

Students' Difficulties in Reading Comprehension at English for Food Technology

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Abstract

English for Food Technology (EFT) is one of the subjects which should be learnt in the third semester by students majoring Food and Technology Department. Most of the students find some difficulties in reading comprehension since they do not have background knowledge related to the new vocabularies. The purpose of this study was to describe the difficulties encountered by students in learning English for Food Technology especially in reading comprehension. This study employed qualitative design. There were 11 students who have passed English for Food Technology recruited as the sample of research. The data were collected by using questionnaire, test, and interview. The data were analyzed descriptively. The result of this research showed that students' difficulties in learning English for Food Technology were unfamiliar words, lack of background knowledge, and complex syntax. It is expected that the lecturer give motivation and apply various teaching method so the students can be motivated in learning English for Food Technology.

Keywords: *English for Food Technology, Reading Comprehension, Students' difficulties*

Introduction

English for Specific Purpose (ESP) is a lesson used by non-English major students. Hutchinson and Waters (1994) said that ESP is an English teaching approach where the topics taught and the teaching methods are based on the reasons why the learning wants to learn English. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has different approach and assumptions with General English (GE). The purpose of ESP is the students are able to master English in the field of what they are learning. For example engineering students will learn about English related to engineer or accounting students will learn English related to vocabularies about economy. It also happens to students majoring in food technology, they will learn English related to food technology.

For students majoring in food technology, English for Specific Purpose is outlined in the form of EFT (English for Food Technology) subject. Based on the syllabus, the aim of EFT subject is the students are able to communicate English in the food technology context such as food processing, food product, chemical composition of the product etc. Looking at the purpose of the subject, English for Food Technology (EFT) introduce

many new vocabularies related to the food technology. They must find the information through reading a text.

The students are expected to mastery the language skill such as speaking, writing, listening, and reading. One of those skills which is difficult encountered by the students is reading comprehension. Reading is an interactive process between a reader and a text which leads to automaticity or reading fluency. In this process, the reader interacts dynamically with the text as she/he tries to elicit the meaning and where various kinds of knowledge are being used (Rochman, 2018). Satriani (2018) stated that by reading the students of first semester will obtain variety information that has never been known all the events, whether in the past, present, or future events. It shows that reading is the first step to know something. Through reading comprehension, learners can provide new experiences that will serve as the foundation for knowledge (Syafrizal & Yuliantini, 2022)

In teaching and learning process, the students found some difficulties since English is not their first language. Some students were hard to comprehend some new food technology terminologies. English for Food Technology combines the materials from general English and food technology materials. Food Technology department in Institute of Technology and Health Bali was established in 2019. There hasn't been graduated students yet. There were 11 students who have passed English for Food Technology. Based on the interview, the students stated that they found some difficulties in reading comprehension. It is caused by they do not understand the meaning of new vocabularies. Besides that, the students also feel bored if they have to read a long text. Generally, long text will be contained with complex sentences. These difficulties will influence the students' outcomes. They will not optimal in receiving the materials.

The research has been done related to the students' difficulties in reading comprehension. Satriani (2018) conducted research on Reading Comprehension Difficulties Encountered by English Students of Universitas Islam Riau. The findings showed that new words and long texts were seen by the students as a major obstacle to comprehend a reading text. Meanwhile, Prihantini (2020) conducted research an analysis of students' difficulties in reading comprehension at SMA Negeri 1 Sukodadi Lamongan. It was found that most of the students had difficulties in creative comprehension. The factor of students' difficulties was inadequate instruction presented by the teacher, lack of students' interest, and vocabulary difficulties. There were some factors from the students themselves which influence students' difficulties in reading such the students who were still spelling and have not been able to read fluently and completely (Nasution et al., 2022).

In order to solve those problems, the lecturer need to know the students' problem in learning English for Food Technology (EFT) especially in reading comprehension. This information will make the lecturer know the appropriate teaching method given to the students. The lecturer is expected to implement innovative and creative teaching activities to make the students feel happy in learning language. This study aims to identify reading comprehension difficulties faced by students in learning EFT and to identify the students' perception on difficulties in learning EFT. This research is considered necessary to be done as information material which can later be used to improve the concept of effective English learning for students who are not from the English department (ESP learners).

Method

This research employed qualitative design. Qualitative design is a method of choice when a direct description of the desired phenomenon is explained (Moleong, 2014). According to Moleong (2014) descriptive research is a method of research with trying to picture out and interprets the object as in the fact. So, this descriptive research has purpose to describe systematically about the fact and the characteristics of difficulties faced by students in learning English for Food Technology. The subjects of the research were 11 students who have passed EFT subject.

The data were collected by using questionnaire, test and interview. The questionnaires were given to the students to identify students' difficulties. The questionnaire used close ended questions and open ended questions. Open ended question is used to find out more about what is difficult for the respondent so that he gets an unexpected answer. Close ended question is used to get a short answer. After that, they were given reading test to know which questions they did not understand. The interview were given to the students and lecturer to get more details.

The data were analyzed descriptively based on Miles and Huberman. There are three activities on data analysis such as data reducing, data displayed, and conclusion (Miles & Huberman, 1994). First, the data were categorized based on the difficulties in learning English for Food Technology. After reducing the data, then it was displayed. The data were displayed in the form of table. In presenting data, the researcher describe the data in the form of description. The last step was conclusion drawing. This conclusions were taken from the result of data displayed.

Result

The students were given questionnaires to know their problem related to reading comprehension. The result of the questionnaire can be seen on table 1.

Table 1. Students Perception on difficulties reading comprehension

Reading Problems	Always	Often	Sometime	Occasionally	Never
Unfamiliar Words	72.7%	18.2%	9.1%	0	0
Background Knowledge	81.8%	18.2%	0	0	0
Complex Syntax	100%	0	0	0	0

Table 1 showed that 72.7% respondents stated that they always have unfamiliar words when reading a text. Unfamiliar words indicated that they found some new vocabularies related to the text they read. When the students had unfamiliar words, it would disturb their reading process. Meanwhile, there were 9.1% respondent stated sometime found unfamiliar words. It was caused by the student have had good English. The student might be eager to learn English.

There were 81.8% respondents stated that they always have problem in background knowledge. Reading comprehension was related to someone's background knowledge. When the students understand about the topic, they will easily comprehend the text. Moreover, 100% of the students stated that they always have problem in

complex syntax. Complex syntax means that the sentences consist of dependent clause and independent clause. It usually become obstacles for the students to understand the meaning of the text. Besides, long sentences also become problem for the students.

Discussion

Unfamiliar Words

It was clear that vocabulary is perceived as the greatest difficulty. It was caused by the students were unfamiliar with food and technology terminologies. Eventhough the students were introduced the word when teaching and learning process, they still cannot answer the questions because the words were rarely used in their daily conversation. It made them did not remember the meaning of the words in their first language. According to Nurjanah (2018) foreign language learner are limited by their knowledge of the grammar, vocabulary of the target language and must struggle to understand the content. It means vocabularies become the main important when the students learn a new language. One of the example that examine their understanding of new vocabulary is as follows:

The process of preserving the product for several weeks and curing changes the color, flavor and texture of the product is called.....

- A. Canning
- B. Freezing
- C. Pickling
- D. High Pressure
- E. Heating

Answer: C

The question emphasized on the students' mastery in vocabulary. The question might be difficult for the students who never read or understand the meaning of the words. Unfamiliar words can be solved by practicing diligently. The students need to read many information from the text and use the words that they found. That is the way they can understand the unfamiliar words.

Background Knowledge

The students' background knowledge influences their reading comprehension. In reading, the prior knowledge can be about the topic of the text, the structure of the language used, and vocabulary. For example, the teacher gives a text about football game. The students who like football very much will be easier to understand the text. They have carried out the schema about football. Besides that, they also understand the technical vocabulary about football such as striker, midfielder, free kick, diving, etc. However, the students who do not have background knowledge about football will feel difficult to understand the text. They do not have any idea about the technical vocabulary because they have limited prior knowledge about football.

In this case, students majoring in food and technology did not only come from vocational school but also senior high school students. It means that they did not get some information about food and technology terminologies in English. Therefore, when answering the questions, they felt difficulties. Background knowledge can facilitate or enhance transfer of learning. It showed that having background knowledge such as structure or vocabularies influences students to acquire language. Therefore, the

lecturer should use reading material which is contextual and close to students' daily life. The example of asking their background knowledge is as follows:

In the product label, there should be local business entity and country origin means...

- A. The net quantity
- B. The name and address of local importer and country of origin
- C. The ingredients of the product
- D. the date which food should not be consumed
- E. Nutrition claim

Answer: B

The question is one of the examples that showed the students need to know the background knowledge. It talks about the product label which related to food and technology department. The students must have knowledge when they are reading the text about it.

Complex Syntax

Students have difficulty in understanding complex sentence structures. Although students may be skilled enough reading simple texts, they often have problem with the complex sentence structure. The surface level features such as syntactic or lexical elements are important that affect reading ability (Souriyavongsa et al., 2013). It means that the structure of the sentence will affect the students' ability in understanding the meaning of the sentence. In general, long sentences will make the students less interest to read the text. The example of complex syntax can be seen as follows:

The activity involves transporting food from producers to consumers which allowing purchase of such items to be more efficient is called.....

- A. Food distribution
- B. Food production
- C. Food wrapping
- D. Food selecting
- E. Food consuming

Answer: A

The question is one of the examples which contain complex syntax. Complex syntax means there is dependent clause and independent clause. In the sentences, there is conjunction 'which'. It combines two sentences. The complex syntax can be difficult for the students because it has long sentences. The students will be bored to read the sentences.

Based on the result, there were three factors that influence students' difficulties in reading comprehension such as unfamiliar words, background knowledge, and complex syntax. At the word level, students have difficulty choosing the meaning of the word needed. According to Satriani (2018) the students who fail to read words accurately, remember word just read, understand phrase and sentences fail to comprehend the text. In other word, word-level problems are potentially the most important in creating reading failures because they lead both to word reading problems themselves and to derivative comprehension problems.

The second is background knowledge. When the students do not have the information about the text, it will influence their interest in reading. Having good interest concentration would allow the students to gather information from the text or from the teacher's explanation about the lesson in the class (Aida et al., 2022). In this problem, using strategies in reading comprehension could make the students easy to

gain and also gather information from the text. If the students lack in using strategies in reading comprehension, they will need more time to understanding reading text as correctly.

Finally, the complex syntax is also a reason why the students failed to comprehend the text correctly. The sentences in reading text too long or uses complicated sentences. Moreover, students can be successful or fail in reading depending on the type of text being read. As a study conducted by Shehu (2015) found that readers will face difficulties in reading when they are unfamiliar with the particular language structure and features of the text and then their language-processing ability will break down.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the research, it can be concluded that the difficulties of reading comprehension for the students majoring Food and Technology in EFT subject were unfamiliar words, background knowledge, and complex syntax. Having unfamiliar words or lack of vocabulary will make it too difficult to gain the meaning of reading comprehensions. Besides that, the students do not have sufficient background knowledge to understand the texts. The lessons have not been learnt properly because they never read a similar text before. The last is the complexity of sentence influence students' difficulties in reading comprehension.

It is suggested for the further research to find out students' difficulties in another language skills such as listening, writing and speaking. Besides that, the researcher can also do further research in terms of English for Spesific Purpose.

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