The Use of Reading Strategies in EFL Leaning

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Abstract

This research examined the use of reading strategies to the students who learned English as a Foreign Language (EFL) reading in an English dormitory. It employed qualitative descriptive method by distributing questionnaires and taking a transcript of interview. The questionnaire used in this study was Reading Strategies Questionnaire (RSQ) adopted from R. Oxford et al. (2004). Based on the questionnaire and interview session, it was found that students mostly relied on top-down reading strategies (55.38%) they also considered bottom-up reading strategies were beneficial for their reading comprehension (44.62%) since they used both strategies simultaneously when they were reading a text. From the result of this study, it is inferred that the effectiveness of the use of a certain strategy does not depend on the strategy itself, what makes a strategy effective is associated with how it is employed. Therefore, teaching on how to use reading strategies is useful to improve students' comprehension since effective strategies can be taught and reading comprehension can be improved through instruction.

Keywords: Reading Strategies, Top-Down Reading Strategies, Bottom-Up Reading Strategies

Abstrak

Penelitian ini menguji penggunaan strategi membaca pada siswa yang belajar membaca Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing di asrama Bahasa Inggris. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan menyebarkan kuesioner dan mengambil transkrip wawancara. Kuesioner yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah Reading Strategies Questionnaire (RSQ) yang diadopsi dari R. Oxford et al. (2004). Berdasarkan sesi angket dan wawancara, ditemukan bahwa sebagian besar siswa mengandalkan strategi membaca top-down (55,38%) mereka juga menganggap strategi membaca bottom-up bermanfaat untuk pemahaman bacaan mereka (44,62%) karena mereka menggunakan kedua strategi tersebut secara bersamaan ketika mereka sedang membaca teks. Dapat disimpulkan bahwa efektivitas penggunaan suatu strategi tertentu tidak bergantung pada strategi itu sendiri, yang membuat suatu strategi efektif dikaitkan dengan cara penerapannya. Oleh karena itu, pengajaran tentang

bagaimana menggunakan strategi membaca berguna untuk meningkatkan pemahaman siswa karena strategi yang efektif dapat diajarkan dan pemahaman membaca dapat ditingkatkan melalui pengajaran.

Kata Kunci: Strategi Membaca, Strategi Membaca Top-Down, Strategi Membaca Bottom-Up

1. INTRODUCTION

Students at university level mostly considered reading as a sophisticated skill rather than students at high school. Since university-level students may be force to read more literature sources than they have ever had before which is consequently beneficial to support their success in college. They may be not only asked to read but also comprehend and apply their reading into a meaningful way. However, mastering reading comprehension skills are essential for students at university level. In line with that, Grabe & Stoller (2019) suggested that being an effective reader is necessary for students in mastering the reading comprehension skills. Reading comprehension holds significant importance as it is a fundamental skill for language acquisition and effective communication. The process of comprehending a text in a foreign language can be challenging, especially for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners who are non-native speakers of English even it sometimes becomes major difficulties for them. These difficulties arise not only from the text but also the Source Language of the text itself.

It can be seen when students tend to spend too much time on things that are not related to the reading activities. For instance, consuming much time on thinking about difficult vocabularies they found during reading rather than using specific reading strategies necessary for their efficient reading and spending too much mental energy completing the reading task which is consequently frustrating. The ability to understand the meaning from written material is necessary for learning a language. However, EFL learners often encounter a range of difficulties that hinder their comprehension of texts. It simply can be said that in most cases students who get difficulties in comprehending texts need to improve their reading comprehension skills.

To overcome these difficulties, EFL learners are suggested to employ various reading strategies to enhance their understanding of textual information. The use of reading strategies is a dynamic and evolving area of research that seeks to uncover the most effective ways to assist EFL learners in improving their reading comprehension skills. In another hand, Arnold (2009) further explained that students need to master specific reading strategy as it is necessary and efficient for their reading, if they do not, reading problem can occur. Schiff & Calif (2004) contended that reading problem may be experienced by EFL students if they do not have knowledge of reading strategies and awareness of applying the strategies into a text. However, this research tries to investigate the use of reading strategies among EFL learners.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research employed qualitative descriptive method by distributing questionnaires and taking a transcript of interview. This research highlighted explicitly about the use of reading

strategies to the students who learned EFL reading in an English dormitory. The data of this study then was quantified in order to make the description clearer which was shown by the number and percentages of the use of students reading strategies.

The study was carried out in an English Dormitory of State University in Bandung. Class H was chosen as the subject of this research. It consists of 41 non-English students who were from different majors. They were given questionnaires to see what kinds of strategies they used during reading. On the other hands, the focus of this study, in the interview sessions, only focus on 9 students using purposive sampling technique (Dörnyei, 2007) to support data obtained from questionnaire.

The questionnaire used in this study was Reading Strategies Questionnaire (RSQ) adopted from R. Oxford et al. (2004) which consisted of 35 statements. The RSQ measured two types of reading strategies: top-down and bottom-up reading strategies. In RSQ, the top-down reading strategies are reflected in 20 items, while 15 items focus on bottom-up reading strategies.

After the data from questionnaire was obtained, A semi-structured interview was attempted to confirm the data from questionnaire. To develop this instrument, the researcher referred to the statements revealed in the questionnaire. From 35 statements, 7 statements were considered important to be involved in the interview sessions; 4 statements were related to top-down reading strategies and the others associated with bottom-up reading strategies. All of the selected statements were transformed into the forms of questions. In supporting the finding from questionnaire, the data from the interview was cited in the analysis following Creswell & Creswell (2017) suggestion to use the wording from participant to give a detailed descriptive portrait.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study tried to analyze the reading strategies implemented by students to comprehend texts in EFL learning. Reading strategies are defined as defined as the conscious, internally variable psychological techniques aimed at improving the effectiveness of or compensating for the breakdowns in reading comprehension, on specific reading tasks and in specific contexts (Karami, 2008). In this study, Reading Strategies Questionnaires (RSQ) adopted from (R. Oxford et al., 2004) was employed to identify the reading strategies students used to overcome their problem in reading. The questionnaire consisted of 35 statements. The RSQ measured two types of reading strategies, namely bottom-up and top-down reading strategies. Bottom-up reading strategies are associated with strategies applied to interpret the text starting from the small thing such as word level to sentence level. When students try to understand the meaning of words or references as the parts of text, it is included to bottom-up reading strategies. In other words, these strategies focus on the development of basic skills, matching sounds with letters, syllables, and words used in writing the text (Nadea et al., 2021). The second strategy is top down, which is based on the reader's basic ability to understand a written text (Nadea et al., 2021). It is characterized as a reading procedure or psycholinguistics guessing game. Top-down reading strategies emphasize the importance of schemata, or prior experiences and background knowledge, in understanding a literary work. In top-down

reading strategies, the reader must have knowledge, comprehension, and language skills that play a major role in interpreting the meaning of the text (Ardhani, 2011).

Based on the result from questionnaire, it was found that the overall analysis for the 35 items of RSQ portrayed in the table below. It highlighted the percentage of students' reading strategies use.

Table 1.
The Percentage of Students' Reading Strategies Use

No	Reading Strategies	Averages	Percentages (%)
1	Top-down	3.6	55.38 %
2	Bottom-up	2.9	44.62 %
	Total	6.5	100 %

From the table above, it is clearly shown that students preferred to use top-down reading strategies (55.38%) and they also considered that bottom-up reading strategies were beneficial for their reading comprehension (44.62%) as they used both strategies simultaneously when they were reading a text. This is in line with the explanation from (Urquhart S&Weir, 1998), saying that the bottom-up, or language-driven strategy, has the advantage of covering a broad class of linguistic phenomena and processing even the more intricate details of a text. While the benefit of top-down is being able to skim texts for particular pieces of information, passing gracefully over unknown words or constructs and ignoring some of the complexities of the language. In relation with the benefit of each strategy for students in comprehending the texts, many researchers argued that there are no good or bad reading strategies for students in any kinds of purposes. What is determined a good strategy for one reader in one situation might not be a good strategy for another reader in another situation. The use of strategies can be successful or unsuccessful depending on the context and text (Dabarera et al., 2014; Dreyer & Nel, 2003; Koda, 2005; Plonsky, 2011; Raoofi et al., 2014). For the sake of clarity, the explanation of each reading strategy was covered below.

The first reading strategies are top-down strategies which include a process in which the reader's background knowledge plays a critical role. The reader is an active participant in this process, bringing hypotheses about the text, making predictions, and using the information in the text to confirm or disconfirm these predictions (Urquhart & Weir, 1998). It is related to the text-level or strategies students used to comprehend a whole text such as using background knowledge and the title to predict the content, skimming, and scanning. In line with that, it is also known that the top-down reading strategies are characterized as a reading procedure or psycholinguistics guessing game. Top-down reading strategies emphasize the importance of schemata, or prior experiences and background knowledge, in understanding a literary work. In top-down reading strategies, the reader must have knowledge, comprehension, and language skills that play a major role in interpreting the meaning of the text (Ardhani, 2011). Based on the findings from questionnaire, the table below shows the mean scores of the most of top-down reading strategies use.

Table 2.
Mean Scores of the Most of Top-Down Reading Strategies Use

Items	Reading Strategies	Mean
26	Referring back to the previous sentences	4.05
20	Underlining important parts	3.95
11	Continuing reading even if difficulties occur	3.71
1	Predicting the content from the title	3.68
34	Focusing on comprehension questions before reading the text	3.61

From the table above, it can be seen that there were 5 reading strategies that mostly students used to comprehend the text and to decrease their anxieties. The table shows that item 26 got mean score above 4, it was 4.05, which meant that when students were having trouble, they often referred back to previous sentences to process the meaning and get a better comprehension. In other words, more than 70% students often or almost always referred back to previous sentences when they got a problem in reading an English text. This is similar with the findings from Ozek & Civelek (2006) saying that students who use these strategies prefer to re-read a text they read to make sure and remedy their comprehension failures

Other strategies they applied to overcome their comprehension failure is that underlining the important parts of the text. They use this s strategy to highlight the points that they considered important Students who use the top-down reading strategies also think that by continuing reading even when they got difficulties in understanding the text is necessary for their comprehension shown by the mean score 3.71, guessing and predicting the content from what the text's tittle is about also give them beneficial impact (Yousefian, 2015).

One of the students in the interview session stated that she preferred to read the questions first rather than the text itself. This happened when she was asked to read a text which consisted of several questions that must be answered. To make her became an effective reader, she preferred to read the question first. Not only made the time more efficient, but it also made her more comfortable since she was not frustrated by many pressures contained in the text "S2: If I read the text first, it makes me feel confused even it sometimes makes me lazy to continue reading since I have been confused of it". It clearly showed that when the text was read first it made her suppressed with many difficulties she encountered. Therefore, reading the comprehension question first was more comfortable since the pressures decreased. On the other hands, it seemed that there was a gap between what the theory said and what she did, in the case of S2. It can be seen in the excerpt "I directly read the questions, then I look at the text and guess which one is the answer", the way how she found the main idea was reading the questions, looking at the text, and guessing the main idea of the text. There was no way trying to process the meaning and comprehend the text but guessing. However, guessing would be effective when students used it while trying to process the meaning too. In line with the way how S2 applied the strategies into a text, Nolan (1991) stated that having limited knowledge about how to apply strategies effectively and spontaneously while reading may lead students become unsuccessful readers since they cannot vary their

reading for different texts or purposes. They rarely monitor and evaluate their comprehension while reading. In addition, Carrell (1998) acknowledged that unsuccessful readers may have drawbacks related to motivation. They may have difficulty in reading, be unwilling to read or may have difficulty concentrating on what they read. This clearly happened to S2 as it was conveyed by her in the interview session which was explained in the previous discussion of reading anxiety in the sub-source of vocabulary item "S2: Yeah, I often feel upset of myself. You know that I don't like English. However, I most often do.. what.. not seriously taking this course. Even I often open the google translate to make it easier". It was clear that she had no motivation to study as she preferred to choose another way to overcome the problem by asking the google translate without any attempt to use reading strategies.

The second reading strategies is bottom-up reading strategies which were associated with a process wherein the reader reconstructs the messages in a text by first recognizing the smallest textual components such as letters or words. Then, the reader moves to larger parts of the text such as phrases or sentences in order to comprehend the written work Carrell et al. (1998). When students tried to understand the meaning of words or references as the parts of text, it was included to bottom-up reading strategies. Bottom-up reading does not address the entire reading process for proper understanding. Bottom-up reading is the strategy to interpret letters, sounds, words, and structures until the entire text is decoded to comprehend the meaning of the text, and it is often used in the lower-level reading process. This might explain why vocalized and sub vocalized reading skills acquired by significant amount of students (Brunfaut & McCray, 2015). Based on the findings from questionnaire, it was found that bottom-up reading strategies were beneficial for the students' reading comprehension since there were 44.62% students relied on them. The table below shows the mean scores of the most of bottom-up reading strategies use.

Table 3
Mean Scores of the Most of Bottom-Up Reading Strategies Use

Items	Reading Strategies	Mean
7	Trying to understand the meaning of each word in the text	3.85
12	Adjusting the rate of reading depending on the text difficulty	3.73
22	Rereading the difficult sections of the text	3.68

Based on the table above, it can be seen that item 7 got the highest mean score, it was 3.85 which meant that trying to understand the meaning of each word in the tetx was almost often used by students in EFL reading to overcome the anxiety. It usualy happened when they were reading a text; they tried to undertand the text by translating each vocabulary they found then they related it one to another to process the meaning. This was also experienced by S5 which was coveyed in the interview session. She often tried to understand each word in a text since she tried to translate it one by one using dictioary then related it one to another to create meaning "open the dictionary… translate it word by word then related it one another". According to the questionnaire, this case was related to item 7, S5 answered 4 which meant that she often relied on this kind of strategy in EFL reading. Eventhough it was often used, she

still found difficulties to comprehend the text since she did not have sufficient knowledge of the context of the text "I don't know the context of the text… it creates a disordered meaning". In line with that, (Uzunçakmak, 2005) explained that content and background knowledge (content schemata) increase the students' comprehension. Readers who are familiar with the content can understand the text better by relating the information in the text to what they know about text content. However, it was not surprising when S5 created a disordered meaning of the text due to her lack of knowledge of the content of the text she read.

Related to bottom-up reading strategies, the speed of reading, most students with this strategy prefer to adjust their reading speed depending on the difficulty of the text. The purpose is to find out the meaning of each word in the text. Besides, they considered comprehending the text is challenging. On the other hands, regarding the reading speed based on the text's difficulty (Farrell, 2001) stated that students who rely on this strategy consider reading with too slow speed can cause your mind wander. Besides, reading too fast can cause the information to be lost.

Another student in the interview session (S4) found difficulty in reading an English text, she reread the difficult part since she hoped that she could undertand the text. As previously mentioned that this strategy belonged to item 22 which was answered 4 by S4. It was indicated that she often did it when she was reading. The reason why she often relied on this strategy was to remember the each word contained in the text in order she could guess the meaning of the text "I hope that there will be a word that I remember so I can guess the meaning of the text". In other words, she felt that it was useful for her comprehension since she could create the meaning of difficult part by going over it which enabled her to recognize the word contained in the text as (Uzunçakmak, 2005) proposed that a large recognition vocabulary enables readers to comprehend a text more easily.

Based on the result of the study, students mostly relied on top-down reading strategies. Although they considered that top-down reading strategies were beneficial for their comprehension, they also admitted that bottom-up model had its own advantage to their reading comprehension. It can be concluded that the effectiveness of the use of a certain reading strategy does not depend on the strategy itself (Kern as cited in Farrell, 2001). What works for one reader may not work for another. Similarly, while a strategy can work for a reader with a particular text, it may not be a useful tool with another text when the reading purpose is different. It is also inferred that what makes a strategy effective is associated with how it is employed (Anderson, 1991; R. L. Oxford, 2003). In other words, the same strategies can be employed by different group of readers, yet in different manners.

4. CONCLUSION

There were two reading strategies students used in EFL reading, namely: top-down reading strategies and bottom-up reading strategies. Based on the questionnaire and interview session, it was found that students mostly relied on top-down reading strategies (55.38%) involving referring back to the previous sentences, underlining important parts, continuing reading even if difficulties occur, predicting the content from the title, focusing on comprehension questions before reading the text, skimming, and focusing on the beginning

and end of each paragraph. Beside top-down reading strategies, they also considered bottom-up reading strategies were beneficial for their reading comprehension (44.62%) since they often tried to understand the meaning of each word in the text, adjust the rate of reading depending on the text difficulty, and reread the difficult sections of the text when they are reading an English text. Based on the result of the study, it can be concluded that the effectiveness of the use of a certain reading strategy does not depend on the strategy itself (Kern as cited in (Farrell, 2001). What works for one reader may not work for another. Similarly, while a strategy can work for a reader with a particular text, it may not be a useful tool with another text when the reading purpose is different. It is also inferred that what makes a strategy effective is associated with how it is employed ((Anderson, 1991); (R. L. Oxford, 2003)). In other words, the same strategies can be employed by different group of readers, yet in different manners

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