

## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

#### **Background of the Study**

Standardized test is still widely used to see the test taker's competence in one field of study. In order to be able to see their competence in English, TOEFL-PBT ® is frequently used as one of the indicators that students are competent in both spoken and written English. This standardized test is still used by many universities in Indonesia.

Universities used the test as one of the admission requirements and graduation pre-requirements. Students are obliged to get the targeted score assigned by the faculty. Since many students did not get used to taking this particular test when they were in high schools, they have difficulties in achieving the targeted score. To help them getting the targeted score, a test preparation program is conducted. The main focus of this program is preparing the students for the test by

teaching the test taking strategies. They are taught how to deal with problems occurring in the test in limited time allotted.

The teaching of test-taking strategy has been proved effective to enhance students' test performance by a few studies (Cohen, 1984; Radojevic, 2006; Zhang, Liu, Zhao, & Xie, 2011). In a paper reviews study on test-taking strategies in second/foreign language reading comprehension tests done by Abidin (2009) stated that the studies which he had been reviewed showed that test-taking strategies instruction and the use of such strategies lead to improvement in language test performance, especially reading comprehension scores, for different leveled students regardless of what learning context they are in (Abidin, 2009). The findings indicate that test-taking strategies enable learners to use the characteristics and format of a test to increase scores in a test-taking situation (W. T. Rogers & Harley, 1999). Moreover, the teaching of test-taking strategies has proved giving positive effects in decreasing students' anxiety and improving their confidence when they are

taking the test (Haam, 2006; Pour-Mohammadi & Abidin, 2011). Thus, the test preparation training is highly recommended to aid the students to get their targeted score as well as to prepare their mental for doing tests.

Test-taking strategies are cognitive abilities to deal with any testing situation in appropriate manner and to know what to do during tests. Examples of these strategies are managing time effectively, surveying all questions before responding, solving easy questions first, checking and reviewing answers, underlying key words or concepts in questions, eliminating wrong options, and others (Dodeen, 2015). Those abilities are extremely important to help students maximize their scores to the limit required by their institution and by the level of their knowledge and preparation for the test. One of the most important test-taking strategies is to know how to study and to prepare well for the test.

An anecdotal pre-research was done at the first meeting of the course. This was done to analyze which section of the

test that the students were mostly concerned about. The pre-research was conducted by distributing a questionnaire to 85 students. The results showed that reading was considered to be the most challenging section. It was the most time consuming and exhausting section. The respondents said that the allocation time was insufficient for them to read five to six passages and 50 test items. Vocabulary banks were still the main barriers. They found many unknown and unfamiliar words which consequently slowing down their reading speed.

When the pre-test was administered, 39 (46%) from 85 students admitted that they were able to answer 21 to 30 test items before the time ran out. In other words, they were able to answer only half of total of the test items. The rest of the items were probably answered by guessing, not referring back to the passages. This probably might happen due to the lack strategies of doing the test they mastered and the inappropriate reading strategies application.

In light of the above, this thesis was exclusively observing the teaching of test-taking strategies for reading test. Although the other skills in the test are equally important, reading section test-taking strategies was chosen due to the two side impacts attained. Besides the improved test score, the students can improve their comprehension skills as well. This would help them when they have to read articles for their study, assignments, and exams.

The teaching of the strategies is best known as explicit or direct strategy instruction. Explicit strategy instruction involves making students cognitively aware of the thinking processes good readers have as they engage with text and providing them with specific strategies they can use to support and repair their comprehension as they read a wide variety of texts (Ballou, 2012a). An instructional model includes an explicit description of the strategy, strategy modeling by the teacher and/or student, collaborative use of the strategy in

action, guided practice with gradual release of responsibility, and independent use of the strategy (Duke & Pearson, 2002b).

The Reading Comprehension section contains four to six reading passages of approximately 200-450 words each. A reading passage is usually followed by seven to twelve questions. The topics of reading passages are usually academic. Typical of those will be found in textbooks for introductory courses in a university. Most frequently, the passages comes from texts on biology, chemistry, geography, physics, American history, biography, economics, social sciences, and the arts.

Some questions will be asking about sentence restatements or a word or a phrase paraphrasing according to the meaning in a particular passage. However, the main purpose of this section is to test the comprehension of the ideas expressed in the passage and the ways in which these ideas relate to one another.

The types of questions in the test are questions about the ideas of the passage, directly answered questions, indirectly answered questions, vocabulary questions, and overall review questions. These questions require the test takers to use their reading skills in answering the questions. In order to be able to answer the questions, the test takers should have ample reading skills and strategies to deal with the types of the questions.

Therefore, this study was conducted to investigate how the strategies were implemented in the classroom, and whether the students were able to implement the strategies given in the post test by choosing the correct answer.

The course books used in the training program is a level 3 book. This book is intended for students whose pre-test score is more than 403 and below 450. By the end of the program, the students were expected to get at least 450 even though it was still lower than the minimum score required.

The reading section in this book was divided into 4 units. They are Scanning and Skimming, Vocabulary in

Context, Main Idea of the Passage, and Purpose and Organizational Patterns. Each unit provided the strategy instructions for answering questions in the test. The instruction presented was taken from Longman Complete Course for the TOEFL® Test, written by Deborah Phillips. In this book she gave the strategies to choose the best answers for the TOEFL® test. The strategies presented were how to get the idea of the passage, how to answer stated and unstated detail questions, how to recognize the organization of ideas, how to find the pronoun referents, how to answer implied detail questions, how to answer transition questions correctly, how to answer vocabulary questions correctly, and how to answer overall review questions (Phillips, 2001).

Not all the strategies presented in Phillips' book were discussed in the course book. In level 3 course book, the first unit of the reading section was talking about the general skills needed for answering the test items. Then, in the second, third, and fourth units, they were talking about the types of questions

frequently found in the test. The strategy instructions offered in this course book were presented in order. They were presented steps by steps from how the learners could recognize the type of the questions and what skills they needed to answer the questions to how to choose the best answers. They were clearly defined to ease students' understanding. The strategies explicitly and implicitly presented in the book were scanning and skimming, predicting, and summarizing. In addition, exercises were included to make the learners practice the strategies they had just learned. The exercises were integrated to the test questions as well. Consequently, the learners could get used to with types of the questions in the test.

The strategies presented in the course books are the strategies in which the learners can apply them when they are doing the test in restricted time provided. The main strategies presented are skimming and scanning. These strategies are offered exclusively in the first unit of the reading section. Scanning and skimming are the basic strategies for answering

the questions of some passages in the reading questions.

Skimming is used to answer main idea and topic questions.

These are found in every passage of the reading section. While,

scanning is used to answer some detailed questions, such as

reference and vocabulary questions. The other strategies which

potentially support in answering the test items and are used but

not presented exclusively are predicting and summarizing.

Predicting is mostly useful when doing vocabulary questions.

In these questions the test takers are asked to guess the

meaning of particular words based on the context provided.

The questions sometimes ask the test takers to guess the

synonym or the antonym of the words. Summarizing is used

when the test takers are asked to determine the purpose of the

passage and inference. The strategies are used simultaneously

while solving the problems.

The book used for this class is ELPT (English Language Proficiency Test) Preparation Book Three. In Book Three, there were four units allocated for Reading Section.

Each unit provided strategies for solving the problems found in the text. The first unit was about the general skills needed for doing time limited test. These strategies were included in speed reading strategies. The other three units talked about types of questions frequently found in the test. They were vocabulary in context, main ideas and topics, and purpose and organizational pattern.

Each unit was started by giving short introduction about the topic, and then, followed by the explanation about the strategies. After the short introduction and explanation, one or two examples are given. The examples are in form of short passages followed by some multiple choice questions. They were made similar to the real test with easier level of difficulties. After each example there are some explanations about the answer choices and the reasons for the correct answer. The explanation is used as guidelines of how choosing the most appropriate option for the question. Then, a couple of exercises are provided for students to practice. In addition,

more extra exercises can be found in the workbook section which is also included in the book.

As mentioned above, it can be seen that the strategies were presented clearly. They were explained in isolation in the beginning of each unit and topic. In addition, the strategies were also exemplified in sample tests. The explanation part demonstrated clearly how to get the correct answer by applying the strategies. It described the way step by step followed by the sentence proofs, the context cues, or the reasons.

### **The Research Questions**

In light of the above, this study asked the following questions:

- How were the reading test-taking strategies presented in the classroom?
- How did the students benefit the teaching of the reading test-taking strategies to their post-test results?

### **The Purposes of the Study**

The objectives of this current study were to answer the research questions above. Since the book has already given strategies needed for doing the test, it is crucial to see how the class instructor presents or teaches the strategies in the class. Students study the strategies not only from the book but also from the instructor. Thus, it is important since the strategies in the book and the strategies teaching are completing each other.

The current study was also to see the benefit of the strategy teaching to the students. Post-test result was used as the indicator whether the students gained positive impact or not besides interviewing them. Students interview was used to get information about to what extend the strategy teaching helped them during the test.

### **Scope and Limitation**

From the three sections tested, reading section was chosen as the focus of the study as the score was the lowest compared to the other sections. Meanwhile, reading was

chosen since the skills learnt may benefit to the improvement of student's comprehension skills. Those skills are highly required to help students with their studies and exams.

The strategies covered were a part of the strategies suggested to master to take the tests. They were scanning, skimming, vocabulary in context, purpose, and organizational pattern. Thus, the observation and analysis were based on those skills.

The number of the class meeting became the limitation for this current study. Since from 14 meeting allocated, there were only two meetings allocated for teaching reading strategies.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The focal point of this thesis is the teaching of reading test-taking strategies. Test-taking strategies are cognitive abilities to deal with any testing situation in appropriate manner and to know what to do during tests (Dodeen, 2015). In addition, according to Cohen and Upton (2007), test-taking

strategy was processes which respondents had selected and which they were conscious of, at least to some degree (Cohen & Upton, 2007). It enables learners to use the characteristics and format of a test to increase score in a test-taking situation. The strategies include: reading the instructions carefully, scheduling the allocated time appropriately, making use of clue words in the questions, delaying answering questions, reviewing the work in order to check the answer, etc. (W. T. Rogers & Harley, 1999).

Doing reading test in limited time needs appropriate strategies in order to be able to answer the questions correctly and use the time allocated wisely. The test takers make any appropriate manner to help them answer the questions. They use the characteristics and format of the test to decide what strategies needed. As mentioned above, the strategies are related to the skills of reading the text and answering the questions efficiently and effectively.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

- ELPT (English Language Proficiency Test): is a TOEFL-like test to assess student's English proficiency.
- The teaching of reading test-taking strategies: is an instructional strategy which was conducted to prepare the students to do the reading section of the ELPT tests.
- Test preparation strategies: are instructional reading strategies needed to improve students' ELPT reading test score.
- Test-taking strategies: are strategies used by students for doing the ELPT test so that they can gain better score.

### **Significance of the Study**

The results of this current research are expected to generate the instructors' awareness the importance of teaching reading skills for improving students' reading test score.