

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

English had become the most widely used language in the world, serving as a global means of communication across various fields such as education, science, business, and diplomacy. As a lingua franca, English connected people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, enabling them to collaborate, exchange information, and participate in the global community (Crystal, 2003). In the context of education, English played an important role as many academic resources, such as textbooks, scientific journals, and online learning materials, were predominantly written in English. Students who were proficient in English had greater access to knowledge, information, and opportunities that extended beyond their local context (Harmer, 2007). Therefore, learning English was essential for students' academic success and future career prospects in an increasingly interconnected world. In Indonesia, English was taught as a foreign language from the elementary to the senior high school level, aiming to prepare students to engage with global knowledge and communication. The ability to use English effectively was seen as a valuable asset that enhanced students' personal and professional development (Richards, Jack C. and Schmidt, 2010).

Learning English involved mastering four essential language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These skills were interrelated, and proficiency in each one was necessary for effective communication. Listening

allowed learners to understand spoken language in conversations, lectures, and media, while speaking enabled them to express ideas, ask questions, and engage in discussions. Writing was important for producing clear and organized texts, such as essays, reports, and messages. Reading, however, was particularly crucial because it provided access to a wide range of information and ideas from various sources, both in print and digital formats (Brown, 2007). As a receptive skill, reading helped students build vocabulary, improve grammar, and enhance their overall language competence. Furthermore, reading was essential for academic learning, as it enabled students to comprehend texts across subjects, such as science, social studies, and literature. Without strong reading skills, students might have struggled to understand and engage with the content of their lessons. Thus, developing reading proficiency was a fundamental goal in English language learning.

Reading played a key role in supporting students' intellectual growth and learning across disciplines. It allowed students to explore diverse topics, such as history, culture, and science, which broadened their knowledge and understanding of the world (Grabe, 2011). Through reading, students gained exposure to different perspectives and ways of thinking, which helped them develop empathy and critical thinking skills. Reading also promoted independent learning, as students could access information beyond what was taught in the classroom. In addition, reading was a lifelong skill that supported academic success and personal enrichment. According to Day et al., (1998), reading extensively in a second language contributed to vocabulary

development, improved fluency, and built confidence in using the language. The ability to comprehend written texts was essential not only for English learning but also for success in other subjects and for functioning effectively in the modern world. Therefore, reading should have been a central focus in English language education to help students become proficient learners and active members of society.

Reading comprehension played a significant role in fostering critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. When students engaged with a text, they were required to go beyond surface-level understanding by analyzing the author's message, identifying main ideas, and distinguishing between facts and opinions. This process of critical engagement helped students develop their reasoning skills and equipped them to make informed judgments (Grabe, 2011). Furthermore, reading comprehension enabled learners to connect information from texts with their prior knowledge and real-life experiences, applying what they had read to solve problems, make decisions, and contribute meaningfully to discussions. Thus, reading comprehension empowered students to think deeply, reflect critically, and apply knowledge in practical, real-world situations.

Beyond academic benefits, reading comprehension opened the door to exploring diverse ideas, cultures, and perspectives. Through reading, students gained insights into different ways of life, historical events, scientific discoveries, and social issues, which broadened their understanding of the world (Day et al., 1998). Reading literature from various cultures, for instance, helped

learners appreciate cultural diversity, while reading biographies or historical texts allowed them to learn from the experiences of others. This exposure fostered empathy, respect for differences, and an appreciation for global interconnectedness. Moreover, reading empowered students to become informed citizens who could engage with contemporary issues thoughtfully and contribute to building inclusive societies. In this way, reading comprehension served as a gateway to both intellectual growth and personal development, making it an essential skill for lifelong learning.

Despite the importance of reading comprehension, many students continued to face significant challenges in understanding texts, particularly those that were complex or unfamiliar. According to Ramadhianti & Somba (2023), common difficulties in reading comprehension included a lack of vocabulary knowledge, limited background knowledge, difficulty in identifying main ideas, and problems with making inferences. Some students also struggled with understanding the overall structure of a text, such as distinguishing between cause and effect or identifying the author's purpose. These challenges often led to a superficial understanding of texts, where students were able to read the words but failed to grasp the meaning behind them. Anderson et al., (2023), argued that such difficulties could persist unless specific reading strategies were explicitly taught and practiced in the classroom. Addressing these issues was critical, as comprehension was not an automatic process; it required active engagement and support.

The consequences of poor reading comprehension significantly impacted students' academic performance across subjects. Reading comprehension was not only essential for English language learning but also for understanding content in science, social studies, and mathematics. When students struggled to comprehend what they read, they often found it challenging to follow lessons, complete assignments, and prepare for exams. This led to a lack of confidence, decreased motivation, and ultimately lower academic achievement (Grabe, 2011). Furthermore, limited reading comprehension skills hindered students' ability to participate in classroom discussions, express their ideas clearly, and develop critical thinking abilities. These challenges created a cycle of academic difficulties, in which students fell behind in multiple subjects because they could not access the content effectively. Therefore, improving reading comprehension was not merely a language issue but a crucial step toward overall academic success.

Given the challenges students faced, it was essential to implement strategies that supported reading comprehension development. Research highlighted the need for explicit instruction in reading strategies, such as predicting, questioning, summarizing, and clarifying (Grabe, 2011). These strategies helped students engage more actively with texts, monitor their understanding, and overcome comprehension difficulties. Additionally, teachers used a variety of approaches, including visual aids, discussions, and interactive activities, to make reading more accessible and engaging. As noted by Ramadhianti & Somba (2023), creating a supportive reading environment in

which students felt comfortable asking questions and exploring ideas was crucial. Without effective strategies and guidance, students continued to struggle with reading comprehension, limiting their potential to succeed academically. Therefore, educators played a vital role in helping students develop the skills necessary to become confident, independent readers.

Understanding students' perceptions was a key aspect of improving learning outcomes, particularly in the context of reading comprehension. Students' perceptions referred to how they viewed, interpreted, and evaluated their learning experiences, which influenced their engagement and performance in the classroom. As stated by Richards, Jack C. and Schmidt (2010), perceptions shaped how students approached tasks, responded to challenges, and applied strategies during learning. For example, when students viewed reading as a difficult or boring activity, they were less likely to invest effort or seek help when encountering problems. In contrast, students who perceived reading as valuable and enjoyable were more likely to engage actively and persist in their efforts. By paying attention to students' perceptions, teachers were able to identify factors that motivated or hindered learning and adjust their teaching methods to better support students' needs.

Students' attitudes, motivation, and engagement played a crucial role in shaping their reading comprehension abilities. According to Dörnyei (2005), motivation was a driving force behind learning, as it determined the amount of effort and persistence a learner invested in a task. A positive attitude toward reading encouraged students to approach texts with curiosity, while negative

attitudes led to avoidance or superficial engagement. Furthermore, student engagement, which included behavioral, emotional, and cognitive involvement, was closely linked to reading success (Guthrie, J. T., & Wigfield, 2000). When students were actively engaged—participating in discussions, asking questions, and reflecting on their reading—they were more likely to develop deeper comprehension skills. Therefore, fostering positive perceptions, strong motivation, and high engagement was essential for improving students' reading comprehension.

Exploring students' perspectives provided valuable insights into the challenges they faced and potential areas for improvement in learning reading. Students experienced difficulties with vocabulary, understanding complex texts, or connecting ideas, but these challenges were not always visible to teachers unless students expressed their thoughts and feelings. By encouraging students to share their opinions, teachers gained a clearer picture of what worked well in the classroom and which strategies needed adjustment. This process not only empowered students by giving them a voice but also enabled teachers to make informed decisions that enhanced the learning experience. In summary, understanding students' perceptions was a vital step toward creating a responsive, student-centered learning environment that supported better outcomes in reading comprehension.

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Studying students' perceptions at SMPN 1 Siantan, located in Anambas, Kepulauan Riau, was particularly important due to its unique geographic and educational context. As a school situated in a remote island area, SMPN 1 Siantan faced distinct challenges in providing access to quality learning resources, including books, technology, and professional development opportunities for teachers. These limitations directly affected students' learning experiences, particularly in reading comprehension, where exposure to diverse texts and interactive learning strategies was essential. Investigating how

students perceived reading at this school provided valuable insights into the specific needs and challenges they encountered, which differed from those of students in more urban or resource-rich areas. Understanding their perceptions guided teachers and stakeholders in developing targeted strategies to improve reading comprehension outcomes and ensured that students in remote areas had equal opportunities to succeed academically.

The school environment and context played a critical role in shaping students' reading habits and attitudes. Factors such as classroom dynamics, teacher support, access to reading materials, and overall school culture significantly influenced how students approached reading activities. According to Krashen (2004), an environment rich in print materials, coupled with encouragement from teachers, fostered a love for reading and improved comprehension skills. However, in schools such as SMPN 1 Siantan, limited library access, few extracurricular reading programs, and a lack of engaging reading materials contributed to negative perceptions of reading as a tedious or irrelevant task. Moreover, the cultural context and the community's value on education either motivated or discouraged students' reading engagement. By examining students' perceptions within the specific setting of SMPN 1 Siantan, this study shed light on how contextual factors influenced reading comprehension and identified interventions that were most effective in promoting a positive reading culture in rural and island schools.

This study was relevant as it sought to contribute to the development of more effective reading comprehension strategies at SMPN 1 Siantan,

addressing the unique needs of students in a remote island setting. Given the challenges students faced in understanding texts, particularly due to limited access to diverse reading materials and modern teaching methods, it was essential to explore how their perceptions informed teaching practices. By identifying what students thought about reading and how they experienced it in the classroom, this research highlighted areas in which teaching strategies needed adjustment to better support comprehension skills. As emphasized by Ramadhianti & Somba (2023), tailored interventions based on students' needs and perceptions significantly improved learning outcomes, especially in critical skills such as reading. This study's findings helped teachers adapt their methods, for example by selecting more engaging texts, using interactive activities, or incorporating student feedback into lesson design.

Moreover, this research provided valuable insights for teachers, school administrators, and education stakeholders in planning programs and policies that supported students' reading development. Understanding students' challenges and preferences informed decisions on resource allocation, such as expanding the school library, offering reading clubs, or integrating technology to enhance access to reading materials. By focusing on students' perspectives, this study bridged the gap between theoretical approaches to reading comprehension and the real needs of learners in the classroom. Ultimately, the goal of this research was to foster a positive reading culture at SMPN 1 Siantan by empowering students to become independent readers who could access, understand, and critically engage with various texts. For this reason, this study

explored students' perceptions of reading comprehension and was conducted under the title **“Students’ Perceptions of Reading Comprehension Activities in the English Classroom at SMPN 1 Siantan”**.

1.2 Identification of the Study

Based on the background of the study above, the problems were identified as follows:

1. Many students at SMPN 1 Siantan faced challenges in reading comprehension due to limited vocabulary, background knowledge, and reading strategies.
2. Students' perceptions, including their attitudes and motivations, played an important role in shaping their reading comprehension abilities.
3. The school's context, such as limited resources and access to learning materials, influenced students' perceptions and outcomes in reading comprehension.

1.3 Limitation of the Study

This study focused on exploring the perceptions of eighth-grade students at SMPN 1 Siantan regarding their challenges, attitudes, and experiences in reading comprehension. The research was limited to this school; therefore, the results may not have been applicable to students in other schools or areas. The data were collected through questionnaires and interviews, so they may not have covered all factors that affected students' reading comprehension.

1.4 Research Question

Based on the explanation above, the research formulated the following research question:

“How are students’ perceptions of reading comprehension activities in the English classroom at SMPN 1 Siantan?”

1.5 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate students’ perceptions of reading comprehension activities in the English classroom at SMPN 1 Siantan.

1.6 The Significance of the Study

The results of this study were expected to have both theoretical and practical significance.

Theoretically

- a. The findings of this study were expected to contribute to the theoretical understanding of students’ perceptions of reading comprehension.
- b. This study was expected to provide useful information for future researchers who intended to study similar topics, particularly in the context of reading comprehension in rural or remote areas.

a. Practically

- a. For the Student

The results of this study could be used as a reference to help students understand and improve their reading comprehension skills.

b. For the Teacher

The findings were expected to inform teachers about students' perceptions, enabling them to adjust their teaching methods to better support students' needs in reading comprehension.

c. For Researchers

This study could serve as a reference for other researchers who were interested in conducting further studies related to students' perceptions and reading comprehension.

1.7 Definition of Key Term

1. Perception

Perception referred to how students thought, felt, and gave meaning to their learning experiences in reading comprehension.

2. Students

Students referred to eighth-grade learners at SMPN 1 Siantan who were learning English, with a particular focus on reading comprehension.

3. Reading comprehension

Reading comprehension referred to the ability to understand and construct meaning from written texts in English.