

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The research is intended to investigate students' reading comprehension. This chapter illustrates the background of the study, the research questions, and the aims of the study. This chapter also includes the significance of the study, the limitation of the problem, the definition of key terms and the organization of the thesis.

1.1 Background of the Study

Reading is probably the most important skill for second language learners in academic contexts (Grabe, 1994: 138). Lyon (1997) also states that reading allows us to learn “about other people, about history and social studies, the language arts, science, mathematics, and the other content subjects that must be mastered in school”. In other words, only by reading students can acquire more knowledge when they want to learn new content in their discipline and when they leave schools. It also means that reading is the core of the syllabus because by reading a book most students learn.

In the context of English Language Teaching (ELT) in Indonesia, the teaching of reading comprehension plays a significant role in leading our students to the understanding of the written text. Chastain (1989: 86) introduces that the ultimate objective of teaching reading comprehension is to enable the students to comprehend written text which is considered appropriate to their level.

In university level, English course is an obligatory subject for the first two years. According to Indonesian Qualification Framework (*Kerangka Kualifikasi Nasional Indonesia*) based Curriculum at tertiary level, English course is a course that is expected to help students to develop communicative competence in a specific discipline and to help students to comprehend particular field materials in English such as academics, accounting, geography, business, IT, teaching, and engineering. Specifically, in Accounting Department students should be able to read accounting and business related texts in order to transfer the information

from other countries. They have to learn to read and have to read to learn. Learning to read relates to reading for meaning or comprehension. Reading for meaning is an important attempt to comprehend texts, and reading to learn refers to reading for remembering or studying (Hamra, 2003).

In fact, it seems that reading instruction is perceived less important than almost any other language skills in the university level. The problem is one that encompasses a variety of factors including fitting a learner with appropriate materials and learning strategies. The present study focuses on learner factors such as previous exposure to reading, motivation to learning reading and interest in reading, and possible cultural differences and attitudes toward reading. The problems also include the reading process – what does one do when one reads? What is highly skilled reading? And what does one do when one learns to read well? How will this process be meshed with instructional strategies and materials for successful reading? What strategies, techniques, and material are useful for particular students?

Also the teacher's behavior in this process of learning to read and of reading itself is a major factor. Some studies have shown that teacher behavior may be one of the most crucial factors in reading success. Haycock (1988) in his research says that teacher is likely the most important factor affecting student achievement including in reading instruction. This is supported by Vygotsky (1978) who states that emergent literacy is based on behaviors modeled and supported by adults (teachers) that encourage children to change and refine their own ideas to more closely match conventional notions.

The socio-cultural environment of both learner and teacher also influences learning and teaching of reading. In recent years, awareness of the importance of these factors in the success of reading has been growing among teachers and educators. This awareness is partly because of a broader understanding of the concept of cultural clash as it enters into the area of reading (Jones, 1985). We know we need to understand where, geographically and socially, the students come from if we are to maximize communicative competence, including competence in literacy.

The aim of students learning English at university level is to read and comprehend their own field materials in English without any difficulties. However how little this objective is met has raised some concerns. Experience shows that many students find it difficult to understand the texts, let alone mastering it.

Students' difficulty in comprehending the text was the case in one private university in Bandung. It implies that the students' reading achievement is yet unsatisfactory. On the result of the preliminary study, the researcher found out that the students' reading achievement was still under the criteria of success.

Through this study, the researcher wants to lead the difficulty to a better improvement of students' reading skill. It is difficult for teacher to transfer knowledge, especially in reading competence. When the teacher gives the text, the students do not know what the text is. The reason is because they lack vocabulary so they do not understand the meaning. Besides that, the teacher has problem with the method or technique in teaching reading. The atmosphere of the class and the students' motivation in reading instruction are also the problem.

From the reasons above, the teacher tried to find the method for teaching reading. Many approaches and methods have been managed to avoid students' failure in reading comprehension. Using Language Experience Approach (LEA) to teach reading comprehension is one of the options. However, little has been done to promote students' English literacy development as a second language.

An empirical research conducted by Stahl and Miller (1989) showed that LEA for teaching reading was more effective when used with kindergarteners or as a pre-reading/reading readiness program than when used with 1st or 2nd graders. Carrigan (1974) also found that learners had better reading ability after taught using LEA. Both previous researches were administered to learners whose English was as a first language.

The present research investigated the use of Language Experience Approach (LEA) in improving students' reading comprehension. The students involved in this study were second language learners. Meanwhile, the kind of texts used in this study was business text. The reason why the research specified

on business texts was because business texts are learnt by accounting students. The research was conducted to second semester students of one private university in Bandung. The purposes of the research were to find out whether the LEA improved the second semester accounting students' reading comprehension and also to find out the most effective activities in implementing LEA to develop the students' reading comprehension.

1.2 Research Questions

To guide this research, there are two research questions which were formulated as follow.

1. Can LEA help develop the students' reading comprehension?
2. What are the most effective activities in implementing LEA to develop the students' reading comprehension?

1.3 Aims of the Study

Relevant to the research questions, this present research aims:

1. to investigate whether LEA can develop the students' reading comprehension;
2. to find out the most effective activities in implementing LEA to develop the student's reading comprehension.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This research is potentially significant in three aspects of contribution. The first is its theoretical contribution to research in teaching reading comprehension using Language Experience Approach (LEA). The second is its practical contribution to practice in teaching and learning in Indonesia. The third is its professional contribution to teacher's development.

Theoretically, this research offers some information on the application of LEA in teaching reading comprehension.

Practically, this research is advantageous for teachers to increase and create the method to improve teaching reading for students.

Professionally, this research can be a reflection for the researcher and other teachers in teaching reading comprehension using LEA. It is hoped that this research can give information for teachers about how to implement LEA with effective activities suggested.

1.5 Limitation of the Problem

In order to make the research focuses more on a certain problem, the researcher limits the study on the use of Language Experience Approach (LEA) to improve the students' reading comprehension. It is a Classroom Action Research (CAR).

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

To avoid misunderstanding of the key terms used in this study, thus, they are defined as follows. First, *Language Experience Approach (LEA)* is an approach to reading instruction by using the student's own vocabulary, language patterns, and background of experiences to create reading texts, making reading an especially meaningful and enjoyable process (Nessel & Jones, 1981; Stauffer, 1980).

Second, *reading comprehension* is the process of inferring the ideas and information that the author intends to convey which depends on the information contained and the background information available with the reader (Sahu and Kar, 1990).

Third, *classroom action research* is the design of research which is specifically arranged to improve the quality of classroom learning activity (Latief, 2008: 2)

1.7 Organization of the Thesis

This thesis consists of ideas, methodology, data analysis, findings and interpretations in five chapters. It is reported in the form of thesis with the writing organization as stated in *Pedoman Penulisan Karya Ilmiah* of the Indonesia University of Education Bandung as follows. *Chapter One* presents the general introduction dealing with the background of the study, the research problems, the purposes of the study, the significance of the study, the limitation of the problem,

the research method, the definition of key terms, and organization of the thesis. *Chapter Two* discusses the review of related literature dealing with some definitions of reading skill, reading comprehension, the role of metacognition in reading comprehension, metacognitive behaviors of good and poor readers, top-down reading strategy, Whole Language, Language Experience Approach (LEA) and related previous study. *Chapter Three* elaborates the methodology of research dealing with the research problems, the research design, the data collection, the data analysis, the research procedures and the criteria of success in reading comprehension. *Chapter Four* presents the discussion and some important research findings which are dealing with descriptive analysis on reading strategies using LEA. *Chapter Five* draws the conclusions and recommendations.

1.8 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has elaborated the background of the present study. The increasing awareness of reading is now considered an integral part of students' lives. The problems, the purpose, the significance, and the organization of this study are also included in this chapter. The next chapter discusses the literature review of related theory to reading comprehension and Language Experience Approach (LEA).