THE FIRST YEAR STUDENTS' READING DIFFICULTIES: A Case Study in English Subject at TPB Program of Mataram University in Academic Year 2016-2017

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to investigate the TPB students' performance and in the reading test as well as to identify their difficulties in answering the questions in reading test. This research is a quantitative study in which the data were taken from 470 students' midterm answer sheets. The data were analyzed by using table of classification by Philips (2002) and Microsoft Excel. The results of the data analysis showed that generally the students' performance in English can be shown from number of students who did not pass the passing grade was 378 students (80%) which were higher from those who passed 92 students (20%). There were only 3 students got the grade of A (score ≥ 80), 44 students scored B (65 - < 80), 45 students got C (56 - < 65), 114 students got D (46 - < 56), and the rest 264 students got the grade of E (score < 46). The rank of difficulties can be shown by the average percentage of incorrect answer based on reading questions types, those were *implied question* which was 68% of students could not answer the question of this type correctly. The second and third highest percentages were *synonym questions* 59% and *unstated detail questions* 55%. While *stated detail questions* and *main idea questions* got the same average percentage which was 46% of the students that were fall in this type of questions, and the lowest average percentage was *author's purpose questions* which were only 32%.

Key words: performance, difficulties, reading test.

KESULITAN MEMBACA MAHASISWA TAHUN PERTAMA: Studi Kasus dalam Mata Kuliah Bahasa Inggris di Program TPB Universitas Mataram Tahun Ajaran 2016-2017

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ABSTRAK

Tuuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mencari tahu kemampuan mahasiswa TPB dalam tes membaca dan mengidentifikasi kesuliatan apa saja yang dihadapi dalam menjawab pertanyaan di tes membaca. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dimana data diambil dari 470 lembar jawaban mahasiswa dalam ujian tengah semester. Data analisis menggunakan kolom klasifikasi dari Philips (2002) dan aplikasi Microsoft Excel. Hasil dari analisis data menunjukan bahwa kemampuan mahasiswa dalam tes membaca dapat dilihat dari jumlah mahasiswa yang tidak mencapai nilai rata-rata kelulusan adalah 378 mahasiswa (80%) dimana jumlah ini lebih tinggi dari pada jumlah siswa yang melampaui nilai rata-rata kelulusan yakni 92 mahasiswa (20%). Hanya 3 mahasiswa yang memperoleh nilai A (nilai $\geq$ 80), 44 mahasiswa mendapat nilai B (65 - < 80), 45 mahasiswa mendapat C (56 - < 65), 114 mahasiswa mendapat nilai D (46 - < 56), dan 246 mahasiswa lainnya mendapat nilai E (score < 46). Rangking kesulitan dapat dilihat dari rerata persentase jawaban salah berdasarkan tipe pertanyaan, jenis pertanyaan *implied question* dengan persentase 68% dari jumlah mahasiswa yang tidak menjawab jenis pertanyaan ini dengan benar. Posisi kedua dan ketiga adalah jenis pertanyaan *synonym questions* dengan persentase 59% dan *unstated detail questions* dengan jumlah persentase 55%. Sementara jenis pertanyaan *stated detail questions* dan *main idea questions* memperoleh jumlah persentase yang sama yakni 46% mahasiswa yang salah dalam menjawab tipe pertanyaan tersebut, dan persentase terendah adalah jenis pertanyaan *author's purpose questions* dengan jumlah persentase 32%.

Kata kunci : Kemampuan, kesulitan, tes membaca

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of Study

Teaching a foreign language, especially English at all universities in Indonesia can be classified into two types; the first as a main course and the second as a supplementary course.

In Indonesia especially at Mataram University, students of non – English program such as medical, law, pharmacy, engineering, science, economic and the other programs are suggested to read many International journals and textbooks in their field which are written by expertise and mostly in English and usually they need to write a review or resume about the text they read. Therefore English course has strong position in fulfilling the needs. That is why students in their first year have to take and pass English course as the supplementary course.

Unfortunately, eventhough English course has been offered in those non-English study programs, the students in previous year still had difficulty in comprehending English textbooks or international journals in their field and also wrote a review about the journals they read. It may be because of the allocation of the credits given. The students had only 2 credits or 16 meetings for English course whereas they are expected to be able to read and comprehend complex writing. It is elusive to achieve that expectation if they only have little hours of meetings, and yet the students also have different level of English.

As an effort, in 2016 Mataram University conducted a new program named TPB or "Tahun Pertama Bersama" where the new students or freshmen were

prepared by accommodating them with basic language knowledge, science and technology in their first year before going into their specific field. Furthermore, TPB is expected to overcome the problems that happened at the previous years. The students are given 4 credits in English subject, the first 2 credits are given on their first semester, and the other 2 credits are given on their second semester.

Therefore, I am interested to conduct an analysis of first year students' reading performance and their difficulties that they found in reading test, in order to see how effective the English course that has been conducted in TPB program of Mataram University under the title of "The First Year Students' Reading Difficulties: A Case Study in English Subject at TPB Program of Mataram University in Academic Year 2016-2017". The investigation is also aimed to gathering written data from the TPB students about their reading performance and observing their difficulties in answering the test.

1.2 Research questions

This study attempts to investigate the answer of some formulated questions, those are as follows:

1) How is the TPB students' performance in reading tests?

2) What are the TPB students' difficulties in reading test?

1.3 Purposes of the study

According to the aforementioned research questions, the writer generates some objectives or purposes of this research, those are as follow:

1) To investigate the TPB students' performance in reading test

2) To identify TPB students' difficulties in answering the reading test

2. Related literature Review

Reading is not a passive action, but an active one (Pang: 2003). The statement is voted by Patesan (2014), he noted that to fully understand a text, the readers need to view reading as an active rather than a passive activity. In fact, reading typically demands readers' background knowledge, vocabulary, grammatical knowledge, experience and other strategies in order to help them understand written text. Reading is not merely moving eyes towards the writing, but it involves many aspects in active way. According to Pang (2003) reading is simply defined as understanding written texts, but there is also interaction between author's mind and the reader's mind (Nuttal: 1996). In order to get the message of what the author try to deliver, the reader reforms the meaning of the passage together with the writer.

Many scholars believe that reading is one of essential skills for educational and professional success. This statement is highlighted by Alemi & Ebadi (2010) in their Language teaching and research journal *"The Effects of Pre-reading Activities on ESP Reading Comprehension"*. It is similar to what former expertise argued that reading is the most important skill in any language class rather than any other skills not only as a means of consolidating and extending knowledge of a language but also getting a source of information in the language itself.

Based on differences of purpose, there are two types of reading skills or operations, the first is expeditious reading operations and second is careful reading operations. The first operations will require candidates or test-takers to respond to the

item of questions without having time to read overall passage. While in the second operations, the candidates need to read all the passage in order to make inference of the reading, they have to combine the information from inside the text with their own knowledge from outside the text (Hughes: 2003).

In all academic institution and educational system, tests are the most common measuring method. Tests brace the most load of students' total grade especially in college level (Mohammadi & Abidin: 2013). It will also be needed in order to gather information about the achievement of learners (Hughes: 2003). It can be concluded, without a test it is difficult to see how objective and rational educational decision can be made. Indeed there is also informal assessment, but test provide common standard in order to make meaningful comparison between students' behavior and their ability.

There are several types of question in reading test.

1. Main idea question

    The question is about overall ideas of a passage, whether it is about the title, topic, or main idea of a paragraph or passage.

2. Stated detail question

    In this type of question, the readers are not asked about a passage as a whole but as piece of information.

3. Unstated detail question

    According to McGraw (2009) this type of questions ask the test taker to "…verify what information is true and what information is not true" or not assimilated in the text based on information that is directly affirm in the passage.

4. Pronoun referent question

   The pronoun references question, the students are commonly asked to determine to which noun a pronoun refers.

5. Implied detail question

   Question of this type typically need an answer that is not directly written in the passage, but the students have to draw a conclusion from information given from the text.

6. Vocabulary question

   Vocabulary questions merely ask about related to the words or phrases that are used in the passage. In the passage, some words are unusual, technical, or have special meanings in the context.

7. Where question

   Where question type usually asks about where in the text certain information is found.

8. Purpose tone and course question

   The question is about asking author's emotion or tone, purpose and course towards his writing.

9. Organization of ideas question

   This type of question will ask the readers to determine how the idea of one sentence or paragraph is connected to other sentence or paragraph.

10. Transition question

    This type of question attests the readers' ability in predicting what probably come before or come after the given passage.

11. Summary question

These items measure the readers' ability to comprehend and recognize the major points and the relative importance of information in a reading.

3. Research Method

3.1 Research Design

The main objectives in this research were to find out the English competence level of the TPB students especially in reading comprehension and to identify the difficulties made by them in the reading test. Therefore, I applied quantitative approach where hard data or figures were used for objective data presentation.

3.2 Population

The population of this study was the TPB students of Mataram University in academic year 2016-2017 who were enrolled in English course in their second semester as the compulsory subject. There were total 108 classes in which each class consisted of 40-45 students. Therefore, the number of population in this research was 4700 students from both Soshum (social department) and Saintek (science department).

3.3 Sample and sampling technique

The sample of the study consisted of ten per cent of the target population as Arikunto (2002) stipulated that the minimum sample size should be at least 10-15 or 20-25 per cent of target population if there are more than 100 participants. Hence, the

researcher took 470 students in 11 different classes with cluster random sampling technique.

3.4 Data collection method and instrument

As an essential part in conducting a research, it is important to adopt an instrument to collect the data. In order to make sure that the way in collecting the data was suitable and matched to the main objective in this study, the present researcher took the result of midterm test as the primary data by asking permission to the English lecturer as the data sources. It was because the present researcher believed that taking students' exam was more valid in term of measuring students' real ability, because the results of the test were used as the students' record. Table of question types by Philips (2001) was used to identify the students' difficulties in reading test.

3.5 Data Analysis

The processes of quantitative data analysis that was conducted in this research were mentioned in the following steps:

1) The first step, the present researcher helped the lecturer to score the midterm sheets by using simple scoring formula. If the questions were multiple choices and each question had the same value (example one question equal one) the data were scored by following formula.

$S = \frac{\Sigma B}{\Sigma N} \text{x} 100$ (scale 0-100)

S: The score

Σ: The sum

B: The number of right answer

N: The number of question

By the formula above, the students were also bracketed into A B C D E. After getting the score of all the students, the next step was to find out how many students passed the passing grade (passing grade is 56 - < 65 marked by C) and how many of them did not pass the passing grade, and proved it into a percentage

2) The second step that present researcher classified the questions in reading test into several question types in reading test based on Philips (2001) in her book "*Longman*: *Preparation for The Computer And Paper Tests*". The data was analyzed by using the following table:

Table 3.1 : Questions types in reading test

Question types in reading test	Item Number	Incorrect Answer	Percentage
Main idea questions			
Total			
Stated detail questions			
Total			
Unstated detail questions			
Total			
Implied detail questions			
Total			
Author's purpose questions			
Total			
Synonym questions			
Total			

After categorizing the item number based on the question type in reading test, the numbers of students who answered the question incorrectly were also counted. The last step, the data were extracted into following formula:

$$P = \frac{\Sigma B}{\Sigma N} \text{x} 100\%$$

P: The percentage

Σ: The sum

B: The number of students who answer incorrectly

N: The number of students

After working the data with the mentioned formula, the percentage of difficulties that were faced by the TPB students discovered.

4. Findings and Discussions

4.1. Findings

4.1.1 Students' performance in reading test

In analyzing the students' performance in reading test, firstly the students' midterm answer sheets were collected and then matched it to the answer key of the midterm test that was provided by the lecturer. The following table showed the result of the midterm test:

Table 4.1: The result of the students' midterm test

Grade	Score interval	Number of students	Percentage
A	score $\geq$ 80	3	1%
B	65 - < 80	44	9%
C	56 - < 65	45	10%

D	46 - < 56	114	24%
E	score < 46	264	56%

The table showed that out of 470 students' answer sheets being analyzed, more than 80% the students did not pass the passing grade (C). The present researcher also categorized the students based on PAP or *Penilaian Acuan Patokan* based on *regulation and guideline of Mataram University*. There were only 3 students got the grade of A (score ≥ 80), 44 students got B (65 - < 80), 45 students got C (56 - < 65), 114 students got D (46 - < 56), and the rest 264 students got the grade of E (score < 46). It showed that the students who did not pass the passing grade (80%) were higher than those who passed (20 %).

4.1.2   Students' difficulties in reading test

In analyzing the students' difficulties in answering the reading test, the present researcher classified the 40 questions in the midterm test into several question types in reading test based on Philips (2001) and McGraw (2009) by identifying the characteristic of each question. Thus, there were six types of the reading question used. Those wer*e main idea questions* in the questions number 1 and 17, stated detail questions for questions number 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 13, 16, 18, 25, 28, 29, 33, 34, and 40, *unstated detail questions* at the number 6, 10, 15, 20, 35, 36, and 39, while *implied questions* for question number 8, 12, 14, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 30, and 37, the questions number 31 and 38 were categorized as *author purpose questions* and for questions number 9, 11, 19, and 32 were classified into *synonym questions*. The following table showed the students difficulties in answering reading test

Table 4.2: Questions types in reading test

Question types in reading test	Item Number	Number of students who answer incorrectly	Percentage	Average percentage
Main idea questions	1	105 students	22%	46%
	17	326 students	70%	
Stated detail questions	2	108 students	23%	46%
	3	212 students	45%	
	4	156 students	33%	
	5	59 students	13%	
	7	264 students	56%	
	13	225 students	48%	
	16	334 students	71%	
	18	205 students	44%	
	25	350 students	74%	
	28	258 students	55%	
	29	153 students	33%	
	33	300 students	64%	
	34	396 students	84%	
	40	32 students	7%	
Unstated detail questions	6	371 students	79%	55%
	10	392 students	83%	
	15	298 students	63%	
	20	209 students	44%	
	35	195 students	41%	
	36	179 students	38%	
	39	191 students	41%	
Implied detail questions	8	348 students	74%	68%
	12	378 students	80%	
	14	245 students	52%	
	21	239 students	51%	
	22	399 students	85%	
	23	163 students	35%	
	24	349 students	74%	
	26	375 students	80%	
	27	297 students	63%	
	30	324 students	69%	
	37	398 students	85%	
Author's purpose questions	31	173 students	37%	32%
	38	125 students	27%	
	9	215 students	46%	59%

	11	412 students	88%	
	19	220 students	47%	
Synonym	32	257 students	55%	

Table 4.3: The average percentages of incorrect answer based on reading questions types

Item number	Type of questions	Average Percentage
1	Implied questions	68%
2	Synonym questions	59%
3	Unstated detail questions	55%
4	Stated detail questions	46%
5	Main idea questions	46%
6	Author's purpose questions	32%

The table showed the rank of average percentage of incorrect answer based on reading questions types. The highest average percentage was *implied questions* which was 68% of students could not answer the question of this type correctly. The second and third highest percentages were *synonym questions* 59% and *unstated detail questions* 55%. While *stated detail questions* and *main idea questions* got the same average percentage which was 46% of the students were fall in this type of questions, and the lowest average percentage was *author's purpose questions* which was 32%.

4.2. Discussions

4.2.1. Students' performance in reading test

Reflecting on the first research problems, this research found that 80% of the students did not pass the passing grade and the rest 20 % passed the passing grade. It can be seen that large number of students got the grade of D and E. It was proved by the data that 114 students scored under 56, and 264 students got the score under 46.

While those who passed the passing grade were only 92 students, which were consisted of 3 students got the grade of A, 44 students and 45 students scored B and C. Not even half of the students passed the passing grade, it indicated that the students might had some of difficulties in reading comprehension. The lack might be on the the students' current level of vocabularies, structures, experiences, reader's motivation and attitude towards the text or passage, where Mehrpour & Riazi (2002) categorized those aspects as reader variables, and there was also text variables which included as factors that contributed in reading comprehension those were text content, text type and genre, text organization, and mostly about the text readability. It referred on how easily a passage or text can be read and understood by the readers. They mentioned that comprehension deficiency was not merely because the lack reader variables but also text variables (Mehrpour & Riazi : 2002).

4.2.2 Students' difficulties in reading test

This research also found the major findings toward the difficulties. This research discovered that the highest percentage was *implied questions type* where 68% of the students were fall at this type of questions. This type of questions typically needed an answer that was not directly written or stated in the passage, but the students had to draw a conclusion from information given from the text and outside the text (Philips : 2001). They did not need to focus only on what was in the text, but rather on what could be infer from the text. The percentage explained that the students had quite high difficulties in inferring the meaning of certain words from context.

The second highest percentage was *synonym questions*, where 59% of the students were wrong in answer this question type. According to the interview with the English lecturers, students' difficulties in understanding the text could be derived from the students' lack of knowledge towards the words or concepts in the passage. They had insufficient knowledge of vocabulary. The students mostly depended on dictionary-based meaning, which mean that they only knew the meaning of what it was written in dictionary, not in depth. With the lack of vocabulary knowledge, the students started to fall when they were asked to find the answer in different words that represented the same meaning or concepts in the text or passage. They tended to stuck at the unfamiliar words, and ignored the reading. In this case, the passage or the text gave clues of what the word means, it was called as context clues (Philips : 2001). The students might use the context clues by relating the sentences to sentences with the words and predicted the meaning based on the context of the passage.

The third highest percentage was *unstated detail questions* where 55% of the students could not answer this type of questions correctly. In this type of questions the students typically had to eliminate the distractors (possible answers) by verifying that three of the four answer choices that were found at the passage and, the one remaining choice that was not mentioned was the correct answer. Because the correct one of this type of questions was the option that was not stated in the passage (McGraw : 2009). Therefore, scanning strategy was needed in answering this type of questions.

The fourth and the fifth highest percentage were *stated detail questions* and *main idea questions*, which both type got the same percentage which was 46% of the students who answered this question types incorrectly. Eventough the answer of *stated detail questions* usually explicitly mentioned on the part of the passage, the students still had difficulties in this kind of questions. It was proved that 46% were fall in this question type. One of the reasons was because the students have low scanning strategy in answering the test. Students tended to look at the passage as a whole before going to the questions. While, in stated detail question, the readers did not need to look over the whole text, but rather they should focused on specific information that was asked in the question. Therefore, scanning was the proper way to be applied in dealing with this kind of questions.

While in answering the main idea questions, the students need to apply skimming strategy. Different from scanning strategy, in skimming the students had to look at the general overview about the passage and ignore the specific information. The same as the *stated detail questions,* this question types also got the percentage of 46% were wrong in answering this question type.

The last was *author's purpose questions* where 68% of the students or more than a half students could answer this kind of question type correctly. Therefore, the *author purpose questions* were categorized as less problematic question type.

5. Conclusion

Based on the data at the fourth chapter, the students' performance in reading test was showed by the percentage of the students that passed the passing grade

(20%) which was lower from those who did not pass the passing grade (80%). There were only 3 students got the grade of A, 44 got B, 45 students got C, and those who got the grade of D and E were 116 and 264 students. Therefore, the lecturers obviously could not only take the midterm as their record, but they also conducted another assignments or tasks to assist the students' midterm scores.

At the fourth chapter also mentioned the students' difficulties in answering the midterm test. Based on the rank of average percentage of incorrect answer based on reading questions types that the major difficulties that the students faced in the midterm test were *implied questions* as the most difficult question types, and then followed by *synonym questions, stated detail questions, main idea questions* and the last *was author's purpose question* as the less problematic question types.

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