BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE IN EFL READING COMPREHENSION: LECTURERS' PERSPECTIVE & CLASSROOM STRATEGIES

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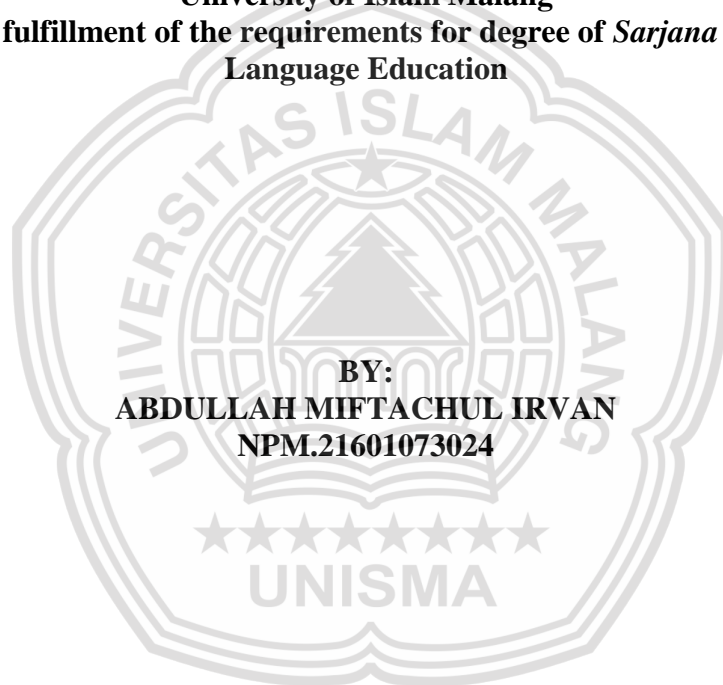**NPM.21601073024**

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ABSTRACT

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Keywords: background knowledge, classroom strategies, and reading comprehension.

This research aims to find out three main sectors related to background knowledge in reading comprehension. The lecturers' perspective about the role of background knowledge, the instructional strategies they employ to activate students' background knowledge, and the difficulties they encounter when activating students' background knowledge.

The research design of this study was descriptive qualitative study. Eleven reading lecturers from five different universities in Indonesia participated in this study. Two instruments were used: an online Google Form questionnaire adapted from Al-Jahwari and Al-Humaidi (2015), and an online semi-structured interview. The researcher analyzed the summary, conclusion based on the online data from the online Google Form questionnaire and online interview session.

The results of this research indicated an intense agreement about the role of background knowledge in text comprehension, a serious reliance on some techniques and a clear connection about the difficulties of resources such as students' low linguistic competence and lack of lecturers training on background knowledge theory and its instructional techniques.

Based on the result above, the researcher suggested to students that they have to learn and understand the role of background knowledge in English reading and improve their reading comprehension. For the lecturers, the researcher suggested that they give more exercises on variety of techniques of activating background knowledge and overcome the difficulties in teaching reading so that the students would comprehend text better. Then, for the future researcher, they are suggested to conduct the deeper study of background knowledge in reading comprehension especially on students' perspective.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explains the background of the study, research problem, the objective of the study, hypothesis, scope and limitation of the study, the significance of the study, and the definition of key terms.

1.1 Background of The Study

As we know that reading is a very complex process which educators, psychologists, and linguists are interested for decades. Because of the complex reading process, a number of theorists are devoted to defining or developing reading models of reading process. Reading comprehension is the process of making meaning from text. The goal, therefore, is to gain an overall understanding of what is described in the text rather than to obtain meaning from isolated words or sentences (Wolley, 2011). Reading comprehension is attained through successful interaction between the reader and the text. This interaction is the major factor that plays the most important role in comprehension. Accordingly, background knowledge will be of primary importance for EFL readers. So schema-based, pre-reading activities should be used for activating such background knowledge. It is assumed that background knowledge activation requires pre-reading activities.

The concept of the role of background knowledge in reading process serves perceptions into why students might succeed or fail when comprehending text.

For instance, Murray (1980) showed that schema affects reading comprehension in some ways. It affects the information recall as well as the storage information. It converts recall after reading and seals out irrelevant information. Anderson (1994) also sure that in reading comprehension the schemata allow readers to make inferences and add some other information in the text. The readers use clues in the text and the stored knowledge in their minds to decide knotted information.

Neuman, Kaeferand and Pinkham (2014) believe that background knowledge is essential to reading comprehension; the more you know about a topic, the easier it is to read a text, understand it and retain the information. Lenski (1998) describes people as "natural synthesizers". That means people tap into their background knowledge for experiences they have had with other texts about a similar topic. Tapping into background knowledge can also motivate a student to read a novel. Wigfield, Gutherie, Tonks, Perencevich (2004) express that motivation "is crucial to reading engagement". When students are engaged, "they comprehend better and have strong reading outcomes than when they are not engaged".

Brownson (1988), a reading specialist, believed that students have difficulty with reading because "they do not have the conceptual knowledge to relate the text material to their own lives". Without conceptual knowledge, the reading information might be unfamiliar to the student. When students are not familiar with the topic, it can be difficult for students to correctly comprehend the text. Students' might not be familiar with vocabulary words, terms or overall history of the book which can result

in a misconstrued thinking of the text, which can lead to misinterpretation of the book. Some researchers have revealed the study about it. As has been done by Pei-shi (2012), the participants were freshmen of National Chiayi University. They were divided into three language proficiency levels based on the General English Proficiency Test. There were six classes of freshmen in National Chiayi University involved in this study. The result of this study was analyzed by using a paired-sample T-test to investigate the effect of culture familiarity on participants with different language proficiency levels. The results indicated the effect on reading comprehension with participants of different language proficiency levels. Furthermore, the result of this study showed that background knowledge or schema was significant in helping students comprehend the reading text and the appropriate background knowledge of texts produces better reading comprehension.

The next study was conducted by Mansor, Nurhidayah, Zuldin and Rahim (2017) this study examined the effect of background knowledge reading strategy among ESL learners as well as to identify the pre-reading strategies that are commonly used by the students. The sample comprised of 160 form one students from one of the schools in Kuala Terengganu. The quasi–experimental design was used in the study. Students were divided into experimental and controlled groups. The findings of this study had revealed that there was significant improvement in the reading comprehension performance of the lower secondary students after being exposed to activation of background knowledge reading strategy.

Another study was conducted by Kathleen C. Stevens (1980).This study examined the contention that background knowledge (or schema) influences the

efficacy of reading. The subjects for the study were 108 ninth grade students, comprising the entire ninth grade class of the only public high school in the district. The results of the experiment were analyzed using a repeated measure, split-plot ANOVA. The results of the study indicate that background knowledge or schemata affect reading comprehension.

Those previous studies become the references for the researcher in conducting this research. Unlike other previous researches, this research is conducted on university level for the teachers or lecturers of university and the researcher uses descriptive qualitative method, the data will be collected through online questionnaire adopted from Al-Jahwari and Al-Humaidi (2015) and online semi structured interview via video call.

1.2 Research Problem

Based on the research background above, the researcher formulated the research question of this study In order to achieve its purpose, the study attempted to answer the following questions:

a. How do the reading lecturers view the role of background knowledge in reading comprehension?

b. What are the instructional strategies that lecturers use to foster the activation of background knowledge in EFL reading classroom?

c. What are the difficulties that reading lecturers face when activating background knowledge in the EFL reading classroom?

1.3 Objective of the study

As stated in the research question above, the objective of this study is to know more about the lecturers' view of background knowledge in reading comprehension. Second, the researcher wants to investigate the instructional strategies use to foster the activation of background knowledge in EFL reading classroom. The last is to describe the difficulties faced in reading comprehension for English as Foreign Language (EFL) Learners by the reading lecturers.

1.4 The Significance of The Study

Theoretically, it is expected the result of this study will add the body of knowledge of teaching reading comprehension, especially in term of how to activate background knowledge and practically the result of this research hopefully will give some contributions to lecturers or teachers, students, and future researcher as follows

1. For the lecturers, the researcher highly expects that the result of this research can help the lecturers or teachers to develop the students' reading comprehension by knowing on how to activate students' background knowledge and the students' reading difficulties. The lecturers can use this study as a reference to help lecturers to solve their problems in teaching reading.

2. For the students, the researcher highly expects that this study can make the students realize and know about the problems in reading they have. The students

can use the results of this study to overcome their reading difficulties with the strategies provided.

3. For the future researcher, the researcher highly expects that this research can be the reference for conducting research specifically in developing reading skill and background knowledge strategy.

1.5 Scope and Limitation of The Study

This research is held to find out the lecturers' perception on background knowledge teaching reading comprehension problems and strategies. The three main angles concerned to background knowledge in reading comprehension. The first is the lecturers' perception about the role of background knowledge, the second is the instructional techniques which are used to foster students' background knowledge, and the last is the problems which are faced by lecturers in activating background knowledge in teaching and learning reading. The selected participants are from qualified reading lecturers from five different universities in Indonesia. Since it was not possible to survey all the reading college teachers in many institutions, this study was limited to the lecturers enrolled in the selected university.

1.6 Definition of Keyterms

There are some key terms that need to be clarified by the researcher to evade misconception of the definition of the terms in this study.

1. *Lecturers' perspective*

Lecturers' opinion or view refers to the conviction, behavior, encouragement, and purpose in relation to the learning context. Teaching perspectives give shape and meaning to educational practices including supervisory practices. The way in which we plan instruction, the manner in which we engage students, the elicitation strategies we employ, our consideration of the social milieu in which learning takes place, the assessment strategies we draw upon, etc., reveal our understanding of what constitutes knowledge, and our sense of the relationship between the knower and the known. Therefore, teaching perspectives are important in any exploration of pedagogical practices.

2. *Classroom Strategies*

Classroom strategy or management is defined as the methods and strategies an educator uses to maintain a classroom environment that is conducive to student success and learning. Although there are many pedagogical strategies involved in managing a classroom, a common denominator is making sure that students feel they are in an environment that allows them to achieve.
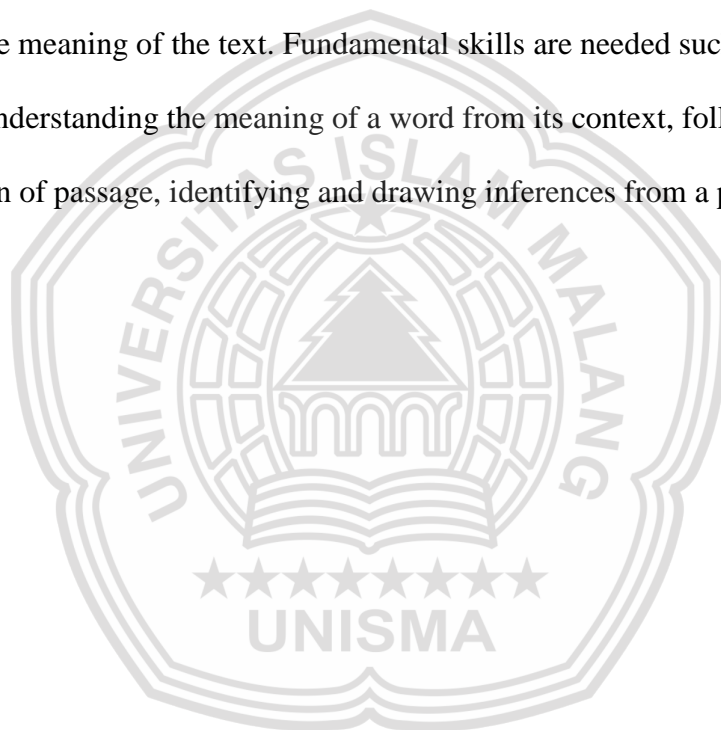
3. *Background Knowledge*

Background Knowledge is what the reader brings to the reading activity which might come from their experience or from reading process. Background knowledge has had a high sway in reading comprehension, which is become an interactive process that demands the simultaneous performance of certain mental operations. It is also what the reader brings to the reading event. Each reader's interpretation and each reading of the text are potentially unique. This theory helps

explain our individual responses to literature, art, and music and can be applied more broadly to our generalized responses in all areas of learning (Moreillon, 2007).

4.   *Reading Comprehension*

Reading comprehension is the ability to process, to understand, and to integrate the meaning of the text. Fundamental skills are needed such as knowing meaning, understanding the meaning of a word from its context, following organization of passage, identifying and drawing inferences from a passage about its contents.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

In this chapter, the researcher presents the conclusions of this study and the suggestion.

1.1 Conclusions

The purpose of this study is to find out the lecturers' perspectives about background knowledge in EFL reading comprehension and classroom strategies. The research design of this study was descriptive qualitative research. The study was conducted in five different universities in Indonesia. The participants of this study were seven reading lecturers of University of Islam Malang, one lecturers of STAIN Tulungagung, one lecturer of STAIN Kediri, one lecturer of UIN Malang, and one lecturer of Kalimantan State University. In total the researcher had eleven research participants. The instrument that used in this research was Google Form online questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of three parts. The first part, there were nine questions about the views of the role of the background knowledge, four questions about views of good readers and seven questions about views the role of the lecturer. The second part, there were ten questions about the instructional practices. The third part, there were three questions about the difficulties related to

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background knowledge activation. In total the researcher have thirty three online

questions.

The data were analyzed by using percentage in a table and the result of the research showed that every lecturer had their own view on background knowledge in reading comprehension. However, majority of the lecturers had the same perspectives and they do agree on students who have sufficient background knowledge they can understand text better, recall information easily, read text quickly, link the ideas in the text easily, focus on main ideas, overcome limited linguistic knowledge, relate text to their own prior knowledge, predict text content easily, confirm predictions based on background knowledge. This is proven by the results of the data that students will comprehend reading text better if they have enough background knowledge.

To foster text comprehension with the use of students' background knowledge, it is important for lecturers to provide students with appropriate background knowledge, activate available prior knowledge, identify the absence of knowledge, raise students' awareness of the role of background knowledge, ask questions before, during and after reading, encourage students to summarize what they have read, and elicit background information related to the reading topic.

Next, the data showed that every reading lecturer have their own views about the following strategies use to activate EFL students' background knowledge in text comprehension. Lecturers usually used brainstorming about the text topic, class discussion about text topic, called students' attention to specific signal words, main idea, sentences, highlighted phrases, headings and subtitles, listed some statements

on the board that are related to the reading topic to guide students' reading, used supporting materials to display background knowledge, developed inquiries about the text to create a purpose of reading, selected key words from the text that require the students to infer text topic, and linked the topic to students' culture and previous experience. Even though, some of lecturers were sometimes organized the ideas on the board under headings to create relationships and used visual-based questions. So the researcher claims that based on research data, those previous mentioned strategies could make or help the lecturers to activate student's background knowledge easily.

The last part of this research was about the difficulties related to background knowledge activation. There were three problems were faced by lecturers. The first problem was lack of knowledge about the role of background knowledge. It can be inferred that lack of knowledge about the role of background knowledge was one of the difficulties faced by teachers in encouraging students' background knowledge. The second was lack of knowledge about its instructional implications. And the last was lack of training on a variety of techniques. The result of this study indicated that although teachers had been teaching reading for some long periods of time, they still had the difficulties in activating student' background knowledge in reading comprehension.

1.2 Suggestions

According to the conclusion above, the researcher gives some suggestions to the students, the teachers, and the future researchers.

5.2.1   The Students of English Department

As future teacher candidates, it is expected that the students of English department have to pay more attention in learning and understanding the role of background knowledge in reading comprehension. The errors we make or lack of ability will cost many problems, especially in teaching reading. Learning and understanding more about English reading materials especially background knowledge in reading comprehension will build you to be good teachers. The students should give meaningful feedback for their further understanding about the role of background knowledge in reading including the elements of language such as reading strategy, identifying main ideas, etc. Those elements can influence the students to comprehend reading text better.

5.2.2   The Lecturers of English Department

It is known that the students still have the problem in reading comprehension. Thus, it is important for the teachers or lecturers to focus on teaching of reading. It means that they have to emphasize the aspect of determining the proper explanations and exercises in teaching and learning process especially learn more about teaching technique variety in order to activate students' background knowledge better. So, both of the teachers and students are able to overcome the problems in activating background knowledge. The teachers also can apply the various strategies found from this research in order to assist them in teaching reading.

5.2.3   The Future Researchers

In this study, the numbers of the reading lecturer were only eleven. While to reach a better reliability, the researcher should use at least thirty reading lecturers. So, the next researcher should add the number of the reading teachers to get reliable result of the study.

The last suggestion is the next researcher might be able to conduct a research about background knowledge toward listening comprehension or another writing activities and the researcher is also highly expects that the future researcher can be explore more deeply about this topic.
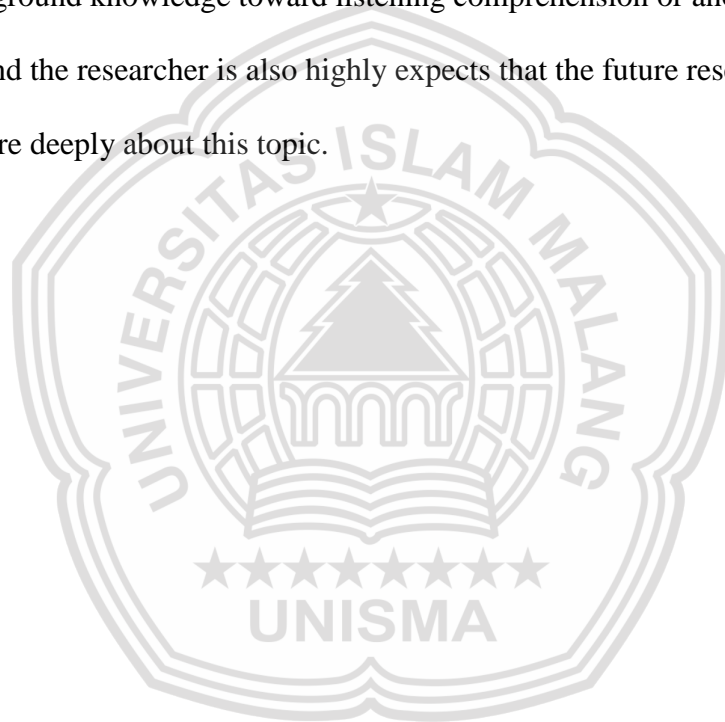
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