AN INVESTIGATION OF THE PREFERRED READING STRATEGIES

EMPLOYED BY EFL STUDENTS TO ASSIST IN READING COMPREHENSION

Faricha Rizqi, Joko Nurkamto, and Abdul Asib

Universitas Sebelas Maret, Department of English

faricharizqi2@gmail.com

Abstract: Reading strategies undoubtedly have considerable roles in language learners' reading comprehension, especially in academic reading. The importance of reading strategies includes solving specific comprehension difficulties and enhance reading comprehension ability. Therefore, this study looked into the type and the frequency of the employment of reading strategies by twelfth grade students who were prepared to perform National Exam. National Exam (abbreviated as NE, Indonesian: *Ujian Nasional*) is a standardized English test which is conducted in order to measure and evaluate the students' competence nationally by the central government. This test primarily consists of the reading section which measures the students' competency in reading comprehension. Through the instrument developed by Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002), the students' preferred reading strategies were revealed. Global reading strategies were mostly used by the students instead of problem solving strategies and support strategies.

Keywords: reading strategies, reading comprehension, academic reading

INTRODUCTION

English is one of the subjects examined in the National Exam for Senior High School students. In Indonesia, the National Exam (abbreviated as NE) itself is a test which is conducted in order to measure and evaluate the students' competence nationally by the central government after the teaching and learning process. This test can be defined as a requirement for students to graduate and proceed with the next education level after the learning competences are achieved. The NE tests the students' language skills of listening and reading. The NE of English includes 50 multiple-choice items in total, 15 numbers of the listening section and 35 numbers of the reading section.

Therefore, this study would focus more on reading a section of NE which mostly dominates the English National Exam for high school students. The NE involves reading comprehension as defined by Duke (2003) that comprehension is a process involving readers to come with meaning by interacting with text and the assistance of prior knowledge and previous experience, information in the text, and the views of readers related to the text. It can be said that comprehension is a process of perceiving and constructing meaning through interaction with written language. Reading comprehension takes place not only during the education period but in every field of life. Therefore, the reading comprehension skill, which has a strong relation to academic success, should be developed since the first years of education.

For students, the particular objective of reading is to have a general understanding of the passage. It means that when the students read the texts, they try to comprehend the words order, to engage with what they are reading to respond to the content and to grasp the message delivered. However, McNamara (2009) explains that it can be challenging for the readers to understand how the words come together in each sentence. She also provides another case in which the readers may understand each word and even sentence, but they cannot understand the relationship between the sentences and the meaning of the text as a whole. It is particularly initiated with requisite knowledge demanded of text. However, it has essentially resulted from the students' lack of reading strategies to deal with such reading challenges (McNamara, 2009).

Therefore, students are necessarily provided with the understanding of appropriate use of reading strategies in reading process to make them succeed in reading comprehension. By knowing how to apply reading strategies, students will be able to develop their reading comprehension skill. For example, when students find difficulty in grasping the main idea of the text, they can take advantage of reading strategies such as by underlining, rereading, taking notes, or highlighting the essential information of the passage. Furthermore, the advantages of reading strategies are explained by Ling (2011) that the use of reading strategies in the process of doing reading tasks can solve the specific comprehension difficulties and enhance the reading comprehension ability. Besides, Chen and Chen (2015) state that the use of reading strategies is helpful for learners to promptly understand general information of the reading text and to remember new lexical items found in the text. Therefore, the role of EFL reading strategies is regarded as one of the contributing factors that influence language learner to be successful (Ikeda & Takeuchi, 2006). In a word, reading strategies allow readers to tackle complex reading problems in more efficient ways.

The classification of reading strategies is various according to researchers. Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) divide reading categories into three groups; they are Global Reading Strategies (GLOB), Problem Solving Strategies (PROB), and Support Strategies (SUP). The descriptions of each category are explained as follows:

1. Global Reading Strategies (GLOB) are those intentional, carefully planned techniques by which learners monitor or manage their reading, such as having a purpose in mind, previewing the text as to its length and organization, or using typographical aids and tables and figures.
2. Problem Solving Strategies (PROB) are the actions and procedures that readers use while working directly with the text. These are localized, focused techniques used when problems develop in understanding textual information; examples include adjusting one's speed of reading when the material becomes difficult or easy, guessing the meaning of unknown words, and rereading the text to improve comprehension.
3. Support Strategies (SUP) are basic support mechanisms intended to aid the readers in comprehending the text such as using a dictionary, taking notes, underlining, or highlighting textual information.

Several previous studies regarding the use of reading strategies had been conducted. There were Chen and Chen (2015) who investigated the use of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) reading strategies used by high school students. They found that the EFL high school

students had a high awareness of reading strategy, especially global reading strategies, followed by problem-solving strategies and support strategies. Moreover, investigating students' reading strategies and its effect on their reading comprehension skill had been conducted by previous researchers. These studies provide another sight of the use of reading strategies in reading the academic text. Besides, an investigation into the reading strategies used by high school students is crucial to figure out which reading strategies employed when they are reading, to develop their reading skills, and to enhance their vocabulary mastery. Mokhtari and Reichard (2002) state the importance of surveying reading strategies is to enable students to enhance awareness of reading strategies and consequently provide the notions of reading and learning from text.

In conclusion, this study was carried out to discover specific reading strategies used by senior high school students as EFL learners. It is restricted on the issue of academic reading found in the reading comprehension section of English NE. Through this study, the students are expected to be able to develop their preferred reading strategies effectively during their reading process. Furthermore, the findings of this research are expected to be a valuable source for EFL students' reading strategies, especially at the high school level.

METHOD

This study involved 26 EFL students as the participants, they were 18 females and 8 males. They were native speakers of Bahasa Indonesia and learned English as a foreign language. They were the twelfth grade students of the senior high school who prepared to perform the reading test in the National Exam. The data were obtained by asking the students to fill a questionnaire based on their preferred reading strategies types used in reading school-related materials. The questionnaire was adapted from an instrument developed by Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002), Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS). It was designed to measure adolescent and adult ESL learners' metacognitive awareness in reading academic English text. Therefore, the SORS is a means to gauge the type and frequency of reading strategies employed according to the students' preference. It measured three types of reading strategies namely global reading strategies, problem solving strategies, and support strategies. This questionnaire consisted of 30 items in which each item was rated with a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*I never do this*) to 5 (*I always do this*). After analyzing the score of each item, the data were interpreted into standard usage levels. Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) explain that reading strategy usage is identified into three levels proposed by Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995): High (mean of 3.5 or higher), moderate (mean of 2.5 to 3.4), and low (mean of 2.4 or lower). Therefore, the higher the number, the more frequent the use of the strategies.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This research presents the investigation of the frequency of reading strategies employed by EFL students in reading academic English text. According to the 26 participants' questionnaire answer, the frequency of metacognitive reading strategies use is high as presented in table 1 below.

Table 1   Descriptive Statistic Results of GLOB, PROB, and SUP reading strategies

Strategy	Mean	Usage Level

GLOB reading strategies	3.50	High
PROB reading strategies	4.13	High
SUP reading strategies	3.68	High

Based on the findings presented in table 1, the reading strategy most frequently used is problem solving reading strategy. How often the students employed reading strategies is described into the mean score for each category of strategies. It shows that problem-solving strategies were employed with a highest mean score while global and support strategies had a slight difference in their mean scores. According to the data, these strategies can be arranged as follows, problem solving reading strategies (4.13), support reading strategies (3.68), and global reading strategies (3.50).

In this research, the highest mean score of problem solving reading strategies indicated that the students tended to use reading strategies when they were dealing with the text directly. This strategy focused on the techniques applied in understanding textual information. The students admitted that this problem solving strategy helped them in generating the idea of the text by reading slowly and carefully, taking more notice to what they read. As there were 35 numbers of reading section in NE, the students had to be able to comprehend each text provided in the examination. Besides, when they found the difficult word, they tried to guess the meaning of it. Even though the students had enough NE preparation by doing some reading comprehension exercise, they thought that they still found it difficult when they found unfamiliar words in the text. The students also attempted to remember information of what they read by forming a picture their mind.

Support reading strategy was in the second position of the usage level in this study. In this strategy, the students preferred to utilize tools to comprehend text, for instance, using a dictionary, underlining or highlighting text. However, the students didn't think that taking notes would help them understand what they read. It was indicated from the moderate mean score of this item which was lower than 3.5. Then, the global strategy was least used, although it was categorized to be used with high frequency level. This strategy encompassed intentionally and carefully planned techniques. In order to monitor the students' reading, they took advantage of their prior knowledge and context clues to help them obtain the meaning of the text. Besides, before reading, the students took an overall view of the text to see the content, length, and organization. As the students were prepared for NE, they had learned material that would be tested and set purpose in mind before reading. Therefore, they knew what to ignore and what to read closely. The typographical features such as bold face and italics were useful for students to discover the main information. Nevertheless, the students rarely used table, figures, and pictures in the text to enhance their comprehension. The overall findings described the ESL students' academic reading needs. As Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) explain that the information obtained through SORS can be advantageous for students to develop their reading process and recognize their reading strategies.

Moreover, referring to the frequency scale proposed by Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995), this present study found that the frequency of the reading strategies was high. The problem solving strategy was regarded as high in frequency since its mean score was 4.13 which was higher than 3.5. Similarly, the support and global reading strategies were categorized into high usage as well, seeing that their score averages were 3.68 and 3.50 consecutively. As the mean

score of those three broad categories belongs to high usage level and the mean of the SORS was 3.77, it obviously could be concluded that the students had a high awareness of the reading strategies used in the academic reading activity. Besides, it indicated that the Indonesian EFL students use all types of reading strategies. This occurs because the students were determined to pass the test leading the students to consciously or unconsciously use learning strategies in assisting them to achieve their learning goal, which is passing the National Exam. Therefore, Saukah & Cahyono (2015) consider that the NE is high-stakes testing as it brings to phenomena known as a washback effect for students.

The research conducted by Chen and Chen (2015) also found the same amount of the SORS mean score which was 3.77. However, their research presented different findings of the mean score of each reading strategy category. They stated that the Taiwanese students preferred to use global reading strategies (3.95), followed by problem-solving strategies (3.75) and support strategies (3.60). In this case, there are several factors influencing the score of reading strategy groups obtained by each student. Mokhtari and Reichard (2002) explain that the possible use of strategies is influenced by students reading ability in English, the type of reading the material, and the reading purpose. They add that if a strategy is least employed, it means that there may be some strategies in that part that the students might want to learn about and consider using when reading. Therefore, it is possible to find various findings of research on the use of reading strategies used by EFL students. However, the main significance of reading strategies survey must be highlighted that "awareness and monitoring of one's comprehension processes are critically important aspects of skilled reading" (Mokhtari and Reichard, 2002).

CONCLUSIONS

In the language learning process, students find difficulties in their foreign language learning for all time, even in their own native language. In certain instance, the students generally struggle to comprehend the gist of the text in their reading. This kind of problem is hardly avoided but it can be overcome by effective use of reading strategies. This study proves that reading strategy is one of a significant factor in assisting students' reading comprehensions. Each student has a certain favored reading strategy that is different from each other. However, as long as the students are able to employ the strategies appropriately, it will result in students' improvement of both performance and understanding of their reading comprehension. The present study is expected to provide another insight into the improvement of the reading strategies which have not been frequently applied by EFL students. Thus, the students are able to utilize the reading strategies in an effective way. Nonetheless, the role of the teacher is obviously needed in order to directly lead the students to the effective way of reading strategies usage.

REFERENCES

Chen, K. T., & Chen, S. C. (2015). The use of EFL reading strategies among high school students in Taiwan. *The Reading Matrix: An International Online Journal, 15* (2), 156-166.

Duke, N. (2003). *Comprehension instruction for informational text*. Presentation at the annual meeting of the Michigan Reading Association, Grand Rapids, MI.

Ikeda, M., & Takeuchi, O. (2006). Clarifying the differences in learning EFL reading strategies: An analysis of portfolios. *System, 34*, 384-398.

Ling, S. (2011). Investigating Chinese English majors' use of reading strategies. Kristianstad University Sweden.

McNamara, D. S. (2009). The importance of teaching reading strategies. Perspectives on Language and Literacy, 35, 34–38.

Mokhtari, K., & Reichard, C. A. (2002). Assessing students' metacognitive awareness of reading strategies. *Journal of Educational Psychology. 94* (2), 249-259.

Mokhtari, K., & Sheorey, R. (2002). Measuring ESL' student's awareness of reading strategies. *Journal of Developmental Education, 25* (3), 2-10.

Saukah, A., & Cahyono, A. E. (2015). National Exam in Indonesia and its implications to the teaching and learning of English. *Jurnal Penelitian dan Evaluasi Pendidikan*, *19* (2), 243-255