

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background

English, which is known as the first international language, is now used in almost every country and in every aspect in our life, such as education, business, and many more. In order to survive in this modern era, people realize that English mastery is very important. Therefore, they have started to learn English as foreign language.

In Indonesia, English is the first foreign language learned. Schools in Indonesia teach English from the early ages. Based on the *Kurikulum 2013*, English is actually taught starting from junior high school level. However, schools in Indonesia have become aware of the importance of English for the students' future, and they start to teach English from the earlier level. Most schools, especially public schools, start giving English lesson at elementary school level. Private schools are even earlier in giving English lesson. They teach English since the students are in a very young age (starting from preschool).

Although English is taught since the early age, English is not easy for them to learn. Even in the university level, students find difficulties in many aspects of English. The four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and the language components (pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary) are difficult for students (Putra, 2015).

Since English is the first foreign language in Indonesia and the use of English is getting more and more common in daily life, people are now exposed with many English texts. Starting from the simplest ones such as advertisements and signs until the difficult ones such as business letters and education textbook, they are all written in English. Therefore, reading is a very important skill.

“Reading is an important skill gained through training activities in regular school environment after the listening and speaking skills,” (Gocer, 2014: 1). Grabe (as in Alyousef, 2006) describes Godman’s perception of reading which is seen as:

an active process of comprehending [where] students need to be taught strategies to read more efficiently (e. g., guess from context, define expectations, make inferences about the text, skim ahead to fill in the context, etc (1991, p. 377).

Hence, reading aloud skill and silent reading skill are not enough. “Many students can recognize words and know how they are pronounced, but they do not know their meanings” (Hamra and Syatriana, 2010: 30). We do really need to comprehend the information given not only read it.

Comprehending a reading passage requires the reader to fulfill several aspects before one can completely comprehend it. To comprehend a text, a reader must have a wide range of capacities and abilities. These include cognitive capacities (e.g., attention, memory, critical analytic ability, inferencing, visualization ability), motivation (a purpose for reading, an interest in the content being read, self-efficacy as a reader), and various types of knowledge (vocabulary, domain and topic knowledge, linguistic and discourse knowledge, knowledge of

specific comprehension strategies). Of course, those aspects depend on what texts are read and the specific activity in which one is engaged (Snow, 2002: 13).

As English is a foreign language in Indonesia, students at any level of education find difficulties in reading English texts. Many studies show that most university graduates are not able to read English and comprehend it well (Hamra & Syatriana, 2010). This means that the ability of Indonesian students' reading comprehension may be low. They still need assistance from teachers to comprehend English texts.

Reading comprehension can be learned. By learning and practicing routinely and continuously, this skill will grow. In reading comprehension class, students should be provided with as many practices as possible to comprehend reading passages. Students also need to be exposed with reading passages as routinely as possible. To do this, teacher should choose the appropriate learning materials to enhance the teaching-learning process of reading comprehension. One of the most important learning materials is reading course book which contains reading passages and reading comprehension exercises.

A good reading course book gives variety of reading comprehension exercises following the reading passages. As stated by Alderson and Urquhart (1984) that the usual approach to know one's comprehension is by giving a series of passages to understand, and ask them a variety of questions afterwards. Good reading comprehension exercises, which commonly appear in the form of questions, lead students not only comprehending the surface information but also

achieving the deeper information (full comprehension) from the texts given in the book.

Many reading researchers have attempted to discover whether reading is composed of different subskills that might relate to one another within taxonomy or levels of skills (Alderson and Urquhart, 1984: xvi). In fact, reading comprehension is like a continuum, starting from decoding what they read, understanding the simple facts in the passage to the deeper understanding until the reader is able to connect the knowledge they get from the passage with their life (Thomas & Thorne, 2016).

Reading comprehension exercises, as their purpose to help reading comprehension, are divided into several levels of comprehension. Some taxonomies have been suggested to analyze levels of comprehension. The levels of comprehension in those taxonomies cover the lowest comprehension level that requires lower-order thinking skill until the highest comprehension level which requires higher-order thinking skill. The most well-known taxonomy is Bloom's taxonomy (Bloom, et al. 1956), but this taxonomy is naturally composed for educational objectives not specifically made for knowing one's reading comprehension level. One most-used reading comprehension taxonomy is composed by Thomas Barrett (Clymer, 1968). This taxonomy has 5 levels of comprehension, which are: (1) literal, (2) reorganization, (3) inferential, (4) evaluation, and (5) appreciation. Barrett's taxonomy is used to assist teacher in developing and reviewing reading comprehension exercises.

At university level, especially in the English Department, students are expected to achieve the higher-order thinking level in comprehending reading passage. Higher-order thinking skill is someone's ability to not only getting the information from the reading passage, but also able to apply the information in the real life situation. In short, higher-order thinking skills is the inferential, evaluation, and appreciation level in Barrett's taxonomy. To reach the higher-level thinking, students are supposed to be exposed regularly with problems, in this case reading comprehension exercises, which support the growth of their thinking level. Those problems should be provided in the textbook used in the classroom or sometimes by the teacher.

Some teachers tend to give reading comprehension exercises only for knowing how far the students have understood the reading passage, while the goal of classroom questioning – in this case reading comprehension exercises - is not to determine whether students have learned something (as would be the case in tests, quizzes, and exams), but rather to guide students to help them learn necessary information and material. Exercises should be used to encourage students to learn rather than to test students (Fredericks, 2005).

Fredericks (2005) says that students tend to read and think based on the kinds of questions (exercise) they are used to receive from the book and the teacher. If students are commonly given exercises that require only low levels of intellectual involvement (lower-order thinking skill), they will tend to think accordingly. On the other hand, students who are given higher-order thinking exercises will tend to think more creatively and divergently.

The exercises given in class form the habit of the students. Students tend to think according to the exercises they do regularly. If they receive exercise which involve their higher-level thinking, they will tend to think deeper than only catching the explicit information given in the reading passages.

The writer observed Reading I course in one English department of one private university in Surabaya. This class is the basic reading class for the university students who are taking English Teaching major. As the foundation of the students' reading skills, the class provides exercises in meaning construction of intermediate level reading passages. The goal of this class is that the students can achieve the lower-order thinking skills until higher-order thinking skills in reading comprehension. The syllabus states that the objectives of Reading I course are (1) the students should be able to infer main ideas, (2) to identify specific details, and (3) to create evaluative comments about the reading passages given in the class (*Pedoman Akademik*, 2015). Those three expected learning outcomes refer to the Barrett's taxonomy level, excluding the appreciation level.

To achieve those expected learning outcomes, the lecturers prepared materials. The materials are taken from the book entitled "Issues for day". This book is newly used for the 2015 batch. The book provides reading passages and reading comprehension exercises. Those exercises are given to the students to help them in growing their reading comprehension until they can achieve the expected learning outcomes.

The success of achieving the expected learning outcomes is affected by many variables (such as the background knowledge, vocabulary mastery, and the

teacher's assistance to the students), the writer believes that one of the most important variable is the quality of the reading comprehension exercises given in the class.

The reading comprehension exercises given in class should be adequate to lead students to a deeper understanding of the passage since the function of the exercises is to lead students to not only understanding the reading passage but also applying the information given to the real practice.

Since it is important to know whether the exercises in the newly used book meet the need of the students to achieve the expected learning outcomes, the writer is attempted to analyze the level of the exercises in "Issues for Today," by using the Barrett's reading comprehension taxonomy as the parameter. The reading comprehension exercises examined are those exercises provided in the book used in the class, "Issues for Today" textbook.

1.2 Research Questions

The book used in this study, "Issues for Today" textbook, has reading passages and reading comprehension exercises following the reading passages. Those reading comprehension exercises are ideally covering all level of comprehension (Barrett's taxonomy) and cover the two levels of thinking (LOTS and HOTS), so that those exercises can be used to help students to achieve the expected learning outcomes for Reading I course. Therefore, in this study the writer has two major research questions which are:

1. What are the levels of the reading comprehension exercises in “Issues for Today” book?
 - 1.a. How many percent of those exercises belong to lower-level thinking?
 - 1.b. How many percent of those exercises belong to higher-level thinking?
2. Do those exercises meet the objectives of Reading I course?

1.3 Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

1. To find out the levels of the reading comprehension exercises in “Issues for Today” book.
 - 1.a. To know how many percent of the exercises in the book belong to lower-order thinking.
 - 1.b. To know how many percent of the exercises in the book belong to higher-order thinking.
2. To find out whether those exercises meet the objectives of Reading I course or not.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

The writer uses the theory of reading comprehension and reading comprehension taxonomy which is proposed by Thomas Barrett (Clymer, 1968). Barrett’s taxonomy consists of five levels of comprehension. Those levels are arranged in sequence starting from the lowest comprehension until the highest comprehension. Starting from the lowest comprehension level, the levels in the

Barrett's taxonomy are (1) literal, (2) reorganization, (3) inferential, (4) evaluation, and (5) appreciation. Those level of comprehension are categorized into the level of thinking. There are 2 levels of thinking, which are called higher-order thinking skills and lower-order thinking skills. The first two levels in the Barrett's taxonomy belong to lower-order thinking skills and the rest belong to the higher-order thinking skills.

1.5 Significance of The Study

This study provides information for teachers and lecturers about the reading comprehension exercises level in "Issues for Today" textbook based on Barrett's taxonomy and about the thinking skills covered in those exercises. From this information, lecturers can decide whether the book is suitable for teaching Reading I course. Besides, teacher can choose exercises in the book which is essential for students to achieve the learning out comes stated in the syllabus. Teachers can also add more exercise as a supplement for this book if the book is considered insufficient to help students in comprehending reading passages. Another significance of this study is that this study will also give insights for the book writer about the exercises he/she has written in the book.

1.6 Assumption

All the reading passages in the "Issues for Today" textbook are accompanied with reading comprehension exercises which vary in types.

1.7 Limitation and Scope

This study is limited to the 12 reading passages and their reading comprehension exercises in "Issues for Today" textbook. This textbook has the

same forms of exercises in every chapter. The reading comprehension exercises titles which are analyzed in this study are “Fact-finding Exercise”, “Reading Analysis”, “Information Organization”, “Information Recall and Summary”, and “Topics for Discussion and Writing.” Those exercises are in the form of true-false exercise, multiple-choice exercise, chart-completing exercise, and answering questions exercise.

1.8 Definition of Key Terms

- Reading comprehension exercises are the tools which are used to help readers to comprehend reading passages. Those exercises can be in the form of questions, multiple choices exercises, true-false exercises, and sometimes instruction.
- Barrett’s Reading Comprehension Taxonomy is a set of reading comprehension levels. Those levels are: (1) literal (2) reorganization (3) inferential (4) evaluation, and (5) appreciation. Those levels cover the lower-order thinking skills as well as the higher-order thinking skills. This taxonomy provides guidance for classroom teachers in developing and choosing appropriate comprehension exercises that help students to comprehend reading passages.
- Higher-order thinking is human ability to think higher than memorizing facts or retelling something with exactly the same way as it is told before.
- Lower-order thinking is the basic skills needed before someone reach the higher-order thinking. Lower-order thinking only requires someone to

remember and understood the information given without applying the information/knowledge to the real life.

1.9 Organization of the Study

This study consists of five chapters. The first chapter covers the background of the study, research title, objectives, theoretical framework, significance of the study, assumption, limitation and scope, and the last is definition of key terms. The second chapter covers the review of related literature and the previous studies. The third chapter discusses about the research method of this study. The research findings and the discussion are provided in Chapter 4. The last chapter provides the conclusion of the study and the suggestions from the writer.