

AN ANALYSIS OF MATH STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION ABILITY IN INFERENCE ENGLISH TEXT STORY AT STKIP AL HIKMAH SURABAYA

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ABSTRACT:

The objective of this research is to investigate students' comprehension ability in inferring English texts by analyzing their reading comprehension written answers to an English course text book. The participants of this research were ten Math department students of STKIP Al Hikmah who took English Reading Course in the second semester. One of the objectives of this course is to allow the students to master reading comprehension ability, particularly the skill of inferring scientific and Islamic texts. To reach the objective, the students were equipped with an English reading course book which contained English texts supplied with comprehension question and integrated with Islamic Story English Texts and English Math Topics. In this descriptive research, the data were taken from students' work in answering the questions in the course text book, particularly in doing inferring questions. Interviews were conducted and questionnaires were distributed to the students in order to gain more accurate data of their reading comprehension ability. The results of the study show that most students were capable in answering inferring questions. There were several factors that caused the students to have the ability of inferring English story texts. They were being able to identify the context of the sentences, resolve ambiguous words and pronominal referents, predict causes and consequences of events, and recognise incongruent events.

Keywords: Inferring ability, Math Students, English Text Story

INTRODUCTION

In learning English as foreign language, mastering reading competence becomes one of the essential skills for language learners to master all English skills. Komiyama (2009, p. 32) said that Reading is the fundamental skill upon which all formal education comprehends. This skill becomes very important since it gives potential impact to master other English skills. Language learner who wants to master English as foreign language must exposure to the language itself before they start practising in productive activity – writing and speaking skill. Reading becomes one of the initial step for the learners to master the language since this activity requires learners' understanding of English text. Reading comprehension is defined as to get the correct message from a text (Zhang, 2008). Snow (2002, p. 11) defines reading comprehension as the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language. Reading activity is not only about understanding the explicit information from particular passage, but it also includes other activities: summarizing and discussing the content and demonstrating the text, analyzing and evaluating the text, recognizing words quickly and efficiently (Martinez, 2011).

Mastering reading competence is necessary for college students since most of their academic activities, particularly in doing assignment, needs many sources which are written in English. They have to read International English journals to get an accurate source for academic task such as preparing presentation, composing scientific paper, conducting a research, and composing a thesis. The benefit of mastering reading for college students is to help them gaining valid theory either from International journal or books. The level of reading ability for college students must be different from high school students. For high school students, their ability is only on understanding the content of the text. For college students, however, they must have more advanced reading level: not only understanding the content of the text, but also possessing an ability in evaluating, concluding, and breaking the implicit information of English text.

Inferencing is one of the reading skills that requires complex language skills. This skill is complex since it does not only require the ability in understanding the explicit meaning information of English text, but it also needs the ability in breaking the implicit information from the text. Fatemeh (2013) said that inference reading strategy refers to breaking the implicit meaning of the text – understanding the clue that the writer gives for getting the clear information of the text. There are several factors influencing the successful of mastering reading comprehension for inference: vocabulary mastery, the ability in decoding

words, structure understanding, and prior knowledge. The important of having prior knowledge in inferencing text is to make predictions about what might happen next in the text. (Power, 2013). Since reference ability refers to a competence of breaking the implicit meaning of English text, those five factors are really necessary to reach this competence.

There are many types of text that a teacher uses to improve students inferencing ability. English story text is one of the texts that a teacher can use to improve and shape students' inferencing ability. This text is very useful for students since the content of text provide a lot of implicit information. An English text always offers the reader the main character of the story. The text frequently invites the reader to figure if the moral value of the story. Cooper (2000, p. 13) said that a story is categorized as narrative text which the values are used to describe and/or to explain human behaviour. The text also invites the reader to guess the correlation between one character to another. To get an accurate implicit meaning of the story, inferencing ability is obviously needed.

For non English department college students, inferencing is one of difficult reading skills to be mastered. There are a lot of reasons why most students face obstacles in mastering this competence. Therefore, in this study, the writer tries to investigate students' ability in inferencing English story text and identify their obstacles in mastering this competence.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study aims to investigate students' comprehension ability in inferencing English story text. The participants of this research were ten math students of STKIP Al Hikmah who took English for Reading course on the second semester. The data of this study were students' written reading comprehension work. The data were then examined and analyzed carefully to get the accurate results. The followings were the results of the study.

Students' Obstacles in Mastering Inferencing Ability

To get an accurate information regarding students' obstacles in mastering inferencing English text story ability, the writer, in this study, took the data when the students learned and read an English Islamic text "A Blind Boy". To measure students' understanding toward the implicit information of the story, the students had to answer six inference questions provided by the writer. The six inference questions are as follow:

1. With whom did the blind boy live?
2. How do you describe the character of the man who helped the blind boy?
3. How did the blind boy recognize the existence of the man for the second time?
4. Where did the story take place?
5. What value can you take from the story?
6. According to the story, why did the second sign successfully influence to give the coin than the first one?

The following is the students' work in answering inference question

Table 1. Students' Inference Work for Blind Boy Text

No	Question	Answer	
		Accurate	Inaccurate
1	With whom did the blind boy live?	80%	20%
2	How do you describe the character of the man who helped the blind boy?	70%	30%
3	How did the blind boy recognize the existence of the man for the second time?	60%	40%
4	Where did the story take place?	80%	20%
5	What value can you take from the story?	50%	50%
6	According to the story, why did the second sign more successfully influence to give the coin than the first one?	50%	50%

The data above showed that 80% students were able to answer inference question accurately from English story for understanding the implicit setting of the story. 20% students were not able to answer that question correctly since those students had a difficulty in recognizing the meaning of the

word in a sentence. The author of the story did not tell explicitly the place or setting of the story. However, the writer actually has given a clue of the story setting. In the story, the writer described the place by telling many people walked and passed the blind boy – this clue showed that the place setting is on the pavement which many pedestrians walked along that place. Dealing with an inference question about the character of the story, 70% students were able to explain the answer correctly. Those students were able to elaborate the character of the story for a sufficient ability to break the implicit meaning from the structure of the sentence. 30% students, on the other hand, faced obstacles getting the correct answer since they did not have proper English structure competence. Their difficulties come up since they can not understand the meaning of the sentence clearly. The students were able to comprehend from the story, but they faced difficulty in catching the word in a sentence, particularly in a sentence where the writer told the activity of the man in the story. A question about inferring the moral value of the story becomes a difficult question from most students. There were only 50% students who were able to answer the question accurately. One of the reasons why of most students could not answer the question was that they did not have much prior knowledge in giving value of particular story. The students were actually able to understand the story, but they could not take values of the story, because they did not a lot of experience or knowledge of motivational value.

Students' Comprehension Ability in Inferencing English Story Text

The aim of this study is to investigate students' comprehension in inferencing the implicit meaning of an English story text. To measure their ability in inferencing the story, the students were instructed to read an English story text than answered several comprehension questions based on the text. Students' work in answering those comprehension questions were used as the data of the study. The writer, then, analyzed that data to gain students' comprehension ability in inferencing the story.

The data of students' comprehension work were gained from their work in reading and understanding research one of English story texts entitled "IFTAR". Five comprehension questions were also provided by the writer to facilitate the students in measuring their ability in comprehending the story. The six questions were as follows:

1. According to the story, how could you describe prophet's behavior?
2. Why did not the prophet tell Anas that he hasn't got Iftar yet?
3. Why did Anas always arrange Iftar for prophet Muhammad?
4. How could you describe the moral value of the story?
5. How did Anas finally know that the prophet hasn't got Iftar yet?

The following is the students' work in answering inference question

Table 2. Students' Inference Work for Iftar Text

No	Question	Answer	
		Accurate	Inaccurate
1	According to the story, how could you describe prophet's behavior?	70%	30%
2	Why did not the prophet tell to Anas that he hasn't got Iftar yet?	60%	40%
3	Why did Anas always arrange Iftar for prophet Muhammad?	70%	30%
4	How could you describe the moral value of the story?	60%	40%
5	How did Anas finally know that prophet hasn't got Iftar yet?	60%	40%

From the result of students' work in answering those questions, the research got several findings regarding their comprehension ability in inferencing implicit information of the story. Many students were successfully able to answer the first question. Most students were able to describe prophet's behavior correctly based on the context of the story. Most students said that they were able to explain the answer of the first question correctly since they ever read several books about prophet Muhammad' noble behavior. In other words, most students had good inferencing ability since they had sufficient background knowledge about prophet's behaviour.

The researcher on this study, found a similar result of students' work in answering question number two and five. According to the finding, there were 60% students who were able to do the second and fifth question accurately, and most students had similar reason why they could answer the question correctly. Most students said that they were able to get the correct answers because of two reasons: recognizing the word and the sentence clue easily and having experience in reading prophet story which had similar plot and ending.

CONCLUSION

The result of the study showed that most math students had sufficient comprehension ability in inferencing English story. The result of data analysis showed that most students were able to describe the answer of inference question from the story accurately. According to the analysis result of students' opinions about their success in answering the questions correctly, most students were successful in getting the implicit information of the story since they were able to decode the meaning of the word and the sentence in the story, identify the context of the sentences, resolve ambiguous word and pronominal referents, and connect the context of the story with their background knowledge.

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