

STUDENTS' READING STRATEGIES IN COMPREHENDING ACADEMIC READING: A CASE STUDY IN AN INDONESIAN PRIVATE COLLAGE

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Abstract

This study was intended to find out the certain strategies which were used by low level and high level English proficiency students in comprehending academic reading and the aspects which influence students' reading comprehension. The methods of the research used a qualitative approach based on the theory of case study. The data were collected by using interviews, documentary studies and questionnaire. The data were analyzed using data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing. The results of this study showed different strategies using between low and high proficiency students. Moreover, the result also showed that there are five aspects which influence students' reading comprehension such as, motivation, linguistics competence, interest, characteristic of the text and the last is environment role.

Key words: Reading strategies, comprehension and academic reading

INTRODUCTION

Reading is one of the important skills in language learning because reading is a way to gain any new knowledge and raise the information which involves thinking process. Nevertheless, there are many students in Indonesian who tend to dislike reading because of lack interest and motivation to read a lot, so their comprehension is extremely poor. This is proven from the result of Progress in International Reading Literacy (PRILS) in 2006 mentioned that Indonesia is on the 41st rank of 45 countries in reading ability (cited in Litbang Kemdikbud). It means that Indonesian students' reading ability is still awfully low and far from the expectation.

Actually reading is a must for the students no matter the level of proficiency they have, but the problem is most of them cannot comprehend well the whole meaning of the text especially for academic materials which usually has long paragraphs and a lot of unfamiliar words, as comprehension is a difficult process and it needs students'

background knowledge. Thus, comprehension will not merely occur without using any strategy because in reality the use of strategy in reading will help the students understanding the text and overcome the problem or gap knowledge when doing reading activity, so their comprehension is improved. It was proven from Rong and Xiaome's statement (2006 cited in Khairiyani 2012, p. 1) who said that since the late of 1970's, reading strategy has been considered as one of fundamental factors that promote students' comprehension improvement in reading.

Besides, learning strategy will show the way a person learns. Furthermore, learning strategy is linked with the way a person processes and perceives information in learning situations. Therefore, implementing reading strategy in comprehending academic materials is a must especially for lower language learners because without using strategy they will feel difficult to take the gist from the text. According to O'Malley and Chamot (1989 cited in Jou 2015, p. 181), "the

major obstacle for successful language learning is that learners do not apply the learning strategies effectively". That is why a lot of students are failed in learning and do not have proper motivation to learn better.

Since many universities' academic materials written in English, English reading proficiency becomes an extremely important requirement for the students. The students are expected to understand what they read regardless of the subject matter they study. Dealing with this situation, normally the students of tertiary level should already have the proper ability to comprehend the text well and able to get the gist from every single academic reading they read, because as known that the students have learnt English for approximately six years since they were in junior high school level. Moreover, there are some of them who probably have learnt English since they were in elementary level. Therefore, they should have better quantity of the vocabularies in their minds, better English proficiency, and particularly for the use of reading strategy, so they can comprehend any kinds of text easily and efficiently. Due to those findings, the researcher has been encouraged to investigate this problem. The researcher is going to conduct a research entitled "Students' Reading Strategies in Comprehending Academic Reading at First Semester of LP3I Business Collage in Cilegon.

Reading is the activity to interpret the information from the text which is read by the reader. In fact, reading is one of activities that no easy to do by some people. The reader should pay attention to book/reading text which they read, in order to get the information about something which they need. According to Grabe and Stoller (2002, p. 9) "Reading is the ability to draw meaning from the printed page and interpret this information appropriately." In the line with this, Bamford and Day (1998, p. 9) said that reading is building up the meaning from a printed or written text, so the reader know the content of the text in detail. Reading is very useful for students' language achievement,

they can know many information and important knowledge from what they read. In accordance with this, Brown (2007, p. 99) said that reading is useful for language acquisition, the more they read, the better they get it because reading has positive effect on students' vocabulary knowledge, on their spelling and writing.

Reading comprehension is reading to take a crucial gist from the text, so the readers can fully know and understand about the content of the text itself. According to Grellet (1981, p. 3) "reading comprehension is extracting the required information from it as efficiently as possible." Similarly, Koda (2005 cited in Grabe 2009, p. 14) argued that comprehension occurs when reader can take out and put together various information from the text and combines it with what is already known. Thus, when someone tries to comprehend the text it means that she/he combines her/his previous knowledge with the recent information that she/he got in reading text, in order to get the goal of her/his reading, because one of the purposes of reading comprehension is to obtain the information which is required or available in text reading. "The reader comprehends by actively constructing meaning internally from interacting with the material is that read" (Anderson and Pearson 2000, p. 52). Hence, the essence of reading comprehension is that the readers are able to interact with the text to obtain the required information.

According to Oxford (1990) "reading strategies are important for language learning because they are tools for active, self-directed involvement which is essential for developing communicative competence or specific action taken to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferrable to new situation." According to Abbott (2006, p.637), reading strategies are "the mental operations or comprehension processes that readers select and apply in order to make sense of what they read." The term of 'reading strategy' is specific tactics carried out by the reader in order to comprehend the intended meaning. Research studies have

demonstrated that successful language learner in reading comprehension does not happen automatically. It depends mostly on the intentional reading strategy use.

A successful learner is aware of his strategy use and why he uses strategies. They make use of strategies more frequently than less successful readers do. Moreover, they always coordinate and change those strategies when it is necessary, they can also distinguish between important information and details as they read. "There are researches on reading development have shown that good readers use strategies that are not used by poor readers (Grabe and Stoller, 2002)."

However, less competent readers are not well aware of selecting appropriate strategies or decide on how to connect them to have a useful strategy although he/she is able to describe his/her own strategies. Thus, overall improvement in reading comprehension is depend on the improvement of skills and strategies and explicit training of strategies has often led to successful reading comprehension (Barnett, 1988, p.150-162). Furthermore, the factors which make a strategy effective can be sorted as: (a) who is employing it, (b) how consciously it is employed, (c) what kind of text is being read, (d) when it is being employed, and (e) why it is being used (Carrell, 1998; Farrell, 2001). In other words, what is being good for one student may be different for another student because the strategy is used based on the students' need. Similarly, whereas a strategy can be useful for a reader with a specific text, it may not be a suitable tool with another text when the purpose of reading is different. Moreover, Richards and Renandya (2002, p. 125) argued that there are many factors which influence the use of particular strategies such as, maturity, comprehension of one's own learning style preferences, and previous experiences.

The notion of reading strategies had been conducted by some researchers, such as Shokrpour (2012), Peishi (2014), Razak and Amir (2011), Yukselir (2014),

Saengpakdeejit and Intaraprasert (2014) and Omar (2014)

Firstly, the study was conducted by Shokrpourin 2012 entitled "*The Reading Strategies Used by Iranian ESP Students to Comprehend Authentic Expository Texts in English*". This study aimed to investigate reading strategy used by Iranian ESP students when they read authentic expository texts in English. There were 81 students from different major in medical science university participated in this study, their age ranged between 18 and 21 years old. The participants all spoke Persian as their mother tongue language and all the participants had been studying English for eight years. Furthermore, the study was conducted quantitatively and the data were collected by using questionnaire then analyzed by descriptive statistic and One Way ANOVA. This study used Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS). This Survey classifies reading strategies into three categories: *global, problem solving, and support* strategies. The finding showed that the participants were moderately aware of reading strategies and the most frequently used strategies were support strategies, followed by global strategies, and then problem solving strategies. The Iranian ESP students used the reading strategies differently according to their academic majors.

Secondly, the study was conducted by Peishi in 2014 entitled "*The Investigation of Reading Strategy Use of EFL Learners in Different Background Knowledge Texts*". This present study investigated the reading strategy which used by the students with different background (familiar and unfamiliar) reading text. There were 61 college students from a University of New Taipei City were involved in this study to complete the reading strategy questionnaire related to background knowledge for different background reading passages. The study was conducted quantitatively and qualitatively by using questionnaire and interview as data collection technique. Then, the result showed that all of the subjects use different reading strategy when they read

different background reading text, and if it was compared the students tend to use more strategies in comprehending familiar reading text. For instance, they used more main idea, vocabulary, and background strategies when they read familiar passage than unfamiliar passage.

Thirdly, the study was conducted by Razak and Amirin 2011 entitled "*A Study on Students' Perception of Reading Strategies While Comprehending an Academic Text by UTM Students*". Therefore, the aim of this research is to identify the perception of first year students of University Technology Malaysia, Skudai towards the reading strategies while comprehending an academic text and reading strategy used by low and high proficiency students. The respondents of this research are first year students who are taking UHB 1412 (English for Academic Communication) course from various faculties in UTM for the 2008/2009 session which consists of 60 students. This study was conducted qualitatively by using interview and questionnaire as the sources in collecting the data. The study showed that the students' perception on their preference of using reading strategy both high and low proficient students are almost same. Furthermore, based on this research, it was found that the students used the three reading strategies as proposed which are cognitive, metacognitive and social reading strategies while comprehending the text that they read. However, based on the result found the high proficiency students used all three reading strategies proposed by the researcher while for the low proficiency students, all of them frequently used metacognitive reading strategies.

Fourthly, the study was conducted by Yukselir in 2014 entitled "*An Investigation into the reading strategy use of EFL prep-class students*". This study aims to reveal what kind of reading strategies are generally used by pre-intermediate level of students enrolled in the School of Foreign Languages, Osmaniye Korkut Ata University. Also, this study tries to find out whether there are gender and department differences among

the participants. The population of this study consisted of 65 prep-class students. The data collected from the questionnaire was analyzed statistically. The results of the analysis indicated that students tend to report use of reading strategies with great frequency. They used 14 reading strategies, three of them belong to before reading and the rest of them belong to while reading section. However, these reading strategies do not differ in terms of their gender but their departments have an effect on the students' reading strategy use.

Fifthly, the study was conducted by Saengpakdeejit and Intaraprasertin 2014 entitled "*Reading Strategy in Foreign Language Academic Reading: A Qualitative Investigation*". The purpose of this study was to investigate how EFL undergraduate students do to improve their reading comprehension, solve the problems encountered while reading, and overcome comprehension failures. The study was conducted qualitatively by using semi-structured interview as the main source in collecting the data and analyzed by open and axial coding technique. There were thirty 39 students from four different universities who are participated in this study. The data of this study clearly shows that the participants had an awareness of their activities while reading English academic materials. The information provided by 39 participants revealed that English academic reading in the tertiary level was a complex process in which they consciously employed the number of reading strategies to make them easier in comprehending the text. They employed these strategies in order to comprehend an English academic text by improving their reading skills, solving the problems encountered while reading, and overcoming reading comprehension difficulties. Moreover, the data showed that some participants are relied more on dictionary to help them in comprehending the text, while some others used employing contextual clues, discussion with classmates and friends, and help of peers or teachers as ways of

achieving comprehension of English academic texts.

Last, the study was conducted by Omar in 2014 entitled *“An Investigation into the Reading Strategies of ESP Students in the College of Medical Sciences at Umm Al-Qura University.”* This study was intended to investigate reading strategy used by a group of medical science students enrolled in an intensive ESP program. The sample is composed of 24 students from the college of medical sciences at Umm AL Qura University. Results obtained through a questionnaire and think – aloud protocol. The result showed that the students frequently used seven strategies in reading comprehension. Two of them belong to pre-reading activity (relating the title and illustration to the text and thinking about previous knowledge), five of them belong to while-reading activity (check the dictionary

only for important words, contextual guessing, using grammatical clues to guess the meaning, skipping unknown words and rereading a sentence if not understood), while few of them did not use post-reading activity.

METHODOLOGY

This study is using qualitative methode. The participants of this study were 22 students consisting of 13 females and 9 males at third semester majoring in Business Administration. Based on preliminary research, the researcher found the data that this class was mixed ability level in English proficiency. This study used triangulation to collect the data, such as interview, questionnaire and documentation. Data analysis was carried out by following these procedures; data display, data reduction and conclusion drawing.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: The Result of Students' Strategies Taken from Interview and questionnaire Part

No	Students' Level	Strategies
1	Low Achievers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imagine the title of the text and make an illustration on it • Translating every unknown word • Asking their classmates if found unfamiliar words • Translating word by word into bahasa • Try to memorize the main information without writing it • Rereading the text to find out certain information • Having small discussion to convince their understanding and sometimes make/answer the questions.
2	Moderate Achievers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trying to skim the text • Relate the content of the text with their previous knowledge • Translating only for the most important word • Trying to open dictionary if found unfamiliar words then they ask their friends if they feel not confidence • Never translate word by word • Taking note on every important information of the text • Rereading the text to find out important information • Having small discussion with their classmate to convince their understanding
3	High Achievers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paying attention more on title of the text • Trying to focus on the first sentence of the text

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- Relating the content of text with their previous knowledge
 - Identifying the questions of the text
 - Translating only for the most important words
 - Trying to guess the meaning first by looking at the sentence around it then open dictionary to clarify their understanding
 - Never translate word by word
 - Paying attention more on grammatical clue
 - Try to write every single crucial information or clue of the text
 - Think aloud and make guess
 - Having small chat with their partner to convince their understanding
 - Try to make or answer the questions well
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Based on the data analysis of interview and questionnaire the researcher found that the students employ some strategies in comprehending academic reading along with their different reason on using it. The students used their own reading strategies to help them understanding the text and overcome the problem when doing reading activity. The three students' level frequently used various reading strategy which is in several cases different from one to another.

The low achievers tended to use several strategies such as imaging the title of the text and make an illustration on it, translating every unknown word, asking their classmates if found unfamiliar words, translating word by word into bahasa, trying to memorize the main information without writing it, rereading the text to find out certain information, and having small discussion to convince their understanding in the end of reading activity.

Moreover, the moderate achievers tended to use reading strategies such as trying to skim the text, relate the content of the text with their previous knowledge, translating only for the most important word, trying to open dictionary if found unfamiliar words then they ask their friends if they feel not confidence, never translate word by word, taking note on every important information of the text, rereading the text to find out important information, and having small discussion with their classmate to convince their understanding in post-reading activity.

Nevertheless, the high achievers tended to use many strategies more than the others

students' level. They frequently employed several reading strategies such as paying attention more on title of the text, trying to focus on the first sentence of the text, relating the content of text with their previous knowledge, identifying the questions of the text, translating only for the most important words, trying to guess the meaning first by looking at the sentence around it then opening dictionary to clarify their understanding, never translating word by word, paying attention more on grammatical clue, trying to write every single crucial information or clue of the text, thinking aloud and make guess, having small chat with their partner to convince their understanding and trying to make or answer the questions well in the end of reading activity.

In pre-reading activity the low achievers tended to imagine the title and the illustration to the text. It means that the students were frequently having imagination on the title of the text before they read a whole of the text. They said that imaging a title of the text enabled them easier in predicting the content of the text. It is in line with Jenning (2006, p. 280) who said that the use of imaginary in doing reading activity would encourage the students to interact directly with the text and also it was able to enhance students' comprehension.

On the other hand, when the moderate achievers started to read (pre-reading) they frequently tend to trying to skim the text and relating the text with their previous knowledge. They argued that by doing those strategies it would make them easy in

understanding the content of the text before they continued their reading activity. Furthermore, they said that *"I always skim the text to look for general idea of the text first to know what this passage is about."* According to Grabe and Stoller (2002, p. 13) "skimming strategy involves, in essence, a combination of strategies for guessing where important information might be in text until a general idea is formed." It means that that the students try to read the text at glance before they read it in detail.

Nevertheless, in pre-reading activity the high achievers frequently employed more than one strategy. In this phase they employed three strategies such as, paying attention more on the title (imaging the title), trying to focus on first sentence of the text and relating the content of the text with their previous knowledge. They employed those strategies because it helped them in comprehending the text. It is supported by Anderson and Pearson (1984, p. 178) who said that people with high amounts of prior knowledge would comprehend the text better than those who did not have much background knowledge. Thus, the high achievers could understand the text well rather than the low achievers. Trying to focus on the first sentence of the text also was one of the strategies which employed by high achievers in pre reading activity. It also in line with the study which was conducted by Omar in 2014 at Al Qura University, the result showed that the good readers tended to read the first sentence of the text before continuing their reading activity.

During reading activity the low achievers frequently employed translating every unknown word, asking their classmates if found unfamiliar words, translating word by word into bahasa, trying to memorize the main information without writing it and rereading the text to find out certain information. One of reasons why they employed those strategies was because they said *"I always translate every unknown word in the text because I think every unknown word is important, if we want to know its meaning we have to translate it even though*

it spends a lot of time." It is in line with the study which was conducted by Hosenfield (1977) cited in Omar 2014, the study showed that most of the unsuccessful students did not skip all unimportant words. It means that the unsuccessful frequently translate every unknown word even though in fact it was unimportant word. Furthermore, it is also supported by the study which was done by Khairiyani in (2012) the data showed that the low readers tended to translate every unknown word in bahasa. One of their reasons was *"because English is not my native language. Thus it is important in order I can understand the text well."* Furthermore, for rereading strategy which was employed by the low achievers supported Harrison's statement in (2004, p. 113) who said that repeated reading was effective to increase students' reading proficiency. Thus, it indicates that repeated reading is very useful for low achievers in increasing their comprehension on reading English text.

Meanwhile, during reading activity the moderate achievers employed some strategies such as, translating only for the most important word not word by word, trying to open dictionary if found unfamiliar words then they ask their friends if they feel not confidence, taking note on every important information of the text and rereading the text to find out important information. Regarding taking note part that used by the moderate achievers during reading activity, it supported Oxford's statement in (1990, p. 88) who said that taking notes is very important strategy for reading, but the focus of taking notes should be on understanding not only writing. The reason of applying this strategy was because according to their opinion *"in reading I always prepare my pen to write the important information because taking note is very gainful to save the data rather than only memorize it."* Whereas for rereading activity according to Oxford (1990, p. 70) "repeating strategies can be used in highly innovative ways, is actually essential for all four languages skills and virtually always include some degree of meaningful understanding".

It means that repeating strategy can be benefit for the students who are eager to take meaningful reading, and the researcher assumed that the students have already done the right ways for this part.

Besides, during reading activity the high achievers tended to employ more strategies than others such as, translating only for the most important words, trying to guess the meaning first by looking at the sentence around it then open dictionary to clarify their understanding, never translate word by word, paying attention more on grammatical clue, try to write every single crucial information or clue of the text, and thinking aloud and make guess. In rereading the text the high achievers in this class tended to not employ this strategy during reading activity. It was in contrast with the study which conducted by Omar in (2014), it revealed that 66,6 % good readers frequently used this strategy to help them in understanding the text. Furthermore, Omar's research supported Harrison's statement in (2004, p. 113) who says "repeated reading is effective to increase students' reading proficiency". In addition, the high achievers also employed grammatical clue and guessing the meaning in understanding the difficult sentence or unfamiliar words of the text. One of them said *"If I see difficult words, I will pay attention more to grammatical clue and try to guess the meaning of the words by looking at the sentence around them to find out and guess the appropriate meaning."* It was in line with Oxford in (1990, p. 92) who said that using grammatical clue is related to how to guess the meaning and it is good strategy for learner.

Furthermore, in post-reading activity unintentionally the low and high achievers employed same strategies such as having small discussion with some classmates and sometimes making/answering the questions. According to their opinion *"to convince my understanding I always get small discussion with my classmate especially to the higher achievers. I do that because having small discussion will give me chance to clarify my understanding. Thus it really improves my*

confidence and makes my understanding be better and reduce my hesitation. Furthermore, sometimes I also make or answer some questions to know how far and how deep my understanding on the text substance." The student's reason above indicates that they need a group work or discussion group in reading activity. It is in line with Oxford (1990, p. 171) who argued "cooperative with peer strategy involves a concerted effort to work together with other learners on activity with a common goal or reward." It means that sharing with each other would make the students easier in comprehending the text. It also is in line with Ismail's research in 2002, the data showed that most of high students had small discussion with their group or their teacher. Similarly, to convince their understanding the moderate achievers also employed discussion strategy in the end of their reading activity. One of them said *"in the end of my reading, to convince my understanding I usually share the idea or have small discussion with my classmate. Mmm.. because I think it is the best way to improve and convince my understanding. "*

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion above, it can be concluded that among low, moderate and high level English proficiency students have different reading strategies used. The data also showed that there are five aspects which frequently influence students' comprehension, such as motivation; when the students have great motivation on reading they can be easier in comprehending the text rather than the students who do not, linguistic competence; the students who have good language competence tend to have a merit to comprehend the text easily because their English proficiency is good enough, interest; when the students have great interest on the text they will get trouble-free in understanding the text which they read, characteristic of the page; the type of the text also influence students' comprehension, the more they read familiar text the more they can identify well the text and the last is

environment role which unconsciously gives a significant effect on the way how the students are able to recognize the text. The students who have reading habit in their life will be more effortless in comprehending the text rather than who do not.

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