

CHAPTER I

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1.1 Background of the Study

It is a common fact that English is known as an international language which is used in all parts of the world. According to Sadtono (2005, personal interview), English is used officially by at least 35 nations in the world. In countries where English is neither a first nor a second language, English is taught or learned as the first foreign language for practical and necessary uses of communication (Suryawati, 1989:1). That is why English has become the world's most important language since it is spoken by people all over the world and has several roles as a mother tongue, a second language or a foreign language.

In Indonesia, English plays the role as the first foreign language which is taught in schools. Based on the Legislation No. 096/1967 of the Ministry of Education and Culture dated 12 December 1967, English became the first foreign language in Indonesia (Kartono in Suryawati, 1989:1). Furthermore, Ngadiman (1990:1) explains that in Indonesia, English is officially acknowledged as the first foreign language. It is not used as a means of daily oral communication but mostly functions to access a large body of scientific and technological information. In short, English as the first foreign language in Indonesia does not only have an important position in the educational system but it is also the key which opens doors to scientific and technological knowledge which is needed for the economic and political development in Indonesia.

Due to the fact that English has an important role in Indonesia, the objectives of English teaching must be determined clearly. The Decree of the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture no. 096/1967 dated 12 December 1967 stipulated that the objective of the teaching of English is to build a “working knowledge of English”. A working knowledge is defined in the following aspects: (1) effective reading ability; (2) ability to understand spoken English; (3) writing ability and (4) speaking ability (Halim in Suryawati, 1989:2). The order of the listing of these abilities suggests primary emphasis on reading ability and the purposes given to the ability is respectively to comprehend the content of textbooks and references materials in English. This statement is also supported by Sutaria’s, “Reading is a learning aid. For many kinds of learning, it is essential..., reading is considered as an important phase in foreign language teaching” (1980:11). According to the above quotations, it is clear that reading is very important in encouraging successful foreign language teaching and learning, particularly English. Because of the importance of reading, language learners have to read a lot to improve their competence.

To support students’ reading activity, reading materials which are readable must be available to use. Alexander (1988:23) says that reading materials are one of the factors influencing reading comprehension. In this case, reading materials should be suitable in terms of difficulty to the students. Otherwise, it will bother the students’ process in developing their reading skill. Also, perhaps, they will lose interest in or be frustrated by the text that is not suitable for them. In contrast, if they are given a suitable text or a text that they can read, they will enjoy the text and be motivated to read it. Consequently, their reading ability will improve. Strang (in

Ibadiyah, 1995:9) states that the teaching of reading will be successful if the materials can be fully understood and comprehended by the students. Similarly, Saukah and Murdibjono (cited in Utami, 1996:18) also state that matching the readability level of a text used in instruction to the intended readers is important. In other words, unsuitable materials may cause or intensify reading problems. That is why, reading materials given to the students must be readable.

Readable reading materials refer to several things. One of them is Input Hypothesis. According to the Input Hypothesis (Krashen and Terrel 1983:32), we acquire (not learn) language by understanding comprehensible input – input that is a little beyond our current level of (acquired) competence ($i + 1$). In other words, students acquire only when they understand language that contains structure that is “a little beyond” where they are now. It implies that readable reading materials must not be too difficult for the readers. These materials must be within the students’ range of competence, either in terms of vocabulary, structures or background knowledge. It is obvious that selecting materials is something that is very important for a teacher. In other words, the teacher should consider the students’ ability in selecting materials since it might influence their reading skill development. Thus, identifying suitable materials is an essential thing for the teacher.

Unfortunately, not all reading materials available for the students are readable. There are still problems of reading texts whose level of difficulty is not suitable for the students’ level of competence. As a result, the students gain nothing from reading materials. To enable students to read with understanding, the text must be readable for them. According to Sutaria, the more readable a book is, the more

useful it will be as an aid in teaching pupils (1980:99). Regarding this explanation, it is important to provide the suitable book for the students so that their reading ability will increase.

Studies on investigating the readability of English textbooks have been conducted by some other researchers. The first researcher is Wiyono (1988) who analyzes the readability of reading materials in the “Penuntun Pelajaran Bahasa Inggris Berdasarkan Kurikulum 1984.” She proves that this textbook is not readable because there are no illustrations at all in it. Whereas illustrations are one of the main factors which facilitate the students in comprehending the contents of the reading materials. Sutaria states major factors of readability as follows:

“The major factors of readability include those that vary considerably to suit the learner’s maturity and increasing competence in reading and affect readability to a great extent, namely: (1) content, (2) vocabulary, (3) structure, (4) typography, and (5) illustrations.” (1980:99-100)

Furthermore, she adds that illustrations increase readability by decreasing the reading difficulty found in the text. With the help of illustrations, students may find reading in a foreign language is a pleasure rather than a burden (1980:111). However, in her research, she does not consider that novels or short stories do not usually have any illustrations but they are still readable (Sadtono, 2006, personal interview).

The second researcher is Suryawati (1989) who analyzes the readability of reading materials in the “Buku Teks Wajib Untuk SMTA – Bahasa Inggris – Depdikbud.” She concludes that even though the reading materials in this textbook are suitable for Senior High School level (according to Fog index), they indicate low level of readability for the second year students of Social Science (A-3) of SMA

DAPENA – I Surabaya. The reading materials show low level of readability in terms of vocabulary and structure, a moderate level in terms of background knowledge and personal interest, and a sufficient level in terms of illustrations (Suryawati, 1989:xi). It means that the reading materials are too difficult for the students so that they need much help from the teacher or other aids.

The third researcher is Karuniawati (1995) whose study is on the readability of reading materials in the “Communicative Learning English for SMA.” The result of her research shows that the reading materials in this textbook indicate high level of readability in terms of vocabulary, structures, and illustrations. In addition, the reading materials also show a sufficient level of readability in terms of background knowledge and personal interest. While in terms of school level, the reading materials indicate that they are not suitable for the third year students of Senior High School (1995:xi).

Regarding to the above researches done to SMA students, the researchers should realize that different SMA would have different standard. As a result, certain reading materials that are appropriate for certain SMA students may not appropriate for other SMA students (Sadtono, 2006, personal interview). In addition, they did not consider the different level of class or education in Indonesia and countries where readability formulas they used in their studies originated. They directly applied the readability formulas as the instruments of the investigation to the reading materials whose readability level they were measuring. In reality, these formulas cannot be directly applied to the reading materials used in Indonesia, for students’ language

competence in Indonesia is different from students' language competence in countries where these formulas originated.

In addition, several other studies related to the text readability have been conducted. They have proved that most of the available textbooks are not readable for the intended readers. Deboer et al (1982:173) say that many books have readability indexes far beyond the grade level for whom they are intended. Furthermore, they explain that there are some texts which are too difficult for secondary school students in terms of vocabulary. Vocabulary items in some textbooks are too difficult for the intended students. Of course, this condition will influence the students' reading skill development. A study conducted by Ibadiyah (1995) found that the three textbooks investigated were readable, but one of them was not appropriate for the intended students as it was too easy.

Therefore, it is clear that the readability of texts has an important role in developing the students' reading skill. In other words, the texts' readability will determine the success of reading skill mastery of Indonesian students. Based on the above consideration, this study is conducted. It investigates the readability of reading materials used in the reading instruction II at the English Department Faculty of Teacher Training and Education Widya Mandala Catholic University Surabaya. Readability level of reading materials investigated in this study is measured by using three readability formulas and cloze tests. Here, the use of readability formulas is important because it is not scientific if reading materials are considered to be readable or not readable just based on assumption. That is why research is needed to

prove the materials are really easy or difficult for the intended readers. In this research, readability formulas are needed.

1.2 Statement of the Problems

The primary concern of this study is to investigate the reading materials used in the reading instruction II at the English Department Faculty of Teacher Training and Education Widya Mandala Catholic University Surabaya in order to know whether the materials have fulfilled the criteria of readability. In this regard, the researcher focuses on the readability of the materials. Therefore, the major problem which is going to be investigated in this study is:

What is the readability level of reading materials used in the reading instruction II at the English Department Faculty of Teacher Training and Education Widya Mandala Catholic University Surabaya?

Since this study applies three readability formulas and cloze tests, the above major problem can also be specified into the following minor problems:

- (1) What is the readability level of reading materials used in the reading instruction II at the English Department Faculty of Teacher Training and Education Widya Mandala Catholic University Surabaya measured by using Fry Graph formula?
- (2) What is the readability level of reading materials used in the reading instruction II at the English Department Faculty of Teacher Training and Education Widya Mandala Catholic University Surabaya measured by using Raygor Graph formula?

- (3) What is the readability level of reading materials used in the reading instruction II at the English Department Faculty of Teacher Training and Education Widya Mandala Catholic University Surabaya measured by using Reading Ease Flesch formula?
- (4) What is the readability level of reading materials used in the reading instruction II at the English Department Faculty of Teacher Training and Education Widya Mandala Catholic University Surabaya measured by using cloze tests?

1.3 Statement of the Objectives

Derived directly from the above formulated problems, this study has one major objective that is to investigate the readability level of reading materials used in the reading instruction II at the English Department Faculty of Teacher Training and Education Widya Mandala Catholic University Surabaya. Besides, since there are three readability formulas and a cloze test used in this study, the above major problem objective can also be specified into four sub-objectives as follows:

- (1) To determine the readability level of reading materials used in the reading instruction II at the English Department Faculty of Teacher Training and Education Widya Mandala Catholic University Surabaya measured by using Fry Graph formula.
- (2) To determine the readability level of reading materials used in the reading instruction II at the English Department Faculty of Teacher Training and Education Widya Mandala Catholic University Surabaya measured by using Raygor Graph formula.

- (3) To determine the readability level of reading materials used in the reading instruction II at the English Department Faculty of Teacher Training and Education Widya Mandala Catholic University Surabaya measured by using Reading Ease Flesch formula.
- (4) To determine the readability level of reading materials used in the reading instruction II at the English Department Faculty of Teacher Training and Education Widya Mandala Catholic University Surabaya measured by using cloze tests.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The study provides information about the reading materials, whether they are readable for the intended readers or not. If the finding shows that the reading materials are readable and appropriate, it is better for the teachers to use them as instructional materials. On the other hand, if the reading materials are not readable and inappropriate for the intended readers, it is better to reconsider the use of the reading materials or to revise them in order to have a more suitable readability level for the intended readers.

1.5 Limitations

There are some aspects about the limitations of this study that the researcher would like to explain in this section. First, the research focus is only on the reading materials which are investigated in this study. The researcher will only deal with the readability of reading materials used by students in the reading instruction II at the

English Department Faculty of Teacher Training and Education Widya Mandala Catholic University Surabaya.

Second, the researcher will deal only with the readability level measured by using cloze tests and three readability formulas which include Fry Graph formula, Raygor Graph formula and Reading Ease formula. The other factors that may hinder the students' achievement in the reading comprehension will not be discussed.

Third, the instruments used in this study are cloze tests and three readability formulas which include Fry Graph formula, Raygor Graph formula and Reading Ease formula. The reasons for choosing those instruments are because they are quite practical – they require no complicated computation and have a clear criterion for the interpretation of the result. In addition, a cloze test is an effective way to measure reading comprehension. It is in line with what is stated by Benssosan (in Ginting, 1990:32) that cloze test score is very sensitive when measuring reading comprehension. Furthermore, Hinofotis (in Oller and Perkins, 1980:44) also says that the characteristics of a cloze test are easy to understand and administer. Whereas the reason for choosing the three readability formulas is not only that the formulas use sentence length as syntactical difficulty determiner and syllables or word number consisting of six letters or more as semantical difficulty determiner, but also they are widely used or discussed in some books. Based on the above explanation, the researcher thinks that the instruments she has chosen to be used in this study are the appropriate ones.

1.6 Theoretical Framework

As this thesis deals with readability, the following theories are used as a basis to expound the topic.

(1) Theory of Second Language Acquisition

The theory of Second Language Acquisition deals with several points. One of them is Input Hypothesis. The Input Hypothesis states that “acquisition” takes place as a result of the learner having understood input that is a little beyond current level of his competence ($i + 1$) (Krashen and Terrel, 1983:32). In other words, learners acquire only when they understand language that contains structure that is “a little beyond” where they are now.

(2) Theory of Reading

The theory of reading deals with perceiving a written text in order to understand its contents (Richards and Schmidt, 2002: 443). There are three subtopics in this section: (1) definition of reading, (2) reading comprehension, and (3) some factors that affect reading comprehension process.

(3) Theory of Readability

The theory of readability deals with the right reading materials for the right reader at the right time. In other words, it is the quality of a book that is being easy and interesting to read (Sutaria, 1980:97). Readability can be simply defined as the relationship between the reading level of students and the difficulty of the text that is influenced by some factors such as the print on the page, the presentation of the subject matter, language style, and reader’s motivation.

The theories mentioned above are amplified in the review of literature.

1.7 Assumptions

This study is based on the following assumptions:

- (1) The students are motivated to achieve proficiency in the reading class.
- (2) The classes that the writer investigated are homogenous.
- (3) The reading materials used in the reading instruction II at the English Department Faculty of Teacher Training and Education Widya Mandala Catholic University Surabaya are already graded.
- (4) The students were serious in answering the cloze test administered.
- (5) Since this study investigates the readability of reading text, the following assumptions about the relationship between text and reader are needed:
 - as difficulty of text increases, comprehension decreases.
 - as difficulty of text increases, the likelihood of finishing the reading decreases.

1.8 Definition of Key Terms

1. Reading

Reading is perceiving a written text in order to understand its contents (Richards and Schmidt, 2002: 443).

2. Readability

Readability is how easily written materials can be read and understood. Readability depends on many factors, including (a) the average length of sentences in a passage, (b) the number of new words a passage contains, and (c) the grammatical complexity of the language used. Procedures used for measuring readability are known as “readability formula” (Richard and Schmidt, 2002:442).

3. Readability formulas

Readability formulas are procedures used for measuring written texts whether they can be easily read and understood. Readability depends on the number of some factors such as (a) the average length of sentences in a passage, (b) the number of new words a passage contains, and (c) the grammatical complexity of the language used (Richard, Platt, and Weber, 1985:238).

4. Cloze test

Bastidas in Zakaluk and Samuel (1984:15) states that a cloze test is a test of systematically deleting words from passage and replacing them with blanks to be filled by the students. Whereas Shohamy (1983:22) states that cloze test is a testing procedure in which the examinee is required to supply letters or words that have been systematically deleted from a continuous text. In this thesis, the rule for the cloze tests is every 9th word is deleted. There are 20 deletions in every cloze test. Since there are three passages used, three cloze tests are administered.

5. Grade

Grade is education year in school; a class or year in school, especially in the United States and Canadian school system (Encarta Dictionary).

6. Reading Materials

Reading materials are materials that are read, written or written materials that can be read (Encarta Dictionary).

7. Reading Instruction

Reading instruction is the teaching of interpretation or understanding of a situation or of something that has been written (Encarta Dictionary).