STUDENTS’ ABILITY IN UNDERSTANDING READING PASSAGE QUESTIONS AT THE EIGHTH GRADE OF SMP MUHAMMADIYAH 5 SURAKARTA IN 2013/2014 ACADEMIC YEAR

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STUDENTS’ ABILITY IN UNDERSTANDING READING PASSAGE QUESTIONS AT THE EIGHTH GRADE OF SMP MUHAMMADIYAH 5 SURAKARTA IN 2013/2014 ACADEMIC YEAR

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ABSTRACT

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The objectives of this research are to describe (1) the students’ ability in understanding reading passage questions at the eighth grade of SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Surakarta in 2013/2014 academic year, (2) the most difficult question in understanding reading passage questions, and (3) the students’ strategies in understanding reading passage questions.

This research belongs to descriptive research. The data of this research are the students’ test result, verbatim of interview, and field notes of observation, which are collected through observation, interview and test. The data are analyzed in two ways, quantitatively and qualitatively, by using a simple descriptive statistic analysis and using Miles & Huberman’s interactive model of data analysis technique which consists of data collection, data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusion or verification. The data credibility of this research is checked by using triangulation of source and triangulation of technique.

The result of this research showed that: (1) the students’ ability in understanding reading passage questions at the eighth grade of SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Surakarta in 2013/2014 academic year is in a Fair level, because the percentage indicates in 62.29%; (2) the most difficult question in understanding reading passage questions according to the eighth grade of SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Surakarta in 2013/2014 academic year is the Indirectly Answered Questions; (3) in understanding reading passage questions at the eighth grade of SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Surakarta in 2013/2014 academic year, the students did not use a certain strategy because they did not know the kinds of strategy in answering the reading passage questions are.

Keywords: reading passage questions, most difficult question, students’ ability, students’ strategies.
INTRODUCTION

Language is a primary need in human life. People use language as a tool to communicate to each other. They use it for every activity to show their idea, thought, or desire to other people. In globalization era nowadays, it is important to all people to master the international language. English, as an international language, is taught in almost all of countries in the world, including in Indonesia.

In Indonesia, English is introduced in kindergarten and elementary school. It is taught specifically in junior high school, senior high school, and university. Teaching English in junior high school includes four language skills; Listening, Speaking, Reading, And Writing. Reading is one of the difficult skills in teaching English. It relates to many students who are lack of vocabulary which make them unable to understand the meaning in reading. Smith in Fauziati (2010: 33) defined reading as an understanding a message conveyed by the writer through visual and non-visual information.

The process of understanding the meaning sense in reading has a close relationship with the ability of students. Students’ ability is the capacity or potentiality to master the knowledge that given to them. Kennedy (1981: 9) stated that when language ability of someone is developed or improved, reading skills at all levels are reinforced.

In order to investigate the students’ ability in understanding reading, the writer conducts a research in SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Surakarta in 2013/2014 academic year. As the reference material in conducting the research, the writer takes several previous researches related to the students’ ability in understanding reading, they are: Magfur (2012), Susanto (2011), Priwijaya (2013), Widati (2010), Khan and Pandian (2011), and Ghafournia and Afghari (2013).

The first previous research entitled Students’ Capability in Answering Multiple Choice Question of Reading Passage at Ninth Grade of SMP Muhammadiyah 4 Surakarta in 2011/2012 Academic Year was done by Magfur (2012). Magfur found that the students’ capability is fair because the percentage of the mean score showed in 56.19%. He stated that the problems faced by the students in answering multiple choice question of reading passage are: answering
direct and indirect question, and vocabulary question. He also stated that the causes of the problem faced by the students are: lack of vocabulary, sentence structure, and comprehending the ideas of text.

The second previous research was written by Susanto (2011) entitled *Students’ Capability in Understanding Written Texts of the Second Year Students of RSBI Class at SMP N 1 Wonogiri*. He found that the students’ capability in understanding written texts is good because the most of students are in 60.87% level. He also stated that the problems faced by the students in understanding written texts are: understanding reference, understanding vocabulary, and understanding the paragraph development. Then, he concluded that the causes of problem faced are: the less motivation from the teacher to improve the students’ reading skills, and the limited vocabulary and grammar of the students.

The third previous research is *The Students’ Difficulties in Answering Reading Test in National Examination of Third Graders in SMP N 1 Sewon in Academic Year 2010/2011* whose conducted by Priwijaya (2013). He described that the students get difficulties in answering reading test which is divided into six types of questions; identifying main idea (IMI), identifying detailed information (IDI), identifying implied information (III), identifying word reference (IWR), and identifying word meaning (IWM). He found that identifying implied information (III) is the most difficult type of question in national examination of the third graders in SMP N 1 Sewon in 2010/2011 academic year.

The fourth previous research is *Students’ Reading Strategies to Answer Multiple Choice Questions of Reading Passage at the Third Grade of SMA Negeri 1 Klego Boyolali 2009/2010 Academic Year* by Widati (2010), who found that the students did not use the appropriate strategies to answer multiple choice questions of reading passage. She also found that the question dealing with main idea is the easiest type of question, while the overall review question is the most difficult one for the third grade of SMA Negeri 1 Klego Boyolali 2009/2010 academic year.

The fifth previous research was taken from Khan and Pandian’s work (2011) entitled *A Study on Reading Comprehension Performance in English among Matriculation Students in Pakistan*. It was stated in the research finding
that the reading performance of matriculation students was insufficient. It was found that only 41.81% respondents were successful to retrieve the main ideas from ten given short texts, it meant that 58.19% respondents were failed. It was concluded that the matriculation students were lack of comprehension when given the intensive reading tasks.

The sixth previous research was written by Ghafournia and Afghari (2013) entitled *The Interaction between Cognitive Test-Taking Strategies, Reading Ability, and Reading Comprehension Test Performance of Iranian EFL Learners*. They found that there is a relationship between the participants’ level of reading proficiency and the using of cognitive test-taking strategies. The findings implied that the students in high level of reading proficiency used test-taking strategies as learning strategies to increase the comprehension, while the students in lower level used test-taking strategies as compensatory strategies to understand the reading texts and answer the questions.

The differences between the previous researches and the current research are occurred on the different subjects, the different objectives, and the different methods of research. The position of current research is extending the previous researches which have been conducted. The current research focuses on the students’ ability in understanding reading passage questions at the eighth grade of SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Surakarta in 2013/2014 academic year. The writer wants to analyze the students’ ability in understanding reading passage questions, the most difficult question in understanding reading passage questions, and the students’ strategies in understanding reading passage questions.

The writer applies several theories related to the issue of this research in order to support the data of research. The several theories includes: notion of reading, students’ ability, reading passage, reading passage questions, teaching reading, and principles in teaching reading.

Reading is the ability of an individual to recognize a visual form, associate the form with a sound and/or meaning acquired in the past, then, understand and interpret its meaning (Kennedy, 1981: 5). Reading is one of language skill that the process involves the readers, text, and interaction between readers and text
(Aebersold and Field, 1997: 15). Smith in Fauziati (2010: 42) affirmed reading as an understanding a message conveyed by the writer through visual and non-visual information.

Students’ ability is the capacity or potentiality to understand or to master the knowledge that given to them. Students’ ability on language is related to language skills. It means the ability of mastering the four language skills in language learning. Djiwandono (2008: 8) stated that language skill means the ability to use language. Ability in reading consists of several abilities in detail. As Farr in Djiwandono (2008: 116) has stated that comprehending the text in reading skills basically covers the several abilities, they are: (1) ability in understanding the word meaning suitable with its used; (2) ability in identifying the structural organization of text; (3) ability in identifying the ideas of text; (4) ability in answering the questions that the answers are written explicitly in text; (5) ability in answering the questions that the answers are written implicitly in text; (6) ability in drawing inference about the ideas of text; (7) ability in identifying and understanding words or expressions deals with literature; and (8) ability in identifying and understanding the writer’s aim in composing the text. All those abilities are needed in making the reading comprehension success.

To identify the students’ ability, the teachers generally used evaluation in their classroom activities. Evaluation is the systematic process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting information to determine the extent to which pupils are achieving instructional objectives (Gronlund, 1985: 5). Classroom evaluation can be done through measurement (such as: testing) and non-measurement (such as: observation). Testing is used to evaluate the students’ ability in mastering the materials given during the teaching learning activities in the classroom. It relates to the score judgment of the students’ outcomes.

The question in reading test commonly consists of five types: questions about the ideas of the passage, directly answered questions, indirectly answered questions, vocabulary questions, and overall review questions (Phillips, 1996: 13). The strategies to answer each types of question in reading passage according to Phillips (2001: 368-442) are: (1) for questions about the ideas of the passage: the
answer can generally be determined by looking at the first line of each paragraph, so the readers have to look at the first line of each paragraph; (2) for directly answered questions: the answers are found in order in the passage, so the readers have to choose a key word in the question and skim for that key word (or a related idea) in order in the passage; (3) for indirectly answered questions: the answers are not directly stated in the passage, so the readers have to draw a conclusion of the question; (4) for vocabulary questions: the answers can be easier to be found if the readers know the meaning of the word, but if it did not, there are skills that help the readers to find the correct answer, they are, finding definition from structural clues, determining meaning from word parts, and using context clues; (5) for overall review questions: the answer are found anywhere in the passage, so the readers have to carefully read the passage before draw the conclusion.

Reading passage is a portion or section of a written work in reading skills. Reading passage can be a text, a paragraph, a verse, or a dialogue. In teaching reading skills, reading passage is commonly organized as paragraph or text. Reading texts provide opportunities for students to learn vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and even good models of English writing – the way sentences, paragraphs, or texts are constructed (Harmer in Fauziati, 2010: 32). Reading passages are used to practice the reading ability and to check the comprehension of the reader.

The ability of students in understanding reading passage depends on the successfulness of the teaching reading on them. Teaching can be meant as the activity of transferring knowledge from teachers to their students. Teaching cannot be separated from learning. Teaching and learning is the two things that unite together. Anderson (1999: 68-69) stated that teaching reading usually has at least two aspects: (1) teaching reading refers to teaching learners who are learning to read for the very first time; and (2) teaching reading refers to teaching learners who already have reading skills in their first language. Reading can be meant as a process of combining information between the text and the own background knowledge of the readers to build meaning. The purpose of teaching reading of a language is to encourage the students to develop their reading skills.
There are some principles in teaching reading according to Anderson (1999: 74-77), they are: (1) exploit the reader’s background knowledge, (2) build a strong vocabulary base, (3) teach for comprehension, (4) work on increasing reading rate, (5) teach reading strategies, (6) encourage readers to transform strategies into skills, (7) build assessment and evaluation, and (8) strive for continuous improvement as a reading teacher. The teachers should be aware to execute their principles in teaching reading activity in the class, in order to improve the students’ achievement in teaching reading.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research is a descriptive research about the students’ ability in understanding reading passage questions at the eighth grade of SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Surakarta in 2013/2014 academic year. Seliger and Shohamy (1989) defined descriptive research as a research that provides the description of the phenomenon that occur naturally, without any intervention or artificiality of the researcher. The data of this research are the students’ test result, verbatim of interview, and field notes of observation, which are collected through observation, interview and test. While, the data sources in this research are taken from event, informant, and document.

In this research, the subject of the study is the eighth grade students of SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Surakarta in 2013/2014 academic year. The researcher takes sample from class VIII A which consists of 34 students; 20 males and 14 females. In conducting the research, the researcher is helped by Mrs. Fany Fitriatul Chasanah, S.Pd., the English teacher in class VIII A.

To analyze the data, the researcher used two techniques, they are: by using a simple descriptive statistic analysis and using Miles & Huberman’s interactive model of data analysis. The simple descriptive statistic analysis is used to analyze the statistical data dealing with the students’ score of test in understanding reading passage questions. While, the Miles & Huberman’s interactive model of data analysis is used to analyze the data dealing with the descriptive data. The
activities in interactive model of data analysis technique according to Miles & Huberman consists of four activities, they are, data collection, data display, data reduction, and drawing conclusion or verification.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Based on the observation, interview, and test which have been conducted by the researcher in SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Surakarta, especially in class of VIII A, it is found that there are three result points of research. Those three points are: the students’ ability in understanding reading passage questions, the most difficult question in understanding reading passage questions, and the students’ strategies in understanding reading passage questions.

1. The Students Ability in Understanding Reading Passage Questions

To analyze the students’ ability, the researcher conducted a test. The test belongs to objective test in a form of multiple-choice question that contains of 50 items with four optional answers. The questions in the test are divided into five types of question, they are: questions about the ideas of the passage, directly answered questions, indirectly answered questions, vocabulary questions, and overall review questions. Each type of questions is represented by 10 items of question which are distributed disorderly in the test.

From the result of test of the 34 students in SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Surakarta, it is found that there are 1059 correct answers of the 1700 total questions. The percentage of 1059 correct answers of the 1700 total questions is 62.29%. So, it can be stated that the students’ ability in understanding reading passage questions at the eighth grade of SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Surakarta in 2013/2014 academic year is 62.29%. According to a categorization that the researcher used, the number of 62.29% belongs to the third category that is Fair level. It can be concluded that the students’ ability in understanding reading passage questions at the eighth grade of SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Surakarta is Fair, because the percentage indicates in 62.29%.
2. The Most Difficult Question in Understanding Reading Passage Questions

In order to find out the most difficult type of questions at the eighth grade of SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Surakarta, the researcher divides the result of test into five types of ability as follows:

a) Students’ Ability in Understanding Reading Passage Questions Deals with the Questions about the Ideas of the Passage

It is found that the students’ correct answers dealing with the questions about the ideas of the passage are 220 of the 340 total answers. The percentage of 220 correct answers of the 340 total answers is 64.70%. It belongs to a Fair category. It can be concluded that the students’ ability in understanding reading passage deals with the question about the ideas of the passage is Fair.

b) Students’ Ability in Understanding Reading Passage Questions Deals with Directly Answered Questions

It is found that the students’ correct answers dealing with directly answered questions are 249 of the 340 total answers. The percentage of 249 correct answers of the 340 total answers is 73.23%. It belongs to a Good category. It can be concluded that the students’ ability in understanding reading passage deals with directly answered question is Good.

c) Students’ Ability in Understanding Reading Passage Questions Deals with Indirectly Answered Questions

It is found that the students’ correct answers dealing with main idea questions are 148 of the 340 total answers. The percentage of 148 correct answers of the 340 total answers is 43.52%. It belongs to a Poor category. It can be concluded that the students’ ability in understanding reading passage deals with indirectly answered question is Poor.

d) Students’ Ability in Understanding Reading Passage Questions Deals with Vocabulary Questions

It is found that the students’ correct answers dealing with main idea questions are 243 of the 340 total answers. The percentage of 243 correct
answers of the 340 total answers is 71.47%. It belongs to a Good category. It can be concluded that the students’ ability in understanding reading passage deals with vocabulary question is Good.

e) Students’ Ability in Understanding Reading Passage Questions Deals with Overall Review Questions

It is found that the students’ correct answers dealing with main idea questions are 199 of the 340 total answers. The percentage of 199 correct answers of the 340 total answers is 58.52%. It belongs to a Fair category. It can be concluded that the students’ ability in understanding reading passage deals with overall review question is Fair.

From the result above, it can be seen that there is a poor category among those five types of question. The poor category indicates in the third type that is Indirectly Answered Questions. So, it can be concluded that the most difficult question in understanding reading passage questions according to them is the Indirectly Answered Questions. The students get difficulties to answer this type of question because they are confused to draw the conclusion of the passage.

3. The Students’ Strategies in Understanding Reading Passage

The researcher conducted interview to the eighth grade students of SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Surakarta to collect the data about this third research question. One of interview questions is the students’ way to understand reading passage question dealing with each type of questions in reading passage.

Based on the result of interview with the eighth grade students of SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Surakarta, it is found that most of them stated that they were not use a certain strategy to answer the reading passage questions. Instead, there are many students who did not know the strategies are. The students only read the overall text and tried to guess the meaning of every single word then decided the answer. The students admitted that they used the same way to answer the question in reading passage questions although the types of question are different. This finding is also supported by the English
teacher of the eighth grade students of SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Surakarta, who said that the strategies in understanding reading passage are conditionally. Sometimes it can be used, but sometimes it cannot be.

From the result of interview with some of the eighth grade students of SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Surakarta, then added by the information by the English teacher at the eighth grade of SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Surakarta, it can be concluded that most of the eighth grade students of SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Surakarta did not use a certain strategy to understand the reading passage questions. Most of them did not use a certain strategy because they do not know the kinds of strategy in answering the reading passage questions. What they did were only reading the overall text then trying to guess the meaning of every single word in text before they choose the answer.

CONCLUSION

After describing and analyzing the data from the result of observation, interview, and test which has been done at the eighth grade of SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Surakarta in 2013/2014 academic year, the researcher draws the conclusions as follows:

First, the students’ ability in understanding reading passage questions at the eighth grade of SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Surakarta in 2013/2014 academic year is in a Fair level, because the percentage indicates in 62.29%. The students’ ability is divided into five types of ability in understanding each types of question, they are: questions about the ideas of the passage, directly answered questions, indirectly answered questions, vocabulary questions, and overall review questions.

Second, the most difficult question in understanding reading passage questions according to the eighth grade of SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Surakarta in 2013/2014 academic year is the Indirectly Answered Questions. The students get difficulties to answer this type of question because they are confused to draw the conclusion of the passage.
Third, most of the eighth grade students of SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Surakarta did not use a certain strategy to understand the reading passage questions. Most of them did not use a certain strategy because they do not know the kinds of strategy in answering the reading passage questions. What they did were only reading the overall text then trying to guess the meaning of every single word in text before they choose the answer.

Those are the conclusion of research which is conducted by the researcher in SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Surakarta in 2013/2014 academic year. The researcher hopes that this research can be useful to the further research and can be used as a reference to the similar research.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


