

STUDENTS DIFFICULTIES IN UNDERSTANDING DESCRIPTIVE TEXTS AT GRADE XI OF SMKS 1 TAMANSISWA PEMATANGSIANTAR



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INFO ARTIKEL	ABSTRAK
<p><i>Sejarah Artikel: (Diisi Editor)</i> <i>Sejarah Artikel: (Diisi Editor)</i> <i>Diterima: 05 Desember 2025</i> <i>Direvisi: 25 Desember 2025</i> <i>Disetujui: 30 Desember 2025</i> <i>Tersedia Daring: 27 Januari 2026</i></p> <p>Kata Kunci: Kesulitan siswa Pemahaman bacaan Pemahaman Tata Bahasa Penguasaan Kosakata Teks Deskriptif</p>	<p>Pemahaman membaca memainkan peran penting dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris karena memungkinkan siswa untuk membangun makna, memperoleh pengetahuan, dan mengembangkan kecakapan bahasa. Namun, banyak siswa SMK yang masih mengalami kesulitan serius dalam memahami teks deskriptif, yang merupakan bagian penting dari kurikulum bahasa Inggris. Studi sebelumnya telah menyoroti bahwa siswa sering mengalami kesulitan karena kosakata yang terbatas, pengetahuan tata bahasa yang tidak memadai, kurangnya pemahaman latar belakang, dan motivasi yang rendah. Namun, beberapa penelitian telah meneliti masalah ini dalam konteks pendidikan kejuruan. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui kesulitan siswa dalam memahami teks deskriptif di SMK Swasta 1 Tamansiswa Pematangsiantar. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif yang melibatkan observasi, wawancara, dan analisis dokumen untuk mengidentifikasi jenis dan penyebab kesulitan siswa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa permasalahan utama yang dialami mahasiswa adalah kurangnya penguasaan kosakata, kesulitan mengenali struktur umum teks deskriptif, salah paham terhadap gagasan pokok dan informasi spesifik, serta kebingungan tentang tata bahasa, terutama dalam penggunaan simple tenses. dan kata sifat. Selain itu, motivasi membaca yang rendah dan ketergantungan yang berlebihan pada alat penerjemahan juga berdampak negatif pada pemahaman siswa. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa kesulitan tersebut muncul dari faktor linguistik, kognitif, dan afektif. Hasil penelitian ini diharapkan dapat memberikan wawasan berharga bagi guru untuk merancang strategi membaca yang lebih efektif dan meningkatkan pemahaman siswa terhadap teks deskriptif dalam bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing.</p>
Keywords:	ABSTRACT
<p>Keywords: <i>Descriptive Text</i> <i>Grammar Understanding</i> <i>Reading Comprehension</i> <i>Student Difficulties</i> <i>Vocabulary Mastery</i></p>	<p><i>Reading comprehension plays an important role in English language learning because it enables students to construct meaning, acquire knowledge, and develop language proficiency. However, many vocational school students still experience serious difficulties in understanding descriptive texts, which are an important part of the English language curriculum. Previous studies have highlighted that students often experience difficulties due to limited vocabulary, insufficient knowledge of grammar, lack of background understanding, and low motivation. However, few studies have examined this issue in the context of vocational education. Therefore, this study aims to investigate students' difficulties in understanding descriptive texts at SMK Swasta 1 Tamansiswa Pematangsiantar. This study uses a qualitative descriptive method involving observation, interviews, and document analysis to identify the</i></p>

	<p><i>types and causes of students' difficulties. The results of the study show that the main problems experienced by students are a lack of vocabulary mastery, difficulty recognizing the general structure of descriptive texts, misunderstanding of main ideas and specific information, and confusion about grammar, especially in the use of simple tenses and adjectives. In addition, low reading motivation and over-reliance on translation tools also have a negative impact on students' comprehension. This study concludes that these difficulties arise from linguistic, cognitive, and affective factors. The results of this study are expected to provide valuable insights for teachers to design more effective reading strategies and improve students' understanding of descriptive texts in English as a foreign language.</i></p>
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1. Introduction

Reading is one of the most essential language skills that plays a crucial role in the process of learning English as a foreign language. Through reading, students are able to gain knowledge, expand their vocabulary, and improve their language proficiency. According to Grabe and Stoller (2011), reading is not merely a process of decoding written symbols, but also an active process of constructing meaning from text. This means that reading involves both linguistic knowledge and cognitive strategies to comprehend the message conveyed by the writer. Therefore, reading comprehension is a fundamental skill that needs to be mastered by students at all levels of education. Reading comprehension refers to the ability to understand, interpret, and evaluate what has been read. Snow (2002) defines reading comprehension as “the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language.” In other words, comprehension occurs when readers are able to connect the information from the text with their prior knowledge and experience. However, in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), many students encounter difficulties in understanding English texts due to limited vocabulary, lack of background knowledge, and insufficient reading strategies (Anderson, 2003). In the Indonesian context, reading is one of the skills emphasized in the national curriculum for English language teaching. Senior high school and vocational school students are expected to be able to understand various text types, including descriptive, narrative, recount, and report texts. Among these, descriptive text is one of the most common genres taught at the eleventh-grade level. According to Gerot and Wignell (1994), a descriptive text aims to describe a particular person, place, or thing in detail. It usually focuses on the characteristics or features of the subject to help the reader visualize it clearly. Although descriptive text appears to be simple, many students still face difficulties in identifying its generic structure, language features, and main ideas. Several previous studies have reported that students often experience problems in reading

comprehension of descriptive texts. Nunan (2003) states that EFL learners often struggle with comprehension because they focus too much on word-by-word translation instead of understanding the overall meaning of the passage. Similarly, Harmer (2007) emphasizes that poor reading comprehension among students may result from a lack of motivation, unfamiliar vocabulary, and the inability to infer meaning from context. These factors can significantly affect their understanding of descriptive texts, where recognizing adjectives, spatial order, and factual information is crucial.

Based on preliminary observations at SMK Swasta 1 Tamansiswa Pematangsiantar, many students still find it challenging to comprehend descriptive texts. They tend to have difficulties identifying the purpose of the text, understanding specific information, and recognizing the meaning of unfamiliar words. Some students also rely too heavily on dictionaries and translation tools, which hinders the development of their reading fluency. These problems indicate that students' comprehension skills need to be analyzed more deeply to identify the underlying factors that cause such difficulties. Therefore, this research aims to investigate the students' difficulties in understanding descriptive texts at SMK Swasta 1 Tamansiswa Pematangsiantar. The study applies a qualitative descriptive method to explore the students' challenges in detail through observation, interviews, and document analysis. As Fraenkel and Wallen (2012) explain, qualitative descriptive research seeks to describe and interpret the characteristics of a phenomenon in a natural setting without manipulating any variables.

This approach is suitable because it allows the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of students' learning experiences and difficulties in reading comprehension. The findings of this study are expected to provide insights into the specific reading comprehension difficulties experienced by Grade XI students of SMKS 1 Tamansiswa Pematangsiantar in understanding descriptive texts in an EFL context. Unlike previous studies that mainly focus on students in general senior high schools, this research highlights the unique characteristics of vocational high school students, who tend to prioritize practical skills and have limited exposure to academic English reading materials. By focusing on the vocational school context in Indonesia, this study addresses a research gap concerning how students' reading comprehension difficulties are influenced by vocational-oriented curricula and learning objectives. The results are expected to contribute theoretically to the discussion of reading difficulties in EFL vocational education and practically to assist English teachers in designing more relevant and effective reading instruction tailored to the needs of vocational students.

2. Method

This research applied a qualitative descriptive design, which is one of the most widely used approaches in educational research to describe and interpret a phenomenon as it naturally occurs. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2012), a qualitative descriptive study aims to describe and interpret phenomena without

manipulating any variables, focusing on understanding a situation in its real-life context. This method allows researchers to observe, record, and analyze participants' experiences, behaviors, and perceptions in detail, providing a comprehensive and holistic understanding of the issue being studied. In the context of this study, the qualitative descriptive design was selected because it enables the researcher to explore students' difficulties in understanding descriptive texts in English as they happen in an authentic classroom environment, rather than through controlled experiments or quantitative measurements. Creswell (2014) also explains that qualitative research is characterized by the collection of data in a natural setting, the use of the researcher as the key instrument, the inductive analysis of data, and the focus on participants' perspectives. The goal is not to test hypotheses but to develop a deep understanding of social or educational phenomena.

Similarly, Bogdan and Biklen (2007) state that qualitative research emphasizes the importance of process rather than outcomes and seeks to capture how people interpret their experiences and the world around them. Therefore, this approach is particularly relevant for this study because the main objective is to understand what kinds of comprehension problems students face and why those problems occur when they read descriptive texts. In line with this, Moleong (2017) defines qualitative research as a study that aims to understand phenomena experienced by research subjects, such as behavior, perception, motivation, and actions, in a holistic manner, using descriptions in the form of words and language within a specific natural context. Through this method, the researcher can describe students' reading comprehension difficulties more accurately and meaningfully by interpreting their responses, behaviors, and reflections during the learning process. It allows for a more humanistic and detailed exploration of students' experiences, which is often difficult to achieve through numerical data alone. This research focused on describing the types of difficulties encountered by students in understanding descriptive texts and the possible factors that contribute to these difficulties. The study was not intended to generalize findings statistically but rather to provide a rich, detailed picture of the phenomenon as it exists within the selected setting. To achieve this, data were collected through questionnaires, classroom observations, and interviews, which complemented one another and helped to triangulate the findings. The questionnaire was used to gather students' self-reported challenges and perceptions in reading comprehension, while observations provided real-time insights into their behaviors, attitudes, and problem-solving strategies during reading activities. The interviews, on the other hand, allowed the researcher to clarify and deepen the understanding of students' difficulties and the reasons behind them. As suggested by Ary, Jacobs, and Sorensen (2010), qualitative research allows flexibility in data collection and analysis, enabling the researcher to adapt to the realities encountered in the field.

This flexibility is essential when exploring educational phenomena, where learners' attitudes, motivations, and comprehension skills are influenced by multiple factors, including linguistic competence, background knowledge, learning strategies, and classroom environment. Therefore, the use of a qualitative descriptive design was

deemed appropriate to capture these aspects comprehensively and to interpret the data based on the participants' authentic experiences. In conducting this study, the researcher acted as the primary instrument of data collection. As the main instrument, the researcher was directly involved in observing, interpreting, and interacting with participants to obtain an accurate picture of their comprehension difficulties. This is in line with what Creswell (2014) asserts, that in qualitative research, the researcher becomes the key instrument for data collection and analysis. By being directly engaged in the field, the researcher can better understand the context and nuances of students' responses, ensuring that the findings reflect their real experiences and learning conditions. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, this qualitative descriptive study also applied several principles such as credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability as proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

Credibility was maintained by triangulating the data from multiple sources questionnaires, observations, and interviews to validate the consistency of information. Dependability and confirmability were ensured through careful documentation of the research procedures and analysis, while transferability was achieved by providing detailed descriptions of the context so that other researchers can judge the applicability of the findings to similar settings. In summary, the qualitative descriptive design was considered most appropriate for this research because it focuses on understanding the students' difficulties in reading comprehension as a natural and complex phenomenon. By using this approach, the researcher could portray students' learning experiences holistically, capture their voices authentically, and reveal the underlying causes of their challenges in understanding descriptive texts. This approach also provided the flexibility needed to explore the richness of the data, enabling a deep and meaningful interpretation of how and why students struggle with reading comprehension in the context of English as a foreign language.

The participants of this study consisted of eleventh-grade students (Grade XI) of SMK Swasta 1 Tamansiswa Pematangsiantar in the academic year 2025/2026. A total of 20 students were selected as the participants through purposive sampling, which is one of the most common techniques used in qualitative research. According to Creswell (2014), purposive sampling (also known as judgmental or selective sampling) is a non-probability sampling technique in which the researcher deliberately chooses participants who are considered capable of providing rich, detailed, and relevant information related to the phenomenon being studied. Unlike random sampling, which emphasizes generalization, purposive sampling focuses on depth of understanding and information richness. Therefore, the main consideration in selecting participants is not the size of the population but the ability of the participants to contribute meaningful insights to the study. In the context of this research, the selected participants were chosen because they had already learned descriptive texts as part of their English subject in the first semester of Grade XI and demonstrated different levels of reading comprehension ability based on prior classroom observations and teacher feedback. The selection process was based on several considerations, including the students' willingness to participate, their attendance consistency, and their active involvement in

reading-related activities. This ensured that the data collected would represent a balanced perspective, capturing both students who struggle with and those who perform better in understanding descriptive texts. By including participants with varying levels of proficiency, the researcher was able to explore a wider range of comprehension challenges and learning experiences among the students. Purposive sampling is considered suitable for this study because, as Patton (2002) emphasizes, it allows researchers to focus on information-rich cases from which one can learn the most about the issues of central importance to the research.

Similarly, Fraenkel and Wallen (2012) note that in qualitative research, participants are often selected because they are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with the phenomenon under investigation. In this study, the phenomenon being explored was the difficulty in comprehending descriptive texts in English, which makes eleventh-grade students at SMK Swasta 1 Tamansiswa Pematangsiantar the most appropriate participants, as they are directly engaged in learning and practicing this type of text as required by the curriculum. Furthermore, the decision to involve 20 students was made to ensure that the data collected would be manageable yet sufficiently diverse to reflect the range of reading comprehension difficulties among the learners. According to Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006), a qualitative study typically reaches data saturation with a sample of 12 to 20 participants, depending on the complexity of the topic and the homogeneity of the group. Therefore, involving 20 students was considered adequate for gaining a thorough and representative understanding of the phenomenon while still allowing for in-depth qualitative analysis of each participant's responses. The selected participants were from the 11th grade skin and hair beauty class, with varying abilities, consisting of female students aged around 16 to 17 years old.

They came from different educational and social backgrounds, which added diversity to the study and helped reveal how such factors may influence their reading comprehension skills. Most of them had been learning English for at least four years and were familiar with basic grammar, vocabulary, and text structure, yet still faced significant difficulties when required to comprehend and analyze descriptive passages in English. Their varying linguistic proficiency and reading habits made them ideal subjects for exploring the multifaceted nature of reading comprehension problems among vocational school students. Before the research was conducted, permission was obtained from the school principal and the English teacher to ensure that the study would not disrupt the students' learning process. The participants were also informed about the purpose of the study, the type of data that would be collected, and their right to withdraw at any time. Ethical considerations such as confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation were fully observed throughout the study to maintain trust and integrity in the research process. According to Creswell (2012), maintaining ethical conduct in research is essential to ensure that participants feel respected, safe, and comfortable in sharing their genuine experiences and opinions. By selecting participants through purposive sampling, this research ensured that the data obtained would be deeply relevant to the objectives of the study. The chosen students were

expected to provide meaningful insights into the types of difficulties encountered in reading descriptive texts, the linguistic and cognitive factors contributing to these challenges, and their personal perceptions of reading in English as a foreign language. Their participation thus played a crucial role in achieving the main purpose of this research, which was to explore and understand students' reading comprehension difficulties in descriptive texts within a real classroom context at SMK Swasta 1 Tamansiswa Pematangsiantar.

The main instrument used in this study was a questionnaire consisting of 15 items. The questionnaire was specifically designed to identify students' difficulties in reading comprehension of descriptive texts. Each item focused on various linguistic and comprehension aspects such as vocabulary understanding, grammatical structures, identifying the main ideas, finding specific information, and recognizing the generic structure and language features of descriptive texts. These components were carefully chosen because they represent the essential skills required for successful reading comprehension and are often the areas where students face the greatest challenges. The process of developing the questionnaire began with an in-depth review of the English curriculum and relevant literature to ensure that all items aligned with the learning objectives and the research focus. The researcher also considered the students' level of English proficiency to make sure that the statements were clear, concise, and understandable for vocational high school learners. The instrument was designed to reveal not only the types of comprehension difficulties but also the frequency and patterns of those difficulties as experienced by the students during their learning process. The statements were presented in a Google Form with the following response options: always, often, sometimes, and never. This digital format was chosen to make data collection more efficient, organized, and accessible. Students could easily complete the form using their mobile phones or school computers, which minimized paper use and ensured that all responses were automatically recorded in a spreadsheet for analysis. The use of Google Form also allowed the researcher to distribute the questionnaire simultaneously to all participants, reducing potential delays and ensuring that each student could respond independently and honestly. Before distributing the questionnaire, the researcher validated the instrument by consulting an English teacher at SMK Swasta Tamansiswa Pematangsiantar. The purpose of the validation process was to ensure that the questionnaire items were clear, relevant, and suitable for the students' linguistic level. The teacher provided feedback on the clarity of wording, grammar, and appropriateness of each question. Based on the teacher's suggestions, several minor revisions were made to improve readability and accuracy. This validation process helped increase the reliability and credibility of the instrument, ensuring that the data collected truly reflected the students' real experiences and challenges in understanding descriptive texts.

The data collection was conducted in several stages to ensure the accuracy, credibility, and reliability of the research results. First, the researcher obtained official permission from the school principal and the English teacher to conduct the study in the class. This step was important to maintain ethical research standards and to ensure that

the study was carried out in accordance with the school's academic policies. After receiving approval, the researcher visited the classroom to explain the main purpose of the research and the procedures involved. During this stage, the researcher clearly informed the students that their participation was voluntary and that all information provided would be kept strictly confidential. The assurance of anonymity and confidentiality helped create a comfortable and trustworthy environment so that students could respond honestly without feeling pressured. Next, the questionnaire was distributed to the 20 selected students during their English lesson. The researcher explained each section of the questionnaire carefully to make sure that the students fully understood how to respond to every question.

The questionnaire was provided through a Google Form link, which allowed students to access and complete it easily using their smartphones or school computers. The researcher remained present in the classroom throughout the process to monitor participation, clarify any questions, and ensure that the students completed the questionnaire independently. Sufficient time was allocated so that all students could provide thoughtful answers based on their real experiences in reading and understanding descriptive texts. The students were encouraged to answer truthfully according to their actual difficulties and perceptions, as their responses would serve as essential data for analyzing reading comprehension challenges. To ensure the validity and richness of the data, the researcher also conducted classroom observation as a supporting method. During the observation, the researcher focused on how the students interacted with descriptive texts in actual classroom activities such as reading exercises, vocabulary discussions, and comprehension tasks. Field notes were systematically taken to record students' learning behaviors, attitudes, and reactions when encountering descriptive reading materials. Observing the students in their natural learning environment allowed the researcher to gain deeper insights into the real difficulties that might not be fully captured through the questionnaire alone. After all responses were collected, the researcher checked the data carefully to make sure that every questionnaire had been answered completely and correctly. If there were any parts that were unclear or incomplete, the researcher made notes about them to avoid confusion during the analysis. After that, the researcher grouped the students' answers based on the types of difficulties they experienced in understanding descriptive texts, such as problems with vocabulary, grammar, or identifying main ideas. In addition, the notes from classroom observation were also reviewed to support the questionnaire results. The researcher compared what was seen in the classroom with the students' answers in the questionnaire to find similarities or differences. This process helped the researcher understand the real problems students faced when reading descriptive texts and gave a clearer picture of their learning situation. By organizing the data in this way, the researcher could analyze it more easily and draw accurate conclusions about students' reading comprehension difficulties.

The data collected in this study were analyzed using a descriptive approach. The primary data were obtained from students' questionnaires, which were analyzed descriptively to identify the frequency of students' responses related to their difficulties

in understanding descriptive texts. The questionnaire results were presented in percentages and simple summaries to show patterns of students' reading comprehension difficulties. Classroom observation was used as supporting qualitative data to strengthen and clarify the findings from the questionnaire. Observation notes were analyzed qualitatively by describing students' behaviors and responses during reading activities in the classroom, such as their difficulties with vocabulary, sentence meaning, and identifying main ideas.

The data analysis procedures followed the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing as proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994). In the data reduction stage, irrelevant or repetitive data were removed to focus on information related to the research objectives. In the data display stage, the reduced data were organized into tables and descriptive summaries to make the findings easier to interpret. Finally, conclusions were drawn by interpreting both the questionnaire results and observation findings to answer the research questions and describe students' difficulties in understanding descriptive texts.

3. Result and Discussion

Based on the data obtained from the questionnaire and classroom observations, it was found that students experienced several difficulties in understanding descriptive texts. These difficulties were classified into: Most students had difficulty understanding the meaning of unfamiliar words, especially adjectives and descriptive phrases commonly used in descriptive texts. Many students tended to focus on translating every word into Indonesian, which made them lose the overall meaning of the paragraph. This shows that vocabulary limitation was the major obstacle to reading comprehension. Some students were unable to distinguish between the identification and description parts of a descriptive text. They often could not determine which sentences introduced the topic and which ones provided detailed information about it. This confusion made it hard for them to comprehend the overall organization and purpose of the text. Students also struggled to find the main idea of each paragraph.

They tended to rely on literal translation rather than trying to infer meaning from context. As a result, they often misunderstood the content or failed to identify important details. This problem was observed during class activities where students focused more on word-for-word reading than on understanding the message of the passage. Many students were confused with the grammatical patterns commonly used in descriptive texts, especially the use of the simple present tense and the correct order of adjectives. This limited their ability to understand sentence meaning accurately. The findings from classroom observation also showed that students often made grammatical errors when discussing or summarizing descriptive texts. Based on these findings, several factors were identified as the main causes of students' difficulties, namely: Lack of vocabulary knowledge, particularly in adjectives and descriptive expressions, Low reading motivation, as many students were not interested in English reading materials and preferred using translation tools, Teaching approach, which tended to focus on literal comprehension rather than on interactive and critical reading strategies, Insufficient reading practice, as students rarely read descriptive texts outside the classroom. These

findings indicate that students' comprehension problems were influenced by both linguistic and motivational factors.

Discussion

The discussion section presents an interpretation of the research findings by connecting them with the relevant theories and previous studies reviewed earlier. The present study revealed that students at SMK Swasta 1 Tamansiswa Pematangsiantar faced several major difficulties in understanding descriptive texts, particularly related to limited vocabulary, lack of awareness of text structure, grammatical confusion, and low reading motivation. These difficulties reflect the multifaceted nature of reading comprehension problems in English as a foreign language, which involve both linguistic and cognitive aspects. The first prominent finding concerns students' limited vocabulary mastery.

This difficulty directly affects their ability to understand descriptive sentences and infer meaning from context. As Nation (2001) asserts, vocabulary knowledge is central to reading comprehension; without adequate vocabulary, learners cannot grasp the meaning of a text effectively. The students' dependence on word-by-word translation, as observed in this study, aligns with Nunan's (2003) statement that many EFL learners focus excessively on literal meaning, which hinders their ability to comprehend the overall message. This implies that teachers should provide more vocabulary enrichment activities and teach contextual guessing strategies to reduce learners' reliance on translation tools. The second finding relates to students' difficulty in identifying the generic structure of descriptive texts. Many students were unable to distinguish between the identification and description parts, leading to confusion about the organization of information.

This finding is consistent with Gerot and Wignell (1994), who emphasize that understanding text structure is essential for comprehending meaning and purpose. Without recognizing the function of each paragraph, students cannot connect details cohesively, which explains their tendency to misunderstand descriptive passages. Teachers therefore need to guide students to analyze text structure systematically and use visual aids such as text maps or diagrams to make generic structures clearer. Another major problem identified was the students' inability to find main ideas and specific information. This issue may stem from their lack of higher-order reading strategies such as inference, prediction, and summarization. Grabe and Stoller (2011) explain that effective comprehension involves both lower-level decoding and higher-level integration of ideas. However, the findings show that students mostly focused on decoding individual words rather than synthesizing meanings across sentences. This supports Harmer's (2007) view that poor comprehension results from insufficient reading strategies and lack of cognitive engagement with texts. To overcome this, students should be trained to use interactive reading strategies such as identifying key sentences, underlining main ideas, and paraphrasing content to enhance their comprehension. The study also found that grammatical confusion, especially regarding the use of simple present tense and adjective order, interfered with understanding descriptive texts. Since descriptive texts rely heavily on grammatical accuracy to

portray characteristics and relationships, students' weak grammar knowledge limited their ability to interpret meaning. This observation supports Anderson's (2003) claim that linguistic competence is a crucial foundation for reading comprehension in EFL contexts. It further suggests that grammar should not be taught in isolation but integrated with reading practice so that learners can apply structures meaningfully in context. Moreover, the research revealed that affective factors such as low motivation and lack of reading habits significantly influenced students' comprehension. Many students viewed English reading as difficult and relied on translation tools instead of developing their own strategies. This supports Alderson's (2000) argument that motivation plays a vital role in sustaining engagement with reading materials. When learners feel discouraged or anxious, their willingness to read decreases, resulting in superficial comprehension.

Therefore, teachers should create more engaging classroom environments, use topics relevant to students' interests, and encourage extensive reading to foster positive attitudes toward reading. Finally, the discussion demonstrates that students' difficulties in understanding descriptive texts are rooted in a combination of linguistic, cognitive, and affective factors. These findings are consistent with previous research (Sari, 2018; Rahman & Yusuf, 2020; Dewi & Sitorus, 2022), which also identified vocabulary limitation, lack of strategies, and low motivation as primary challenges in reading comprehension. By linking the present results with established theories, it can be concluded that improving students' reading comprehension requires integrated instruction that addresses vocabulary, structure, strategy use, and motivation simultaneously. This pedagogical implication reinforces the importance of teaching reading as an interactive, meaning-making process rather than a mere translation activity.



Figure 1. Documentation of the Classroom Situation During Data Collection through a Research Questionnaire on "Students' Difficulties in Understanding Descriptive Texts"

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that Grade XI students of SMK Swasta 1 Tamansiswa Pematangsiantar experienced several difficulties in understanding descriptive texts in an EFL context. The main difficulties involved limited vocabulary mastery, problems in identifying generic structure, difficulties in finding main ideas and specific information, and grammatical challenges, particularly related to the use of the simple present tense and adjective order. These difficulties were influenced by the interaction of linguistic, cognitive, and affective factors, including low reading motivation and limited exposure to English reading materials. The findings indicate that students' reading comprehension difficulties in vocational schools are multifaceted and require attention to both language knowledge and reading processes.

The findings of this study imply that English reading instruction in vocational schools should address not only linguistic aspects but also students' reading strategies and motivation. Teachers need to design reading activities that emphasize vocabulary development, comprehension strategies, and contextual understanding rather than word-by-word translation. The use of engaging learning media and varied reading materials can help increase students' interest and support better comprehension of descriptive texts.

This study was limited to Grade XI students of one vocational school, namely SMK Swasta 1 Tamansiswa Pematangsiantar, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the data were primarily collected through questionnaires and classroom observations, without in-depth interviews, which may have restricted deeper exploration of students' individual reading experiences.

Future studies are suggested to involve a wider population of vocational school students to provide more comprehensive findings. Further research may also examine the effectiveness of specific reading strategies or instructional interventions in improving students' comprehension of descriptive texts. Conducting experimental or mixed-method studies could provide deeper insights into how particular teaching approaches influence students' reading development in EFL vocational contexts.

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