



FREEDOM TO CHOOSE READING MATERIAL AND ITS EFFECTIVENESS TO READING COMPREHENSION

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abstract

This research elaborates on readers' independency to choose the reading material and its effectiveness in reading comprehension. It highlights the correlation of students' independency in deciding the reading material they are going to read and how it correlates with reading comprehension. Reading is considered as one of the language skills with easier access to be developed, both in numbers and quality of the sources. The research is quasi-experimental research with 21 participants from reading class students in the English Education Program of State Islamic University Datokarama Palu. During the six weeks meeting the students were divided into two groups: experimental group and control group. Treatment was given by giving students numbers of reading materials and letting them choose and read freely. The data were then analysed quantitatively using the independent sample t-test. The result of the test shows that the significant value is 0.309 or classified as no significance between the readers' freedom to choose the reading material with their reading comprehension.

INTRODUCTION

Reading always becomes an inseparable part of language learning. Following its prominent roles in language learning, reading has become part of language teaching at all levels and gets more intense as the levels go up. Reading also follows with numerous benefits, including enhancing people's social skills, developing creativity, improving hand-eye coordination, providing people with endless hours of fun and entertainment, and especially for EFL learners, reading helps to acquire more in English (Divina, 2009; Iftanti, 2012; Khoshbakht & Gorjian, 2017). Those reasons strengthen reading as one of the important language skills.

The important position of reading makes reading often become an indicator of learning quality. For example, Program for International Students Assessment (PISA) uses reading proficiency, mathematics, science, and innovative domains and students' well-being as indicators to measure students' quality at the global level (OECD, 2018). Numbers of language tests also include reading as part of their test, ranging from local to international scales, such as IELTS and TOEFL.

Despite its benefits and roles, defining and explaining reading could not be categorized as an easy task. To fully answer what is reading is hardly possible. It is a complex process that no one is able to give a satisfactory definition (Ngabut, 2015). Various experts have given their best definitions of reading. Summing up, reading could be defined as the

interaction between reader and writer with the reading texts as the medium (Eviyuliwati & Sarwan, 2018; Iftanti, 2012; Rohmah, 2018). From this point of view, it could be concluded that reading should have at least three elements; reader, writer, and reading text.

After having a clue about reading, the challenge is how to read. To read properly is on a different level than just defining what is reading. As the key to reading is the interaction between reader and writer, there is a complex process and requirements necessary for the reader. Several factors required are knowledge of the language, ability to predict or guess the cues, ability to remember previous cues, and ability to connect all different cues (Yorio, 1969). Without these factors, readers will most likely not construct the messages and the meaning of the text, which become the essential part of the reading.

From this point, it is necessary to note that reading is not just a process of producing sound or acting as to read from the passages. It is a process that requires readers to know and gain something from written materials. Reading is not a passive activity; it is an active action in which the reader tries to understand the messages in the reading material. Comprehending the messages is the key to reading. There is no reading without comprehension (Eviyuliwati & Sarwan, 2018; Rohmah, 2018).

To have a proper understanding of what is reading comprehension, one should look for definitions constructed by experts. There are various definitions of reading comprehension from various points of view. There are three models of reading that could widen the views of reading comprehension: top-down, bottom-up, and interactive. The top-down model sees reading comprehension as an automatic outcome of accurate word recognition. Meanwhile, the bottom-up model defines reading as obtaining meaning by using only as much information as necessary from the graphic, syntactic, and semantic cue systems. Different from the previous two models, the interactive model believes that reading comprehension is the result of the interaction between perception of graphic symbols that represent language and the reader's language skill and knowledge of the world (Ngabut, 2015). The interactive model is one of the most common definitions used by a number of experts.

Following the definition, it can be understood that comprehending a text needs a serious effort. To comprehend a text, readers need to synchronize their eyes and brain to extract and acquire information (Eviyuliwati & Sarwan, 2018). It requires a significant investment of attention, especially when the words and contents are difficult (Cirino et al., 2019). Therefore, the same teaching strategy will result differently as comprehending is not acquired merely from teaching.

Reading is nurtured through practices and how readers build up their knowledge; those who read more frequently will likely have a better comprehension than those who read less. The information and understanding of an object could be constructed differently for each person, in terms of speed, precision, and perfectness. For example, people who often read scientific material are more likely used to the scientific topic than those who often read stories.

Within the frame of the definitions and theories of reading comprehension comes the classification of readers. Readers are often classified as good and poor readers. Good readers, despite various labels given, such as successful readers, proficient readers, and others, have some common attributes. They often correlate with the ability to read widely and accurately, recognize words automatically, monitor their understanding, negotiate meaning, and use various strategies to construct meaning when they lack prior knowledge or face unfamiliar vocabulary and grammatical problems (Fotovatian & Shokrpour, 2007; McLaughlin, 2012; Rawian, Mokhtar, & Yahaya, 2018; Sudiran, 2011).

The second group is the poor readers. Just like good readers, poor readers are also followed by other labels such as remedial readers or struggling readers; they are often defined as readers who have poor spelling, poor verbal skills, poor reading comprehension, poor reading speed, listening problems, poor handwriting, and an inability to make notes (Le Cordeur, 2011; Rawian et al., 2018). They are also unable to develop reading expectation and rely to the texts much (Sudiran, 2011).

The existence of readers classification shows that reading ability has complex indicators to measure and also challenges that are often found. Besides the roles of the tutors or teachers, readers also need to categorize themselves. Therefore, they can see what they lack of and recognize the weaknesses they have in their reading. From all the categorization of readers, the grand idea in reading teachers and researchers, with all of its complexity, is to find the most suitable way to improve the comprehension of the readers. Once again, comprehension is the main focus for reading as there is no reading without comprehension.

Experts have conducted numerous studies regarding reading comprehension. There are some ways and factors which are believed able to improve reading comprehension. Reading fluency, vocabulary, lexical and syntactical understanding are some aspects that had been proved to have correlation with reading comprehension (R. R. Day, 2018; Wolf, Muijselaar, Boonstra, & Bree, 2018; Zipke, 2008). Besides language understanding, there are other foundational factors, including memory process and readers utilization of world knowledge (Lin, 2010; Wolf et al., 2018). To sum up, there are six variables related to reading comprehension: readers' background knowledge, reading strategies, purpose of reading or the nature of the task, length of the text, type of text, and treatment of new vocabulary (Ngabut, 2015). These factors should be the main considerations as how reading comprehension should be seen and treated.

Among factors that affect reading comprehension, reading fluency and readers background knowledge are factors that consider having bigger possibilities to be shaped through teaching and learning process. There are numerous teaching methods that boost reading ability. Among them is extensive reading; this method is one of the methods that is able to improve reading ability (Ruzin, 2019). Extensive Reading is taught by reading widely and in large quantities (Kirin, 2010). This method also comes with other benefits, including macro and micro skills, critical thinking, motivation, and attitude towards reading (R. R. Day, 2018; Husna, 2019; Kirin, 2010; Puspitasari, 2020).

Extensive Reading (ER) gains more popularity as numbers of studies have proven its benefits. Reading classes and EFL teachers have applied it, including in Indonesia. Its foundation is learning reading by reading (R. R. Day, 2018). Extensive reading comes with other terms including pleasure reading, self-selected reading, free voluntary reading, and wide reading (Ng, Renandya, & Chong, 2019). By doing extensive reading, reading is hoped to become the nature for students' daily activities (Iftanti, 2012). From this point of view, the Extensive Reading could provide not only vast amount of knowledge and information for students, but also build up students reading habit and fluency. Those two, knowledge and reading fluency are significant factors for reading comprehension.

Regarding ER, there are some principles that need to be highlighted. Among them are the Bamford and Day's ten principles: easy reading material, wide range of topics, readers free to choose, read as much as possible, the purpose is general understanding, reading is its own reward, reading speed is usually faster, reading is individual and silent, teachers are orient and guide, and the teacher is the role model (R. Day & Bamford, 2002). Despite still being debatable related its applicability in the classroom, the ten principles still give some

main points, including vast amount of reading materials, choices, and the importance of students' pleasure and autonomous. These are also found in Prowse's principles of Extensive Reading (Prowse, 2002). The pillars of Extensive Reading put students' independency as one of the prominent elements. Extensive Reading should make students' point of view about reading as a pleasurable activity.

As the core value of extensive reading is to reshape the perspective of readers towards reading activity, it is important that reading teachers also ensure that the class could provide the necessary atmosphere. Readers should see a reading material as an informative, interesting, and even part of the needs. This idea paved the way to produce what is called as 'good readers' students.

As learning orientation is to produce students with the standardized quality and achieve the goals, students' development should be put as the priority. In term of reading classes, there should be long-lasting goals to develop reading ability and habit. Extensive reading requires students to feel reading activity not as a burden; therefore they can build their attitude towards reading. Letting people read what they want is believed to develop reading habit (Lestari, Sofendi, & Petrus, 2018). Giving more independency to students is proved to be beneficial. It brings positive response on improving confidence in reading L2, promoting their reading motivation, and increasing students' writing skill. On the other hand, it sometimes makes the students' clueless about what they are going to read (Puspitasari, 2020). To let readers' freely choose what they are going to read means to minimize the intervention of the teachers, in which teachers' role is the guide and tutor of the reading class. The grand idea and goals of building up reading habit and giving more freedom to the readers is none other than creating a reader with better comprehension towards reading. There is no reading without comprehension (Eviyuliwati & Sarwan, 2018).

Giving freedom for readers, as extracted from ER's core principals, to choose their reading material is one of the ways to help students improve their reading quality. Reading comprehension as the soul of reading itself becomes the main concern. The core of letting students choosing their reading material is giving pleasure to students and encouraging students to have positive attitude towards reading. Experts believe that attitude towards language learning has a strong relation with the language learning (Clark & Zoysa, 2011). This concept is also strengthen by research in Benue State, Nigeria revealing that the teachers' and students' attitude towards English is one of the predictors of their English learning achievement (Udu, 2021).

This point becomes the step with the major goals, improving the quality of reading comprehension. Despite various theories and techniques created to improve readers' comprehension, there are still gaps to be filled by research and improvements inside and outside the classroom.

To improve the reading quality, experts and researchers explore reading comprehension from time to time. A number of studies exploring reading comprehension have been made by several experts. In 2018, Rawian *et. al.* have made a research project to see the correlation between reading rate and reading comprehension. They tested students from college by giving them reading rate and reading comprehension test. The research also investigated possible differences between genders and academic semester. They found that reading rate has a positive correlation with reading comprehension (Rawian et al., 2018).

The study by Ismail also tried to explore reading comprehension and its relationship with various factors, including gender, socio-economic status, and ethnicity. The research was taken place in Malaysia, a suitable place in which multi-ethnicity become the core of the population. The research's participants were thousands of university students. The findings of

the research discover that among three variables, only ethnicity was influential to the reading comprehension (Ismail, Karim, & Mohamed, 2018).

Another study by Zipke investigated the use of riddles to teach reading comprehension. Different with some studies about reading comprehension that mostly done in high schooler or above, Zipke did his research in elementary grade students. By using riddles and ambiguous text, he tried to monitor their effects on reading comprehension. The result found that riddles and ambiguous texts has positive effect towards students' reading comprehension and metalinguistic awareness (Zipke, 2008). This idea was in line with the theory that vocabulary is one of the factors affecting reading comprehension.

Study about reading comprehension has taken in many forms. However, it still leaves spaces to explore. Among the questions raised is about students' freedom in choosing reading materials. According to theories, this aspect can boost students' motivation and attitudes towards reading. The main idea is putting readers' pleasure in the front line. The idea of pleasure related to language learning is strengthen by the research on Omani university students, in which pleasure plays a positive role in language learning (Al Yaaqubi & Al Mahrooqi, 2013).

Providing more freedom to reading class' students is one of the ways to provide the feeling of pleasure towards reading. Based on numerous studies related to factors affecting reading comprehension, this study then focused on another factor that could affect reading comprehension; giving freedom to students in choosing reading material.

Therefore, this research tried to answer the question "do students' freedom to choose reading materials have significant effect on reading comprehension?"

METHOD

Research Design

This is quantitative research with the experimental design. Its purpose is to check whether there is an impact of a treatment or an intervention (Cresswell, 2014). Therefore, in this research the treatment or independent variable is giving independency and freedom for students to choose their reading material. While the dependent variable is students' reading comprehension.

During the learning process, the students in Reading class have 22 short texts, both descriptive and narrative texts. All texts are authentic texts, the kind of texts produced according to the social community needs (Islam & Santoso, 2018). The use of authentic texts are based on the consideration of its limitless options, the language choices, the information it provides, and other numerous benefits compared to the non-authentic texts. The texts are from various sources with range of words 900-1,500 words.

To ensure the texts' level is in the range of the students, then the readability tests were conducted. The readability is a measure to know whether the text is well-constructed and effective in delivering the information (Alfa, Telaumbanua, & Umiyati, 2019; Yulianto, 2019). The tests' results show that the readability level of the texts range between grade 3 to 12. The data about the texts' readability used in the teaching process are as follow in table 1.

Table 1. Reading Materials Data

Text	Genre	Words	Readability	
			Grade Level	Classification
1	Narrative	1081	3	3rd-4th Grader
2	Narrative	1043	4	4th And 5th Grader
3	Narrative	1050	4	4th And 5th Grader
4	Narrative	1401	4	4th And 5th Grader
5	Narrative	1082	5	4th And 5th Grader
6	Narrative	1181	5	4th And 5th Grader
7	Narrative	1260	6	5th-6th Grader
8	Narrative	1453	6	5th-6th Grader
9	Narrative	1032	6	5th-6th Grader
10	Narrative	1135	6	5th-6th Grader
11	Narrative	1421	7	6th-7th Grader
12	Narrative	1235	7	6th-7th Grader
13	Narrative	1037	7	6th-7th Grader
14	Descriptive	973	9	8th-9th Grader
15	Descriptive	1026	9	8th-9th Grader
16	Descriptive	907	11	10th-11th Grader
17	Descriptive	1159	11	10th-11th Grader
18	Descriptive	917	12	12th Grader
19	Descriptive	1164	12	12th Grader
20	Descriptive	950	12	12th Grader
21	Descriptive	1031	12	12th Grader
22	Descriptive	1007	12	12th Grader

Population

The participants of the research are students of English Education program with total number of 29 students. The students were taking the reading class and on semester three. All the students are assumed to have the proper English ability. However, due to some requirements that need to be had by the participants, including activeness in the classroom, number of participants that can be part of the research was reduced to 21.

Instruments

In collecting the data, the main instruments used was reading comprehension tests. The tests were conducted twice, pre-test and post-test. To have a reliable instrument, the tests were taken from a standardized reading test from TOEFL Reading Practice for basic reading comprehension. Both tests were a 10-number reading test with a single text. Distribution of the test is by using Google Form, due to the online learning under the health protocol. The google form was chosen as it is a web-based application that can collect information efficiently through surveys or tests (Mallette & Barone, 2013; Mulatsih, 2020).

Data Analysis

To analyse the data, there were several steps taken. As the research is experimental research, the statistical analysis becomes the pillar of the data analysis. The first step of the data analysis was to check the normality of data. The step was to check whether the data were distributed normally or not. It was also used to decide whether the data were classified as parametric or non-parametric. The normality was checked by comparing chi-square count and chi-square table (Sugiyono, 2007). The result of data normality showed that the data were classified as parametric data.

To analyse parametric data the formula used was the independent sample T-test. The formula was to check the effectiveness of the treatment (Razavi & Gilakjani, 2020). Both analysing normality and testing the hypothesis were done by using SPSS. These analyses put readers' freedom to choose reading material as the independent variable (X_1) and reading comprehension as the dependent variable (Y_1).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This section elaborates the findings of the research and the interpretation of the results. To find the results of the readers' freedom in choosing material and its effect to reading comprehension, the class were divided into two: control group and experimental group. The control group received no treatment and did the class activity regularly. The experimental group received a treatment in which all members of the group could choose what material they were going to read in the class activity. The control group consisted of 14 students and the experimental group consisted of 15 students. However due to certain criteria that could not be fulfilled by the participants, such as the activeness in the classroom activity, the number was reduced. The class control consisted of 12 students and the experimental group consisted of 9 students.

To answer the research's question, statistical analysis was the main step. The testing of normality was conducted to find whether the data were normal or not. The result was shown in table 2.

Table 2. Reading Comprehension Tests' Normality Results

MODEL		Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.
Pre-test	Control	.962	12	.811
	Experiment	.980	9	.963
Post-test	Control	.964	12	.836
	Experiment	.931	9	.494

The table 2 shows the result of comprehension test for both experimental class and control class. The pre-test in control class had significances 0.811 and the experiment class had 0.963. Both results were bigger than 0.05 which means that the pre-test in both classes were distributed normally. The exact condition was also found in the post-tests' resultch in which the control group achieved 0.836 and experiment had 0.494 significances result. With the data distributed normally it can be concluded that the data were classified as parametric data.

The pre-tests were conducted for both groups, the control and experimental. The result of the pre-tests then calculated and evaluated. In table 3 the data about the description of pre-tests' result in class control and experiment were provided.

Table 3. Pre-test Data Description

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Control	12	30.83	22.344
Experiment	9	34.44	22.973
Valid N (listwise)	9		

The mean of pre-test for class control with total students (N) 12 had mean of 30.83 and standard deviation of 22.344. This result was lower than the experimental class (mean of 34.44 and standard deviation of 22.973) with total students (N) 9. However, the differences between the two classes were still in the same range 30-40. It indicated that the two classes still had problems in terms of comprehending a reading text.

After the treatments were given in the classes for the experimental group, the post-test was conducted. The test was to see whether there were changes in their reading comprehension or not. Similar with the pre-test, the post-test was also conducted with the google form and the test with same level with pre-test. The result of the test was counted and calculated. The result for the post-test had changed compared to the pre-test as in the table 4.

Table 4. Post-test Data Description

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Control	12	38.33	16.967
Experiment	9	31.11	13.642
Valid N (listwise)	9		

There were changes with the post-test of both classes. The control class had the mean of 38.33 and Std deviation of 16.967 for the post-test. While the experimental class had the mean of 31.11 and std. deviation of 13.642. Both classes' reading comprehension result showed that there were changes in term of Mean and Std Deviation. Figure 1 showed the comparison of the mean of pre-test and post-test.

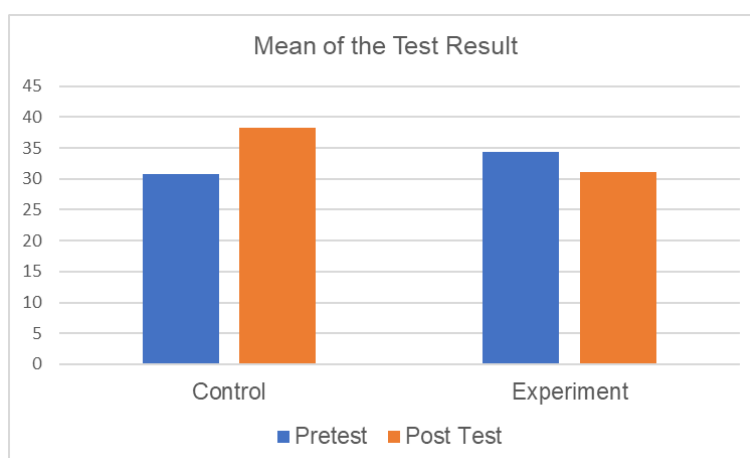


Figure 1. The Result of Comprehension Reading Test

Based on the result of pre-test and post-test, the class control had improved from 30.83 to 38.33. Different from the control class, the experimental class changed negatively from 34.44 to 31.11. However, both classes result in pre-test and post-test were still in the same range between 30-40.

As the data for the pre-tests and post-tests had been collected, the next step was to analyse the significance of the treatment. To analyse comprehensively, the result then was checked through the paired sample t-test. This step function was to see the group in which the readers have freedom to choose reading material's significance. The data results are presented in table 5.

Table 5. Paired Sample t-test for Experimental Class

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pretest-Posttest	3.333	30.000	10.000	-19.727	26.393	.333	8	.747

The result of the paired sample t-test is higher than 0.05 (t: 0.333, df: 8, sig: 0.747). This result shows that there are no significance differences for the experimental class, the reader class's members who can choose their reading material for the class activity. In order to have proper conclusion related to the variables tested, the control and experimental group results then were analysed more comprehensively.

To find the significance level of the pre-test between the experimental and control groups, independent samples t-test was conducted. Comparing the two pre-tests in order to check the significance different between the pre-tests or without the intervention first. The result is necessary in order to see how the treatments affected when comparing the two groups in the latter steps. The result of the test as in table 6.

Table 6. Independent Samples T-test for Reading Comprehension Pre-test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.013	.910	-.362	19	.721	-3.611	9.971	-24.480	17.257
Equal variances not assumed			-.361	17.113	.723	-3.611	10.012	-24.724	17.502

The independent sample t-test for reading comprehension pre-test in the both classes have Levene's equality of variances' result 0.910. This number is more than 0.05. It means the result is homogeneity. Therefore, the result for the independent samples t-test will be based on *Equal variances assumed* (t: -0.362, df: 19, sig: 0.721). As the result of the sig is more than 0.05 then there is no significance different of the reading comprehension tests between the two groups.

As the next step is to check the effect of the treatment to the participants by comparing the two groups' post-tests result using independent sample t-tests. The detail is explained in the table 7 below

Table 7. Independent Samples T-test for Reading Comprehension Post-test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.552	.467	1.046	19	.309	7.222	6.903	-7.225	21.669
Equal variances not assumed			1.081	18.864	.293	7.222	6.683	-6.773	21.218

The independent sample t-test for reading comprehension post-test in the control and experimental classes have Levene's equality of variances' result 0.467 or more than 0.05. The result means there is homogeneity for the tests. Therefore, the result for the independent samples t-test will be based on *Equal variances assumed* (t: 1.046, df: 19, sig: 0.309). As the sig result is more than 0.05, there is no significant difference in the reading comprehension tests between the control and experimental groups' post-tests.

The test result shows that the readers' independence to choose the reading material does not have a significant effect on students' reading comprehension. In another word, based on the result of the study, it can be said that this factor is not one of the factors that could be the predictor or have prominent impact to the achievement for reading comprehension.

Discussion

The result of this study gives a deeper and enrich view of reading comprehension. Improving reading comprehension needs great effort. Factors that affecting it also numerous. By giving more freedom to the students, experts and researches have shown that letting students to read in a more pleasurable conditions has positive boost to their reading. Al Mahrooqi and Al Yaqoobi (2013) surveyed English teachers and students. They found that readers who read literature material for pleasure boost their language learning. Udu (2021),

also in his research found that attitudes toward reading and writing can give positive effect to their language achievement, reading and writing. The basic conception is how attitude and feelings, which can be built by giving more comfort condition and freedom, can be beneficial to students' language learning, including their reading.

The positive effect by letting reader to read what they want to read also supported by Lestari *et. al.*, highlighting that it can enhance reading habits for the students (Lestari et al., 2018). Giving numbers of choices for reading material is related with their interest. It is also influence and empowers readers vocabulary and comprehension (Clark & Phythian-sence, 2008). However, give students more independency and freedom do have problems, one of them is let the students clueless about what they are going to read (Puspitasari, 2020).

Despite the number of supportive theories related to giving more freedom to the readers, this research shows other possibilities that might not work correctly. Several factors might lead to this result, including the basic language proficiency required, the difficulty of the texts, and some external factors. Most of the students still have low reading ability, in this case there are higher possibility that number of information acquired from the text is low. Therefore, comprehension cannot build properly.

The difficulty of the text is also probably one of the factors that affecting the students. As the texts are found to be difficult for some students, they might not build their reading ability. However, despite the result that shows readers free to choose reading material has no significant effect on reading comprehension. Reading comprehension is still a big open area to explore. This research highlighting having a proper and necessary requirement for the students to reduce some external factors.

CONCLUSION

The study has explored one of the aspects related t reading ocomprehension. However, as repeatedly explained, reading comprehension is a vast area that still need to be explored. Reading comprehension will always be an inseparable part of the reading class. In one point, it might be said, that comprehension is the main objective of most research related with reading.

The result of this research brought a conclusion on readers' freedom to choose the reading material in improving reading comprehension. It is noted that readers' freedom might not play significant role with the assumptions that numbers of other factors is not fulfilled. Aspects like genre, difficulty, language competency, and others are assumed to have more significant role. Once this issues are addressed, there will be higher possibility that readers' freedom will affect more positively towards reading comprehension.

It is expected that this research is able to bring more understanding for reading comprehension. There are still great efforts needed, either by reading teachers, lecturers, and researchers to explore. The scope of reading to be explored is a vast area that still needs more efforts to improve reading quality.

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