated, "*Saya mencoba menghubungkan kejadian dalam cerita*" (S2). These responses indicate that success in inferential comprehension is closely related to students' ability to use contextual clues and connect information throughout the text. These findings are consistent with the views of Grabe and Stoller (2013), who emphasize that strategic reading behavior plays a crucial role in successful reading comprehension. Students who use effective reading strategies are better able to construct meaning and understand the implicit information in narrative texts.

External Factors Affecting Inferential Reading Comprehension

Classroom observations identified several external factors that influence students' inferential reading comprehension skills, including teaching methods, classroom atmosphere, and learning materials. Teachers provided explicit instruction on narrative text structure, unfamiliar vocabulary, and comprehension tasks. Throughout the learning process, the teacher guided students in understanding narrative elements and encouraged them to engage with the text through discussions and question-and-answer activities. The classroom atmosphere generally supported the learning process. Most students paid attention during reading activities and participated in classroom tasks, although only a few students actively asked questions. Peer discussions were also observed during reading activities, allowing students to clarify their understanding of the text. These findings are consistent with research conducted by El-Sakka (2021), which emphasizes that the classroom environment influences students' reading achievement by affecting their level of engagement and learning experiences.

Additionally, the learning materials used during the learning process were appropriate for the students' proficiency level and contained important narrative elements such as characters, conflict, and resolution. These characteristics helped students follow the plot and understand the relationships between events in the text. These findings indicate that inferential reading comprehension is influenced not only by individual student characteristics but also by the learning environment. Effective teaching practices, supportive classroom conditions, and appropriate instructional materials can facilitate students' comprehension and promote the development of inferential reading skills. These findings align with Snow's (2002) interactionist perspective, which states that reading comprehension is the result of an interaction between the reader, the text, and the reading context.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that students demonstrate varying levels of inferential reading comprehension when understanding English-language narrative texts. Based on reading comprehension tests, the majority of students were categorized as high achievers, while a small number were classified as medium and low achievers. Students with stronger inferential comprehension were generally able to utilize contextual clues, connect information within the text, and construct meaning beyond what was explicitly stated. This study also revealed that students' inferential reading comprehension is influenced by both internal and external factors. Internal factors include vocabulary mastery, reading motivation, self-confidence, and reading strategies, while external factors consist of teaching methods, classroom atmosphere, and learning materials. Among these factors, vocabulary mastery and reading strategies appear to play a particularly important role in supporting students' ability to understand implied meaning in narrative texts. These findings suggest that English teachers should provide students with more opportunities to expand their vocabulary and practice drawing conclusions through guided reading activities, discussions, and strategy-based instruction. A supportive classroom environment and appropriate learning materials can also help students improve their inferential reading comprehension skills. This study was limited to a single class at a junior high school in Karawang; therefore, these findings cannot be generalized to all EFL learners. Future research could involve a larger sample, different school contexts, or other text genres to provide broader insights into students' inferential reading comprehension skills and the factors that influence them.

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