

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### A. Background of Study

Reading is one of the four language skills taught in English language learning process besides listening, speaking and writing. However, among of all the skills reading is considered as the most important skill. Snow stated that “reading is essential to success in our society. The ability to read is highly valued and important for social and educational advancement.”<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, according to Komiyama, “reading supports the development of overall proficiency and provides access to crucial information at work and in school.”<sup>2</sup> Therefore, it can be concluded that people's daily life and reading activity are closely related because reading is not only useful in the world of education, but also in social and working life.

Reading is the skill in which the students will have the greatest ability at the end of their language study. It can help the students to understand about a country and its people. It can serve as a vehicle for entering into the country's present and past civilization. The ability to read will stay with them longer than

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<sup>1</sup> Chaterine. Snow, *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Learner* ([http://www.nap.edu/openbook.php?record\\_id=6023&page=15](http://www.nap.edu/openbook.php?record_id=6023&page=15)) accessed on April 10<sup>th</sup> 2013, 2 a.m.

<sup>2</sup> Reiko. Komiyama, *CAR: A Means for Motivating Students to Read*. United States: 2009, 32. ([http://americanenglish.state.gov/files/ae/resource\\_files/09-47-3-f.pdf](http://americanenglish.state.gov/files/ae/resource_files/09-47-3-f.pdf)) accessed on April 10<sup>th</sup> 2013, 2 a.m.

the other skills, and it is the skill that will be most convenient to use.<sup>3</sup> That is why reading is very important to be taught to the students starting from junior high school up to university.

In learning reading, the students are required to understand the text to get the information. They are not required to understand each individual part of the sentence or paragraph, but they should understand the message the writer is trying to convey.<sup>4</sup>

According to Anderson:

Reading is a very complex process: it requires a high level of muscular coordination, sustained effort and concentration. Reading is more than just visual task. Not only must the reader use and identify the symbols in front of her but also he must interpret what he reads in the light of her background knowledge, associate it with past experience and project beyond their in term of ideas, judgments, application and conclusion.”<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, Oberholzer said that “understanding what we are reading is far more important to us than knowing the mechanical skill of reading. Without understanding, reading would serve no purpose.”<sup>6</sup> It means that understanding text is the goal of reading skill that should be achieved by the students in each levels of the language learning process.

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<sup>3</sup> Kenneth. Chastain, *Developing Second –Language skills: Theory to Practice* (Chicago, USA: Rand McNally College Publishing Company, 1976), 308.

<sup>4</sup> Chastain, *Developing Second –Language skills: theory to practice*, 309.

<sup>5</sup> As cited in Insiyah, *Teaching Techniques of Reading Skill For The Second Year Students Of MTs Miftahul Ulum Batang-Batang Sumenep* (Unpublished S-1 Thesis. Surabaya: English Departement, IAIN Sunan Ampel, 2009), 2.

<sup>6</sup> Bronwen. Oberholzer, *The Relationship Between Reading Difficulties and Academic Performance* (Submitted in part fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of M Ed (Ed. Psych) in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Zululand, 2005), 1. (online) accessed on April 15<sup>th</sup> 2013, 8 p.m.

Since English in Indonesia is a foreign language, there are possibilities that the English language students may get difficulties in understanding reading text, it may be because of faulty word identification and recognition, limited special comprehension abilities, or poor oral reading. According to Nuttal, there are five problems students usually face while they are reading not in their first language, especially when they try to comprehend the text. Those problems are: the code or alphabet symbol, vocabulary and sentence structure, cohesive devices and discourse markers, problem beyond plain sense and the concepts.<sup>7</sup> All of those problems are probably because Indonesian students' first language has different form, sound, vocabulary and structure from that of English. This is in line with the result of study done by Fitrawati which focused on improving senior high school students' reading comprehension through reading strategies derived from genre based approach.<sup>8</sup> The result of the study showed that factors causing the students difficulty in understanding various text books are students' lack of vocabulary mastery, students' lack ability of recognizing the grammar or structure and students' passive response toward reading.

Realizing that understanding text is very important to be achieved by the students in reading skill, these difficulties in understanding reading text should be known and solved both by the students and the teacher because the difficulties

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<sup>7</sup> Christine. Nuttal, *Teaching Reading Skill in a Foreign Language* (Oxford: Macmillan Heinemann, 1983), 78.

<sup>8</sup> Fitrawati, *Improving Senior High School Students' Reading Comprehension through Reading Strategies Derived from Genre Based Approach*, 89. (online)  
<http://ejournal.unp.ac.id/index.php/bahasaseni/article/viewFile/60/40> accessed on Mei 7<sup>th</sup> 2013, 8 p.m

will give negative impact on the students' ability and motivation to achieve the reading target. Oberholzer stated that "difficulty with reading can have an increasingly negative effect on the students' schoolwork and tertiary education, as reading requirements become greater and more extensive."<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the researcher believes that it is important to do research based on this topic with the assumption that every student may have different difficulties in understanding the reading text.

MTs Miftahul Ulum, Duriwetan Maduran, Lamongan was chosen with one of the considerations that this phenomenon may as well happen to the students at the school. Therefore, the researcher did the preliminary study to make sure that her research is possible to be conducted in this school. The preliminary study was done by interviewing the English teacher of eight grade students about his class especially when the focus of the lesson is on reading.

Based on the interview, the researcher found that there was a tendency that a lot of 8<sup>th</sup> Grade students at MTs Miftahul Ulum, Duriwetan Maduran, Lamongan have difficulties in understanding the reading text especially descriptive text. According to the English teacher, until today, he still finds a lot of students who make mistakes while working on reading questions, the mistakes resulted in their low reading achievement. These mistakes happened probably because they do not understand the content of the text.

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<sup>9</sup> Bronwen. Oberholzer, *The Relationship Between Reading Difficulties and Academic Performance*, 5.

This study is conducted in MTs Miftahul Ulum Duriwetan Maduran Lamongan with several considerations. First, this school is still considered as less favorite school most probably because it is located in the village. Second, this school still lacks of professional teachers especially English teachers. The researcher hopes that she can see the reading problems faced by the students in this school clearly, so the results of this research can give contributions for the English language teacher to improve the quality of this school.

In this study, the researcher chooses the eighth grade students of MTs Miftahul Ulum Duriwetan to be the research participants because based on the result of the preliminary study, they seemed to have difficulties in understanding reading text, and the students' reading skill was still considered as low.

In junior high school, the students are expected to be able to read a text based on five genres of English texts, they are: procedure, descriptive, recount, narrative, and report. However, not all of the texts are learned by the 8<sup>th</sup> grade students at MTs Miftahul Ulum, Duriwetan Maduran, Lamongan. They only focused on the descriptive, recount and narrative text. In this study the researcher decided to use descriptive text as the test. The choice of this text is not only based on the syllabus of the second year students of junior high school but also the fact that the students seem to have difficulties in understanding descriptive text more than the other genres.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The students' reading score (see Appendix 1)

There has been a lot of research in the field which focused on difficulties in reading text, such as research from abroad which is done by Albader. In his research Albader mentions the difficulties that students' faces in reading in a second or foreign language. It covers some linguistics aspects, such as grammar (*syntax*), pronunciation (*phonetics*), and meaning of words (*semantics*).<sup>11</sup> Another research by Best, Floyd, and McNamara showed the importance of text genre and reader knowledge when examining reading comprehension abilities and difficulties.<sup>12</sup>

There are also some researches related with the students' difficulties in reading text done in Indonesia. Ade in 2012 conducted a research to discover the ability of students and types of difficulties faced by students in comprehending recount text. The result of this study showed that there are several common problems or difficulties faced by students such as: students still have difficulties in analyzing the text content, the students do not allocate their time to study and students have difficulties in understanding the meaning of sentences.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, Fakhrudin also have conducted a similar research with this research. It used to

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<sup>11</sup> Yousuf B. Albader. *Difficulties in Second Language Reading*. School of Linguistics & English Language Bangor University

<sup>12</sup> Rachel Best, Randy G. Floyd, and Danielle S McNamara. *Understanding the Fourth-Grade Slump: Comprehension Difficulties as a Function of Reader Aptitudes and Text Genre*. 202 Psychology Building, University of Memphis

<sup>13</sup> Ade, *A Study On Students' Difficulties In Comprehending Recount Text; A Case Study At SMAN 1 Gangga On First Grade Academic Year 2012/2013*. (online). <http://fkip-unram.ac.id/ejurnal/index.php/inggris/article/view/222>

find out the students' problems in comprehending English reading texts.<sup>14</sup> The findings showed that the factors that may make the students have difficulties in understanding English reading texts were related to vocabulary, grammar knowledge, and reading interest.

This research will be different from all of those researches because in this research the researcher will analyze the difficulties in understanding reading text faced by junior high school students. Furthermore, this research will focus on the students' difficulties in understanding descriptive texts. Therefore, the researcher chooses this topic with the title of "An Analysis of Students' Difficulties in understanding English Reading text (case study of Descriptive text among the 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Students at MTs Miftahul Ulum, Duriwetan Maduran, Lamongan)." with the expectation that the result of this research can be used by both the students and the teacher in improving the English teaching and learning process.

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<sup>14</sup> Eka. Sasmita, Identifying Students' Abilities in Understanding English Reading Texts: A Case Study at The Second Year Students of Smkn 1 Gangga in Academic Year 2012/2013. (online). (<http://fkip-unram.ac.id/ejurnal/index.php/inggris/article/view/235>)

## **B. Research Problems**

Based on the background of the study above, the researcher tries to answer the following questions:

- a. What are the difficulties faced by 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Students at MTs Miftahul Ulum, Duriwetan Maduran, Lamongan in understanding English reading descriptive text?
- b. What are the factors causing the difficulties faced by 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Students at MTs Miftahul Ulum, Duriwetan Maduran, Lamongan in understanding English reading descriptive text?

## **C. Objectives of the Study**

Derived from the above questions, the study aims:

- a. to know the difficulties faced by 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Students at MTs Miftahul Ulum, Duriwetan Maduran, Lamongan in understanding English reading descriptive text.
- b. to know the cause of difficulties faced by 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Students at MTs Miftahul Ulum, Duriwetan Maduran, Lamongan in understanding English reading descriptive text.



#### **D. Significance of the Study**

The researcher expected that the findings of the study will be significant for:

1. The students: as source of information to solve their problem and improve their reading competence.
2. The teacher: as a reference to improve his reading teaching and learning process and to choose the most appropriate teaching method based on his students problem.
3. The researcher: as additional information and knowledge of experience in education, especially in teaching reading for a better future English teacher.

#### **E. Scope and Limitation**

The scope of this research is students' difficulties in understanding English reading text and the factors that cause those difficulties. The researcher limits the focus of this research as follow:

1. The participants of this research are the 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Students at Mts Miftahul Ulum, Duriwetan Maduran, Lamongan. It is because based on the result of the preliminary study, they seem to have difficulties in understanding the reading text, and the students' reading skill of eighth grade was still low.

2. The researcher limits the focus of the reading text into the descriptive text because the researcher found that the students' have more difficulties in understanding descriptive text than when reading texts in other genres. Therefore, the researcher uses the descriptive text as a test to analyze the students' difficulties.

## **F. Definition of Key Term**

The following key terms are used to help the readers to have the same interpretations in understanding the study:

### 1. Reading

Reading is an activity to get information and to understand the content of a book or a text.<sup>15</sup>

### 2. Reading difficulty

Reading difficulty refers to problems associated with reading and it was causing to fall behind in terms of reading requirements within the classroom.<sup>16</sup>In this study, the researcher use the term reading difficulties which mean the problems that are faced by the students in understanding English reading text.

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<sup>15</sup> As cited Siti khodijah, *The Use of Snowball Throwing Technique in Teaching Reading Narrative Text at the Second Grade of SMPN 3 Surabaya*, (Unpublished S-1 Thesis. Surabaya: English Departement, IAIN Sunan Ampel, 2009), p.7

<sup>16</sup> Bronwen. Oberholzer, *The Relationship Between Reading Difficulties and Academic Performance*, 10.

### 3. Factors of difficulties

In this research the factors mean something which could influence reading and cause the students' difficulties in understanding English reading text.

### 4. Understanding

Understanding is "the power of clear thought."<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, Perkin definite understanding as a matter of being able to perform in a variety of thought-demanding ways with the topic, for instance to: explain, find examples, generalize, apply concepts, analogize, represent in a new way, and so on.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, in this study the researcher use the term understanding which mean the ability of the students to get the point or idea of the text.

### 5. English reading text

English reading text in this research means the written or printed material that has to be studied by students in learning reading on English subject. There are many types of reading text, they are: descriptive, narrative, recount, report, spoof, news item, and procedure texts. Based on the content standard of Indonesian National Curriculum, there are three kinds of text that have to be mastered by students in reading skill in the eighth grade of junior high school. The texts are descriptive, recount and narrative texts. In this research the researcher focuses on students' difficulties in understanding descriptive text.

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<sup>17</sup> Oxford, *Advanced learner's Dictionary*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.1299

<sup>18</sup> David Perkins, *Teaching For Understanding* (<http://www.exploratorium.edu/ifi/resources/workshops/teachingforunderstanding.html>) accessed on August 2<sup>nd</sup> 2013, 10 a.m