

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

English plays an important role in our lives. There are four skills which are needed to be mastered in order to be able to acquire it. They are listening, speaking, reading and writing. Among those four skills reading may be considered as the most difficult one by the students to be mastered because many of today's students are poor readers (Bean, 1996).

There are five specific practices that teachers should use when teaching students to read or when helping them to improve their reading skills. These practices are phonemic awareness, instruction in phonics, guided oral reading practice with feedback, vocabulary instruction, and comprehension strategy instruction (Prado & Plourde,

2005) in Harvey (2014). Among those five practices the most important may be reading comprehension strategies.

In order to comprehend English test, students must have sufficient vocabulary size as it is stated by Nation (2001) vocabulary knowledge is one of the best predictors of learners' ability in reading comprehension. Reading comprehension requires the students to know and understand what they are reading. Thus, if students can read fluently without making any mistakes, it does not mean that they have comprehended the reading materials.

Reading comprehension is a complex skill which involves, thinking, teaching, past experience and knowledge (Prado & Plourde, 2005) in Harvey (2014). It means when students read a text for the first time, they are only reading words then when his ability is getting better, he moves into learning the actual meaning of words they are reading. In this case what is being read by students is actually the key to comprehension. Comprehension is the "interaction among word

identification, prior knowledge, comprehension strategies, and engagement”

(Prado & Plourde, 2005, p. 33) in Harvey (2014). Thus it means that if students want to comprehend a reading text, they must be able to identify words, have prior knowledge about the material, have comprehension strategies, and engagement to the reading passage. If they cannot do all of those things, comprehending reading texts might be difficult for them.

What is the purpose of reading? Nuttall (2005) states that the reasons for reading is not because we are interested in the pronunciation and grammatical structures which are used in the text but we probably want to get the message that the writer intended. Based on the explanation it is clear that reading is difficult not only because of the structures or grammatical structures which are used in the text but also because the readers are expected to get the message the writer has written. In order to be able to get the message delivered

by the writer, students must have schemata or background knowledge (Nuttall, 2005) and enough vocabulary size (Laufer, 1997 in Nilforoushan, 2012).

Nuttall (2005, p. 7) states “Schema is a mental structure. It is abstract because it does not relate to any particular experiences, although it derives from all the particular experiences we have had. It is a structure because it is organized; it includes the relationship between its component parts.” For example, if students do not have many experiences, it will be difficult for them to relate the story which is being read with the real life they have. In this case understanding reading passages can be really difficult for them.

Lack of vocabulary might lead students to difficulty in understanding reading passages because vocabulary plays an important role in order to comprehend reading texts. If students do not have enough vocabulary size, it is for

sure that they will have difficulties in comprehending

reading passages. Vocabulary is the most important part in language learning and language use (Laufer, 1997) in Nilforoushan (2012). It is a central aspect of language learning in general, and reading comprehension in particular. A main strategy which can be applied in order to build vocabulary for reading is by guessing word meaning from contextual clues and background knowledge. Moreover, vocabulary is the strongest component of proper reading comprehension and studies have shown that students who have a large working vocabulary receive better grades than students who do not (Stahl & Fairbanks, 1986) in Harvey. In other words, we may say that without having enough vocabulary size, it is impossible for students to understand reading passages. Moreover, Laufer (1997) states that vocabulary learning is the heart of language learning and language use. Thus, it is vocabulary learning that makes the essence of any language. Without vocabulary it is impossible for someone to convey message and communicate with each other in any particular

language.

What might make the students read poorly? Reading may be difficult for students because, first, they do not have sufficient vocabulary. Vocabulary plays an important role to comprehend reading texts. If students do not have enough vocabulary size, they will have difficulties in comprehending reading passages. Laufer (1997) in Nilforoushan (2012) stated that vocabulary is the most important part in language learning and language use. Thus, we may say that vocabulary is a central aspect of language learning in general and reading comprehension in particular. Next Laufer (1998) cited in Olmos (2009) also stated that he expected Israeli high school students to have learned between 3,500 and 4,000 word families, while a native speaker of the same age was supposed to know between 18,000 and 20,000 word families. In the same study a threshold level for minimal comprehension was established at 3,000 word families and a level of 5,000 word families needed to be capable of reading for pleasure.

Therefore, teachers in Indonesia should expect their students to reach at least the 3,000 threshold level. Stahl & Fairbanks (1986) cited in Harvey believed that vocabulary is the strongest component of proper reading comprehension and studies have shown that students who have a large working vocabulary receive better grades than those who do not.

The second is students do not practice extensive reading.

Extensive reading involves learners reading texts for enjoyment and to develop general reading skills. Read (2000) in Olmos (2009) stated that learners more likely know about words if the words frequently occur but when the words occur less frequently then the students will also know less about the words. Thus it is clear that if the students practice extensive reading, they will find new words and if they find them frequently, they will remember them. The third is students' poor reading comprehension. Jitendra and Gajra (2011) cited in Harvey stated that poor reading comprehension may also be related to a lack of

prior experiences or a lower socio-economic environment. In this case, the students' ability to comprehend reading passages is strongly related to their prior knowledge. If students do not have sufficient experiences, they will get difficulty to get the ideas from the passages they are reading.

Realizing the importance between reading skill and vocabulary size owned by the students, the writer wants to find out whether vocabulary size gives strong influence on students' ability on reading achievement.

Studies on the importance of having vocabulary size in order to understand reading passages have been done by some experts. Yildirim, Yildi and Ates (2011) found out that there was a significant correlation between vocabulary and reading comprehension in terms of text types as well as that the vocabulary was a predictor of reading comprehension in terms of text types. Anderson & Freebody (1979) found out that word knowledge is a prerequisite for reading

comprehension. Similarly Olmos (2009) found out that ‘a small vocabulary size will also limit students’ other language capacities’.

The above mentioned studies were conducted in the environments where English is spoken as a second language (L2). The same study in EFL environments has been done but the subjects are different. In the previous study the subjects are under graduate students while in this study the subjects are senior high school students. The purpose of the present study is therefore to test whether there is a strong relationship between having a wide range of vocabulary knowledge and the ability to understand reading passages in the EFL environments.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The study tries to find out whether there is a strong correlation between the breadth and the depth of vocabulary and the students’ ability to comprehend reading passages. Stahl and Fairbanks

(1986) in Harvey (2014) state that vocabulary is the strongest component of proper reading comprehension and studies have shown that students who have a large working vocabulary receive better grades than students who do not. The purpose of reading is actually to get the message intended by the writer (Nuttall, 2005, p. 3). In real life (in the writer's class), most of students fail to comprehend reading passages. Based on the explanation above the formulated question is "What is the correlation between the breadth and the depth of vocabulary and grade ten students' reading achievement?"

1.3 The Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to determine what the correlation is between the breadth and the depth of vocabulary and the grade ten students' reading achievement.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used in this study is linguistic schemata theory developed by Barlett (1932). Barlett (1932) in An (2013) states that the term "schema" was first used in psychology by Barlett as an active organization of past reactions or experiences. The second is Vocabulary Theory. It is about the breadth and depth of vocabulary. Meanwhile Barrett's Taxonomy of reading comprehension will be used to examine students' reading comprehension skill.

1.5 The Hypothesis

Based on the theoretical framework above the question of the present study can be tentatively answered. The temporary answers to the problem statement are formulated as follows:

Ha: There is a positive correlation between the breadth and the depth of vocabulary and reading achievement on ten grade students.

To test the alternative hypothesis, the null hypothesis is formulated as follows:

Ho: There is no positive correlation between vocabulary size and reading achievement on ten grade students

1.6 The Assumptions

This study is based on these following assumptions:

1. The Vocabulary Test Level 3000 is considered to be valid and reliable since the test has been validated by many EFL and ESL contexts.
2. The students' score of the vocabulary Test Level 3000 represents their vocabulary size.
3. The students' score of reading comprehensions tasks represents their ability in understanding passages.

1.7 Scope and Limitation of the Study

The study focuses on the correlation between vocabulary size and the students' achievement in reading.

It is a correlation study. The sample is grade ten students of a private school in Surabaya. This study involved 60 students.

1.8 The Significance of the Study

Practically, this study is expected to give more insight for diagnostic purposes. Teachers can diagnose their students' weaknesses and strengths in English in terms of vocabulary. This study will also be useful for teachers to assess and measure the learners' vocabulary knowledge and to select teaching materials which meet their ability. Finally, it will help teachers to find the right strategy to teach vocabulary.

Theoretically, the findings are expected to be useful information for other observers who are interested in analyzing the correlation between vocabulary size and reading ability and also the

importance and the role of vocabulary in reading.

1.9 Definition of Key Term

According to Hiebert & Kamil (2005) vocabulary is the knowledge of meanings of words which come at least in to two forms: oral and print. Knowledge of words also comes in at least two forms: receptive and productive. Receptive means vocabulary we understand and recognize whereas productive means vocabulary we use when we speak and write.

Vocabulary Knowledge is the ability to go from the printed form of a word to its meaning.

Reading Comprehension is “the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language (Snow, 2002, p. 11)