THE EFFECT OF TEXTBOOK READABILITY ON STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION

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ABSTRACT :

Language learners should learn reading skill as one of four language skills. It is to make learners' ability on foreign language becomes more comprehensive. The purpose of reading is to improve the understanding about the content of the text and it is the central purpose of language learners. Text readability level is also influenced by the readers' motivation, ability, and interest. Thats whay in selecting reading texts, the teacher should concern to text readability level and the student language level. Students' level must be related with text readability level, so that it is inappropriate to give junior high school students difficult text such as a difficult scientific text. Therefore this study conclude that the is an effect of textbook readability on students reading comprehension.

Keywords : Text book, Readability, Reading Comprehension

Introduction

Reading is one of ways to improve language ability because language learners can learn another language skill through reading texts which will improve language learners' ability. As noted in Jack C. Richards and Renandya (2002:273) that good reading texts can enhance writing skill, speaking and studying language such as vocabularies, grammar and idiom. Language learners improve their writing skill by summarizing the reading texts in their way, stimulating discussion of the topic on the given texts for speaking skill and studying vocabularies, grammar and idiom. So that reading cannot be neglected by foreign language learners and they must be able to interact foreign language text.

In academical setting, reading materials are provided by language teachers through textbook and it is widely used in language teaching program. Because of its usage in language teaching program, it must cover all four language skills. Relating to reading, textbook can be a basic media for course on reading skill in

which it provides a set of reading texts and exercises dealing with the reading texts. However, In order to teach reading in foreign language effectively, the teacher must select the texts which are appropriate for the students' language level.

The level of text will be used differently for different student's language level. In a view of Miller as adapted by Payani, Diem and Purnomo (2003:54) that there are seven levels of texts. They are very difficult, fairly difficult, difficult, standard, fairly easy, easy and very easy level. Very difficult text level is appropriate for college student, difficult level is recommended for high school student and fairly difficult level can be given to some high school student. Whereas standard level can be given to seventh or eighth grade students, fairly easy to the sixth grade student, easy level to the fifth grade student and very easy level to the fourth grade student. As description above, the level of text relates to the students language level.

Aslanian, in David Nunan (1991:69) set out a study dealing with this matter and it showed that students' reading comprehension depends on text readability level. As stated in David Nunan, "...whether one has understood the text or not depends on very much on text variables such as sentence structure and length, vocabulary intensity, number of new concepts introduced the difficulty and novelty of subject matter and etc...". Those variables affect each other which influence text readability level. Sentence structure which is syntactically complex is considered text readability level in difficult one and considered inappropriate for secondary students' level. Based on Aslanian's study above, it indicates that the text is written determines the text readability level.

Beside those variables, of course, text readability level is also influenced by the readers' motivation, ability, and interest. Motivation within the readers cannot be ignored in comprehending text. It is because the readers will attempt hard to comprehend the text when they are motivated. As stated by Mathewson in Alexander (1988:165) that comprehension on the given text was higher for a liked story than for disliked story. It shows that motivation within the readers determines text readability. Then, ability of readers will

affect readability of text since a good reader will easily comprehend the text. Interest also contributes to readability because interest supports the readers to comprehend the text. As Nasution said, as cited in Murniasih's thesis that an interest urges one to do an activity and leads him/her to pay his/her attention as well as let himself/herself to be bound to the activity. It means that interest will make one attempt to do something. And it indicates that interest will make the readers attempt hard to comprehend the text.

The text will easily be comprehended if the readers know to what the text talks about. Since text readability level is also determined by readers' schemata. Readers' prior knowledge on the given text plays an important role for readers in comprehending text. In this case, the readers bring their prior knowledge to the text. Such as if one is given medical science text and he/she is good in medical world, she/he will easily comprehend the text. It is because in reading, readers' background knowledge will determine whether or not the readers can comprehend the text. As Oller stated in David Nunan (66) that there is a close relationship of linguistics forms in the text and the knowledge of readers about the world.The former refers to text variables such as sentence structure and so on. The latter refers to what the readers know about the text. Those variables influence each other in determining the readability level.

Based on Aslanian theory which suggests that readability of text will determine students' reading comprehension on the given text. Moreover, it will be difficult if the text is not appropriate for learners' level. Since in academical setting, reading materials are provided through textbook. Junior high school uses textbook as a source of English teaching learning. It provides some English topics which are expected will develop students' English skills. Relating to reading, it is expected will increase students' reading comprehension. However, it will not work well when reading texts in textbook are not readable for junior high school students. The students, as textbook's readers, may not achieve comprehending the text if it is not appropriate for students' language level.

The Nature of Readability

Readability is easy to understand the text because of writing style. The text will easily be understandable, if writing style of text attracts readers to read it. The style of writing will contribute the learners to understand the reading text. Writing style includes how the text is written and its physical features. As Thonis stated (2003:171) that reading material seems more readable through the physical features of text such as the size of print, the organization of chapter, graphic items - charts, tables, pictures, diagram and illustration – the space between sections, the headings as introduction and transitions, paragraph length and so on. Text readability is affected by several factors in which they interact each other in determining text readability level. Readability level will affect to readers' comprehension on the text.

Jack Richard (1992:306) stated that readability is how easily the text can be read and understood. The Text is considered readable if the readers can read the text and construct meaning of text means easily. The text can be read and understood easily depends on the text itself. At which how the writer write and organize the text will determine the readability level and comprehension of text.

Readability refers to the difficulty level of text material and the degree to which a text are readable by target population, Martha Rapp (2005:56). Before giving text to target population, it is suggested to determine the difficulty level of text and whether the text is readable to target population. It is because readers can read and comprehend the texts which are appropriate for their level. Readability level of text is measured by readability formulas. There are various readability formulas but they mostly measure two aspects of text. They are semantic and syntactic complexity. The former refers to word length and multiple syllables and the latter refers to long sentences and their structures. Therefore, the longer the text becomes harder to comprehend.

Based on those definition can be drawn a conclusion that readability refers to comprehending the reading text easily that depends on how the writer write and organize the text, including word selection and sentences structure of text.

Factors Influencing Text Readability

There are two major factors that affect text readability level. They are factors within the text and factors within the readers. The former refers to the way the text written. It includes the format of text in which it refers to how writer arrange the written text. The typography of text also affect text readability in which it refers to the style of printed of the written text. The content of text which refers to what the text talks about. If the text contains the topic that the readers already know, the readers will easily comprehend the text and conversely. It is because background knowledge of learners will influence students' comprehension on the given text.

Then, vocabulary difficulty will affect text readability if the text contains vocabularies that the readers consider difficult, they cannot easily comprehend the text. It is the most significant factor that determines text readability level. Sentence complexity will affect readability level if the sentences, in a text, are syntactically complex. Idea density refers to how the writer delivers her/ his idea. Since the writer is not available for readers if

they don't understand the text, the writer should deliver his/her ideas properly in order that the text comprehensible to readers. Beside those factors, cohesiveness of text determines text readability level. Cohesiveness is the central factors in fluent reading and comprehension.

The latter refers to readers' reaction to the text, Such as motivation, interest and ability of readers to read the text, determine text readability. If the readers have high motivation to read the text they will easily comprehend the text. It will make the text readable since they will effort to comprehend the text though the text is in difficult level. Interest of readers to read will result in easy to comprehend the text. According to West as cited by Tinuk Murniasih in her thesis stated that the learners should like to learn foreign language when they want to learn it. When the readers have high interest to read, it will make them understand the text easily. Ability of readers in reading will affect text readability. Beside motivation, interest and ability of readers, background knowledge of readers will determine text readability.

The Formula of Text Readability

To measure text readability level can be done through readability formula in which readability scores are only approximation and it is to obtain the highest degree of prediction using the least number. There are several formulas in determining text readability level. The followings are the procedures used to measure a given text, Dewi Payani (50-51):

1. Selecting sample from textbook.

2. For each sample, counting off the 100- word paragraph contraction and hyphenated words are counted as one word. A number of letters separated by a space also counted as one word.

3. Computing the average of syllables per 100 words paragraph in accordance with to the number is pronounced."2002" is scored as four syllables.

4. Finding the sentences in each sample that ends nearest to the word marks.

    Counting the number of words in those sentences up to that point, dividing the number of word in those sentences up to that point, dividing the number of the words in those sentences by the number of sentence. This gives the average sentence length.

5. Figuring the average reading ease by inserting number of syllables per 100 words and average sentence length.

As Hornby (1995:1374) give a defitinion related with words, syllable and sentence. Word is a sound or group of sounds expressing a meaning and it is an independent unit of language usually with a space on either side. Syllable is any of units into which a word may be divided usually consisting of a vowel with a consonant before or after it. Sentence is a group of words containing subject, verb and an object which begins with capital letter and ends with full stop.

Text Types in English

Text is the number of words are put together which is built on the number sentences to communicate a meaning, Mark Anderson (1997:1). In creating the text, the author should concern to the diction. It is because words selection depends much on the context and purpose of text. Medical text will contain technical terms for medical world. It is in order to

communicate the message of text effectively.

There are two major text types; they are literary and factual texts according to Mark and Katy Anderson (1997:1). They will be discussed as follows.

a. Literary Text

It is a text which is constructed to appeal readers' emotion and imagination. This text is to entertain the readers and it can make the readers think about life. There are three main types of literary text; they are narrative, poetic and dramatic text.

b. Factual Text

It is a text which presents information of things or ideas and aims to show, to tell and to persuade the audiences or readers. This text can lead the audiences or readers to agree or do what the text says.

There are some text types which fall on this category. They are recount, response, explanation, discussion, information report, exposition and procedures texts. Descriptive text can also fall in this category since it presents description of things.In this regard, three factual texts will be discussed; they are recount, procedural and descriptive texts.

The Nature of Reading

Reading has a complex meaning and experts define it differently. Nuttal in *Lingua* (2003:43) put five words to reflect the definition of reading. They are text, interpret, meaning, sender and receiver. They mean that reading involves the text, interpreting the text to obtain meaning that assimilates with the author of text means. In which the author sends message through written form and the readers receive what author sends. Since, the author is as the sender and the readers are as the receiver.

Reading is getting messages from a text. The message, here, is what the writer communicate within the text. To get the message, the readers should comprehend the text well in order to obtain the messages which are communicated in the text explicitly and implicitly. The message should be or nearly same with the writer means.

Reading is a receptive language process which involves starting with linguistics surface encoded by writer and ending with meaning which the readers construct. Readers receive the visual symbols of the text which is communicated by the author in a text and then the readers construct meaning

from the text which is expected same with author construct. To do this, readers should read the text effectively and efficiently. The former means that the readers construct meaning that same with author means. The latter means that the readers should read the text with less effort to get effectiveness which depends on the readers' level.

Reading is interpreting a printed or written symbol meaningfully. The readers interpret the symbols to obtain the meaningful message in the text. The message should or nearly be same as the author means. Reading involves sensing, perceiving, achieving meaning and reacting to the symbols. The readers look at the symbols and then perceive the symbols. After perceiving, the readers achieve the meaning which is same as the author intend to and then reacting to the test. In this case, the readers can react to text by agreeing or disagreeing to the message that the author delivers.

Based on those definitions can be drawn a conclusion that reading is the process of constructing meaning /message which is communicated in the text explicitly and implicitly.

The Nature of Reading Comprehension

Nunan (1999:257) agued that comprehension is an interactive process between readers and text in which readers are required to fit the clues provided in the text to their own background knowledge. Of this definition, we may say that comprehending reading text is influenced by readers' background knowledge which is related to what the text talks about. In this case, the readers find the clues in the text and then match the clues with readers' background knowledge. At which Reading text is only clues which the reader tries to find. In this case, the readers interact actively with the text. The readers do not only receive what the text stated but also criticize the text if the text does not match with the readers' background knowledge.

Johnson (2003:47)in *Lingua* defines reading comprehension is the result of thinking which is triggered by visual symbol. The fundamental concern must be with the thinking process and their application in the reading situation. It means that reading does not only involve looking at the written text which is visualized through

a number of words but also thinking what the text talk about. Readers think the visual symbols which are available in the text which is then resulted in comprehension. Different readers have different way in thinking the visual symbol of text. It can be understood that the way readers think will influence reading comprehension.

According to Anderson and Pearson in Alexander (1988:160) stated that reading comprehension is a special kind of thinking process in which the readers comprehend by actively constructing meaning internally from interacting the material which is read. Comprehending a reading text involves thinking process in which it is different in each reader. In this matter, there is an interaction between readers and text in which readers construct meaning from text they read. Reading comprehension is different which depends on the readers' level. For active readers, they are involved in an interchange of ideas with the author. Those readers understand what the text explicitly and implicitly stated. While passive readers, they only receive what the text stated and they only understand what is explicitly stated in the text.

Based on the definition can be drawn a conclusion that reading comprehension is an interactive process of readers and the text in which readers construct the meaning from text which resulted in comprehension.

Factors influencing Reading Comprehension

There are several factors that influence the readers to comprehend the text. They are reading material, Turner (161). In academical setting, reading material must be selected properly and appropriate for students' language level. The text should be readable for students, the text topic should be interesting for students and it can enhance students' language improvement. If the reading material comprises those aspects it is assumed that the students can comprehend the text easily. However, if the reading material is inappropriate for learners' level they cannot comprehend the text easily. In academicals setting, the teacher should guide the students in reading in order to achieve reading comprehension.

Reading rate also influences reading comprehension; readers with fast reading rate are considered capable of comprehending the text. Beside that

reading the text repeatedly will increase comprehension and rate. The more readers read, the more they will comprehend reading text. When the readers read repeatedly, they will easily comprehend the text since they are already familiar with the text. Good readers will have different reading rate when they read texts on different topic. It depends on the readers' need in reading a text. A reader who wants to get general information of text will read the text quickly. However, a reader who wants to get specific information of text will read the text slowly and rather silently.

There are some factors that influence reading rate, four of them are, Arnold R:

1. The readers' familiarity with the printed language, such as sentence structure and word usage.

2. The readability of the material as determined by difficulty level of vocabulary and sentence length.

3. The readability of material as influenced by the style of writing, sentence structure and difficulty of concept.

4. Mechanical factors such as size of print, length of printed line and type of paper used.

Those factors influence reading rate of readers which then influence readers' comprehension on reading. It can be concluded that readability affect readers' comprehension on reading.

The quality of text cohesion in reading materials is a major factor influencing comprehension. The cohesiveness of text will make students comprehend the text easily since cohesiveness includes text variables such as content, paragraph and sentence structure and so fourth. The text achieves cohesiveness when it contains united sentences in that between lexical and grammatical are interconnected. As Steffensen (140) stated that cohesion is an analysis system that describes the unity of text as a function of semantic relations realized at the surface – level structure of text. The cohesiveness of text will make the text readable since the readers are not confused with the text. When the readers are confused with the text, they will not comprehend it easily and conversely.

Beside those factors, readers' background knowledge is a major factor on students' reading comprehension. As David Nunan (2003:70) stated that background

knowledge was a significant factor in reading comprehension. If the students have a background knowledge dealing with the text, they will easily comprehend the text. It is because prior knowledge of readers will help them in comprehending the text. Therefore, the text is considered readable, if the readers have background knowledge concerning the text. For instance, one reads a text about religion and he is good in it, he/she will easily comprehend it. It is because the readers are already familiar what the text talks about.

The Effect of Textbook Readability on Students' Reading Comprehension

In selecting reading material, the teacher should determine three aspects of material, as suggested by Nuttal. They are readability, suitability of contents and exploitability. A selected reading text should be at the right level for students' language level. It is to increase students' comprehension on the given text. Selected text should also talk about the topic that the students like. When the students like the topic, they will catch the message from the text easily. Beside the two former aspects, a selected text should be able

to enhance students' language skill, not only in reading but also in other language skill, such as writing, structures, vocabulary and so on.

Nuttal stated that that readability is the most important criteria in selecting reading material. Selected text should be readable for students in which to find out the readability level of text, teacher may estimate it by using readability formula. Readability of text becomes main consideration in selecting reading material.

Readability involves many variables, some of them are sentence length, sentence structure and vocabulary intensity. They interact each other in determining readability level on the given text. Those variables will be discussed as follows.

Reading text consists of the number of words which are organized into sentences which then build some paragraph. Students obtain the message of text through reading the sentences of text. However, it is not easy to understand the text if the sentence structure confuse the readers. It is because sentence structure influence reading comprehension. As turner, in Alexander, stated that "the structure and organization of reading material is

an important factor in comprehension". The structure and organization, including sentence structures influence reading comprehension.

The readers can find any difficulties when they read a text which contains sentences which are syntactically complicated. As shown by research that readers can increase their comprehension on reading when they comprehend the sentence structures. A writer sometimes organizes a text by using various types of sentences. Types of sentences may influence reading comprehension if a text contains sentence structure that the readers do not know or understand. Such as, a text which consists of sentences with relative clauses may be difficult to understand if the readers do not know or understand about relative clause. It is shown that sentences with relative clause, complex sentences, passive voices, pronouns, missing words and implicit relationships have been found to cause comprehension difficulty for children. Furthermore, reading materials are understandable when the sentences are like readers oral language patterns.

In order to understand written English, readers should know the knowledge of words, either native or non- native speakers. As stated that comprehension of printed language depends upon knowledge of words, of group of words and of arrangement of words in English. Words refer to English vocabularies, group of words refer to English phrase and sentence and the arrangement of words refers to English sentences which include the structures of sentences.

Beside sentence structure, the length of sentence also influences reading comprehension. The difficulty of text is occurred when the sentences grow longer and more complex. Increase in length makes the readers difficult to predict the message of text. This is because readers are confused in reading. That is why, readers cannot apply their schemata to reading text.

English words for non-English speakers seem difficult since English is not spoken in daily life. They bring this drawback when they read written English. In the case of readability, vocabulary is one of determination of readability level. The text that contains difficult lexical items is considered difficult. Vocabulary difficulty is estimated in various ways in which the most usual estimation is vocabulary

frequency. Paul Nation and James Coady stated that written English is more readable when it contains high vocabulary frequency in occurrence and shorter vocabularies. Shorter word will influence the syllable of the word which then influences text readability level when it is found by applying readability formula. Since the number of syllable is one of consideration in determining the readability level.

Based on description and supporting theories above, they indicate that text readability affect students' reading comprehension. There is an effect of textbook readability on students' reading comprehension. It is better for English teacher to provide textbook for students containing texts which are readable for the students and appropriate for their language level.

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