Reading Comprehension Difficulties Encountered by English Students of Universitas Islam Riau

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to find out the difficulties of reading comprehension faced by the first semester of students in FKIP UIR Pekanbaru. Kualitative research design in case study used in this research by using the instruments were questionnaire and interview guide. Based on the results of analyzing data from the questionnaire and interview, the reseacher found most of students' difficulties in reading comprehension because they have no motivation in reading habit, they read a little or nothing. It is considered to be a problem for the students to comprehend a reading text. Another students' difficulties in reading comprehension was the low reading skill. The students complained about the fact that they found, they need to study hard to remember the information they just read. They also need much time to read the text to overcome their problem. Too difficult reading material is also one of students problem in understanding the reading text. The material of reading is unfamiliar for them and grammatical complexity is also a reason why the students failed to comprehend the text correctly. The sentences in reading text too long or uses complicated sentences. Related with these problem, new words and long texts are seen by the students as a major obstacle to comprehend a reading text.

Key Words: *Reading Difficulties, Reading Comprehension*

Kuslitan dalam Memahami Teks Bacaan yang dihadapi oleMahasiswa Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris di Universitas Islam Riau

Abstrak

Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui kesulitan yang dihadapi mahasiswa semester pertama di FKIP UIR Pekanbaru dalam memahami bacaan yang dibacanya. Desain penelitian ini dalam bentuk kualitatif dengan studi kasus. Dalam mengumpulkan data peneliti menggunakan angket dan wawancara. Berdasarkan hasil analisis data dari angket dan wawancara, peneliti menemukan bahwa sebagian besar kesulitan mahasiswa dalam memahami membaca adalah karena mereka tidak memiliki motivasi membaca, mereka membaca hanya sedikit atau tidak sama sekali. Hal ini menjadi masalah besar bagi mahasiswa dalam memahami teks yang dibacanya. Kesulitan lain bagi mahasiswa dalam memahami bacaan adalah tidak memiliki keterampilan membaca atau keterampilan membaca mereka rendah. Para mahasiswa mengeluh tentang fakta yang mereka hadapi ketika membaca sebuah teks, mereka perlu belajar keras untuk mengingat informasi yang baru saja mereka baca. Mereka juga membutuhkan banyak waktu untuk membaca teks agar dapat mengatasi kesulitan mereka dalam memahami bacaan yang mereka

baca, sedangkan bahan bacaan yang terlalu sulit juga merupakan salah satu masalah siswa dalam memahami teks. Materi bacaan yang kurang familiar dan kalimat kompleks yang ada pada teks merupakan masalah lain bagi mahasiswa dalam memahami bacaan. Kata-kata baru yang mereka temukan dan teks yang terlalu panjang merupakan hambatan utama bagi mahasiswa untuk memahami bacaan yang dibacanya.

Kata Kunci: *Kesulitan-kesulitan dalam memahami bacaan*

1. INTRODUCTION

Reading functions as the window of knowledge can get much informations that students need. The researcher has opinion that reading is one aspect of language skills which is very important in every person's life, both at school and university. Reading skill (looking for a word meaning, find main idea, remembers the text, guessing the difficulty of words, and etc.) at all levels of education should be mastered by students especially the students of English Study Program in the first semester. By reading the students of first semester will obtain variety information that has never been known all the events, whether in the past, present, or future events. According to Ulmer (2000), reading is an interactive and complex process. The process through which the dynamic interaction of the reader's background knowledge, the information inferred by the written language, and the reading situation context is constructing the meaning. Without understanding, reading would serve no purpose. It means that understanding text is the most important aspect in reading. Not only to understand but also the students should comprehend the text that they read.

The main purpose of reading is comprehending the text read. Everyone agrees that reading comprehension is not a simple matter of recognizing individual words, or even of understanding each individual word as eyes pass over it. All models of comprehension recognize the need for readers to build up a mental representation of text, a process that requires integration across a range of sources of information. Townend (2003) states that comprehend in reading means the students should fully understand of all the aspect of the text.

Since English in Indonesia is a foreign language, there are possibilities that the English language students may get difficulties in understanding reading text, it is caused by wrong word identification and recognition. Realizing that understanding text is very important to be achieved by the students in reading skill, these difficulties in understanding reading text should be known and solved both by the students and the teacher because the difficulties will give negative impact on the students' ability and motivation to achieve the reading target. Oberholzer (2005) stated that "difficulty with reading can have an increasingly negative effect on the

students' schoolwork and tertiary education, as reading requirements become greater and more extensive." The students should master those aspects so they can comprehend the text and answer the questions which are served well.

The efficient interpretation of the text involves a combination of word recognition skill, linking of new information to prior knowledge, and application of appropriate strategies such as locating the main idea, making connections, questioning, inferring and predicting. Therefore, comprehending the English reading text is not an easy thing, so that is why there are many students find difficulties in comprehending the English text.

Some researchers have done the research related with the students' difficulties in reading text; Albader (2007), Atikah (2009), Sasmita (2012), and Chung (2012). The findings of their researches convey that the students' difficulties in reading comprehension are vocabulary, grammar knowledge, and reading interest.

Further, Irena Shehu (2015) also conducted the related research for the three different high schools in Albania, she found main problems on students' reading comprehension; *Vocabulary*. They need to open the dictionary and do not understan the new word . *Working memory*. They need to hold the information in working memory, *Absence of extensive reading*. The students read a little or nothing . *Type of text*. The type of text can be problem by the students in reading comprehension.

Therefore, the researcher believes that there are other difficulties that have not been found in previous studies such as students motivation and reading habit, material of reading, reading skills and reading strategy used, with the assumption that every student may have different difficulties in understanding the reading text.

Based on the fact found by the researcher during teach reading subject in FKIP-UIR until today, many students who make mistakes while working on reading questions, the mistakes resulted their low reading achievement. These mistakes happened probably because they do not understand the content of the text.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There has been a lot of research in the field which focused on difficulties in reading text, such as research from abroad which is done by Albader (2007). In his research, he mentions the difficulties that students' faces in reading in a second or foreign language. It covers some linguistics aspects, such as grammar (syntax), pronunciation (phonetics), and meaning of words (semantics). There are also some researches related with the students' difficulties in reading text done in Indonesia. Fakhrudin (2005) also have conducted a similar research with this research. It used to find out the students' problems in comprehending English reading texts. The findings showed that the factors that may make the students have difficulties in understanding English reading texts are related to vocabulary, grammar knowledge, and reading interest. Moreover, Ade (2012) conducted a research to discover the ability of students and types of difficulties

faced by students in comprehending recount text. The result of this study showed that there are several common problems or difficulties faced by students such as: students still have difficulties in analyzing the text content, the students do not allocate their time to study and students have difficulties in understanding the meaning of sentences.

All teachers would probably agree that the primary reason for reading text is to understand it. Reading without comprehension is not reading and it is the ability to recognize, to pronounce, and to understand the printed symbols on a page". In other words, reading is the process of reconstructing an author's ideas and deriving meaning from a printed page through the ability to recognize printed words, knowledge of language, and previous reading and life experiences.

Comprehension is the reason for reading; it encompasses the learning, growing, and evolution of ideas that occur as one reads. Comprehension is a process in which readers construct meaning by interacting with text through the combination of prior knowledge and previous experience, information in the text and the stance the reader takes in relationship to the text. This means that the readers look the construct meaning in text that they found information in text. Comprehending what the readers read is more than just recognizing and understanding words. True comprehension means making sense of what the readers read and connecting the ideas in the text to what already know. It also means remembering what the readers

have read. In other words, comprehending means thinking while the readers read. It means that comprehension needs understanding words, connecting the main idea in text and remembering context.

Vaughn (2003) states that reading comprehension refers to understanding of text that has been read, that is a complex skill that requires the use of various strategies to activate one's prior knowledge, monitor understanding, self-question, distinguish between the main idea and supporting details, and summarize. Therefore, the students require instruction in the development of strategies that can be used before, during, and after reading text. Woolley (2011) says that reading comprehension is the process of making meaning from text. The goal is to gain an overall understanding of what is described in the text rather than to obtain meaning from isolated words or sentences. In understanding read text information children developmental models, or representations of meaning of the text ideas during the reading process. Therefore, reading comprehension has process of making meaning in a text.

The efficient interpretation of the text involves a combination of word recognition skill, linking of new information to prior knowledge, and application of appropriate strategies such as locating the main idea, making connections, questioning, inferring and predicting. Therefore, comprehending the English reading text is not an easy thing, so that is why there are many students find difficulties in comprehending the English text. Carvalho (2001) states

that many students have difficulties in performing the tasks they are assigned. These difficulties concern mainly three aspects: reading and selecting relevant content, organizing and synthesizing information retrieved from different textual sources, and making use of conventional forms adopted by the academic community.

As the writer said above, in Indonesia schools, writing is rarely seen as a learning tool and students are more often asked to use it in knowledge reproduction tasks than in knowledge construction ones. It means that students get more difficulty in reading because students feel lazy to read. Reading comprehension is so useful for them to obtain new insight which is called receptive skill, and writing can help them in productive skill. Therefore, if the students have difficulties in performing task, the students have a lot to read.

The same line, Joseph (2001) says that students exhibit difficulty understanding and deriving meaning from text, the explicit instruction on comprehending needs to be provided. Difficulties understanding text can be derived from not knowing meanings of words or concepts, not capturing factual information, not inferring about content, and not forming relationships among content presented in text. Therefore, the students have difficulties understanding, meaning of word or concepts and inferring information. One general problem that less-skilled comprehends seems to have is making inferences from text. These difficulties include: a). Inferring information that is only implicit in a text. b). making inferences to connect up the ideas in a text, and c) Inferring the meanings of particular words from context. Three studies discuss about the difficulties in reading comprehension. The above studies about inferring information that is only implicit in a text include main idea.

Spivey (2002), Wilawan (2005), claim that most all texts have one sentence within a paragraph or passage stating the author's message, or main idea. Finding the main idea becomes more difficult in the upper grades where the main idea may be *explicit* (a complete sentence taken directly from the text) or *implied* (summarized by evaluating the details in the text). The sentences in the text may have too much detail to pick one main idea or so little information that there is no obvious message. The main idea helps readers recall important information. Locating the main idea helps the reader understand the points the writer is attempting to express. Identifying the relationship between these will improve comprehension. Determining implied main idea is also much more difficult and can be problematic for most readers. The main idea is easier to identify when it is first or the last sentences in the paragraph. It is more difficult to find when it is located in the middle of a reading. And it is perhaps most difficult to identify when it is inferred and not actually stated.

The other opinion, Makar (2005) said that the Students have difficulty correctly reading information. The researcher offers some reasons for why it is important for students to be able to correctly

read and offer suggestions for how to help develop this type of reasoning. It means that students should increase their information in order students do not get difficult in their education.

Snow (2013) also adds the difficulties of reading comprehension. She said that comprehension of longer texts is very difficult, because the construction of meaning is disrupted by the difficulty and slowness of word recognition. Therefore, comprehension needs understanding meaning in a text because comprehension is longer text.

Based on the explanation above, the researcher concludes that main idea is main important in reading comprehension, because main idea is the core information that tells more about the overall idea of a paragraph. Besides that, the students must find background knowledge to understand the difficult text, information inferred in reading context, and the strategies used in reading comprehension.

3. METHOD

To conduct this research, the researcher used qualitative research design in case study. Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2006:399) explained that "qualitative research is the collection, analysis, and interpretation of comprehensive narrative and visual data in order to gain insight into a particular phenomenon of interest". Thus, in a qualitative research, the researchers collect, analyze, and interpret data descriptively in order to capture the particular phenomenon of interest. The data for qualitative research collected by using instruments such as audio-visual data

(videotape and photos) and documents (observation sheets, interviews and questionnaires (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). In this study the researcher used questionnaire and interview as the instruments.

The subject of this research was the first year students of English Study Program that consists of four classes and each class consists of 40 students. Purposive sampling used to determine the sample in this research. The sources of data were from the students questionnair and interview. Questionnaires were used as a means of data elicitation. The items in each scale of the instrument are randomly distributed throughout the questionnaire.

The questionnaires for the students were divided into four categories, which are labeled as Part-1, part-2, part- 3, and part 4 in closed-ended questions. The item format for type in questionnaire is developed on a four-point scale which asks individuals to respond in series of statements by indicating whether the incidents in question take place 'Always', often', 'occasionally' and 'Never'. The Part-1 type questionnaire for students consisted of 5 statements, which aimed to determine the habit and the motivation of the students for reading. The Part-2 type questionnaire for the teachers, on the other hand, consisted of 5 statements, which likewise aimed to determine the efficacy of the ongoing materials and the textbook. The Part-3 type of questionnaire for the students consisted of 5 statements respectively. These questionnaires were aimed at determining the competence of reading skill, The

Part-4 type of questionnaire for the students consisted of 5 statements respectively. Teaching technique and strategies was used in the class room.

To get more information from the students, the researcher uses interview. Respondents on upper and lower score were analyzed to see how far each item in this group is different. Items that do not show any real difference, whether included in high or low scores are also discarded to maintain internal consistency of the question. In order to get the results of interpretation, must first know the highest score (Y) and lowest score (X) for the assessment items with the following formula:

Formula: T x Pn

T = Total number of respondents selected

Pn = Likert score option Or

Y = highest score likert Y number of respondents

X = lowest score likert X number of respondents

The result of the resulting value using the formula Index%

Index% formula = Total Score/ Y x 100

4. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Concerning with the statement of the problems, the researcher described and analyzed the findings during the research process conducted for the first semester students of English study program of FKIP-UIR . It was intended to answer the questions of the study. The researcher described the process of calculating and presenting result of the data.

Table 1 Great Score

No	Option	Score of Scale
1	Always	5
2.	Often	4
3	Sometime	3
4	Occational	2
5	Never	1

Table 2
Score of Presentation

Answer	Description
0% - 19.99%	Never
20% - 39.99%	Occasionally
40% - 59.99%	Sometimes
60% - 79.99%	Often
80% - 100%	Always

Finding
Questionnaire

The data from the quistionnaire and interview in this study have been analyzed with the results as shown in the following table:

Table 3
The Rekapitulation of Students Questionnaire

No	Indicator	AL	OF	OC	NV	Total Score	%
1	Low Reading Habit	44	54	18	2	118	73.75
2	Too difficult reading Material	64	39	10	6	119	74.38
3	Low Skill of Reading	60	51	8	4	123	76.86
4	Low Strategy or technique of reading	28	15	38	6	87	54.37

The results in the table above show that from four indicators that were analyzed only three indicators indicate that the students' difficulties in reading comprehension such as low reading habit, too difficult material, lack of skill of reading. While the use of strategies and techniques in reading is not a cause of student difficulties. The results is based on the data analysis by using Liker scale.

Based on five items asked to students by a questionnaire about reading habit, almost of the students (73.75%) answer that they rarely read English Reading text, because the English text is difficult to understand. They read English text when they need it to work the task. They also feel intimidated whenever they see a whole page of English in front of them. Based on this fact reading habit is one of the students difficulties in reading comprehension.

Too difficult material in reading is also another difficulty in reading. There are (74.38%) students answer that they face difficulties to capture the meaning when they read complicated sentences in the text and have problem to derive the factual information because the material is unfamiliar for them. New vocabulary and grammar complecity are also one of the obstacle for the students to get the meaning of text.

The low skills of reading is also one of students difficulties in reading comprehensionng. Based on the students answers of questionnair, 76,86% students states that they get so confused and can not remember what they are reading. They need to concentrate in reading the text , and they also have problem to locate the main idea of the text. They are not able to guess the meaning of word when they face the difficult word in the text. All of finding here indicate that the students have some difficulties in reading comprehension.

Interview

The interview given for the students to answer the second research question "how the students overcame the difficulties in reading". The answer of students' interview as follow:

Lecturer: what should you do when you do not want to read English texts whereas you have to read many English texts as a English student.

*Students:*I start to read a familiar text first, if I have background knowledge about the text, so I think I will be easy to get the meaning of the text.

Reading habits can help students to overcome reading difficulties, in this case, the students try to tackle their problems by read some text that they have background knowledge about the text, they read enjoyable text and forced themselves to enjoy reading. The questionnaire findings seem to be corroborated by the data gathered from the students' interviews. Many of the 5 students interviewed indicated that they rarely read English texts, especially those with low and intermediate levels of reading proficiency in English. For example, Nanda said: "I do not read much. If I read, I would read for about 10 minutes". Yudia commented that: "I read English texts every other week for a short time, and it is not a lot." Students at these levels tend to read very short texts, such as text

messages, newspaper headlines and social media postings. With regard to reading in English, these students hardly read anything. Dita, for example, acknowledged that: "I do not read outside the class. I do not need to read more English to improve my language skills". When asked about why they do not read enough English, if any, Rezky, Dea, Gita and nanda indicated that "lack of motivation and low reading habit", "poor reading skills", and "ineffective material of reading" were the main reasons for their inability to comprehend the text well in English. The next question in interview is:

Lecturer: how do you cope when you have to read texts you do not know before and find lots of difficult words, as well as have complicated sentences?

Students: I read slowly and carefully to be sure I understand what I'm reading. I try to guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases or I will open the dictionary, and I connect the text to information from other sources.

The interviews above indicate that students are trying to get out of problems in reading comprehension. The last question for the students is:

Lecturer: what should you do, when you read English text you cannot remember what you are reading, do not locate the main idea, and lack grammar knowledge?

Students: I try to get back on track when I lose concentration. When text

becomes difficult, I pay closer attention to what I'm reading. I try to picture or visualize information to help remember what I read. I identify the first paragraph that contains main idea mostly. I try to find the topic first to know the mind idea next.

The students answer in this interview illustrates that they use different ways to improve their readership skills.

Discussion

The research revealed three main findings, the difficulties in reading comprehension. The first issue raised is students difficulty in reading habit. studying the reading habit of UIR students says that their reading habit is poor because they read with aim to do the task and pass examination, it is not for pleasure. Therefore, the purpose of reading is to make the invisible layer, the underlying meaning, visible and clear. Teele (2004) asserts that the goal of all readers should be to understand what they read. In the results of this study, students shows less motivation to read especially English text. The less of reading motivation have strong impacts on the students in reading habit because reading habits can help them overcome difficulties in reading comprehension. Palani (2012) support the statement above that reading habit is an essential and important aspect for creating a literate society in this world. It shapes the personality of individuals and it helps them to develop proper thinking

methods, and creates new ideas. Tampubolon (1990:41) confirms that in building the reading habit the reader needs longer time because the interest and motivation have rule in it. In this case the researcher states that reading habit is behavior to read which is done regularly to understand information and get entertainment from written material.

Lack of good students reading ability is another factor that makes students difficulty in reading comprehension. Students' reading difficulties are potentially visible in each component. At the word level, students have difficulty choosing the meaning of the word needed. In this case, the students who fail to read words accurately, remember word just read, understand phrase and sentences fail to comprehend the text. In other word, word-level problems are potentially the most important in creating reading failures because they lead both to word reading problems themselves and to derivative comprehension problems. For example, verbal efficiency theory (Perfetti 1997), Crain and Shankweiler 1988) assumes that phonological processing problems may have consequences throughout the reading process: learning to read words, remembering just-read words, and understanding phrases and sentences. This matter denotes that even though the students good reading strategies but in fact their reading comprehension is still low.

Another important point found in this study is the difficulty of reading material read by the students. The material of reading is unfamiliar for them and grammatical complexity is also a reason why the students failed to comprehend the text correctly. The sentences in reading text too long or uses complicated sentences. Moreover, students can be successful or fail in reading depending on the type of text being read. As a study conducted by Schoenbach, (1999) found that readers will face difficulties in reading when they are unfamiliar with the particular language structure and features of the text and then their language-processing ability will break down. In contrast to other research results, the use of strategy and techniques in this study is not a difficulty for students, they understand the strategies and techniques of reading but they are not able to understand the text well.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the research, it can be concluded that the difficulties of reading English text for the students involve some important aspects such as low motivation to read that causes there is no reading habit for the students, poor reading skill is also one of the cause students' difficulties in compnrehending reading text. Another reason why the students faced difficulties is the students do not have sufficient background knowledge to understand the texts, the lessons have not been learnt properly and/or they never read a similar text before. As a result of having poor vocabulary and poor grammar, the students had difficulties in understanding the texts. In this case, the students need to acquire adequate vocabulary and know how to use it accurately in context in order to overcome their difficulties.

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