

# STUDENT'S DIFFICULTIES IN READING COMPREHENSION AND VOCABULARY MASTERY

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# STUDENT'S DIFFICULTIES IN READING COMPREHENSION AND VOCABULARY MASTERY

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## Abstract

Comprehension is the second classification level of Bloom's Taxonomy, which assesses true reading comprehension skills. However, based on the results of the preliminary interviews and observations, the writers identified that the students found difficulty in understanding the reading texts which were in the form of articles used in the Reading for Professional Contexts courses. Hence, the writers would analyze and map out what difficulties the students found when understanding the articles and use the results of analysis and mapping of these difficulties as the bases for developing HOTS in reading strategies. Therefore, this study aimed to identify, analyse, and map the difficulties experienced by the students, as to influence their reading comprehension ability and improve their HOTS. It applied questionnaires and interviews to obtain data about the difficulties experienced by students in reading. The mapping results show that the students' difficulties are in the areas of (a) using background knowledge appropriately; (b) vocabulary knowledge; (c) grammar knowledge; and (d) strategy use and metacognitive skills.

**Keywords:** student difficulties, reading comprehension, vocabulary mastery, metacognitive skills

## I. Introduction

Reading is one of the important activities used in everyday life. In Linguistics, Oberhalzer (2005: 2) describes the reading process as a basic skill and foundation for students to excel both in education and throughout their lives. Having good reading skills is absolutely necessary for students to fulfill their duties at the campus. However, considering the results of the preliminary interviews and observations, the writers found out that the students have difficulties in reading the texts in the form of academic articles used in the Reading for Professional Contexts course. Therefore, the writers need to conduct a research to analyze and map out what difficulties experienced by students when understanding the articles and use the results of analysis and mapping of these difficulties as a basis for developing reading strategies in the Reading for Professional Contexts which also aims to improve their HOTS. HOTS is defined in terms of (1) transfer, (2) critical thinking and, (3) problem solving (Brookhart, 2010). In describing transfer, Brookhart (2010) states that students not only acquire knowledge and skills, but also the ability to apply the knowledge and skills to new situations. This applies to life outside of school where thinking is considered a series of transfer opportunities rather than a series of recalled assignments. Norris and Ennis (1989) described critical thinking as referring to reasonable, reflective thinking to decide on what to believe or do. Students can therefore apply wise judgement or produce a reasoned critique. Problem solving may be defined as a skill to find a solution to a problem that cannot be solved simply by memorizing (Collins, 2014). This includes the ability to remember information, learn with understanding, critically evaluate ideas, formulating creative alternatives, and communicating effectively.

## II. Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is the process of generating meaning from varied sources—directly observing phenomena, reading, looking at a sign, cartoon, painting, listening to a lecture or discussion, viewing a film (Robert:63). Comprehension itself is the process of building a connection between what the reader knows and what he or she doesn't know, between the new and the old. Comprehension is a developing process, often beginning before a book is

opened, changing as the material is read, and continuing to change even after the book is completed. Comprehension is constructing meaning

As students grow into mature readers, their comprehension and thinking skills should also mature. Reading comprehension involves the ability to not only read the lines but also the abstract step of "reading between the lines." However, the next crucial step involves higher order thinking that takes reading between the lines one step farther. "Good readers" have the ability to read beyond the lines. Higher-order thinking skills enable students to do this and find the real value in the information they are reading. However, students with poor reading comprehension skills will lack adequate ability to truly understand the many facets of what they are reading. Processing the information presented in the text will be hard for them. They will also find it difficult to connect new ideas to previously learned facts and they haven't learned to implement higher order thinking skills so they can analyze, synthesize, and evaluate new knowledge.

### III. Vocabulary Mastery

The principal thing in learning a language is the mastery of a vocabulary. Therefore, accomplishment in learning English requires vocabulary mastery. A large vocabulary cannot certify the learner's competence in learning English but inadequacy of vocabulary will impede their chances to make success in learning English. Rivers in Nunan (1998: p. 117), argues that the mastery of a sufficient vocabulary is crucial for successful second language use because without an extensive vocabulary, one will be unable to use the structures and functions one may have learned for comprehensible communication. The importance of mastering vocabulary in learning is also stated by Nunan. Nunan (1998: p. 118) says that, the development of a rich vocabulary is an important element in the acquisition of a second language.

Nurgiyantoro (2012: 338) says vocabulary is the property of words contained in a language. While according to Keraf, understanding vocabulary can be seen from two aspects. First, in terms of language itself, it states that vocabulary is the whole words owned by a language which represents the component of language with all information about the meaning and use of words in the language. Second, viewed in terms of language users, vocabulary is the property of words that a speaker or writer has (1996: 64). The definition of vocabulary according to Nurgiyantoro is included in the meaning of vocabulary in the first aspect in Keraf's opinion. While vocabulary according to Soedjito (1992: 1) can be interpreted as follows: (a) all words contained in a language; (b) the property of words owned by a speaker or writer; (c) word used in a field of science; (d) glossary arranged like a dictionary accompanied by a brief and practical explanation. Whereas according to McLaughlin and Allen in Rahim (2008: 4), the development of vocabulary and learning affects reading comprehension, and vocabulary itself has an active influence on the reading comprehension. The more vocabulary that is known and understood by the reader, the more likely the reader can understand the reading material well.

### IV. Metacognitive Skill

Metacognition relates to the knowledge and skills for organizing, guiding, and controlling one's own thinking, actions, and learning processes. It involves the skills for task orientation (what am I to do?), goal setting (what am I to achieve?), planning (how do I reach that goal?), a systematic approach (step-by-step), monitoring oneself during task execution (am I not making mistakes, do I understand all of it?), evaluating the outcome (is the answer correct?), and reflection (what can I learn from this episode?). Students with good metacognitive skills control their own learning process, through which they can execute a learning task more effectively and achieve learning performances. Metacognition determines learning performances to a large extent (up to 40%). As such, metacognition is more important to the learning process than intelligence, social-economical background, and motivation (Veenman, 2015).

1 The development of metacognitive skills starts around the age of 8 years. These skills reveal a strong growth throughout late childhood and adolescence, even into adulthood. However, there are huge individual differences in the spontaneous development of metacognition. Some students remain metacognitively weak, whereas others outperform their peers of the same age.

Until the age of 12 years, metacognitive skills are task-specific by nature. Some students are metacognitively better in math, while others are metacognitively better in language. Around the age of 13-14 years, metacognition becomes general and task surpassing, that is, metacognitive skills are no longer dependent on the nature of the task. This general metacognitive repertoire is of great importance to learning new tasks or, later, to getting acquainted with a new profession (Veenman, 2015).

#### V. Methodology

The study is based on the qualitative research conducted in the writers' university. The research was a qualitative research developing concepts to help researchers understand the social symptoms that occur in natural situations. The emphasis of qualitative research lies in the meaning, experience, and perception of research subjects. The dimensions of qualitative research itself include an understanding of context, humans, and all interactions that occur. The study was conducted at the English Language Education Study Program, Universitas Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa Yogyakarta. The subjects of this study were second semester students of English Language Education Study Program enrolling Reading for Professional Context course.

Questionnaire and interview were instruments to gather the data. Both asked about: (1) whether the students like the text given in classes; (2) whether the students read these texts outside of class assignments; (3) whether the students read other scientific / academic texts to work on the class assignments; (4) whether the students make a summary of the topics read; (5) whether the students make a personal response to the topic read; (6) whether the students use reading strategies such as scanning, skimming, etc.; (7) whether the students have difficulty in using reading strategies such as scanning, skimming, etc.; (8) whether the students have difficulty in understanding text because of the vocabulary used; (9) whether the students have difficulty understanding the text because of the grammar used; and, (10) whether the students have trouble finding the main ideas in the texts.

#### VI. Result

The mapping of students' difficulties in reading comprehension and vocabulary mastery resulted as follows: (1) the students found difficulties in the area of using background knowledge appropriately; (2) the next was that the students still had lack of vocabulary knowledge; (3) they had also need to improve their grammar knowledge; and (4) they needed to improve their strategy use and metacognitive skills in their reading.

#### VII. Conclusion and Suggestion

The result of mapping of students' difficulties in reading comprehension and vocabulary mastery shows that students of 2nd semester enrolling Reading for Professional Contexts course need to improve their use of background knowledge appropriately, vocabulary knowledge, grammar knowledge and strategy use and metacognitive skills. The syllabus of the course needs to be adjusted in ways that it accommodates the improvement of the students in the above areas which concern with the development of higher order thinking skills in reading. The teachers need to provide more opportunities / activities to the students to develop/improve themselves in the above areas.

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