

STUDENTS' READING TECHNIQUES DIFFICULTIES IN RECOUNT TEXT

Ayu Sonia Habibah Fisher

Department of English Education, Indonesia University of Education

Abstract: This study aims to investigate the students' reading techniques difficulties in recount text. The study is based on the theory proposed by Mikulecky and Jeffries (2004) regarding the reading techniques; previewing and predicting, scanning, skimming, summarizing and making inference. The study employed qualitative approach with a case study design. Fifteen students in the sixth semester of a state of University in Bandung were selected as the participants of the study. Reading test and semi-structured interview were used as the instruments. The data from the reading test in the form of students' responses were analyzed based on the scoring guide of reading techniques (adapted from Mikulecky and Jeffries, 2004). The findings of the study indicated that the most difficult reading technique is making inference. It can be seen that 53% of the students get a lower score. Based on the findings, it is suggested that English teachers put a big concern in developing students in being a good reader and giving a guidance in practicing the techniques.

Keywords: *reading, reading techniques, recount text.*

Introduction

In education, reading is highly important for the learners. It is a part of communication and the way of building knowledge (Emilia, 2010). Reading is also included into receptive skill besides listening. Receptive skill is the way in which people extract the meaning of the discourse they see or hear (Harmer, 2001: 199). To achieve the purpose of reading, which is to get general or detail information from the text, the students have to comprehend the text in order to understand the information effectively. Gillet and Temple (2004) argue that comprehension is the understanding new

information in life.. This thing will make students be more successful in applying and improving everything that had been learned and understood.

Reading is not only important for the learners in English speaking countries (e.g. United States, Australia and United Kingdom, etc.), but also in non-English speaking countries, especially Indonesia. The PISA study reported Indonesia students' reading performance in 2009 and 2012 as follows: In 2009, Indonesia ranked 59 of 67 countries; and in 2012, Indonesia ranked 64 of 65 countries. The report shows that Indonesian students' reading performance have decreased during the

periods. Furthermore, according to the Alliance for Excellent Education, approximately 8 million students in grades 4-12 read well below grade level (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007). It is also emphasized by the previous study conducted by Biancrosa and Snow (2006) who reported that nearly 70% problems of the secondary readers deal with 'reading comprehension'.

There are many studies concerning certain techniques in improving students' reading comprehension. Kerr (2009) cautioned against the abandonment of classroom task that involve skimming, scanning, and inferring. Kispal (2008) investigated the effectiveness of teaching inference skill for reading.

The fact is there are many reading techniques or reading strategies which can help students to read. This paper aims to discover students' reading technique difficulties in reading recount text by using several techniques based on the theory of reading techniques or reading comprehension skill by Mikulecky and Jeffries (2004). The techniques are categorized into several types, but the researcher decided to focus on five reading techniques, such as previewing and predicting, scanning, skimming, making inference, and summarizing) The study was conducted in the sixth semester of college students' in order to see their

difficulties in answering questions which are represented five reading techniques. Since the study of examining students' reading techniques difficulties in recount text in Indonesia is still rare, it is expected that this study will contribute to the betterment of students' reading ability in Indonesia.

Literature Review

- **Reading in EFL**

Reading plays a crucial role in all fields of studies because learners can acquire a great deal of knowledge through reading activities (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983). There are four skills in learning language: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Those skills are divided into receptive and productive skills. Reading is known as receptive skill in learning a language. The inclusion of reading in receptive skill is based on the characteristics of reading, which the language users receive written language (Harmer, 1998). Reading is concerned mainly with learning to recognize the ranted symbols that represent language and to respond intellectually when being asked about the content of the text he has read. However, in most cases, it seems that reading is a contact between eyes and text. In other words, reading is a visual or sensory process. In this process, a reader

should acquire visual capability to react to the graphic symbols (Field, 1997). In many situations, reading is considered to be the indispensable channel of communication in an ever widening world. Reading is a part of the way we use language in daily life in order to communicate with each other.

- **Definition of Reading**

There are many definitions of reading, which have been stated by many experts in this field. The definition and meaning of reading itself depend on the purpose of the reader, the text and textual content, the attitude of the readers toward the text, the reading materials, and the experience of the reader. Harmer (1998) defines reading as an exercise dominated by the eyes and the brain. Nunan (2003) defines that reading as a fluent process of readers considering information represented in a text and their prior knowledge to get the meaning of the text. He also adds that the purpose of reading is comprehension. It means that, in the reading process, the readers not only depend on the information drawn from the text, but they also should recall their prior knowledge to fully comprehend the text. Readers read a text with a great store of prior knowledge and experience, including some assumption about the text.

- **Reading Difficulties**

There is a widespread case among academies in Asia that a young learner should focus on speaking and listening than reading and writing (Paul, 2003, p. 83). Learning English as a foreign language for some students is considered as a difficult thing (Westwood, 2008, p. 14).

Students who failed in reading tend to see reading as a painful experience, build their own mindset about reading as a demanding activity where readers have to read a text correctly; they see reading as a process of getting a word right rather than see it as an enjoying activity.

The factors that cause the failure in reading are the failure to understand a word or a sentence, how sentences relate to one another, how the information fits together in meaningful ways and lack of interest or concentration.

- **The Sub-skills and Techniques of Reading**

Reading is a receptive skill. Readers or students can be claimed successful where they are like expert in all most of some sub-skills, and apply it to get a good comprehension when reading a text. According to Brown (2001), he stated that “technique is any of a wide variety of exercises, activity, or devices

used in the language classroom for realizing lesson objectives". There are many techniques or strategies that can be used in reading. In this research, the researcher decided to choose five of techniques in reading (Skimming, Scanning, Previewing and Predicting, Making Inference and Summarizing) based on the theory from Mikulecky and Jeffries (2004) to get an efficient and effective reading comprehension for readers/students for basic need in academic reading.

The reason why researchers choose those techniques is due to the need of this study, which analyzes the students' reading techniques difficulties in recount text. The respondents which are the third semester of college students also became the consideration because the five techniques are in accordance with what they need in academic reading.

- **Skimming**

Skimming is one of the tools that can be use to read efficiently. Skimming refers to looking only for the general or main ideas, and works best with non-fiction (or factual) material. With skimming, the overall understanding is reduced because the reader does not read everything. The reader reads only what is important for the purpose. Skimming takes

place while reading and allows the reader to look for details in addition to the main ideas.

It also means reading the text quickly to get general meaning. This requires speed reading skill. The benefit of this technique is that it can allow you to familiarize yourself with a text. It is useful for reading passage in comprehension test, for answering cloze passages that test grammatical knowledge, or for reading academic articles or textbook chapters. This technique is not appropriate to use for reading a whole book. According to Mikulecky and Jeffries (2004), skimming is high-speed reading that can you save time and help you get through lots of material quickly. It is different from other kinds of high-speed reading, such as previewing and scanning. Skimming is "glancing rapidly through a text to determine its gist, for example in order to decide whether a research paper is relevant to our own work or to keep ourselves superficially informed about matters that are not of great importance to us." 'Gist' is a major point of information of a text. This statement is also supported by Grellet (1996) who state that skimming is the reading for getting the gist (*main point or general meaning*) of a text. Various reading schemes recommend as a starting process because by starting with skimming

the reader will have a framework to accommodate the whole text because it is a quick process of reading.

Many people think that skimming is a haphazard process placing the eyes where ever they fall. However, to skim effectively, there has to be a structure, but the reader does not read everything. There are a several ways to do skimming; skimming to get an overall impression, skimming a text using first line of paragraphs, skimming a text using a first and last paragraph and skimming a text using a section heading.

- **Scanning**

Scanning means reading slowly and carefully and picking out certain key words or phrases. It allows you to pick out specific information from a text. It does not mean reading word by word, it just means reading carefully. For scanning to be successful, it is needed to understand how the material is structured as well as comprehend what is read so the reader can locate the specific information they need. Scanning also allows to find details and other information in a hurry. To do scanning there are few ways to do it; establishing the purpose, locating the appropriate material, and knowing how the information is structured before start scanning is essential.

The scanned material is typically arranged in the following ways: alphabetically, chronologically, non-alphabetically, by category, or textually. Alphabetical information is arranged in order from A to Z, while chronological information is arranged in time or numerical order. Information can be also be arranged in non- alphabetical order, such as a television listing, or by category, listings of like items such as an auto parts catalog. Sometimes information is located within the written paragraphs of text, also known as a textual sense, as in an encyclopedia entry.

The benefit of this technique is most useful for picking out the key learning points when ready for learning. Mikulecky and Jeffries (2004, p. 25), states that “scanning is very high-information. When you scan, you have a question in mind. You do not read every word, only key words that will answer your question”. In addition Brown (2001) states that scanning is quickly searching for some particular piece or pieces of information in a text or passage. Based on this definition, scanning has a purpose to extract some specific information without reading through the whole text. It is also makes the time efficiently. There are a variety of texts suitable for scanning; indexes, dictionaries, maps,

advertisements, reference materials, and many others.

- **Prediction**

Prediction is fundamental to comprehension. According to Duffy (2003), predicting is the strategy most relied upon as we begin reading. Good readers anticipate meaning. They do this by predicting what they think is going to happen in the selection and by revising their predictions as they read. Students rely on previous study and experiences to make educated guesses about material to be read. Smith (1988) defined predicting as the prior elimination of unlikely alternatives.

The simple definition come from Grellet (1996) who defines prediction as the faculty of predicting or guessing what is to come next, making use grammatical, lexical and cultural clue. The benefit of this technique is can prepare your mind to absorb, interpret, check, and confirm information. Studies have shown that that good readers are mentally prepared to read a text; they have certain expectations that they confirm, reject, or refine as they read. Prediction means making intelligent guesses about what a textbook, chapter or section contains uses only a small sample of the text. The more the subject is known, the easier it is for the reader to make prediction because it can relate the samples

of new text to our existing knowledge. When the knowledge of the subject is limited, reader has to make maximum use of all available clues to predict well.

Making predictions is a strategy in which readers use information from a text (including titles, headings, pictures, and diagrams) and their own personal experiences to anticipate what they are about to read (or what comes next). A reader involved in making predictions is focused on the text at hand, constantly thinking ahead and also refining, revising, and verifying his or her predictions. This strategy also helps students make connections between their prior knowledge and the text.

- **Previewing**

Previewing is a pre-reading skill by which the reader tries to gather as much information about the text as he/she can before reading it. The aim of previewing is to find out what readers going to be reading before actually they are read. Preview before read is to get an idea of what will find in the text. Previewing a text mentally prepares readers to receive information from written materials. This gathering of information helps the reader to have a general picture of the text. Grellet (1996) defines that previewing is a very quick reading technique to find out

some information about a text. This technique involves using the title of a text, the table of contents, the index, the appendix, the preface of the author or publisher, headings or subtitles of chapters and paragraphs, information on the back cover, acknowledgement, and so on. It is common for students to dive into an academic text and begin reading in a hurry, which is often counterproductive. When reading for academic purposes, it is preferable to read with certain goals in mind.

- **Making Inference**

Inferring—making inferences—is often described as making a logical guess or "reading between the lines." Making an inference is a lot like the chemical process of forming a chemical compound—when two elements combine and form a new substance. Readers make inferences when they are able to take their own experiences and combine them with information they gather from what they read. The result is that they create new meaning or draw a conclusion that isn't explicitly stated in the reading (Zwiers, 2005).

Mikulecky and Jeffries (2004) states that good readers constantly make inferences as they read. That means they think like a detective and look for clues in the text. Then they use these clues to guess about the text and about the writer's ideas.

This is especially important when some ideas are not directly stated.

For students, it can be difficult to understand a text because it contains few linking words and few signpost expressions. In such situations we have to make use of two kinds of information to make sense of what we read. The first information is from the text, i.e. clues from the words, sentences and ideas which make up the text. The second information is provided by the readers, i.e. clues from outside the text, from our own knowledge of the world.

- **Summarizing**

According to Mikulecky and Jeffries (2004), summarizing is the process of retelling the important parts of a passage in a much shorter form. Summarizing is also a good study skill, he states that "Often you must read, understand, and remember information from several textbook chapters. When you write summaries of your reading, the summaries can help you review for examinations". Summarizing is a strategy in which readers sort through the information presented in a text in order to pull out and paraphrase the essential ideas. It requires readers to determine what is important, to condense this information, and to state it in their own words (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007).

Summary writing is also one of the important academic skills for students to show their reading comprehension. It can be said that if students can summarize well, exactly, they improve their reading ability (Budi, 2009; Palmer, 2003). It is a valuable practice for students in developing reading and writing skills, also it is related to paraphrasing (Sotiriou, 2002). Many researchers have found that summarization process connected with reading and writing. Corbeil (2000) pointed out that “the summarization process in second language becomes a valuable assessment tool to conduct students’ progress towards the acquisition of second language reading comprehension skills”. Also, cultivating students’ writing skill through reading is important (Liu, 2008). Palmer (2003) stated that summarizing is based on a learning process, and the perfect comprehension of a text will be a necessary step in order to teach students to condense information in a new piece of discourse.

It can be concluded that summarizing is a technique in reading to retelling the stories or passage in a short version by sorting the information and paraphrasing the ideas.

- **Definition of Recount**

A recount is a text that tells about past experience or events that can be based on the author’s personal or historical events. This type of text is chosen as means in which the students write. It is selected since they can feel free to explore the story that is based on their personal experience and eventually convert their ideas into written form.

The purpose of a Recount is to inform and entertain the readers. To attain its purpose, the text needs to involve several steps namely, an orientation which lets the reader know who is involved, where, when and others and the retelling of a series of events in chronological sequence (Derewianka, 1990). A piece of text that retells past events, usually in the order in which they happened is a recount text. It begins with by telling the reader who was involved, what happened, where the events took place and when it happened (Derewianka, 1990)

Methodology

This study used a descriptive-qualitative method, embracing the characteristics of a case study approach. The focal point of this study was on the response of reading comprehension test answered by sixth semester college students in a state university in Bandung. The method was used to discover the

phenomenon as seen from the participants' point of view (Creswell, 2009).

This study will be conducted at a university in Bandung. The respondents of the study are fifteen of college students in sixth semester. The college students' responses were categorized into three representing all levels of achievements: low achiever, middle achiever, and high achiever.

There are two ways used in collecting the data in this research: reading test and interview. Reading comprehension text is used to gather the students' answer and to get an outline of the reading skill that they have. The interview is used to collect the data and find deeper information about students' reading skill and what the reading techniques difficulty is in recount text. Even though reading test and interview tend to be used in the quantitative research, the focus of the study is to search for opinion, not a number or percentage. The samples of the research were also fewer in term of numbers, which makes the research become more qualitative. Moreover, the numerical data serve as a supporting data only.

The data which had been collected from reading comprehension test are expected to show the result of the difficulty of students' reading techniques

in reading recount texts in English. The result of the students' answer of completing a short - answer test was scored by the researcher using scoring guidelines adapted from Mikulecky and Jeffries (2004).

Data Presentation and Discussion

• Reading Test and Interview Result

The type of the text used in this reading test is recount text. There are three recount texts given to students; "Taking on Mountains", "Life and Death", "The Loan" that text is taken from *www.western.edu*. The texts were selected based on many considerations.

The first is the type of text; researcher decided to select this text is because of recount text has one interesting feature is that they have a story which close with the students daily life, because it is all about the experience.

Second is the content; each text has a fairly common content and suitable to be given to students of sixth semester, not too easy but not too difficult. The first text is about someone experience in riding a bike to a mountain, the second text is about a friendship between two people who have a same dangerous hobby, and the last text is about the loan. That text is familiar in our daily life.

Third is the length; the length of the text is enough and appropriate for sixth semester students. Each text has approximately 1200 words or longer texts. A common argument in favor of the use of longer text in, such for testing for academic purposes is that this practice reflects more closely the situation where students have to read and study long texts.

Fourth is the language features and the structure. There are some generalization of recount's language features, such as proper nouns that inform the participants who involved in, the use of past tense to retells the events, the use of action verbs (went, saw, played, studied, etc.), the frequent use words which link events in time (next, later, when, then, after, before, first, at the same time, as soon as she left, late on Friday, and others), and personal comments about the event (Derewianka, 1990).

The text also contains the generic structure of recount text, which has the three stages. The first stage is orientation which provides information about the setting and situation of the participants. The second stage is record of events (series of events) which tells about sequence of events or what happened to these participants from the beginning to the end of the event. The last stage is re-orientation which brings the listener or

reader back into the present (Emilia, 2010). This re-orientation stage is an optional element that can be added on the recount text.

The reading test indicates that the most difficult reading techniques encountered by college students is making inference. It is shows through the scores of students which mostly get a lower score. It is also supported by the result of interview, which students agree that making inference technique is the most difficult technique among the other techniques.

Conclusions

This study investigated students' reading techniques difficulties in reading a recount text. This study has clarified the findings from previous studies focused on the effectiveness of reading techniques and strategies in reading comprehension through certain techniques and certain texts (see for example Kispal, 2008; Kerr, 2009).

The result of the study indicates that the students master almost all five techniques tested in this study. However, the result of the study shows that making inference becomes the most difficult reading technique for the students. Based on the findings of this study, making inference is considered as the most difficult category for the students, because

the expected responses to these questions are stated implicitly in the text. Generally, this result is dominated by lower achiever students. It indicates that 53% of the students need more guidance in practicing making inference skill in reading, because good readers constantly make inferences as they read (Mikulecky & Jeffries, 2004). Thus, they create new meaning or draw a conclusion that is not explicitly stated in the reading (Zwiers, 2005).

The implication of the result of the study is that the teacher should provide an accurate and clear understanding about reading technique and also provide appropriate exercises for each technique.

In contrast, the technique that students master in recount text is scanning; 100% students achieved a perfect score. It is influenced by the expected response for this question was stated clearly in the text. Furthermore, for the other reading techniques, students seem to master each technique. Students only need more guidance in reading and practice in answering the similar question. The finding indicates that students difficult in making inference.

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