

**STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN ANSWERING OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS IN  
READING COMPREHENSION TEST: A CASE STUDY AT THE TEN GRADE  
STUDENTS OF PONPES NURUL HARAMAIN NW PUTRI NARMADA IN ACADEMIC  
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**Students' Difficulties in Answering Open-Ended Questions in Reading Comprehension  
Test: A Case Study at the Ten Grade Students of Ponpes Nurul Haramain NW Putri  
Narmada in Academic Year 2017/2018.**

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**ABSTRACT**

The thesis is aimed to find out the students' difficulties in answering open-ended questions and some factors that contributes to the difficulties. This is a case study using descriptive qualitative method that was conducted at Ponpes Nurul Haramain NW Putri Narmada. The population of this study is all of the ten grade students and the sample was X 1 Class which consists of 25 students that was chosen by using purposive sampling technique. In collecting the data, two kinds of instruments were used, those were reading tests that are taken from a textbook for senior high school. The book is a supplementary reference of the English teacher at Ponpes Nurul Haramain NW Putri Narmada and is owned only by them. The result of the test showed that students' mean score was 52 which qualitatively means Poor. Students' difficulties in answering open-ended questions were shown in percentage as follows; 25.8% of the students faced difficulties in establishing appropriate title, 34.4% students faced difficulties in determining main idea and at the same percentage 34.4 % of the students faced difficulties while asked about specific information and at last, 5.4% of the students faced difficulties in determining moral values of the text. The students' responses to the given questionnaire were categorized into; lack of motivation or interest, vocabulary mastery, students' background knowledge and students' environment.

Key words; Open-ended, Students' Difficulties, Reading Comprehension.

**KESULITAN SISWA DALAM MENJAWAB SOAL OPEN-ENDED PADA TES  
PEMAHAMAN MEMBACA: STUDI KASUS PADA SISWA KELAS 10 DI  
PONPES NURUL HARAMAIN NW PUTRI NARMADA TAHUN AJARAN  
2017/2018**

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**ABSTRAK**

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui kesulitan siswa dalam menjawab soal open-ended dan faktor yang mempengaruhi kesulitan tersebut. Penelitian ini merupakan studi kasus menggunakan metode *descriptive qualitative* yang dilakukan di Ponpes Nurul Haramain NW Putri Narmada Tahun Ajaran 2017/2018. Populasi dalam penelitian ini adalah seluruh siswa kelas X dan X-1 diambil sebagai sampel yang terdiri dari 25 siswa yang dipilih menggunakan tehnik *purposive sampling*. Dalam mengumpulkan data, 2 jenis instrument digunakan, yaitu tes reading yang diambil dari buku paket untuk Sekolah Menengah Atas. Buku ini merupakan referensi tambahan guru bahasa inggris di Ponpes Nurul Haramain NW Putri Narmada dan hanya dimiliki oleh guru bahasa inggris di sekolah tersebut. Hasil dari tes tersebut menunjukkan bahwa rata-rata nilai siswa adalah 5.2 dimana secara *qualitatively* rendah. Kesulitan siswa dalam menjawab soal open-ended terlihat dari persentasi berikut; 25,8% dari siswa mengalami kesulitan dalam menetapkan judul yang tepat, 34,4% dari siswa mengalami kesulitan dalam menentukan ide pokok dan pada persentasi yang sama 34,4% dari siswa mengalami kesulitan ketika ditanya mengenai informasi tertentu dan terakhir, 5,4% dari siswa mengalami kesulitan dalam menentukan nilai moral dari bacaan. Tanggapan siswa terhadap angket yang diberikan dikategorikan sebagai; rendahnya motivasi atau minat, penguasaan kosakata, latar belakang pengetahuan siswa dan lingkungan siswa.

Kata kunci : Open-ended, kesulitan siswa dan pemahaman bacaan.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

English has a significant role in some aspects of life including the sector of education in Indonesia. Indonesian students learn English as a foreign language. It is an important subject where is taught from elementary school to university. The purpose of learning English is to develop communication skill in oral and written forms. In addition, learning English aims to facilitate learners to be able to have information and knowledge delivered in English.

At schools in Indonesia, English is generally taught and assessed in terms of four skills namely; listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Listening and reading are categorized as the receptive skills, while writing and speaking are the productive skills. Every skill has their own standard to expert within, such as in reading. Reading as a language skill is an important aspect in learning English which should be mastered by the students because from reading students can get new vocabulary or some information either related to the text or not.

Furthermore, reading is one of the language skills that is not as easy as many people think. In doing reading, students are expected to get knowledge from the text which is useful for them. On reading activity, readers need to recognize the vocabularies and be able to comprehend from them, meaning that the students need to understand widely and deeply about the text and must have good understanding to answer every question about the text. Without those abilities, the students are likely unable to comprehend much information quickly, accurately and easily.

Comprehending and understanding a text written in English is not easy, many students still find that reading comprehension is difficult although they have learned English for quite longtime. It can be seen from the reading test result which is still far from the teachers' expectation.

Students' reading comprehension can be improved if teachers understand the students' difficulties in reading comprehension. This problem could be solved through evaluation process. In reading comprehension, there are two types of test that usually be used for testing students' reading comprehension, namely open and closed ended questions. Open-ended questions test is a question that cannot be answered in *Yes* or *No*, but rather be answered in own sentences. An open-ended question is expected to receive a long answer, this type of question allows the respondent to express their opinion.

After doing an interview with the English teacher of the 10<sup>th</sup> grade students at Ponpes Nurul Haramain NW Putri Narmada, it was found that the students had some difficulties in answering open-ended questions in reading comprehension test. The English teacher expressed that some students found some difficulties in answering the test because they had less of vocabulary knowledge. The result of observation showed that the English teacher had done several techniques to improve students' ability in answering reading task such as questioning technique. The teacher helped the students to understand deeply about the reading text, the teacher assisted the students to understand vocabulary in the text, but the students could not understand the content of the text because they never tried to master the vocabulary. Therefore, the method was less useful.

Based on the description above, the research conducted under the title "Students' Difficulties in Answering Open-Ended Questions in Reading Comprehension Test: A Case Study at the Ten Grade Students of Ponpes Nurul Haramain NW Putri Narmada in Academic Year 2017/2018".

## **2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

### **A. Reading Comprehension**

According to Kruidenier (2002:77) reading comprehension is an active process which the reader must interact and related to get meanings outside and inside the text. John also explained reading comprehension as the ability to understand what has been read. Grellet (1981:3) defines reading comprehension as understanding a written text that required information from the text as efficient as possible. Wainwright (2007:37) states that reading comprehension is a process where the reader must decide linguistic symbol and reconstruct the text to the meaningful content, and that comprehension includes recognizing and understanding a main idea and related details. A good recognized emphasizes the reader to understand every word of the text to get the full meaning of the reading text. Wainwright (2007:37) also argues that when doing reading, the readers should be able to recall information after reading. Meanwhile, according to Klingner (2007:2) reading comprehension is the process of building an understanding of meaning by connecting information from the text.

Moreover, Serravallo (2010:43) states that comprehension means when readers doing read and thinking at the same time, they will understand the message and get the meaning from outside the text. Furthermore, Armbruster (2000:41) also defines that comprehension is the reason for reading. If readers can read the words but do not understand what they are reading, they are not really reading.

### **B. Open-ended questions in Reading**

According to Ackley (2010) an open-ended question cannot be answered with a "yes" or "no" response, open-ended questions are phrased of statement which requires a response. Johnston & Cooper (1997) states that questions that require the respondents to give more information or details are includes as open-ended questions, because it “opens” a conversation and provides an opportunity for the respondent to answer in free term. The respondent’s answer can be compared as the information that is already known to the questioner. Foddy (1993:127) argues that an open-ended question allows the respondent to express an opinion without being influenced by the researcher. An open-ended question is expected to receive a long answer, this type of question allows the respondent to express their opinion. In other word, open-ended question needs more than one-word answer, question that requires someone to give a free-form answer. The answers could come in the form of a list, a few sentences or some information longer such as a speech, paragraph or essay. Open-ended questions require responses with a deeper and longer answer which will be helpful in finding out more information about the text.

### **C. Difficulties in Reading**

Harmer (2007) states that reading difficulties are define as students’ inability to process the reading text as standard of their score. According to Noormah (2000), the students are lack of vocabulary, hardly understand the words and less interest to English as a subject. Besides, there are some external factors which contribute to the difficulty of this skill. Based on Sivaguru (2000), those factors are home, school, and social environment. The students who are living in a family, where English is the second language, will know English better compared to the students

who are living with English as the foreign language. This later environment causes the motivation to learn the language being low.

Reading is a cognitive process of decoding meaning to get the point from the text. Reading has three components that every student must understand. First; decoding, it refers to processing the word into a sound that is easy to understand. In other word, decoding means the way of students itself try to understand the text that they read become simpler and easier to understand by using their own word. Students who have difficulties in decoding word will read slower and find more difficulties to comprehend the text. Second; comprehension, it is defined as a level of reading which aims to understand the message of the text. The understanding comes from what students read and how the students know the knowledge outside the text. According to Healy (2002), comprehension is the understanding of the written word, the understanding of the content, and the construction meaning of the text. Third; retention, it is the condition of retaining or keeping some information. In this case, retention means the students may be able to memorize facts or information from the text in the short-term. Students with low ability of retention will have some problem in remembering what the text is about and spend much more time to answer the question.

#### **D. Difficulties to Answer Open-ended Questions**

Westwood (2001:32) states that understanding the information from the text is not easy because the students have to recognize the word, to link the information beyond the text, to have appropriate strategy to determine main idea, topic, questioning, inferring and predicting, so that is why there are many students find difficulties in understanding the text. Furthermore, Taylor (1995) proposes some kinds of difficulty in answering test in Reading comprehension as follows;

- a. Confusion about the meaning of words sentences
- b. Inability to connect the ideas
- c. Omission over detail
- d. Difficulty in differentiate significant information
- e. Lack of concentration during reading

Another factors that affecting answering reading comprehension test come from Hart (2015), who divides some factors affecting reading difficulties into three perspectives as follows;

1. Background knowledge

Background knowledge plays an essential role in reading comprehension. In effort to comprehend and answer the text, the students rely on their background knowledge to link what the students have already known from the text that they are reading. Moreover, Mellon (2013) stated that students have their own knowledge before they enter the class, either they got from the class or outside the class, students' knowledge influences how they will understand what they learn. Furthermore, Sokhbirin (2002:21) believes that the students' knowledge influences the students' ability in learning a foreign language. Students who have a lot of knowledge will be easier to learn the new lesson. Background knowledge includes both reader's real-world experiences and literary knowledge. It can be assumed that if the students have low background knowledge of English, the students will feel more difficult to comprehend the text and answer the question.

2. Vocabulary

Unconsciously, students' mastering vocabulary skill affects their reading comprehension. The students must be able to comprehend a familiar word and relate it to other words beyond the text. Mastering vocabulary includes recognizing a word's part of speech, definition of a word and how it functions to a sentence. Lack of vocabulary will make the students get some difficulties to understand the whole text and harder to arrange the answer. Moreover, Cain and Oakhill (1999:489-503) states that reading influences vocabulary development; however, when students do not read fluently or regularly, their vocabulary skills will be affected. In addition, Caccamise and Snyder (2005:25) state that vocabulary knowledge positively affects reading comprehension and academic performance. During reading, the student process to create meaning, but without a strong vocabulary base, the students will struggle to understand what they have read.

3. Critical thinking

The students are likely to respond the text more effectively when they process the words by the critical thinking skill. While the students doing reading, they can determine the idea, supporting details, the events and the overall structure of the text, students will be able to identify the text. Having critical thinking is very useful in reading, on other hand,

students will have a late race in reading and need quite longtime to understand and answer the text. In addition, Carney (1990) adds some factors that might affect the students' difficulties in answering reading text test, those are;

1. Learner's Motivation

Motivation in reading is very important to make the students familiar with the text, especially in English reading text. Motivation is an essential information for students to make them work beyond their heart, so the learning process could be more useful for them. Motivation in reading should be given to the students in order to encourage them to do reading activity as much as possible. Hence, Brown (2004:160-166) states that motivation includes factors such as the need of exploration, activity, stimulation, new knowledge, and ego enhancement. The readers who are lack of motivation to comprehend the text may not enthusiast while doing reading and have less understanding about the text because they just read for assignment without fully interpreting the meaning.

2. Learners' Environment

Learners' environment is one of the important information in developing students' learning interest. This aspect is divided into two general parts: 1) School and 2) Learners' home. School has crucial impact to the learners' environment especially the class. In class activity, the relationship between the teacher and the students should be positive; the class must full of joy and motivation. Reading activity is valued as a useful activity. In another situation, home also plays an important point in developing students' interest in learning English, especially in reading skill. Parents as guidance at home should help their children to improve their knowledge by giving motivation and support. Hence, Diane and Michael (1990) stated that parents have to give more attention to their students to reach their achievement. Moreover, Shalahuddin (1990:95) added interest as the factor that contributes to the students' difficulties;

3. Interest comes from feeling; it can motivate students to be active in their job or activity. Furthermore, De Bortoli (2010:28) argues that having an interest and enjoying a subject will affect quality and diligence, thus they will improve the motivation. Therefore, interest is being one of the important factors in order to increase the students' achievement in reading. If the readers are interested to read, it

will be easier for them to understand what they read. On the other side, if the readers are not interested to read, it will be difficult for them to understand the text.

### **3. RESEARCH METHOD**

#### **A. Research Design**

According to Noor (2011:67) this research can be classified as a case study using descriptive qualitative method. A case study is an intensive study of an individual or group that is seen as having a particular case. Moreover, Lee McKay (2006:71) argues that a case study can be implied in several systems that range from one individual to a class, a school, or an entire community. The data gathered including interview data, narrative accounts, classroom observation, verbal reports, and written documents. According to Yusra (2015:38) the purpose of case study observation is to probe deeply and to analyze intensively some phenomena that occurred in the unit with the population that the unit belongs to.

#### **B. Population**

The population of this research was the 10<sup>th</sup> grade students of Ponpes Nurul Haramain NW Putri Narmada. Based on the researcher's own experience graduated from Ponpes Nurul Haramain NW Putri Narmada there was a tendency that the students have difficulties in answering open-ended questions test. Although they use English as their daily language, but it cannot be denied that some of them are lack in English academic. The 10<sup>th</sup> grade students of Ponpes Nurul Haramain NW Putri Narmada consists of four classes; X-1, X-2, X-3, and X-4, where each class consists of 25 girls, 28 girls and 27 girls and 25 girls.

#### **C. Sample**

X-1 class has been chosen as the sample of the research by using purposive sampling technique, because most of those students have standard ability in English especially in reading skill. Therefore, those students were given a test to find out their difficulties and a set of questionnaires to find out their factors of difficulties in answering open-ended questions.

#### **D. Technique of the Data Collection**

In conducting the research, there are two instruments that been used to collect the data:

##### **a. Test**

In this research the test was used to answer the research question number one; the difficulties in answering open-ended question in reading comprehension test faced by the students. The test asked the students to answer the questions by their own words based on the understanding of the text. The test has been administered to the 10<sup>th</sup> grade students of Ponpes Nurul Haramain NW Putri Narmada who were detected as having difficulties in answering open-ended questions in reading comprehension test. The test has been in six questions and given three (3) times related to the text to answer the question. There were some texts which being adapted and the texts which never been read before by the students. The tests were narrative texts which were adapted from students' textbook based on school wisdom which students has as their reference and the text has been consulted to both supervisors. The six questions have been arranged with some indicators; identify main idea, title, personality and moral value of the text.

##### **b. Questionnaire**

Juliansyah (2009:87) states that questionnaire is a technique of collecting data by delivering and distributing a questionnaire to the respondent with the hopes that they will respond the questionnaire. According to Sugiyono (2009:63) questionnaire was written in the form of statements that is used to get information about the students' possible factors of difficulties. There were two types of questionnaire, those are close form questionnaire and open form questionnaire. Open form questionnaire consists of questions that expect the respondents to write their answer about some information descriptively. On the other hand, close form questionnaire will help the respondent to quickly answer by giving alternative answers to them. The questionnaire consists of ten (10) questions with an instruction in Bahasa Indonesia. The questionnaire is asked about the learners' personal background; interest, motivation, background knowledge and living environment of the students.

## 4. RESULTS

### 1. The difficulties that students faced in answering open-ended questions

Based on the research question number one, that aims to find students' difficulties in answering open-ended questions in reading comprehension test, the data obtained was analyzed by using the students' result score in answering open-ended questions in reading text. The results were divided into three categories: Good (Above Minimum Passing Grade), Satisfying (Minimum Passing Grade) and Poor (Under Minimum Passing Grade), where the standard of the students' Minimum Passing Grade were 7.5. The results presented on table 4.1 showed the students' individual score based on transcript of teachers' supplementary reference book in Academic Year 2017/2018.

Each category was arranged based on the scoring system that has been discussed with the teacher of the school. The data showed that the total score of 25 students was 1.282. After concluding all the result of three tests above, the highest score is 82 while the lowest score is 33. Three (3) students got score above the minimum passing grade, one (1) student got score at minimum passing grade and twenty-one (21) students got the score under of minimum passing grade. The mean score of the students is 52. Therefore, based on the scoring system the mean score of the students was categorized as poor.

Table 4.2 percentage of students' test result

No	Score	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1.	75-100	Good (Above Minimum Passing Grade)	3	12%
2.	70	Satisfied (Minimum Passing Grade)	1	4%
3.	65-00	Poor (Under Minimum Passing Grade)	21	84%

The table above illustrated the category of the students' score in answering open-ended questions: 12% of the students were at good category, 4% of the students were at satisfying category and the rest 84% students were at poor category. Therefore, based on the data above, it can be concluded that most of the 10<sup>th</sup> grade students of Ponpes Nurul Haramain NW Putri Narmada Academic Year 2017/2018 had poor reading performance, meaning that they had difficulties in answering open-ended questions in reading comprehension test.

The sources of the open-ended tests based on the transcript of students' textbook in academic year 2017/2018. The result of open-ended test indicated the most difficulties that faced by the students. The percentage of students' difficulties showed that 34.4 % of the students faced difficulties in answering determining the main idea with 64 incorrect answers from total 186 incorrect answers, in which the question only appeared once of each text. This might be caused by the students' inability to understand the content of the text. They rarely read English book or any kinds of reading text to look for new English reading material to make them aware of knowing main idea of each text.

Furthermore, while answering questions about main idea the students need to apply skimming strategy. In skimming, students had to look at the general overview of the passage and ignore the specific information beyond the text. There was an easier way for students on how to find the main idea of the text: the main idea was stated on the first paragraph where the following paragraphs contained supporting idea, which described the main idea itself. 34.4% of the students failed on this type of questions, with 64 incorrect answers from 186 total incorrect answers of the students who faced difficulties in answering specific information, in which the question appeared three times in the tests.

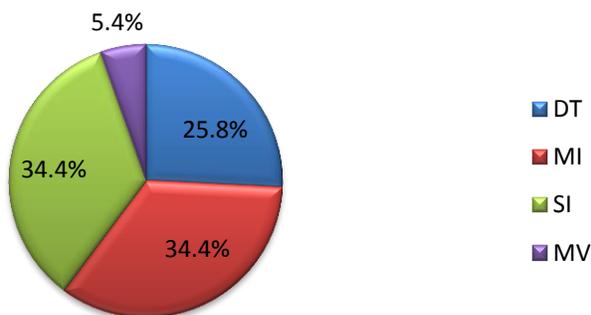
Students less vocabulary mastery was become the main cause. Their low seriousness to learn English make them lazy to know each vocabulary of English. In this case, opposite from finding the main idea, was finding specific information of the text, the students should focus on either specific information and or the general overview thus they should be able to understand every part of the sentences. Hence, based on the frequency of the occurrence questions' item above, it seems that the most difficult question is a questions about determine main idea.

Next, students faced difficulties while being asked about the title of the text with 48 incorrect answers from total 186 incorrect answers. 25.8% of students are involved, this cause has

similarity with asking about main idea. The similarity level was on the ability of understanding the contents of the text either to find the main idea or to determine the title of the text.

The last question where the students faced difficulty to answer was the question of moral value. Only 5.4% of students could answer this correctly. There were 10 incorrect answers out of total 186 incorrect answers. This question could be categorized as an easy question since most students gave correct answers.

**Percentage of Difficulties**



In conclusion, determining the main idea, determine the title of the text and finding specific information were the difficulties in answering open-ended questions in reading comprehension test which were faced by the 10<sup>th</sup> grade students of Ponpes Nurul Haramain NW Putri Narmada based on transcript of students textbook in academic year 2017/2018.

## **2. The factors contributing to students' difficulties in answering open-ended questions**

The data of the students' own perceptions about the factors contributed their difficulties in answering open-ended questions in reading comprehension test was obtained from questionnaire, which related to the research question number two. Some factors occurred as the reasons why the students got problems in answering open-ended questions in reading comprehension test. Furthermore, as it has been explained previously, the students' lack of motivation and interest were become the main factors of students' difficulties.

Their bad habit to not interested in reading English text and visiting library to look for English reading text or doing reading activity outside the class also contributed to the difficulties the faced in answering the reading comprehension test. They could find any kind of reading text

which will be useful for their academic purposes so that they could know how to determine title and main idea and learn how to connect each sentence to another to understand the content of the text. By doing that way, the students could increase their vocabulary mastery, as in this case vocabulary mastery were become the following factors of students' difficulties. Mentioned by Snow (2002;14) that the features of the text have a large effect on comprehension. The text could be difficult or easy for students depending on the relationship between the text content (vocabulary) and the reader (knowledge and motivation).

Furthermore, doing reading activity as much as possible and has curiosity to know new vocabulary will unconsciously increase students' vocabulary. Students will be easier to understand every word and meaning of the sentences. In addition, students' background knowledge also becomes the next factor of students' difficulties. The students who were not seriously learning English could not manage their time to learn English outside the class and keep their concentration beyond the teaching and learning processes although they know that understanding English material, especially in reading text, were very important.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

Based on the collected data regarding the test and questionnaires that has been determined in the present study, this section states all results of the research in general. There are two main research of question to answer in this study. The first; students' difficulties in answering open-ended questions in reading comprehension test, and second; the factors that contributed to those problems. Based on the findings and discussion in the previous chapter the following conclusions are drawn below;

There are several difficulties that students faced in answering open-ended question in reading comprehension test. The difficulties generally correspond of determining main idea and determining the title of the text. There are 25.8% of the students failed to find appropriate title of the text, while 34.4 % of the students were unable to determine the main idea of the text.

Based on the result of the questionnaire that has been given to the students, the factors that contributed to the students' difficulties are students' motivation and interest, also students' vocabulary mastery. As can be seen from the results (*see appendix II*) which were given to the

25 students, 44.7% of the students' responses difficulties related to motivation and interest. They were uninterested to read English reading text. Meanwhile 37.2% of the students' responses difficulties related to vocabulary mastery. The students still find difficulties with unfamiliar and uninteresting word because they have a small amount of vocabulary.

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