

Freshmen's reading strategies in comprehending agricultural journal articles

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Abstract: This paper is part of an ongoing thesis for a master's degree in English Language Education. Freshmen of the Agricultural Department have English proficiency problems, among others, English in their grammar and vocabulary. The lesson material in school or university does not meet the student's needs. The students feel insecure about their skills. The students are not motivated to learn English because they think it is difficult and do not use it much daily. English is not their mother tongue, so they are not confident in conversation. The students also still lack vocabulary and grammar. In this research, a descriptive qualitative technique was applied. The research focused on reading strategies and reading comprehension in English academic journals. The participants were two lecturers from an English class at the Faculty of Agriculture at Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa University. Interviews from the lecturer's perception were used as data collection methods. The researcher collected data on the lecturer's opinion regarding the student's reading abilities. The findings indicated that the students were still unable to understand English reading. Some of the obstacles faced by students in reading comprehension. The students were categorized as having low reading comprehension by lecturers' perception that the students had some strategies in reading comprehension. All strategies were used to help the students comprehend their reading texts.

Keywords: Difficulties, Reading Strategies, Reading skill.

INTRODUCTION

English is a very important language in this globalization era. Many people use English in all fields such as economy, politics, trade, health, education, and other sectors of life. English is studied by children in elementary school until they are in the university, otherwise, many parents send their kids to English courses from toddlers. On the other hand, the students who finish their studies or graduate, especially university students, must have more skills than their competitors in finding a job because it will get additional value in the assessment. In Indonesia, English is a second language so this might make it difficult for Indonesian students to learn English. English in Indonesia is only a subject at school, English is not used for daily activity outside school or university. In addition, the students have problems with their grammar and vocabulary. The lesson material in school or university does not meet the student's needs. Students rarely do not listen to English conversations. Students feel afraid of speaking English. The students feel insecure about their skills. The students do not have the motivation to learn English because they think it is not necessary in their daily activities. English is not their mother tongue so they are not confident in English conversation. English is not the main subject in school.

Thus, the lecturers must have extra abilities in the learning-teaching process. Lecturers must be able to build a pleasant learning atmosphere for students. Lecturers can keep students motivated as well. The lecturers must prepare or develop the syllabus based on the curriculum. The students have difficulty in English tests especially in reading skills because they do not

understand the meaning and lack the vocabulary. In the university, lecturers also make test questions to measure students' abilities which are carried out in the middle of the semester and the end of the semester. The lecturer assesses each meeting by assigning homework. Students can work either in individual or group form.

In the English language learning process, English has four skills; writing, reading, listening, and speaking skills. The skills are difficult to master because the student should take into detail three language aspects—structure, pronunciation, and vocabulary. Students have limited English competence. English was also determined to be one of the subjects to be tested in the final examination to graduate. Reading is considered to be an important aspect of the English language-learning process. Reading is also one of the essential skills in the English language learning process because it supports other language skills. People can get more information and knowledge from books, magazines, newspapers, and others. Reading skill plays a role in the learning process and becomes the only way that helps students to keep in contact with English (Ahmed, 2021).

Reading is a necessary skill in language proficiency. Comprehension is making sense out of a text as the result of interaction between the perception of graphic symbols that represent language and the reader's prior knowledge (Mcneil, 1992). It means that comprehension is the necessary way in which the reader reads the text to construct meaning in the language-learning process. The readers can interpret their experience, relate new information to what they already know, and find answers to cognitive questions in the text through reading comprehension (Suryana et al., 2021). It means that the activity can provide additional information and give a statement of the question in a text. Reading is a crucial skill for academic and professional purposes in the language learning process.

Reading has good advantages for the students. Reading is not only about combining certain information taken from the text with a reader's background knowledge but also about the kind of information that the reader retains (Frankel et al., 2016). Reading can give some information to the readers suitable with their background knowledge in the written texts. The students can build their knowledge and their ability must also be developed well. The lecturers should develop their skills and ability to design attractive materials, especially the ones related to the reading texts. The lecturers should build their students' abilities.

In the language learning process, the students always face some constants or difficulties in achieving their goals in this process. Most students are confused about the long texts, especially the cohesion between words, and incoherence between paragraphs (Jayanti & Hidayat, 2021). The problem faced by the students is that they are confused and is difficult to see the coherence between words or paragraphs in the long texts. The problems in academic English reading comprehension among Indonesian students are a lack of vocabulary and prior knowledge, insufficiency of grammar mastery, and poor reading strategies (Setiyadi et al., 2016). It means that the students have other problems sometimes the students feel bored and too lazy to read because they find the difficult words when they read and they don't know the best strategies for reading comprehension. The students have a lack of vocabulary. The students also have understanding problems and are confused about the word or phrase when they read. Thus, the students always fail and don't have confidence in the reading activity. In this research, the researcher focuses on the analysis of reading strategies used by freshmen of the Agriculture Faculty of Universitas Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa.

To achieve the goal of the language learning process, the lecturers can measure the quality and success of the students in academic English not only by tests but the lecturers can do observations of the learning process. The students can be successful at reading comprehension

if they can understand the vocabulary, phrase, and meaning of the text, thus they are more confident in their abilities. Vocabulary is one of the essential aspects of English communication. The lecturers provide vocabulary materials that include lexical, phonological, morphological, and others. Students can increase their level of vocabulary by learning new vocabulary that they can learn in the teaching-learning process. Communication will run smoothly if students can master vocabulary well. Students have good competence in reading the English text because vocabulary has a basic role in reading skills. The students can get new words or vocabulary by using a dictionary or internet or a textbook. So that students can improve their reading skills well. The students also know the strategies for reading. On the other side, if the students cannot understand the text, the students still have a problem such as difficult words, grammar, and lack of vocabulary. The students still have difficulty reading English texts because they feel unfamiliar with the words in the academic text. The level of students is not the same as reading. Students also feel disinterested in the topic of reading and feel their limited abilities. Thus, the lecturer should help them develop the student's ability. The students get the best achievements.

Some researchers have conducted research in connection with students' difficulty in reading English texts, particularly journal articles. (Par, 2020) The reading strategy was important to achieve student ability in the learning process. However, the researcher knew the reading strategies were not always in line with the reading comprehension of the student. The problem-solving strategy was the best way for the student.

(Dardjito, 2019), The students were categorized in low-cohort of reading proficiency although their metacognitive reading awareness scores were high. The students mainly used metacognitive reading awareness related to finding out the meaning of words.

(Manh Do & Le Thu Phan, 2021) The Vietnam students liked to choose problem-solving strategies to help them in their reading skills. Metacognitive reading awareness is related to reading comprehension so it can encourage students to apply strategies in reading comprehension. The lecturer should use these reading strategies in the teaching method for reading comprehension.

Based on the studies above, the researcher of this study concludes that this research has a similarity with the previous studies with some differences. However, there are some differences between this research and the previous studies. The researcher of this study analyses the reading comprehension from the students' reading strategies and the difficulties in academic English. Referring to the problem above, this research aims to describe and analyze: (1) What the difficulties the undergraduate freshmen of the Agriculture Faculty of Universitas Sarjanawawiyata Tamansiswa in reading the journal English articles are; (2) What are the reading comprehension strategies used by undergraduate freshmen of the Agriculture Faculty of Universitas Sarjanawawiyata Tamansiswa to improve their reading skills in reading the journal articles are;

Thus, this study focuses on figuring out the students' difficulties and comprehension of reading journal articles especially the undergraduate freshmen of the Agriculture Faculty of Universitas Sarjanawawiyata Tamansiswa.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Second Language Acquisition

According to Mitchell (2013) second language (SL) can be well-defined as a non-native language that is broadly used for purposes of communication, commonly as a medium of education, government, or business. Klein (1986) cited in (Aljumah, 2020) differentiates

between the two expressions. i.e., 'acquisition' and 'learning'. He stated that an equivalent distinction is that between 'acquisitions and 'learning', the learning refers to planning and the acquisition to unplanned learning. Second Language Research is a far wider sub-branch than first language acquisition research since it comprises, not just the progressive aspects of first language acquisition, but all the aspects of the L2 user's language enclosed in other areas of linguistics and psychology" ((Dörnyei, 2022). (Ridge, 2013) explores the chief issues in SLA research under the headings: (1) learned language, (2) learner-external factors, (3) learner-internal factors, and (4) the language learner as an individual.

Reading

Reading is the method of evaluating, organizing, and understanding a multitude of information sources (Scanlon et al., 2010). (Noor, 2011) claimed that reading is the most important academic language skill for all second and foreign-language learners. According to (Suyana, 2019) reading is an activity that exerts several actions including physical or cognitive actions.

According to (Liu & Brown, 2019) investigating the acquisition process of advanced reading skills from the perspective of learners who suffer the problem may give insights into the theoretical knowledge about how advanced reading skills are acquired. Readers are experienced when they grasp the nature of the text and utilize their insight to understand the essence or intent of the text that they interpret (Takallou, 2011). If a reader only says the word, it is not considered to read completely until he or she understands what it is. Once a reader can translate the word into meaning, it is considered reading (Nelson, 2019).

Reading cannot merely be seen as looking at and remembering any paragraph of a book (Berridge, 2015) cited (Muhassin et al., 2021). (Kasim & Raisha, 2017) viewed reading as a 'thinking process' that leads to inferring meaning from the text. (Grabe, 1991) as cited in (Celce-Murcia, 2001) identified six general component skills and knowledge areas to limit the complexity of the reading process: (1) Automatic recognition skills – a virtually unconscious ability, ideally requiring little mental processing to recognize text, especially for word identification; (2) Vocabulary and structural knowledge – a sound understanding of language structure and large recognition vocabulary; (3) Formal discourse structure knowledge – an understanding of how texts are organized and how information is put together into various genres of text (e.g., a report, a letter, a narrative); (4) Content/world background knowledge – prior knowledge of text-related information and a shared understanding of the cultural information involved in the text; (5) Synthesis and evaluation skills/strategies – the ability to read and compare information from multiple sources, think critically about what one reads, and decide what information is relevant or useful for one's purpose; (6) Metacognitive knowledge and skills monitoring – an awareness of one's mental processes and the ability to reflect on what one is doing and the strategies one is employing while reading.

Reading comprehension

According (Rutzler, 2020) cited (Abbas, 2021) showed a disparity by stating that "the act of reading and the act of comprehending what you read are two very different things". It means that the act of reading and the act of comprehension have different meanings and actions. Kolmar (2021) cited in (Abbas, 2021) said that reading comprehension is the ability to process what is being read, understand the meaning the author trying to convey – both textually and subtextually – and make inferences based on prior knowledge. Reading comprehension is a complex interaction among automatic and strategic cognitive processes that enables the

reader to create a mental representation of the text (van den Broek & Espin, 2012) cited in (Marpaung et al., 2022).

Reading comprehension is a process of social constructively that is building new word meanings based on prior knowledge (Rahim, F. 2008) cited in (Sari et al., 2020). It means that reading comprehension is the process of managing previous knowledge to become something new. (Aksan & Kisac, 2009) provided that reading comprehension requires the effective utilization of cognitive structure and the latter requires sentient behaviors by the individual namely, awareness of his cognition system. To describe the reading activity, the student must understand what he/she reads. This situation indicates that cognitive awareness or reading comprehension strategies work through reading (Coelho & Correa, 2017).

Effective readers know how to apply decoding skills to recognize words quickly and efficiently. Effective readers have a good vocabulary about their age and show high word recognition. Effective readers possess strong fluency skills" (Tankersley, 2003). (ter Beek et al., 2019) contends that reading comprehension is the predictor of academic success. It means that reading comprehension is the essential key to success in academic English. The student should have this important way of reading comprehension. Reading comprehension has some purpose which can help and develop the student to comprehend the text.

According to Ahmadi and Hairul (2012) cited in (Reza Ahmadi et al., 2013), reading comprehension is an important factor in the EFL/ESL learning process and should be emphasized in different levels of education, for instance, reveals that an area of concern and indeed one of the top priorities of ESL/EFL students after completing elementary English courses is reading comprehension.

According to (Grabe & Stoller, 2019) The purpose of reading comprehension is 1) to find simple information, 2) to skim, 3) to take place in academic and professional contexts, and 4) to integrate information, write and criticize texts. According to (Pham, 2017), the relationship between reading comprehension and translation was examined in other studies as well, and in most cases, a significant correlation was found between them.

(Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985) as cited by (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987) added that good characteristics of comprehension or skilled readers read with some process that a reader with poor comprehension does not have, and those are: **First**, Skilled Reading is constructive No reading passage is completely self-explanatory. To bring meaning to the printed text, readers draw upon their existing store of knowledge and prior experiences. Thus, readers "construct" the meaning of possessing. Unfortunately, sometimes a reader cannot supply this information correctly. For example, when reading about computer software, a reader came across the words, "utilities." Using his prior knowledge, he constructed the meaning of this text to be about "electric power companies." Of course, "Utilities" in this context refers to programs that help computer users. This case happens usually when readers do not have any background knowledge about the topic. Students need to know the topic or at least students know the vocabulary in the text to know how to answer the questions. By reading a lot, they construct their knowledge and when they encounter similar topics, they will not face any difficulty. **Second**, Skilled reading is fluent. Fluency refers to the ability to identify words easily. If readers must concentrate on figuring out words, they are unable to focus on meaning. In skilled reading, the word identification process must be automatic, not a conscious, deliberate effort. **Third**, Skilled reading is strategic. Skilled readers are flexible and use strategies that are appropriate to each reading situation. They change and direct their reading style depending on their purpose for reading, the complexity of the text, and their familiarity with the topic. Unlike poor readers, skilled readers monitor their reading comprehension. If

something in the text is puzzling, they will go back and use fix-up strategies, such as re-reading, rephrasing the text to improve comprehension, or looking ahead.

Reading Strategy

Strategies learned in the first language (L1) do not automatically transfer to the L2 instruction and must be extended, in formal education, to include L2 reading strategy instruction (van Gelderen et al., 2007). It means that Strategy is important in the language learning process where the process of converting the first language to the second language requires clear strategy instructions. According to Oxford (1990, p.8) cited in (Hardan, 2013): "learning strategies are specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferrable to new situation. Reading strategies that help the reader determine what is important in the text, what may be implied but not explicitly stated, and which assist the reader in forming a synthesis of the information presented, are considered to be effective strategies for active reading purposes (Harvey & Goudvis, 2017). (Abbott, 2006) defines reading strategies as 'the mental operations or comprehension processes that readers select and apply to make sense of what they read'.

In addition (Mokhtari & Reichard, 2004) point out that these less successful learners, who are often unaware of their cognitive process, must be helped to acquire and use the reading strategies that have been identified to be successful. teach the strategies by naming the strategy and how it should be used, modeling through the think-aloud process, group practice, partner practice, and independent use of the strategy (Duke & Pearson, 2009)

Reading strategies are important as they can assist the learner's reading process and give them a clear sense of direction on what they are digesting while reading. (Afflerbach et al., 2008) stated that reading strategies are "deliberate, goal-directed attempts to control and modify the reader's efforts to decode text, understand words, and construct meanings of the text. (Dole et al., 1991) point out that strategies are conscious, intentional, deliberate, and flexible plans emphasizing reasoning that the reader applies and adapts to a variety of texts to construct meaning from texts.

English as a Second language acquisition in general has employed different reading strategies that suit them well especially when they have different reading materials. According to (Brown, 2003), there are some strategies for reading, it stands for as follows: **First**, Identifying the purpose of reading. Identify the purpose of reading something so you will know what you are looking for and can weed out potentially distracting information. **Second**, Using graphemic rules and patterns to aid in bottom-up decoding (especially for beginning-level learners). In many cases, learners have become acquainted with oral language and have some difficulty learning English spelling conventions. They may need hints and explanations about certain English orthographic rules and peculiarities. **Third**, Using efficient silent reading techniques for relatively rapid comprehension (for intermediate to advanced levels) If you are teaching beginning-level students, this particular strategy will not apply because they are still struggling with the control of the limited vocabulary and grammatical patterns. **Fourth**, Skim the text for main ideas Skimming consists of quickly running one's eyes across the whole text for its gist. Skimming gives readers the advantage of being able to predict the purpose of the passage. **Fifth**, Scan the text for specific information Scanning consists of quickly searching for some piece or pieces of information in a text. The purpose of scanning is to extract specific information without reading through the whole text. **Sixth**, Use semantic mapping or clustering. The strategy of semantic mapping, or grouping ideas into meaningful clusters, helps the readers to provide some order to the chaos. **Seventh**, Guess when you are not certain. Learners can use guessing to their advantage to guess the meaning of a word, guess a

grammatical relationship, guess a discourse relationship, infer implied meaning, guess about a cultural reference, and guess content messages. **Eighth**, Analyze vocabulary. Several techniques are useful here: look for prefixes, look for suffixes, look for familiar roots, look for grammatical contexts that may signal information, and look at semantic context for clues. **Ninth**, Distinguishing between literal and implied meanings. This requires the application of sophisticated top-down processing skills. **Tenth**, Capitalizing on discourse markers to process relationships. Many discourse markers in English signal relationships among ideas as expressed through phrases, clauses, and sentences. A clear comprehension of such markers can greatly enhance learners' reading efficiency.

METHODS

A descriptive qualitative technique was applied because it seeks to interpret the information obtained both individually. Qualitative research focuses on understanding phenomena deeply and holistically through the collection of rich narratives. Qualitative researchers focus on gaining a deeper understanding of people's experiences, perceptions, behaviors, and processes, as well as the meanings they attribute to them (Moser, 2017). The researcher focused on reading strategies and comprehension in English academic journal articles.

The research was conducted at the Faculty of Agriculture of Universitas Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa. the participants were 2 lecturers from an English class at the Faculty of Agriculture at Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa University.

Research instrument

In this research, the researcher used interviews. The interviews followed a structured format, using an interview guide. This guide consists of 10 questions, 1 general question, 5 about difficulties when reading articles in English, and 4 about reading strategies.

The interviews were conducted individually, recorded with participants' permission, and the duration of 10 to 15 minutes each. The gathered information was organized and compiled for further analysis.

Data collecting technique

The researcher conducted interviews with the lecturers, focusing on two main areas: the challenges faced by students when reading English articles and the reading strategies they used. The purpose was to gather information and insights from both perspectives. Additionally, the lecturer's opinion regarding the students' reading abilities, particularly in English, was also sought. Short questions were used to elicit clear responses. Each interview was conducted individually and privately to avoid any influence on the answers provided by others. Estimated duration of 10 min per interview.

Data analysis technique

After the data were collected, the results of the surveys were organized in a document to make their analysis easier. The researcher used thematic analysis by Virginia Braun. According to Braun & Clarke,(2022), Thematic analysis is a method of systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns meaning (themes) across a data set. Researchers focus more on research topics and research questions will be more explored. The researcher employed a theoretical framework to define, identify, and evaluate the data collected in this study. The objective was to determine the reading comprehension strategies used by the students. The entire set of interview responses from each student and the test essays were analyzed by the researcher.

The qualitative data obtained from the interviews and test results were subject to descriptive analysis. Data reduction was conducted to select, focus, simplify, abstract, and transform the interview data. This process involved summarizing, ordering, and organizing the data to facilitate a conclusion.

Data visualization, the second element in the qualitative data analysis model, was used to present the reduced data in a compact and accessible format. This approach allowed the researcher to gain a comprehensive view of the data and develop justified conclusions.

The final step in the qualitative analysis involved elaborating on the conclusions drawn and verifying their validity. The researcher critically assessed the analyzed data to determine the meaning and implications of the research questions. The process of verification involved reviewing the data multiple times to ensure the emerging conclusions were supported by the evidence.

By employing these qualitative analysis techniques, the researcher was able to gain valuable insights into the students' reading comprehension difficulties and the strategies they employed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

The purpose of this research was to explore students' difficulties and reading strategies to the student in the Agricultural faculty. The interview was conducted to identify the students' difficulties and reading comprehension strategies. The participants are 2 lecturers who have taught English lessons in the Agricultural Faculty. Each participant was given the same set of questions. The two participants were marked as Lecturer 1 and Lecturer 2.

Lecturer 1

In the meeting, the Lecturer prepared the teaching materials for reading comprehension. The lecturer showed the material on the screen. Then the lecturer gave an academic journal via group WhatsApp and the students opened the material. The lecturer gave the instructions well. The journal had 7 pages and the material was about Agricultural. The students could follow the instructions from the lecturer. Based on the lecturer's perception, The lecturer found that the students have problems in reading comprehension. The factors were the student's lack of interest in reading, lack of vocabulary mastery skills, lack of understanding of the purpose and the structure of the text, and lack of text comprehension skills. Because of those factors, the lecturer observed the students they found out the easy way to read comprehension in the English text. The students applied some strategies to understanding the text. The strategies used by the student as setting the purpose of reading, understanding the structure of the text/ the structure of the journal article, identifying the key information, recalling and reviewing the text, and reading for details. These strategies are easy for them.

Lecturer 2

The lecturer also prepared the teaching materials for reading comprehension. The text was used as the main material in teaching reading comprehension. The lecturer checked the student to make sure that all the students were present in the class and ready to join the teaching and learning process. The lecturer also found out that the students had some problems in reading texts. The problems are the students do not have motivation, lack of vocabulary, and lack of understanding the meaning of text. When the lecturer gave the English text, the students tried some strategies for reading comprehension. The strategies are knowing

what and why the students read the text, identifying the meaning of difficult words by context and grammar, identifying the main idea, identifying the keywords, and making a summary.

Discussion

This research was about the students' reading strategy in reading comprehension at the Agricultural Faculty. This research used descriptive qualitative research. All the data were collected from two participants of English lecturers. The data results of reading comprehension proved by the lecturers' perception that the student had some problems in reading ability. In general, the students were still unable to understand English reading. Some of the obstacles faced by students in reading comprehension are that students were less interested and there was no motivation to learn English so students had no interest in reading. Students still lacked vocabulary. Students were less able to understand the contents of the reading. Students lacked structure and grammar. The students were categorized in low reading comprehension.

Therefore, students still experience problems. Students also had to survive in reading. So students had several ways to understand English reading. The strategies used by students such as the student as set the purpose of reading, understanding the structure of the text/ the structure of the journal article, identifying the key information, recalling and reviewing the text, reading for details knowing what and why the students read the text, identifying the meaning of difficult words by context and grammar, identifying the main idea, identification the keywords and making summary. All strategies used were very effective in helping the students in reading comprehension. The strategies used also gave benefit to the lecturer.

CONCLUSION

In this research, the researcher found that the Agricultural students have some difficulties in reading comprehension. The students lacked vocabulary, no motivation, less understanding of the contents of the text, and lack of structure and grammar. Some students used some reading strategies when they read the academic journal. The strategies that they used are setting the purpose of reading, understanding the structure of the text/ the structure of the journal article, identifying the key information, recalling and reviewing the text, reading for details knowing what and why the students read the text, identifying the meaning of difficult words by context and grammar, identifying the main idea, and identifying the keywords. The students were categorized in low reading comprehension. By lecturers' perception that the student had some strategies in reading comprehension. The lecturer also helped the students to use the strategies. Thus, the student can find effective strategies and understand the journal article easily.

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