



**Exploring Students' Barriers to English Reading
Comprehension at SMP Negeri 2 Suwawa**
***(Mengeksplorasi Hambatan yang Dihadapi Siswa dalam Memahami
Bacaan Bahasa Inggris di SMP Negeri 2 Suwawa)***

Sinta Dewi A. Amin¹, Rasuna Rasid Talib², Rahmawaty Mamu³, Sartin T. Miolo⁴, Irmawaty Umar⁵

^{1,2,3,4,5}Department English Language Education, Faculty of Letters and Cultures, Universitas Negeri
Gorontalo

sintafdewi@gmail.com¹, rasunatalib@ung.ac.id², rahmawaty.mamu@ung.ac.id³, sartin@ung.ac.id⁴,
irmawaty.umar@ung.ac.id⁵

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the linguistic and non-linguistic factors that hinder eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 2 Suwawa in comprehending English reading texts, and to determine which of these factors are most dominant. A descriptive qualitative design was applied, with data collected through a questionnaire distributed to 25 students and in-depth interviews with 5 selected students, and then analysed thematically. The results show that linguistic difficulties are dominated by limited vocabulary, followed by grammatical and spelling difficulties, which hinder students from identifying main ideas, locating specific information, and drawing inferences. Non-linguistic, the students' social environment, teaching strategies, and inadequate facilities also contribute, with low motivation and interest emerging as the most dominant factor; students reported giving up easily and reading only to complete school assignments. Most students further indicated that videos and LCD projectors support their comprehension. These findings indicate that students' difficulties stem not only from language mastery but also from affective and instructional conditions, and suggest that English teachers apply more varied, creative, and interactive strategies supported by audio-visual media.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi faktor linguistik dan non-linguistik yang menghambat siswa kelas VIII di SMP Negeri 2 Suwawa dalam memahami teks bacaan bahasa Inggris, serta menentukan faktor yang paling dominan. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain deskriptif kualitatif dengan data yang dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner kepada 25 siswa dan wawancara mendalam dengan 5 siswa, kemudian dianalisis secara tematik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa hambatan linguistik didominasi oleh keterbatasan kosakata, diikuti oleh tata bahasa dan ejaan, yang menghambat siswa dalam menemukan ide pokok, informasi spesifik, dan membuat kesimpulan. Hambatan non-linguistik meliputi lingkungan sosial, strategi pengajaran, fasilitas yang kurang memadai, serta rendahnya motivasi dan minat yang menjadi faktor paling dominan. Siswa juga menyatakan bahwa mereka mudah menyerah dan membaca hanya untuk menyelesaikan tugas sekolah. Sebagian besar siswa menunjukkan bahwa penggunaan video dan proyektor LCD membantu pemahaman mereka. Temuan ini menunjukkan perlunya strategi pembelajaran bahasa Inggris yang lebih bervariasi, kreatif, dan interaktif dengan dukungan media audiovisual.

Corresponding Author:

Rasuna Rasid Talib
Faculty of Letters and Cultures
Universitas Negeri Gorontalo
rasunatalib@ung.ac.id

1. INTRODUCTION

Reading is an essential component of language proficiency since it allows individuals to access information and comprehend messages conveyed in written form. Reading is one of the language skills that the students have to acquire (Masyudi, 2023). According to Amylia Putri et al. (2024) as cited in Ningsih et al. (2025) reading comprehension is an activity of reading to absorb information from the reading material and to understand or identify the implied meaning or intention of the text so that it can be clearly conveyed to the reader. According to Astuti (2018), barrier is a condition that makes it difficult to make progress or achieve an objective. In the context of learning, barriers refer to various obstacles that hinder students from understanding the material effectively or reaching their learning goals. Reading comprehension is not merely the ability to read words, but a complex cognitive process in which readers actively construct meaning by connecting textual information with their prior knowledge, interpreting linguistic cues, and making inferences. This process requires the integration of vocabulary knowledge, grammatical understanding, and reasoning skills, enabling readers to understand explicit ideas as well as underlying messages within the text. Nuttall (1996) identify several indicators of reading comprehension, including understanding main ideas, identifying specific information, making inferences, and understanding vocabulary.

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, students often face various barriers in understanding English reading texts. According to Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016) as cited in Taladngoen et al. (2020) linguistic barriers are related to individual learners' characteristics, such as limited vocabulary, poor grammar knowledge, and spelling errors. These internal constraints hinder students' ability to decode texts, identify main ideas, locate information, and make inferences. Non-linguistic factors social environment, teaching strategies, motivation, and facilities further shape students' engagement with English reading, albeit indirectly.

An initial observation conducted in May 2025 at SMP Negeri 2 Suwawa in grade 8 showed that most students had not yet achieved the expected learning outcomes. They experienced barriers in understanding main ideas, identifying specific information, making inferences, and mastering vocabulary, which significantly affected their ability to comprehend English texts and express ideas effectively. This condition indicates that students at SMP Negeri 2 Suwawa face serious barriers in English reading comprehension that need to be explored further.

Several previous studies have examined students' barriers in understanding English reading texts. However, most of them primarily focused on measuring the level of students' reading comprehension barriers through quantitative or mixed-methods approaches, without exploring the barriers in depth from the students' own perspectives and experiences. In contrast, the present study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to explore in depth the barriers faced by students in understanding English reading texts, particularly those related to linguistic and non-linguistic factors at SMP Negeri 2 Suwawa.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the barriers faced by eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 2 Suwawa in understanding English reading comprehension and to identify the most dominant barriers that influence students' reading comprehension ability based on the framework of Nuttall (1996). The findings of this study are expected to provide meaningful contributions to the improvement of English reading instruction and serve as a reference for English teachers to develop more effective teaching strategies in the EFL classroom.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to explore in depth the barriers faced by eighth-grade students in understanding English reading comprehension. According to Creswell and Poth (2018) qualitative approaches are well-suited for exploring individual subjective experiences. This approach was chosen because it can provide a more contextual understanding of educational phenomena through the direct experiences of participants, particularly in identifying linguistic and non-linguistic barriers that influence students' reading comprehension ability.

This study was conducted at SMP Negeri 2 Suwawa, located in Suwawa District, Bone Bolango Regency, in the second semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. The school was purposively selected due to its diverse student backgrounds and preliminary information from the English teacher indicating that some eighth-grade students experience barriers in understanding English reading texts. The participants of this study consisted of 25 eighth-grade students selected through purposive sampling for the questionnaire and 5 students for the in-depth interviews. The selection criteria included students with low reading comprehension achievement, recommendations from the English teacher, and willingness to participate in the study.

Data collection was conducted using two main instruments, namely questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The questionnaire consisted of 40 statements, where 20 statements focused on linguistic barriers including limited vocabulary, poor grammar knowledge, and spelling errors, while the other 20 statements focused on non-linguistic barriers including students' social environment, teaching strategies, motivation and interest, and facilities and infrastructure. The questionnaire used a Likert scale with four response indicators, namely Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). Meanwhile, the interviews were conducted with 5 selected students after the questionnaire was administered to obtain deeper insights into students' personal experiences and perceptions regarding their reading comprehension barriers.

Data analysis in this study followed the stages of qualitative analysis proposed by Creswell and Creswell (2023), which include organizing the data, reading the entire dataset, conducting the coding process, grouping the codes into themes, presenting the data in the form of narrative descriptions, and interpreting the findings. In analyzing the questionnaire data, students' perceptions were classified into two categories, namely positive and negative. The positive category includes Strongly Agree (SA) and Agree (A), while the negative category includes Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The data were then calculated based on percentages using the following formula: $P = F/N \times 100$, where P is the percentage, F is the frequency of respondents, and N is the total number of respondents. Meanwhile, the interview data were analyzed using the steps proposed by Sugianto (2005), namely data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings and discussion of students' barriers in understanding English reading comprehension, organized into two main categories: linguistic factors and non-linguistic factors. The data were drawn from questionnaire responses of 25 students and in-depth interviews with five informants.

3.1 Linguistic Factors

Linguistic factors refer to internal language-related barriers that directly affect students' capacity to decode and construct meaning from English reading texts. Three sub-categories were identified: limited vocabulary, poor grammar knowledge, and spelling errors.

3.1.1 Barriers in Vocabulary

The findings reveal that limited vocabulary is the most dominant linguistic barrier, significantly disrupting all four reading comprehension indicators proposed by Nuttall (1996). Table 1 summarizes the percentage of students who agreed or strongly agreed with each vocabulary-related questionnaire item.

Table 1. Encountering unfamiliar vocabulary in English texts

Scale	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	15	60%
Agree	9	36%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	1	4%
Total	25	100%

Based on table 1, as many as 15 students (60%) selected *Strongly Agree* and 9 students (36%) selected *Agree*, resulting in a combined positive response rate of 96%. None of the students (0%) selected *Disagree*, and only 1 student (4%) selected *Strongly Disagree*. These figures indicate that encountering unfamiliar vocabulary is a widespread and persistent barrier experienced by virtually all students when reading English texts.

This finding is supported by the interview data. All five informants confirmed that unfamiliar words are their primary obstacle during reading. Informant 1 stated that she always encounters unknown words, especially in long texts, because she rarely memorizes vocabulary. Informant 2 added that even when she attempts to guess word meanings from context, it remains difficult. Informant 3 explained that her limited vocabulary forces her to frequently consult a dictionary or ask friends for help. Informant 4 confirmed that difficult vocabulary directly prevents her from understanding the overall content of the text. Informant 5 further revealed that forgetting previously learned words compounds the problem, forcing her to read very slowly to understand the text little by little.

These findings align with Salam and Nurnisa (2021), who identify limited vocabulary as a principal factor in reading comprehension difficulties. Within the framework of Nuttall (1996), vocabulary knowledge

directly underpins all four reading comprehension indicators, making it the most fundamental barrier in students' English reading comprehension at SMP Negeri 2 Suwawa.

Table 2. Difficulties in Determining Main Idea Due to Limited Vocabulary

Scale	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	19	76%
Agree	6	24%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total	25	100%

Based on table 2, as many as 19 students (76%) selected *Strongly Agree* and 6 students (24%) selected *Agree*, yielding a combined positive response rate of 100%. None of the students selected *Disagree* or *Strongly Disagree* (0%). This unanimous result indicates that all students without exception experience difficulty identifying the main idea of English reading texts due to limited vocabulary mastery.

This finding is reinforced by the interview data, as Informants 1, 3, and 5 confirmed that limited vocabulary was the primary reason they struggled to identify the main idea, locate specific information, and draw conclusions from the text.

These findings are consistent with Nuttall (1996) and Güneş (2022), who emphasize that understanding the main idea is a fundamental indicator of reading comprehension, requiring students to identify the central meaning of a paragraph or entire text. When vocabulary knowledge is insufficient, students are unable to process the overall meaning of the text, making it impossible to distinguish essential information from supporting details. This finding confirms that vocabulary limitation does not only disrupt word-level understanding but directly impairs higher-order reading comprehension skills such as identifying the main idea.

3.1.2 Barriers in Grammar

Poor grammar knowledge was identified as the second significant linguistic barrier. The table presents the percentage of students who agreed or strongly agreed with grammar-related questionnaire items.

Table 3. Grammar as a Barrier to Students' Reading Comprehension

Scale	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	8	32%
Agree	10	40%
Disagree	6	24%
Strongly Disagree	1	4%
Total	25	100%

Based on table 3, as many as 8 students (32%) selected *Strongly Agree* and 10 students (40%) selected *Agree*, yielding a combined positive response rate of 72%. Meanwhile, 6 students (24%) selected *Disagree* and 1 student (4%) selected *Strongly Disagree*. These results indicate that the majority of students perceive grammar as a significant barrier in understanding English reading texts, although a smaller portion of students (28%) did not experience the same difficulty, suggesting that grammar-related barriers are not as universally experienced as vocabulary-related barriers.

This finding is supported by the interview data. All five informants confirmed that difficulty with grammar, particularly irregular past tense verbs (V2), affects their reading comprehension. Informant 1 stated that she struggles to distinguish irregular V2 forms and frequently uses incorrect verb forms. Informant 2 explained that she is often confused because she does not understand the basic concept of tenses, as there are too many rules to remember. Informant 3 noted that the large variety of irregular verb forms makes comprehension more difficult, especially in complex sentences. Informant 4 added that she is frequently confused when distinguishing V1 and V2 forms within sentences. Informant 5 emphasized that her grammatical weakness extends beyond verb forms to other word classes such as nouns and adjectives, all of which negatively affect her reading comprehension.

These findings are consistent with Rasyid (2007) as cited in Munibi (2023), who asserts that grammatical competence substantially influences reading comprehension development. Within the framework of Nuttall (1996), poor grammar knowledge primarily hinders students' ability to make inferences and identify the main idea, as both skills require accurate interpretation of sentence structures and word relationships within the text.

Table 4. Difficulty making inferences with complex structures

Scale	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	6	24%
Agree	13	52%
Disagree	6	24%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%

Total	25	100%
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Based on table 4, as many as 6 students (24%) selected *Strongly Agree* and 13 students (52%) selected *Agree*, yielding a combined positive response rate of 76%. Meanwhile, 6 students (24%) selected *Disagree* and none selected *Strongly Disagree* (0%). These results indicate that the majority of students find complex sentence structures a significant barrier in making inferences, though 24% of students did not experience the same difficulty, suggesting that individual differences in grammatical competence influence the extent to which sentence complexity affects inferential comprehension.

This finding is supported by the interview data. Informant 3 explained that the large variety of irregular verb forms combined with complex sentence structures makes comprehension considerably more difficult. Informant 4 stated that when texts contain long sentences with complicated structures, she struggles to identify the main idea, draw conclusions, and locate specific information. Informant 5 further emphasized that her general weakness in grammar, including understanding nouns, verbs, and adjectives within sentences, prevents her from processing implied meanings effectively.

These findings are consistent with Oakhill et al. (2014), who state that inferential comprehension requires readers to go beyond literal meaning and construct connections that are not explicitly stated in the text. Within the framework of Nuttall (1996), making inferences is among the most cognitively demanding reading comprehension indicators, as it requires accurate grammatical interpretation alongside the ability to integrate textual clues with prior knowledge. When sentence structures are long and complex, students with limited grammatical competence are unable to parse meaning accurately, ultimately preventing them from drawing logical and well-supported inferences from the text.

3.1.3 Barriers in Spelling

Spelling errors constitute a third linguistic barrier, although student responses were somewhat more varied compared to vocabulary and grammar.

Table 5. Difficulty distinguishing the spelling of similar words

Scale	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	5	20%
Agree	7	28%
Disagree	8	32%
Strongly Disagree	5	20%
Total	25	100%

Based on table 5, as many as 5 students (20%) selected *Strongly Agree* and 7 students (28%) selected *Agree*, yielding a combined positive response rate of 48%. Meanwhile, 8 students (32%) selected *Disagree* and 5 students (20%) selected *Strongly Disagree*, resulting in a combined negative response rate of 52%. These results indicate that responses were relatively balanced, with slightly more students not experiencing this difficulty. This suggests that distinguishing similarly-spelled words is not a universally shared barrier, and that individual differences in phonological awareness and spelling recognition play a significant role in determining whether students encounter this specific problem.

This finding is supported by the interview data: Informants 1 and 4 reported frequently misreading or confusing similarly-spelled words, leading to misunderstanding of entire sentences, while the remaining informants did not highlight this difficulty consistent with the relatively balanced questionnaire responses.

These findings are supported by Cook (2008) as cited in Murphy and Justice (2019), who explains that the inconsistency between English spelling and pronunciation creates additional difficulty for foreign language learners, particularly when distinguishing minimal pairs. Within the framework of Nuttall (1996), confusion between similarly-spelled words directly disrupts vocabulary comprehension, which in turn affects students' ability to identify main ideas and locate specific information accurately.

Table 6. Difficulty in Finding Main Idea, Specific Information, And Making Inference

Scale	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	7	28%
Agree	14	56%
Disagree	3	12%
Strongly Disagree	1	4%
Total	25	100%

Based on table 6, as many as 7 students (28%) selected *Strongly Agree* and 14 students (56%) selected *Agree*, yielding a combined positive response rate of 84%. Meanwhile, only 3 students (12%) selected *Disagree* and 1 student (4%) selected *Strongly Disagree*. The dominant *Agree* response (56%) indicates that while most students experience this difficulty, it is perceived as a moderate rather than extreme barrier for the majority. Nevertheless, the overall 84% positive response rate confirms that word-by-word spelling significantly slows down students' reading process and impairs their ability to extract key information from texts.

This finding is strongly supported by the interview data. Informant 2 stated that she spends a very long time spelling out English texts word by word, making it slow and difficult to determine specific information, draw conclusions, and identify the main idea. Informant 5 similarly explained that she habitually spells words one by one to avoid misunderstanding, which significantly reduces her reading speed and overall comprehension efficiency. Informant 3 added that spelling confusion sometimes forces her to stop reading entirely and reread sections of the text, further interrupting the reading process.

These findings are consistent with Kim et al. (2015), who argue that spelling ability reflects underlying phonological, orthographic, and morphological knowledge that is essential for efficient word recognition during reading. When students lack automaticity in word recognition and must consciously spell each word individually, cognitive resources that should be directed toward meaning construction are instead consumed by decoding, leaving insufficient capacity for higher-order comprehension processes. Within the framework of Nuttall (1996), this condition directly impairs all three higher-order reading indicators: identifying the main idea, locating specific information, and making inferences.

3.2 Non-Linguistic Factors

Non-linguistic factors encompass external and affective barriers that indirectly but significantly influence students' engagement and effectiveness in reading comprehension. Four sub-categories were identified: students' social environment, teaching strategies, motivation and interest, and facilities and infrastructure.

3.2.1 Barriers in Students' Social Environment

This section discusses barriers related to students' social environment that may affect their reading comprehension in English. These barriers include factors such as classroom conditions, peer influence, and learning support from the surrounding environment.

Table 7. Family environment supports or uses the English language.

Scale	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	5	20%
Agree	1	4%
Disagree	12	48%
Strongly Disagree	7	28%
Total	25	100%

Based on table 7, only 5 students (20%) selected *Strongly Agree* and 1 student (4%) selected *Agree*, yielding a combined positive response rate of merely 24%. In contrast, 12 students (48%) selected *Disagree* and 7 students (28%) selected *Strongly Disagree*, resulting in a combined negative response rate of 76%. These results clearly indicate that the majority of students receive little to no family support for English learning at home, meaning most students have very limited exposure to the English language outside the classroom environment.

This finding is strongly supported by the interview data. All five informants stated that their families were unable to support their English learning at home. Informant 1 noted that no one at home could speak English, leaving her to study independently. Informant 2 added that her parents paid little attention to her reading practice, so she learned entirely on her own. Informants 3, 4, and 5 similarly reported receiving no guidance at home, relying instead on independent study or occasional help from friends.

These findings are consistent with Sari (2019), who emphasize that the frequency of language exposure through social interactions, including at home and among peers, significantly influences students' opportunities to develop vocabulary and reading comprehension skills. The absence of English use and support within the family environment severely limits students' out-of-class practice, making classroom instruction the sole source of English exposure and ultimately placing greater pressure on in-school learning to compensate for the lack of home-based support. Within the framework of Nuttall (1996), this restricted exposure indirectly weakens vocabulary comprehension, the most fundamental of the four reading indicators, by limiting the incidental language input students would otherwise gain through repeated exposure at home.

Table 8. Confidence due to vocabulary mastery compared to classmates

Scale	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	4	16%
Agree	8	32%
Disagree	8	32%
Strongly Disagree	5	20%
Total	25	100%

Based on table 8, as many as 4 students (16%) selected *Strongly Agree* and 8 students (32%) selected *Agree*, yielding a combined positive response rate of 48%. Meanwhile, 8 students (32%) selected *Disagree* and 5 students (20%) selected *Strongly Disagree*, resulting in an equal combined negative response rate of 52%. The nearly balanced distribution between positive and negative responses indicates that students' confidence

based on vocabulary mastery is divided, with slightly more than half of the students feeling that their vocabulary is not superior to their peers, which in turn reduces their confidence in reading English texts.

This finding is supported by the interview data. Informant 3 explained that she feels embarrassed when reading English texts in front of the class precisely because her vocabulary is limited, causing her to make frequent mistakes during reading. Informant 1 similarly stated that she feels nervous and embarrassed when required to read in front of classmates, largely due to her insufficient vocabulary knowledge. This pattern is pedagogically significant because low confidence often leads students to avoid reading practice altogether, meaning the vocabulary gap is unlikely to close without deliberate classroom intervention that separates skill-building from social comparison, such as low-stakes reading tasks that reduce peer pressure

These findings align with the view of Khaerati (2021) as cited in Anjani et al. (2025), who explains that students' confidence and self-perception in English learning are closely tied to their language proficiency, including vocabulary mastery. Within the framework of Nuttall (1996), a lack of confidence rooted in limited vocabulary knowledge indirectly affects all reading comprehension indicators, as students who feel less confident tend to disengage from reading tasks, reducing their opportunities to practice and develop essential comprehension skills.

3.2.2 Barriers in Teaching Strategies

Table 9. The Use of Pictures or Illustrations in Teaching Reading Texts

Scale	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	2	8%
Agree	3	12%
Disagree	5	20%
Strongly Disagree	15	60%
Total	25	100%

Based on table 9, only 8% of students selected *Strongly Agree* and 12% selected *Agree*, yielding a combined positive response rate of merely 20%. In contrast, 20% selected *Disagree* and 60% selected *Strongly Disagree*, resulting in a dominant negative response rate of 80%. The particularly high percentage of *Strongly Disagree* responses (60%) indicates that the absence of visual aids in reading instruction is not an occasional occurrence but a consistent pattern in the classroom, suggesting that picture and illustration-based teaching is rarely or never practiced by the teacher during reading lessons.

This finding is supported by the interview data. Informant 1 stated that when the teacher uses pictures or visual explanations at the beginning of the lesson, she is able to understand the reading material more easily. Informant 4 noted that the teacher mostly relies on textbooks with little discussion or visual support, making reading lessons feel less engaging. Informant 5 similarly explained that she becomes more motivated and finds it easier to understand texts when visual media are incorporated into instruction.

These findings are consistent with Aisyahhadi (2024), who states that monotonous instructional activities and the lack of varied teaching strategies make students passive and result in only surface-level reading comprehension. The limited use of visual aids deprives students of an important comprehension support tool, particularly for EFL learners who benefit significantly from visual context when processing unfamiliar vocabulary and text content.

3.2.3 Barriers in Motivation and Interest

Table 10. Motivation to understand English reading texts

Scale	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	0	0%
Agree	5	20%
Disagree	7	28%
Strongly Disagree	13	52%
Total	25	100%

Based on table 10, none of the students (0%) selected *Strongly Agree* and only 20% selected *Agree*, yielding a combined positive response rate of merely 20%. Meanwhile, 28% selected *Disagree* and 52% selected *Strongly Disagree*, resulting in a dominant negative response rate of 80%. The absence of any *Strongly Agree* response is particularly striking, indicating that not a single student possesses strong intrinsic motivation to read English texts beyond academic obligation.

This finding is supported by the interview data. Informant 1 stated that she has little interest in reading English texts because she finds them difficult. Informant 2 explained that difficult texts cause her to feel bored quickly and lose motivation entirely. Informant 4 similarly stated that the difficulty of texts often leads her to give up out of frustration. These findings are consistent with Khaerati (2021) as cited in Anjani et al. (2025), who explains that the main reason learning difficulties arise is when students lose their motivation and interest in English.

Table 11. Interest in looking up unknown words

Scale	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	5	20%
Agree	5	20%
Disagree	7	28%
Strongly Disagree	8	32%
Total	25	100%

Based on table 11, 20% of students selected *Strongly Agree* and 20% selected *Agree*, yielding a combined positive response rate of 40%. Meanwhile, 28% selected *Disagree* and 32% selected *Strongly Disagree*, resulting in a dominant negative response rate of 60%. These results indicate that the majority of students lack motivation to independently look up the meanings of unknown words during reading.

This finding is supported by the interview data. Informant 1 stated that she often feels reluctant to use a dictionary when encountering unfamiliar words. Informant 2 explained that her low interest in English texts reduces her willingness to make the extra effort of consulting a dictionary. In contrast, Informant 3 noted that she still occasionally uses a dictionary or asks friends for help, reflecting a more proactive attitude. These findings align with Khaerati (2021) as cited in Anjani et al. (2025), who emphasizes that low motivation reduces students' engagement in independent vocabulary learning activities.

3.2.4 Barriers in Facilities and Infrastructure

Table 12. Adequacy of school facilities for English learning

Scale	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	6	24%
Agree	7	28%
Disagree	8	32%
Strongly Disagree	4	16%
Total	25	100%

Based on Table 4.37, 24% of students selected *Strongly Agree* and 28% selected *Agree*, yielding a combined positive response rate of 52%. Meanwhile, 32% selected *Disagree* and 16% selected *Strongly Disagree*, resulting in a combined negative response rate of 48%. The relatively balanced distribution between positive and negative responses indicates that students hold divided opinions regarding the adequacy of school facilities. However, the slightly dominant negative responses suggest that available facilities such as the language laboratory and library have not been fully optimized to support students' English reading comprehension learning.

This finding is supported by the interview data. Informant 1 stated that available textbooks are not interesting and the library has not been sufficiently helpful in supporting her reading comprehension. Informant 2 mentioned that learning mostly relies on textbooks without any supporting media, making it difficult to improve reading ability. Informant 4 acknowledged that facilities are available at school but remain insufficient, leaving her struggling to understand English texts. Informant 3 added that she rarely visits the library and mostly relies only on classroom textbooks.

Within the framework of Nuttall (1996), inadequate access to supporting media such as language laboratories or diverse library materials limits students' exposure to authentic reading input, which in turn constrains their opportunities to build the vocabulary and contextual knowledge required for identifying main ideas and specific information. This suggests that facility limitations do not directly impair comprehension skills, but rather act as an indirect barrier by reducing students' practice opportunities outside formal instruction.

3.3 The Most Dominant Barriers in Reading Comprehension

Based on the integration of questionnaire and interview findings, limited vocabulary mastery is identified as the most dominant barrier affecting students' English reading comprehension at SMP Negeri 2 Suwawa. Vocabulary-related items consistently reached the highest agreement rates of 96-100%, and all five interview informants identified vocabulary limitation as their primary reading obstacle. Within the Nuttall (1996) framework, limited vocabulary directly impairs all four reading comprehension indicators understanding main ideas, locating specific information, making inferences, and vocabulary comprehension itself making it the barrier with the broadest and most immediate negative impact.

Among non-linguistic factors, low motivation and interest emerged as the most dominant barrier, with 80–88% of students reporting avoidance behaviors such as giving up easily and finding little enjoyment in reading. Critically, the two dominant barriers reinforce one another: limited vocabulary creates frustration that reduces motivation, while low motivation in turn limits students' willingness to engage in vocabulary learning, forming a self-reinforcing cycle of disengagement. This aligns with Khaerati (2021) as cited in Anjani et al. (2025), who identifies motivation loss as the primary driver of learning difficulties.

Grammar knowledge and spelling errors represent secondary linguistic barriers (72-88%), while social environment, teaching strategies, and inadequate facilities represent secondary non-linguistic barriers.

However, the universal endorsement (100%) of technology-based media as an effective learning support tool suggests that targeted improvements in teaching strategies and facility utilization could simultaneously address motivation, engagement, and comprehension difficulties.

4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusion

This study reveals that eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 2 Suwawa face reading comprehension barriers rooted in both linguistic and non-linguistic factors, with limited vocabulary and low motivation emerging as the most dominant. More importantly, these two barriers do not operate independently; they form a self-reinforcing cycle in which linguistic difficulty breeds frustration that erodes motivation, while diminished motivation, in turn, limits students' willingness to build the very vocabulary they need to comprehend texts. This cyclical relationship suggests that the core challenge facing EFL learners is not simply a deficit in language knowledge, but a deeper disengagement that compounds over time when left unaddressed.

These findings carry implications beyond this particular school context. They suggest that reading comprehension interventions in Indonesian EFL settings are unlikely to succeed if linguistic and affective barriers are treated as separate problems, since improving vocabulary alone does little to sustain engagement, and boosting motivation alone cannot compensate for insufficient language foundations. The near-universal positive response to technology-based instructional media in this study points to one practical entry point for breaking this cycle, indicating that innovative, engaging pedagogy may serve a dual function: making texts more accessible while simultaneously rebuilding students' motivation to read. Future research and instructional design should therefore prioritize strategies that address the vocabulary–motivation cycle as an integrated whole, rather than as two isolated areas of concern.

4.2 Suggestions/Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, several suggestions are proposed for the parties involved in the English language learning process.

- 1) For EFL Students: Students are encouraged to build vocabulary through consistent independent reading practice outside the classroom, rather than relying solely on classroom exposure. Since low motivation was found to reinforce vocabulary limitations in a cyclical manner, students should also consciously work on sustaining their interest in reading, for instance by starting with simple, high-interest English materials before progressing to more complex academic texts.
- 2) For Teachers: It is suggested that teachers integrate technology-based and visual media, such as videos, pictures, and digital tools, into reading instruction, given that these were shown to significantly increase student engagement. Beyond media use, teachers should embed vocabulary development directly within discussion-based and inferential reading activities, rather than teaching vocabulary and comprehension skills as separate components, since this study found the two to be closely interdependent.
- 3) For Schools: Since existing facilities such as the language laboratory and library were found to be underutilized rather than absent, schools are encouraged to focus on the practical integration of these resources into everyday teaching, alongside continued professional development for teachers in technology-based pedagogy.
- 4) For Future Researchers: Since this study focuses on a specific school context and a limited number of participants, future researchers are encouraged to test targeted interventions that address the interconnection between vocabulary and motivation identified in this study, and to extend similar investigations to other grade levels or educational stages to obtain a broader understanding of reading comprehension barriers in Indonesian EFL contexts.

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