

THESIS JOURNAL

**AN ANALYSIS OF EFL STUDENTS' STRATEGIES IN DEALING WITH
UNFAMILIAR WORDS IN READING TEXT: A CASE STUDY AT THE THIRD
SEMESTER STUDENTS OF ENGLISH DEPARTMENT OF MATARAM
UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC YEAR 2014/2015**



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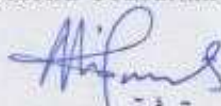
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This research is concerned with students' strategies in dealing with unfamiliar words especially collocation and idiomatic expressions. The reason to conduct this research is that many students are not on to reading English since sometimes it makes them confuse with the words which meanings are difficult to catch. Non-literal meanings make the students difficult to understand an English text. In order to see students' ability in dealing with this matter this research was conducted. This research was conducted in Mataram University with English Department of Faculty of Teacher Training and Education as the target population. "D" class of the third semester students was chosen as the sample by using random cluster technique. Data for this research were collected by using test, questionnaire, and interview. The result from the data shows that most students face difficulty in dealing with unfamiliar words especially collocation and idiomatic expression. Although they mentioned some strategies such as guessing, asking mates, and using dictionary in dealing with unfamiliar words, the students were still unable to deal with the words because they used very basic strategies. Those basic strategies are commonly used when encountering common words, which were listed in dictionary. The strategies may not work in dealing with words which meanings are not listed in dictionary. After all, what they need is a little bit of analysis in order to deal with words which meanings are not literal.

Key terms: *unfamiliar words, collocation, idiom*

Introduction

Language is a natural system used by human to interact with each other. In this world, there exist a great number of languages used by human to communicate in which each region has their own language. It is inevitable that people from a region will meet with people from other regions. In such case, we cannot keep remaining monolingual as it is a wise decision to master not only a single language because more languages will help us perform more communication among people especially those from other regions so we can get more information and things that may improve our life into a better life. Amongst languages all over the world, English has become the major language that unified the whole world. Nowadays, English exists everywhere that we can find it in books, electronics, advertisements, fashions, and even food wrappers. Science and technology have started to apply English that it forces people to at least, know English to survive globalization.

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Learning English is very challenging for students in foreign language context because they have very few opportunities to use the language outside the classroom (Nunan, 2004; p.54). Regarding to the small opportunities to practice English, students are recommended to take chances on reading more English books on their own outside their classroom to enrich their knowledge about English. Through reading, students will acquire more knowledge about English that are not provided in classroom. They will find the use of grammar, the use of punctuation, more complex sentences, new ways of arranging words in a sentence, idioms, collocation, how some difficult words are spelled, and even some unfamiliar words that are not found in dictionary since in classroom students only encounter common use of English.

Many students seem not into reading because they are not used to it. Literally, they find it boring and time wasting since they prefer to do outdoor activities. Dealing with this condition, many English teachers force their students to read in classroom but not few students are troubled in comprehending what they are reading. They are unable to catch the main idea of the text they are reading because they got distracted by some unfamiliar words that disrupted them, stuck and frustrated. It makes students not up to reading even more.

In this case, students have to find their own strategies to use when reading a text and dealing with unfamiliar words. Therefore, three questions need to be answered. The first is whether students of English Department

encounter problems related to unfamiliar words in reading text, the second is kinds of problems do students encounter related to unfamiliar words in reading text, and the last is the way students deal with unfamiliar words in reading text. Based on these questions, it means that there are three main goals of this research. The first is to know whether students of English Department encounter problems related to unfamiliar words in reading text, the second is to describe any kinds of problems related to unfamiliar words in reading text, and the last is to explain how students deal with unfamiliar words in reading text. To avoid confusion there were two limitations to be made as the subject of this study is limited to the third semester students of English Department of Mataram University and limited on describing students' ability to comprehend English texts, specifically those that consist of collocation and idiomatic expressions. This research is expected to give contribution in English language teaching and learning for those related to this study. English teachers will be more aware of their students' problems in dealing with unfamiliar words so that teachers can provide strategies that may suit students in learning English. Students may improve their ability in dealing with unfamiliar words from given beneficial input about problem they are encountering and how to overcome them. This may provide information for next or other researchers in conducting further research in this field. Writer's knowledge about English language teaching and learning related to students' problem with unfamiliar words also improved.

Idiom and Collocation

Idiom and collocation are two that are considered quite confusing for EFL students. Both are combination of words with a fixed meaning but the two are different each other. An idiom has a meaning that is different from its literal meaning whereas collocation has a fixed form and still has its literal meaning.

Idiom

Idiom is usually found in a combination of words but the meaning is totally different from its literal meaning. The meaning of an idiom often cannot be guessed by simply looking at its individual words because it will lead to confusion. Based on Encarta Dictionary, idiom is a fixed expression with non-literal meaning. It is a fixed distinctive expression whose meaning cannot be deduced from the combined meanings of its actual words.

Collocation

Collocation is a combination of words in which the words are habitually appearing together. Beare (2014) says that there is no reason for using collocation because native speaker just put certain words together more often than they put other words together.

Previous Relevant Study

There are two studies that were previously conducted by other researchers that relate to this study. One was conducted by Nurul Widyasari that is entitled "Students' Understanding in Using Idiomatic Expression. A Case Study at Semester 9th Extension Program Class of English Department Mataram University 2011/2012".

Her study was aimed to find out in what extent students' understanding about idioms, to know the students' difficulties in understanding the idioms, and to find out how the students deal with English Idioms. She limited her study to analyze the ninth semester students' ability in understanding idiom expressions. As the result of her study, she found that students were not familiar with idiom, they also did not understand what idiom is, and they did not know how to deal with idiom. According to her, the first test in filling gap that consists of 20 incomplete sentences showed that students did not familiar with idioms. After that, the second test in multiple choices that consists of twenty items showed that students did not understand the meaning of idioms presented. The last test in construction that requires students to construct sentences using idioms provided showed that students do not know how to interpret and deal with idioms.

Related to Widyasari's study, this study also covers idioms and strategies to deal with idiom expressions but this study specifically studies on how students comprehend idiomatic

expressions whereas Widyasari's study specifically studied on how students use idioms. In addition, this study also covers collocation. However, this study will take the third semester of English Department of Mataram University as object.

Another study entitled "The Students' Ability in Comprehending the Reading Texts. A Case Study of Eight Grade Students At SMPN 3 Mataram Academic Year 2011/2012" was conducted by Lastri Novriana. She aimed to find out the students' ability in comprehending English reading texts especially three text types as narrative, descriptive, and recount and to identify factors that may contribute to the students' ability in comprehending English reading texts. Her sample was the 8th grade students of SMPN 3 Mataram.

As a result, she found that the students are lack of effort to look over the vocabulary. Students are not interested to find out the meaning of words they do not know which makes them unable to comprehend what the text is.

Related to Novriana's study, this study covers more specific purpose in which this study is trying to investigate to what extent students are able to deal with unfamiliar words such as idiom and collocation in a text.

Design of Study

This study was designed for a case study in which researcher typically observed phenomena of a community. A case study involves detailed study about a specific case which simply examines closely characteristics and qualities of the object of the study. The purpose of case study is to investigate deeply and to analyze intensively phenomena of objects with a view to draw generalization about population to which the objects belong.

This study is one kind of descriptive study in which it describes existing phenomena, either natural phenomena or artificial phenomena. In this study, it describes students' strategies in dealing with unfamiliar words when reading text, especially narrative text.

This study was conducted at Faculty of Teacher Training and Education of Mataram University, which is located on Majapahit Street 62, Mataram. This faculty is chosen as the field of study because researcher is studying in this faculty and it is also easier to identify problems since the researcher is already used to the condition.

Population and Sample of Study

Population

Population is the total number of individuals in an area who have certain characteristics and be a researcher's interest. Due to its large size, researchers often cannot study every individual in the population instead they rely on sampling technique. Explorable.com (2009) divides research population into two, target population and accessible population.

Target population is "the entire group of individuals or objects to which researchers are interested in generalizing the conclusions." This population varies in characteristics and also known as theoretical population. The subset of this population, accessible population, is "the population in research to which researchers can apply their conclusions." This population is also known as the study population and researchers draw their samples from this population.

Based on these types of research population, then the target population for this study is all students of Faculty of Teacher Training and Education of Mataram University Academic Year 2014/2015 and the accessible population is all students of English Department of Faculty of Teacher Training and Education of Mataram University Academic Year 2014/2015. The 3rd semester students are divided into four classes; A, B, C, and D class.

Sample and Sampling Technique

Samples are selected from population as subject of study. The reason for taking sample is because it is time-consuming and too expensive, from strategic and resource perspective, to study all members of the population. However, samples must represent the population from which it is drawn and must have good size to warrant a valid analysis. It is suggested to always use largest samples possible because the larger samples will be more representative whereas smaller samples will result in less accuracy since it is less representative. Explorable.com (2009) explains that the main function of samples is allowing researchers to conduct study to individuals from the population so they can derive conclusions that will be applied to the entire population based on the result of the study.

Samples were taken by using random cluster sampling technique that randomly selects specific part of the population and then study all members of that specific part. In this study, the third semester students are chosen instead of the other semesters based on a balanced judgment that the third semester is an appropriate subject for this study. The third semester students are now on their best in which they are enrolling reading III course. On the other hand, the first semester students who are still in the first year are not yet ready for dealing with difficult text and do

not have any strategies for it. “D” class is the cluster of the population that is selected randomly from the four classes (cluster) of the 3rd semester students.

Method of Data Collection

There are three methods applied in this study as follow:

Test

Test is a basic way of finding out objects’ knowledge and ability in a certain subject depending on the purpose of the test itself. A test is used to make an objective judgment whether the objects meet, exceed, or fail the required objectives. A test may be on paper, oral test, or physical test. Test will also be stronger with the use of additional method such as questionnaires, and interviewing.

In this study, the test consists of 15 multiple choices and 15 essays. The objective of using multiple choices is to see objects’ sense in analyzing materials whereas the objective of essays is to see objects’ knowledge in dealing with the materials.

Questionnaire

Questionnaire is designed to obtain specific information to meet a particular need related to the topic of study. Questionnaire is a research instrument that consists of a series of written questions for gathering information from respondents. The questions used for this

study are open- and close-ended questions. Open-ended questions allow respondents to respond on their own words. The purpose is to cover data that are more detailed. Close-ended questions provide a list of responses to choose. The purpose is to gather desired information.

Interview

Interview is alike to the questionnaire but more personal. Researcher works directly with respondents and complete the interview based on respondents’ responses. By interviewing, researcher can obtain in-depth information from respondents.

Data Analysis

Gathered data from data collection methods are then analyzed accordingly.

Test

Data gathered from test are calculated and classified. After that, the final scores are tabulated to find the mean score using the following formula;

$$M = \frac{\sum X}{N}$$

In which; M = Mean score

X = Final score

N = Number of participant

Since the sample is less than 40, obtained mean score is then classified using the following score classification adapted from the Criterion-Reference

Assessment of FKIP Manual book (2011, p.20):

80 – 100 = Excellent

65 – 79 = Good

56 – 64 = Fair

46 – 55 = Low

00 – 45 = Poor

Questionnaire and Interview

Data gathered from questionnaire and interview are analyzed by listing and tabulating the answers to be identified. After that, conclusion can be taken from the data.

Finding

Table 1. Tabulated test scores

No.	Name	MC	*2.6	Essay	*4.0	Total	Class.
1	R P	6	16	8	32	48	Low
2	R H H	9	24	6	24	48	Low
3	R A K	9	24	11	44	68	Good
4	S M	9	24	13	52	76	Good
5	S A	11	29	3	12	41	Poor
6	S	9	24	5	20	44	Poor
7	S A	10	26	6	24	50	Low
8	S W A	7	19	10	40	59	Fair
9	S U	10	27	4	16	43	Poor
10	S P	7	19	5	20	39	Poor
11	S M M A H	10	27	7	28	55	Low
12	S	9	24	11	44	68	Good
13	S Z	9	24	12	48	72	Good
14	T S D	10	27	4	16	43	Poor
15	T W S	4	11	5	20	31	Poor
16	T A A	9	24	5	20	44	Poor
17	T R L	10	27	5	20	47	Low
18	V N	6	16	5	20	36	Poor
19	V N W	9	24	10	40	64	Fair
20	W H	5	13	0	0	13	Poor
21	W D	7	19	5	20	39	Poor
22	W I H	9	24	5	20	44	Poor
23	Y S	9	24	3	12	36	Poor
24	Y E	8	21	7	28	49	Low
25	Y L	7	19	6	24	43	Poor
26	Y	7	19	5	20	39	Poor
27	Y	9	24	1	4	28	Poor
28	Y S	8	21	2	8	29	Poor
29	Z A	9	24	1	4	28	Poor
30	Z K	9	24	11	44	68	Good
MEAN SCORE			22		24	46	Low

Considering the mean score, in multiple choices the mean score is 22 out of 40. The students are only able to deal with at least 55% of idioms and collocations. It means that the students' basic sense to analyze idiom and collocation is average. In essays, the mean score is 24 out of 60 that mean students are able to deal with at least 40%, which mean that they have difficulties in dealing with idioms and collocations. After all, the total mean score that is 46 is classified as low. Based on the classifications percentage table, out of 30 test participants, more than 50% students have poor scores and less than 30% students are able to deal with the test. It means that they have problems in dealing with idioms and collocations. The classification table below shows that only few students are able to deal with idioms and collocation satisfactorily.

Table 2. Classifications percentage

Classification	Degree of Mastery	Number of Students	Total Percentage
Excellent	80 – 100	0 student	00.00%
Good	65 – 79	5 students	16.67%
Fair	56 – 64	2 students	06.67%
Low	46 – 55	6 students	20.00%
Poor	00 – 45	17 students	56.67%

Based on the table above, only seven students are considered pass the test according to the Criterion-Reference Assessment whereas the rest are considered failed the test. It means less than 30% are able to deal with idiom and collocation and more than 50% are in trouble.

Discussion

This section will relate the finding section with the statement of problem to see whether the stated problems do occur in the field. The first statement questions whether students of English Department encounter problems related to unfamiliar words in reading text. From the result of the test that is considered low based on the Criterion-Reference Assessment, it is obvious that there is something wrong with the students' ability that leads to an assumption that most of the third semester students of English Department have problem in dealing with unfamiliar words especially idiom and collocation.

More than 50% students' scores are below expectation and categorized as low and less than 30% students meet the expectation. However, it is still an assumption since a single test is not valid enough to judge their language knowledge. That is why a questionnaire is preferred to dig up more information about the students' ability related to unfamiliar words. When it is about difficulties in reading English text, around 20% students do not experience difficulties and the rest still experience difficulties in reading English. Their answers relate to their test scores in which around 20% students meet the expectation because they are not troubled with English text.

Barely half of the students stated that they are able to deal with a new unfamiliar word. The first item has nothing to do with the scope of study that limits the study to collocation and

idiom but only as a comparator to see students' analysis skill in order to be able to analyze collocation and idiomatic expression. This first item answers the first statement of problem in the way if most students cannot deal with a new words then it is also clear that students have problem in dealing with unfamiliar words.

Collocation and idiom contain daily- used words that are combined to form a new meaning that make them unfamiliar whereas unfamiliar word is a totally new word that is rarely used in daily life. Indeed the meaning of every single word in collocation and idiom is far easier than a single unfamiliar word but of course, all of them need to be analyzed. If they are troubled in analyzing a new unfamiliar word, there is a chance that they will also be troubled in analyzing unfamiliar words such as collocation and idiom.

Dealing with collocation, more than 50% students stated that they are able to deal with it. Since collocation still has its literal meaning, it will be easy to analyze the meaning. On the other hand, it is also about 50% students state idiom is not difficult. Considering the test result in which more than 50% students are below expectation, it is a kind of surprising that more than 50% students claim idiom and collocation as easy things. Their answers indicated that collocation and idiom are easier than that single unfamiliar word. Perhaps it is true that around 50% students have potencies to deal with collocation and idiom. The questionnaire shows that all students like English. It is

enough to say that they have potencies because by liking the subject it will be easier. Besides, more than 50% have interest in reading English either outside or inside classroom. One's interest in the subject will improve the success probability in dealing with problem related to the subject. On the other hand, there is one surprising thing that about 10% students have almost never read English. Then, what are they doing in English department? This may be considered as prove that information from questionnaire is not precise enough.

In order to make things clear, interview is essential to strengthen the data gathered from test and questionnaire. Ten students were chosen as a representative of the sample. The result of the interview is that most of the students actually find idiom quite difficult but they are interested in it and they will try to deal with it. Therefore, it is clear that they have trouble in dealing with collocation and idiom, but they have potencies to deal with it.

The second statement questions kinds of problems the students encounter in reading English text related to unfamiliar words. The questionnaire shows that the problem is most of students got themselves stuck by the unfamiliar words. Even though they try to ignore the words and focus on finding the main idea but sometimes the unfamiliar words distract them. Some students also experience emotional problem like sad, crazy, confused, lost control, and even frustrated. From interview, another problem occurred when they were in the middle of a test. Dealing with unfamiliar words really took their time because

sometimes it is required to find the meaning of the unfamiliar words.

The third statement questions students' strategy in dealing with unfamiliar words in reading text. Data that were gathered show that there are some common strategies applied by students in dealing with unfamiliar words such as asking mates, opening dictionary, and reading the context. Around 40% of them prefer to try to deal with text by reading through context, around 30% of them are to use their dictionary, around 10% pass the text and prefer to catch main idea of text, and around 30% like to ask their friends. In addition, some students have more advanced strategy by using modern technology such as Google translate and mobile dictionary which provide instant problem solving. However, machines are sometimes disappointing because it does not always provide desired answer. In such case, students have to recheck and modify the given answer. As an additional strategy for later use, 46% students usually take notes if they find new words, 16% students sometimes take notes if they remember, 6% rarely takes notes, and 20% have never taken a note.

Conclusion

Overall, the result of this study shows that students already have their own strategy to deal with English text, but they apply some common basic ways to deal with English text such as searching in dictionary, asking their friends, and guessing. However, practically their strategies do not really help them in dealing with unfamiliar words such as idiom

and collocation. Based on the result of the test, which is a basic way to find out students' knowledge and ability to deal with unfamiliar words, students' knowledge about the unfamiliar and their ability to deal with it is considered as low. It means that they find it difficult even though they say that they have strategies to deal with it.

There is a reason that may influence students' knowledge and ability in dealing with idiom and collocation. The reason is that they have not been introduced yet to it in classroom that they feel very unfamiliar with such words. Perhaps it is too early to introduce idiom at their level since they have not mastered the four language skills. They need to master the four skills first and then advance to next level where they need to hone their language analysis. Translating the words one by one or simply guessing the meaning will not get them any closer with the meaning of the words. All they need to do is analyze the words and make some relations with the context as a basic strategy.

Suggestion

After a conclusion of the study, there are some suggestions that may need to be considered and hopefully may be useful. It is suggested to students to read more English text especially free writing outside classroom because it will help to improve language knowledge. A reader will not surprise when encountering something unfamiliar because he/she already get used to it. Besides, there is nothing wrong with reading since it not only

improves language knowledge but it also improves general knowledge. It is cool to have a wide knowledge and people will pay respect. To English teachers it is suggested to give students some brief introduction about idiom and collocation to help students if sometimes they find the expression somewhere they will be able to deal with it. In addition, it is suggested to develop students' analysis skill so they do not rely on dictionary or their friends. For further researcher of the same field, the result of this study may be used as an additional reference with different discussion. Since this study is limited in strategy in dealing with unfamiliar words such as idiom and collocation, it is also suggested to study other aspects related to students' strategy or problem in learning English as a foreign language.

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