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ANALISA KEMAMPUAN MEMBACA MAHASISWA

ANALYSIS OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' READING ABILITY

Oleh

Ujang Suparman

Staf Pengajar pada Jurusan Pendidikan Bahasa dan Seni FKIP Unila
Diterima 12 Januari 2007/disetujui 13 Pebruari 2007

Abstract: *This article reports the results of an investigation on students' reading comprehension-related aspects, which were obtained by using questionnaire data collecting technique. The main questions are whether high and low proficiency Indonesian EFL readers differ in any way (1) in the reading comprehension problems they might encounter; (2) in the strategies they might use to overcome these comprehension problems; (3) in the motivation in reading an English text and (4) in their attitude toward English and reading comprehension of an English text. The population of the research was the students of English Study Program at Lampung University registered in the odd semester 2003 (Semesters Three, Five and Seven). The sample was 150 students who were selected at random. The data collecting technique was questionnaire. Based on the results of the data analysis, for the first three questions, it was found that there were statistically significant differences between high and low proficiency readers in reading comprehension problems they encountered, strategies they used and their motivation to learn and read English texts.*

Key words: *reading problems, reading strategies, motivation, and attitude*

INTRODUCTION

The research was triggered up by some people's concern about the unsatisfactory results of teaching and learning English in Indonesia (Alisyahbana, 1990: 320, Kartasasmita, 1997: 19 - 15, Soedrajat, 1997: 13, British Council, 1990: 11). The research was conducted to answer the questions pertaining to comprehension problems (Smith, 1978: 11, 1986: 25, Suparman, 2001: 153-177), which were commonly found by Indonesian students, the strategies (O'Malley, et al. 1990, 1999: 129-130) they used to overcome the problems, motivation to learn English and their attitude toward English. The data required were collected by means of questionnaire and think aloud (Ericsson, et al, 1980, 1987, 1993: 372). However, this article focuses on the report of the findings of questionnaire-based data. The questionnaires consisted of eight sections with a total of 132 items, administered to 150 participants.

The questionnaire items are classified into those relating to reading difficulties, reading strategies, participants' attitude toward English and English speakers and their motivation to learn English. After each item was grouped into the classification above, the reliability of each group was calculated as will be explained in the following section.

RESEARCH METHOD

The data were analyzed by using a quantitative method, that is, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). Although it would be possible to use t-tests to examine differences in the variables, between high and low proficiency readers when they were trying to make sense of English texts, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was employed because it is more conservative than t-tests. With the use of a series of t-tests it is possible to obtain tenuous significant results, that is, misleading results, because some may occur by chance.

The items from the questionnaires were examined to determine whether they were reliable to answer the questions about the comprehension problems. Or whether other groups of the items were reliable to answer the questions about the comprehension strategies. Cronbach's Alpha was used to measure the reliability of the grouping.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results of Reliability Analysis

The results of the reliability analysis show that the three categories of the comprehension problems have a high Cronbach's alpha, that is, (1) *Grammatical, morphological and syntactic* $\alpha = .96$, *Lexical and semantic* $\alpha = .90$, and (3) *Background knowledge* $\alpha = .88$. all those three categories, therefore, could be used to answer the main research question, whether there is a difference between high and low proficiency Indonesian EFL readers in some way in the comprehension problems.

The results also show that four categories of the comprehension strategies (O'Malley, et al, 1990, 1999: 129-130) have a high Cronbach's alpha: (1) *Prediction, guessing* (Goodman, 1982: 31) and *inference* (McKoon, et al, 1992: 121, Hammadou, 1991) $\alpha = .90$, (2) *Skimming, skipping and topic priority* $\alpha = .94$, (3) *Translation, coinage, paraphrasing, and alternative interpretation* $\alpha = .93$, and finally (4) *Dictionary consultation, help-seeking* (Karabenick, et al, 1991: 125, Nelson, 1981: 27, Newman, 1994: 57) and *self-asking* $\alpha = .80$. They, therefore, were also able to be used to answer the second main research question, whether there was a difference between high and low proficiency Indonesian EFL readers in comprehension strategies they might use. The Cronbach's alpha for the motivation variable is also high enough, $\alpha = .88$, to be used to answer the secondary research question. The Cronbach's alpha for the attitude toward English and/or English speakers is high enough, because it exceeds Cronbach's alpha = .60 (the general accepted level), as indicated by Cronbach's alpha .67.

Comprehension Problems

The results of the analysis of comprehension problems in general indicated that there were significant differences between high and low proficiency readers in comprehension problems that the participants encountered, both by level of proficiency, $F(6, 274) = 44.33$, $p = .000$, and by level of semester, $F(6, 274) = 7.25$, $p = .000$. Each category of the comprehension problems will be discussed in greater depth in the following sections.

Grammatical, morphological and syntactic

The analysis of the results to test the main research question indicated that, first, there was a significant difference between high and low proficiency Indonesian EFL readers in the comprehension problems encountered. Low proficiency readers reported encountering *Grammatical, morphological and syntactic* category of comprehension problems more frequently than high proficiency readers did.

These findings support those of the results of the think aloud protocol analysis data, (see Suparman, 2001: 159). The difference in *Grammatical, morphological and syntactic* comprehension problems was also found to vary according to the semester levels. The participants in the high proficiency group in Semester One ($\bar{x} = 46.35$) reported encountering *Grammatical, morphological and syntactic* comprehension problems more frequently than the high proficiency groups in Semesters Three ($\bar{x} = 35.49$) and Five ($\bar{x} = 24.52$). However, the rate at which low proficiency readers reported encountering problems in *Grammatical, morphological and syntactic* decrease much less from Semester One to Semester Five than did the rate for high proficiency readers. The differences were significant by semester levels, $F(6, 274) = 7.25$, $p = .000$.

Figure 1 displays the difference between high and low proficiency readers in *Grammatical, morphological and syntactic* comprehension problems.

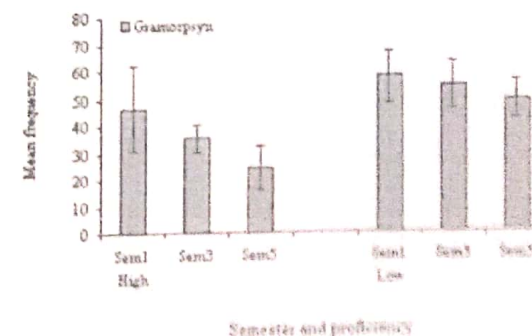


Figure 1. Comparison of *Grammatical, morphological and syntactic* comprehension problems by proficiency and semester

Lexico-semantic

Similarly to the results for *Grammatical*, (Mandell, 1999: 37) *morphological and syntactic*, the results revealed that there was a significant difference between high and low proficiency readers in *Lexico semantic* comprehension problems by level of proficiency ($F = 66.21$, $p = .000$).

Low proficiency readers in every semester encountered *Lexico-semantic* comprehension problems more frequently than the high proficiency group did. There was no difference among high proficiency readers between semesters.

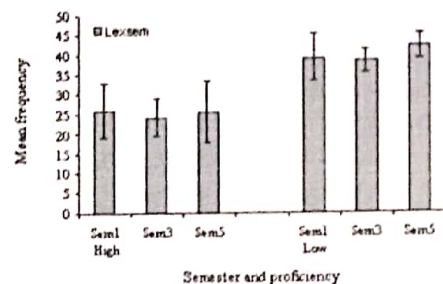


Figure 2. Comparison of *Lexico-semantic* comprehension problems by proficiency and semester.

Figure 2 above shows that as a whole, low proficiency readers reported encountering *Lexico-semantic* more frequently than the high proficiency readers. Semester One ($\bar{x} = 38.48$) students in the low proficiency group reported marginally similar to those in Semester Three ($\bar{x} = 37.71$) even slightly more frequently. This suggests that the students are more conscious of *Lexico-semantic* problems and, therefore, that they reported more frequently than they really encountered. The evidence of this can be seen in Suparman (2001: 123-238).

Background Knowledge

Consistent with the previous two areas, the results of the data analysis showed that there was a significant difference between high and low proficiency readers in *Background knowledge* (Bernhardt, 1991: 5, Cote, et al, 1995: 95) comprehension problems ($F = 3.47$, $p = .0340$). But this significant difference can be attributed to the difference between high and low proficiency readers enrolled in Semester Five and not to the other students enrolled in two other semesters.

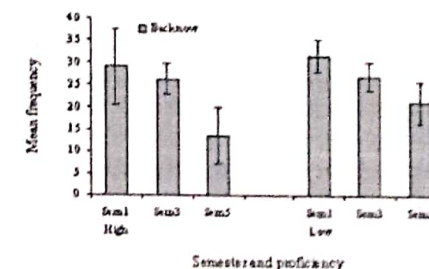


Figure 3. Comparison of *Background knowledge* comprehension problems by proficiency and semester.

In Semester Five, the difference is 7.84, whereas in the other two semesters, the difference is less than 1.5. All this significance is attributable to the differences above.

Figure 3 above shows that there is a direct relationship between their report of encountering the problems and the level of semester. Earlier semester students in both groups reported encountering the problems more frequently than those in later semesters.

Comprehension Strategies

The results of the data analysis indicated that there were differences between high and low proficiency readers in the strategies that the participants reported using to overcome their comprehension problems. The differences were found in six categories of comprehension strategies - (1) *Prediction, guessing, and inference*, (2) *Skimming, skipping, and topic priority*, (3) *Repeating and note taking*, (4) *Translation, coinage, paraphrasing, and alternative interpretation* (5) *Language analysis*, and (6) *Dictionary consultation, help-seeking and self-asking*.

The evidence of the differences was shown by the results of the statistical multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) as follows: (1) There was a significant difference, at an alpha level of .05, in the comprehension strategy use among the participants of different levels of proficiency, $F(12, 250) = 26.95$, $p = .000$. The univariate/between-subjects tests indicated that all six categories of comprehension strategies contributed to the significant effects of the multivariate analysis, at an alpha level of .05. (2) There was a significant difference, at an alpha level of .05, in the comprehension strategies used by the participants of different semesters, $F(12, 250) = 2.86$, $p = .001$. The univariate/between-subjects tests indicated that four out of six comprehension strategies contributed to the significant effects of the multivariate analysis. They were (1) *Prediction, guessing, and inference* ($F = 9.58$, $p = .000$), (2) *Skimming, skipping, and topic priority* ($F = 10.12$, $p = .000$), (3) *Language analysis* ($F = 5.14$, $p = .000$) and (4) *Dictionary consultation, help-seeking and self-asking* ($F = 5.17$, $p = .000$). The differences were found to vary between proficiency groups and among semester levels.

Prediction, guessing, and inference

High proficiency readers (= 84.05) reported employing *Prediction, guessing, inference and alternative interpretation* comprehension strategies more frequently than low proficiency readers (= 58.64), did. However, there was almost no difference in the use of these comprehension strategies across the semester levels in low proficiency readers.

Skimming, skipping, and topic priority (SSTP)

The results of the analysis also indicated that high proficiency readers (= 30.06) might employ *Skimming, skipping, and topic priority* (SSTP) comprehension strategies more frequently than low proficiency readers (= 22.30) did. This suggests that those high proficiency readers tended to focus their attention on the main idea (Wasman, et al, 2000: 114) rather than on the details and that they tended to skip anything, which was not directly related to the understanding of the main idea.

Figure 4 displays the comparison of the use of *Skimming, skipping, and topic priority* comprehension strategies by both groups of readers by level of proficiency and semester.

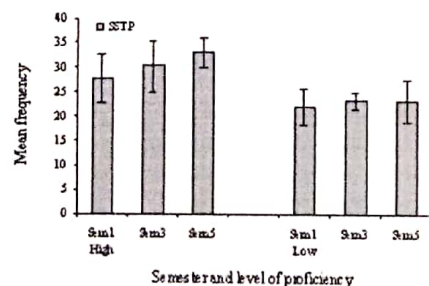


Figure 4 Comparison of *Skimming, skipping, and topic priority* (SSTP) comprehension strategies by level of semesters and proficiency

In general, Figure 4 shows that high proficiency readers used SSTP comprehension strategies more frequently than low proficiency readers did. For high proficiency readers, the figure shows direct relationship between the use of the strategy by the high proficiency group and the level of semester. The only difference happened for low proficiency readers where there was no influence of the level of semester in which the participants were enrolled on the use of the strategies.

Further, the results also revealed a direct relationship between level of proficiency and semester, that is, the high proficiency participants tended to increase their possible use of the strategies in relation to the semester level. By contrast, those of low proficiency were less affected by the level of semester in which they were.

Repeating and note taking

The results of the analysis indicated that low proficiency readers (= 9.69) reported employing *Repeating and note taking* (Wasman, et al, 2000: 319) comprehension strategies more frequently than the high proficiency readers (= 7.08).

The use of the *Repeating and note taking* strategies was assumed to relate to the habit of the low proficiency readers who focus their attention on the independent individual words rather on the main idea of the text. While repeating, they also take notes about the difficult words. Therefore, they tended to take longer to read the same text than the high proficiency readers did. Repeating and note taking strategies can be considered non-integrative strategies because while using the strategies, the readers focused the attention predominantly on the individual word.

Translating, coinage, paraphrasing and alternative interpretation (TCPA)

Low proficiency readers (= 25.94) reported employing the strategies more frequently than the high proficiency readers (= 14.49) did.

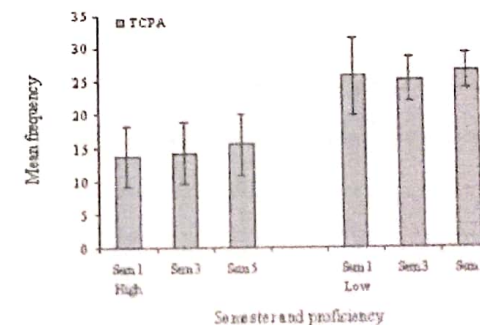


Figure 5 Comparison of *Translating, coinage, paraphrasing and alternative Interpretation* (TCPA) comprehension strategies by semester and proficiency

Figure 5 shows great differences between high and low proficiency readers, in the use of TCPA strategies where low proficiency readers reported using the strategies more frequently than the high proficiency readers.

Language Analysis

The results of the analysis indicated that high proficiency readers (= 49.31) reported employing *Language analysis* comprehension strategies more frequently than low proficiency readers (= 37.34) did. Furthermore, statistical multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) shows a significant difference between high proficiency readers in each semester ($F = 5.14, p = .007$). The difference indicates that the later the semester in which the participants studied (Semester Five), the higher the rate of the use of the strategy was.

Dictionary consultation, help-seeking and self-asking

High proficiency readers (= 32.13) reported using *Dictionary consultation, help-seeking and self-asking* comprehension strategies more frequently than low proficiency readers (= 25.61). The question then is, why did high proficiency readers employ the *Dictionary consultation, help-seeking and self-asking* strategies more frequently than low readers? I assume that high proficiency readers were more overt, cooperative, and felt happy to ask and discuss the comprehension problems they found with other classmates. Besides, they used the strategies in combination with help-seeking, sharing ideas with other friends, whereas low proficiency readers might have been reluctant to ask and share ideas with other readers. The low proficiency readers tended to be more covert, feel threatened to ask and discuss comprehension problems with other students.

The Attitude toward English and The Motivation to Learn and Read English Texts

In relation to the attitudes towards English in general and reading comprehension in particular, the results of the data analysis showed no differences between high and low proficiency readers. Both high and low proficiency readers have positive attitudes toward English and both groups considered that English was very important for them either for increasing academic achievement or for their future career. By contrast, concerning motivation, the findings indicated that high proficiency readers' interest to learn and to comprehend English texts was very high, whereas low proficiency readers' was very low.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**Conclusions:**

In this research, the research questions have been examined by using questionnaire-based data and answered as follows:

- There were differences between high and low proficiency Indonesian EFL students in the comprehension problems that they encountered during making sense of an English text. Low proficiency Indonesian readers encountered comprehension problems more frequently than high proficiency readers in three major categories of comprehension problems: (1) *Grammatical, morphological and syntactic*, (2) *Lexical and semantic* and (3) *Background knowledge*.
- There were significant differences between high and low proficiency readers in the comprehension strategies to overcome the comprehension problems during making sense of an English text. High proficiency readers, in general, employed a combination of comprehension strategies, whereas low proficiency readers tended to use a limited range of comprehension strategies.
- There were differences between high and low proficiency readers as to the motivation to learn English and to read an English text.
- Concerning the participants' attitude toward English and the speakers of English, the results of data analysis showed **no differences** between high and low proficiency readers. Both high and low proficiency readers have positive attitudes toward English and academic achievement or for future careers.

Recommendations:

Based on the findings of this research, it is recommended that to help the students increase their comprehension achievements and overcome their difficulties when they are trying to make sense of the ideas in an English text, the teachers or lecturers of English should pay their attention to three major comprehension problems which are commonly found when they are making sense of the ideas conveyed in a text. Secondly, they should teach the low-reading-proficiency students to make use of appropriate, **more integrative** reading strategies rather than **non-integrative** strategies. Finally, they should encourage the students to learn and read English texts in such a way that they may be more motivated, because motivation was found to play important roles in this study.

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