



## ***CLASSROOM-BASED PSYCHOLINGUISTIC STUDY OF ENGLISH L2 COMPREHENSION THROUGH TEXTUAL READING AMONG 1<sup>ST</sup> ENGLISH LITERATURE STUDENTS***

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### ***Abstract***


*This study investigates how first-year English Literature students at Universitas Pamulang comprehend English as a second language (L2) through textual reading activities from a psycholinguistic perspective. Using a one-group pretest-posttest design, the study involved 150 students across five classes over a fourteen-week semester. Data were collected through reading comprehension tests focusing on vocabulary knowledge, syntactic/language structure, and decoding ability. The findings revealed substantial improvement in all three components, with vocabulary and decoding showing the greatest development. The study concludes that textual reading activities effectively support L2 comprehension by strengthening key psycholinguistic components of reading comprehension.*

**Keywords:** *Language comprehension, L2 learning, Psycholinguistics, Reading Comprehension, Textual Reading*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Language plays a fundamental role in human communication, cognition, and learning. Beyond functioning as a medium for conveying messages, language enables individuals to process information, construct meaning, and interact with their social environment. In the field of psycholinguistics, language is not only viewed as a linguistic system but also as a cognitive process involving how language is acquired, comprehended, and produced (Traxler, 2012). Therefore, understanding language comprehension is essential for explaining how individuals process linguistic information, particularly when learning a second language (L2).

Psycholinguistic studies generally examine three major language processes: language acquisition, language comprehension, and language production. Among these processes,



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SMART Journal: Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics

language comprehension occupies a central position because it reflects an individual's ability to interpret and construct meaning from linguistic input. Language comprehension involves the interaction of various cognitive processes, including lexical access, syntactic processing, semantic interpretation, and discourse integration (Harley, 2014). For second language learners, these processes are often more demanding because they require the learner to process linguistic information that is not yet fully automatized.

One of the most observable manifestations of language comprehension is reading. Reading provides learners with access to vocabulary, grammatical structures, discourse patterns, and cultural knowledge embedded in written texts. Consequently, reading comprehension has been widely recognized as a crucial indicator of language proficiency, particularly in second language learning contexts. According to Fletcher (2006), the ultimate goal of reading is comprehension, and reading comprehension itself is a complex developmental process influenced by multiple linguistic and cognitive factors. The relationship between language comprehension and reading comprehension has been explained by several influential models. Gough and Tunmer's (1986) Simple View of Reading proposes that reading comprehension is the product of two major components: decoding and language comprehension. Similarly, Scarborough's Reading Rope Model (2001) emphasizes that skilled reading emerges from the integration of language comprehension components, such as background knowledge, vocabulary knowledge, language structures, verbal reasoning, and literacy knowledge, with word recognition processes, including phonological awareness, decoding, and sight recognition. These models suggest that successful reading comprehension reflects an individual's broader language comprehension abilities.

From a psycholinguistic perspective, reading comprehension requires readers to construct meaning by integrating textual information with their existing linguistic knowledge and cognitive resources. Kintsch's (1998) Construction-Integration Model explains that comprehension occurs when readers actively build mental representations of a text and connect them with prior knowledge. Therefore, comprehension is not limited to recognizing words but also involves higher-level cognitive processes that enable readers to understand, interpret, and evaluate textual information. In the context of English as a Second Language (ESL), learners often demonstrate varying levels of language comprehension due to differences in linguistic exposure, educational background, vocabulary mastery, and reading experience. These differences are particularly evident among first-year university

students, who enter higher education with diverse levels of English proficiency. Such variation creates an important area of investigation for psycholinguistic research, as it allows researchers to observe how learners process and comprehend English during the early stages of academic language development.

Based on preliminary observations conducted in Textual Reading classes at Universitas Pamulang, first-year students of the English Literature program exhibit different levels of reading performance. While some students are able to comprehend texts effectively, others continue to experience difficulties in vocabulary recognition, decoding, and meaning construction. These differences indicate that students may employ distinct psycholinguistic processes when comprehending English texts as their second language. Although numerous studies have examined reading comprehension and second language learning, relatively few studies have specifically explored English language comprehension from a psycholinguistic perspective among first-year English Literature students in Indonesian higher education settings. Therefore, this study aims to investigate how first-year English Literature students at Universitas Pamulang comprehend English as their second language through textual reading activities. By focusing on reading comprehension components, particularly vocabulary knowledge and decoding skills, this study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of second language comprehension processes within the field of psycholinguistics.

Previous studies have established the importance of vocabulary knowledge, decoding skills, and cognitive processing in second language reading comprehension (Nassaji, 2003; Verhoeven & Perfetti, 2008; Jeon & Yamashita, 2014). However, most studies have focused on identifying factors that contribute to reading achievement or examining correlations among linguistic variables. Limited attention has been given to exploring how first-year English Literature students in Indonesian higher education contexts comprehend English as a second language from a psycholinguistic perspective through textual reading activities. Therefore, the present study investigates the psycholinguistic processes underlying students' L2 comprehension, particularly focusing on vocabulary and decoding development in textual reading classes.

To address this gap, the present study examines the language comprehension processes demonstrated by first-year English Literature students during textual reading activities. Since reading comprehension involves the interaction of linguistic knowledge and

cognitive processing, investigating students' engagement with written texts can provide valuable insights into how they construct meaning in English as a second language. Furthermore, a psycholinguistic perspective enables the identification of specific language comprehension components that support successful reading, including vocabulary knowledge, decoding ability, and other cognitive-linguistic processes involved in understanding written texts. Accordingly, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How do first-year English Literature students comprehend English as their second language through textual reading activities?
2. What psycholinguistic components of language comprehension are reflected in students' L2 reading comprehension?

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employed a one-group pretest-posttest design to investigate how first-year English Literature students comprehended English as a second language (L2) through textual reading activities. The study combined descriptive analysis of students' reading comprehension performance with a psycholinguistic interpretation of vocabulary knowledge, syntactic/language structure knowledge, and decoding ability. The study focused on identifying the psycholinguistic components reflected in students' reading comprehension, particularly vocabulary knowledge and decoding skills. A qualitative approach was selected because the study aimed to provide a detailed description of students' language comprehension processes as demonstrated through their engagement with reading texts and comprehension tasks. According to Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2006), qualitative research involves the collection, analysis, and interpretation of narrative and observational data to gain a deeper understanding of a particular phenomenon. Likewise, Bogdan & Biklen (1982) argue that qualitative research seeks to understand activities and situations in their natural contexts. In this study, the phenomenon under investigation was students' English language comprehension during textual reading instruction over one academic semester.

The participants of this study were approximately 150 first-year students enrolled in the English Literature Study Program at Universitas Pamulang. The students were distributed across five Textual Reading classes during the first semester. These participants were selected because they represented learners who were in the early stages of academic English

development and were actively engaged in learning English as a second language (L2) through formal classroom instruction.

The primary instruments used in this study were reading passages and reading comprehension tests. The reading materials consisted of texts used in the Textual Reading course and were designed to expose students to various vocabulary items, sentence structures, and contextual meanings. The comprehension tests contained questions aimed at assessing students' understanding of textual content, vocabulary knowledge, and decoding ability. Vocabulary assessment was integrated into the reading comprehension tests, allowing the researcher to examine students' understanding of lexical items within textual contexts. The instruments were developed based on language comprehension components proposed by Dechant (as cited in Putra, 2017) and decoding principles discussed by Treiman (2003).

The study was conducted over a period of fourteen weeks during one academic semester. Students participated in a series of reading comprehension assessments administered every three weeks. Throughout the semester, classroom instruction and reading activities were provided as part of the regular Textual Reading course. These instructional activities served as opportunities for students to develop their reading comprehension abilities, vocabulary knowledge, and decoding skills. Reading comprehension tests were administered periodically to monitor students' progress in understanding English texts. The collected data consisted of students' responses to comprehension questions and vocabulary-related tasks embedded within the reading assessments.

The data were analyzed descriptively by comparing students' pretest and posttest performance in vocabulary knowledge, syntactic/language structure knowledge, and decoding ability. The findings were subsequently interpreted from a psycholinguistic perspective to explain the development of students' L2 comprehension. The analysis focused on language comprehension components adapted from Dechant's framework and decoding processes proposed by Treiman (2003). The researcher categorized students' performance according to indicators of language comprehension, particularly vocabulary knowledge and decoding ability. The findings from the successive assessments were then compared to identify developmental patterns in students' English (L2) comprehension throughout the fourteen-week instructional period. The results were interpreted qualitatively to explain how students comprehended English through textual reading activities and which psycholinguistic components were most prominently reflected in their reading comprehension performance.

## **FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

### ***Students' L2 Comprehension through Textual Reading Activities***

To investigate how first-year English Literature students comprehended English as their second language through textual reading activities (RQ1), students were assessed before and after participating in a semester-long Textual Reading course. The assessments focused on three major components of language comprehension: vocabulary knowledge, syntactic/language structure, and decoding knowledge. The pretest results revealed that students entered the program with varying levels of English language comprehension. Vocabulary knowledge achieved an average score of 37%, syntactic/language structure achieved 23%, and decoding knowledge achieved 37%. These findings indicate that although students had already acquired basic English skills, many still experienced difficulties in understanding vocabulary, processing sentence structures, and decoding written texts effectively.

Following fourteen weeks of classroom instruction and textual reading activities, the posttest results demonstrated substantial improvement across all three components. Vocabulary knowledge increased to 89%, syntactic/language structure increased to 77%, and decoding knowledge increased to 87%. The findings suggest that regular engagement with textual reading activities enabled students to develop stronger comprehension abilities and improved their capacity to construct meaning from written English texts. The comparison between pretest and posttest scores indicates that students comprehended English as a second language by gradually developing their vocabulary repertoire, improving their understanding of language structures, and strengthening their decoding abilities. These components collectively supported students in interpreting textual information and achieving better reading comprehension performance.

### ***Psycholinguistic Components Reflected in Students' L2 Reading Comprehension***

The second research question examined the psycholinguistic components reflected in students' L2 reading comprehension. Based on the findings, three major components emerged prominently throughout the learning process: vocabulary knowledge, syntactic/language structure knowledge, and decoding knowledge. Vocabulary knowledge showed the highest level of development, increasing from 37% in the pretest to 89% in the posttest. This finding suggests that vocabulary acquisition played a crucial role in students' ability to comprehend written English. From a psycholinguistic perspective, vocabulary knowledge facilitates

lexical access, allowing readers to retrieve word meanings efficiently and integrate them into broader textual understanding.

Decoding knowledge also demonstrated substantial improvement, increasing from 37% to 87%. This finding supports Treiman's (2003) argument that decoding is a fundamental component of reading comprehension because readers must first recognize and process written symbols before constructing meaning from a text. The improvement observed in this study indicates that students became more capable of identifying and processing written English forms during textual reading activities. Syntactic or language structure knowledge improved from 23% to 77%, suggesting that students developed a better understanding of grammatical relationships within texts. This component contributed to students' ability to interpret sentence meaning and connect ideas across larger discourse units. The findings support psycholinguistic theories of language comprehension, which emphasize the role of syntactic processing in constructing coherent mental representations of written texts.

These findings are consistent with the Reading Rope Model proposed by Scarborough (2001), which identifies vocabulary knowledge and language structures as essential components of language comprehension, as well as decoding as a central element of word recognition. The substantial improvement in these components suggests that textual reading activities can facilitate the development of English language comprehension among first-year English Literature students. Furthermore, the findings support previous studies conducted by Nassaji (2003), Verhoeven and Perfetti (2008), and Jeon and Yamashita (2014), which identified vocabulary knowledge, decoding skills, and language processing abilities as significant contributors to second language reading comprehension. The present study extends these findings by demonstrating how these psycholinguistic components develop within the context of a Textual Reading course in Indonesian higher education.

## **CONCLUSION**

The findings of this study indicate that first-year English Literature students at Universitas Pamulang comprehended English as their second language through the development of vocabulary knowledge, syntactic/language structure knowledge, and decoding ability during textual reading activities. The comparison between pretest and posttest results showed notable improvement in all three components, suggesting that textual reading instruction contributed positively to students' L2 comprehension. In terms of

psycholinguistic aspects, vocabulary knowledge, language structure, and decoding emerged as the primary components reflected in students' reading comprehension. Vocabulary and decoding demonstrated the greatest improvement, highlighting their important role in supporting students' understanding of English texts. These findings confirm that language comprehension and word recognition work together in the process of L2 reading comprehension and that textual reading activities can effectively support the development of English language comprehension among first-year university students.

Despite the positive findings, this study was conducted within a single institutional context and employed a one-group pretest-posttest design without a comparison group. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted as evidence of students' L2 comprehension development within the Textual Reading course rather than as a direct measure of instructional effectiveness across broader educational settings. Future studies may incorporate multiple institutions, comparison groups, or additional psycholinguistic measures to provide a more comprehensive understanding of L2 comprehension development.

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