



The English Literacy Subtest in Indonesia College Entrance Examination: A Bridge or a Barrier to Academic Reading?

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Info Article

Received: 21 May 2026

Revised: 28 May 2026

Accepted: 30 May 2026

Online Version: 01 June 2026

Abstract

English literacy is one of the components of the National College Entrance Examination in Indonesia (SNBT), as it assesses students' reading comprehension skills needed for academic study. This study explores students' voices of the English literacy subtest, focusing on the difficulties they experience and their reflections on school-based English learning. A qualitative approach was employed, using questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with 32 first and second year students from a public university in Indonesia who had previously taken the SNBT. The findings show that students experienced different levels of difficulty across reading components. Linguistically, complex sentence structures required greater processing effort than vocabulary or grammatical features. At the comprehension level, identifying main ideas, understanding text organization, and restating information were perceived as more demanding than locating explicit details. Students also reported test-taking challenges, particularly post-review hesitation, confusing distractors, and lengthy reading passages. In reflecting on their school learning, students indicated that English instruction supported general reading comprehension and text understanding, but provided limited emphasis on strategic engagement with multiple-choice questions and inferential reading under test conditions. The study highlighted the need for alignment between classroom instruction and national assessment requirements for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers in Indonesia.

Keywords: Literacy; National college entrance examination; Reading comprehension; Standardized test

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INTRODUCTION

The college entrance examination, which is a part of standardized testing, has become government policy for admission pathways in several countries (Jian, 2020; Hua, 2017; Kudus et al., 2024; 2025; Ruoling, 2010; Wei, 2020). This admission path is administered for multiple reasons, including measuring students' performance and readiness (Alegre et al., 2024; Komaraju et al., 2013; Veas & López-Pina, 2025). In Indonesia, the Computer-Based Test in the national college entrance examination is one of the admission tests that assesses students' scholastic and literacy capabilities. The test is highlighted as highly competitive, admitting only 27% of the 860,976 examinees nationwide in the most recent data (Kemdiktisaintek, 2025). In which one of the sub-tests, including English competency, becomes a determining factor in students' results as part of assessing students' literacy skills? Literacy skills in college entrance examinations assess examiners' reading comprehension skills due to a significant correlation with students' language

achievement (Clinton-Lisell et al., 2022) and their verbal intelligence (Sedlmayr & Weissenbacher, 2025; Vernucci et al., 2021; Alloway & Gregory, 2013). The importance of English competency, as assessed through reading comprehension tests, has a considerable impact on academic success (Clinton-Lisell et al., 2022). Additionally, the criteria for students who passed the test are not based on passing grades. However, on students' scores according to the study program they pursued (National Selection Committee for New Student Admissions, 2025).

Due to the rigorousness of college entrance exams, most examinees who have diverse abilities and discrepancies in understanding the questions from the English subtest suffered within this subtest due to the variable which influences reading comprehension skills, include not only lower-level processes such as word recognition (i.e., decoding), vocabulary knowledge, but also higher-level processes, like background knowledge, inference-making, working memory (Cain & Oakhill, 2006; Cromley & Azevedo, 2007; Gustine et al., 2024). Regarding the points, understanding the difficulties of examinees' experience and reflection, which are related to their strategies in preparing for the examinations, needs to be studied since reading comprehension tests also involve making choices, such as searching for information for answers, and the way to begin searching (Binder et al., 2024).

Hence, difficulties in reading comprehension occur globally among students during the college entrance exam (Ha Le, 2021; Anugerahwati, 2019; Sukyadi & Mardiani, 2021). There are several studies that also mention the predictive effect of the items in reading comprehension aspects to predict the question's difficulties (Rafatbakhsh & Ahmadi, 2023; Brizuela & Montero-Rojas, 2013). Moreover, its impact on students' achievement remains central to their educational growth (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2019). Mastering reading comprehension is considered a main goal in reading (Clemens et al., 2021; Li & D'Angelo, 2016). Consequently, understanding which literacy skills need to be maximized to prepare for learners' experience needs to be explored further. Furthermore, a study discussed the linguistic, psychological, and environmental aspects of students' experiences in the English subtest (Darmawan et al., 2024), as well as the factors influencing college entrance tests, including learning motivation, content, and strategies derived from the subtest (Sabillawati & Ardiana, 2022).

However, the difficulties in literacy skills on the English subtest of the national college entrance test have not yet been thoroughly explored in previous studies. Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap between examiners' English proficiency and the challenges they encounter when completing high-stakes assessment tasks. Hence, exploring these issues through reading comprehension as a literacy aspect is essential for improving the current educational field. Thus, this study proposes two research questions: (1) What difficulties do students experience in answering the English subtest questions? and (2) How do students reflect on their school learning experiences, and what improvements do they expect to better prepare for the SNBT exam?

RESEARCH METHODS

The section presents aspects of the research methodology used in the study. This study attempted to explore students' perceptions regarding the English Competencies Subtest in the Indonesian College Entrance Test. It covers research design, the time and place of the research, research sites and participants, data collection techniques, data analysis, and ethical issues.

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of students' experiences with the English Component subtest of the National College Entrance Examination. Within this approach, the phenomenon was examined in its real-world context, allowing a focus on participants' experiences and insights (Yin, 2017). To capture the full range of students' perspectives, the study incorporated a descriptive component that aimed to document existing conditions, including perceived difficulties, test-taking strategies, and reflections on prior English learning. Building on this, a questionnaire was used to collect general trends across the participant group, providing a structured overview of their experiences. The interviews and questionnaire data reveal their reasoning, challenges, and personal

experiences in understanding the observed patterns and linking them back to the study. The research was conducted from September to December 2025 at a public university in Bandung.

Research Subject

For the research subject, the participants were 32 first- and second-year university students who had taken the College Entrance Examination during the 2024-2025 academic year. They were selected because they had recently taken the computer-based test in the National College Entrance Examination English Competency subtest and could therefore provide accurate and relevant reflections on their experiences. The target group for the questionnaire comprised a large, diverse pool of respondents to ensure representativeness across faculties at a public university in Bandung.

Research Procedure

The research procedure began in September 2025, and the idea was to collect sample texts from the National College Entrance Examination. Then, five sample texts are distributed to participants, who are first- and second-year students from a public university in Bandung. The participants were chosen from students who had taken the National College Entrance Examination, whether they were accepted or not, as long as they had ever taken it. After that, the questionnaire was distributed to them, covering three aspects: students' difficulties in answering the questions, their reflections on the learning sources used to prepare for the SNBT exam, and their expectations for improvements in test preparation.

Instruments and Data Collection Techniques

The data were collected through questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaire was designed to explore three major constructs: students' perceived difficulties on the English subtest, their test-taking strategies, and their reflections on literacy instruction during high school. Questionnaire items were adapted from validated instruments in literacy research and standardized testing studies (Yunanda & Husda, 2025; Ramadhianti & Somba, 2023; Sabillawati & Ardiana, 2022). Questionnaire validation was conducted through expert assessment, with lecturers specializing in educational evaluation reviewing the items to ensure content and construct validity. The items were aligned with theoretical concepts by adapting the question structure from the English Literacy subtest.

Furthermore, items related to the washback effect were drawn from previous research and reflect the issues participants frequently encounter. The questionnaire addressed vocabulary comprehension, grammatical awareness, inferential ability, comprehension of long passages, time management, and background knowledge. These categories align with established models of reading comprehension, such as those proposed by Grabe and Stoller (2013), Grabe (2014), and Cain and Oakhill (2006), who emphasize that reading comprehension relies on both lower-level linguistic skills and higher-order cognitive processes. The questionnaire was distributed through Google Forms to maximize accessibility. Respondents were given one week to complete the questionnaire at their convenience, followed by 5 sample questions to help students remember the questions they had worked on during SNBT.

For the interview, the interviewees were purposely chosen based on their background in the following supplementary courses, not during their high school. So, interview data can yield diverse outcomes. Interviews were used to obtain deeper insights into students' experiences. This format allows flexibility to explore emerging issues while still maintaining a guided structure (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). The interview questions examined students' descriptions of the difficulties they encountered in the English section, their perceptions of the alignment between school learning and test demands, and their expectations for improving literacy instruction. Interview sessions were conducted online via Google Meet or WhatsApp voice notes, depending on participants' availability. Data collection began with informed consent in accordance with ethical guidelines (Cohen et al., 2018).

Data analysis technique

For data analysis, questionnaire data were thematically coded into three main themes: students' difficulties, reflections, and insights, with mean scores calculated in Google Sheets to summarize trends from students' responses. Interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006). Then, the data were triangulated from the questionnaire and the interview to enhance the credibility of the findings (Nowell et al., 2017).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings and discussion of this study provide a deeper understanding of how students perceive the English subtest of the Indonesian college entrance examination, particularly regarding their difficulties with questions, learning experiences, and expectations for improvement. Then, for a deeper understanding, these perceptions highlight several participants identified as representatives of those preparing for the college entrance examination.

Table 1. Interviewee background

No.	Identity	Faculty	College Entrance Examination Preparation
1.	P1	Faculty of Social Science Education	Yes
2.	P2	Faculty of Education	Yes
3.	P3	Faculty of Engineering and Industrial Education	Yes
4.	P4	Faculty of Social Science Education	No
5.	P5	Faculty of Language and Literature	No
6.	P6	Faculty of Education	No
7.	P7	Faculty of Language and Literature	No
8.	P8	Faculty of Language and Literature	Yes

Students' Difficulties in Answering the English Competencies Subtest Questions

Table 2. Linguistic Difficulties (Low-Level Difficulties)
(N=32; 1= very easy, 5= very difficult)

Aspects	Mean
Complex sentence structure	3.16
Vocabulary	2.78
Grammatical aspects	2.63
Modality	2.50
Word formation	2.16

Table 2 shows that students experienced varying levels of linguistic difficulty when answering the English subtest questions. Among all aspects, complex sentence structure was the greatest challenge ($M = 3.16$), indicating that students struggled most when interpreting long, syntactically complex sentences. The Computer-Based Test supports this finding in 2025 practice results provided prior to the questionnaire, which revealed that 26 out of 32 students failed to answer the restatement question correctly when the answer options contained complex sentence structures. In question number 5, for example, option A ("American Chinese restaurants were asked to respond to the reactions and fear that occurred in society because of the use of MSG in their food") includes subordinate clauses and multiple embedded ideas, which increase cognitive load during processing.

Interview data further reinforce this pattern: Participant 8 stated, “I had difficulty answering questions with complex sentence structures... I had to think carefully,” indicating that additional effort was required to parse the meaning before selecting an answer.

Moderate difficulties were observed in vocabulary ($M = 2.78$), grammatical aspects ($M = 2.63$), and modality ($M = 2.50$). Vocabulary emerged as a significant concern. Students consistently reported unfamiliar words as barriers to comprehension, especially academic and discipline-neutral vocabulary (e.g., synthesizing verbs, abstract nouns). According to Nation (2013), learners require approximately 8,000–9,000 word families to read academic texts comfortably. However, studies on Indonesian students indicate that many high school graduates possess a vocabulary size well below this threshold (Nurweni & Read, 1999; Supriyadi, 2020). This gap helps explain why students perceived the test's vocabulary as disproportionately challenging, even when the text content was familiar.

In contrast, word formation was perceived as the least difficult aspect ($M = 2.16$), likely because word formation items appear in the reading passages to support comprehension rather than being tested directly. Regarding students' difficulties in answering the English Competencies subtest questions, one of the items, word formation, can be used to help students answer the question. For instance, item no.4 in the test (*The expression the flavor enhancer in the text is closest in meaning to...*) aims to ask for synonyms. Students can identify the word form of the phrase initially before determining its meaning. The suffix -er typically forms nouns, so recognizing this helps students focus on the question “What is this?”. Since synonymy depends not only on meaning but also on grammatical and syntactic equivalence, this step is essential. As noted by Lensch (2022), the -er suffix prototypically derives agent nouns. Furthermore, word-formation processes such as affixation, compounding, and conversion can produce words with related meanings, which may function as synonyms (Karlygash et al., 2023). Then, findings align with previous research indicating that Indonesian EFL learners often rely on surface-level reading strategies and require explicit support when parsing complex sentences (Anugerahwati, 2019; Sukyadi & Mardiani, 2021).

Table 3. Comprehension and Cognitive Difficulties (High-Level Difficulties)
($N=32$; 1= very easy, 5= very difficult)

Aspects	Mean
Main Idea	2.81
Text-organization	2.75
Restatement	2.72
Socio-cultural aspect	2.69
Conclusion	2.66
Title	2.56
Author's Attitude/ Tone	2.53
Author Purpose	2.50
Reference	2.50
Detail Information	2.31

As shown in Table 3, students experienced different levels of difficulty across the higher-level comprehension aspects. The mean scores ranged from 2.31 to 2.81, showing that none of the indicators were perceived as highly difficult, with the highest score being 5.00. Among the higher-level comprehension aspects, identifying the main idea was the most challenging for students ($M = 2.81$). The College Entrance Examination supports this finding in 2025 practice results, which were provided before the questionnaire, showing that **28 out of 32 students** failed to identify the main idea correctly, confirming that this skill remains a major obstacle.

Participants' reflections also indicate a consistent difficulty in determining the main idea, showing that this aspect required greater cognitive effort during the literacy subtest. Several participants described that identifying the main idea demanded deeper processing of the text and more time to arrive at an answer. As Participant 3 noted, "The part of determining the main idea and restatement requires a deep understanding of the text and takes a little more time to answer the questions."

This comment suggests that main idea questions require integrative students to process the text as a whole rather than rely on explicit cues. Then, participant 7 expressed a similar view, stating, "It takes a lot of time, especially when finding the main idea."

Participant 7's statement reinforces the idea that time pressure increased the difficulty of working through questions requiring deeper comprehension. "In my opinion, the difficult part of the English subtest is when the questions ask about conclusions or main ideas."

In addition to this, Participant 8 emphasized the challenge of processing the entire passage holistically, stating, "The most difficult part is understanding the whole context of the text." This reflects that some students' difficulties extend beyond identifying the main idea alone. They also struggle with integrating multiple pieces of information to grasp the overall meaning of the text. Taken together, these statements show a consistent pattern: tasks involving main ideas and related inferential skills, such as drawing conclusions and understanding broader context, pose the greatest difficulty for students.

Beyond the main idea, Text Organization ($M = 2.75$) and Restatement ($M = 2.72$) also posed considerable challenges. These difficulties point to students' limited ability to analyze the structure of ideas in the text or to restate information in their own words. In the context of the College Entrance Examination, this challenge manifests as students' difficulty choosing the correct option that accurately represents the restated idea. Both skills require students to understand the relationships between ideas rather than focus on isolated details. Other aspects, such as conclusion ($M = 2.66$), Socio-cultural Aspects ($M = 2.69$), Title ($M = 2.56$), Author Purpose and Reference (both $M = 2.50$), and Author's Attitude/Tone ($M = 2.53$), showed moderate difficulty.

In contrast, finding detailed information was the easiest aspect ($M = 2.31$), indicating that students are more comfortable retrieving explicit information directly from the text. This is supported by students' results in finding the information directly from the passage. As a result, 23 out of 32 students answered correctly. The evidence shows that by looking at the item test no. 1, which asked students to define information about MSG "According to the text, MSG" can be found explicitly in lines 4-6 in passage 1. "MSG is extracted from a fermented tapioca (or sometimes wheat/corn) broth, then heated and dried into crystals. In some cases, other plant ingredients such as beets, sugar-cane, or corn may be used instead...." The results emphasize that students find the answer directly by answering option A. "Can be derived from tapioca, beets, sugar cane, or corn."

Therefore, regarding test-taking strategy difficulties, findings are presented below. The topic is categorized into 4 points: post-review hesitation, confusing distractors, lengthy textual material,

and insufficient time for item completion. These aspects are presented on a 1-5 scale, with 5 as the maximum score for respondents' responses.

Table 4. Test-Taking Strategy Difficulties
(N=32; 1= very easy, 5= very difficult)

Aspects	Difficulty level (Max=5)
Post-review hesitation	3.53
Confusing distractors	3.15
Lengthy textual material	3.03
Insufficient time allocation for item completion	2.66

The results show that students experienced several difficulties related to test-taking strategies when answering the English subtest. The greatest difficulty was post-review hesitation ($M = 3.53$), suggesting that many students struggled to change or doubt their answers after reviewing the items. Rather than reinforcing confidence, the review stage often triggered self-doubt, leading students to question their initial responses. This reflective struggle is evident in Participant 1's statement, "We usually cross-check before submitting, but a feeling of doubt arose, and I realized that the answer was not supposed to be like that." Related to these findings, previous research has revealed post-review hesitation as a characteristic of language difficulty and test anxiety (Burnham & Makienko, 2018). This phenomenon occurs most frequently in non-exam for multiple-choice form. Interestingly, our study also found that post-review hesitation is a common behaviour among test takers during the college entrance examination. Although earlier studies suggest that such hesitation does not directly affect student performance, more recent evidence indicates that post-review can be a beneficial strategy for answering questions (Kim, 2019).

Then, confusing distractors also posed a significant challenge ($M = 3.15$), suggesting that students often found the answer options misleading or too similar. According to the previous research, distractors affect the effectiveness of multiple-choice questions (Kalpakchi & Boye, 2021). Another difficulty was dealing with lengthy textual material ($M = 3.03$), which implies that long passages increased students' cognitive load and affected their comprehension. Meanwhile, insufficient time allocation was rated as moderately difficult ($M = 2.66$), indicating that although pressure existed, it was not the most critical challenge compared to the other aspects. Interview comments support this finding that some students stated that time was manageable. However, they struggled when questions required deeper analysis, especially when combined with lengthy texts or similar-looking options. Several students described feelings of anxiety or pressure when encountering unfamiliar vocabulary or lengthy passages. Affective factors such as anxiety have been widely recognized as contributing to poorer reading performance (Listyani & Tananuraksakul, 2019). When students are confronted with high-stakes tests, affective responses can further diminish comprehension efficiency, creating a cycle of decreased confidence and reduced performance. This emotional dimension underscores the need for classroom practices that build resilience and self-regulated reading strategies.

Students' reflections on their school learning experiences

Table 5. Students' Reflection regarding Curriculum Alignment

Aspects	Level of alignment (Max=3)
Learning materials helping in understanding comprehension	2.71
English lessons in schools deliver similar materials on reading skills for College Entrance Examination	2.66
English lessons in schools focus on reading skills for College Entrance Examination	2.56
Teacher helps in arranging strategy for multiple choice item	2.31
Materials in school align with College Entrance Examination's question	2.31

The results in Table 5 show that students perceived the alignment between school English instruction and the College Entrance Examination in the English component subtest as partial. Although some aspects of classroom instruction were helpful, the school's support did not fully meet the demands of the College Entrance Examination.

The strongest alignment was found in learning materials that support students' reading comprehension ($M = 2.71$). This perception is clearly reflected in Participant 5's description of classroom practices:

"We often read long texts, like news articles or essays. Then my teacher would ask us to analyze the text's structure. Which part is the main topic, which parts are the supporting details, things like that."

This statement shows that classroom instruction mainly focuses on basic comprehension activities, such as identifying main ideas, supporting details, and text structure. These activities help students develop foundational reading comprehension skills, which explains why this aspect received the highest mean score in the table.

Students also perceived that the reading materials used in school were similar to those found in the College Entrance Examination ($M = 2.66$), and that English lessons moderately focused on reading skills relevant to the exam ($M = 2.56$). This perception is supported by Participant 4, who stated: "It is mainly reading texts. That is the most helpful because those are exactly the kinds of texts that appear in the College Entrance Examination." This indicates that students recognized similarities in the text types and lengths between school materials and the College Entrance Examination.

However, this similarity did not necessarily mean that students felt fully prepared for the College Entrance Examination, as the materials were not always aligned with the test's specific cognitive demands. This partial alignment is further illustrated by Participant 6, who stated, "There were additional classes at school, so the material was general, and TOEFL-type questions were also included." This suggests that although supplementary instruction was available, the focus remained general rather than College Entrance Examination-specific, limiting students' exposure to the types of questions and skills emphasized in the English subtest.

This limitation is evident in the lower mean scores for teacher support in developing strategies for multiple-choice questions ($M = 2.31$) and for aligning school materials with College Entrance Examination question formats ($M = 2.31$). Participant 2's experience illustrates this gap:

“Honestly, during my three years in high school, my English teacher only taught as a formality... So I decided to study outside (at a tutoring course) to prepare for the College Entrance Examination.”

This statement shows that when classroom instruction does not provide sufficient guidance on exam strategies, students seek additional support outside school to prepare for the College Entrance Examination.

In addition, students' personal academic considerations also influenced their preparation decisions. Participant 1 explained: “Since I am not very good at mathematics, I prefer to focus more on language subjects. I decided to follow a course to prepare for the College Entrance Examination.” This statement indicates that students' perceived strengths and weaknesses across subjects shape their learning priorities and motivate them to seek additional preparation, particularly in areas they consider more manageable and relevant to the College Entrance Examination.

Therefore, students struggle more with questions that need inference, combining ideas, and understanding the text as a whole, while finding direct information is easier. It suggests that advanced reading skills, like interpreting hidden meanings and connecting different parts of a text, are not yet fully developed in schools (Alderson, 2000; Lea & Street, 1998).

In other words, students' difficulty in processing long texts indicates persistent gaps in higher-order reading skills. Many students reported challenges in identifying implicit meanings, interpreting the author's intention, and synthesizing information across paragraphs. These issues mirror previous research showing that Indonesian EFL learners often rely heavily on surface-level reading strategies, such as word-by-word decoding, which limits comprehension of academic texts (Anugerahwati, 2019; Sukyadi & Mardiani, 2021). This is further supported by Alderson's (2000) argument that reading proficiency is not merely the ability to understand words and sentences but also to engage with text organization, inferencing, and critical evaluation. The findings suggest that literacy instruction at the school level may not yet be sufficiently focused on advanced comprehension strategies, leaving students to feel overwhelmed by the test's demands.

Thus, the findings show that students expect classroom practices to offer more realistic, challenging, and skill-focused preparation. They want instruction that not only develops vocabulary through contextual reading but also provides intensive practice, time-management training, and exposure to authentic materials that align with the demands of the Computer-Based Test English subtest.

Overall, the findings suggest that although school English instruction supports students' reading comprehension and partially aligns with College Entrance Examination reading materials, greater emphasis on test-taking strategies and College Entrance Examination-specific question formats is still needed.

Table 6. Students' Reflection regarding School Material with a type of questions
(N=32; 1= very easy, 4= very difficult)

Aspects	Level of alignment (Max=4)
Modality	2.72
Author's purpose	2.43
Conclusion	2.40
Organization of text	2.41
Reference	2.31

Aspects	Level of alignment (Max=4)
Main idea	2.28
Title	2.28
Author tone	2.25
Detail information	2.22
Restatement	2.19
Socio-cultural aspects	2.18

As shown in Table 6, students perceived that the school materials partly aligned with the types of questions commonly found in the College Entrance Examination English component subtest. Among all aspects, modality obtained the highest level of alignment ($M = 2.72$), indicating that students felt more familiar with this type of question. This finding suggests that modality is more consistently addressed in classroom instruction because it is part of basic grammar and is frequently taught in school. Participant 5's statement supports this perception:

"The modality is basic grammar and is often taught."

In contrast, aspects requiring higher-level reading comprehension and interpretation, such as identifying the author's purpose ($M = 2.43$), concluding ($M = 2.40$), and understanding text organization ($M = 2.41$), showed lower levels of alignment. Similarly, items related to deeper textual interpretation, including restatement ($M = 2.19$) and socio-cultural aspects ($M = 2.18$), were perceived as least supported by the school materials.

Overall, these findings indicate that while grammatical aspects, such as modality, are relatively well covered, school materials provide limited support for more complex literacy skills assessed in the College Entrance Examination English subtest.

Students' expectations for improvements in preparing for the SNBT exam

Table 7. Students' Expectation towards Educational Practice

Expectations	Mean Score (Max=3)
Bridging vocabulary in context	2.97
Intensive practice	2.94
Time management	2.84
Strengthen critical thinking	2.78
Authentic materials	2.72

The data indicate that students hold strong expectations for improvements in how English reading skills are taught at school. The highest expectation is for better support in understanding vocabulary in context ($M = 2.97$), indicating that students want more guidance in decoding words directly from reading passages. The interview findings strongly support this. One participant explained:

"I personally wish we had more practice in critical reading... If we were used to critical reading, we would be more familiar with more academic vocabulary. During the Computer-

Based Test (CBT), my problem was that there were still many vocabulary items I did not know or understand.”

Although the student refers to critical reading, the key issue raised is the difficulty in dealing with unfamiliar vocabulary during the exam. This illustrates how students see critical reading as a way to build vocabulary knowledge through context, reinforcing why “bridging vocabulary in context” emerged as their strongest expectation.

Students also strongly expect more intensive practice ($M = 2.94$), reflecting their belief that frequent exposure to complex reading tasks will better prepare them for the Computer-Based Test. This expectation is echoed in the interview with Participant 3, who stated.

“SNBT practice questions should be introduced earlier, not only at the end of the semester near the SNBT, but from the beginning of grade 12, so that students become more trained in working on the questions.”

This suggests that students want earlier and more sustained practice that mirrors the exam format. Then, the expectation for stronger time-management support ($M = 2.84$) indicates that students feel they need more structured practice under timed conditions. Their expectation to strengthen critical thinking ($M = 2.78$) further shows a desire to move beyond surface-level comprehension and engage with texts more analytically, an approach they believe will support both vocabulary development and exam performance. Additionally, students highlight the importance of using authentic materials ($M = 2.72$), suggesting that real-world texts are essential for building vocabulary and comprehension skills relevant to the Computer-Based Test.

Table 8. Students' Expectation Learning Support Expectation and Resource

Expectations	Mean Score (Max=3)
Educational policy in aligning materials with test	2.91
Supplementary Class	2.84
Simulation Test	2.84
Feedback in Reading	2.88

The results show that students have strong expectations for additional learning support and resources to help them succeed in the Computer-Based Test English subtest. The highest expectation is the need for educational policies that align school materials with the test format ($M = 2.91$), indicating that students want schools to provide materials and learning activities that reflect the structure and demands of Computer-Based Test questions. Students also highly value receiving clear feedback in reading ($M = 2.88$), suggesting that they rely on teachers' guidance to understand their weaknesses and improve comprehension skills.

In addition, students expect more supplementary classes ($M = 2.84$) and simulation tests ($M = 2.84$), showing that they believe extra practice and exposure to exam-like situations are essential for building their confidence and readiness. They also express a strong need for opportunities to discuss reading difficulties directly with teachers ($M = 2.81$), indicating their preference for personal support when facing challenging texts.

Then, the data reveal that students expect a learning environment that provides consistent practice, meaningful feedback, personalized assistance, and school-level policies that ensure

stronger alignment between classroom learning and Computer-Based Test requirements. These expectations highlight the need for more responsive and coherent instructional practices that better prepare students to navigate the challenges of high-stakes university entrance examinations.

The next point is that the perceived misalignment between school reading practices and test expectations reflects broader challenges in curriculum implementation. Students commented that the literacy subtest required more analytical and inferential thinking than they typically practiced in class, where exercises often emphasized identifying explicit information or translating sentences. Similar findings have been reported in Indonesian assessment studies, where instructional practices emphasize low-level comprehension, while national assessments demand higher-order literacy skills (Zaim, 2017; Renandya & Jacobs, 2016). This misalignment may contribute to students' sense of unpreparedness and indicates a need for strengthened coherence between curriculum goals, teaching materials, and assessment formats.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, students' difficulties in the English literacy subject mostly occurred in identifying the main ideas in the passage, since this is a high-level comprehension skill. Then, the frequent issues test-takers experienced lately were post-review hesitation, mostly due to a lack of language skills, as mentioned by Burnham & Makienko (2018). Additionally, students report that time pressure does not impact them much. Despite the widespread assumption that time constraints inevitably hinder reading comprehension, several studies suggest that time pressure is not uniformly negative. Therefore, students expected the materials to align with the test form, as several case experiences showed that the materials in school did not fully meet the demands of the College Entrance Examination, as the interviewee's response indicated. It can be improved by serving an exam that aligns with student learning outcomes and the expected level of performance, as mentioned by Young (2019).

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