

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. The Background of the Study

Reading, as well as listening, speaking, writing plays a significant role in developing students' English mastery. Alyousef (2006:64) defines reading as an “interactive” process between a reader and a text which leads to automaticity or (reading fluency). In this process, the reader interacts dynamically with the text as s/he tries to elicit the meaning and where various kinds of knowledge are being used: linguistic or systematic knowledge (through bottom-up processing) as well as schematic knowledge (through top-down processing).

The above statement implies that mastering reading skill will allow students to directly improve their other skills of English because the more students read, the faster they will be able to widen their vocabularies and use of language to enrich their knowledge of English. For that reason, to facilitate the needs of students to improve their reading skill, the content of English reading texts in students' textbook must be maximized to cover the students' needs.

One of the primary source of teaching English as a foreign language in Indonesia is textbook since it is dominantly used in the process of teaching and learning. Diniyah (2013:73) defines textbook as something important in the teaching and learning process that teachers tend to use textbook in their whole teaching and learning process without selecting and adapting appropriate materials for their students.

In addition, Tok (2010:509) also states that textbooks play a prominent role in the teaching/learning process and they are the primary agents of conveying the knowledge to the learners. Besides, one of the basic functions of textbooks is to make the existence knowledge available and apparent to the learner in a selected, easy and organized way.

The two stated theories have made to us clear that the existence of textbooks is crucial for both teachers and students. Most teachers still choose textbooks as their main guide while teaching the students. The reasons vary. Some teachers say the textbooks have already provided good materials as well as been in line with the existed curriculum and syllabus. Some also point out that they do not have much time to prepare additional materials so they just follow the materials in the textbooks. On the other hand, for students, textbooks are the main source of study since their teachers will mostly take the materials provided in the textbooks. Due to its importance, English textbooks should demonstrate quality materials in order to support students to improve their English mastery.

Unfortunately, when the use of textbooks is claimed as something important in instructional activities, it does not directly guarantee that all materials in textbooks have a good quality. Most of the published textbooks contain inappropriate materials which are not suitable to the curriculum and syllabus. Furthermore, the materials in the textbook do not also match to the level of students which then cause to the failure of achieving students' motivation to study.

Richard (2001:2) explains that a book may be ideal in one situation because it matches the needs of that situation perfectly. It has just the right amount of material for the program, it is easy to teach, it can be used with little preparation by inexperienced teachers, and it has an equal coverage of grammar and the four skills. Richard believes that in order to achieve the best understanding to the materials that are going to be used in instructional activities, the content of the textbooks should fulfill the objectives of the language learning as well as match to the target learners' needs. He, furthermore, emphasizes that materials in the textbooks must be well-written and well-organized.

To put it simple, a good English reading material is understandable and comprehensible. The materials of the textbooks must contain a suitable and interesting topic that meets students' ability. Moreover, the use of words and the length of the passage must also be the aspects to be considered about so that the passage can ease students in understanding and comprehending the text.

It has been clear that a good English textbook with good materials followed will contribute to the successful of students to achieve the learning objectives. In other words, the existence of an appropriate English reading material will directly affect to students' willingness to study. Thus, analyzing the quality of the reading materials is felt important to know whether the published English reading material that has been used by teachers and students can be categorized as a proper source of study.

Basically, the main objective of a writer to write a text is to provide information to readers. In order to be able to convey the main idea of text, a writer should also make sure that the text s/he is being designed to contain informative and interesting topics. Besides, the text must also match to the target. That is why during the process of designing the text, the researcher must be careful to the words choices as well as the sentence lengths.

In the perspective of readers, the reason why they read a passage is because they want to gain new information and knowledge. In order to achieve the goals, readers will first choose whether the topic interests them or not. Furthermore, they will also consider about the content of the passage, whether it is easily understood or not. Readers are often willing to widen their knowledge by reading something, but the reading materials in which they are interested in are too difficult.

For the stated reasons, the researcher thinks that it is important to measure the difficulty level of a text, especially for academic level so that English teachers can predict the level of the passages in the textbook, whether they are difficult, plain or easy.

The degree of difficulty lays in a text is called readability. Dubay (2004:3) says that readability is what makes some texts easier to read than others. Zamanian and Heydari (2012:43) also state that all in all, readability studies are concerned with ensuring that a given piece of writing reaches and affects its audience in the way that the author intends. In conclusion, readability is the level of text difficulty in which the difficulty of a text should be adjusted to whom the readers will be.

It also discusses about how a text can be easily understood and comprehended by students in order to convey the primary information based on writer's intention.

In analyzing the level of text difficulty, there must be many factors involved. Dubay (2004:14) explains that to check the readability of reading passages must be very complex due to its factors. He, then, added that the most affected factors are the sentence and word length, the students' understanding and background of texts, the types of material that students want to read, and many others.

Therefore, to know how readable a reading passage is, and to know whether the text has been appropriate to the level of readers or not, it can be analyzed using readability approaches, namely: (1) Readability Formula which aims to analyze the level of texts' difficulty in students' textbook; (2) Cloze procedure which functions to know students' understanding and comprehension to the reading texts by providing some tests, and (3) Judgments which aims at seeking for further information about the readability of a text based on the perspectives of experts (teachers, librarians, etc).

Finally, after revealing the issues, the researcher conducted an observation and interviewed an English teacher and some tenth grade students of SMA Negeri 3 Medan. The teacher explained that some students can understand and comprehend the reading texts, yet, there are also some of them who still fail in getting the meaning of the texts due to the vocabularies. She also claimed that even though the texts are easily understood, they will not be enough to achieve a high level of students' reading comprehension.

Besides the teacher, the researcher also interviewed some tenth grade students and asked their opinion to the reading texts in their textbook. Among seven reading texts provided in the textbook, the students admitted that a text entitled Cut Nyak Dhien has the most difficult words, especially in the fifth paragraph written as follow:

The war continued, and the Acehnese declared Holy War against the Dutch, and were engaged in guerilla warfare. Undersupplied, Teuku Umar surrendered to the Dutch forces on September 30, 1893 along with 250 of his men. The Dutch forces on welcomed him and appointed him as a commander, giving him the title of Teuku Umar Johan Pahlawan. However, Teuku Umar secretly planned to betray the Dutch. Two years later Teuku Umar set out to assault Aceh, but he instead deserted with his troops taking with them heavy equipment, weapons, and ammunition, using these supplies to help the Achenese. This is recorded in Dutch history as “Het verraad van Teukoe Oemar” (the treason of Teuku Umar).

From the above paragraph, the students noticed some difficult words in the paragraph such as *engaged* ‘terlibat’, *warfare* ‘perang’, *undersupplied* ‘karena kekurangan alat perang’, *surrendered* ‘menyerah’, *betray* ‘menghianati’, *assault* ‘menyerang’, *deserted* ‘membelot’, *troops* ‘tentara’, and *treason* ‘penghianatan’. They explained that they seldom and almost never find and listen to those words in their daily conversation. Finally, the existence of those unfamiliar words makes students difficult in translating and understanding the words. The failure of students to grasp the meaning of some vocabularies listed in a text will then cause to students’ failure to understand and comprehend the real meaning of a text. If that happens, students will find it hard to improve their reading comprehension ability due to the appearance of the low frequency words which they do not understand.

Therefore, the researcher intends to know whether or not the reading materials in students' textbook have been appropriate to their grade and thus, she is interested in conducting a research which focuses on analyzing the reading texts' readability used by the tenth grade students of SMA Negeri 3 Medan using the Flesch Reading Ease Formula.

B. The Problems of the Study

Based on the background of the study, the problems of this research are formulated as the following:

1. How is the readability of the texts for the tenth grade students of SMA Negeri 3 Medan?
2. How is the readability level adjusted to the present needs of the students?

C. The Objectives of the Study

In line with the problems of the study, the objectives of this research are:

1. To identify the readability of the texts for the tenth grade students of SMA Negeri 3 Medan.
2. To analyze the adjustment of readability level to the present needs of the students.

D. The Scope of the Study

This research will be focused on the analysis of the reading texts' readability in the textbook used by the tenth grade students of SMA Negeri 3 Medan.

There are varied of readability approaches used by researchers to measure a readability of a reading text and this research will only use one of three approaches, namely: Readability Formula. There are also varied of readability formulas which are commonly used, they are: Flesch Reading Ease Formula, Gunning Fox Index, Dale and Chall Formula, Cloze Procedure, and so on. However, this research will only implement Flesch Reading Ease Formula to analyze the readability level of reading materials in the chosen textbook.

E. The Significance of the Study

It is expected that the findings of this study offer theoretical and practical significance.

Theoretically, the findings can add new horizons in theories of language learning, specifically theories of readability as a tool to measure and analyze the quality of reading texts in a textbook. Practically, the findings can be references for other researchers, mainly university students who are willing to conduct the same research. In addition, they can also help teachers and principals to be more aware in selecting textbooks so that the reading texts match to the grade of the students.