



CHALLENGES IN KOREAN READING SKILLS DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY AT UNIVERSITAS MADANI INDONESIA

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Info Article	Abstract. <i>This study investigates the difficulties faced by Indonesian learners in developing Korean reading proficiency, focusing on students enrolled in the Korean Language Program at Universitas Madani Indonesia. Using a qualitative exploratory design, data were collected through questionnaires and in-depth interviews with seven selected participants. The findings reveal five major obstacles: insufficient vocabulary knowledge, heavy reliance on translation tools, structural and grammatical challenges, and difficulties understanding various text types. Learners also struggle to identify main ideas due to limited discourse-processing skills. These challenges stem from typological differences between Korean and Indonesian, restricted reading exposure, and inadequate cultural knowledge. The study highlights the need for instruction that integrates vocabulary development, explicit grammar teaching, scaffolded text engagement, and cultural literacy. The results offer important insights for improving Korean reading pedagogy in Indonesian educational contexts.</i>
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<p>Keywords: Korean Reading Skills; Vocabulary Mastery; Structural and Grammatical Challenges.</p> <p>Kata Kunci: Kemampuan Membaca Bahasa Korea; Penguasaan Kosakata; Tantangan Struktur dan Tata Bahasa.</p>	
<p>Licensed Under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License</p> 	<p>Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengkaji kesulitan yang dialami pembelajar Indonesia dalam mengembangkan kemampuan membaca bahasa Korea, dengan fokus pada mahasiswa Program Studi Bahasa Korea di Universitas Madani Indonesia. Dengan menggunakan desain kualitatif eksploratori, data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner dan wawancara mendalam terhadap tujuh responden terpilih. Temuan menunjukkan lima hambatan utama: kurangnya penguasaan kosakata, ketergantungan pada aplikasi penerjemah, tantangan struktur dan tata bahasa, serta kesulitan memahami berbagai jenis teks. Pembelajar juga mengalami kesulitan mengidentifikasi ide pokok karena lemahnya kemampuan memproses wacana. Hambatan tersebut dipengaruhi oleh perbedaan tipologis antara bahasa Korea dan Indonesia, minimnya paparan membaca, serta kurangnya pengetahuan budaya. Studi ini menekankan perlunya pembelajaran yang mengintegrasikan pengembangan kosakata, pengajaran tata bahasa, pendampingan membaca, dan literasi budaya. Hasilnya memberikan wawasan penting bagi peningkatan pedagogi membaca bahasa Korea.</p>

INTRODUCTION

The rise of the Korean Wave (Hallyu) has significantly reshaped patterns of cultural engagement in Indonesia, leading to a marked increase in interest in learning the Korean language (Darmanto et al., 2025). Korean dramas, films, K-Pop, and digital media have become highly accessible through television and online platforms, embedding Korean cultural products deeply in the daily lives of Indonesian youth (Maulidita et al., 2024; Cahyo et al., 2025). This continuous cultural immersion has stimulated linguistic curiosity and motivated learners to pursue Korean language study through both formal and informal pathways (Harris et al., 2024; Izzulhaq et al., 2025). In response to this growing demand, various institutions in Indonesia—from universities to private language centers—have opened Korean language programs aimed at accommodating learners with diverse educational backgrounds.

Despite this increasing interest, the process of studying Korean remains challenging for many Indonesian students. Enthusiasm toward Korean culture does not automatically translate into ease of language acquisition (Zhang et al., 2020), particularly when learners strive to build balanced proficiency across the four core skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Navruzova & Qushshayeva, 2025). Among these, reading occupies a central and foundational role. In foreign language acquisition, reading serves as the basis for vocabulary expansion, grammatical awareness, and comprehension of authentic texts (Liu & Saad, 2025). Strong reading skills also support learners' progress in other language domains, helping them to engage more confidently with academic materials, online resources, and real-world communicative situations.

However, mastering Korean reading is far from straightforward for Indonesian learners. Korean is structurally distinct from Indonesian, and this typological distance imposes additional cognitive demands on beginner-level students. According to Heo et al. (2024), reading constitutes a core component of communicative competence, particularly in relation to information acquisition and cultural literacy. This importance stems from the fact that most materials providing learners with access to the Korean language and its cultural contexts are presented in written form. By engaging with these texts through reading and interpretation, learners are able not only to extract meaning but also to construct a deeper understanding of the linguistic and cultural information embedded within them (Heo et al., 2024).

Lee (2024) states that in general, the goal of reading education is to enhance learners' communicative competence by enabling them to understand information presented in Korean texts (written language). Further, this goal can be divided into primary and secondary goals. The primary goal of reading education is to improve linguistic abilities such as vocabulary and grammar, meanwhile the secondary goal is to strengthen learners' reading proficiency so that they can acquire and understand information about Korean society and culture (Lee, 2024). According to Heo et al. (2024), to achieve this goal learners should be able to understand the text as they finish reading it. Learners should not stop at understanding individual sentences; they should grasp the overall meaning of the entire passage. In addition, unknown words or idiomatic expressions should be looked up independently to aid text comprehension.

Firstantin (2022) states that reading fluency encompasses several essential components, including vocabulary comprehension, reading speed, rhythm and expression, and overall text comprehension. The study further highlights that the length of study and proficiency test scores do not necessarily correlate with learners' reading fluency, suggesting that fluency development is shaped by multiple interacting factors rather than mere exposure or test performance. In addition, structural challenges also constitute a major barrier for learners. Al-Muttaqin (2024) identifies syntactic difficulties as the most prominent obstacle, noting that students frequently struggle with particle placement, sentence structure, and grammatical functions when reading Korean texts. These findings indicate that substantial typological differences between Korean and Indonesian significantly contribute to learners' limited reading proficiency.

Psychological factors further impede reading development. Fuengbangluang (2025) reports that many learners experience reading anxiety—an affective response triggered when encountering foreign-language texts. Such anxiety diminishes students' ability to employ effective reading strategies, thereby reducing their overall comprehension. Previous studies demonstrate that Korean language learners face multifaceted challenges in mastering reading skills, encompassing linguistic, structural, and affective dimensions. Considering these conditions, the present study seeks to explore the specific obstacles faced by students majoring Korean Language program at Universitas Madani Indonesia in developing their Korean reading proficiency.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research design with an exploratory orientation, which is well suited for examining the multifaceted nature of human experiences, linguistic practices, and meaning-making processes situated within social contexts (Cahyo et al., 2025). Qualitative inquiry enables in-depth exploration of phenomena from learners' subjective perspectives, offering detailed insights rather than broad generalizations (Dehalwar & Sharma, 2024; Tracy, 2024). This study therefore applied qualitative methods to examine learners' experiences and perceptions of the challenges in mastering Korean reading skills.

The first phase of data collection involved administering a questionnaire containing both closed- and open-ended questions. As a research tool, questionnaires enable the collection of mixed data types and support the generation of accurate, comprehensive insights into participants' characteristics, perceptions, attitudes, and experiences (Saadi, 2025). This instrument provided an initial overview of participants' backgrounds and learning experiences while also helping to identify preliminary themes to be explored further during the in-depth interviews. Open-ended responses were systematically analyzed, including those provided by participants who did not participate in the interview phase. The questionnaire was distributed online via Google Forms to 16 students enrolled in the department of Korean language at Universitas Madani Indonesia who were taking the Korean Reading 1 course.

After analyzing the questionnaire results, seven respondents were selected for interviews. In addition, the respondents held a TOPIK I Level 2 certificate to ensure that they possessed an adequate foundation in Korean language proficiency for assessment. All respondents have studied Korean language for one year. According to Rachmawati (2007), interviews in qualitative inquiry are purposeful interactions that allow researchers to obtain rich and meaningful insights. In this study, interviews were employed to examine participants' experiences, perceived obstacles, and strategies when engaging with Korean reading tasks. All interviews were conducted online using Zoom to accommodate participants' schedules and geographic locations. This approach also facilitated the collection of detailed and contextually grounded data. Additionally, method triangulation was employed by integrating questionnaire data with in-depth interviews to enhance the credibility of the present study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

An initial questionnaire completed by 16 respondents provided an overview of their experiences in learning Korean, particularly in relation to reading skills. The participants consisted of 7 male and 9 female students. The results showed that the majority of respondents (13 out of 16) rely heavily on textbooks as their primary learning material. This indicates that learners prefer structured, curriculum-based resources when engaging with Korean reading tasks, as such materials are often perceived as reliable and easy to follow, especially for beginners. This pattern highlights the central role of formal instructional materials in shaping learners' reading habits.

Outside the classroom, learners demonstrate varying levels of reading engagement. The largest group (6 respondents) reported reading Korean texts for less than one hour per week, suggesting limited exposure that may hinder vocabulary development and sentence-level comprehension. Five students reported reading for 2–5 hours weekly, indicating a moderate level of engagement that may support more consistent progress. Meanwhile, three respondents stated that they read for more than 10 hours per week, reflecting strong motivation or higher proficiency; this group is likely to experience faster improvement due to sustained exposure to written Korean. These differences suggest that learners' progress in reading comprehension is closely tied to the amount of time they devote to reading outside the classroom.

In terms of the types of texts accessed, a relatively high number of students (7 respondents) reported frequently reading subtitle dialogues. This highlights the important role of audiovisual media—such as dramas, films, and variety shows—in providing accessible and contextualized reading input. Subtitles allow learners to connect written vocabulary with visual cues, supporting comprehension. Additionally, five respondents frequently read Korean social media posts, indicating engagement with authentic digital communication. Although often brief, informal, and nonstandard, such content can still contribute to vocabulary growth and exposure to natural language use. This shows that informal, multimedia-based exposure plays a meaningful role in learners' everyday reading experiences.

Conversely, only one respondent reported reading webtoons and another reading news articles. This indicates that more complex or extended reading materials are rarely accessed, likely due to their perceived difficulty in terms of vocabulary load, sentence complexity, or unfamiliar discourse structures. Overall, the findings suggest that Korean language learners tend to rely on structured materials like textbooks and context-

supported resources such as subtitles, while informal digital texts function as supplementary input. More challenging genres, including webtoons and news articles, remain underutilized. This limited engagement with advanced texts underscores a need for greater support in helping learners navigate complex reading materials.

Table 1 presents the overall findings regarding learners’ difficulties in mastering Korean reading skills. The scale consists of five response categories, where 1 indicates strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neutral, 4 agree, and 5 strongly agree. This rating system allows for a clear interpretation of the intensity of challenges experienced by the learners. The distribution of responses provides important insights into which aspects of Korean reading are perceived as most problematic.

Table 1. Difficulties in Korean Reading Comprehension

No	Questions	Score				
		1	2	3	4	5
1	I find it difficult to read Hangeul.	5	1	3	5	2
2	I find it difficult to distinguish similar Hangeul letter shapes.	10	4	2	0	0
3	I can read Hangeul but have difficulty understanding the meaning.	2	9	4	0	1
4	I find it difficult to understand Korean texts without the help of a dictionary or translator tools.	1	5	7	3	0
5	I find it difficult to distinguish particles or grammatical markers (e.g., -은/는, -이/가, -에/, -에서, etc.).	3	6	7	0	0
6	I feel that everyday dialogues in Korean are difficult to understand.	0	6	7	3	0
7	I feel that informative texts are more difficult to understand.	0	8	6	2	0
8	I find it difficult to understand texts even when I already know most of the vocabulary.	2	7	5	2	0
9	I find it difficult to read Korean texts that use advanced grammar.	0	3	5	7	1
10	I find it difficult to identify the main idea in Korean texts.	0	7	7	2	0

Source: Processed data, 2025

Based on Table 1, the present study identifies five major areas of difficulty experienced by learners in developing Korean reading skills. These findings are supported and elaborated through qualitative data gathered from interviews with seven participants (three males and four females). The integrated interpretation of quantitative and qualitative results reveals that learners’ reading challenges arise from interconnected factors, including restricted vocabulary knowledge, excessive reliance on external tools,

grammatical and structural complexity, text-type sensitivity, and difficulties in identifying main ideas.

Difficulties in Lexical Understanding

The findings highlight that reading skills remain problematic for many students, particularly in relation to vocabulary mastery. Although some respondents report being able to read basic Hangeul, a significant portion still struggles to differentiate similar letter shapes and decode written forms with accuracy. This issue is evident in the high number of participants who agree that reading Hangeul is difficult. Furthermore, even when learners can correctly read individual syllables, they often fail to grasp the overall meaning of the text, indicating a persistent disconnect between basic decoding abilities and higher-level semantic comprehension.

The seven interviewed respondents consistently emphasized that vocabulary mastery is the most crucial factor in improving reading skills. R1 stated that the difficulty level of a text is largely determined by learners' vocabulary knowledge. Similarly, R3 explained that without knowing the vocabulary, it becomes difficult to understand the content of the text being read. R7 added that knowing the meaning of key words in a text allows readers to grasp the general idea even if they do not understand all of the vocabulary. Furthermore, R6 noted that learners should prioritize expanding their vocabulary before focusing on grammar. These responses collectively indicate that lexical knowledge serves as the foundation upon which other reading comprehension skills are built.

This difficulty aligns with cross-linguistic research showing that reading development depends on accurate mapping between orthographic forms and phonological representations, even in transparent writing systems such as Korean (Verhoeven & Perfetti, 2022). Furthermore, although learners may correctly decode individual syllables, many fail to grasp the overall meaning of the text, reflecting the well-established distinction between lower-level decoding and higher-level language comprehension as described in the Simple View of Reading (Kang, 2021). Previous studies revealed that vocabulary knowledge is one of the strongest predictors of L2 reading comprehension (Dong et al., 2020; Nation, 2013). Recent research further confirms that both the breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge substantially contribute to learners' ability to extract meaning from texts (Cai, 2024; Tong et al., 2023). In line with these findings, respondents in the present study noted that understanding key

words enables them to grasp the general idea of a text, and that vocabulary development should be prioritized before grammar.

Heavy Reliance on External Support Tools

Learners demonstrate substantial dependence on dictionaries and translation applications when reading Korean texts. This reliance suggests limited vocabulary mastery, low confidence in independent reading, and underdeveloped reading strategies such as contextual inference and meaning construction. The questionnaire results indicate that most respondents find it difficult to understand Korean texts without external support tools, highlighting challenges in autonomous reading. Such dependence may hinder learners' ability to develop essential comprehension skills, as frequent reliance on translators reduces opportunities to infer meaning from context and to build reading fluency naturally.

Based on the interview results, R1 reported occasionally using the Papago application when encountering a large number of unfamiliar vocabulary items. R1 further explained that they typically search for individual words rather than translating whole sentences to avoid potential misunderstandings. Similarly, R3 also relies on Papago when faced with difficult vocabulary. R4 uses both Papago and Google Translate to support comprehension of unfamiliar words, while R5 and R6 turn to ChatGPT when they encounter vocabulary they find challenging to interpret. R7 uses both Gemini and Papago to help in understanding the text. All respondents stated that they generally read the text through to the end first and then identify unfamiliar vocabulary before using translation tools to determine their meanings.

This behavior suggests limited vocabulary mastery, low confidence in independent reading, and underdeveloped strategies such as contextual inference and meaning construction. Similar findings are reported in recent empirical work such as Alharbi (2023) found that over 90% of Saudi university EFL learners rely on Google Translate to interpret difficult words, phrases, sentences, and even whole paragraphs, using it both for production and comprehension. Li et al. (2023) likewise showed that EFL learners heavily employ smartphone dictionary apps while reading; although these tools can support comprehension, many students struggle to use the information effectively and require explicit training in dictionary-use strategies.

Experimental studies on machine translation and reading indicate that machine translation can facilitate comprehension compared to no aid or traditional glossaries (Park

& Chon, 2024), but they also highlight that learners may become dependent on machine translation outputs rather than developing their own inferencing skills. Synthesizing this body of work, Urlaub and Dessein (2022) caution that uncritical, frequent use of online machine translation risks reducing language learning to “checking translations,” potentially weakening learners’ engagement with higher-order reading processes. These studies support the interpretation that while translation tools and digital dictionaries can scaffold access to Korean texts, heavy reliance on them—without pedagogical guidance—may limit opportunities for learners to build autonomous reading strategies and robust lexical and discourse-level competence.

Structural and Grammatical Barriers to Comprehension

Learners face notable difficulties in processing Korean particles such as *-은/는*, *-이/가*, *-에*, and *-에* *서*, as well as more advanced grammatical markers. These challenges arise largely from the fundamental typological differences between Korean and Indonesian, which in turn hinder students’ ability to interpret sentence relationships and construct coherent meaning from texts. Structural and grammatical issues thus emerge as a major source of difficulty. Many students report struggling to understand the function of Korean particles and grammatical markers, which play an essential role in shaping sentence meaning and indicating relationships among linguistic elements. This difficulty reflects the contrast with Indonesian, where such grammatical information is not encoded through particles. Moreover, more complex grammatical structures further exacerbate comprehension challenges, as respondents indicate that texts containing higher-level grammar are particularly demanding. These grammatical obstacles substantially limit learners’ capacity to integrate sentence components and derive accurate overall meaning from Korean texts.

The interview results revealed that three respondents (R2, R3, R4) stated that Korean sentence structure is very difficult to understand, while the remaining four respondents (R1, R5, R6, R7) described Korean sentence structure and grammar as highly complex. All participants emphasized that Korean sentence patterns differ significantly from those of Indonesian and English, making them challenging to comprehend. R1 provided the example of the sentence “Saya membeli baju di pasar,” which in Korean becomes “Saya pasar di baju membeli,” illustrating how the shift to a subject–object–verb (SOV) structure can confuse learners. R4 noted that even the use of particles *-이/가*

and *-은/는* is often confusing. R5 added that particles such as *-에게/한테* can be difficult because they may convey seemingly opposing meanings, such as both “to” and “from.” R6 further explained that vocabulary and grammar appear inseparable in Korean learning, suggesting that both must be learned together as an integrated unit.

The substantial structural differences between Korean and Indonesian, coupled with the inherent complexity of Korean lexical and grammatical forms, make sentence construction particularly challenging for many Indonesian learners. One of the most persistent areas of difficulty involves Korean grammatical particles, which encode semantic and pragmatic functions not found in Indonesian. As noted by Heo et al. (2024), these particles carry subtle distinctions in meaning and usage, requiring learners to attend to contextual cues that are often unfamiliar to them. Consequently, many students struggle to select and apply particles appropriately in real communicative situations, particularly when expressing nuanced meanings that depend on precise grammatical marking. This challenge is further heightened by the central role particles play in conveying meaning in Korean; incorrect use can significantly alter the intended interpretation of a sentence. As Lee and Ramsey (2001) explain, particles serve as grammatical markers that signal syntactic roles and shape the overall discourse meaning in Korean. Korean, being an agglutinative language, relies heavily on these markers to express grammatical relationships within sentences—a typological characteristic emphasized by Heo and Kim (2019), who identify Korean as a prototypical example of agglutinative morphology.

Text-Type Specific Challenges in Comprehension

Different text types present varying levels of difficulty for learners. Everyday conversational dialogues, for example, are often challenging due to their informal expressions, idiomatic language, and rapid, compressed structures characteristic of spoken Korean. Informative texts, however, pose an even greater hurdle. Their dense vocabulary, extended sentence constructions, and academic register demand higher-order comprehension skills that many learners have not yet fully developed. Even when students are familiar with most of the vocabulary, these texts require an ability to process syntactic complexity and interpret discourse-level relationships—skills that go beyond simple lexical recognition.

The findings further confirm that the type of text significantly influences learners’ reading difficulties. Many respondents report struggling with conversational dialogues

commonly encountered in media, attributing these challenges to informal language use and fast-paced discourse patterns. Informative or academic texts are perceived as even more demanding, as they often include specialized terminology, longer and more complex sentences, and abstract conceptual content. Notably, several students state that comprehension problems persist even when they can identify individual words, indicating that their difficulties stem not only from vocabulary limitations but also from underdeveloped syntactic and discourse-processing abilities.

The interview results indicate that all respondents agreed that reading difficulties are also influenced by the type of text. Six respondents reported that texts containing cultural content are particularly challenging to understand. R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, and R7 explained that they must first understand both the relevant vocabulary and the associated cultural context in order to grasp the overall meaning of such texts. This finding suggests that cultural knowledge plays a crucial role in supporting reading comprehension for Korean language learners, as familiarity with Korean cultural concepts enables them to interpret culturally embedded texts more effectively.

Informative or academic texts were perceived as even more challenging due to their specialized terminology, complex syntax, and abstract content. Such text features require learners to integrate meaning beyond the word level, a skill aligned with what Mulder et al. (2024) describes as word-to-text integration—the ability to connect lexical items into coherent sentence- and discourse-level meaning. Several learners noted that comprehension breakdowns occurred even when individual words were recognizable, indicating limitations not only in vocabulary but also in discourse-processing skills necessary for understanding text organization and overall meaning. Interview findings further revealed that culturally embedded texts were particularly difficult for six respondents, who explained that comprehension required both knowledge of relevant vocabulary and familiarity with Korean cultural concepts. This pattern supports research demonstrating that background knowledge, including culture-related schema, significantly enhances L2 reading comprehension, especially for specialized or context-dependent texts (Tarlani-Aliabadi et al., 2022; Umek, 2023).

Difficulties in Main Idea Identification

Learners frequently struggle to identify the main idea in Korean texts, indicating challenges with global comprehension processes such as integrating information across sentences, recognizing overarching text structure, and making inferences. These higher-

level skills remain insufficiently developed among beginner readers. The findings show that many respondents experience difficulty determining the central point of a passage. Identifying the main idea requires readers to synthesize information from multiple sentences, understand how the text is organized, and draw implicit connections—all of which demand advanced comprehension abilities. This suggests that learners' difficulties extend beyond lower-order skills like decoding or vocabulary recognition; they also face limitations in the global processing skills essential for constructing coherent meaning from extended discourse.

Based on the interview results, the ability to identify the main idea is highly dependent on learners' vocabulary knowledge. Three respondents (R1, R3, R7) reported that they did not experience difficulty identifying the main idea as long as they understood the key vocabulary in the text. In contrast, the other four respondents (R2, R4, R5, R6) indicated that determining the main idea is challenging, particularly when they do not know the meaning of essential vocabulary or when they recognize words only in isolation without being able to integrate them into a coherent interpretation. These findings suggest that limited vocabulary proficiency is a primary factor hindering learners' ability to grasp the main idea of Korean reading texts.

Empirical research consistently shows that robust vocabulary knowledge—both breadth (the number of known words) and depth (the quality of understanding words and their relationships)—is strongly predictive of reading comprehension outcomes, including the ability to integrate meaning across sentences and to infer overarching text structure (Dong et al., 2020; Tong et al., 2023). Xie et al. (2022) further demonstrated that vocabulary knowledge assessed at an earlier stage predicts later reading comprehension through decoding and listening comprehension, highlighting that lexical knowledge supports not only word-level processing but also higher-level global comprehension. Limited vocabulary, therefore, can significantly hinder the development of reading comprehension, particularly for tasks such as identifying the main idea of a text. The difficulties reported by learners in the present study are consistent with this broader evidence: without sufficient vocabulary breadth and depth, learners struggle to integrate information across sentences, recognize text organization, and draw inferences—making main-idea identification especially challenging.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that Indonesian learners of Korean at Universitas Madani Indonesia encounter multifaceted challenges in developing their reading proficiency. Despite the growing popularity of the Korean language driven by Hallyu influences, structural and typological differences between Korean and Indonesian continue to pose significant barriers for beginner-level readers. Data from questionnaires and interviews reveal five major areas of difficulty, beginning with lexical processing. Many learners can decode syllables but struggle to derive meaning, indicating gaps between orthographic decoding and semantic comprehension. Vocabulary mastery emerges as the strongest predictor of reading success, with respondents consistently highlighting the importance of knowing key words to understand both sentence-level and text-level meaning.

In addition to lexical limitations, learners exhibit heavy reliance on external support tools such as Papago, Google Translate, Gemini, and ChatGPT. While these tools assist with unfamiliar vocabulary, excessive dependence limits the development of autonomous reading strategies, including contextual inference and meaning construction. Structural and grammatical barriers—particularly difficulties with Korean particles and the subject–object–verb (SOV) sentence structure—further complicate comprehension due to typological contrasts with Indonesian and English. Text-type specific challenges also emerge, as conversational dialogues introduce idiomatic expressions and rapid discourse patterns, while informative and cultural texts require advanced comprehension skills that many students have not yet developed. Learners likewise report difficulty identifying main ideas, a skill that requires global comprehension processes heavily dependent on vocabulary knowledge and discourse-level understanding.

The findings indicate that Korean reading proficiency among Indonesian learners is shaped by a combination of linguistic, cognitive, and cultural factors. Limited vocabulary knowledge, structural complexity, insufficient reading strategies, and unfamiliar cultural references collectively result in substantial comprehension challenges. These insights underscore the need for pedagogical practices that strengthen foundational decoding and vocabulary acquisition, provide explicit instruction on grammar and particles, scaffold learners' engagement with diverse text types, foster greater autonomy in reading strategies, and integrate cultural knowledge into reading instruction. Future research may explore interventions to enhance reading fluency, investigate the role of digital literacy in Korean language learning, or compare learners

across different proficiency levels to develop more effective and contextually responsive reading instruction tailored to the needs of Indonesian learners.

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