The English Reading Proficiency of Universitas Padjadjaran Undergraduates: A Case Study in Faculty of Cultural Sciences

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Abstract: Reading competence is a critical element to be successful in learning in university level. This study aims to measure reading proficiency levels of the second year students and their attitude towards English. The method of this research is based upon the language attitudes theory, adopted from Sarnoff and Asmah, and a series of questionnaire based on Likert Scale. The reading proficiency is gained from a reading test evaluating five-component skills: vocabulary knowledge, drawing inferences and predictions, identifying references, identifying the main idea and summarizing skills, and identifying supporting information. The participants are 144 second year undergraduate students: 39 students from Japanese Study Program, 53 from History Study Program, and 52 students from Sundanese Study Program, enrolled in 2016-2017 academic year. The data are collected through a reading comprehension test. The result of this study indicates that there is a mixed and wide variation of students reading competence levels; there is one study program whose students have very good ability in reading English texts, another has students with middle ability, and the other one has very low ability. The students from the first study program are ready for reading advanced-level English texts, meanwhile a significant number of students in the study program last mentioned are inadequately prepared for university reading. This study is a preliminary research, for this result will be put as the initial data for creating and then testing an appropriate teaching method of further study in English.

1 INTRODUCTION

English is one of compulsory courses in all universities in Indonesia. In Universitas Padjadjaran, English course is given to students with the emphasis on reading skills, for it is considered that they will need it as they begin to study their own field of knowledge. They will add knowledge from English-language text sources as the references for their study, either from textbooks or international journals, both printed and digital.

Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren in the 1940s wrote a book entitled *How to Read a Book*, and mentioned that 'reading is tools', which then brought European society into literacy (Prijana and Rohman, 2016, p. 225). In a study of students' ability in reading textbooks, Prijana and Rohman (2016)) found that there was no significant relationship between high-GPA students and whether or not they read; however, the conclusion derived from their research is that students with high GPAs are more skilled at reading so they can read faster and get more information: "[...] which determines faster reading times [is] caused by skills and training factors. The more skilled at

reading, the shorter the reading time is." (Prijana and Rohman, 2016, p. 259-260). Therefore, students should be taught and trained reading skills, including reading (especially textbooks and journals) in English which is much more widely available in digital media.

Students of non-native English speakers often find difficulties in comprehending English textbooks and international journals. Chen (2017) discovered that graduate students in Chaoyang University of Technology, Taiwan, had medium-to-high levels of reading comprehension difficulties, because they did not know which reading strategy is appropriate to understand the journal articles. They had tried some reading strategies but failed to understand the English articles because of the lack of training in using the suitable reading strategy (Chen ,2017, p. 27-28). In the act of reading, Hermida (2009) has conducted a research on university students' approach to reading academic texts. She based her study on the previous research from J. Biggs (cited in Lavelle and Zuercher, 2001), saying that most university students at this time take a surface approach to reading. In this kind of approach, students only take stated information from the text, without linking it to other facts or knowledge. Therefore, they only use this limited

information in their memory in facing another reading test. On the contrary, a deep approach to reading makes the reader use high cognitive skills: analyzing, synthesizing, and solving problems. The deep reader tries to find the author's idea, the line and the structure of the argument. They use their previous knowledge and concepts to understand the information from the new contexts. Consequently, teachers have to train students to use the deep approach to reading academic tests (Hermida, 2009, p. 21).

From those previous researches, it could be seen that to comprehend an English text, students need to have a certain reading strategy. In the English courses in universities, the teacher must teach and train students to use the effective one. Kintsch (1998) had created a reading comprehension model of English texts. In line with Hermida (2009) argument, Kintsch (1998) suggested that readers must combine two reading models, which he then called as the Construction-Integration model. This concept is used in the current study.

University students need to improve their skill in comprehending English texts. Hellekjær (2009) discovered in his research that Norwegian undergraduate students also have serious difficulties in reading English (30% of the respondents), and others found it more difficult than reading their language (44%). Based on his other research, he argued that it was caused by the failure of the upper-secondary schools to develop the academic English reading proficiency that they need when they go to higher education. The Norwegian EFL teachers in the secondary schools did not teach reading strategies; even most of them did not know what reading skills and strategies are (Hellekjær, 2009, p. 212-213). It becomes a good idea to make a similar research on English teachers of junior and senior high schools in Indonesia, for the university students specifically in Universitas Padjadjaran face the same problem: their English reading proficiency is poor.

Another research on evaluating English reading proficiency is by Stoffelsma et al., (2017) who studied the reading proficiency, reading behavior, and reading attitude of 496 pre-service teachers in two universities in Ghana. She investigated the connection between students' reading proficiency and their behavior and attitude towards English. However, the result showed that there is no connection between those three variables, and she explained that the students possibly "inclined to give socially acceptable answers [...], whereas in practice they do not read as much as they report" (Stoffelsma et al., 2017, 111-112). The methodology of the current research refers to what (Stoffelsma et al., 2017) has done in hers.

Ntereke and Ramoroka (2017) also studied the reading competence of 51 Humanities students in University of Bostwana. He found that there is a mixed and variation of students' reading competence levels when they started their lecture in the first semester, and after taking the reading module in one whole semester, still a great number of students were not ready for university reading (Ntereke and Ramoroka, 2017, p. 9)

2 RESEARCH METHOD

The condition found by Ntereke and Ramoroka, (2017)) also happens to Universitas Padjadjaran students, especially those from Faculty of Cultural Sciences. Their reading competence is in wide range, and some of them are inadequately prepared for reading texts in university level. Therefore, a research is conducted to the specific third semester students of Universitas Padjadjaran.

The first step is to find out the students' ability to understand English texts, by giving a reading comprehension test to the students. The questions given are those that can explore their ability to get the topics and main ideas, supporting information, vocabulary meanings, and information retrieval from inference. In the next stage, the results of the data are analyzed, so which type of question is difficult is found out. The results of this study can be the basis of making learning models and textbooks that can be offered to the faculty.

In this study, the English learning process of the third semester students of Universitas Padjadjaran in 2016 has been evaluated by examining the ability to understand English texts. The respondents come from three study programs in the Faculty of Cultural Sciences, namely foreign language program (Japanese Study Program), non-foreign language study program (Sundanese Study Program), and non-language study program (History Study Program). They are given a reading test, taken from the upper-intermediate level text, which often appears in TOEFL. This test includes finding topics, getting main ideas, scanning/finding supporting information, guessing vocabulary, identifying references, and making inference.

The purpose of this research is to get an accurate description of the Faculty of Cultural Science students' ability after learning English for one semester. It is executed by measuring students' ability in understanding English. To achieve this goal, the

type of descriptive research has been used. Furthermore, the results of this study can be used as a basis for preparing appropriate learning models for students in different study programs, so that later it can be used by English lecturers at the Faculty of Cultural Sciences.

The research team has measured the level of students' reading comprehension of English text through analysis of the difficulty level of the given test. Preparation of questions in the test focused on five components of reading proficiency, namely: (1) vocabulary knowledge, (2) drawing inferences, (3) identifying references, (4) identifying the main ideas, and (5) identifying supporting information. The total number of questions in the test is 12 questions, with the division of 6 questions for Text 1 and 6 questions for Text 2. The spreads in each of the text questions are as follows: two questions on supporting information, one question on main ideas, one vocabulary question, one references question, and one inference question.

The compilation of these five components of proficiency is based on a reading comprehension model of the English text, called the Construction-Integration (CI) model from (Kintsch, 1998). The CI model distinguishes two reading models: the reader's text model and the situation model of the reader's interpretation. According to the text model, understanding the reading lies in two levels: local and global. The examples of local levels are knowledge of nouns, verbs, and modifiers, which construct sentence comprehension; whereas, at the global level, reading can use language knowledge and inter-sentence relationships to understand text content, such as inference techniques. In reading a text, it is also necessary to use model situation from the reader's interpretation. In this model, the reader uses the prior knowledge in order to understand the text being read, by searching for explicit and implicit information, in addition to building reader-free interpretation (Kintsch, 1998). Free interpretation can be influenced by the reader's intent, the purpose of reading, the text genre, and the evaluation of important information in the text (Grabe and Stoller, 2011). This technique is a part of high level reading skills, while the understanding of the meaning of words, phrases, and sentence structure formations are included in low-level reading skills. These two techniques, according to Kintsch (1998), are needed in reading comprehension. In this study, five skills are examined from these two models, as mentioned above.

The test of students' language attitude is adopted from the method used by Aziz (cited in Kaur, 2015)

in an investigation he executed to students of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. The definition of language attitudes is taken from who explains that language attitudes are "disposition to react favorably and unfavorably to a class of objects"; and also Asmah (cited in Kaur, 2015) who defines the concept as "the way an individual feels and thinks about something or someone". In this study, Universitas Padjadjaran students' attitude towards learning English is examined. This could give supporting information in creating a suitable learning method in further study on English.

The questionnaire, given in Indonesian language, meanwhile, is compiled based on Likert Scale, offering a method for measuring characteristics and personality traits of a person. This attitude measurement scale consists of questions with five alternative answers: (1) STS (*Sangat Tidak Setuju*)/Strongly Disagree; (2) TS (*Tidak Setuju*)/Disagree; (3) R (*Ragu-ragu*)/Not Sure; (4) S (*Setuju*)/Agree; (5) SS (*Sangat Setuju*)/Strongly Agree. The questionnaire given consists of eleven items:

1. I love learning English.
2. I learned English only to get good grades.
3. I can understand the difficult concept of English.
4. I can do English tests well.
5. I am willing to take a part in the English class if the learning method is interesting and various.
6. I am an active participant in English class.
7. I can understand the concept of English clearly because audio-visual equipment that the lecturers use is adequate.
8. The teaching and learning environment is very supportive and improves my English lessons.
9. I spend more time doing English homework than working on homework from other courses.
10. I am willing to participate in English class because it is challenging.
11. I am satisfied with the English skills I learned from the lectures.

The completed questionnaires were analyzed by calculating the number of voters for each statement, and comparing the number of Agree and Strongly Agree with the number of Strongly Disagree and Disagree voters. From these comparisons, the tendency of students from each study program in giving their opinion towards English learning is shown.

The interpretation of answers then is described based on the following table.

Table 1: Percentage of Choice of Answer (Wiji, 2014)

Range	Interpretation
0	Nothing
1-25	A little
26-49	Nearly half of it
50	Half of it
51-75	Mostly
76-99	Almost entirely
100	Entirely

Each statement is interpreted based on the interpretation in the table above. Then from the total answers, the assessment of English learning is acquired.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There are 39 students of Japanese Study Program, 53 from Sundanese Study Program, and 52 from History Study Program, who took the reading test. The test result is described in the table below.

Table 2: Percentage of Number of Correct Answers

Type of Question	Percentage of Right Answer		
	Japanese	History	Sundanese
supporting information	88%	86%	79%
main ideas	87%	61%	41%
References	86%	67%	53%
Vocabulary	86%	44%	54%
Inference	78%	70%	45%

From the data, it can be seen that the tendency in the Japanese Study Program is as follows: (a) the easiest type of question for the students is the question of supporting information, with the average number of correct answers is 34.4 from 39 students (88%); (b) meanwhile, the most difficult question for them is the type of inference question, with an average number of correct answers of 30.5 (78%).

Also from the data, it can be seen that the tendency of the History students is: (a) the highest ability is in answering the questions of supporting information, with the average correct number of 45.5 from 52 students (86%); (b) In contrast, the students' lowest ability was in terms of answering the

vocabulary question type, with a correct number averaging in 23.5 out of 52 (44%).

Meanwhile, the tendency of the Sundanese students is: (a) the students' highest ability is in answering the supporting information types of questions, with the average number of correct answers is 41 (79%). In contrast, the students' lowest ability is in answering the questions of main ideas, with the average number of correct answers being 22 (41%).

Table 2 shows a clear difference between the ability of students of Japanese and Sundanese Studies Program, while History Study Program is in the middle. Above 80% of students from Japanese Study Program are able to answer questions correctly except the type of inference question. While in History Study Program, more than 60% students can answer the questions correctly for all kinds of questions except the question of vocabulary meaning. However, only the kind of questions on explicit information can be answered by 60% students of Sundanese study program; the other four types are only answered correctly by less than 50% students, with the questions of main ideas being the least correctly-answered.

From the percentage of students who answered above 60% (their test score are above 60), it can be seen that the order is: 92% from students of Japanese, 64% from History, and 39% from Sundanese Study Program. The difficulty level of problems for each study program is also examined. In general, it can be seen that the percentage difficulty of the text for each type of problem is as follows:

Table 3: Questions' Level of Difficulty

Type of Question	Percentage		
	Japanese	History	Sundanese
Inference	22%	56%	59%
References	14%	39%	55%
Vocabulary	14%	33%	47%
main ideas	13%	30%	46%
supporting information	12%	14%	21%

From table 3, it can be concluded that the ability of the students of the Japanese Study Program is still low in making inference or obtaining implicit information. Meanwhile, from the data it appears that they can easily get explicit information in the text.

Table 3 also shows that the ability of the students of History Study Program in knowing the meaning of the word or understanding the vocabulary based on the context is still low. Meanwhile, the data reveals that these students are superior in terms of

understanding the information contained in the text. It is also known that the students of Sundanese Study Program have difficulty in finding main ideas in a text, even more difficult than finding hidden/implicit ideas in the text, which is usually seen from the type of inference questions. Some students have a low ability to know the meaning of vocabulary in context,

as seen from the types of vocabulary questions and references. Meanwhile, in obtaining supporting information, almost all students of Sundanese Study Program given the test are able to solve it.

The result of the test on students' attitude towards learning English could be seen in the following table.

Table 4: The Result of the Questionnaire.

No	Statement	Answer		
		Strongly Agree & Agree		
	How I learn English	Japanese	History	Sundanese
1	I love learning English.	85%	89%	81%
2	I learned English only to get good grades.	8%	11%	6%
3	I can understand the difficult concept of English.	44%	15%	12%
4	I can do English tests well.	69%	28%	23%
5	I am willing to take a part in the English class if the learning method is interesting and various.	77%	92%	81%
6	I am an active participant in English class.	31%	40%	21%
7	I can understand the concept of English clearly because audio-visual equipment that the lecturers used is adequate.	28%	43%	42%
8	The teaching and learning environment is very supportive and improves my English lessons.	46%	51%	35%
9	I spend more time doing English homework than working on homework from other courses.	8%	21%	17%
10	I am willing to participate in English class because it is challenging.	33%	58%	60%
11	I am satisfied with the English skills acquired through the lectures.	26%	15%	17%

From the survey, the results reveals that almost all students of Japanese Study Program were happy to learn English and not just to get good grades, and half of them prioritized learning English. Similarly, students of Sundanese Study Program and History Study Program loved to learn this language but most of them did not put it in the first priority. In the next point, nearly half of Japanese literature students thought they could understand difficult English concepts, and most of them were sure that they were able to do English tests well. In contrast, most students of Sundanese Study Program thought that they are unable to grasp the difficult concept and they are also unsure whether they could do the tests properly. Meanwhile in the History Study Program, almost half of the students were unsure of whether they were able to understand difficult English

concepts or not and mostly thought they were not able to do their tests properly.

4 CONCLUSIONS

From the research on three study programs at the Faculty of Cultural Sciences of Universitas Padjadjaran, there are several important points. Related to the effectiveness of learning English, it could be concluded that Japanese Study Program students have the ability to understand English reading very well. It can be seen from the average of correct answers on all types of questions in the test, which is above 80%. Meanwhile, the students of History Study Program can follow the learning of English well enough since the average number of

correct answers in the test is above 60%, and only one below that score. Afterwards, the students of Sundanese Study Program still have to do a lot of practice to understand the English text because the average number of correct answers on the four types of questions in the test is below 60%, and only one type is above it.

In general, from all participants of this investigation, it can be concluded that they are weak in finding main ideas (48%), but they have tolerable ability in guessing vocabularies (61%), referring pronouns (68%), and making inferences (64%), and they could easily find stated information (84%).

There is a connection between the students' reading proficiency and their attitude towards English learning. The students of Japanese Study Program thought they could understand difficult concepts in English structures, and were sure they could do the tests well. It is in accordance with the number of correct answers they had made. Meanwhile, students of Sundanese Study Program confessed that they did not really understand difficult concepts in English structures, and were not sure whether they had done well in the tests. It can be shown as well in a few numbers of correct answers they made. In addition, it is expected that the result of this research can be useful for the sustainability of teaching and learning process of higher quality English Course in the Faculty of Cultural Sciences.

We would also like to give some further suggestions. For Japanese Study Program, it is necessary to increase the difficulty of learning level from upper intermediate to advanced level. They could also be given TOEFL preparation, besides beginning to practice comprehending English textbook and journal. In further study on English, they can be given the materials of writing scientific articles.

Meanwhile for the History study program, the students could be given exercises in understanding of reading intermediate to upper intermediate level of English, and in further study on English, they can start to be introduced to questions from TOEFL, as well as readings from textbooks and journals in English.

At last, for Sundanese Study Program, the students still need to be given a lot of practice of reading English texts in pre-intermediate to intermediate level with General English topics. In further study, it is necessary to teach writing skills to add knowledge about the structure of sentences, to help them understand easier the meaning of sentences and ideas in it.

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