

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

One of the most important things for achieving a good language teaching is finding proper materials, among them are coursebooks. Coursebooks are very important, because they hold second place of importance after the teacher in determining most of the teaching's content. Coursebooks, in some situations, even serve as the basis for much of the language input learners receive and the language practice the students take part in (Richards, 2003). Good coursebooks will help students to have proper knowledge, information, and practices, since coursebooks have multiple roles: learners' resource for grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, practice, and activities (Cunningsworth, 1995:5).

As one of the four language skills, reading skill should gain enough attention in language teaching. Reading is defined by Urquhart and Weir (1998,22) as a process of receiving and interpreting information encoded in language form via the medium of print. The information extraction from reading needs the decoding of the message contained in the text being read. It may need knowledge on the language itself (the vocabulary and the language rules), supported by the schemata (the previous knowledge and experience) of the readers on the topic discussed. Reading comprehension skill as one of the skills in

reading skill also needs to be developed. Two important factors in reading comprehension are texts and exercises. Choosing reading materials suitable to students' academic level would help the students to comprehend the text they read, which will further develop the students' comprehension skill in reading skill. Nuttal (2005,187) stresses the importance of reading texts to be readable (have suitable structural difficulty to the students by following certain standard readability index). Another important factor is exercises in teaching reading, the exercises provided by the coursebook should also help students to comprehend the content of the reading texts. It is important for students to develop their competence as readers in comprehending the texts by learning different levels of comprehension, from the lowest level until the highest level, in order to be able to respond to different levels of comprehension of texts.

Browne (1996) has studied the readability of 12 EFL reading books for university students in Japan, 4 coursebooks for the third year Japanese High School students, and 4 textbooks for USA college-level students. Readability formulas used for studying the readability of the books are Flesch Kincaid Grade, Coleman-Liau Grade, and Bormuth Grade Level Formulas. The result of the study shows that the EFL reading books have varied readability score, which shows that the publishers do not have same ideas about the level of reading materials the university students can handle. The average readability level of the EFL reading books from the Flesch-Kincaid Formula is for grade 8, while from Coleman-Liau and Bormuth is similar, for grade 10. The readability level of the High School coursebooks are one level higher than the EFL reading books, which might

happen because the coursebooks provided for High School are supposed to help students preparing themselves for college entrance examination. The average readability level of the High School coursebooks is for grade 9 from Flesch-Kincaid Formula, for grade 10 from Bormuth Formula, and for grade 11 from Coleman-Liau Formula. The highest readability level is the USA college-level textbooks. The readability level is 10 to 11 from Flesch-Kincaid and Bormuth Formula, and 15 from Coleman-Liau Formula.

Yong (2010) studied the readability of the Secondary Science for Brunei Darussalam Book 1 using Gunning, Smog, and Flesch-kincaid formulas, which is validated by the Cloze Test. Three passages were chosen for the assessment, the Floating and sinking in Water, Evaporation, and Photosynthesis. The result shows that Fry and Gunning formulas give the same result of reading age for the coursebook, that is 15 years, while Flesch-Kincaid gives lower reading age, that is 13 years. The scores obtained from three different formulas show the same result with the Cloze Test given to the students, 65% of the students found the texts are too difficult for them.

Studies on readability levels of texts have also been done in Indonesia, such as study conducted by Rahma and Gunadi (2009). They studied the readability level of A-level Chemistry 1B for Senior High School, which was used in SBI/RSBI (Sekolah Bertaraf Internasional/Rancangan Sekolah Bertaraf Internasional), schools using English as the medium of the instructional language. The study using cloze test shows that reading level was in frustration level for most of the students. The study using Fry graph, Flesch-Kincaid formula, and Dale-

Chall formula show similar result, the reading passage is above the grade level of the students and suitable for grade 10-12.

The previous studies above show that measuring text readability using readability formulas/graph is important for preliminary estimation of text readability level. It would help the establishment of competence required to read particular texts, which might be more accurately matched with readers. The question is whether the grade level obtained from the readability formulas, which are for native English students, could be used for EFL students. Hamsik (1984) investigated the ESL validity of Flesch, Dale-Chall, Fry, and Lorge readability formulas and graph. He gave cloze tests on 18 academic passages to 40 Intensive English centre students at an American University. The result shows positive correlation of 0.775 to 0.819 between the rank orders of difficulty of the passages measured by the cloze test and the readability formulas/graph. Hamsik concluded that the four readability formulas and graph do measure readability for ESL students. Further, they can be used to select material appropriate to the reading level of ESL students. While Greenfield (1999) studied Flesch-Reading Ease, Flesch-Kincaid, Coleman-Liau, New Dale-Chall, and Bormuth validity. The study involved 200 Japanese students enrolled in a small liberal arts college in Western Japan. The testing procedures conducted was based on Bormuth (1971). Fifth-word deletion cloze tests were constructed on 31 of 32 Bormuth academic passages. One passage was read by all participants as a control. The study shows Pearson correlations between observed EFL mean scores and scores predicted by formulas are 0.691 for the New Dale-Chall formula, 0.765 for Coleman-Liau

formula, 0.845 for Flesch Reading Ease, 0.847 for Flesch-Kincaid formula, and 0.861 for Bormuth formula. The study also shows that the readability formulas are fundamentally valid for a broad spectrum of English readers, non-native as well as native readers. The previous studies give the correlation between the grade levels obtained, which is for native English students and the grade levels for Indonesia EFL students. The grade levels obtained from readability formulas or graph could also be used for determining the grade levels of Indonesia EFL students.

Although the studies of readability levels of texts have already been done, included in Indonesia, there is no study has been done on *Scaffolding* coursebooks which are widely used by many State Junior High Schools in Surabaya. This study tried to answer the importancy of readability levels of the reading passages and comprehension levels of the exercises by assessing the readability levels of passages and judging the comprehension levels of exercises in *Scaffolding for Grades 7, 8, and 9*.

Junior High School Coursebooks were chosen because Junior High School is a preparation level before students enter their secondary education, Senior High School. *Scaffolding* coursebooks were chosen because they have been widely used by many State Junior High Schools in Surabaya, such as Sekolah Menengah Pertama Negeri (SMPN) 1, 3, 8, 15, 16, 18,19, 29, 30, 37, and 45. *Scaffolding* coursebooks which are written by Joko Priyana, Riandi, and Anita P. Mumpuni, have been approved by the Badan Standar Nasional Pendidikan (BSNP), an independent organization appointed by the Indonesia government, whose job is to develop, monitor, and evaluate the national educational system in Indonesia.

Scaffolding coursebooks were considered to have met the English syllabus requirements in the *KTSP* current curriculum standard as stated in Peraturan Menteri (National Educational Ministry Regulation) No. 34 year 2008.

This study will provide some insights for teachers about *Scaffolding* coursebooks, about readability levels of the reading passages and comprehension levels of the exercises in the coursebooks. Through this study, teachers would have the consideration, whether the reading passages and the exercises in the coursebooks could be used directly or not, whether they need to be supplemented or not, concerning the language readability of the texts and comprehension levels of the exercises. It is also hoped that this study will encourage teachers to do the coursebook evaluation in the future, especially concerning the reading passages and exercises in teaching reading.

1.2 Statements of the Problem

The research was conducted to evaluate the reading passages and the exercises in Junior High School coursebooks, *Scaffolding for Grades 7, 8, and 9*, to answer the research questions:

1. What are the readability levels of reading passages in *Scaffolding* coursebooks?
2. What are the comprehension levels of exercises in *Scaffolding* coursebooks?

Further, the major research questions are divided into the following minor research questions:

- 1a. What is the readability level of reading passages in *Scaffolding for Grade 7*?
- 1b. What is the readability level of reading passages in *Scaffolding for Grade 8*?

1c. What is the readability level of reading passages in *Scaffolding for Grade 9*?

2a. What is the comprehension level of exercises in *Scaffolding for Grade 7*?

2b. What is the comprehension level of exercises in *Scaffolding for Grade 8*?

2c. What is the comprehension level of exercises in *Scaffolding for Grade 9*?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The research was conducted to evaluate the reading passages and the exercises in Junior High School coursebooks, *Scaffolding for Grades 7, 8, and 9*, by evaluating:

1. The readability levels of reading passages in *Scaffolding* coursebooks

2. The comprehension levels of exercises in *Scaffolding* coursebooks

The readability levels of reading passages and the comprehension levels of exercises in *Scaffolding* coursebooks were obtained by evaluating:

1a. The readability level of reading passages in *Scaffolding for Grade 7*.

1b. The readability level of reading passages in *Scaffolding for Grade 8*.

1c. The readability level of reading passages in *Scaffolding for Grade 9*.

2a. The comprehension level of exercises in *Scaffolding for Grade 7*.

2b. The comprehension level of exercises in *Scaffolding for Grade 8*.

2c. The comprehension levels of exercises in *Scaffolding for Grade 9*.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

The theory underlining this study is the bottom up approach to reading comprehension. Bottom up is a process of receiving and interpreting information

encoded in language form via the medium of print, by recognizing letters and words, and working out sentence structures (Nuttal, 2005:17). It is one of the approaches used in the reading process, usually in the lower reading process. In this approach, the students try to build meaning from the letter and sound recognition, followed by the morpheme and word recognition, which will in turn build up to the grammatical structures, sentences, and longer texts recognition. The focus in constructing meaning of the text in bottom up approach is the language (morpheme, word and sentence).

One of the important factors in understanding or comprehending the text is that the language of the text given to particular students should be readable for them. Measuring readability of a text, especially the language readability, could be done by using readability formulas/graph, such as Flesch-Kincaid formula or Fry graph. While the result of reading comprehension could be observed by providing exercises for the students to be answered which consider reading comprehension taxonomy offered. One of comprehension taxonomies is Barrett's Reading Comprehension Taxonomy.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This research will provide teachers some insights about readability levels of reading passages and comprehension levels of exercises in *Scaffolding* series. Further, the findings of this study could be used as one of the coursebook evaluation models.

1.6 Scope and Limitation

The evaluation was conducted to know the readability levels of reading passages and the comprehension levels of exercises in the *Scaffolding* coursebooks. The assessment readability levels of reading passages was limited to the factors inherent in the passages, that is the language factors (the words and the sentences difficulty). Since readability was limited to language factors, the readability was assessed using readability formula/graph. The judgement of reading comprehension exercises was limited to comprehension levels of exercises and not types of questions.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

1. Bottom up is a process of receiving and interpreting information encoded in language form via the medium of print, by recognizing letters and words; and working out sentence structures
2. Readability is an analysis of linguistic structures, aiming at the identification and the characterization of linguistic factors, rendering a given text more or less easily comprehensible to a given person or group of persons. This study only considered the factors inherent in the text itself, that is the vocabulary and sentence difficulties, for assessing the readability of the reading passages. Language readability does not consider the factors involving both the readers and the text.

3. Reading comprehension is a process of understanding written ideas, in which the core of the process is the continuous development of oral and written language ability
4. Levels of comprehension are defined as the understanding of one's reading level, which is observed by providing the exercises for the student to be answered by considering comprehension levels or taxonomy offered by researchers