

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### **A. Background of the Study**

Reading is an important skill for students to master, especially young students. Reading involves the ability to understand and interpret text effectively, including the process of deciphering words and reconstructing the meaning of the message conveyed by the author. Reading is now not only used to expand language skills and vocabulary (Sadiku, 2015) but also to help foster language development at an early age (Ismail & Yusof, 2018). This makes reading an important foundation in language learning, as without sufficient input, the development of other language skills will be hindered. In addition, Bamford & Day (1998) also argue that reading is one of the fundamental receptive skills, reading becomes a gateway for students to broaden their horizons about language, culture, and the world in general. Reading also allows students to build a strong foundation in understanding the structure of a foreign language, including English.

However, in the teaching process, teachers face various challenges that hinder the effectiveness of reading instruction. According to Alharbi (2022), difficulties in teaching reading in the classrooms include low text comprehension because students have difficulty connecting information, and finding the main idea, as well as reading fluency, which causes students to read slowly and disjointedly, in line with this, teachers often report that students struggle with several common reading indicators, such as recognizing vocabulary in context, identifying main ideas, finding specific information, inferring meaning from context, and relating the content of the text to their prior knowledge. These challenges show that the problem is not only about decoding words but also about building overall comprehension, which requires appropriate strategies and continuous support from teachers.

In this study, reading to young learners refers to a reading learning process specifically designed for young students, in this case junior high school students who are still in the early stages of learning English. Young learners' reading learning includes developing basic skills such as comprehending text, recognizing

vocabulary, as well as improving reading fluency with age-appropriate strategies and their cognitive abilities. Young learners are students who are in the early stages of development, spanning ages 3 to 15 (Hijriati, 2023). Grade 7 students in junior high school fall into this category as they are still in the early stages of English language development, thus requiring adaptive teaching approaches to support their reading skills.

Teachers at one junior high school in Tasikmalaya face various challenges in teaching reading to young learners in English classes. Based on initial interviews, the teacher explained that many students had just begun learning English at the junior high level, which limited their basic reading abilities. In their usual reading instruction, the teacher often introduces new vocabulary and its meaning related to the theme, breaks the reading text into smaller sections or paragraphs, and assigns reading tasks that match the students' proficiency levels. However, despite these efforts, students still struggle to recognize word forms, interpret texts, and connect written language with spoken forms. These difficulties make it challenging for them to identify main ideas or infer meaning from context. As a result, the teacher needs to provide frequent scaffolding throughout the lesson to help students process and understand the text more effectively. This phenomenon highlights the need for further exploration of both the challenges encountered by teachers and the solutions that can be implemented to support early learners in reading instruction.

To explore these challenges in more depth, this study refers to Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes that learning, including reading, is mediated through social interaction with individuals who are more knowledgeable or More Knowledgeable Others (MKO) (Vygotsky, 1978). In teaching reading to young students, the difficulties they face, such as limited vocabulary, low motivation, and differences in reading ability, show that students need guidance in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which is the gap between what they can do on their own and what they can do with help. This is in line with the concept of scaffolding introduced by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976), which explains how teachers provide gradual and temporary support to help students comprehend reading texts. In the context of teaching reading to young learners, scaffolding is

realized through various forms of support, including verbal guidance and encouragement, metacognitive support that helps students regulate their reading process such as guiding students to use translation strategies or digital tools to monitor their understanding and visual support that assists learners in interpreting textual meaning. Through these supports, students are gradually guided to become more aware of their comprehension and to read texts more independently.

Thus, Sociocultural Theory is relevant to explain why young students need structured support in the reading process and how teachers act as mediators during reading instruction.

There are several previous studies related to teaching reading. First, Hidayatulloh and Sugirin (2022) This study explores the reading teaching practices to young learners of two Indonesian EFL teachers who teach in two different socio-cultural contexts, namely Indonesia and Thailand. The study used a narrative research design to analyze teaching experiences, teaching techniques and learning materials. Second, Adhikari et al. (2024) looked into the hurdles that university teachers encounter while teaching reading skills to those learning English. The findings of this research illuminated several challenges, such as the absence of textbooks, dependence on substandard reading resources, inadequate reading habits, and restricted vocabulary proficiency. Last Alharbi (2022) explored the barriers that students experience in their journey of English reading development in Saudi Arabia, highlighting issues like limited vocabulary, poor reading routines, and a reliance on translations. All three studies highlight the challenges of teaching reading, such as limited resources, poor reading habits and limited vocabulary.

Although previous studies have discussed challenges in teaching reading and emphasized innovative teaching approaches, such as the studies by Hidayatulloh and Sugirin (2022), Adhikari et al. (2024), and Alharbi (2022), there is still limited research that specifically focuses on teaching reading to young learners at the junior high school level, particularly in local contexts such as Tasikmalaya. This gap is significant because students at this stage are in a transitional period of cognitive, social, and language development, which creates

unique learning challenges that require more contextual and developmentally appropriate reading instruction.

## **B. Formulation of the Problems**

Based on the background above, the researcher addressed the following question, “**What are the challenges and solutions in teaching reading to young learners?**”

## **C. Operational Definitions**

### **1. Teaching Reading**

Practical efforts by teachers to help seventh-grade students understand English texts, including introducing key vocabulary, dividing texts into smaller sections, and providing guidance to support their comprehension.

### **2. Teacher’s Challenges**

The barriers junior high school English teachers face in teaching reading include students’ limited vocabulary, low motivation, lack of relevant teaching materials, and challenges in creating engaging learning strategies.

### **3. Teacher’s Solution**

Strategies or methods junior high school English teachers use to overcome challenges in teaching reading include using interactive approaches, relevant teaching materials, and individualized student support.

#### **4. Young Learners**

Grade 7 students who have just started learning English and are still in the early stages of language acquisition, with an age range of 12-13 years.

#### **D. Aims of the Study**

This study aims to explore the challenges and solutions teachers face in teaching reading to young learners to help teachers address the challenges they face when teaching reading to young learners.

#### **E. Significances of the Study**

This research determines teacher challenges and solutions in teaching reading to young learners. Theoretically, it will enrich the literature on these challenges and solutions. Practically, it aims to assist teachers in overcoming the difficulties they face. Empirically, it offers new insights into addressing these challenges.

##### **1. Practical Significance**

This study provides an overview to readers or educators about the challenges and solutions when teaching reading English texts. Study is expected to provide guidance for teachers to understand and overcome the challenges they face, such as differences in language ability, lack of motivation, and limited resources. By identifying effective solutions, such as adaptation of teaching methods and selection of appropriate materials, teachers can significantly improve students' reading skills. In addition, this study can also serve as a reference for the development of better curriculum and teaching strategies so that it has a positive impact on the quality of education and the development of student literacy in the school.

##### **2. Empirical Significance**

This study provides empirical data on the challenges faced by English teachers in teaching reading to young learners in junior high schools in Tasikmalaya. These empirical findings are important because they provide direct insight into the experiences of teachers involved in the teaching process,

as well as identifying various factors that influence the effectiveness of reading instruction. Data obtained from interviews and field observations can be the basis for further research on more effective and relevant teaching strategies, as well as opening up opportunities to develop new approaches to overcoming the difficulties faced by students in learning to read. Thus, this study not only adds to the body of knowledge in the field of English language education but also contributes to better teaching practices in schools.