

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter delves into the background of the research, encompassing the problem statement, objectives, and significance.

1.1 Background of the Research

Reading proficiency is a cornerstone of academic achievement and lifelong learning, crucial in knowledge acquisition, literary appreciation, and essential modern life activities (Sa'adah et al., 2022). The importance of effective English reading instruction cannot be overstated, as it demands significant attention and effort from both educators and learners. Proficiency in reading not only enhances students' language skills, vocabulary, and critical thinking abilities but also supports teachers in developing other crucial language areas, such as listening, speaking, and writing. Tsai & Lee (2018) emphasize the pivotal role of reading in English language acquisition, highlighting its status as a primary source of information and language input. Furthermore, Ambarini et al., (2018) underscore the global significance of English reading proficiency, noting its far-reaching impact on academic pursuits, professional development, and personal growth.

In Indonesia, people's interest in reading is comparatively low compared to individuals from other nations. However, Indonesia faces significant challenges regarding literacy rates, both traditional and digital (Faqih & Aziz, 2021; Gusti Yarmi, 2022; Istiq'faroh et al., 2022). International assessments highlight these issues: The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) ranked Indonesia 45th out of 48 countries in reading ability among fourth-grade students. A survey by The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) placed Indonesia 62nd out of 70 countries in literacy levels in 2019. This means

that Indonesia is in the bottom ten countries regarding public literacy. Moreover, The Indonesia National Assessment Program (INAP) found that the national reading skills value was only 46.83%. These statistics underscore the pressing need to improve reading skills among the Indonesian population.

Reading proficiency is fundamental to academic success and lifelong learning, yet teaching reading, especially to diverse tenth-grade students and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, presents significant challenges for educators. These challenges, as highlighted by various studies, are multifaceted and complex. Ali & Razali, (2019) identified critical obstacles, such as a lack of practical guidance in teaching reading strategies, insufficient student exposure, and diverse linguistic backgrounds. Motivating EFL students to read and providing ample opportunities for reading practice are additional challenges. Hezam et al., (2022) emphasize reading comprehension difficulties among EFL learners, particularly in vocabulary and word recognition, often stemming from ineffective teaching methodologies, inadequate curriculum design, and low student motivation. Reynolds & Teng (2021) expand on these findings, noting challenges in cognitive development, motivation, attention, strategy utilization, and assessment when instructing young English language learners. AL-Qahtani (2016) corroborates these findings, highlighting the negative impact of limited English exposure and ineffective teaching on EFL students' reading proficiency. These studies underscore EFL teachers' complex challenges, including insufficient training, time constraints, and over-reliance on standardized approaches. To address these issues, researchers advocate for tailored teacher training, curriculum development, and classroom practices aligned with EFL learners' specific needs. A *promising emerging approach* is the socio-constructivist method, emphasizing learners' prior knowledge and interactive learning strategies to enhance reading outcomes.

While extensive research has explored challenges in teaching English reading, there remains a need for context-specific studies, particularly in vocational schools like SMK NU Ma'arif Kudus. This study, titled "Teachers' Challenges in Teaching Reading for Students of Vocational High School," aims to address this gap by examining teachers' unique challenges when instructing tenth-grade students in reading. By investigating teachers' perceptions of problems and needs associated with EFL reading instruction and their strategies, this research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of EFL reading pedagogy in Indonesian Islamic secondary schools. The study focuses on two primary research questions: (1) What principal challenges do English teachers encounter when teaching reading comprehension to tenth-grade students at SMK NU Ma'arif Kudus? and (2) What strategies do English teachers at SMK NU Ma'arif Kudus employ to overcome these identified challenges in EFL reading instruction? By exploring teachers' perspectives on challenges and their instructional practices, this research aims to inform the development of contextually appropriate teaching approaches to enhance students' reading comprehension. Ultimately, the findings of this study will contribute valuable insights to the field of EFL reading instruction, particularly within the unique context of Indonesian vocational schools.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Based on the background of the problems mentioned above. However, this issue needs to be addressed in future studies.

1. What principal challenges do English teachers encounter when teaching reading comprehension to tenth-grade students at SMK NU Ma'arif Kudus?

2. What strategies do English teachers at SMK NU Ma'arif Kudus employ to overcome these identified challenges in EFL reading instruction?

1.3 Objective of the Research

Based on the problem statements, the objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To identify and analyze English teachers' principal challenges when teaching reading comprehension to tenth-grade students at SMK NU Ma'arif Kudus.
2. To examine and evaluate the strategies employed by English teachers at SMK NU Ma'arif Kudus to overcome the identified challenges in EFL reading instruction.

1.4 Significance of the Research

This study is expected to provide theoretical and practical benefits and contribute to future research. These are formulated as follows:

1. Theoretically, this study aims to give committed educators a voice and a platform to share their experiences and insights. This is based on theoretical underpinnings. This study deepened our understanding of educators' daily barriers by capturing their thoughts. These findings can be used to explore innovative solutions for overcoming these challenges.
2. The study of challenges in teaching reading skills has practical significance for governments, teachers, students, and for future research.
 - a. Understanding these challenges can lead to developing policies and initiatives to improve reading instruction in schools. This research can provide insights into specific strategies and approaches that

effectively teach reading skills, and areas where teachers may need additional support and training.

- b. Research on the challenges of teaching reading skills can provide valuable guidance and support for instructional practice. This can help teachers identify effective strategies for teaching reading comprehension, fluency, and critical thinking skills.
- c. The outcomes of this study can have significant implications for teaching reading, as the identified challenges can be used to improve instruction. Educators can enhance students' reading abilities by adapting their teaching methods to address these challenges.
- d. This study's findings create opportunities for future research to explore the difficulties teachers face when teaching reading. Researchers can examine particular aspects of reading instruction, such as the role of technology in fostering the development of reading skills or the efficacy of various instructional techniques. By advancing knowledge in this area, future research can contribute to developing evidence-based strategies that can assist policymakers, educators, and students in overcoming challenges associated with teaching reading skills.