THE INFLUENCE OF CONTEXT CLUES MASTERY IN STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION OF DESCRIPTIVE TEXT AT STKIP "TAPANULI SELATAN" PADANGSIDIMPUAN

Melwan Ady Rezki Harahap, Mukhaiyar, Hamzah
Language Education Program, State University of Padang

Abstrak: *Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi keefektifan context clues terhadap pemahaman membaca teks deskripsi mahasiswa program studi pendidikan bahasa Inggris pada semester tiga di STKIP "Tapanuli Selatan" Padangsidimpuan. Selain itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk melihat jenis context clues yang mana yang lebih mudah di pahami mahasiswa dalam mengidentifikasi kata baru. Penelitian ini adalah penelitian experimen. Populasi penelitian adalah mahasiswa semester tiga pada program studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris STKIP "Tapanuli Selatan" Padangsidimpuan tahun akademik 2012-2013. Sampel dari penelitian ini diambil dengan cara cluster random sampling yang terdiri dari tiga kelas paralel dan homogeny yaitu kelas A, B, dan C. Sampel dibagi menjadi dua kelas yaitu kelas A sebagai kelas experimen yang diajarkan dengan context clues sedangkan kelas B sebagai kelas kontrol diajar dengan menggunakan kamus. Tes pilihan berganda digunakan untuk mengukur pemahaman membaca siswa untuk memperoleh data dengan pretest dan posttest. Untuk melihat keefektifan dari context clues, data di analisis dengan menggunakan t_{test}. Dari analisis data, ditemukan bahwa mahasiswa yang diajar dengan context clues lebih baik pemahaman membaca daripada menggunakan kamus. Untuk memahami kata sulit, mahasiswa lebih mudah dalam penentuan example clues. Dengan kata lain, mengajar reading dengan menggunakan context clues memiliki pengaruh yang siknifikan jika dibandingkan dengan yang menggunakan kamus. Kesimpulannya, hasil nilai membaca mahasiswa dari kelas eksperimen dan control berbeda.*

Key words: context clues, reading comprehension, descriptive text

INTRODUCTION

Reading is one of the most important skills to get information or new knowledge. The students read when they need some information or to entertain themselves. Most of current information has been found through electronic or printed media, such as: internet, books, journals, articles, and newspaper. It means the students should read from many kinds of sources to get more information in every field of study.

The student must know a kind of text. Such as narrative, descriptive, recount, expository, report, etch. The students is easy understand the text if they know the structure and function of the text. It means the text have some characteristics. Descriptive text is written to explain or to describe. Most of the printed media has been written in descriptive text. The uthors use the descriptive to give

1

information, to explain, to describe, or to persuade the reader.

Although reading comprehension is an important skill in developing English language ability, most of students at English Department of STKIP "Tapanuli Selatan" Padangsidimpuan do not have any interest to comprehend the English materials. They are passive or lazy students and they do not have role to read more reading materials. As the result, they have low skill in reading comprehension.

The process of teaching reading comprehension and learning activities in the classroom depends on written material such as textbooks, journals, articles, etc. It means that the learners should have a good ability in reading in order to comprehend what they read from descriptive texts. Related to teaching English as a foreign language, lecturers should motivate their students to read English texts by using appropriate strategies and technique in reading in order to make the students are able to comprehend what they read in the target language. The appropriate strategies in teaching reading comprehension should be implemented by the English lecturers in teaching and learning processes especially for the English as foreign language learners, because applying good strategies and techniques in teaching and learning process may improve students' reading comprehension achievement.

Understanding the context can help the students to improve their reading skill, whereas it can make them easier to find out contains, messages and details information. The context can be identified through some clue words or phrases, such as: "for instance" for example, "because" for cause and effect idea, "although" for contrast idea. Based on the clue words, the students can identify the context directly. And then, when they understand the context, they can guess the meaning of unknown words, and then hopefully can catch the ideas, news, message or information from the text.

In this research, the writer uses context clues to determining the unfamiliar words to improve students' reading comprehension of descriptive text. Larson (1984:56) says that descriptive text is the text that lists the characteristics of something. Axelrod (1985:366) says that descriptive essay is a type of writing that draws picture with words describing not only something physical and concrete but also feeling of thought. McWhorter (1986:133) says that descriptive articles and essay present ideas by providing details about characteristics of people , place, and things.

Based on the previous explanation, there are some purposes of descriptive text. First, it is to engage a reader's attention, to create characters, to set a mood or create, atmosphere and to bring writing to life. Second, it is to describe a particular person, place or thing. Third, it is to appeal readers' senses, to help readers create mental picture, or to make readers feel a certain way. Last, it is to see, the object, person, and situation by giving description. In short, a descriptive text is a text that is used to describe a particular person, place and thing in detail.

Good readers can comprehend a text by understanding sentences and texts. In

comprehending text, vocabularies are very important to understand the new words. It means they can comprehend ideas, follow arguments, and detect implications. They know most of the words in text already and they can also determine the meaning of many of the unfamiliar words from the context. Without it, the students will find some difficulties.

Based on the facts mentioned above, it can be assumed that the students have problem in their reading comprehension. They have difficulties in comprehending many sources of English text. So, the lecturers must find the solution or strategy to solve problem in reading comprehension. One of them is using context clues. This strategy is one of the way that can be used by lecturer or the teacher to improve the students' ability in reading comprehension. It can be used to find the meaning of unfamiliar words in the reading text and to make students easier to comprehend the text itself.

In this research, the researcher focuses on the application of a teaching strategy for mastering the words to improve the students' reading comprehension. The strategy in teaching reading comprehension is context clues. Using Context clues will help students in understanding of difficult or unfamiliar words. It means the students will easy in comprehend the various English text.

Reading is one of the important English skills for students to learn because reading can provide some information for them. The interaction between the writer and the reader is made possible via text. It is through the text that the writer encodes his message, and it is also through the text that the reader gets the meaning of the message by decoding it reading is the process of interpreting the symbols of the written words.

Reading is the process of understanding written texts. According to McWhorter (1992:165) states that reading is a complex process; it involves much more than adding word meaning together. Reading involves not only understanding ideas, but also recognizing the relationships and structures among ideas. Next, Dorn and Carla (2005:197) say that Reading is a complex process involving a network of cognitive actions that work together to construct meaning. A reader's comprehension is influenced by a range of internal factors, including perceptions, beliefs, motivation, and problem-solving strategies. Than, Pang et al. (2003:45) defines that reading is about understanding written texts. It is a complex activity that involves both perception and thought. Reading consists of two related processes: word recognition and comprehension. Word recognition refers to the process of perceiving how written symbols correspond to one's spoken language. While, comprehension is the process of making sense of words, sentences and connected text.

In fact, the ability to identify words accurately and quickly *out of context* is a characteristic of good readers. Their word recognition is too rapid and automatic for context usage to play a meaningful part. This is true for both familiar and unfamiliar words. Instead, context is a mechanism in the comprehension process.

Similarly, Mikulecky and Jeffries (1996:29) state that reader try to guess the meaning of unknown

word, the reader use the text surrounding the word-the context. Also, Chin (2004:78) states that the reader can also learn strategy for discovering the meaning of unfamiliar words. The strategy is recognized as different kinds of context clues that enable to make an educated guess about the meaning of an unfamiliar word in reading. Next, Hiebert and Khamil (2005:89) state that students who were taught specific types of context clues were able to use contextual analysis to unlock the meanings of unfamiliar words.

Pennock (1979:36) states that context clues are essentially, a hint about the pronunciation and/or meaning of an unfamiliar word. The hint, or clue, is perceived by examining the preceding and following words and sentences. By studying these surrounding words and their relationships to the unknown word, a reader may be able to gain additional insight. Further Dorn and Carla Soffos (2005:197) Context clues involve the linguistic (e.g., words, phrases, sentences) and nonlinguistic information (e.g., illustrations, typographic features) available surrounding an unfamiliar word, which a reader can use to infer the word's meaning. Instruction in context clues typically involves teaching students to use linguistic information to predict the meaning of a word.

McWhorter (1986:4) states context clues can help the reader to figure out the meanings of unfamiliar words. He divides context clues into four types: definition, examples, contrast, and inferences. The first is *definition clues.* Many times a word is immediately defined following its use. Sometimes a formal definition

of the type a reader might find in a dictionary is included. At other times the idea may be informally restated, or a synonym, a word that means the same meaning, is offered. These definitions are usually set apart from the main part of a sentence by commas or parentheses. They are *means, is refers to and can be defined as.* The second is *example clues.* It is to determine the meaning of an unknown word is to look for examples that explain or clarify it. The examples are giving signals by certain words or phrases. Command signals used here include *such as, including, for example, for instance, and to illustrate.* The third is contrast clues. It is sometimes possible to determine the meaning of an unknown word from a word or phrase in the context that has an opposite meaning. The signal words used here are *despite, however, on the other hand, although, but even thought, rather, while, yet, and nevertheless.* The last is inference clues. Many times of a reader can determine the meaning of a word by guessing or figuring it out from the information that is given in the text. Sometimes a reader's knowledge or experiences can help him/her figure out the meaning of an unknown word.

Next, Zainil (2008: 5) states: " understanding context clues" function to recognize the clues and understanding the meaning of unfamiliar words, they can be grouped into: definition clues, example clues, cause and effect clues, contrast clues, restatement clues, and modifier clues. Then, he states that understanding a sentence can be developed through comprehending the meaning of punctuations, context clues, core part

7

of a simple sentence and complicated sentence. The context clues are restatement and modifier.

Furthermore, McWhorter (1986:133) says that there are four steps in understanding descriptive text. First, Students identify the subject of the essay (ask yourself who or what is being describe). Second, students pay close attention to the writer's choice of words. This is because the writer often paints a picture with words and through word choice, a writer often paints a picture with words and through word choice, a writer tries to create and attitude or feeling. Therefore, students try to identify that feeling. Third, students look for overall impression the writer is trying to create by some questions, such as what do all these details, taken together, suggest about the subject?, what is the writer trying to say?, how am I supposed to feel about the subject? Forth, students pay particular attention to the first and last paragraph. There they are likely to find the most clues about the writer's main points and purpose for writing.

It can be concluded that descriptive text is a type of text which describes thing, person, place, object or event, etc.

Based on the previous explanation the purpose of this research were: first, to find out the effectiveness of context clues and dictionary in reading comprehension of descriptive text to the third semester students of English department of STKIP "Tapanuli Selatan" Padangsidimpuan. Second to find out which give more influence upon the student reading comprehension, using context clues or using dictionary to the third semester students of English

department of STKIP "Tapanuli Selatan" Padangsidimpuan. Third, to find out what type of context clues is the easiest for the students to identify measuring of a new vocabulary.

METHOD

This research is an experimental research. Gay and Airasian (2000:367) say that experimental research in the only type of research that can test hypothesis to establish cause and effect relationship. The population of this research is the third grade students of STKIP " Tapanuli Selatan" Padangsidimpuan of 2012/2013 academic year. The sample of this research are class A and B. The instrument of collecting the data was quantitative data. It was multiple choices test consist of 30 items. The data was analysis by

Groups	Pretest					Posttest			
	N	Highest	Lowest	Mean	SD	Highest	Lowest	Mean	SD
Experimental	38	63	33	47.45	7.97	97	63	81.89	8.50
Control	38	63	27	46.63	10.24	90	63	77.55	6.93

using SPSS 17.00 version for windows.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The objectives of this research are to find out the effectiveness of context clues and dictionary in reading comprehension of descriptive text. Besides that, this research also was purposed at

determining what type of context clues is the easiest for the students to identify measuring of a new vocabulary to the third semester students of English department of STKIP "Tapanuli Selatan" Padangsidimpuan.

1. Students' score of Pre-test and Post-test of Reading Comprehension of Descriptive Text both experimental and control group.

Based on the result or the test of reading comprehension of descriptive text, it can be seen that the result of pretest and posttest of the test as follows:

Table 1
The result of Pretest and Posttest of Reading Comprehension both Experimental and Control Group

The data on the table above shows that the result of pre-test on experimental group is not different with the control group. On the highest score both of the groups got the same score was 63. It means that both of the group have the similar result on reading comprehension. On the other hand, the result of the post test, the data shows that there is a significant difference between experimental group and control group. On the highest score both of the groups got the difference 7 scores. In mean score, both the groups got differences 4.34 scores and on the standard deviation both groups got differences 1.57. It can be concluded that there is difference score of the post-test between the experimental group and control group.

Based on the students' score on reading descriptive text in the experimental group, to know to what extent context clues can influence students reading comprehension of descriptive text at STKIP "Tapanuli Selatan" Padangsidimpuan.

2. Difference Analyses of the Experimental Group and the Control Group

To examine the significant difference of the students' post-test in the experimental group and the control group, the statistical analysis of group statistics and independent sample test were used. The result of the data analysis can be seen as follow:

Table. 2
Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	experimental	81.89	38	8.507	1.380
	control	77.55	38	6.931	1.124

The mean of reading comprehension of descriptive text achievement of the students' post-test in the experimental group was 81.89 and 77.55 for the reading achievement of the students in control group.

In analyzing the differences of the experimental and the control group after taking the post-test, the statistical analysis of independent sample test was used. The t-test in post test of the students in the experimental group and control group was 2.806. The value of two tail significance was .008. It can be compare to t-table was 2.680. It means that there is an influence of using context clues in teaching reading comprehension to the

students' achievement in the third semester at STKIP "Tapanuli Selatan" Padangsidimpuan.

Some experts has described and defined context clues in reading comprehension: First, McWhorter (1986:2) suggests that one of techniques that will help the students to improve their vocabulary mastery is using several types of context clues to figure out the meanings of unfamiliar words. It is clear, through understanding context clues can help the students to understand unfamiliar words or difficult words. The relationship between word knowledge and comprehension is unequivocal. It means the connection between word knowledge, concept development, and prior knowledge affects the reading comprehension.

Third, Zainil (2006:1) states that understanding sentences can be used as a comprehensible input through comprehending context clues. It means that through understanding context clues, reader can understanding sentences and will be easier to understanding reading text as whole. In other words, context clues can help the students to increase their reading skills.

Based on this study, it was found that context clues will help students succeed in comprehending English text. In relation to this study, it is found that teaching context clues is provided as an effective strategy for teaching reading comprehension. This is also indicated by the increasing of students' reading achievement during the application of context clues in the treatment to experimental group of this study. In other words, the students who are teaching by using context clues is more easies to understand the descriptive text.

Unfortunately, teachers tend to teach the students uncommunicatively. They tend to ask the students to open the dictionary to find out the meaning of the words. This strategy makes the students more passive and do not creative for the students activities.

CONCLUSION

Based on the result of the study, the students who were taught through the context clues had higher reading comprehension achievement than those who were taught using the conventional technique (using dictionary). Than the students more easy to identify the examples clues in comprehending of context clues.

Although the result of this study indicated the positive influence, teaching reading comprehension applied context clues to students' reading comprehension achievement at STKIP "Tapanuli Selatan" Padangsidimpuan, the finding of this research cannot be generalized to all of the students of STKIP "Tapanuli Selatan" Padangsidimpuan due to the fact that the researcher still used experimental as the research method (non-random) with a very small sample size. In other words, context clue can be used as alternative technique to a better students' reading comprehension. In simple, by applying context clues in teaching reading comprehension of descriptive text gain better result on students' comprehension.

SUGGESTION

In this section, the writer offers suggestion for: (1) the English teachers, (2) the students of English Department of STKIP "Tapanuli Selatan" Padangsidimpuan, and (3)

future researchers. Firstly, English teachers in teaching reading is better for the lecturer to teach context clues, in order the students can understand the use context clues in reading activities perfectly.

Secondly, the students should increase their habit in reading especially learn and use their understanding of context clues in reading activities to increase their reading comprehension and minimize the use of dictionary in understanding the reading text.
Finally, since this study was conducted with a limited number of STKIP 'Tapanuli Selatan" Padangsidimpuan students, other further researchers need to be conducted using a bigger sample size, a variety of texts, different kinds of comprehension measure and other types of instructional strategy regarding with the context clues strategy, which might yield further evidence to contribute further support.

Notes: This article is written based on the writers' thesis at Graduate Program of State University of Padang and through well advised by honorable advisors: Prof. Dr. Mukhaiyar, M.Pd. and Dr. Hamzah, MA.,MM.

REFERENCES

Axelrod, Rise B. 1985. *Guide to Write.* New Jersey: St. Martin's Press.

Chin, Beverly Ann, 2004. *Wiley Key to Success How to Build A Super Vocabulary.* New Jersey: Book Builders LLC.

Dorns, Linda J and C. Soffos, 2005. *Teaching for Deep Comprehension.* Maine: Stenhouse Publishers Portland

Gay and P. Airasian, 2000. *Educational Research*

Larson, Mildred. 1984. *A Meaning Based Translation Guide to Cross Language Equivalence.* Lanham, MD: University Press of America

Hiebert, Elfrieda H and ML Khamil, 2005. *Teaching and Learning Vocabulary Bringing Research and Practice.* London: Laurence Erlbaum Associates.

McWhorter, Kathleen T, 1986. *Guide to College Reading.* Toronto: Little Brown & Company.

——————————— 1992. *Efficient and Flexible Reading* (Third Edition). New York: HarperCollins Publisher.

Mikulecky, Beatrice S and L Jeffries. 1996. *More Reading Power. Reading Faster. Thinking Skills. Reading for Pleasure. Comprehension Skills.* Longman: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company

Pang, Elizabeth. SA Muaka, EB. Bernhard, ML. Kamil. 2003. *Teaching Reading. IAE Educational Practice Series.* Chicago: University of Illinois.

Pennock, Clifford. 1979. *Reading Comprehension at Four Linguistics Levels.* New Jersey:

13

International Reading Association, Inc.

Zainil. 2008. *Actional Functional Model (Good Language Learner Strategies and* *Communicative Teaching).* Padang: Sukabina Offset.

_____ 2010. *Actional Functional Model (All in One).* Padang: Sukabina Offset.