

# STUDENTS' PERCEPTION TOWARD THEIR READING DIFFICULTIES OF DIFFERENT GENRES

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## *Abstract:*

*Students of English Language Teaching Program are required to have the ability to comprehend different kinds of texts or genres. However, their reading ability as reflected in Reading courses and other courses is low. This paper is aimed at describing the students' perception toward their reading difficulties of different genres. The data presented in this paper are partially derived from the data collected through a descriptive research conducted in 2009/2010 at the English Department of FBSS, State University of Padang. The instrument of the research were a reading test, which was to determine the level of the students in genre awareness and reading comprehension, and interview to gain students' perception on their reading difficulties. Data were analysed descriptive-qualitatively and descriptive-quantitatively. From the result of the test, the students thus are categorised into high, middle and low achievers. The result of the interview showed that students with different level of comprehension had different difficulties in understanding texts with different genres because of some factors. Thus, improving the syllabus on Reading courses and other related courses such as Writing, TEFL dan Linguistics are considered important.*

*Keywords: perception, genre awareness, reading comprehension*

## A. INTRODUCTION

Learning to read is essential in academic settings. For language students such as those who learn English as a foreign language, reading is a subject they have to take as it is one of the compulsory subjects in their curriculum. Students who major in English teaching have bigger responsibility because they learn how to read not only for themselves but also for their future students.

Reading various kinds of texts, which are termed as genres, is a skill that the students of the Teaching English Study Program have to acquire. To reach this goal, the curriculum of English Language Teaching Study Program of UNP offers four compulsory reading subjects. The skills are graded in such a way that each is prerequisite to another. In *Reading 1* to *Advanced Reading*, the students are trained to read several different text types in different level of complexities and length. In *Extensive Reading*, they are expected to

be able to comprehend English articles and books (Kurikulum Jurusan Bahasa dan Sastra Inggris UNP, 2008).

In order to reach the goal of teaching reading as stated in the curriculum, the ELTSP of UNP has done some efforts. The teaching team keeps improving the syllabus in accordance with the students' needs and the development of theories in language teaching of reading. The team also keeps improving their techniques of teaching and the teaching materials. In addition to that, the lecturers and the students conducted a number of studies related to reading such as students' ability in comprehending a certain kind of text, the students' reading problems, and teachers teaching techniques. To some extent, the results of the research may have contributed to the improvement of the teaching and learning process and results of reading.

However, the results of the teaching reading are not yet satisfactory. Based on the explanation given by the lecturers who

teach reading and other subjects that assign students to read, the students' reading ability is low. It is evident in their difficulties in comprehending materials of other subjects such as Research Methodology, Linguistics, Curriculum, and Literature. The students' low reading ability was also reflected in their difficulties in understanding references they need for their theses or papers. The researchers often found that the students who wrote theses and papers under their guidance showed their low reading ability. Some research findings indicate that the students' problems in reading vary from text to text.

The question why this could happen is not easy to answer. There are some intertwined factors which may cause it. First, there is an indication that the basic entry level of the students' reading ability is low. This should be understandable as the high school graduates' reading ability is known to be as indicated by the average scores they obtain in the national examination. Another possible reason behind this is the students' low linguistic competence which may influence their reading comprehension. Still, the reading materials and the teachers' teaching and the students' reading strategies are not yet effective enough to help the students to read well. Thus, to reach the goal of teaching and learning reading, some improvement is needed. The improvement should cover several aspects mentioned above. This will be effective if the roots of the problems can be determined. This paper tries to unveil the causes of the reading difficulties as perceived by the students based on a research conducted at the English Department of FBSS, State University of Padang in 2009/2010.

### 1. Perception

People hear, taste, see, or feel stimuli by means of sense. This process occurs spontaneously and enables people to construct, interpret, and make conclusions about information they obtain. This is what is called perception. Perception is defined as a process of making inferences. Through

inferences, people can construct their own vision of reality which may be distorted by past experiences, education, cultural values, and role requirements. In line with this, Desiderato in Rakhmat (2005:1) defines perception as an experience about an object, event, or relationship that are gained by concluding information and interpreting messages.

Thus, before one can learn anything, perception must take place. One has to become aware of it through one of the senses. In essence then, perception means interpretation. Of course, lack of experience may cause a person to misinterpret what he has seen or heard. In other words, perception represents our apprehension of a present situation in terms of our past experiences (Plessis in <http://www.articledashboard.com>). In fact, Plessis adds that perception is one of the four skills for successful learning beside concentration, memory and logical thinking.

Ruch (1959:243) states that through our perceptual processes, we gain the kinds of information about our environment that we need for effective adjustment. He adds that this perception activity uses both the sensations (sensing and thinking) aroused by the stimuli and the learning gained from past experience. Three processes take place in this activity: receptor processes, symbolic processes, and affective processes. When the stimuli occur, the receptor processes are brought into operation. While the receptor processes are happening, the stimuli is brought to mind through symbolic processes based on someone's background knowledge. Lastly, affective processes operate to make the perception (conclusion) of the stimuli received. These two processes cannot work separately since they are connected each other and are continuing. This shows us that there is a complex activity in making a perception.

There are factors that determine our perception, they are functional factors and structural factors (Krech and Crutchfield in Rakhmat, 2005: 51). Functional factors are derived from need, past experience and others which are called personal factors.

The one that determine the perception is not the kind or the form of stimuli, but characteristics of the person who gives response to the stimuli. Let us take an illustration as example. Someone who is starving will tend to choose rice and meat first rather than having a coca cola or soda. It is his biological needs that lead him to make such perception. It is his need that plays a role in making the perception. In addition, other personal factors that can influence someone's perception are mental readiness, emotional condition and cultural background.

Structural factors come solely from physical stimuli and effects of nerves which it gives on an individual nerve system. Kohler in Rakhmat (2005) says that when we perceive something, we perceive it as a whole. We cannot examine separated facts but we must examine it as a whole connection. Furthermore, we need to examine the context, the environment, and the problem in understanding someone. Since there is a structure in a context, people tend to find structures in stimuli which can be categorized based on closeness and similarity.

Another factor which influences perception is attention (Rakhmat, 2005:52). Andersen (in Rakhmat, 2005) defines it as a mental process that happens when a stimuli or series of stimuli protrude in our consciousness when the other stimuli get weak. Stimuli are observed since it has prominent characteristics: moves, stimuli intensity, novelty and repetition. We tend to see something that moves, colorful, new, and repeating events that something flat or not prominent. As Hilgard (1962:186) expresses, we see signs or pictures instead of spot light; we hear music or words instead of single pure tones. Thus, our attention can influence our perception.

An individual's ability to perceive a series of fragments as a whole object depends on many factors (Ruch, 1959: 237). The intelligence of the perceiving individual, his past experience, and his mental set (what he expects to see) are very important. As a rule, the more intelligent a

person is, the fewer details he needs to perceive a whole. So is with past experience. When we have seen or read information about a picture, the more likely we have no difficulty in seeing what this confusing picture represent.

The following situation (Plessis, 2006) will illustrate how perception correlates with previous experience: suppose a person parks his car and walks away from it while continuing to look back at it. As he goes further and further away from his car, it will appear to him as if his car is gradually getting smaller and smaller. In such a situation none of us, however, would gasp in horror and cry out, "My car is shrinking!" Although the sensory perception is that the car is shrinking rapidly, we do not interpret that the car is changing size. Through past experiences we have learned that objects do not grow or shrink as we walk toward or away from them. We have learned that their actual size remains constant, despite the illusion. Even when one is five blocks away from one's car and it seems no larger than one's fingernail, one would interpret it as that it is still one's car and that it hasn't actually changed size. Past experience determines one's perception.

To conclude, perception is a process of knowing everything around us. Thus, it determines someone's success in learning. Perception is influenced by many factors, such as attention, personal or functional factors and structural factors. Everyone may have different perception toward something since they have different intelligence, needs, and past experiences. As a consequence, perception can be seen by asking someone about his or her past experiences as what was done in this study.

## 2. Genre and Genre Awareness

ESP theorists see genre as a class of structured communicative events employed by specific discourse communities whose members share broad social purpose. Genre analysis in ESP is often associated with the kind of move analysis exemplified by Swales (1990). This kind of analysis which is similar is the tradition of Systemic

Functional Linguistics (SFL). Communicative purpose is the key characteristic feature of a genre. Linguistic analysis in language teaching is also considered as an important part of genre analysis.

From the definitions above, genre can be simply defined as a product of a particular communicative event. As the communicative event has occurred and evolved in a certain discourse community, it has a reoccurrence structure that the community is familiar with. For instance, a report is a genre that is commonly used by academic discourse community. Report has a certain structure that the discourse community is familiar with, thus when they produce a report they will use that structure. The structure is known as generic or schematic structure.

Building on the understanding of genre, it can be said that genre is text type. The term 'text type' can be understood more easily than 'genre' by most teachers. The question now is what a text is. Feez (1998) suggests text as "a stretch of meaningful language". This means that; 1) a text is not limited by its length, 2) text can be in oral or written form, 3) it has to be meaningful, and 4) texts have various types. This conclusion is expected to shed light on our understanding about text.

Each genre (text type) has its own characteristics- its special purpose, generic structure, and language features. Genre analysis thus will show three important things, the purpose, the generic structure, and the lexicogrammatical features of a text. For instance, through an analysis of an exposition text, students will know that an exposition is a genre where the speaker/writer argues on an issue and intends to persuade readers to agree with him/her. Viewed from its generic structure, an exposition has a thesis statement, some arguments, and reiteration. It has some dominant language features such as use of passive voice, simple present, high frequency of modality. Since genre is closely related to social and cultural contexts (Martin, 1997; Christie, 1997) where one genre is different from another,

understanding the characteristics of a genre will help students to learn it efficiently and effectively.

Hyland (2004) states that genre analysis seeks to:

- identify how texts are structured in terms of functional stages or moves
- identify the features that characterize texts and that help realize their communicative purposes
- examine the understandings of those who write and read the genre
- discover how the genre relates to users' activities
- explain language choices in terms of social, cultural, and psychological contexts
- provide insights for language teaching

In ESP, as Hyland (2004) contends, the communicative purpose has always played an essential part in analyzing genre. The procedures usually include identifying the texts potentially important to learners, identifying the purposes/functions of the texts, and analyzing the structure of the language.

Quoting Kress, Wallace (1992:114) draws on a framework for a critical reading procedure. The questions raised as a starting point are: Why is the topic being written about? And How is this topic being written about? The first question answers the purpose of the text, and the second one deals with the generic structure and the features of the text.

Let's take a look at an example of analysis which can help readers comprehend a text. The text is an exposition; the purpose is to argue for or against an issue. The generic structure of the text consists of thesis statement, arguments, and reiteration. The dominant language features include the frequent use of passive construction, clause complex, simple present tense, and modality (Hyland, 2004). At the beginning of the text, the writer should state his/her thesis explicitly. The thesis shows whether the writer agrees or disagrees with the issue (i.e. showing his/her position). It has to be supported with arguments, which also have to be elabo-

rated. At the end, the writer should emphasize the thesis, which is known as reiteration. If the students are exposed to the features of an exposition text and given exercises how to comprehend that particular text, they will be able to understand it well.

With genre knowledge, the students will be able to locate certain information they want obtain from the text. For example, if they want to find out the arguments the writer gives, they look at the middle part of the text. If they want to find out the reasons behind a particular argument, they should focus on the paragraph where the argument is stated.

Text types exist in different languages and different discourse communities. Some are those we often encounter in our daily life and use in our communication, while others are not. To understand and to produce the texts in our first language, we still often find difficulties. Thus, it should be understandable why understanding and producing the texts in another language are more difficult. For that reason, the students who learn another language such as English should recognize genres/types of texts in order to understand and be able to produce them well.

### 3. Reading Comprehension

Reading is a receptive language process. It is a psycholinguistic process in that it starts with a linguistic surface representation encoded by a writer and ends with meaning which the reader constructs. There is an interaction between language and thought in reading. The writer encodes thought as language and the reader decodes language to thought. Reading is not just extracting meaning from the text, but a process of connecting information in the text with the knowledge the reader brings to the process of reading. Reading, in this sense, is a "dialogue between the reader and the text (Grabe, 1991). According to this view, the reader reconstructs the meaning from written language by using the graphone, syntactic, and semantic systems of the language, but she merely uses cues from these three levels of language to

predict meaning, and, most important. Confirm those predictions by relating them to his or her past experiences and knowledge of the language.

According to Carrell (1988), the reader is not only an active participant in the reading process, making predictions and processing information, and also everything in his/her background knowledge plays a significant role in the process. His/her prior linguistic knowledge, and the level of proficiency, and background knowledge of the content area of the text as well as of the rhetorical structure area of text are also important.

According to Sheng (2000), reading is a process of communication from the writer to the reader, it involves the recognition of letters, words, phrases, and clauses, and in some respects, it can be considered a simpler process than comprehension. On the other hand, she further claims that comprehension is a process of negotiating understanding between the reader and the writer. It is a more complex psychological process and includes linguistic factors, such as phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic elements, and cognitive and emotional factors. The reader receives information from the author via the words, sentences, paragraphs, and so forth, and tries to understand the inner feelings of the writer.

Then, further processing of these ideas determines particular ideas as main ideas, then thematic generalizations out of the main idea, while top-down processing occurs when higher level of information, for example the general topic of the text helps readers identifies lower level information. This higher level of processing requires background knowledge to help decide what is important. Both bottom-up and top-down processing often occurs in reading comprehension and is called interactive processing. In this process, the reader interacts dynamically with the text as he/she tries to extract meaning and where various kinds of knowledge are being used through bottom-up and top-down processing.

In addition, Grabe (2009) classifies two levels of processing, namely lower level processing and higher order processing. The lower-level processing includes word recognition, syntactic parsing using grammatical information) and semantic-proposition encoding (building word meaning encoding, while the higher level processing includes model formation (what the text is about), situation- model building (how we decide to interpret the text, inferencing, executive-control processing (how we direct our attention) and strategic processing. He adds that the lower-level and higher level component processing provides an explanation for how to read and operate simultaneously and interact with each other at certain points.

Because of the complexity of reading process, Grabe (1991) argues that, in an attempt to understand and explain the fluent reading process, six component skills and knowledge should be taken into a consideration. They are 1) automatic recognition skills; 2) vocabulary and structural knowledge; 3) formal discourse and structure knowledge; 4) content/world knowledge; 5) synthesis and evaluation skills/strategies; and 6) metacognitive knowledge and skills in monitoring. Both Kirby and Stoller agree that word recognition is now widely accepted as the most important processes contributing to reading comprehension. Grabe's view indicates that reading does not only include the aspects of the language and text, but also the strategies used by readers in comprehending.

Reading strategies are related to comprehension. A number of L2 research studies on strategy add strong support to L1 strategy research findings and confirm the relevance of comprehension strategies for L2 (Grabe, 2009). The goal for comprehension strategies is to develop (a) fairly automatic routines that work to resolve more general reading comprehension difficulties and (b) a more elaborate set of problem solving that can be used when routines strategy do not work well (Celce-Murcia, 2000). Aside from being proficiency in strategic processing, strategic

readers know when, how, and why to use strategies effectively and recognize appropriate contexts for using effective strategies (Grabe, 2009). They also make use of a wide repertoire of strategies in combinations rather than in isolated applications (Celce-Murcia, 2001). There are eight strategies that have been identified in research as providing support for reading comprehension: 1) Summarizing, 2) Forming questions, 3) Answering questions and Elaborative Interrogation, 4) Activating prior knowledge, 5) Monitoring comprehension, 6) Using text-structure awareness, 7) Using visual graphics and graphic organizer, and 8) Inferencing (National Reading Panel, 2000). Related to this, instruction should include modeling, scaffolding, guided practice, and independent use of strategies so that students develop an internalized self-regulation of comprehension process. Celce-Murcia (2000) also suggests that for any approach to strategy development, students need to be introduced to only a few strategies at a time. Each strategy should be discussed, explained, and modeled.

Based on the previous discussion, it can be concluded that reading strategy especially reading comprehension is a very complex process and difficult to understand. The reader interacts dynamically with the text when he tries to extract the meaning. In this process, various kinds of knowledge are being used: linguistics knowledge, syntactic knowledge and schematic knowledge.

## **B. RESEARCH METHOD**

This research is a descriptive one, using a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. The population of this research were all students of the ELTSP of Universitas Negeri Padang (State University of Padang) registered in 2009/2010 academic year who had taken all Reading subjects. The number of the population was 160 students. The sample was cluster randomly selected. The students are grouped by the department randomly. In other words, the students with different

levels of ability are spread in different classes; no class is more superior to the other.

The instruments of this research included tests and interview. There were two kinds of tests covering genre awareness test and reading comprehension test. The first one was intended to find out the students' knowledge about genre and was designed based on the theory of genre. The second one was to find out the students' reading ability and was designed based on reading comprehension indicators. Both tests were in form of essay questions. From the result of the tests, the students were categorised into high, medium and low achievers. Interview was aimed at finding out the students' perception about their reading difficulties. There were six main questions, and other supporting questions were developed during the interview in accordance with the flow of the interview.

Of the several kinds of texts learned by the students, the researchers took six genres, four academic/scientific and two genres of fiction texts. They were *explanation*, *exposition*, *discussion*, *review*, *recount*, and *narrative*. Each genre consisted of two texts. For genre awareness, there were six questions for each text; so, there were 72 six questions altogether. For reading comprehension, there were 96 questions (8 questions for each text).

Construct and content validity were used to validate the tests (Brown, 2004; Miller et al. 2009). Content validity was especially used for reading comprehension test. In this case, the questions were constructed in accordance with what the students had learned (i.e. the syllabus of Reading subjects were taken as the basis). Construct validity was used to validate genre awareness test and interview. The indicators were established through analysis of theories of genre and perception.

To measure the reliability of the tests, the procedure suggested by Brown (2004) and Hughes (2002) were applied. The reliability was checked through taking reasonable sample of behavior, writing unambiguous items, providing clear and

explicit instructions, and using a guide to check the students' answers to give objective scores. In addition, the tests were tried out to three students. The results of try out test were analyzed in order to see whether a certain test item had to be improved. It was found that no item should be improved, but the time was added.

The tests took place at the ELTSP, and it was conducted in four different times. Then, interview was conducted to 10 purposively selected students. They represented high, medium, and low achievers based on the result of the test. They were interviewed one after another, answering six major questions.

## C. DATA DESCRIPTION AND DISCUSSION

### Data Description

The interview was given to ten students who were categorized into high-level readers (4 students, coded H1-H4), medium-level readers (3 students, coded M1-M3), and low-level readers (3 students, coded L1-L3). The interview was held after the tests from which the levels of the readers were identified. The answers obtained from the interview were categorized based on six points as below:

#### 1. The Most Difficult Text

During the interview, almost all of the students admitted that they found all texts are long and difficult to comprehend. Most of them mentioned more than one type of texts which they considered difficult. Interestingly, when they were asked about which text was the most difficult one, seven interviewees (H1, H3, H4, M1, M2, L1, and L2) answered an explanation text. H1 said she found it hard to understand the text. The other difficult text was review. H2, M3, L1 and L2 mentioned that both texts in review were difficult to understand. In addition, H3 also found that exposition text was a difficult text, agreed by L2. The next difficult text was recount, according to H4. Discussion was also difficult for M1. Thus, it can be concluded that for all levels,

non fiction texts were difficult to understand. However, based on the interview with the low level readers, all of them (L1, L2, and L3) mentioned a non fiction text, *Freedom At Last* (narrative) was another problem. This was interesting since the other level readers did not mention this text type.

## 2. The Reasons of Why the Texts were Difficult

There are some reasons of why the texts were difficult for them. The first was the vocabulary. All of the interviewees said that there were many words and terms which are difficult for them to guess the meaning. M1 said that non fiction, especially *the Radio Carbon Test*, was considered the most difficult one because of having too many technical terms. He had tried to guess the meaning from context clues, but since he still could not guess the meaning, he just skipped the part in which the difficult term was stated. The second reason was having no background knowledge about the topic of the texts. This was the answer gained from four interviewees, H1, H3, M2, and L1. H3 gave an example on the explanation text. *The Radio Carbon Test* was more difficult to understand compared to the other text with the same type, *Earthquake*. As students who live in the area where earthquake happen quite often, and are exposed to news or articles about earthquake, she did not find the second text difficult. She could understand the text by gathering her background knowledge about how earthquakes happen, the steps and the victims. *The Radio Carbon Test* was something else. It was seldom for students to read text with chemistry topic. The third reason, for H3, H4, M2, L1, and L3, was the length of the text and the time provided. They admitted that there were many blanks on the test answer due to this. L1 said that since the texts were long, it made him think that the text was difficult. The

fourth reason, for two interviewees in the medium and low level, was the content of the text. M1 said that the explanation given in the discussion text was confusing. L1 also found review text confusing. She could not tell whether *Titanic II* mentioned in the text is about a new movie or the continuation of *Titanic I*, the movie she watched before. The fifth reason, according to H2, was the questions of the test. She did not understand the question. The last reason was the grammar of the language. L3 said that grammar sometimes contribute to the difficulties in understanding a text.

## 3. The Reading Strategies

Dealing with ways to overcome the problems in comprehending texts, the interviewees said that they applied some techniques even though they may not know the name of the techniques. The high and medium level readers said that they applied skimming, scanning, and guessing meaning from context. H2, H3, H4, M1, M2, and M3 applied those strategies. All level students applied steps in answering the reading comprehension test. First, they read the title and the questions, then the whole text (H2, H3, H4, M1, M2, L1, L3). H2 specifies that she reads the introduction, conclusion, then the whole text. For non fiction, if the title is interesting, she reads the introduction. If it is still interesting, she continues reading; otherwise, she stops. For non fiction, she reads the introduction, then the whole text. These steps, in her opinion, helped her to understand the text better. However, for some students, if they find difficult words and cannot guess the meaning from context, they look up the dictionary (H1, H2, M1, M2, L1, L2). However, it seemed that the low level readers tend to look up the dictionary sooner than the other. L2 mentioned this strategy as the first one when being asked this question. The low level readers did not apply many strategies in

reading. None of them answered skimming, scanning, or guessing meaning from context in the interview. They tend to read the whole text after reading the questions (L1 and L2).

#### 4. The Reading Habit

The reading habit of the students influences their comprehension. H1, H2, H3 and H4 like reading. H1 likes reading fiction, novels in English and non fiction about motivation articles. H2 likes reading interesting articles in English and books about health. H3 likes reading novels in English. H4 likes reading novel and short stories in Indonesian language. She only reads English text if it is an assignment. H3 even likes writing and ever followed a writing contest held by The Jakarta Board of Art (*Dewan Kesenian Jakarta*). Two of the medium level students read only books and stories in Indonesian language. Still, the language used in the text is Indonesian. The low level students were lack of reading frequency. L1 admitted that she did not like reading. She only likes to read poetries and poems in Indonesian language. L2 also admitted that she is lazy to read. She reads Indonesian novel and if there is assignment in reading English text, she discusses or ask a friend. L3 sometimes read Indonesian novels or short stories in her spare time.

#### 5. The Suggestion for English Department

In answering questions about suggestions for the department to improve the students reading ability, the answers were various. H1 said that reading texts must be various and lecturer should integrate reading and writing. H1 also added that lecturers should make reading assignment as compulsory and give quiz to test the students' comprehension. This is similar to what M1 and L1 said. They agreed to have a quiz, questions or activities like retelling or writing summaries after the reading assignment. H2 suggests that

students should read and then write. By writing, the more likely the new vocabulary to be remembered. M1 and H1 suggested that the level of difficulty of the reading texts must be increased. So far, in their opinion, the level of difficulty in the reading classes is far below those found in the test of this research. M2 suggested that there should be given exercise on speed reading and the text should be of interest of the students. L1 suggested that the length of the article should be given consideration in teaching reading. In her opinion, 10 pages should be the maximum of the reading assignment. If more than that, students might copy and paste from the internet. L2 said, similarly with the M2 ideas, that speed reading should be put as exercise to students. She also added that lecturers should explain generic structure of the texts and explain more reading strategies. Commenting on the reading classes, L3 suggested that it should be reading class that tells much about how to understand the text, not the writing class. M3 also said that he learned about text types when he took Writing 2 class. He did not gain the same knowledge in reading classes.

Thus, it can be concluded that there are suggestions given by the students for the improvement of reading comprehension of the students. First, students should write the new words in an essay so that they remember them. Second, there should be assignments after reading. It could be in the form of oral questions to each student so that they really prepare themselves reading at home before coming to the class. It could also be in the form of retelling the text. Discussion can also follow the reading. Students analyze the text in groups and discuss the problems then there will be a class discussion. However, if the assignment was long, the students tend to cheat. Third, there should be exercises on speed reading. Since many students were unable to

answer the questions due to the limitation of the time (90 minutes), speed reading is considered necessary.

#### 6. Knowledge about Genre

All interviewees said that questions in part B, the genre awareness questions, were not expected. H4, M3 and L3 admitted that it was the first time for them to get such questions on reading. In reading tests that they ever followed, there were only questions dealing with main idea, topics, and some details on the texts. In the class, they did not get the material dealing with genres. Reading lecturers did introduce the text types, but not the generic structure and lexicogrammatical features of the texts. Thus, questions dealing with genre awareness were difficult for them.

For fiction texts, most students understand narrative and recount since they are frequently explained in junior and senior high school. All interviewees (except L2 and L3) said that they know both texts well, including the generic structure of those texts. L3, however, did not know that *The Yellow Ribbon* was a narrative. She mentioned that it was a recount text. L2 also could not identify a recount text.

For non fiction texts, most students said different things. H1 admitted that she did not know non fiction text well because not all were taught by the lecturers. H2 said that explanation, review and narrative were known but not the generic structure of the texts. H3 said that she knew review, exposition, and all other text types but not the generic structure. Similarly, H4 said that she did not remember all generic structure of the text but in general knew all text types. When identifying *Easy Job, Good Wages*, she mistakenly said it was a spoof text. M1 forgot the characteristics of review, report and description. Exposition was not a problem for him. He understood it well. M2 knew the generic structure of explanation and exposition, but not

review. M3 claimed that she knew all text types in general but, again, not the generic structure. L1 knew explanation, but not the exposition. L2 found it hard to identify most of the texts. She could not identify review, explanation, and recount. L3 only knew how to identify an explanation text. She did not know review and recount.

Thus, it can be inferred that the students' genre awareness has a close relation to the students' reading ability. High level readers tend to know more about genre compared to those in lower level. As Christie (1997) said that genre is closely related to social and cultural contexts, understanding the characteristics of a genre, such as its generic structure and the lexicogrammatical features, can help readers to comprehend a text.

All interviewees realized that understanding genres of the text can help much to understand the text. For example, in narrative text, H3 knew the plot of the story from the generic structure. M2 also said that readers can identify the beginning and the ending of the story. L1 could tell that knowledge of genre helps to identify where the setting and the conflict. L2 said that she could answer the question dealing with the participant since she knows it should be mentioned in the first part that is the introduction. In discussion, for example, H2 can figure out that there were two opinions discussed in the text so that when she had to answer questions dealing with opinions, she found it easier to identify the opinions.

#### Discussion

This part is devoted to discuss the results of the research presented in the previous subchapter. The conclusions drawn from the students' perception are synthesized and linked up with some related theories and previous research findings.

The first set of data shows the students' limited knowledge about genre. Their answers indicate that most of them did not

know the characteristics of each genre in focus well. This is supported by the data obtained through the interviews. With exception in narrative, the students acknowledged that they did not know much the characteristics of the genres. In relation to the importance of having theoretical knowledge, Veel (1997) and Coffin (1997) mention some examples through which they implicitly state that genre awareness helps learners in reading comprehension because they can manipulate the knowledge to them in several aspects of reading such as understanding the general ideas from the structure of a text, locating certain information s/he wants to find, and understanding how one point is related with another. Butt (2000) discusses extensively how speakers (i.e. here including writers) manipulate language to make meaning and convey it to their readers. This is of course, what readers have to learn through understanding genres. This research proves that two students whose reading comprehension was relatively good believed that their knowledge about characteristics of genres, especially Exposition text, helped them in answering the questions. Though it is not statistically measured, the relationship between genre awareness and reading comprehension in this study is evident; both genre awareness and students' reading comprehension of the students are low. And, there is a tendency that those who had good genre awareness also had good reading comprehension, and vice versa. Some studies investigating genre awareness and its correlation and relationship with or influence on reading comprehension (e.g. Fitri, 2008; Ermawati, 2008) show that those two variables are positively correlated. Thus, we are in a position of believing that providing students with genre knowledge (genre awareness) is one of the ways to help them increase their reading comprehension.

As for reading difficulties, the results of the interviews show that the students thought that their limited range of vocabulary made it difficult for them to understand the texts. Consequently, they

could not answer the questions well. If this is related to their answers of reading comprehension, it is most likely true that the students had limited vocabulary. Firstly, explanation texts contain a number of technical terms that the students did not or rarely found in their readings. Secondly, narrative and review texts have a great number of words dealing with activities related to culture which the students were not familiar with. In relation to this, Harmer (1991) that methodologist and linguists stress the importance of vocabulary in language teaching. Coady and Huckin in Decarrio (2001:285) also state that "there is general agreement among vocabulary specialists that lexical competence is at the heart of communicative competence...". For that reason, most researchers suggest that a well-structured vocabulary program with a balanced approach that includes explicit and activities providing appropriate contexts for incidental learning is needed (Decarrio, 2001). Vocabulary may be taught in a special course or integrated in the teaching of reading skill.

Next, the answers given toward the question about how they read the six different genres proved that the students were not able to apply some reading strategies they had learned in Reading courses into their reading practices. Almost all of them revealed that they read the texts in the same way. Another possibility is that the teachers might not, or at least rarely, model how to switch from one strategy to another in reading different texts or/and reading for different purposes. If the latter assumption is valid, modeling (i.e. how to read) is then needed in the process of learning (e.g. Christie, 1997). Moreover, from the interviews it was also found that the students applied the same strategies for reading different texts. This may indicate that the types of the texts discussed in Reading courses are limited to certain types only. With regards to the course outline of Reading courses (Syllabus Reading 1, Reading 2, and Reading 3), it is developed based on sub-skills of reading. For example, the students learn how to find

main idea, topic, and details. While this is not wrong, the strategies are not applicable for certain types of texts. It may be better if genre-based (in which skills are integrated in) syllabus is adopted.

The last interesting data from the interviews is the students' low reading habit. Most of them did not read, except materials assigned by the lecturers. Some of them even stated that they did not like reading. They did it just because they were asked to do that by the lecturers. This means that the students do not practice reading much. Consequently there is very little opportunity for to practice applying the reading strategies they have learned in Reading courses. Furthermore, this also means that they are not familiar with reading different kinds of texts. Probably, this is an alternative answer why many of them are quite good in answering questions of exposition texts; the genre that is often found in academic readings. Given that fact and analysis, it is quite reasonable to find that the students' reading comprehension is not satisfactory. Some studies (e.g Lamme, 2010 and Bann, 2010) indicate that reading habit influences one's reading comprehension. Reading habit is not something that cannot be automatically built in the students' themselves. It has to be developed through various ways. At college, this can be realized by surrounding the students with reading materials, for academic and fun activities. As some interviewees suggested, reading habit should also sometimes be developed by 'force'. What they meant is the lecturers should design several different reading tasks such reporting, retelling, and summarizing; it is assumed that eventually this way can make them love reading.

#### **D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

The findings of this research support the research assumptions that the students' reading comprehension is low due to low basic entry level of the students' ability and their low linguistic competence, and that there is a causal relationship between students' genre knowledge and their

comprehension. Thus, conclusion is drawn from the findings and discussion of the research. The other factors that contribute on the low ability of their reading comprehension are limited range of vocabulary, lack of ability in applying reading strategies that they had learned in Reading courses, high level of questions, and students' low reading habit.

This research was done based on an intention to develop the teaching and learning reading English in ELTSP theoretically and practically. The research on students' perception toward their reading difficultied of different genres was an effort to discover data and information which could be used to make Reading course become more meaningful. The findings and conclusion of this research are not the only document which should be put as a basis to improve the quality of the teaching of English in UNP. Thus, a follow up is needed.

Related to this, the research team suggests the Head of the department, faculty and university, the lecturers and the curriculum development team to put the findings and conclusion of this research as a consideration to make policies for Reading courses. It is suggested that: (1) In order to improve students' reading habit, students should, in the first year especially in *Intensive Course*, be given reading assignments which should meet the criteria of fun, light and short. Later, they should report to the class in the form of retelling or summarizing. (2) To enrich the students' vocabulary, on syllabus of *Reading* courses and other related courses, vocabularies which need to be focused should be identified and stated every week or every topic. In addition, the *Vocabulary* course, which was omitted from the curriculum on the revision of curriculum in 2008, needs to be recovered. (3) To improve students' reading strategies, lecturers need to give model in doing the reading strategies so that the students can understand better. Lecturers also need to model various reading strategies based on the genre of the texts. (4) To improve students' genre

awareness, lecturers need to introduce the characteristics of each text type such as the generic structure and lexicogrammatical features. (5) To improve the whole system of teaching, the syllabus designed for this course and related ones should be task-based, not the skill-based as what have been used until present time.

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