Reading Comprehension: A Guide for Non-English Lecturers at Higher Education in Central Java, Indonesia

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Abstract
This paper attempts to find out the reading ability of the non-English lecturers at Higher Education in Central Java, Indonesia; to find out the language factors that affect the reading ability and to develop the reading comprehension guide for the lecturers. Research and Development (R&D) was employed in this research in order to develop a model on reading comprehension guide. Eighty non-English lecturers from several universities in Central Java were taken as samples. The data were in the forms of numeric and non-numeric. The result shows that the average score of the reading ability of the lecturers is 54.24. It indicates that their reading ability is very poor. While the factors that affect their reading ability are among others grammatical mastery, cohesion, pronouns, parallelism, and conjunctions. The lowest score was on grammatical mastery and cohesion 38,5% while the highest score was on conjunctions with the score of 56,25%. It can be concluded that the lecturers of non-English department have poor ability in reading, and therefore, it is worth developing a model on reading guide for them.

Key words: higher education, lecturers, model, reading comprehension guide

Introduction

Higher education lecturers, whose main duties are, among others delivering lectures, seminar and tutorial as well as developing and implementing new methods of teaching have to cope with the enhanced technological media. By coping with the advancement of the technological media, the lecturers will be able to apply it in their teaching-learning process in an appropriate way that they can transfer the knowledge easily and develop their professionalism in whatever fields of study. Actually the government has tried to enhance the lecturers' competence in teaching or research through many ways, such as by giving them an opportunity to continue the study abroad or supporting them in joint research with other universities in other countries but the response is unsatisfactorily. Many kinds of scholarships provided by the government to continue the study abroad are not taken. Djoko Santosa as quoted by Meirina (2013), the director of Higher Education in Antaranews.com stated that 1000 scholarship provided for the lecturers to study overseas was minimally taken. This is ironical since the government has tried to push them to increase their professionalism by providing scholarship to study abroad but it does not get positive response. The fact that they do not take the scholarship for their further study abroad is due to their incompetence in English either in spoken or written communication as well as in reading English text.

However, the lecturers nowadays cannot avoid the obligation to learn English since they are obliged to write articles published in the national or international journals in order to raise their ranks. By writing articles published in academic journals, it is expected that they will read as many scientific books or references as possible so that they have a broader view of the concept of knowledge. Thus, the ability to read scientific books is a must for them and it is therefore the researchers conducted a research with the following objectives:

1. to find out the extent to which the reading comprehension of the non-English lecturers is at Higher Education in Central Java
2. to find out the extent to which the lecturers' knowledge of reading component of English texts
3. to find out what language factors affect the reading ability
4. to develop a guide on reading comprehension of English text for non-English lecturers at Higher Education in Central Java.

Literature Review

Reading is a kind of spelling activity which includes visual activity, thinking, psycholinguistics, and meta-cognitive (Grabe & Stoller, 2011). As a visual process, reading is translating a letter symbol into spoken form. Meanwhile the thinking process of reading includes recognizing words, literal comprehension, interpretation, critical and creative reading. In line with the definition above, Vacca, & Gove (1991) as quoted by Mukhroji (2011: 57) state that reading involves decoding and comprehension. Decoding process refers to the process of saying printed words into a representation of similar to oral language either silently or aloud; and comprehension is the process of making sense of words, sentences, and connected texts. Leipzig (2001) supports the two definitions above who states that there are 3 qualifications for readers in comprehending the text: 1) identify the words in print – a process called word recognition, 2) construct an understanding from them – a process called comprehension, and 3) coordinate identifying words and making meaning so that reading is automatic and accurate – an achievement called fluency.

In general, the aim of reading as stated by Grabe & Stoller (2002) can be classified into seven parts: 1) reading to get a simple information, 2) reading with the skimming technique, 3) reading to learn something from the text, 4) reading to join the information, 5) reading to write or to get information for writing activity, 6) reading to criticize a text, and 7) reading to have general comprehension. Harmer (2001: 16), on the other hand argues that reading is a skill or a receptive activity that the readers get information from the text materials. According to him, the aims of reading can be classified into several parts, namely to look for the main idea, to get specific information, to look for the detailed information, and to transfer information.

According to Tarigan (2008: 7), in reading activity, the focus is on the reading skill rather than on the theory of reading itself. Reading activity involves some elements as follows:
a).   **Moving Element**
        In this part, the reading activity includes the letters identification of the text, the language identification, the identification of the relation between intonation, letter, and the silent reading speed.
b).   **Comprehension Element**
        The reading activity includes the ability to comprehend the simple language, to comprehend the implicit meaning of a text and to adjust the punctuation or intonation with the reading speed.
c).   **Other Elements**
        1).   Awareness of phoneme
        2).   Phonetics
        3).   Fluent in reading
        4).   Vocabulary
        5).   Reading comprehension

In short, it can be stated that reading which is considered to be a complex activity that involves many elements has the main objective of understanding the implicit and explicit meaning of a text.

Brown (2004:186-187) states that there are three kinds of reading text, namely 1) academic reading, 2) job related reading and 3) personal reading each of which has its own characteristics and purposes. Academic reading text, for example, uses formal and direct language where the vocabulary and concept of knowledge in the text are not easy to be understood. The purposes of reading academic texts are to enhance the readers' knowledge for the betterment of their professionalism, to relate the content of the text to the existing knowledge and to integrate the readers' knowledge and the author's message or information. The texts that belong to the academic text are journals, thesis, and dissertation as well as scientific books. Here are the strategies to increase the speed and comprehension in reading: (a) ditermining the aim of reading, (b) fitting the speed of reading which is appropriate with the aim, (c) previewing the reading text before reading, (d) looking for the main idea in every paragraph, (e) using the knowledge and previous comprehension to understand the new concept, (f) comprehending the new vocabulary on a certain context, and (g) choosing the source of references from the right dictionary.

Job related reading text is a text containing messages dealing with matters on employment or occupation. The intention of providing job-related reading text is to help adult people to prepare for the job application or workplace. The followings are texts belong to job-related reading text such as memos, reports on job evaluation, project reports, applications, financial documents, etc.

Personal reading text is a text containing messages for pleasures and not for academic purposes. The language used in this text is not formal and easy to understand. Those belong to academic reading texts are newspapers, magazines, letters, novels, short stories, etc.

Research Method

This research belongs to research and development (R&D) because the researchers tried to develop a model of reading comprehension guide of English text for the non English Department lecturers in Central Java, Indonesia. So, the population of this research is the non-English department lecturers of private universities in Central Java. One hundred lecturers from several universities were taken as samples such as from: University of PGRI Semarang, Dian Nuswantoro University in Semarang, Satya Wacana Christian University in Salatiga, Academy of Health Analyst of August 17, 1945 Semarang, Academy Analyst of Pharmacist and Food of August 17, 1945 Semarang etc.

Three kinds of instrument were used in this research, such as reading comprehension test, questionnaires, and interview. Reading comprehension test was intended to assess the extent to which the lecturers' reading competence is. The researchers gave English reading test to 50 respondents. There are 25 questions consisting of inferences, vocabularies, and paraphrases. While the questionnaires intended to get the information on the difficulties in reading comprehension especially on the components of English reading text were given to 100 lecturers. The questions in the questionnaire were divided into two, namely general and specific. The general questions were asking the identity of the respondents while the specific questions were asking about the mastery of the language components. The questions in the language components were classified into 3, namely the grammar and cohesion mastery, vocabulary mastery, and coherence. The total number of the questions was 25 with the criteria of: (1) very difficult, (2) difficult, (3) average, (4) easy, (5) very easy. The mastery of each component is shown in the graphic. Interview was addressed to reveal the lecturers' opinion whether they feel the need of a guide how to read an English text. Therefore, data were collected in three ways namely by giving the reading test, distributing the questionnaires to the lecturers, and interviewing them.

The collected data were analyzed to find out the mean score. There are 25 questions in the reading test and the final score is counted using the scoring scale 0-100; and the formula used was as follows:

$$\text{Mean} = \frac{B}{50} \times 100$$

Besides finding out the mean score of the lecturers' reading competence, the researchers also analyzed the language factors that become the problems in comprehending the English text. In this case, the percentage of each language component like Reading Comprehension, Grammar, and Vocabulary can be known. From the percentage result it can be known which one is the easiest and which one is the most difficult language component. Then based on the information above, a model of guide for reading English text could be developed.

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Findings and Discussions

1. The Lecturers' Competence in Reading Comprehension

The mean score of each component can be seen in the graphic below:

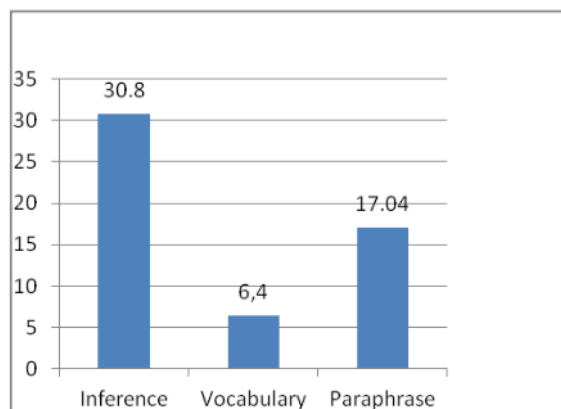*Figure 1. The Lecturers' Competence in Reading Comprehension*

Figure 1. The Lecturers' Competence in Reading Comprehension

As a whole, the average score of the lecturers' reading comprehension test is 54,24 which covers the three main components, inference 30,8, vocabulary 6,4 and paraphrase 17,04. From the graph above, it can be seen that most respondents have difficulties in understanding the vocabulary with the means score of only 6,4. Meanwhile, the understanding of the inference is quite fair with the highest score of 30,8 and followed by the poor understanding of paraphrase with the mean score of 17,04.

The reason why most of the non-English lecturers have poor understanding in vocabulary is because they have no motivation to read the English textbooks. They think that it is easier to read the translated books than to read the original ones. As a matter of fact, they usually stop reading the English text when they find difficulties in understanding the vocabulary, grammar or complex sentences. Consequently, their reading competence does not develop or even dwindles. With reference to the answer of the questions in the reading test, the lecturers have the lowest score in the previewing and in finding the purpose of the text with the percentage of 40%. Then the highest score is in coherence with the percentage of 52,5%.

2. The Lecturers' Knowledge on the Language Components

The researchers distributed 100 questionnaires to the non English lecturers but only 80 questionnaires were returned. Those who filled out the questionnaires were the lecturers with various academic functional status, starting from Assistant Lecturer (A*sisten Ahli)*, Reader (*Lektor)*, Associate Professor (*Lektor Kepala),* and Professor *(Guru Besar)*. Those lecturers also bear various ranks such as rank III =73,75%, rank IV= 15%, and 11,25% were those who forgot to write their ranks. There were 51,25% female respondents and 48,75% male respondents.
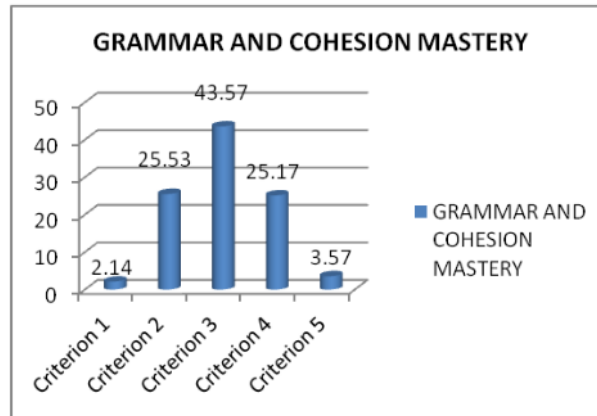
Below is the percentage of grammar and cohesion mastery.

Figure 2. Grammar and Cohesion Mastery

The graphic above shows that the respondents get the score of 43,57% which belongs to the average level of the grammar and cohesion mastery. Meanwhile, the lowest score 2,14% belongs to the difficult level and 3,57 % belongs to the easiest level of grammar and cohesion mastery.
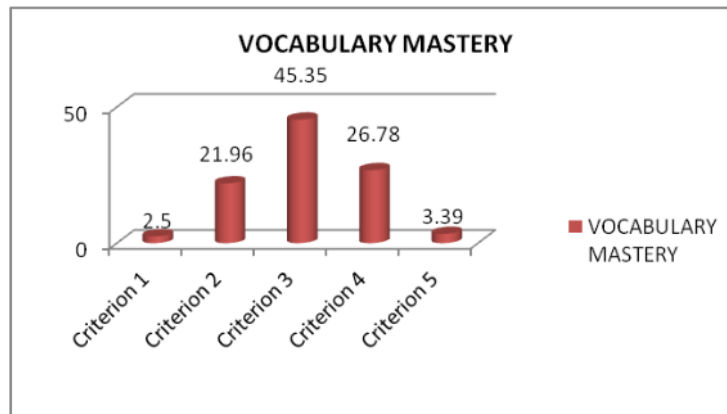
3. Vocabulary Mastery

Figure 3. Vocabulary Mastery

In the second classification on vocabulary mastery, 45,35% of the respondents reach the average level of vocabulary mastery; 2,5% of the respondents reach the very difficult level and 3,39% of the respondents reach the easiest level the vocabulary mastery.

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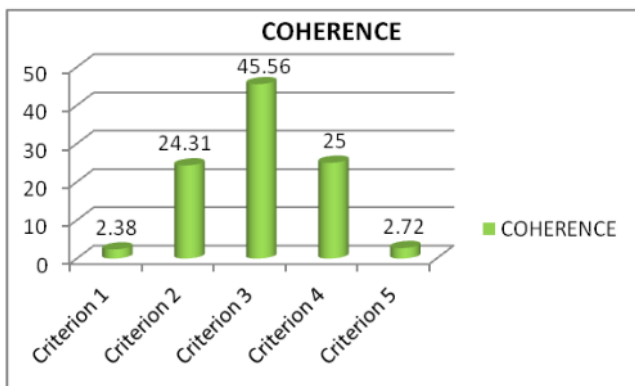
4. Coherence

Figure 4. Coherence

       In the third classification, it can be clearly seen that 45,56% of the respondents reach the average level of coherence understanding; meanwhile 2,38% of the respondents reach the very difficult level and 2,72% of the respondents reach the easiest level of the coherence understanding.

       The researchers also interviewed the respondents to know whether or not reading comprehension competence is important for them; besides, they also crosschecked whether or not there is similarity on the answers in questionnaire with their opinion on the difficulty of the language components. Fifteen questions were addressed to them with the expectation that they can reveal the lecturers' problem in reading English texts.

       Based on the interview, most respondents said that reading competence was very important for them as lecturers in order to be able to develop their knowledge. However, they admitted that they had problem with the vocabulary and grammar mastery. They also realized that those components of language, vocabulary and grammar are the important components of a language in order to be able to comprehend the message conveyed in the English texts, especially in comprehending the academic reading texts like scientific articles, thesis and dissertation. In spite of the fact that they have difficulties in mastering those language components, they still do not have efforts to learn it due to their limited time. They said that it took time for them to learn a foreign language while the execution of *three Dharma* of higher education including teaching and learning, research and public service should be carried out regularly and every semester the result of it should be reported to *Kopertis* (Coordinator of Higher Education). Due to the limited time to learn English as a foreign language, the lecturers therefore, feel the need of having a guide to help them understand the English text.

       Besides having difficulties in understanding the language components, they also found difficulties in interpreting the charts or graphics in the English text. They did not know which part of the graph that should be identified first and what's next in order to interpret it correctly. It is therefore, they also need a guide of how to interpret the charts or graphics correctly.

3. A Model of Reading Comprehension Guide of English Text for Non-English Lecturers at Higher Education in Central Java

Based on the problems encountered by the lecturers in comprehending the English texts, the researchers tried to develop a guide on how to comprehend the English text. It was started from making an outline and then developing it into a draft. The draft was designed to cover the solution of all the difficulties encountered by the lecturers including the way how to find the main ideas, supporting details, understanding the vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, coherence and the way to interpret graphics. Therefore, the draft consists of five chapters; chapter 1 discusses the definition and the essence of reading; chapter 2 discusses the main ideas: main idea, topic sentence, etc.; chapter 3 discusses cohesion and coherence; chapter 4 discusses graphic interpretation and chapter 5 discusses academic reading texts.

Conclusion

Based on the data above, it can be concluded that the reading competence of Non-English lecturers at higher education in Central Java, Indonesia is important in order to develop their professionalism. However, their competence for reading English text is very poor. This is due to the limited vocabulary acquired and the inability to understand the grammar and complex sentences. Besides, they also have difficulties in interpreting the graphs. Therefore, they need a guide on how to comprehend the English texts, particularly the academic reading texts in which they usually contain graphics.

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