

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the researcher talked about the research background, the problem identification and formulation of this research, the objective and significance of the research, the limitations of the research, and the definition of key terms.

A. Background of the Study

Reading is a crucial skill because it allows individuals to gather information from written texts. Reading also enables students to explore new ideas or information from printed or written materials from various countries. During reading, an individual also needs to understand the text they read. This is called reading comprehension. In other words, reading comprehension is a complex process that encompasses multiple cognitive interactions of the readers with the text.¹ By enhancing their reading comprehension skills, people can acquire substantial knowledge and information from written materials. Students' proficiency in reading comprehension contributes to the development of their knowledge and language skills.

¹ A. Klingner, J. K., Vaughn, S., & Boardman, *Teaching Reading Comprehension To Students With Learning Difficulties.*, 2007.

Reading comprehension itself is not just about understanding individual words or sentences. Still, it involves the complex process of both extracting and constructing meaning through active interaction with the written text.² This means that as students read, they do not passively receive information, but instead, they actively engage with the text, interpreting and constructing its meaning based on their own prior knowledge and the context provided by the material. The need to comprehensively understand reading is emphasized more by Oakhill, J. & Cain, K. “Comprehension skills need to be taught. They do not just develop in all children. It’s a skill” That means to fully grasp the meaning of the text, students need to develop and apply specific reading strategies.³ These strategies help them to navigate complex language structures, unfamiliar vocabulary, and different text formats, allowing them to more easily comprehend the content and derive meaning from what they are reading. Through consistent practice in reading, students can build a strong foundation in language proficiency.

While reading is considered one of the main skills of English, some things need to be learned in order to achieve mastery in reading. One of such skills is vocabulary mastery. According to Perfetti & Stafura’s theory vocabulary understanding skill lies in the core of reading skill, Vocabulary mastery means having a strong and well-rounded understanding of many words in a language and being able to use them effectively. It’s not just about recognizing and understanding

² Snow, Catherine, *Reading for Understanding: Toward an R&D Program in Reading Comprehension*, 2024, doi:10.7249/mr1465.0.

³ Oakhill, Jane, ‘*Understanding and Teaching Reading*’, *Understanding and Teaching Reading*, 2013 <<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315044538>>.

words when reading or listening, but also about using them correctly when speaking or writing.⁴ For that reason, learning vocabulary mastery is very important in language learning because students not only understanding words in the scope of reading but also in the scope of daily listening and speaking too.

Students need the ability to communicate with others for academic success. It is a means of learning students to try to understand the messages received. In the case of eighth grade, particularly at SMPN 2 Gandusari, who are at a crucial stage of preparing for exams and higher stages of education, understanding the correlation between vocabulary mastery and reading comprehension becomes crucial. However, a persistent challenge in education is that many students struggle with reading comprehension despite being able to decode words or read fluently. This raises a critical question about the underlying relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension. From such question, this research attempts to find a correlation between students' vocabulary and their reading comprehension ability. A strong correlation would indicate that improving vocabulary could directly enhance reading comprehension skills, thus boosting overall academic performance. As Nation suggests that vocabulary has strong relation and is a solid predictor of reading comprehension.⁵ Furthermore, these findings are expected to provide insight into how vocabulary influence reading comprehension and guide teacher in designing more effective learning strategies. Conversely, if the correlation is weak, it may suggest that other factors, such as critical thinking or

⁴ I. S.P. Nation, 'Learning Vocabulary in Another Language', *Learning Vocabulary in Another Language*, 2001, 1–624 <[https://doi.org/10.1016/s0889-4906\(02\)00014-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0889-4906(02)00014-5)>.

⁵ I. S.P. Nation.

reading strategies, might be at play. This study seeks to explore the correlation between students' vocabulary mastery and their reading comprehension, with a focus on eighth-grade students.

Understanding this correlation will provide insight into how educators can better support students in mastering both vocabulary and reading comprehension. Therefore, the researcher chose this topic entitled "The Correlation Between Students' Vocabulary Mastery and Their Reading Comprehension of Eight Grade in SMPN 2 Gandusari".

B. Problem Identification and Research Limitation

Based on the background outlined above, it is evident that reading goes beyond simply decoding words or paragraphs. Fundamentally, reading is about comprehending the meaning of the text. Recognizing this, the researcher conducted the current study to explore the correlation between vocabulary mastery and reading comprehension among the eighth-grade students of SMPN 2 Gandusari.

This study establishes specific boundaries to enhance the precision and depth of its analysis. Given the broad nature of the research problem, these limitations are essential for a focused investigation. The research focuses on the significant correlation between vocabulary mastery and reading comprehension in eighth-grade students at SMPN 2 Gandusari. For this purpose, 'vocabulary mastery' is operationalized as competence in nouns, verbs, adverbs, and adjectives, while 'reading comprehension' is measured through students' ability to identify a narrative text's general storyline, specific characters, and characterizations.

C. Formulation of Research Problem

To maintain clarity and accuracy, the research problem must be defined in a specific manner to reduce any possible ambiguity within the study. By narrowing the investigation to a clearly stated research problem, the researcher is better able to collect relevant data and determine the solution to the problem being examined. In this study, the researcher focused on exploring the significant correlation between students' vocabulary mastery and their reading comprehension abilities within a junior high school context. SMPN 2 Gandusari was chosen as the research sample. Accordingly, based on the study's background, the researcher formulated the following research question: Is there a significant correlation between eighth-grade students' vocabulary mastery and their reading comprehension at SMPN 2 Gandusari?

D. Objective of The Study

The research objective outlines the aim of the study, specifying what the researcher is trying to accomplish. In this investigation, the researcher intended to determine whether there is a positive or negative correlation exists between vocabulary mastery and reading comprehension.

E. Significance of The Research

One of the key considerations in carrying out this study was the importance of the expected research findings. The significance of the study played an important role in guiding the research process. It aims to further differentiate current research with previously done research. This study specifically aimed to investigate whether there was a significant relationship between vocabulary mastery and reading

comprehension among eighth-grade students at SMPN 2 Gandusari. The outcomes of this research were expected to offer valuable insights into the connection between vocabulary knowledge and reading skills. The researcher hoped that the findings would benefit English teaching, particularly in enhancing reading comprehension, which is closely linked to vocabulary mastery. The results were anticipated to provide both theoretical and practical contributions to understanding the relationship between vocabulary mastery and reading comprehension.

From theoretical perspective, the findings were expected to strengthen existing theories concerning the relationship between vocabulary mastery and reading comprehension by supplying further empirical support. The researcher anticipated that this study would expand the body of evidence affirming the link between these two variables. The results were also intended to emphasize the crucial role of vocabulary mastery in enhancing students' reading comprehension abilities.

Meanwhile, from practical perspective, the findings of this study were expected to serve as valuable feedback for the English teaching and learning process in a foreign language context, benefiting students, teachers, and future researchers. For teachers, the results could support efforts to enhance the overall quality of instruction, particularly in teaching reading comprehension. Consequently, teachers could apply more effective strategies to improve students' ability to understand written texts, taking into account how this skill is associated with their vocabulary mastery.

By contributing to both theoretical and empirical discussions, this study aimed to reinforce established theories while also offering practical implications for English language instruction.

F. Research Scope

The researcher only conducted the research on vocabulary mastery and reading comprehension of the 8th-grade students of SMPN 2 Gandusari, as the general population. In order to make this research more saturated, the researcher will also narrow down the research population into the class that already takes narrative text lessons as a research sample. The sample will be class 8 of SMPN 2 Gandusari. Later, the results acquired from researching the sample will be used to draw a general conclusion of the research.

G. Definition of Key Terms

The key terms in this study needed to be set in a limitation to prevent an overly broad discussion and to ensure a more focused analysis, as previously explained. In line with the study's title, "The Correlation Between Vocabulary Mastery and Reading Comprehension of the Eighth-Grade Students of SMPN 2 Gandusari in the Academic Year 2025/2026," the researcher provided clear operational definitions relevant to the scope of this research. These definitions were intended not only to guide the researcher's focus but also to help readers comprehend the study accurately and avoid any ambiguity or misinterpretation.

To enhance clarity, the researcher identified two essential terms requiring definition: vocabulary mastery and reading comprehension. Furthermore, the

researcher formulated operational definitions for these two key variables as they were specifically examined and applied in this study. The operational definitions are as follows:

1. Vocabulary mastery

In this study, vocabulary mastery was operationally defined as the ability of eighth-grade students at SMPN 2 Gandusari to comprehend English vocabulary. Specifically, nouns, verbs, adverbs, and adjectives, and for the students to use these lexical items appropriately and effectively within relevant contexts.

2. Reading Comprehension

In this study, reading comprehension was operationally defined as the ability of eighth-grade students at SMPN 2 Gandusari to understand and interpret reading texts both comprehensively and inferentially, particularly in identifying the general storyline, specific characters, and characterizations within narrative texts.