

## **The Difficulties of Determining Main Idea on Students Reading Comprehension**

**Ansharul Fuqaha<sup>1</sup>**

(Institut Kariman Wirayudha Sumenep, Indonesia)

**Wartim<sup>2</sup>**

(Institut Nahdlatul Ulama, Tasikmalaya, Indonesia)

\*(ansharulofficial@gmail.com)

### **ABSTRACT**

This study used a descriptive-qualitative method using three data collection procedures to collect research data. The instruments used in this present research are observation, interviews, and documentation. This study has two research objectives. The first goal is to comprehend the challenges English students at an institute in East Java, Indonesia, face in identifying the main ideas in student reading comprehension. The second goal is to comprehend the factors that affect English language learners' struggles in identifying the main ideas of their reading comprehension. Based on observations, interviews, and documentation, there are two difficulties in determining the main idea in students' reading comprehension that English learners face: the first is that there is a difference between the main idea and the topic sentence, and the second is an inductive paragraph. Based on the research results of the study, some factors influence the difficulty in determining the main ideas for English learners, among which are a lack of vocabulary, reading style, and material themes.

**Keywords:** Main Idea; Topic Sentence; Reading Comprehension.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Generally, the main idea is the most important one in a paragraph. "Main idea has two parts; a topic and controlling ideas" (Oshima & Hogue, 2007, p.39). The topic is the subject of the paragraph, and the controlling idea tells what the paragraph would say about the topic. For example, the benefits of reading are obtaining information and knowledge. The benefits of reading are called by topic, mentioning the information and knowledge concerning the benefits of reading is called by controlling idea because it controls and less the topic to a very specific point (Holschuh & Lampi, 2018; Kurniati, et. al., 2023; Marzuki, et. al., 2018). Obtaining information and knowledge of the text was called the main idea. Misunderstanding of the definition between the main idea and topic sentence of a paragraph would make the reader face difficulty in deciding

the main idea of a paragraph (Nasri, 2022; Wibowo, et.al., 2020). While the reader could not decide the main idea of a paragraph, she or he would not obtain anything through reading. Reading is obtaining information or knowledge from a text or symbols, certainly, the aim of reading is to obtain information or increase the knowledge of the reader (Marzuki, 2019; Moge, 2023; Jones & Christensen, 2022).

The phenomenon that occurs especially for English learners is uninterested in reading. As stated in the informal interview, Jamila et.al., 2023, states that Reading is a passive skill in English, so she does not like it. It becomes the opposite of speaking. This means the reader could be silent while he or she is reading meanwhile speaking is the reader should produce a voice. Therefore, one of the English learners as the interviewee claimed that reading is a passive skill in English and they are not interested in reading. Whereas reading is obtaining information or knowledge from a text or symbols. This, passive is accepting what happens or what people do without trying to change anything or oppose them. Reading is an ability to be developed for fluent direct reading with comprehension of meaning. While reading the reader must be able to recognise sound patterns represented by the graphic symbols and identify their combination as a language unit already learned (Silalahi, et. al., 2022; Wibowo, et. al., 2020). Therefore, reading is not a passive skill in English although the reader is voiceless during the activity.

Based on the pre-study, except for uninterested in reading comprehension course as the factor influencing the difficulties of determining the main idea of a paragraph in English as a foreign language for students in the first semester of English learners, the difficulties of determining the main idea are diversification between the main idea and topic sentence. Which is found through documentation namely the students' worksheets. "We favour an approach which concentrates on meaning from the beginning because reading is also the language skill which is easiest to keep up many of us can still read in a foreign language that we used to be able to speak as well" (Scott & Ytreberg, 1990, p.51).

Usually, the students would give up reading while they were finding an unfamiliar word because their concentration had been disturbed by it. Although they could guess the meaning of the word through mental images, it would not make them satisfied unless they did not find the meaning of the word in the dictionary. Which, mental image predicts the meaning of the words through our mind. On the other side, to find out the meaning of the unfamiliar word they were lazy, especially to find out the meaning in the dictionary because it would waste their time. Therefore, the students faced difficulties in deciding the main idea of a paragraph.

The data above described the difficulties of determining the main idea faced by English Learners and the influencing factors. The data was based on the findings of the pre-study concerning the difficulties of determining the main idea of students' reading comprehension and the factors that influenced it. The difficulties of determining the main idea faced by the English learners and the factors influencing became the research focuses of the study, certainly, that would be a guide for the researcher in conducting the study.

Based on the phenomenon related to the difficulties of determining the main idea of a paragraph the researcher is interested in appointing the main idea to be studied. Meanwhile, the phenomenon showed that English learners faced difficulty in determining the main idea of a paragraph. Therefore, the researcher wants to understand the difficulties of determining the main idea of students' reading comprehension by the English learners, and the influencing factors.

## **METHOD**

### **Design and Participants**

The researcher used descriptive research as the kind of research that was used while conducting qualitative research. The researcher used this kind of research because the researcher would like to describe the findings of the study about the difficulties of determining the main idea on students' reading comprehension for English learners and the influencing factors. Descriptive research is research designed to obtain information concerning the current status of Phenomena (Atmowardoyo, 2018).

The study aims to understand the difficulties of determining the main idea on students' reading comprehension faced by English learners and the influencing factors. Thus, in the qualitative approach, descriptive research is used to conduct the study.

### **Data Collection and Analysis Techniques**

Data collection is a systematic procedure and standard to get the data needed, involves validity, reliability, and practicality, and it could be done by seeing, listening, recording and taking note of the incident. In the study, the researcher used observation, interviews and documentation to collect the data (Willson & Miller, 2014).

The observation was one the most important ones in data collection because the researcher would know the problem was happening in the real situation. Observation is a basic method for obtaining data in qualitative research and is more than just hanging out (Cohen, et.al., 2017; Creswell, 2012).

In the use of interviews, the researcher used unstructured interviews. The researcher collected the data by asking some questions spontaneously to the students and Reading 1 lecturer that still related to the problems that the researcher looked at and listened from the phenomenon of the observation of the researcher.

Documentation is a general term for written information, media, and other content used to support a tool or a process (Creswell, 2012). In this study, the researcher used the middle test result and the student's worksheet to collect and analyse the data.

All the data will be analysed by checking the data collection, data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing and verification. The function of data analysis is to know the result of the investigation. After collecting the data, the researcher would analyse it by using a descriptive qualitative procedure. Then the researcher analysed the data that had been collected.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **RESULTS**

The two main points in this section come from the research focuses.

#### **The Description of the Difficulties of Determining the Main Idea**

Based on the result of the study through observation, interview and documentation, the difficulties of determining the main idea faced by English learners are:

##### ***The Diversification between the Main Idea and Topic Sentence***

The phenomenon of the difficulties in determining the main idea faced by the English learners showed that the diversification between the main idea and topic sentence is one of the difficulties of determining the main idea, as an avowal of one interviewee as follows:

*"...while I was reading, I had derived what I wanted, whether it could be information or knowledge but if I passed an examination and the instruction was asking me to decide main idea or topic sentence, directly I had difficulty because both of them are rather same. Sometimes, I had decided the main idea but that was the topic sentence, and while I had decided that that was the topic sentence in the truth that was the main idea."*

Besides, based on documentation namely the students' result of the middle test which the instruction was determining the main idea of a paragraph, the student mentioned the supporting sentence of the paragraph because he did not understand how to decide the main idea of a paragraph. Based on the findings of observation, while the students were passing a middle test, they had a chat with other friends beside them. They are talking between the main idea and topic sentence.

### ***Inductive Paragraph***

One of the students assumed that the inductive paragraph is one of the difficulties in determining the main idea, as the finding below obtained by interview:

*"... actually, deciding the main idea of the paragraph is not too hard, but if the kind of the text mentions the supporting detail in the first paragraph and then the topic sentence. Whole sentences of the texts are suitable to be the main idea of the text. Because it looked like the topic sentence, I faced difficulty in deciding the main idea of a paragraph, that's all."*

Besides, the findings through documentation showed that the kind of paragraph is the inductive paragraph, which is the paragraph that would be decided the main idea by the English learners were passing a middle test on Thursday 09<sup>th</sup> March 2023. The paragraph is as follows:

Game online has many positive sides. It can save students be spared from being stressed. They can also learn English through the game online because it has many vocabularies of instruction. Games online can stimulate the creativity of students because to play the game, we need to think desperately hard.

On the other hand, internet games can make students too lazy to study because they spend too much of their time to play than to study. They also spend money to play the game if at home they are not provided with an internet connection. On the game online often appears many sexy models are not necessarily to be seen, which can poison students' main.

Indeed, there are pros and cons to games online. It depends on how we manage our time, money and the game to benefit our life. Internet games or games online are popular for students. It can refresh our minds from the busy school day."

### **The Description of the Factors Influencing the Difficulties in Determining the Main Idea**

From the observation, interview, and documentation researcher found that the factors influencing the difficulties in determining the main idea are:

#### ***Lack of Vocabularies***

A statement was derived by the researcher from one of the students of English learners interviewed by the researcher, as follows:

*"... When I got a text that was full English and there was an instruction to decide the main idea etc. I hated it and got a little horrified because I had read all of the words of the text and the instructions needed the main idea only. Yes, I realized that the main idea is the important one reading, but I was too lazy to read all of the words of the text because I needed only a little of the text. Besides that, usually I got some vocabulary that I did know the meaning of, finding the meaning made me lazy because it needed much time and I had to be patient, hee... So, to get the main idea of a paragraph is difficult because usually the vocabulary that I did not know the meaning is the clue or the keyword of the paragraph to decide the main idea..."*

### **Reading Style**

The finding of the study that found by the researcher through observation conducted in the classroom while teaching the learning process. Based on the observation, reading style is one of the difficulties in determining the main idea of reading comprehension faced by English students. The statement is proved by this avowal expressed by one of the students who must read loudly to get the main idea of a paragraph:

*"... I looked toward my left side and also my right side by turning my head because I could not concentrate. I could be like that because I could not read the text loudly. Just now we were passing a middle test (UTS) so I could not read loudly because I was wondering if I would disturb the other friends. Besides that, the question is about the main idea and the instruction is about determining the main idea of the paragraph. Finally, I did not do anything because I did not concentrate."*

### **The theme of the Materials**

The material is one of the factors influencing of difficulties of determining the main idea, as the findings of the interview below:

*"...I had never known or heard before concerning the theme, so it was really difficult to decide the main idea. If the reader had known about the theme, she/ he would have an opinion about the paragraph, but if the reader never knew before it would be very difficult. Although I could decide the main idea through an unfamiliar theme it would not be accurate, although it was true it was my luck only."*

## **Discussion**

In this example, the researcher would like to examine the challenges that English learners encounter in determining the key idea in their reading comprehension, as well as the factors that influence these issues. The following is the discussion:

### **The Discussion of the Difficulties of Determining Main Idea on Students Reading Comprehension of English Students**

The following is a description of the types of issues encountered by English students in determining the main concept of a paragraph.

#### **Diversification of main sentence and topic sentence**

The English students reduced the definitions of the main idea and topic sentence. They assumed that the definition and method for determining the main concept and

topic sentence were the same. Meanwhile, both are distinct. The distinction between the topic sentence and the primary concept is dependent on their specific meaning. The researcher demonstrated the distinction between the main sentence and the topic sentence by presenting the text "The most extraordinary" to English learners, as shown below.

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The most extraordinary thing about China is its size. China is so big that England could get lost in it. It is about fifty times bigger than England. When I went by train from Peking to Canton, the trip took forty-six hours and I covered almost 1,500 miles. Yet I was crossing only a small corner of the country.

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In reality, students always think that the opening sentence of a paragraph (The most remarkable thing about China is its size) is the major topic of the paragraph. In contrast, the topic sentence of the paragraph requires supporting and finishing sentences. Which primary concept applies to a paragraph's entire assertion, which includes the topic sentence, supporting sentence, and conclusion sentence. Because of the diversity between the main concept and topic phrase, English students have difficulty deciding the primary idea of a paragraph.

### ***The inductive paragraph***

The types of paragraphs also contribute to difficulty in considering the primary sentence. In this scenario, the most challenging type of text to be regarded as the main sentence is an inductive paragraph. English students understand that supporting sentences include explanations, examples, and illustrations, but they believe that the supporting sentence should come after the topic phrase to make it easier to discover the primary concept of a paragraph. If the supporting sentence is mentioned in the first paragraph, the students will be confused about deciding the main idea of a paragraph because, in their minds, all of the content in the paragraph is important and it could be the main idea of a paragraph, and then they will be confused about deciding the main idea of a paragraph, and finally, they will be difficult to decide the main idea of a paragraph.

Friska Sibarani (2022) found that 45.31% of students did not pass the test on determining the major idea because they were unable to find the main concept in the inductive paragraph in her study on the analysis of challenges in finding the main idea for the Indonesia language. The issue is with the indicators on the headline.

## **The Discussion of Factors Influencing Difficulties in Determining the Main Idea**

### ***Lack of vocabulary***

Foreign language learners' command of vocabulary becomes an important factor in comprehending a text. When students were reading and came across a vocabulary that they had never heard of before, it made it difficult for them to decide on the main idea of the paragraph because the vocabulary that they had never heard of before could sometimes be the clue or keyword of a paragraph to decide on the main idea.

Following the review-related literature concerning reading comprehension, particularly one of the principles of teaching reading comprehension written by (Ghofur, 2008), students should be taught work recognition skills that will allow them to independently unlock the pronunciation and meaning of unfamiliar words. It means that the students would be unable to memorise all of the words they would encounter in print. As a result, they must learn how to decipher unfamiliar words so that they

can read without the assistance of a lecturer, parent, or friend. To solve the students' problem with unfamiliar words, one strategy for teaching reading comprehension is to distinguish between literal and implied meanings (Brown, 2001). This necessitates the use of sophisticated top-down processing abilities. The fact that not all languages can be properly interpreted by paying attention to their literal, syntactic surface structure places special demands on readers.

### ***Reading Style***

The study's findings were discovered by the researcher through classroom observation while teaching the learning process. According to observations, one of the difficulties encountered by English students in determining the main idea of reading comprehension is reading style. Three reading styles were observed based on the observations. For example, reading aloud, reading silently, and reading through a moving body or school equipment. Although many different reading styles are commonly used in reading. For relatively quick comprehension, use efficient silent reading techniques. It could be beneficial to learn to be efficient readers; reading speed is usually not a problem for all but the most advanced learners (Brown, 2001; Pourhosein & Sabouri, 2016).

### ***The Theme of the Material***

Following the factors of lack of vocabulary mastery and reading style, the selection of themes in reading texts became a factor that influenced the difficulty of determining the main idea. Ghofur, 2008 stated in his article about the strategy of teaching reading by summarising that enjoyment of reading should be prioritised. All schools can produce capable readers who are both entertaining and informative. Lectures could assist students in realising this by reading interesting material to them and making appropriate books available for them to read on their own. Giving a text with a varied theme (Santiana, et. al., 2023; Saraswati, et. al., 2021; Nurjanah, et. al., 2018). Aside from that, one of the purposes of reading comprehension is for enjoyment or excitement (Nunan, 1999; Silalahi, et. al., 2022).

The explanation above was clear enough that the reading materials should be interesting for the reader (Fatimah, et. al., 2020; Hidayati, 2018; and, Ghofur, 2008), particularly the theme offered to easily decide the main idea. Because the lecturer did not provide an interesting theme for the students' reading, the students had difficulty determining the main idea of the paragraph.

## **CONCLUSION**

The researcher's objective is to present the findings and conclusions obtained from the analysis and discussion of the aforementioned data. The purpose of this text is to present a brief overview of the existing data. The researcher's analysis of the data suggests that English learners encounter difficulties in ascertaining the primary concept of a text and discerning the factors that impact it. Therefore, the information provided will be brief and to the point: English language learners face two distinct challenges when identifying the main idea: the variation in the main idea itself and the presence of a topic sentence. Three factors that contribute to the difficulties of determining the central concept are a restricted lexicon, the reading approach, and the subject matter's theme.

The researcher's primary goal is to communicate the outcomes and inferences derived from a meticulous examination and discussion of the data mentioned earlier. In essence, the purpose of this text is to offer a concise yet comprehensive overview of the existing data. Through a thorough analysis of the gathered information, the

researcher has identified a noteworthy trend among English learners, revealing that they often encounter challenges in grasping the fundamental concept of a text and comprehending the factors that influence it.

To address this issue succinctly, the information provided in this study will be direct and to the point. English language learners confront two distinct hurdles when attempting to identify the main idea of a text. Firstly, there is variability in the main idea itself, requiring learners to navigate through diverse perspectives and interpretations. Secondly, the presence of a clear topic sentence, which typically aids in signalling the main idea, can be elusive or ambiguous in certain texts.

Further complicating the matter are three significant factors contributing to the difficulties faced by English learners in ascertaining the central concept. These factors include a restricted lexicon, where learners may lack the vocabulary necessary to comprehend nuanced ideas; variations in reading approaches, as different learners may employ diverse strategies when engaging with textual content; and the overarching theme of the subject matter, which can present an additional layer of complexity.

In essence, this study sheds light on the multifaceted challenges encountered by English language learners in deciphering the primary concepts within texts, emphasizing the pivotal role of vocabulary, reading strategies, and thematic understanding in overcoming these obstacles.

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