

A Descriptive Study on Barriers to Reading English Texts and The Self-Directed Learning Method

Abdul Halim^{1✉}, Khairun Nisa Kharisma²

^{1,2} Department of English Language Education Study, Faculty of Languages and Arts, University of PGRI Banyuwangi

¹ abdulhalim@unibabwi.ac.id, ² nissakharisma17@gmail.com

✉ Corresponding Author: abdulhalim@unibabwi.ac.id

ABSTRACT

The study aims to identify the English reading text barriers faced by students of the guidance and counselling department at PGRI University of Banyuwangi and to know the category level of the self-directed learning method used by students of the guidance and counselling department. This research consists of two research problems, they are: what types of barriers do students of the Guidance and Counselling Department encounter when reading English texts? And what is the category level of self-directed learning methods used by students of the Guidance and Counselling Department? Language barriers include barriers in understanding vocabulary, grammar, semantics, the complexity of the reading text material, and decoding or word recognition. Meanwhile, psychological barriers involve issues such as lack of focus, forgetfulness, low self-confidence, shyness, and lack of motivation. These barriers are typically categorized into language and psychological barriers. These barriers hinder students' ability to comprehend English texts effectively. To overcome these difficulties, many students adopt a self-directed learning (SDL) method, which enables them to take initiative in managing their learning process, including identifying personal learning goals, utilizing various resources, and evaluating their progress. The research design was descriptive qualitative. The instrument used for data collection consists of 40 questions. The researcher found that there are 2 barriers in reading English text, namely language barriers and psychological barriers. In terms of language barriers, the researcher found that students have more barriers in understanding English grammar. Meanwhile, in psychological barriers, students have higher psychological barriers in feeling shy when reading English texts in front of others. In addition, in the self-directed learning method, students have more often used the medium-level self-directed learning method.

Keywords: Barriers; Reading English Text; Self-Directed Learning

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INTRODUCTION

In the world of education, English is the medium of instruction, especially in universities or campus internationalization programs. This is in accordance with Law Number 12 of 2012 concerning Higher Education, which states that foreign languages can be used as the language of instruction in higher education (Yulyani, 2023). This also aims to improve the quality of education and prepare students to be more competitive at the global level. By adopting a foreign language, educational institutions can enrich teaching materials and provide students with access to a wider source of knowledge. A foreign language is a language that is not the language used by the majority of the people of a country (Aini & Nohantiya, 2020). For example, Indonesian is the mother tongue in Indonesia.

However, English and other languages that are not Indonesian will be considered as foreign languages in Indonesia. So, they often find it difficult to adapt to using English. This can hinder their ability to understand the material taught in English, especially if they do not have enough exposure to the language in their daily environment. Learning English, as a foreign language, holds significant importance because it serves as a global lingua franca. Mastery of English opens access to vast academic resources, scientific publications, and international communication channels (Crystal, 2019). In education, English proficiency enables students to understand reference materials, follow global developments in their field, and participate in academic exchanges. Moreover, in the job market, English skills enhance employability, as many multinational companies and organizations require employees who can operate in an international environment (Richards & Schmidt, 2020).

In this era of globalization, technology has developed a lot, resulting in students being required to master English to face challenges in the modern era (Rifai, 2019). Additionally, it plays a crucial role for students. Therefore, improving students' oral and written communication skills is one of the objectives of learning English. So that when students communicate in English, they can understand what they are talking about and understand the reading in articles and journals. One of the English language skills, namely reading skills, is a fundamental aspect of language proficiency (Putri et al., 2023). This skill is also very important because it allows students to understand texts effectively and engage with the language meaningfully. In addition, reading helps students improve their overall language skills because reading introduces new vocabulary, grammatical structures, and different writing styles (Setiawan et al., 2022). To develop effective reading skills in English, lecturers can apply active reading and utilize existing technology.

Several previous studies have examined the relationship between self-directed learning (SDL) and reading comprehension. One such study was conducted by Huda (2022) under the title "The Impact of Self-Directed Learning on Students' English Reading Text Comprehension Ability." This research aimed to identify the effects of SDL on students' ability to comprehend English reading texts and how SDL supports this process. Conducted on 30 students from an educational institution in Jakarta, the study applied a mixed-methods approach with an embedded experimental design, incorporating quantitative analysis using a dependent samples t-test. The findings revealed specific barriers students face in reading texts and the influence of SDL in addressing these challenges.

Another relevant study was carried out by Rizal and Sulistyningrum (2022) titled "Investigation of Reflecting Reading Text Comprehension Strategies Through Self-Directed Learning on Higher Education Students." This research focused on how university students utilize and reflect on various strategies for understanding reading texts within self-directed learning settings. Employing a descriptive qualitative method, the study collected data through questionnaires, interviews, and reading tasks involving higher education students. It highlighted the role of SDL in overcoming comprehension barriers.

In contrast to these prior works, the current study also investigates reading comprehension barriers and the application of SDL but narrows its focus to second-semester students of the Guidance and Counselling Department at Universitas PGRI Banyuwangi in the 2024/2025 academic year. This study uses a descriptive qualitative design involving 15 respondents (1 male and 14 females), with data collected through 40 structured questionnaire items. In the process of teaching and learning English Reading Text, students are faced with various difficulties in understanding (Kustanti, 2016). For example, a lack of understanding of English reading texts. In addition to understanding the meaning of English, students must also be able to pronounce words in English according to English pronunciation. This complexity causes students to experience difficulties in reading English texts. Among the difficulties faced, of course, encourages a language lecturer to pay more attention to the conditions of his students, followed by readiness in carrying out learning. Such as preparing lesson plans, materials, media, and assessments. Therefore, English language skills are an unavoidable demand, including among students in various departments, one of which is students of the Guidance and Counselling Department.

Despite these difficulties, students have developed a variety of self-help solutions to overcome the barriers they face. One of them is using a self-directed learning method, which means a learning process in which a person independently determines their own goals, learning resources, and learning strategies. The process of overcoming these language challenges is not only about improving linguistic skills, but also about building the confidence necessary for students to communicate effectively in counselling situations and academic settings.

Therefore, this research aims to conduct a descriptive study on the reading text barriers faced by guidance and counselling students at PGRI University of Banyuwangi in relation to their reading skills. Additionally, this study will explore the self-directed learning method that these students employ to overcome these barriers and improve their proficiency. Self-directed learning is a learning method that emphasizes students' initiative in their learning (Laine et al., 2022). In this method, students take complete charge of establishing educational objectives, picking resources, deciding on strategies, and assessing their progress with lectures. Understanding these barriers and methods is crucial for designing targeted support systems and enhancing the overall learning experience for guidance and counselling students, ultimately preparing them for success in their academic and professional careers.

Based on interviews with English lecturers, learning was more focused on reading, so the researcher wants to examine reading barriers in the guidance and counselling department. Therefore, this research aims to identify the English reading text barrier faced by Students of the Guidance and Counselling Department at PGRI University of Banyuwangi and to know the category level of the self-directed learning method used by Students of the Guidance and Counselling Department. Based on the description above, the researcher will carry out a study entitled "A Descriptive Study of Barriers in Reading English Texts and the Self-Directed Learning Method among Guidance and Counselling Department Students at PGRI University of Banyuwangi in the 2024/2025 Academic Year".

This study contributes to the understanding of English reading comprehension challenges faced by students in non-English majors, particularly those in the Guidance and Counselling Department. By categorizing the barriers into language and psychological factors, the research provides a clearer framework for identifying specific difficulties, such as grammar comprehension and shyness in public reading. Furthermore, the study offers insight into the students' use of self-directed learning (SDL) methods, showing that most operate at a medium level of SDL engagement. These findings can inform lecturers, curriculum designers, and educational policymakers in developing targeted interventions—such as grammar-focused instruction, confidence-building activities, and structured SDL training—to enhance students' reading skills and autonomy in learning. In a broader sense, the research adds to the academic discourse on language learning strategies and psychological readiness, contributing evidence from the Indonesian higher education context to the global body of knowledge.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method to investigate English reading barriers among second-semester students in the Guidance and Counselling Department at PGRI University of Banyuwangi during the 2024/2025 academic year. The participants consisted of 15 students (1 male and 14 females). The researcher aimed to understand the challenges students face in reading comprehension, particularly in the context of learning English as a foreign language.

The primary data collection technique was a questionnaire, which was distributed via Google Forms through WhatsApp. The questionnaire was designed to explore both reading difficulties and students' levels of self-directed learning. It consisted of 40 items—25 descriptive and 15 yes/no multiple-choice questions. The blueprint of the questionnaire covered two main aspects: language barriers (vocabulary, grammar, semantics, decoding, etc.) and psychological barriers (motivation, confidence, attention, etc.), along with a classification of self-directed learning into low, medium, and high levels.

Data were analyzed qualitatively following the framework of Miles and Huberman, as cited in Mezmir (2020), which includes three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, the researcher organized and simplified raw data by identifying patterns and relevant themes. These themes were then presented in narrative form to allow clearer categorization and interpretation. Finally, conclusions were drawn through verification to ensure they accurately reflected the data collected and addressed the research questions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study aimed to identify the barriers faced by second-semester students of the Guidance and Counselling Department at PGRI University of Banyuwangi in reading English texts and to determine their level of self-directed learning. The barriers explored include language barriers—such as difficulties in vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation—and psychological barriers, including lack of focus, forgetfulness, low confidence, shyness, and lack of motivation. Self-directed learning (SDL) was examined as a strategy to help students overcome these challenges by

allowing them to take control of their learning process through independent resource use, personalized strategies, and self-paced study. Data were collected using a Google Form questionnaire shared via WhatsApp between May 28 and June 21, 2025, involving 15 students (1 male and 14 females). The results were analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing based on Miles and Huberman's model.

Based on data reduction and presentation, two primary research problems were analyzed: the barriers to English reading text comprehension and the level of self-directed learning (SDL) among students of the Guidance and Counselling Department at PGRI University of Banyuwangi. The findings revealed that students frequently encountered linguistic barriers, including difficulties in understanding new vocabulary, grammar structures, sentence meanings, and pronunciation. These findings align with previous studies highlighting that limited vocabulary and grammatical knowledge are among the most common challenges faced by EFL learners in reading comprehension (Fitriani & Maulida, 2020; Suryani, 2021). In addition to language-related issues, psychological barriers were also evident. These included lack of concentration, forgetfulness, low self-confidence, shyness when reading aloud, and low motivation. Such affective factors have been widely acknowledged as significant obstacles that reduce students' engagement and comprehension in reading activities (Putra & Anggraini, 2022). These internal challenges were shown to hinder the students' ability to comprehend English texts effectively. Despite these difficulties, some students demonstrated independent efforts to address their learning barriers, such as by searching for unfamiliar vocabulary meanings, reviewing grammar rules, and practicing pronunciation outside classroom settings. These behaviors reflect the characteristics of self-directed learning, where learners take the initiative to identify their learning needs and strategies to overcome them (Wulandari & Pratama, 2019). This indicates that a portion of the students had begun to cultivate SDL skills as a response to their academic challenges.

Regarding the level of self-directed learning (SDL), the data revealed varying degrees of learner autonomy among students. Some students demonstrated low levels of SDL, characterized by a heavy reliance on lecturers, minimal initiative in managing learning, and a passive approach to academic tasks. This is consistent with previous findings that students with low SDL often depend on teacher-directed instructions and lack confidence in independent decision-making (Wijayanti & Nurhadi, 2020). Others exhibited a moderate level of SDL, where they began to engage in independent learning behaviors—such as managing time or seeking resources—but still required external motivation and support. This transitional stage is typical among learners developing autonomy and reflects a shift from dependent to more self-regulated learning practices (Sari & Puspita, 2021). A smaller group of students demonstrated a high level of SDL, actively seeking information, setting personal learning goals, monitoring their progress, and completing tasks without external prompting. These students embodied key SDL traits, including initiative, self-management, and intrinsic motivation (Rahmah & Asriyanti, 2019). Such learners are more resilient in facing academic challenges and tend to be better equipped to overcome barriers in language

comprehension. The process of conclusion drawing and verification, conducted through consistent patterns in questionnaire responses, confirmed these findings. It highlighted the crucial role that SDL plays in enabling students to manage and overcome both linguistic and psychological barriers in reading English texts. These findings support the argument that fostering SDL is essential for improving reading comprehension outcomes, particularly in EFL contexts (Ismail, 2022).

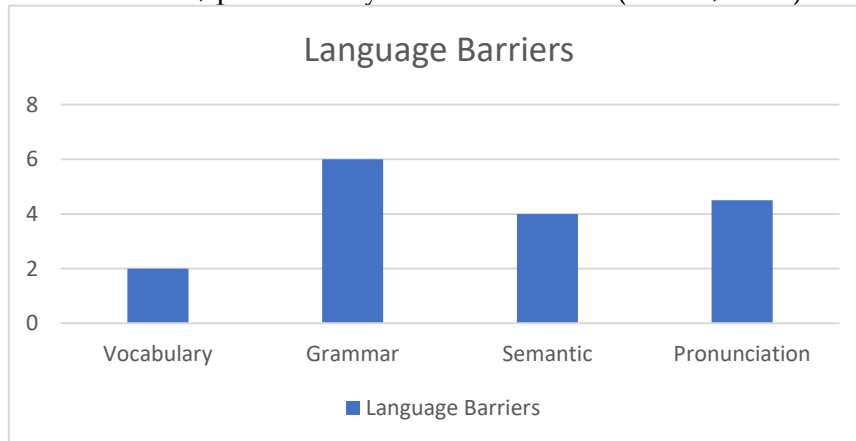


Fig. 1. Language Barriers

The results of the questionnaires showed that students' reading ability was still influenced by language barriers, such as barriers in understanding new vocabulary, barriers in understanding grammar in English texts, barriers in understanding the meaning of English texts, and barriers in pronouncing English vocabulary (Dennis, 2008). The data revealed that 2 students experienced barriers related to new vocabulary, 6 students reported difficulties in understanding English grammar, 4 students struggled with interpreting the overall meaning of English texts, and 3 students encountered challenges in pronouncing English words (see Appendix 3). These findings indicate that grammar-related issues were the most prominent linguistic barrier faced by the students, surpassing difficulties in vocabulary acquisition, textual meaning comprehension, and pronunciation. This suggests that inadequate grammatical knowledge significantly hinders students' ability to process and understand English reading materials effectively—a finding that aligns with previous studies emphasizing grammar as a foundational component in second language reading comprehension (Fitriani & Maulida, 2020; Suryani, 2021).

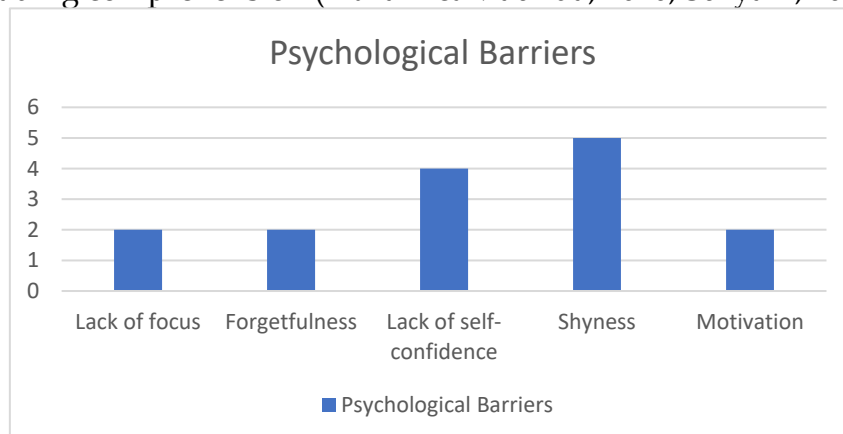


Fig. 2. Psychological Barriers

Psychological barriers were still influenced, such as students experiencing a lack of focus when reading English texts, often forgetting after reading English texts, feeling a lack of confidence when reading English vocabulary, feeling shyness when reading English texts in front of others, and a lack of motivation in reading English texts (Rahim & Ed, 2019). The data indicated that 2 students experienced a lack of focus while reading English texts, 2 students reported frequent forgetfulness after reading, 4 students lacked confidence in reading English vocabulary, 5 students felt shy when reading English texts in front of others, and 2 students demonstrated low motivation in reading English texts (see Appendix 3). These findings suggest that feelings of shyness during public reading constitute the most prominent psychological barrier among the participants. Compared to other psychological factors such as lack of focus, forgetfulness, low confidence, and low motivation, shyness appears to have a greater impact on the students' willingness and ability to engage with English texts in a social or classroom setting. This result supports previous studies, which emphasize that affective filters – such as anxiety, shyness, and low self-esteem – can significantly inhibit language processing and reading comprehension in EFL contexts (Putra & Anggraini, 2022; Amelia & Yunita, 2020). Learners who experience embarrassment or discomfort when reading aloud are more likely to avoid active participation, which in turn affects their reading development and self-directed learning progress (Ismail, 2022).

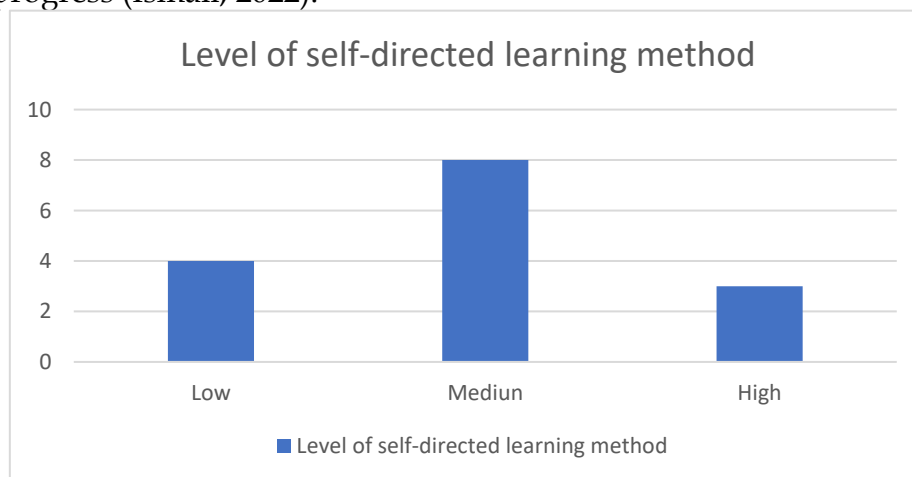


Fig. 3. Level of Self-Directed Learning Method

These findings indicate that most students are not yet fully accustomed to engaging with English texts independently. This is understandable considering that students from the Guidance and Counselling Department generally do not come from academic backgrounds focused on foreign languages, particularly English. The lack of prior exposure to intensive English instruction may contribute to their limited confidence and reading competence in this area. However, the application of the Self-Directed Learning (SDL) approach has shown a positive influence on students' learning attitudes. Several students began to demonstrate initiative by reading texts independently, searching for the meanings of unfamiliar vocabulary, and drawing conclusions from texts with increased confidence. These behavioral changes reflect the early stages of learner autonomy, where students begin to take responsibility for the learning process (Wulandari & Pratama, 2019; Ismail, 2022). This suggests that SDL

can serve as an effective strategy to foster independent reading habits and improve comprehension among non-language major students.

Based on the results of the questionnaire analysis, it was found that each level of the Self-Directed Learning method provides a different picture of students' readiness to read independently. Low levels indicate that students are not ready to take responsibility for the learning process. They are still waiting for instructions, do not have learning strategies, and lack confidence in understanding English texts (Laine et al., 2022). At the medium level, students begin to show initiative and have a desire to try reading on their own, although they still need guidance in understanding meaning or organizing information. This level was an important transition stage for further development (Laine et al., 2022). Meanwhile, at the high level, students demonstrate characteristics of independent and active students. They not only read to fulfill assignments, but also actively seek information, set their own learning goals, and complete assignments without assistance.

Based on the results of the questionnaires analysis, 4 students showing that they used a low level in the self-directed learning method in reading English texts, while students who used a medium level in the self-directed learning method in reading English texts numbered 8 students and 3 students who used a high level in the self-directed learning method in reading English texts. This shows that more students use the medium level in the self-directed learning method in reading English texts compared to the low and high levels in the self-directed learning method in reading English texts. And this shows that: At a medium level in the self-directed learning method, students were more effective in developing learning independence, but still need help and direction from lecturers.

CONCLUSION

. Based on research results and data analysis, it can be concluded that the main barriers students experience in reading English texts are language and psychological barriers. Language barriers are most common in understanding grammar, compared to new vocabulary, text meaning, and pronunciation. Meanwhile, the most common psychological barrier is shyness when reading in front of others, followed by lack of focus, forgetfulness, low self-confidence, and low motivation.

In terms of self-directed learning methods, most students are at a medium level. They are starting to actively study on their own, but still need guidance from their lecturers. Only a few have reached a high level, and some are still at a low level, heavily dependent on lecturers. However, with this self-directed learning, students are beginning to show positive changes, such as increased self-confidence and actively seeking information on their own.

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