

THESIS

**STUDENTS' ABILITY IN USING CONTEXT CLUES IN COMPREHENDING
ENGLISH TEXTS**

The Study at Third Year Senior High School Students of SMA 4 Padang

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TABLE OF CONTENT

HALAMAN PERSETUJUAN

HALAMAN PENGESAHAN

ABSTRACT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

TABLE OF CONTENTS..... i

LIST OF TABLES.....iii

LIST OF APPENDICES.....iv

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION.....1

A. Background of the Problem..... 1

B. Identification of the Problem..... 4

C. Limitation of the Problem..... 6

D. Formulation of the Problem..... 6

E. Research Questions..... 7

F. Purpose of the Research..... 7

G. Significance of the Research.....7

CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE.....8

A. The Nature of Text..... 8

B. Reading Comprehension..... 8

C. Using Context Clues.....10

D. Previous Related Studies.....15

E. Conceptual Framework.....16

CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY.....17

A. Design of the Research..... 17

B. Population and Sample..... 17

C. Instrumentation..... 18

D. Technique of Data Collection..... 22

E. Technique of Data Analysis..... 22

CHAPTER IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS.....	24
A. Data Description.....	24
B. Findings	25
B.1 Test.....	25
1. Definition	25
2. Example.....	26
3. Contrast.....	27
4. Inference	27
5. Cause-Effect	28
6. Modifier.....	29
7. Sentence/Paragraph.....	30
B.2 Interview	32
C. Discussion	37
 CHAPTER V. CONCLUSION.....	 42
A. Conclusion.....	42
B. Suggestion.....	43
 BIBLIOGRAPHY	
APPENDICES	

List of Table

	Page
Table 1.The overall students' scores of context clues.....	24
Table 2. The frequency of the students' score for representative questions of definition clues.....	25
Table 3. The frequency of the students' score for representative questions of example clue.....	26
Table 4. The frequency of students' score for representative questions of contrast clues.....	27
Table 5. The frequency of students' score for representative questions of inference clues.....	28
Table 6. The frequency of students' score for representative questions of cause-effect clues.....	29
Table 7. The frequency of students' score for representative questions of modifier clues.....	30
Table 8.The frequency of students' score for representative questions of sentence/paragraph clue.....	31
Table 9.The result of students' performance in using context clues for each questions asked in the interview.....	34

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Problem

Reading is one of the crucial skills that should be mastered by the students. Through reading the students can gain their information and knowledge about anything including about the language itself. In addition, what they read can be references to improve their other skills in many ways such as getting ideas to speak or write or getting ideas how to speak, read, or listen better. Whereas, frequently reading also gets the biggest proportion tested in examination including in National final examination, which is 35 out of 50 questions.

Based on the curriculum 2004, it is said that the students are expected to be able to understand several types of texts. Especially for senior high school students, the teachers should provide them with several numbers of skills needed in order to prepare them to be a good reader in the future. It is because there is a need to read texts or books in English that has been a necessity for them especially after they graduate from senior high school and continue their study in colleges or universities. Often, they are asked to read any source books used at school or universities written in English.

According to Kalnitz and Judd (1982) the skills needed in reading a text fall into two categories. They are text-related skills and language-related skills, another term for word-attack skills. Text-related skills are skills needed by the readers related to the organization of the text and the characteristics of the text itself; including the skimming, that is getting an overall picture of the text, and scanning, which is finding appropriate information in the text through clues and graphic information quickly. And the word-

attack skills are the skills that are needed by the readers related to how to tackle the unfamiliar words in order to guess the general meaning that can help the readers to understand the text more effectively. They are determining the part of speech of the unknown words, using context clues and using morphological information.

However, based on the fact in SMA 4 Padang, the students' ability in English was still low. It was found that there were more than 50% of students did not pass the pre-national final examination academic year 2007-2008 for English subject. It means that the students have not mastered skills developed in English subject including reading skill. Moreover, it can also be seen in learning process itself at school said by the teachers in SMA 4 Padang asked that many students still got many difficulties in reading.

Referring to the fact above, it is assumed that students have not been able yet in implementing the skills in reading an English text although they have learned it and teacher usually took more times to teach reading skills than teaching the other skills. The students often complained that they can not comprehend the text effectively especially text with unfamiliar words.

Based on the observation done and experience in practice teaching, it is assumed that the problem above is probably due to a number of potential sources. They are as follows. First, it is caused by lack of motivation to read. As we know that many Indonesians are poor readers. Based on the data got from the BPS (Statistic Centers) in 2006, there were only 23, 5% of Indonesians liked reading. And it was also said that this number would only increase about 0, 2% each year. Sankaran (2001) says motivation of the learners to learn, in this case to read, determine their success in language learning.

Second, many students still do not know about reading strategy. When they read something, they read without thinking about what they should do to understand the text easily. They used to memorize what they have read to make sure they have understood the text. The students generally also read every thing the same way, regardless of the type of text; they read newspaper, stories, and textbooks in the same manner. Third, it is because the students tend to have unrealistic expectations of how much they should be able to understand. They feel frustrated and dissatisfied if they have less than 100 % comprehension. When they read, they read word by word and translate each word unless they consider that they could not comprehend the texts.

Fourth, it is because inadequate classroom techniques for teaching reading. Many times teachers more concerned with the development of reading material than developing the students' reading skill. They assign reading task and then ask questions to test comprehension. They do not realize whether they really teach the students' reading skill. As the result, many times students and even teacher use the translation technique to comprehend and answer the question.

Fifth, it is because lack of demonstration done in the class. The teachers do not give much exposure about what they have learned and the presence of demonstrations. For example, the teachers have taught about finding the meaning of one word through context clues, but there is not much exposure where and when it can be used. Bakken and Schauss (1993) mention that to make learners be able in each skill, the teachers should give them opportunities to get and use them. Then, it is because material used by the teacher taken from books that is not sufficient to develop all reading skill. Last, it is because of lack of practice done by the students.

In reading a text then, the word-attack skills seem to be the main skills that must be mastered because the first thing we meet when we are reading is the vocabulary. We can not understand the meaning of the text if we can not understand words important to the meaning of the text (Cranmer, 2002). So, skills to deal with words become a very important aspect in reading especially dealing with the unfamiliar ones. However, among the three sub- skills, using context clues becomes the more important and useful one than the others. It is because when we read everything is always in context. Many times it is not enough if we know only the part of speech of an unknown word without knowing its general meaning. Beside, it is also the most common included in English test including national final examination (UAN) among others. Usually there were 5 questions out of 35 reading questions. Moreover, this skill then will support the reader to comprehend the sentence, paragraph, and also answering the questions.

Unfortunately, senior high school students still have problems with this skill. The students still tend to focus on the word as the unit of meaning instead of looking beyond the word to the sentence, paragraph, and the entire text, for example, based on the experience of a teacher who teaches in SMA 4 Padang, in the sentence below:

“We wish to express our deepest condolences on the passing of Amir Daud.”

At first, the students said the word *express* meant *cepat* or *quick* whereas the meaning of the word *passing* was *lulus* or *graduating* till they found themselves frustrated since they encountered those words in the whole sentence whose meaning they were unsure of.

Beside, they stopped at each unfamiliar word; they were afraid to go on for fear of missing something. The students were also too tied to the dictionaries and relying on translation to understand the word meaning in reading. They ended up spending more

time looking up words than they do reading the text. Therefore, in national final examination when they were not allowed to use any kinds of dictionary, they couldn't do reading the text and of course they might get difficulties in answering the questions.

Based on the statement before, the researcher is interested in doing a research about the ability of third year senior high school students in SMA 4 Padang in using context clues in comprehending English texts.

B. Identification of the Problem

In reading an English text, the readers should have a number of skills that are text-attack skills and word-attack skills. These two skills are important for the readers in order to be effective and efficient readers. However, students seem have problems in both text attack skills and word-attack skills.

In word-attack skills especially in using context clues students seem still tend to focus on the word as the unit of meaning. They are too tied the dictionaries and spend more time for consulting the meaning of the word in the dictionary. Therefore, it seems hard for them to be a good reader in English.

The problem above may occur because of the students, teachers, or material. First, potential sources coming from the students are the students have not really mastered skill in using context clues in tackling the unknown words. It is because they are focused on the word rather than on the entire text, are tied to their dictionaries or tend to ask their friends or teacher to find the meaning of words that they do not know, read slowly and word by word. Many times, they read the text from the first sentence, stopping only to reach in desperation for a dictionary (bilingual dictionary if they have a

choice) at the first word they do not understand. Then it is also caused by lack of practice in tackling unknown words.

Second, it comes from the teachers such as the technique used by the teacher in teaching this skill that is not interesting and insufficient time to develop this skill. According to Popi (2000) there are only 23, 33 % teachers who teach in public senior high school who explained to the students about context clues and only 10 % who taught their students to predict the meaning of a word based on the context. Last, the potential problem comes from material that is material used by the teacher usually taken from books that are not sufficient to develop this skill.

In this research, the researcher will focus on the ability of third year senior high school students in SMA 4 Padang in using context clues in comprehending English texts.

C. Limitation of the Problems

Since there are many problems might occur in reading an English text, she decided to limit her study just in analyzing the ability of third year senior high school students in SMA 4 Padang in using context clues in comprehending English texts.

D. Formulation of the Problems

Related to the limitation above, the problem will be formulated as follow: “How is the ability of third year senior high school students in SMA 4 Padang in using context clues in comprehending English texts?”

E. Research Questions

The research questions for this study are:

1. How is the ability of the third year senior high school students in SMA 4 Padang in using context clues in comprehending English texts?
2. What are problems faced by the third year senior high school students in SMA 4 Padang in using context clues in comprehending English texts?

G. Purpose of the Research

The main purpose of this study is to find out and describe the ability of third year senior high school students in SMA 4 Padang in using context clues in comprehending English texts and to explain the problems faced by the third year senior high school students in SMA 4 Padang in using context clues in comprehending English texts

H. Significance of the Research

The finding of this research may contribute to the field of English learning activities especially to support reading comprehension. It is also expected that it can give contribution to English teachers as an input in getting information about the third year senior high school students' ability in using context clues in comprehending English texts. After they get the data, they can give more attention in teaching learning process or help students to develop their skills better. Finally, it is hoped that the students can improve their ability in comprehending English texts.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

A. Conclusion

Based on the explanation in the research finding it can be concluded that the students' ability in using context clues was poor because the mean got for overall was about 50, 29. There were more than 50% of students who couldn't get the score above 56% that could be considered average. Only 10 (35, 71%) students who could answer more than about 20 items among 35 items asked or 56 % out of all questions. The result shows that only three students got excellent, only one got good, 6 students got average, whereas 8 students had poor ability and the rest of them were considered very poor. Thus, it can be concluded that the students' ability in using context clues was still poor since statistically the mean of their ability was 50, 29. Besides, among seven types of clues, only in two types of clues the students got average score. The mean of students' ability in using context clues for each category from the highest one were as follow; modifier (64, 29), cause effect (56, 71), definition (55, 71), example (53, 57), contrast (49, 29), inference (48, 57), and sentence paragraph (28, 57). From the interview it was also found that the students had lack of knowledge and understanding about this skill. They knew only 2 or 3 types of clues among 7 types. Besides, though they thought that this skill could help them in predicting the meaning of unknown words while they were reading. It was not their habit to apply this skill whenever they read the text. The teachers did not give much explanation and practice to improve their students' ability in this skill. Therefore they got many difficulties in identifying and utilizing the clues in the texts in almost all types of clues.

B. Suggestion

Based on the research finding the researcher may suggest the teacher to improve the students' ability in using context clues in each type of clues since this skill is important for the students in order to make them to be a skillful reader which can read the text effectively and efficiently. It is recommended that they pay more attention to the types of clues which the students had very low ability such as in using sentence / paragraph clues. They should also give them more explicit explanation, instruction and various types of examples about context clues for each type of clues especially for the worst one, in using sentence/paragraph clues. Besides, for the students, it is suggested that they do practice what they had learned and apply it whenever they read the texts. As the result, they could increase their ability in using this skill. Last, for the next researchers, it is expected that they will analyze the other skills in reading both in text-attack skills and word-attack skills.

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