



An analysis of elementary students' differential comprehension of fiction texts from Barrett's perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the levels of fiction text comprehension among fourth-grade primary school students in Surakarta, Indonesia, using Barrett's Taxonomy as the analytical framework. A descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design was employed, and data were collected through reading comprehension tests, classroom observations, and interviews with students and teachers. The five levels of comprehension, literal, reorganization, inferential, evaluative, and appreciative, were assessed to map the range of students' reading abilities. The findings show notable variation across comprehension levels. Literal comprehension achieved the highest score (91.35%, high category), indicating a strong ability to recall explicit information. In contrast, reorganization (40.73%) and inferential comprehension (43.20%) were categorized as low, suggesting difficulties in synthesizing information and interpreting implicit meaning. Evaluative comprehension was moderate (69.13%), while appreciative comprehension received the lowest score (35.79%), reflecting limited engagement with the emotional and aesthetic qualities of the text. Overall, the results indicate that although students demonstrate strong surface-level understanding, their higher-order cognitive and affective comprehension skills are underdeveloped. The study recommends instructional practices that extend beyond factual recall by fostering critical interpretation, reflective judgment, and deeper engagement with literary texts. The implications for curriculum design and classroom instruction are outlined to address these specific gaps in comprehension.



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1. Introduction

Although reading comprehension has been widely studied, research that comprehensively examines each level of Barrett's Taxonomy remains very limited, particularly within the Southeast Asian and Indonesian primary school context [1]–[3]. This scarcity of studies that systematically analyze literal, reorganization, inferential, evaluative, and appreciative comprehension highlights a clear gap in the literature. Therefore, it is essential to clarify the specific research niche this study aims to address, namely, providing an in-depth investigation of students' fiction comprehension across all levels of Barrett's Taxonomy to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of reading development in Indonesian primary education [4]–[6]. Language skills comprise four fundamental components: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, which together form the core of Indonesian language instruction from elementary through secondary education [7], [8]. Within the primary school curriculum, reading comprehension is systematically introduced and developed, with fourth grade serving as a key stage in which students are expected to demonstrate more advanced comprehension abilities.

In the locally adapted national curriculum used in Surakarta schools, reading comprehension is explicitly targeted in the second semester of fourth grade and is formally incorporated into the expected learning outcomes.

One of the required competencies at this level is the ability to understand fictional texts, which serves as a foundational literacy skill for developing higher-order thinking, cultural interpretation, and narrative comprehension [9]. Mastery of fictional texts at this stage not only enables students to identify plot structures, characters, and themes but also supports their ability to make inferences, evaluate moral messages, and relate stories to their own sociocultural context [10]–[12]. This competency, therefore, plays a critical role in preparing learners for more complex forms of reading and textual analysis in subsequent grades [13]–[15]. Fictional texts, as a form of literary writing, contain imaginative elements that are not necessarily grounded in factual reality and therefore do not demand real-world verification [16]. Mastery of fiction comprehension is essential, as it not only supports students' cognitive development, such as interpretation and inference, but also nurtures their capacity for literary appreciation [17].

Understanding the content of reading texts in the form of fictional stories is a complex activity. On one hand, students must absorb information whose reality does not correspond to actual reality. According to Ani's study [18], problems related to the Indonesian language curriculum in understanding fictional texts include students' lack of attention when observing the characters in the story. This results in students being unable to identify the story's characters correctly. Based on interviews with teachers, it was found that the teaching activities related to fictional texts have accommodated the current curriculum standards and learning outcomes. These include students' ability to understand and convey ideas from the text, comprehend characterization, summarize moral messages, and understand the author's purpose in the story. However, [19] revealed that several students have not yet been able to comprehend the content of fictional texts fully. This reality became apparent when students were found to write summaries of the stories they read, such as naming characters, describing settings, making conclusions, determining the moral message, and expressing their opinions according to the story content [20]. Many students could not do this and merely copied text from the reading without understanding its meaning.

Difficulties understanding the content of fictional texts certainly affect other language skills, as comprehension plays a supporting role in developing broader language abilities. Based on this reality in teaching reading comprehension of fictional texts, the researcher is interested in examining students' abilities to understand fictional texts using Barrett's taxonomy theory [21]–[24]. Barrett's taxonomy develops reading comprehension skills by focusing on both information and meaning in texts [2], [25], [26]. This study differs from the three previous studies in that it attempts to describe students' abilities to understand fictional texts using Barrett's taxonomy perspective. Barrett's taxonomy is based on the consideration that it provides a guiding framework for analyzing students' comprehension abilities based on information found in the text [27]. The application of Barrett's taxonomy in assessing reading comprehension has been employed in previous research. This study is important to conduct because if students at the elementary school level have poor reading comprehension skills, they will face significant difficulties in mastering various academic disciplines in subsequent grades. Based on the background outlined above, the research problem in this study is: How is the ability to understand the content of fictional texts viewed from Barrett's taxonomy among fourth-grade students in public elementary schools in Surakarta? This study aims to describe the ability to understand the content of fictional texts using Barrett's taxonomy perspective among fourth-grade students in public elementary schools in Surakarta.

2. Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to provide a holistic description of fourth-grade students' comprehension of fictional texts based on Barrett's Taxonomy in public elementary schools in Surakarta. A case study design was used to allow an in-depth and contextualized exploration of students' reading processes [28]. The research instruments consisted of a reading comprehension test, a Barrett-based scoring rubric, interview guidelines, and observation sheets. The test was developed through several stages: identifying indicators for each of Barrett's five comprehension levels, constructing items aligned with fourth-grade

learning outcomes, and drafting questions that reflected literal, reorganization, inferential, evaluative, and appreciative competencies [2]. The final instrument consisted of fifteen items, with three items representing each level of Barrett's Taxonomy. Content accuracy and alignment with the taxonomy were ensured through expert validation involving a literacy education lecturer, an assessment specialist, and a senior Indonesian language teacher, who assessed the clarity, relevance, and representativeness of each item; revisions were made based on their feedback. The scoring process employed a Barrett rubric adapted from established taxonomy descriptors, consisting of five categories literal (recall of explicit information), reorganization (reordering and synthesizing ideas), inferential (interpreting implicit meaning), evaluative (making critical judgments), and appreciative (showing emotional or aesthetic responses) allowing each student's answer to be classified according to the specific cognitive or affective level it demonstrated [27]. Data were collected through tests, interviews, observations, and document studies, and their credibility was strengthened through triangulation of these techniques and sources involving both teachers and students. All data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, carried out continuously during data collection until saturation was reached, and the results were then explained narratively alongside tabulated findings to provide clear interpretations of students' comprehension across the five levels of Barrett's Taxonomy.

3. Results and Discussion

The presentation of this study focuses on describing the ability to comprehend fictional texts based on the five comprehension indicators outlined in Barrett's taxonomy theory among fourth-grade students in public elementary schools in Surakarta. These five indicators are: (1) literal comprehension; (2) reorganization comprehension; (3) inferential comprehension; (4) evaluative comprehension; and (5) appreciative comprehension. Based on the analysis of the first test document, literal comprehension across all classes reached 88.88%, with 24 students demonstrating good literal comprehension. The analysis of the second test document similarly showed that 88.88% of students, totaling 24 participants, possessed good literal comprehension. Analysis of the third test document revealed an increase, with 96.29% or 26 fourth-grade students exhibiting good literal comprehension. Based on Fig. 1, it can be seen that literal comprehension in the first test reached 88.88%, in the second test, it was also 88.88%, and in the third test, literal comprehension increased to 96.29%. This means the average score of literal comprehension across all students was 91.35%, which falls into the high category.

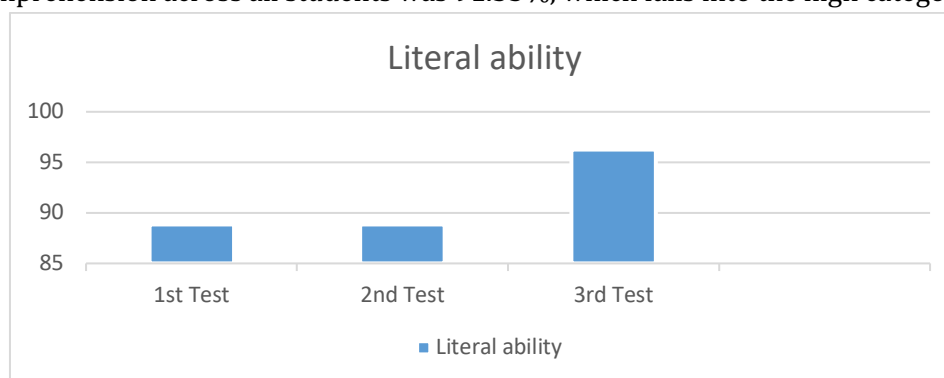


Fig. 1. Literal ability

Reorganization comprehension in fourth grade is organizing or arranging ideas into a conclusion and classifying characters or actors in a fictional story. Based on the analysis of the first test document, reorganization comprehension across the entire class reached 40.74%, with 11 students demonstrating good reorganization comprehension. The study of the second test document showed that reorganization comprehension reached 44.44%, with 12 students exhibiting good comprehension. The third test document analysis revealed a reorganization comprehension score of 37.03%, with 10 students demonstrating good reorganization comprehension. Based on Fig. 2, it can be seen that reorganization comprehension in the first test reached 40.74%, in the second test, it increased slightly to 44.44%, and in the third test, it decreased to 37.03%. This means the average score of reorganization comprehension across all

fourth-grade students in public elementary schools in Surakarta was 40.73%, which falls into the low category.

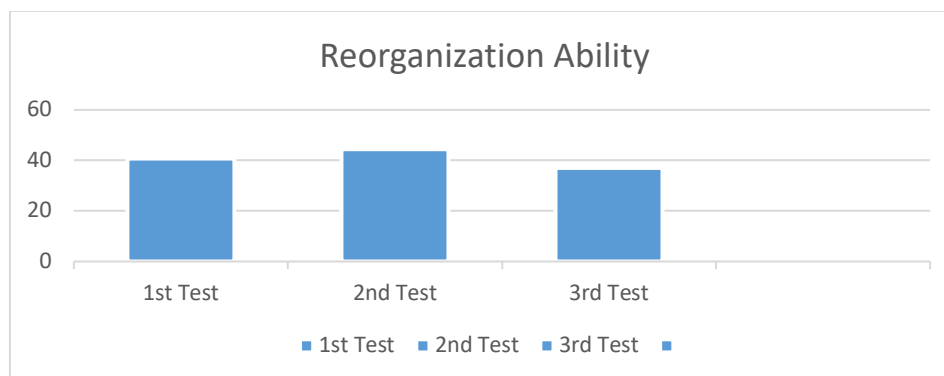


Fig. 2. Reorganization Ability

Inferential comprehension in fourth grade is described as the ability to connect possible events and determine implicit messages or moral lessons within fictional reading texts. Based on the analysis of the first test document, inferential comprehension across the entire class reached 40.74%, with 11 students demonstrating good inferential comprehension. The second test document analysis showed the same result, with 40.74% or 11 students exhibiting good inferential comprehension. The study of the third test document showed an increase to 48.14%, with 13 students demonstrating good inferential comprehension. Based on Fig. 3, it can be seen that inferential comprehension in the first test reached 40.74%. In the second test, inferential comprehension remained at 40.74%. In the third test, inferential comprehension increased to 48.14%. This means the average score of inferential comprehension among all fourth-grade students at Soropadan Public Elementary School was 43.20%, which falls into the low category.

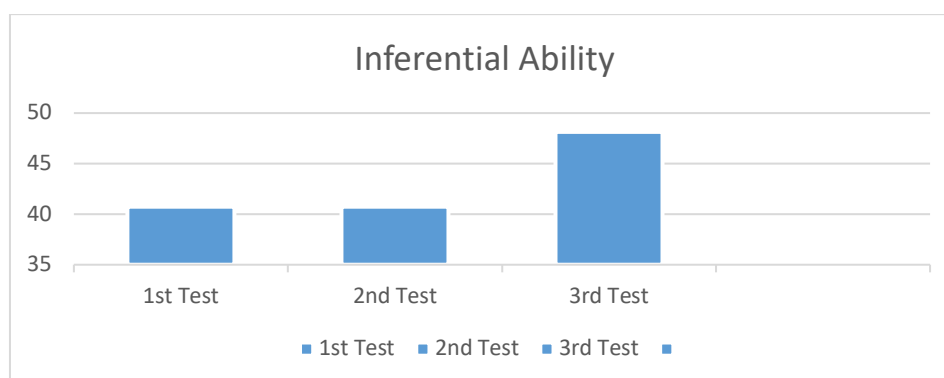


Fig. 3. Inferential Ability

Evaluative comprehension in fourth-grade students at public elementary schools in Surakarta is described as the ability to express opinions about characters' good or bad behavior and convey opinions about the fictional story. Based on the analysis of the first test document, evaluative comprehension across the entire class reached 77.77%, with 21 students demonstrating good evaluative comprehension. The second test document analysis scored 74.07%, with 20 students exhibiting good evaluative comprehension. The analysis of the third test document revealed a decrease to 55.55%, with 15 students demonstrating good evaluative comprehension. Based on Fig. 4, it can be seen that evaluative comprehension in the first test reached 77.77%, in the second test, it was 74.07%, while in the third test, evaluative comprehension decreased to 55.55%. This means the average score of evaluative comprehension among all fourth-grade students in public elementary schools reached 69.13%, which falls into the moderate category.

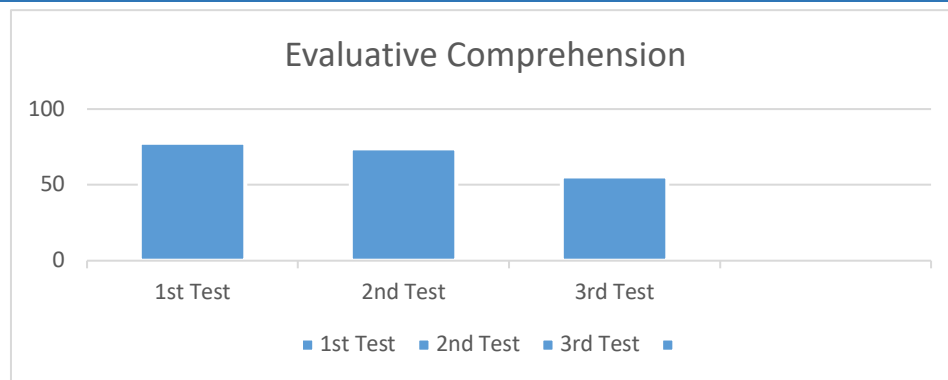


Fig. 4. Evaluative Comprehension

Appreciative comprehension in fourth-grade students at Soropadan Public Elementary School is described as the ability to express opinions about the positive values and attitudes of characters in fictional stories. Based on the analysis of the first test document, appreciative comprehension across the entire class reached 37.03%, with 10 students demonstrating good appreciative comprehension. The analysis of the second test document showed a score of 33.33%, with nine students exhibiting good appreciative comprehension. Based on the analysis of the third test document, appreciative comprehension reached 37.03%, with 10 fourth-grade students in public elementary schools in Surakarta demonstrating good appreciative comprehension. Based on Fig. 5, it can be seen that appreciative comprehension in the first test reached 37.03%. In the second test, appreciative comprehension decreased to 33.33%. Meanwhile, in the third test, appreciative comprehension returned to 37.03%. This means the average score of appreciative comprehension among all fourth-grade students at Soropadan Public Elementary School was 35.79%, which falls into the low category.

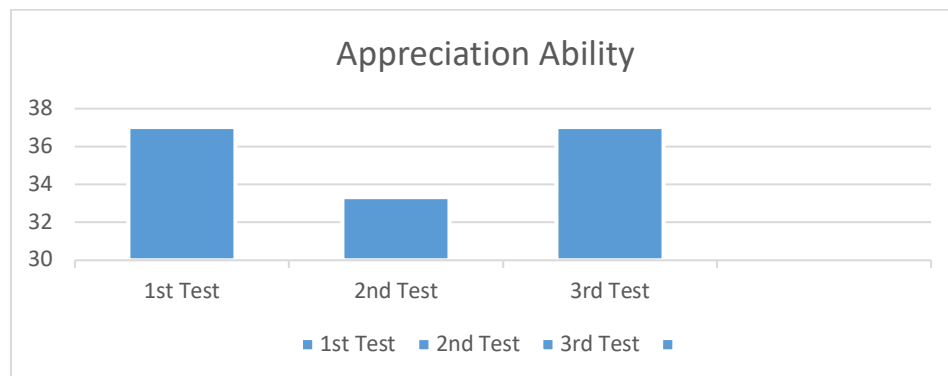


Fig. 5. Appreciation Ability

This study measures the fiction text comprehension ability of fourth-grade elementary students in Surakarta through five levels of understanding based on Barrett's Taxonomy: literal, reorganizational, inferential, evaluative, and appreciative. The results reveal a significant disparity across comprehension levels, indicating that students excel in surface-level understanding compared to deeper, reflective comprehension. The findings of this study describe the fourth-grade students' ability to comprehend fictional texts in public elementary schools in Surakarta based on the five indicators of Barrett's Taxonomy: literal, reorganization, inferential, evaluative, and appreciative comprehension. The results indicate that literal comprehension is the strongest aspect demonstrated by the students. The first and second tests both showed a score of 88.88%, followed by an increase to 96.29% in the third test. The overall average score of 91.35% places literal comprehension in the high category, suggesting that students are highly capable of identifying explicit information in the text. These findings align with previous research, which consistently notes that literal comprehension is the most easily achieved level among elementary school students, particularly when dealing with narrative texts with straightforward structures. Nevertheless, the dominance of literal comprehension

also indicates that students' understanding remains concentrated at surface-level processing, limiting their engagement in more complex interpretative skills. In contrast, reorganization comprehension falls within the low category, with an average score of 40.73%. The results fluctuated slightly, 40.74% in the first test, increasing to 44.44% in the second test, and then declining to 37.03% in the third. These low scores indicate that students struggle to reorganize textual information and classify story elements. This pattern is consistent with previous studies, which emphasize that reorganization skills require the ability to synthesize information across different parts of a text, a cognitive ability that typically develops at a later stage. Inferential comprehension also appears to be weak, with an average of 43.20%. Both the first and second tests yielded 40.74%, followed by an increase to 48.14% in the third test. These findings reflect students' difficulty in drawing conclusions and identifying implicit meanings within fictional texts. Earlier research has similarly shown that inferential comprehension represents one of the most challenging components of reading comprehension, as it demands the integration of prior knowledge with information not explicitly stated in the text. Therefore, the present findings reinforce the understanding that elementary school students generally require guided practice and targeted instruction to develop higher-order thinking skills.

Evaluative comprehension falls within the moderate category, with an average score of 69.13%. The first test yielded 77.77%, the second 74.07%, and the third showed a decline to 55.55%. This pattern indicates variability in students' ability to judge characters' behaviors and form opinions regarding the text. Such fluctuations may be influenced by variations in text difficulty or differences in narrative context. Prior studies have similarly highlighted that evaluative comprehension is closely tied to students' metacognitive abilities, which are still developing during the elementary school years. Appreciative comprehension demonstrates the lowest performance of all five indicators, with an average score of 35.79%. Scores remained relatively constant 37.03% in the first test, 33.33% in the second, and 37.03% in the third. These results suggest that students have limited ability to appreciate the values conveyed in fictional stories or respond emotionally to the text. Previous research indicates that appreciative comprehension develops through extensive exposure to diverse literary works, which may be limited within the current educational setting. Overall, this study confirms earlier research showing that elementary students typically excel in literal comprehension but demonstrate substantial difficulties in higher-level comprehension skills such as reorganization, inferential thinking, and appreciation. The key contribution of this study lies in its comprehensive analysis of students' comprehension profiles across all five indicators of Barrett's Taxonomy, thereby offering valuable insights for educators. The implications of these findings suggest the need for instructional strategies that emphasize deeper comprehension processes, including interpretive discussions, higher-order questioning techniques, and increased engagement with varied literary texts. Such approaches may help shift students' reading comprehension beyond the literal level and support the development of more advanced cognitive and literary skills.

4. Conclusion

This study examined fourth-grade students' comprehension of fictional texts in public elementary schools in Surakarta using Barrett's Taxonomy, covering five levels of comprehension: literal, reorganization, inferential, evaluative, and appreciative. The findings reveal a clear pattern: while students demonstrated strong literal comprehension, their performance declined sharply at higher-order levels, particularly reorganization, inferential, and appreciative comprehension. Literal comprehension achieved an average score of 91.35% (high category), whereas reorganization (40.73%), inferential (43.20%), and appreciative comprehension (35.79%) fell into the low category. Evaluative comprehension occupied a moderate position with an average of 69.13%. These results indicate that students are proficient in recalling explicit information but experience significant challenges in interpreting, organizing, evaluating, and emotionally engaging with fictional texts. This research contributes to the existing body of knowledge in three important ways. First, it provides empirical evidence on the distribution of comprehension abilities across all five levels of Barrett's Taxonomy within the Indonesian primary school context—an area where comprehensive studies remain limited. Second, the study highlights specific cognitive and affective weaknesses that are often overlooked in reading comprehension assessments, thereby reinforcing the need for multidimensional evaluation tools in literacy education. Third, by identifying which levels of

comprehension are most challenging for students, the research offers a clearer understanding of where instruction and curriculum development must be strengthened, especially given the limited availability of Barrett-based assessments in Southeast Asia. Future studies should consider expanding the scope of participants to include multiple schools across different regions to improve generalizability. Researchers are also encouraged to incorporate experimental or quasi-experimental designs to evaluate the effectiveness of specific instructional interventions targeting higher-order comprehension skills. Additionally, the development and validation of more detailed Barrett-based assessment instruments would enhance the accuracy and consistency of comprehension measurement. Finally, qualitative investigations that explore students' cognitive processes while engaging with texts may provide deeper insights into why certain comprehension levels remain underdeveloped.

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