

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter elaborates some aspects related to the introduction of this thesis. They are background of the study, research questions, purpose of the study, significance of the study, definition of the terms related to the topic of the study, and finally organization of the thesis.

### 1.1. Background of the Study

The reader's background knowledge plays an important role in comprehending the reading text. In the reading process the reader uses his or her background knowledge to relate it with the knowledge provided by the writer in the text to build meaning (Anderson and Pearson, 1984). The role of student's background knowledge in the reading process has been formalized as schema theory (Carrell, 1984). It was Barlett in 1932 who proposes that the organization of a reader's past experiences (schemata) directly influences the comprehension and retention the materials in the passage (Johnson, 1982).

According to schema theory, the text itself does not carry meaning. Rather, a text provides clues to enable readers to construct meaning from existing knowledge. Comprehending a text, then, becomes an interactive process between the text and the reader's background knowledge, and input is dealt with in terms of the schemata that readers brings with them (Pearson-Casanave, 1984).

In addition Al-Issa (2006) emphasizes that most of the research based on this theory seem to agree that when the students are familiar with the topic of the text they are reading (possess content schema), aware of the discourse level and structural make-up of the genre of the text (possess formal schema), and skillful in the decoding features needed to recognize words and recognize how they fit together in a sentence (possess linguistic schema), they are in the better position to comprehend their assigned reading.

The closer the match between the reader's schema and the text, the more comprehension occurs. Comprehension of any kinds depends on knowledge; that is, relating what we don't know (i.e. new information), to what we already know, which is not a random collection of facts but a theory of the world. In other words, our understanding of a text depends on how much related schema we, as reader's posses while reading (Issa, 2006). Furthermore, Anderson (1994) states that, when the readers can not locate a schema that fits a text, they may find it incomprehensible. As Carrell (1988) also states "Students apparent reading problems may be the problems of insufficient background knowledge (content, formal and linguistic), furthermore she points out that students may have sufficient schema but unable to comprehend the text if such schemata are not appropriately activated.

The activating students related schemata through the using of appropriate strategies in pre reading activities seem necessary to be conducted by the teacher,

as it builds bridge of the students' background knowledge to the new knowledge provided in the text.

As everybody knows that the students come to the class with different background knowledge. For example the students who are fond of sport may have more background knowledge about it than those who do not like it. This is the teacher's task to know how much background knowledge the students have on the certain topic. Then, helping students to build the new schema and activating the existing schema must be in the teacher's consideration before asking them to read the text to make the students easier in comprehending the reading text.

Activating students' background knowledge can be conducted in various types of pre-reading activities. A study conducted by Hudson (1982) found that explicit pre-reading activity help learner to be better comprehension. He compared one type of explicit pre-reading activity – consist of having students briefly view a set of cue pictures, discuss the pictures, and then individually generate a set of predictions about what they expected to find in the passage – to another type of pre-reading activity – a type of vocabulary activity. The result shows that the former type of pre-reading activity had significantly facilitating effect on reading comprehension compared to the latter.

Unfortunately, in Indonesian secondary school classrooms, a few teachers still use a simple technique in teaching reading. The steps are; students read the text, teacher asks questions, students answer questions and check their answer with the teacher. They feel comfortable with these steps in presenting the reading

lesson because they think that they can assess the students' reading comprehension immediately (Danusubroto and Suria, 2001). They also add, as results not only do the students reading as difficult but also boring and unstimulating.

On the other hand, there are so many strategies which can be used by the teachers to avoid the bored condition of the students, even to promote the students interest and increase the students' ability in comprehending the reading text. One of them is by helping the students activate their background knowledge particularly the knowledge which related to the content of the text or content schema.

Content schema or the reader's background knowledge on the content area of the text plays dominant role in comprehending reading text. Issa (2006) states no matter how well a reader may know a language, he or she can not read in that language with good comprehension if the subject matter or the content of the text is one he or she knows absolutely nothing about.

This study investigated the strategies used by the teachers in helping the students to activate their content schema in teaching reading comprehension and also to investigate the students' responses on activating the students' content schema.

## **1.2. Research Questions**

This study is guided by two research questions, they are:

1. How do the teachers activate the students' *content schema* in teaching reading comprehension?
2. How do the students respond on the activating students' content schema?

### **1.3. Purposes of the Study**

Based on the research questions above, the purpose of this study is:

1. To investigate the strategies which are used by the teachers to activate the students' *content schema* in teaching reading comprehension.
2. To investigate the students' responses on the activating students' content schema conducted by the teachers.

### **1.4. Significance of the Study**

This study is significant in that:

1. It attempts to investigate the strategies which are used by the teachers to activate the students' content schema in teaching reading comprehension. This is very important because the researcher believes that the findings can be beneficial for teachers in choosing and applying the appropriate strategies for activating the students' content schema in teaching reading comprehension. By choosing and applying the appropriate strategies, the teachers can lead the students to comprehend the reading texts effectively and increase their reading skill.
2. By investigating the students' responses on the activating students' content schema, the researcher will obtain the valuable data whether the students give

good responses or not to the activities of activating students content schema conducted by the teachers.

### 1.5. Definition of Terms

**Schema**, plural **sche·ma·ta** also **schemas** is a pattern imposed on complex reality or experience to assist in explaining it, mediate perception, or guide response. (*The American Heritage® Stedman's Medical Dictionary Copyright © 2002, 2001, 1995 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Published by Houghton Mifflin Company*) <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/schema>. Alexander, (1988. p. 9) defines that **schemata** are functions in the brain that interpret, organize, and retrieve information; in other words, they are mental frameworks

**Schema theory** is a theory about knowledge, about how knowledge is represented, and about how that representation facilitates the use of knowledge in various ways. According to schema theorists, all knowledge is packaged into units called schemata, and embedded into these units of knowledge is information on how this knowledge is to be used.

(**Karla Porter**, <http://departments.weber.edu/teachall/reading/prereading.html>)

**Content schema** is background knowledge of the content area of the text that a reader brings to a text, such as knowledge about people, the world, culture and the universe. (Carell and Eisterhold, 1983; Singhal, 1998; Stot, 2001)

**Reading comprehension** is the active process of constructing meaning through interacts between the reader and the material that is read. Successful



comprehension involves the reader's discovering the meaning needed to achieve the particular purposes set for, or by, him. (Alexander, 1988)

## **1.6. The Organization of Thesis**

This thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter one is an introduction which discusses the background of the study, followed by the research questions and the purposes of the study. The significance of this study is also presented in this chapter. This chapter is closed by presenting the organization of the thesis in the last part of the chapter.

Chapter two presents the relevant information and theories related to the activating students' content schema. The integrative relevant information presented as theoretical foundation related to this study consist of two big theories; they are the schema theory which includes the types of schema, the role of schema in reading comprehension, and the schema activation strategies in the first part, and theories of reading include the reading process, and reading phases, and some previous research findings related to this study also presented in the last part of this chapter.

Chapter three elaborates the research methodology. It begins with the research design, research site, participant, data collection methods include the data presentation, research procedures, and the issue of validity. The steps of the data analyses obtained in this study are presented in the last part of this chapter.

Chapter four reports the findings and discussions.

Finally, chapter five presents conclusions and suggestions.