

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Problem

As the most widely used international language of the world, English has been recognized as the language used in many aspects of life, among others in the areas of trade and commerce, politics, science and technology, tourism and education. The importance of this language encourages people in various social ranks who work in different professions to learn it so that they can benefit to survive in their lives. In the area of education, for example, English is learned and taught from primary level of education to university covering the four language skills; that is, listening, speaking, reading and writing. Brown (2007:24) states “For more than six decades now, research and practice in English language teaching has identified these four language skills as the paramount importance in English language teaching.”

Reading in particular is one of the skills that the students should master in learning to get information from the materials. The aim of teaching reading is to make the students able to read English texts effectively and efficiently. Academically, reading is the main point for learning new information and getting access to alternative explanations and interpretations. Reading can also be as an independent learning tool that can be done by students to complete their assignments or to enrich their knowledge. In addition, reading is not only for gathering information but also for entertainment.

Reading is also the essential skill for university students. According to Browden (2000,47) Reading Comprehension ability allows students to access knowledge, understand and elaborate concepts, integrate information from lectures and reference books' contents. A surface approach to reading is the tacit acceptance of information contained in the text. Students taking a surface approach to reading usually consider this information as isolated and unlinked facts. This leads to superficial retention of material for examinations and does not promote understanding or long-term retention of knowledge and information. In contrast, a deep approach to reading is an approach where the reader uses higher-order cognitive skills such as the ability to analyze, synthesize, solve problems, and thinks meta-cognitively in order to negotiate meanings with the author and to construct new meaning from the text. The deep reader focuses on the author's message, on the ideas she is trying to convey, the line of argument, and the structure of the argument. The reader makes connections to already known concepts and principles and uses this understanding for problem solving in new contexts. Simply, surface readers focus on the sign, i.e., the text itself, while deep readers focus on what is signified, i.e., the meaning of the text.

Reading becomes one of the core subjects at English Study Program, Islamic University of Riau (UIR, Universitas Islam Riau). For reading subjects, UIR provides five levels of Reading subjects; that is, Basic Reading, Reading I (Reading Skills), Extensive Reading, Scientific Reading and Academic Reading. Through these levels students are expected to have good reading comprehension. Besides understanding the content of textbooks, articles and essays, students must

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be able to criticize and evaluate ideas in a critical reading and thinking learning attitude. Therefore, students must develop techniques of reading, understanding and remembering what has been read, using concentration to deal with all types of reading assignments. This role is reinforced by Writing as a communicational tool used for conveying ideas, lecture note taking, studying outlining, summarizing, etc. In Academic Reading and Extensive Reading, the lecturers use academic journals as the reading materials.

Reading academic journal article itself is one method that lecturers can use to improve students' textbook reading comprehension ability. The use of reading journals may bring students' academic attainment to meet the standard competencies, and students will ultimately perform better in their academic work where reading plays a primary role. This study explored the effects of reading journals through the comprehension of a textbook material. Reading academic journals also helps the students to do their thesis assignments. They can elaborate theories; find the current research findings, get the latest data, and etc. The students may get the reading comprehension by improving their reading ability especially in reading academic journal articles.

The journal log model suggested by Lyutaya (2011) was utilized in the reading journal used in this study. The reading journal article in this study consists of six parts, namely: (1) Title of the book, text or article, (2) Prediction of content based on the title, (3) An intriguing sentence or passage, (4) Inferential or critical questions, (5) Opinion about the story, and (6) Summary or plot. For the first part, students simply wrote the title of the book, text or any article they chose

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to read. It was aimed to simply identify what the students chose to read which enabled both the students and the teacher to understand better the rest of the contents of the journal.

For the prediction of contents based on the title, students had to indicate what came to their mind upon seeing the title cover of the reading material. Predicting is a common pre-reading technique to activate background knowledge, focus the reader's attention, set the mood of the story, and establish a purpose for reading. Readers can often predict the contents of a story by looking at the title or chapter headings, scanning the table of contents, and reviewing any pictures, tables, figures, or graphs. According to Scriven & Paul (1985,9) Any way to predict the contents is by including reading the blurb on the cover, the introductory paragraphs, or the short excerpts from the text. The information gleaned from these activities may reveal much about the content and make reading easier and meaning more accessible, especially if the information awakens a student's own background knowledge or experience with the subject matter. Even if the predictions are wrong, the reader will be curious and want to start reading to check his or her predictions. In the third part, which was an intriguing sentence or passage, as a during-reading activity, students had to write down part of the text that contained an intriguing idea or puzzling situation, whether it was a sentence or a longer passage, and then interpreted the idea or situation by writing extended comments.

Reading journal articles is designed to aid students with critical reading skills. It means active and skillful conceptualizing, applying, synthesizing and/or

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evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experiences, reflection, reasoning or communication as a guide to belief and action. Wilson (2000) states that the reading journal article allows the students to admit confusion, to ask questions, to make connections and to read with attention.

Reading academic journal articles develops the students' reading comprehension. Academic journals as one of the literature is suggested in the rationale for reading explicitly. Research indicates that it is very hard to get students to read academic journal articles without an explicit, compelling purpose (S & Faulkner (2010, 32-45). Therefore, the reading task should be consistent with the goals of the subject of study and the assessment criteria. That is, there should be a constructive alignment between these factors to foster authenticity to the task and the discipline. While "authenticity" is a highly contested term, Herrington, Oliver and Reeves (2003) have emphasized, based upon their extensive literature review, that learning activities are authentic when they are seamlessly integrated with assessment and engage students to examine the task from different perspectives. Through the proposed exercise, we aim to foster students' authentic learning of reading academic journal articles, which can also be applied to other discipline areas. (Herrington, Oliver, Reeves :2003,57-71)

Although reading is an important skill, to teach reading is not easy, especially reading academic journals. Based on preliminary study, observation and interview to the lecturer of Academic Reading at English Study Program , Islamic Riau University which was conducted on 9th May 2018, it was found that the students still had difficulties in reading especially reading that requires

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comprehension of academic journal articles. The students still had difficulties in finding specific information related to topic/phenomenon, purpose, variables, research methodology, the findings, and discussion of the academic journal articles.

However, reading journal is necessary for academic performance, scholarly communication and delivering new information, not for general information and the entertainment of a broad audience (Campbell:2000). Based on Wilson (1999: 62-69) Reading journals gives students a place to record their thoughts, feelings, and reactions to the text they are reading. Students use the reading of journals to record questions about the text as well as responses to it. When there is a purpose for reading, the students become more critical; thus improving their textbook reading comprehension. Bean (1996:73) states that as students read to eliminate their confusion and develop their comprehension, they begin to make a connections between passages of the text and their own experiences. Reading journal articles encourages creating reading logs to make students interact with texts. He mentioned that students could summarize the text, connect it to personal experience, argue with it, and evaluate it. Writing a reading journal makes students grope, wrestle with confusion on their own and they often make surprising discoveries (Wilson : 1989:62-69). Furthermore, reading journals allows students to pause and mull and ponder, and then it slows them down and encourages them to pay attention to the slow unfolding of a work of a textbook. Reading journals in fact creates readers. (Wilson : 1989:82).

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From the problem and experts' opinions above, it was necessary to conduct a research entitled "*Exploring Students' Reading Comprehension of Academic Journal Articles: A Case Study at English Study Program, Islamic University of Riau.*"

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Reading comprehension is very important for university students. Riau Islamic University students at English Study Program are offered five levels of Reading subjects.

1. Basic Reading
2. Reading I (Reading Skill)
3. Extensive Reading
4. Scientific Reading
5. Academic Reading.

The students are expected to have good reading comprehension. However, the students still have many problems in comprehending academic journal articles. The students still have difficulties in finding specific information related to topic/phenomenon, purpose, research methodology, findings, and discussion of the academic journal articles.

The problem in this study dealt with the factors, strategy, and difficulties that cause the students to achieve low reading comprehension scores in reading academic journal articles.

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1.3 Limitation of the Problem

When talking about reading there may be a number of things that need to be touched on either reading in general context or listening for academic purposes like reading that students deal with at university. In this research only reading for academic purposes were focused on reading on the academic journal. The academic journal articles material in this research focused on the journal articles for English education purposes. The journal can be found at IJAL (Indonesian Journal of Applied linguistics). Therefore, this research only concentrated on the strategy and difficulties that caused the students to have low scores in reading comprehension, in reading academic journals at English Study program Islamic University of Riau. The reading strategy refers to Oxford (1990) theory. The reading strategies include memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social issues.

1.4. Research Questions

The problem of the research is formulated in the following research questions:

1. How is the students' reading comprehension of academic journal articles?
2. What are the students' difficulties in comprehending academic journal articles?
3. What are the students' strategies in comprehending academic journal articles?
4. What are the implications of reading academic journal articles of Academic Reading subject?

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1.5. The Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study was to analyze the students' reading comprehension of academic journals at English Study Program at Islamic University of Riau with the following objectives:

1. To investigate the level of the students' reading comprehension of academic journal article
2. To investigate the students' difficulties in comprehending academic journal articles
3. To investigate the students' strategies in comprehending academic Journal articles.
4. To investigate the implications of reading academic journal article in academic reading subject

1.6. Research Benefits

This research is expected to give benefits both theoretically and practically. The theoretical benefits are used for further research and to add the reader's knowledge and insight about reading comprehension skills in the reading texts, especially in reading academic journal articles.

The practical benefits are for students, lecturers, researchers, and the stockholder. The students are expected to comprehend reading texts especially in academic journal articles through their capability in reading comprehension process and also they can develop their skills in comprehending texts. The students also will give more attention in the text when they are reading.

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The results of this study are expected to give benefits to the English lecturers of Islamic Riau University as the inputs for the evaluation of students' reading comprehension. This study will give the readers more descriptions on the students' reading factors, strategies and difficulties.

For the researcher, the results of this study will improve the researcher's knowledge in reading comprehension and the researcher gets more experience on how to analyze, handle and organize reading process when teaching learning process is in progress.

The University and stake holders would get information about students' reading comprehension of academic journal articles. So, both of them can consider the students' reading factors, strategies, and difficulties before making a decision to plan, design and preparing teaching materials.

1.7. Definition of the Key terms

To avoid misunderstanding to happen, the key terms are defined as follows:

a. Investigation

Investigation is to study, look into, or examine. When you investigate, you typically look through facts or evidence and come up with a conclusion.

(Oxford: 1990)

b. Reading comprehension

Reading Comprehension is a fluent process of readers combining information from a text and their background knowledge to build meaning (Nunan, 2003: 68). Moreover, Kirby (2013:8) also state that reading comprehension is the process by which understand the text we read.

c. Academic journal articles

Academic journal is a periodical publication in which scholarship relating to a particular academic discipline is published. Academic journals serve as permanent and transparent forums for the presentation, scrutiny, and discussion of research (Black and Bly :1993).



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