

STUDENTS' ABILITY IN COMPREHENDING ENGLISH TEXTS



Sudiran

Students will succeed in finishing their and to understand English texts. On the other hand, Students who cannot comprehend printed English books will have a number of problems because they are shortage of knowledge. As a result, it is very important for students to learn how to understand English texts.

Reading is one of students' academic lives which is able to enlarge students knowledge. It is the most important in academic activities because it can determine students to complete their study in university. Students who read books as many as possible will obtain much more information than some other students who read far fewer books. Acquiring much information, they become cleverer and able to finish their study as quickly as possible. On the other hand, students who read few books or never do so will lack information with which to make them unsuccessful. They can not tackle their tasks, nor can they handle their lives.

Indonesia as under developing country is still facing many problems such as poverty, stupidity, and having a set-back in technology. Those problems cause the government to improve the system of education in order to increase the quality of human resources. Through education government hope that people are able to solve their problems by transferring technology from modern countries to Indonesia. Government has spent a lot of funds to finance education. A number of students are given scholarship to the university, and some other students are sent abroad by government in order to study science and technology.

Students who received scholarship and finished their study will be appointed civil employment.

Because of under developing country, Indonesia needs skillful students to maximize nation building towards industrial country. The demands for more skillful students, government has established universities in order to add science and technology. The establishment of universities are not only done by state, but they are also done by private foundation. In this case, privates have the same responsibility of education as state to educate people and to make nation lives better. Based on its establishment, in practice, there are two kinds of university i.e. state university and private one. The state universities are subsidized by government based on the state budget. The private universities, however, are financed by public and students' parents who are concerned with them. Students who are studying in the state universities have

no problematic facilities such as library, laboratory, lectures, etc. In contrast, in private ones students sometimes face those problems because the lead of university lacks finances with which to make the facilities complete. As a result, the quality of state university students' skills are upper than the private universities ones.

Since 18th century, when the industrial revolution was occurred, a number of science and technology were being written in English and were being translated into other languages. At the time, English became popular because many experts wrote their science in English. The industrial revolution did not only cause many modern countries rise, but it also made the number of scientists learns English and translated all science and technology which were printed in English into their own languages. The scientists who succeeded in learning English and in translating science and technology have changed their countries from under developing countries to modern ones. Japan, Taiwan, Hongkong and Korea are the examples of some of countries which could able to translate and to transfer English science and technology into their languages because of their experts' efforts. In other words, mastering English skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing is a prerequisite to make country progress since English is as international language and many scientists print their inventions in English.

Malang Muhammadiyah University is one of the private universities in East Java province of Indonesia which has solid roles to take part in developing country. As higher education institution, it has some heavy responsibilities to enlarge science and technology and to increase the quality of human resources. It consists of ten faculties and the faculty of economics is one of them. The Management Department where the researcher conducts this research is one of the department of economics faculty.

Based on the curriculum of management department, English as subject is taught at the first and second semester, and its main objective is to make students comprehend English

text. It is reasonable since students will face a great number of economics theory books which were printed in English. If they can read and understand English text, they will succeed in finishing their study on time as they master all economics theories written in English. On the other hand, students who can not comprehend printed English economics books will possess a number of problems since they are shortage of knowledge. Therefore, the students of Management Department of Malang Muhammadiyah University must have the ability in comprehending English text in order to make them successful because a great number of scientists write their inventions in English.

From the facts above, it can be identified some problems as follow :

- a. What factors can make students difficult in comprehending English text ?
- b. What problems are faced by students in comprehending English text ?
- c. How well are their ability to comprehend English text ?

For this research necessity, the writer has limited the problem on the third one i.e. "How well are the ability of Management Department students of Economics Faculty in Malang Muhammadiyah University to comprehend English text ?" In this research what the writer means about *How well* is the students' scores achieved in comprehending English text. Then their scores can be classified into *poor, fair, and very good*.

The objectives of this research are (1) to know the students' ability in comprehending English texts (2) to know the students' scores achieved in comprehending English texts.

This research finding can be used as contribution to English lecturers in order to improve their technique of teaching English skills especially in reading texts and to support English lecturers to increase students' ability in comprehending English texts.

The scope of this research is that it is conducted in Management Department of Economics Faculty of Malang Muhammadiyah University at the second semester students. The language skill treated is reading comprehension which is adapted from lecturer's handbook of

Business since the book consist of many reading comprehension texts. Using the Business Book, the writer gives the students texts and asks them to answer the questions. This research is dealing with students' ability in comprehending English Text only.

Masri Singarimbun, et al (1989) state that hypothesis is a means of scientific research which is quite important and is indispensable since it is an operational instrument of theory. As a deduction result of theory or of proposition, a hypothesis is so specific that a research is able to test it empirically.

Based on the Singarimbun's idea above, the researcher has formulated the hypothesis of research as follows :

- a. Ha : There is a significant different of students' scores between observable frequency and its theoretical frequency.
- b. Ho : There is no significant different of students' scores between observable frequency and its theoretical frequency.

Some Steps to Develop Comprehension Skills

English as a means of communication has four skills i.e. listening, speaking, reading, and writing. those skills can be achieved thoroughly if they are supported by language components such as phonology, structure, and vocabulary. Strang et al (1967:8) state that reading is not as simple as people thing. Pronouncing the words correctly and knowing the meaning of each words on the passage does not mean that someone is reading if he or she does not have any idea of what the writer says. Someone needs to thing, to feel and to imagine in order to grasp what the writer has in mind.

Based on the quotation above, reading does not only involve pronouncing the words and understanding the meaning of words in the passage, but it also needs the reader to comprehend what the writer expresses his or her idea on the text.

According to Marksheffle (1966:12) reading is a highly complex, purposeful, thinking process engage in by the entire organism while

acquiring knowledge, evolving new ideas, solving problems or relaxing and recuperating through the interpretation of printed symbols. In this case students' experiences and the background of knowledge are very significant of reading. To understand the printed words, the students need to recall the concepts that they have already had in mind and relate them to the written ideas and get new information from the written ideas or passages.

Tinker and McCullough (1975:9) state that reading involves the recognition of printed or written symbols which serve as stimuli for the recall of meanings built up through manipulation of concepts already possessed by the reader. The resulting meanings are organized into thoughts process according to the purposes adopted by the reader. Such an organization leads to modified thought and as behavior or else leads to new behavior, which takes its place either in personal or in social development. The Tinker's definition is based on the behavioural sense of reading. It means that after reading and comprehending a passage, someone is able to behave to new behaviour as outcomes of reading activity.

As Gillet and Temple said,

"Reading is making sense of written language. The most basic operation of the reading process is sense-making: getting and creating ideas, information, and mental images from print. Making sense is often referred to as comprehending in order to comprehend a number of processes occur, often simultaneously." (1986:8).

In other word, Gillet emphasized the importance of reading to capture ideas and information from printed message. David P.Harris (1974:58) said that readings were generally built around the grammatical structure and lexical items which the students would need to communicate orally, and the content of the material was regarded as relatively unimportant.

Furthermore, Robert L.Zorn (1980:70) defines the meaning of comprehension i.e. the art of understanding what someone reads. It is invisible and mysterious, and none can trace or see it. Comprehension is simply the understanding we receive when we read something.

In understanding Reading Problems book,

Gillet and Temple stated that most readers who had progressed beyond beginning reading had three reading levels, each appropriate for reading of different kinds of text for different purposes.

a. The Independent Level

At this level of difficulty the students can read text easily, without help. Comprehension of what is read is generally excellent, and silent reading at this level is rapid because almost all the words are recognized and understood at sight. The students have to stop reread, if at all, to analyze a new word. Oral reading is generally fluent, and occasional divergences from the written text reread interfere with comprehension.

b. The Instructional Level

At this level the material is not really easy but is still comfortable. Here the students is challenged and will benefit most from instruction. Comprehension is good, but help is needed to understand some concepts. The silent reading rate is fairly rapid, although usually slower than at the independent level. Some word analysis is necessary, but the majority of the the words are recognized at sight. Oral reading is fairly smooth and accurate, and oral divergences from the written text usually make sense in the context and do not cause a loss of meaning.

c. The Frustration Level

Here the material is too difficult in vocabulary or concepts to be read successfully. Comprehension is poor, with major ideas forgotten or misunderstood. Both oral and silent reading are usually slow and labored, with frequent stops to analyze unknown words. Oral reading divergences are frequent and often cause the reader to lose the sense of what was read. Because of this difficulty, it is frustrating for students to attempt to read such material for sustained periods of time, and their efforts often fail. This level is to be avoided in instruction. (Gillet and Temple, 1986:114)

According to Robert L.Zorn (1980:71), there are seven steps to improve comprehension skills. There are as follows:

a. Attention

It is an absolute prerequisite to intensive mental impression. Impression from printed pages are the essence of comprehension. In other word, the more attention students pay to something, the stronger mental impression they will receive.

b. Interest

Interest is very important. Someone always gives voluntary attention to anything he or she is interested in. Interest is an indication of someone's values and priorities.

c. Purpose

Most of the reading people do is not the result of the compelling interest. It is either because they are required to read the material or feel they have to, because it is related to work, school, college, etc.

d. Concentration

Concentration is the process of holding students' attention long enough to establish the vivid impressions which contribute so much to recall abilities.

e. Association

Association is a very useful way to fix ideas in one's mind for later relation or recall. The development of word association should improve one's ability to recall what he reads. Thus, the person who is trying to recall has several handles to take hold of in calling forth any set of related facts or ideas which he has impressed upon his mind through previous reading.

f. Repetition

All other things being equal, the intensity of an impression can be increased by repeatedly reviewing it. Studies on comprehension show that the first time a person reads something his comprehension usually ranges from 40 to 60 percent. The second and the third time he reads the same material there is still some further increase in comprehension.

g. Practice

Practice is highly effective in improving comprehension when it is properly couple with repetition. In studying difficult material for the first time or in reviewing for exams, just reading

is not enough. Students need to do more than cover the pages in the usual way. They should write the subject matter down in outline form and should make a summary or compile an organized list.

Reading Skills

As it has been stated before, reading is one of language skills. Students or common people are capable of understanding English text if they are supported or provided with language components such as phonology, grammar, and vocabulary. Furthermore, the way to make students interested in reading English text is that lecturer or English teacher has to select the reading comprehension texts which are appropriate for the students' knowledge background.

Evangelia Evangelidou et al (1990) state that the first requirement in a reading lesson is that the text should (1) interest the students, (2) be at right level of difficulty, and (3) be authentic. Moreover, they also explain that reading involves a variety of skills which include :

a. Scanning,

It means that reading is quickly going through a text to find a specific piece of information.

b. Skimming,

Here reading means glancing rapidly through a text to determine its general content or gist.

c. Intensive Reading,

This is an activity involving reading for details. The aim at intensive reading is to arrive at a profound and detailed understanding of the text, not only of what it means, but also of how the meaning is produced.

d. Extensive Reading,

It refers to read longer texts or books to grasp the global meaning.

The Criteria of Evaluating Students' Scores

As David P. Harris states, the data from the table might be further simplified and generalized as follows:

Test Scores Probable class performance

80 — 100	Good to excellent
60 — 79	Average to good
50 — 59	Poor to average
0 — 49	Poor.

For this necessity of research, the researcher decides to simplify the students' scores into three categories as follows :

\geq 80	=	Very good
60 — 79	=	Fair
\leq 59	=	Poor

Research Method

As Walter R. Borg et al (1983) state, most research in education can be classified as one of two types — descriptive studies and those aimed at discovering causal relationships. Descriptive studies are primarily concerned with finding out "what is". Observational and survey methods are frequently used to collect descriptive data.

For this reason, the research method used by the researcher is descriptive method. By using it, the researcher wants to obtain information which is dealing with the current phenomena of students' ability in English. After gaining the information the researcher attempts to describe how is the ability of Management Department Students of Economics Faculty in comprehending English texts.

In this case descriptive research deals with systematical description of a situation or area of interest factually or accurately. In a literal sense, it describes situation or events in which the accumulation of the data based solely on description. Consequently, the researcher collects the information about the students' ability in English based on the comprehension tests given, and he is going to generalize from the result obtained.

English as basic and general subject matter (MKDU) is given at the first and second semester in Management Department of Economics Faculty of Malang Muhammadiyah University. This research has been conducted to the second semester students since they have ever received

English before so they have experiences of comprehending English texts. The second semester students of Management Department consist of ten classes, from IIa to IIj, and each class contains 90 students. In other word, the second semester students of Management Department consist of 900 students. All those students are taken as population of this research.

According to Suharsimi Arikunto (1992), there are two ways to get representative sample based on population.

They are as follows:

- If the population is less than 100 students, it can be taken all as sample.
- If the population is more than 100 students, it can be taken 10 % — 15 % or 20 % — 25 % as a representative sample.

Since the total of students at second semester of Management Department are 900 students, the researcher takes 10 % of them as sample i.e. 90 students or one class. The researcher uses the culster random sampling technique to get the representative sample. At first, the researcher writes signs IIa to IIj on ten pieces of paper. Then, he rolls and put them in a glass. After that, the researcher asks someone to shake and to take one piece of paper rolled. From the paper, the researcher decides it as sample of the research.

According to Evelyn Hatch (1982), a variable can be defined as an attribute of a person or of an object which varies from person to person or from object to object.

Based on the statement above, the researcher has identified variables as follows :

- 1) Independent Variable : Students' ability in comprehending English texts.
- 2) Dependent Variable : Students' scores of reading comprehension.

Suharsimi Arikunto explains that in research activities, data has the highest position because it reflects the variables investigated and has function as instrument of proving the hypothesis. As a result, it is valid or not, it depends on the instrument which is applied to collect the data.

To acquire valid data, the researcher follows the David P. Harris' book titled "Testing English as a Second Language" to construct the objective test. As David P. Harris states, there should be sufficient content to yield at least six or seven comprehension items for pretesting. Passages of between 100 and 250 words are about the proper length.

For this reason, the researcher adapts the texts of reading comprehension from the Business book which is applied by English lecturer as handbook for teaching English in Management Department classes. Then, the researcher chooses four reading comprehension texts which contains about 100 words each. From each text, the researcher constructs five objective test items that are provided with four options each. Because there are four texts of reading comprehension, the researcher constructs twenty test items as an instrument to obtain data.

The Data Analysis

Having finished the research, the researcher wants to analyse the data obtained by applying Chi Square formula. As it has been explained in chapter III, this research consists of two variables i.e. an independent variable (Students' ability in comprehending English texts), and a dependent variable (Students' scores of reading comprehension).

As it has been stated above, the researcher applies the Chi Square test to analyse the correlation of students' scores between observable frequency and its theoretical frequency. After arranging the students' scores from the lowest up to the highest score, the researcher categorizes the scores into three categories as follows :

More than 80 = very good
60 — 79 = Fair
Less than 59 = Poor

Furthermore, the researcher tabulates the scores into the table of students' ability.

Table.IV.2. The Result of Students' scores in Comprehending English Texts

Students' ability	Observable Frequency	Theoretical Frequency
Very good	21	30
Fair	49	30
Poor	20	30
The Total	90	90

Having tabulated the scores, the researcher computes them by using Chi Square test, and the result is as follows :

$$\begin{aligned} X^2 &= \frac{(21 - 30)^2}{30} + \frac{(49 - 30)^2}{30} + \frac{(20 - 30)^2}{30} \\ &= 2,7 + 12 + 3,3 \\ &= 18,000 \end{aligned}$$

Based on the result above, it can be concluded that the score of X^2 -rat is equal to 18,000. Then, the researcher consults to the table of Chi Square' value (X^2) to interpret X^2 -rat. Before consulting X^2 -rat to X^2 -table, the researcher has calculated the degree of freedom (df). The d.f. of the X^2 -rat is 2 or d.f., $3 - 1 = 2$.

After knowing the degree of freedom's score, the researcher consults to the table of Chi Square' value either at 5% level or at 1% level. Then, because the score of d.f. is 2, it shows the score of X^2 -table is as follows:

- At the 5% level; X^2 -tab = 5.991
- At the 1% level; X^2 -tab = 9.210

As a result, it can be concluded that the score of X^2 -rat is higher than X^2 -tab at both 5% and 1% levels.

In other word, it can be stated as follows :

$$5.991 < 18,000 > 9.210$$

The Criteria of Hypothesis Test

Having known the result X^2 -rat and X^2 -table, the researcher wants to analyse them into Hypothesis Test. The criteria of hypothesis test are as follows :

- Ho : If X^2 -rat is smaller than X^2 -table, it means that there is no significant difference between observable frequency and its theoretical frequency.
- Ha : If X^2 -rat is equal or bigger than X^2 -table, it means that there is significant difference between observable frequency and its theoretical frequency.

Based on the result of X^2 -rat and X^2 -table above, it can be tabulated into the table below :

Table. IV. 3. The Result of Different Analysis on Chi Square's score

Sign. Level	X^2 -rat	X^2 -tab	Ha
5%	18.000	5.991	Accepted
1%		9.210	

From the fact above, the researcher accepts Alternative Hypothesis (Ha) as the result of computation. Moreover, it can be stated that the students' scores in comprehending English texts have significant difference between observable frequency and its theoretical frequency because the result of Chi Square is higher than its table's value. For this reason, the researcher's Ha, as it has been stated in chapter I, is accepted because its truth has been tested by applying the chi square analysis.

Besides, based on the table IV2. (The result of students' Scores in comprehending English texts) above, it can be explained that the scores of students in *Fair* category is higher than the others (*poor, very good*). The percentage of Fair category is 54.5 %, and the percentage of Poor and of Very good categories are 22.2 % and 23.3 %.

In other word, it can be stated as below :

Fair	=	54.4%
Very good	=	23.3%
Poor	=	22.2%
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Total	=	99.9%

From the percentage above, it can be concluded that the students' ability in comprehending English texts in Department of Management are *Fair*.

Conclusion and Suggestion

Conclusion,

Referring to the explanation and calculation of data in previous chapter, the researcher concludes that

- a. The students' scores in comprehending English texts have significant difference between observable frequency and its theoretical frequency. It is supported with the result of X^2 -rat obtained i.e. 18.000. It exceeds the value of X^2 -table i.e. 5.991 for 5% level and 9.210 for 1% level with d.f.; $3 - 1 = 2$. For this reason, the researcher may decide that the students' scores in comprehending English texts have significant difference between observable frequency and its theoretical frequency. Besides, the researcher may conclude that the students' ability in comprehending English texts are *Fair*.
- b. From the percentage of students' scores in chapter IV, it has been obtained the students' percentage of ability i.e. *Poor* 22.2%, *Fair* 54.4%, and *Very good* 23.3%. In this case, the fair percentage is higher than the others.

Accordingly, the researcher may decide that the students' ability in comprehending English texts are *Fair*.

Suggestion,

Based on the conclusion above, the researcher proposes some suggestion. They are :

- 1) For The English Lecturer,

English lecturer needs to arouse the students' motivation in reading skills, and he or she has to improve his or her technique to teach reading skill since teaching English especially reading skill needs to apply technique which is appropriate for increasing students' achievement.

Then, English lecturer has to select the materials to make them suitable for the students' intelligence level, and he or she

has to make students interest in reading the materials given.

2) For The Students,

Students have to try hard to practise their reading skills. They have to read English texts as many as possible since thier major books of economics theory that are used by their lecturer are in Englis. They have to increase their achievement by reading English texts appropriate to their major of subject matter. They will fail in achieving their glorious future lives unless they study hard and read English books as many as possible.

3) For The University as an Institution of Higher Education,

As the institution of higher education, Muhammadiyah University of Malang must provide the students with a complete and large library. As university, Muhammadiyah University of Malang is not only expected to provide the students with a complete library, but it is also expected to provide the students with qualified lecturers, administration staff which is conducive to students' learning process, and a good environment. In other word, to increase the quality of students, Muhammadiyah University of Malang has to give the students complete facilities for study.

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