An Analysis of Senior High School Students' Difficulties in Learning Historical Recount Text

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Abstract: An Analysis of Senior High School Students' Difficulties in Learning Historical Recount Text. Objectives: This study described the senior high school students' difficulties while learning historical recount text in English class and analyzed the causes of their difficulties. **Methods:** This study used a test, a questionnaire, and an interview. **Findings:** This study showed that 67% of students considered historical recount text as difficult materials. Students' average score was 52.94 or below the minimum criteria of mastery learning. 23.5% of students passed the minimum criteria, while 76.5% of students did not pass it. Students' difficulties in the "high" level of difficulty were about the social function, text structure, and main idea. Meanwhile, grammar features and arranging text had a "moderate" level of difficulty. The causes of these difficulties were the lack of vocabulary mastery, the lack of understanding about the concept of recount text, and the lack of grammar understanding. **Conclusion:** Students face difficulties in reading historical recount text materials due to the lack of English vocabulary mastery, grammar, and text concept.

Keywords: English, reading, historical recount text, learning difficulties, senior high school.

Abstrak: Analisis Kesulitan Siswa Sekolah Menengah Atas dalam Belajar Teks Cerita Sejarah.
Tujuan: Studi ini mendeskripsikan kesulitan-kesulitan yang dihadapi oleh siswa sekolah menengah atas saat belajar teks cerita sejarah di kelas Bahasa Inggris dan menganalisis penyebab dari kesulitan-kesulitan tersebut. Metode: Studi ini menggunakan tes, kuesioner, dan interview. Temuan: Studi ini menunjukkan bahwa 67% siswa menganggap teks cerita sejarah sebagai materi yang sulit. Nilai rata-rata siswa adalah 52,94 atau di bawah nilai kriteria ketuntasan minimal. 23,5% siswa mencapai kriteria minimal, sedangkan 76,5% siswa tidak mencapainya. Kesulitan siswa yang berada di level "sulit" meliputi fungsi sosial, struktur teks, dan ide utama. Di sisi lain, fitur bahasa dan penyusunan teks memiliki level kesulitan "sedang". Penyebab dari kesulitan ini antara lain karena kurangnya penguasaan kosakata, konsep tentang teks cerita, dan pemahaman tata bahasa. Kesimpulan: Siswa menghadapi kesulitan dalam keterampilan membaca pada materi teks cerita sejarah karena penguasaan kosakata bahasa Inggris, tata bahasa, dan konsep teks yang kurang.

Kata kunci: Bahasa Inggris, membaca, teks cerita sejarah, kesulitan belajar, SMA.

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◼ INTRODUCTION

English is an international language learned by many people in Indonesia. Historically, it was the first foreign language in Indonesia and was officially announced in 1955 (Mappiasse & Sihes, 2014). It is also a compulsory subject and eventually became a language of instruction in some international schools. Nowadays, there is a great demand for English proficiency (Alfaraji, 2021). Society develops more awareness about the importance of learning English because it also has a significant role in career progress and economic activities (Gunantar, 2016: 143).

Based on Curriculum 2013, English is learned as a compulsory subject at junior and senior high school levels. Sudirman & Huzairin (2017: 54) found that high school students have a high attitude towards interest and orientation in English learning. It was also revealed that they have a positive attitude and motivation for English learning and literature (Jaliyya & Idrus, 2017; Afdian & Wahyuni, 2020). Aside from having a positive attitude and motivation, high school students or adolescents also learn foreign languages faster and more efficiently than the younger ones (Hu, 2016). For that reason, their English learning process at school should be facilitated well.

The scope of English materials consists of interpersonal conversation, transactional conversation, text types, short functional texts, and songs (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan RI, 2018). Some materials are learned in junior and senior high schools, including descriptive text, recount text, procedure, narrative, exposition, and some short functional texts. However, the depth and themes of the materials are different. Junior high school students are expected to reach the functional level, while senior high school students are demanded to reach the informational level (Putra, 2014).

Students learn English by emphasizing the four language skills. Even though all skills are essential, mastering reading plays a significant role in academic study and everyday activities because it is used to dig information and knowledge (Richards, 2015: 443; Erdiana, Kasim & Juwita, 2021: 248). In reading, it is crucial to understand text types. One of the texts commonly found in daily life is recount text. This text generally contains information or entertainment and can be seen in numerous forms such as journals, police reports, letters, stories, speeches, recipes, biographies, and newspaper articles (Barwick, 1999: 4). Accordingly, having the ability to read recount texts is needed by students to support their study in various fields.

Despite having a routine English lesson at school, senior high school students' English skill still lacks in some matters. There are some conditions behind it. Compared to the previous curriculum, the duration of English lessons in senior high school, especially in science and social programs, was reduced from 4 hours to 2 hours per week. The limited amount of time is still not enough to support students' English skills because, in many cases, students are only exposed to English by their teacher in the classroom (Putra, 2014: 71; Zein et al., 2020: 20). Additionally, long-term pressure in learning English and lectures' performance also influence the English learning process (Yosintha, 2020: 172-173).

In 2017, the English proficiency index of Indonesia was in the category of low, and the country ranked 39 out of 80 in the world (Renandya, Hamied & Nurkamto, 2018: 621). Reading comprehension appeared to be the skill that Indonesian high school students commonly lack (Syahabudin, Yusny & Zahara, 2019: 132; Nanda & Azmy, 2020: 13). According to PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) in 2015 and 2018, Indonesian students' reading

ability was low because many still had not met the minimum reading competency (Safari, 2020; Nugrahanto & Zuchdi, 2019). Furthermore, it is revealed that senior high school students' vocabulary mastery and translation ability are still low (Hariyanto & Wulandari, 2019; Fadena, Muth'im & Arini, 2021).

Based on the pre-survey involving grade X students of SMA Negeri 1 Sedayu, most students (57.6%) claimed past and present-perfect tense as the most challenging materials. After that, recount text was considered difficult (16.9%), followed by announcement text (6.8%), narrative text (5.1%), expressing intention (5.1%), song (5.1%), and descriptive text (5.1%). All of these materials have been taught in junior high school. Hence, it showed that senior high school students still face difficulties even though they have learned similar materials in junior high school.

The first and second materials that were considered problematic by students were related to each other. Past tense and present-perfect tense are two grammatical features used in recount text. A previous study also found that senior high school students' difficulty in learning recount text was related to past tense materials (Rahmati, 2019). Accordingly, students' learning difficulties on this matter need further analysis.

Recount text tells sequential events in the past (Barwick, 1999). The aim is to retell events for informing or entertaining the audience (Sianipar et al., 2021). This text is taught under the topic of unforgettable experiences in grade VIII and history in grade X (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan RI, 2018). In senior high school, the type of recount text taught to students is historical recount text, as it aims to tell past events related to chronological history (Coffin, 2009). This text is commonly learned by emphasizing reading and writing skills. According to the curriculum, students are expected to obtain contextual meaning from historical events and arrange short-simple recount texts related to historical events (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan RI, 2018). The sub-materials consist of social function, text structure, and grammatical features, including simple past tense, present perfect tense, adverbs of time, and time connective.

Based on the details above, the researcher realized the importance of investigating students' problems in learning recount text. For that reason, the purposes of this study were to find out the senior high school difficulties in learning historical recount text, especially related to reading skills, and to identify the causes of their difficulties.

■ METHODS

Research Design and Data Sources

This study used a mixed approach. It applied a descriptive research design. Grade X students of SMA Negeri 1 Sedayu in the academic year of 2020/2021 were involved in this research. Students' age range was 15 to 17 years old. The sample, chosen by purposive sampling, consisted of 51 students from 3 different classes: class X MIPA5, X IPS1, and X IPS2. This research also involved an English teacher from the same school.

Data Collecting Technique

The data were collected by using the test, interview, and questionnaire techniques. The test was used to obtain data about the students' scores and difficulties. The survey aimed to get data about students' perspectives about difficulties in learning recount text. The interview was purposed to support the other data. The instruments include a test, a questionnaire, and an interview guideline. Except for the interview, all of the data were

collected online because of the school policy in the pandemic situation.

The test consisted of 20 multiple choice questions based on 10 learning indicators of historical recount text materials. The learning indicators were formulated based on the core competence number 3.7 and basic competencies number 4.7 from the Decree of Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia *No. 37 Year 2018*. Table 1 shows the organization of the test consist of several items and indicatiors.

Table 1. The organization of test

No	Learning Indicators	Test Items
1	Recognize the common vocabularies in historical recount texts;	10, 11
2	Define the social function of historical recount text;	1
3	Classify the parts of historical recount text based on its text structure;	9
4	Conclude the topic of historical recount texts;	2
5	Conclude the main idea of paragraphs in historical recount texts;	3, 4
6	Find the detailed information in historical recount texts;	5, 6, 7, 8
7	Arrange sentences using the simple past tense;	15, 16, 17, 18
8	Determine the appropriate adverbs of time in historical recount texts;	12, 14
9	Determine the appropriate time connectives in historical recount texts;	13
10	Arrange a historical recount text.	19, 20

The questionnaire consisted of 3 multiple-choice questions about the difficulty level of recount text, difficulties of learning recount text based on learning indicators, and possible causes of difficulties. The interview was done by asking some questions about students' difficulties to the English teacher.

Table 2. Difficulty level categorization

Difficulty Level (%)	Criteria
$80 \leq P < 100$	Very High
$60 \leq P < 80$	High
$40 \leq P\ 60$	Moderate
$20 \leq P < 40$	Low
$0 \leq P < 2$	Very Low

Data Analysis Techniques

The data were obtained from the test, questionnaire, and interview. The test and questionnaire resulted in quantitative data, while the interview resulted in qualitative data. The data from the questionnaire were analyzed by calculating the percentage of each answer, while the data from the interview was described to support other data. The data from the test were analyzed by calculating the percentage of students' incorrect answers in every learning indicator. Further, the percentage was categorized using the criteria of difficulty proposed by Arikunto (2006: 246), as shown in the following table.

■ RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The minimum score of mastery learning for English was 70. Meanwhile, students' average score based on the test was 52.94. Hence, their average score was below the minimum standard. Twelve students (23.5%) passed the minimum criteria, while 39 students (76.5%) did not pass it. The scores achieved by students indicated that most of them still had problems in reading historical recount text. The results of the questionnaire also supported the finding. As shown in Figure 1, most students claimed recount text as difficult materials.
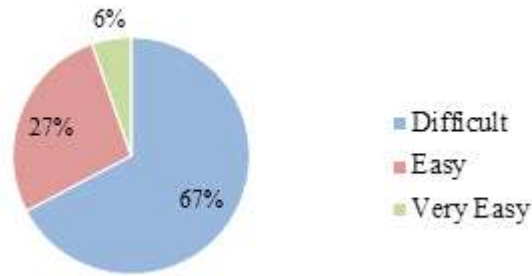
Figure 1. Students' perspective on difficulty level of recount text

Based on the figure above, students had various opinions about recount text materials. Most of them (67%) agreed that recount text was difficult. However, 27% of them claimed it was easy, and 6% said it was very easy. To conclude, most students considered recount text difficult and still had problems learning the materials. To add up, a previous study by Hutagalung et al. (2021: 302) aligned with these results. The study found that 94.1% of grade X students scored below 65 for the reading test of recount text. The score indicated that their reading comprehension of recount text was in the poor category.

Additionally, the interview result also verified the result from the test and questionnaire. The English teacher clarified that recount text was described as difficult by some students while the rest did not think that way. Further, it was explained that students who thought recount text difficult were the ones who had not fully understand the materials yet. The interview transcript is stated below.

Yes, some students face difficulty in recount text. However, some students do not find any difficulty. Those who said difficult have not understood the materials yet.

Difficulties in Learning Recount Text

Students' difficulties in learning recount text were seen from the results of the questionnaire and test. To start with, figure 2 shows the students' perspectives about the difficulty of each learning indicator in historical recount text materials.
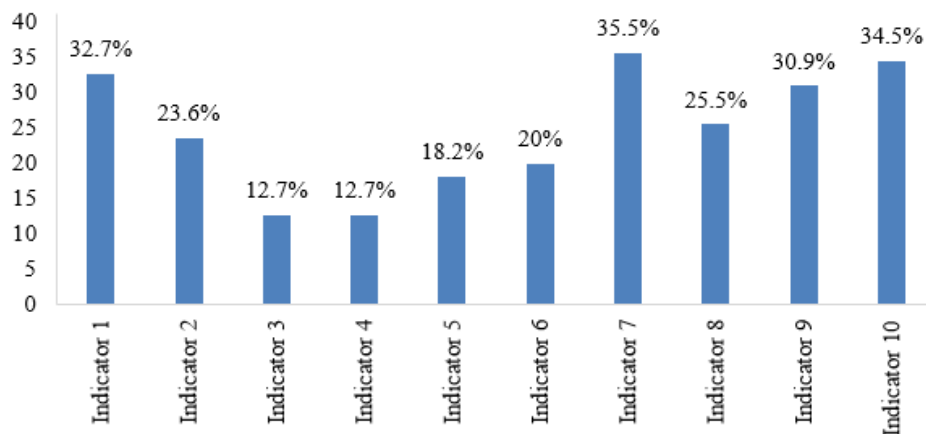

Figure 2. Students' perspective on the difficulty of learning indicators

Based on figure 2, the learning indicators that most students chose included indicator 7 about simple past tense (35.5%), indicator 10 about arranging recount text (34.5%), and indicator 1 about vocabulary (32.7%). A previous study by Mustika, Udin & Susanti (2020) and Fitria (2020: 158) aligned with this result as they also found senior high school students' difficulties related to past tense in recount text materials. The vocabulary and generic structure problems were also identified in studies by Widyawati (2018: 68) and Lestari, Fitriani & Erdiana (2017: 110).

Table 3. The result of learning indicator 1 (vocabulary)

Item Number	Incorrect Answer	Percentage	Total Percentage
10	15	29.4	21.6
11	7	13.7	

Looking at the first learning indicator, it is about recognizing the common vocabularies in historical recount texts. Based on figure 2, 32.7% of students agreed that it was difficult. Meanwhile, table 3 showed that 21.6% of students had incorrect answers. It indicated that the difficulty level of this learning indicator is low. To conclude, fewer students had difficulty on this matter. In contrast, a study by Lestari, Fitriani & Erdiana (2017: 110) revealed that senior high students usually had vocabulary difficulty in reading comprehension.

Table 4. The result of learning indicators 2 and 3 (basic concept of recount text)

Learning Indicators	Item Number	Incorrect Answer	Percentage
2	1	33	64.7
3	9	34	66.7

Learning indicators 2 and 3 are about the basic concept of historical recount text. Learning indicator 2 is about defining the social function of historical recount text. From the questionnaire result, only 23.6% of students agreed that defining social function was difficult. On the other hand, 64.7% of students had incorrect answers. It implied that the difficulty level of this indicator is high. Learning indicator 3 is about classifying the parts of historical recount text based on its text structure. Only 12.7% of students agreed that it was difficult. However, 66.7% of students had incorrect answers. Therefore, the difficulty level of this indicator is high.

The basic concept of recount text had a high difficulty level. These findings were in line with the previous studies that confirmed senior high school students had difficulty in finding the purpose of recount text and determining the generic structure of the text (Widyawati, 2018: 68; Sari, Harha, & Harmaini: 2018; Prayitno, Sari & Asmara, 2021: 30). On the other hand, the problems about finding the social function and text structure were also found in junior high school (Aiman and Fitrawati, 2019: 317).

Learning indicators 4, 5, and 6 are related to reading activities. Learning indicator 4 is about concluding the topic of historical recount texts. 12.7% of students agreed that it was difficult. From the test, 25.5 % of students had incorrect answers, or the difficulty level was low. Learning indicator 5 is about concluding the main idea of paragraphs in historical recount texts. From the questionnaire, 18.2% of students claimed it was

Table 5. The result of learning indicator 4, 5, and 6 (reading activities)

Learning Indicators	Item Number	Incorrect Answer	Percentage	Total Percentage
4	2	13	25.5	25.5
5	3	43	84.3	64.7
	4	23	45.1	
6	5	19	37.3	33.3
	6	3	5.9	
	7	31	60.8	
	8	15	29.4	

difficult, and 64.7% had incorrect answers on the test. Therefore, the difficulty level of this indicator is high. Learning indicator 6 is about finding the detailed information in historical recount texts. From the questionnaire, 20% of students agreed that it was difficult. From the test, the total percentage of incorrect answers was 33.3%, and the category was low.

Based on the data above, the difficulty level of finding the detailed information was categorized as high. It aligns with Prayitno, Sari, and Asmara (2021: 30) in their study that 67.8% of senior high school students had difficulty finding the main idea of recount text. Lestari, Fitri ani & Erdiana (2017: 110) also supported the result as they revealed that 23% of senior high school students faced difficulty finding the main idea in recount text.

Learning indicators 7, 8, and 9 are related to grammar features of recount text. All of them were in the category of moderate. Table 6 shows the results of these indicators.

Learning indicator 7 is about arranging sentences using the past tense. The questionnaire result shows that it was the most difficult indicator based on the students' opinion (35.5%). From the test, the total percentage of incorrect answers was 57.8%. For that reason, the difficulty level of this indicator is moderate.

Learning indicator 8 is about determining the appropriate adverbs of time in historical recount texts. From the questionnaire, 25.5% of students agreed that it was difficult. From the test, the percentage of incorrect answers was 54.9%. Hence, the difficulty level of this indicator is moderate.

Table 6. The result of learning indicator 7, 8, and 9 (grammar features)

Learning Indicators	Item Number	Incorrect Answer	Percentage	Total Percentage
7	15	35	68.6	57.8
	16	43	84.3	
	17	21	41.2	
	18	19	37.3	
8	12	20	39.2	54.9
	14	39	76.5	
9	13	25	49	49

Learning indicator 9 is about determining the appropriate time connectives in historical recount texts. 30.9% of students agreed that it was difficult. From the test, the percentage of incorrect answers is 49%. Therefore, the difficulty level of this indicator is also moderate.

The difficulty of all grammar features materials in recount text were categorized as "moderate". The difficulty of the past tense is in line with Rahmati (2019) and Mustika, Udin & Susanti (2020: 9) that revealed past tense materials as the common problems senior high school students face in learning recount text. Mustafa (2021: 68) also identified grammatical errors in past tense verbs and adverbs of time in high school students' recount text writing. However, no previous study specified the difficulty of time connectives of recount text.

To add up, the interview result with the English teacher also supported the finding of students' difficulty with grammar features. The teacher explained that grammar features, especially the past tense, are the common problems for students in learning the materials. The interview transcript is written as follows.

For recount text materials, students are usually confused with the grammar features, especially the past tense. Because it is different from the present tense, some students considered it difficult. However, it is just because they have not fully understood the concept yet. In addition, there are irregular verbs to be memorized as these verbs do not follow any pattern. For some students, it becomes a burden.

Indicator 10 is about arranging a historical recount text. From the questionnaire, 34.5% of students considered it difficult. From the test, the percentage of incorrect answers was 41.2%. Therefore, the difficulty level of this indicator is moderate. Table 11 shows the test result of learning indicator 10.

Arranging recount text is related to the understanding of text structure. This problem is in line with the studies, as stated previously, that senior high school students faced difficulty in determining the generic structure of recount text (Widyawati, 2018: 68; Sari, Harha, & Harmaini, 2018; Prayitno, Sari & Asmara, 2021: 30).

Table 7. The result of learning indicator 10

Item Number	Incorrect Answer	Percentage	Total Percentage
19	17	33.3	41.2
20	25	49.0	

Table 8 shows the summary of the difficulty level from the test result. Three learning indicators have high difficulty levels, including social function, text structure, and main idea. Then, there are four indicators in the moderate level of difficulty, including past tense, grammar features, time connectives, and arranging text. The low difficulty level categorized the other three sub-materials about vocabulary, topic, and detailed information. These findings were aligned to some prior studies about the difficulty of recount text in senior high

school, except the vocabulary, which had different findings (Fitriani & Erdiana: 2017; Widyawati, 2018; Sari, Harha, & Harmaini: 2018; Rahmati: 2019; Mustika, Udin & Susanti: 2020; Prayitno, Sari & Asmara: 2021; Lestari).

The Cause of Difficulties

The data about the cause of difficulties were obtained from the questionnaire and interview. According to the questionnaire result, unfamiliar vocabulary has the highest percentage, followed

Table 8. The Summary of Difficulty Level

Learning Indicator	Sub-Materials	Difficulty Level
1	Vocabulary	Low
2	Social function	High
3	Text structure	High
4	Topic	Low
5	Main idea	High
6	Detailed information	Low
7	Past tense	Moderate
8	Adverbs of time	Moderate
9	Time connectives	Moderate
10	Arranging text	Moderate

by difficult grammar and heavy themes. The detailed chart about the cause of the difficulty is shown in the following figure.

As shown in figure 3, most students (56.4%) agreed that the unfamiliar vocabulary caused difficulty. In the second place, 52.7% of them claimed it was because of the difficult grammar. Then, the heavy theme was also considered the cause of difficulty by 25.5% of the students. In addition, some students claimed that the recount text had too many sentences, and they still did not understand the materials in general.

The finding of the unfamiliar vocabulary aligns with a previous study by Prayitno, Sari & Asmara (2021: 30) that classified the lack of vocabulary as one of the factors influencing students' difficulty in recount text. Hutagalung et al. (2021: 302) also identified the lack of vocabulary for reading comprehension difficulty

in recount text. Agustin & Purama (2021: 172) also recognized vocabulary mastery and motivation as the factors influencing reading comprehension of recount text.

The interview result also supported the finding of the unfamiliar vocabulary and difficult grammar. The English teacher implied that students need time to memorize the concept of past tense and some vocabulary.

The reason why is because they have not got the concept yet. The past tense is different from the present tense so that students might be confused. They need time and more practice to fully understand the materials. Also, vocabulary plays an important part here. If they do not know the meaning, they cannot understand what the text is all about.
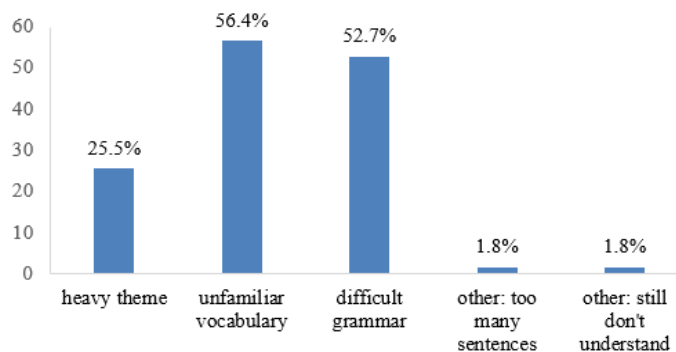
Figure 3. Students' perspectives on the cause of difficulty

Vocabulary used in historical recount text is related to historical events. As 25.5% of students claimed, this topic was considered heavy. This topic made students felt like learning history in the English language. It needs extra effort to make students familiar with the vocabulary. Visualizing the information can improve students' vocabulary mastery and reading comprehension skills (Paivio, 2006: 11). Apsari (2017: 55) also found that using picture series can improve the ability to learn recount text, especially writing. Therefore, visualizing the vocabulary related to history can be one of the solutions in dealing with students' lack of vocabulary.

Aside from the lack of vocabulary, it can be concluded that other causes of difficulty are the lack of understanding about the concept of the text, grammar features, and text features (topic, the main idea, and the detailed information). Therefore, these concepts should be presented in the appropriate elements. In addition, choosing the proper method to organize the materials is required. One of the possible methods is task-based learning which implements the scaffolding principle. The learning process introduces vocabulary and continues with the controlled practice, authentic practice, focus on language elements, freer practise, and pedagogical tasks (Nunan, 2004: 34-35). This method is suitable for organizing the historical recount text materials consisting of reading materials and language features.

■ **CONCLUSIONS**

Recount text is one of the texts learned in grade X of senior high school. Even though students have learned it in junior high school, they still face difficulties learning the materials. Some materials with a high level of difficulty included social function, text structure, and main idea. Meanwhile, past tense, grammar features, time connectives, and arranging text were moderate. Some causes of these difficulties were the lack of vocabulary mastery, lack of understanding of the concept of the recount text, and lack of understanding of grammar concepts. Therefore, the appropriate elements and methods are needed to organize the recount text materials.

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