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EFL LEARNERS' PROBLEMS IN UNDERSTANDING CONTENT-BASED LEARNING MATERIALS

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Abstract

This paper discusses how the EFL learners' problems in understanding content-based learning materials come about. The key questions to answer are: (i) are those problems affected by low reading skill or inappropriate use of learning strategies?; (ii) what are the specific-linguistic features of reading skills causing the academic problems?; and (iii) how did the learners' learning strategies bring about the problems. The data used in this paper are the scores of students' midterm test and the frequency of their preferred learning strategies. In addition, the qualitative data in the form of students' statements gained by means of unstructured-participative interview are also involved and they are more analyzed in descriptive-qualitative ways based on relevant theories in reading skills and learning strategies of the content-based learning materials. The results of data analysis lead to state that the EFL learners' problems in understanding content-based learning materials were caused by both low reading skill and the inappropriate application of learning strategies. The linguistic features of reading skills causing the problems are lack of the understanding on grammatical features, low level of vocabulary mastery, lack of understanding on sentential construction, and problems in understanding a discourse. Dealing with learning strategies, the problems are inappropriate use of learning strategies, uncertain learning goals, and bad learning habits.

Keywords: *problems, EFL learners, content-based learning materials*

1. INTRODUCTION

In addition to successfully read the reading materials in reading classroom activities, another main goal of having reading subject at the English Department of FKIP Universitas Bung Hatta is to facilitate learners to read content-based learning materials offered. To achieve the academic goal is not an easy job since reading in English as a foreign language (EFL) may face linguistic and non-linguistic handicaps. The linguistic factors commonly faced by EFL learners, such as lack of vocabulary, problems in understanding grammatical features of the foreign language, low basic skills of reading, and low level of understanding discourse/text are not only naturally faced by beginners but also by intermediate and pre-advanced learners. In other side, the non-linguistic factors such as inappropriate learning strategies, bad reading techniques used, low motivation in reading, no sufficient facilities of teaching-learning processes of reading are the classic problems which should be overcome seriously.

According to Masuhara (in Tomlinson (ed.), 2007), several approaches to the teaching of L2/FL reading have been developed by experts since 1980s to 1990s. The well-known approaches are the reading comprehension-based approach, the language-based approach, the skill/strategy-based approach, and the schema-based approach. In addition to the approaches, Masuhara (as in Tomlinson (ed.), 2007) proposes an alternative approach to materials for teaching reading. The alternative approach embodies four principles, namely: (i) engaging affect should be the prime concern of reading materials; (ii) listening to a text before reading it helps decrease linguistic demands and encourages learners to focus on meaning; (iii) reading comprehension means achieving multidimensional mental representation in the readers' mind; and (iv) materials should help learners experience the text first before they draw their attention to its language. The approach to materials for teaching reading argued by Masuhara contains the principles for having reading skills for elementary to advanced level of EFL reading. It may serve the reading skill to understand content-based learning

materials at university level, as well. It means that students' sufficient understanding on content-based learning materials at university level acquires the four principles of reading materials of reading subjects offered to the learners.

In the teaching-learning processes of language education, especially at the English Education Department of FKIP Universitas Bung Hatta, Padang, the subjects offered in the curriculum can be academically classified, based on learning materials, into skill-based subjects and content-based subjects. The content-based subjects, such as those of linguistic subjects, Educational Research Design, Language Assessment and the others need better skill on reading comprehension, unless the learners mostly obtain low academic achievement, then. Based on the result of a research conducted in 2014/2015 (see Refnita, 2016), most students were not successful enough in understanding content-based learning materials. The content-based learning materials are mostly available in reading texts and it is certain that reading comprehension skill is highly needed. In fact, however, most students faced serious problems in understanding reading texts (reading materials), particularly the reading texts of *Language Assessment* subject as the research addressed to.

As a matter of fact, the students who took the content-based subjects, in this case*Language Assessment*, had already taken the pre-requisite subjects including language skills which led them to be able to read the materials well. They had learned and passed *Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, (English) Grammar, Introduction to Linguistics, Phonology, Morphology, Syntax*, and *Semantics-Pragmatics*, at least in intermediate levels. It is theoretically supposed that the learners are not in serious problems anymore to learn content-based subjects. The learners would have had enough vocabulary, reading comprehension skill, and critical thinking to read and to understand the learning materials of the content-based subjects. In reality, the assumption and expectation could not be successfully gained. In the teaching-learning processes of *Language Assessment* subject, the English Department students are to read and comprehend the reading texts as recommended in syllabus and instructional programs. The students are in high activities to do reading activities and they should be in critical thinking to gain main information existed in the texts.

In accordance with the reading problems faced by the university students, several questions may be raised in order to know why the problems came up. The answers for those questions are possibly used to draw appropriate ways to solve the relevant problems. This paper, which is further developed from the result of a research conducted in 2014/2015, particularly discusses the causes of EFL learners' problems in understanding content-based learning materials at the English Department of FKIP Universitas Bung Hatta, Padang. The subject matter was limited to the teaching-learning processes of *Language Assessment*. In more specific items, the data analysis and discussion are based on three key questions: *(i) are those problems affected by low reading skill or inappropriate use of learning strategies?; (ii) what are the specific-linguistic features of reading skills causing the academic problems?; and (iii) how did the learners' learning strategies bring about the problems.* The discussion is aimed at discovering the answers for the question asked and to formulate reasonable problems solving for the EFL learners' problems in understanding content-based learning materials.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED THEORIES

a. Reading in a Foreign Language and Language Learning Strategies

Even though reading activities are mostly aimed at understanding the written texts, it is not seriously questioned anymore that reading in L1, L2, or FL may have different problems and difficulties. Reading in a foreign language for its learners, let's say reading in English, frequently finds the phenomena of insufficient practice time for students who are required to cope with studying a new language and to read for content (see Dhieb-Henia, 2006:2). Accordingly, in some subjects, namely in those of content-based subjects, English is the medium of instruction and a vehicle of content information. Consequently, the EFL learners face both language and comprehension problems when they are reading English texts. In this case, it is certain that reading in a foreign language is more difficult compared with reading in L1 and L2.

The ideas of metacognition have been argued and proposed by many as good ways to overcome classic problems and difficulties in EFL reading, including reading the content-based materials. Beside as a theory, metacognition can also be seen as the learning strategies. Metacognition can be understood and defined as: "cognition of cognition" (Carrell, Pharis, and Liberto, 1989); "the

conscious awareness of cognitive processes (Bernhardt, 1991); and "knowledge about learning (Wenden 1998) (see all in Dhieb-Henia, 2006). Then, William and Burden (1997) quoted by Dhieb-Henia (2006:2 – 3) mention that metacognitive strategies include an ability to manage and regulate consciously the use of appropriate learning strategies for different situations. They involve an awareness of one's mental processes and an ability to reflect on how one learns, in other words, knowing about one's knowing. Dhieb-Henia (2006:3) argues that as applied to reading, these metacognitive strategies entail specifying a purpose for reading, planning how the text will be read, self-monitoring for errors in reading comprehension, and self-evaluating how well the overall objectives are being fulfilled, which allows for taking corrective measures if comprehension is not being achieved.

Students' reading ability can be improved when they discover and use specific learning strategies, but it should be kept in mind that there must be a clear rationale for using specific strategies (Oxford, 1990). According to Johnson (1996), language learning strategies are a valuable addition to the challenging task of learning and teaching a second and/or foreign language. The metacognitive strategies and metacognition approach are meaningfully applied to improve the reading skill at intermediate and advanced level, such at university level. They are probably applicable for the activities of reading content-based learning materials. Above all, it is essential for the university students to have sufficient understanding on linguistic features used in the reading texts and appropriate-specific learning-reading strategies.

Theoretically, powerful learners are those who are going to be successful. Powerful learners have expanded repertoires of strategies for acquiring education. They know how to profit from a wide range of learning opportunities, from lectures and readings, from collecting and analyzing information and building concepts and theories, and from working together cooperatively (see Joice et.al., 1992:v). Powerful learners are able to acquire and place the information and concepts into their long term memory so that they are all becoming knowledge of the subjects learnt as the result of the learning processes of content-based subject, as the *Language Assessment* has.

Reading, as an active process of understanding information embodied in a text, needs ability to read. Grabe and Stoller (in Celce-Murcia (ed.), 2001:188) state that the ability to read – taking general comprehension as the example – requires that the reader draw information from a text and combine it with information and expectations that the reader already has. Sufficient and optimal comprehension after reading a text needs linguistic and non-linguistic factors involved in the text. Therefore, effective readers will use linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge and competence while they are reading in order to gain optimal comprehension. In the learning view point, working with texts means working written language with specific characteristics. Brown (2001:303 – 306) simply mentions the characteristics of written language which include the linguistic and non-linguistic features. The written language is characterized by permanence, processing time, distance, orthography, complexity, vocabulary, and formality. The categories of orthography, complexity, vocabulary, and formality are more on linguistic features, in nature. Linguistic features in a reading text, as in a content-based learning material, need to be understood as the language with such characteristics as opposed to spoken language. The failures of understanding such characteristics may lead readers to have low level of comprehension.

The language skills in a foreign language are intentionally supported by the language awareness, the development in learners of an enhanced consciousness of and sensitivity to the forms and functions of language (Cartier in Bourke, 2008:13). Bourke (2008) argues that an impressive body of research shows that conscious learning also builds interlanguage, one's interim grammar in the mind. Interlanguge has to grow and develop; otherwise fossilization sets in and learners may exhibit the all-too-familiar symptoms of a "grammar gap". In reading activities, such as in reading content-based learning materials, the EFL learners have to have language awareness and they need to optimally use it while reading.

b. Content-Based Learning Materials for University Students

The term instruction has been used by language teaching methodologists and teachers in the same sense with learning. It seems that the term instruction is frequently used instead of learning in many current references. Although they are similar in general point of view, the term learning is more on the students' side, but instruction can be generally seen as the matters of instructors' side. Theoretically, instruction is used by teachers and experts in order to focus on the learning's and instructional teachers' sides of learning programs. However, the discussion on the content-based learning materials for university students in this part can be formally begun with the ideas and concepts of learning and instruction, as well.

The materials of teaching-learning at university level, say at the English Department of FKIP Bung HattaUniversity, can be categorized as content-based materials and skill-based ones. Snow (in Celce-Murcia (ed.), 2001:303) says that the word content has had many different interpretations throughout the history of second/foreign language teaching, but she herself defines the content as the use of subject matter for second/foreign language teaching purposes. Subject matter may consist of topics or theories based on student interest or need in an adult, EFL setting or the subjects that students are studying in their elementary school classes. In this paper, the meaning of content stated by Snow is adopted because the main instructional goal of *Language Assessment* subject – the subject learnt by the research sample – is to prepare the students for the types of academic tasks they encounter in their university.

Content-based (also known as "content-centered") language teaching, particularly at university, integrates the learning of some specific subject-matter content with the learning of a second (foreign) language. The overall structure of a content-based curriculum is dictated more by the nature of the subject matter than by language forms and sequences. The second (foreign) language, then, is simply the medium to convey informational content of interest and relevant to the learner (Brown, 2001:234). In relation to this, the content-based subjects offered to learners at university level, as for the English Education Department students of Bung Hatta University, may be the subjects having close relation to the language learning materials or the subjectsdealing with teachers training.

In the sense of content-based instruction, Nunan (in Celce-Murcia (ed.), 2001:61) tells that content-based instruction comes in many different guises. However, all variations share one characteristic – language is not presented directly, but is introduced via the content of other subjects. In school settings, this content is typically the regular subjects in the curriculum such as science, geography, and mathematics. Learners acquire the target language in the course of doing other things. Then, models for content-based instructions are also variously proposed by experts and researchers. Snow (in Celce-Murcia (ed.), 2001:303) informs that content-based models can be found in both the foreign and second language settings. Models of content-based instruction differ in implementation due to such factors as educational setting, program objectives, and target population. All share, however, a common point of departure – the integration of language teaching aims with subject matter instruction.

The ideas above imply that the content-based instructions are the learning materials and/or subjects offered to students in different levels containing subject matters dealing with knowledge instead of skills. In some materials of content-based instructions, language skills are still partially involved, but most of the contents are knowledge and ideas. Therefore, Snow (in Celce-Murcia (ed.), 2001:305) states that models of content-based instruction can be distinguished from each other by several different means. One is by setting; some models are typically implemented in the foreign language setting while others are common in second language context. Another way to distinguish content-based models is by instructional level; elementary school level and secondary or post-secondary levels with adolescents or adults. A third way is to look at the degree of emphasis on language and content which underlies a particular program.

c. EFL Learners' Attitude in Indonesia

Indonesia is well known as a country with multilingual societies; there are more than 700 local languages as L1 spoken by learners in addition to bahasa Indonesia, as a national language, and English, as a foreign language. Language policy in Indonesia places English as a foreign language. The status of English as a foreign languagemay be assumed as one factor which makes the English

instruction has not run well; most parents and students think that learning English is not essentially important. Such reason and attitude are not completely wrong because the attitudes towards a language depend also on the status of the language. Many research results and conclusions drawn by sociolinguists and psycholinguists tell that the motivation and progress of language learning are partially influenced by the attitudes towards the learnt language and its status, as well (see Holmes, 2013; Wardhaugh and Fuller, 2015). The ideas dealing with the relationship between both language learning and the attitudes towards the language and the success of learning the language are reasonably believed and can be practically proved in the field.

In multilingual countries, such as Indonesia, India, Philippines, etc., the significance of political power in the choice of national language is formally clear. For instance, there are over one hundred vernacular languages spoken in the Philippines and in Indonesia. In Indonesia, in particular, the government did not select the language of the political and social elite, for example Javanese, as the national language. Instead, they developed and standardized a variety of Malay which was widely used in Indonesia as a trade language. Indeed, the successful spread of bahasaIndonesia owes a great deal to the fact that it is a very useful neutral linguistic choice in many situations (see Holmes, 2013:107). The status of bahasaIndonesia as a national language is relatively 'powerful' and it has been becoming the tendency that people in Indonesia have positive attitudes towards bahasa Indonesia. It is different from the learners' attitude to English as a foreign language.

Learners of English as L2 and/or FL are in different situation and condition compared with the speakers of English as L1. Their level of comprehension of the standard or any dialect is influenced by amount of exposure to the language. As learners increase in second language proficiency, typically but not always after ever-longer periods of residence in an environment in which the second/foreign language is widely used, they become more knowledgeable about and sensitive to dialectal and contextual variation in language. It is also important to know that the attitudes of parents reflect personal histories, including their responses to the wider cultural themes framing their own experiences (see McGroarty in McKay and Hornberger (eds.), 1996). It seems that the scales of language attitudes of learners, parents, and teachers tell us how the attitudes towards language influence the programs and progress of EFL teaching. The positive attitudes towards English possessed by learners, parents, and teachers become a part of foundation for the success of EFL teaching.

Based on the ideas described above, the English instruction in multilingual society, such as in Indonesia, is highly based on the status and the attitudes towards the English language, and formal-educational policies in the countries. The teaching learning processes of English at a university level, in particular, need to consider and to follow the philosophical and theoretical foundations of EFL teaching as a foreign language. Therefore, it is obvious that the English instruction in Indonesia practically runs in different ways compared with the teaching-learning of English in countries where English is L1 and/or L2. It is right to say that the teaching-learning processes of EFL need specific considerations and ideas to put the learners in a suitable position in academic-educational activities of the foreign language.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

As it has been previously mentioned, this paper is derived from and a further development of a research conducted in 2014/2015 academic year, at the English Department of FKIP Universitas Bung Hatta, Padang (see Refnita, 2016). The research was carried out in the design of a descriptive-quantitative method; it was descriptive in method and quantitative in approach. In the research, the data were in the forms of scores on learning strategies applied by the students in *Language Assessment* subject. The analysis was done in order to argumentatively describe and explain the data in order to have the current portrait of learning strategies used by learners of EFL at the time they were learning a content-based instruction, *Language Assessment*. The procedures of research were initiated by collecting the data through questionnaire distribution and those data were classified in such a way to have classification, tabulation, and quantitative analysis. The conclusion was drawn based on the classification, tabulation, and simple statistical formula (see Gay and Airasian, 2000; Gay, Mills, and Airasian, 2009).

The population of this research was all English Department students of FKIP Bung Hatta University administered as the third year students in 2014/2015 academic year who were taking *Language Assessment* subject. There were137 students as the population of this research. Considering that it was not necessary to involve all population in the research, a two-stage convenience sampling techniquewas done to select the sample. To select the sample, the researcher chose one group of students. Then, among all members of that group the researcher chose the students who firstly took the *Language Assessment* subject. As a result of sampling, 37 students were chosen as the sample of the research and all of them were sitting at group C.

The instrument of the research was a questionnaire dealing with learning strategies habitually applied by learners (research sample) in following a content-based instruction, *Language Assessment*, consisting of 20 items. The items were consulted to other lecturers of both skill-based and content-based subjects at the English Department of Bung Hatta University in order to have experts' scientific opinion and reliable judgment.

The data were collected by using the instrument mentioned above in the following practical steps. Firstly, the researcher as also the lecturer of *Language Assessment*subject asked the students to respond to the items in the questionnaire by putting a tick (√) in a suitable cell of the table provided in the questionnaire. Secondly, the researcher prepared three tables of students' responses in accordance with the three classifications of learning strategies being studied. Thirdly, the researcher readeach student's responses, filled out the table of responses, and counted the frequency of each type of response. Finally, the researcher counted the percentage of each type of the response.After the data were collected, they were quantitatively analyzed by means of appropriate statistical formula. The followings are the steps followed as the technique of data analysis: (1) each group of data was classified and tabulated into a table which contains the statements, frequency of being selected, and the percentage; (2) the frequency and the percentage of each category and type of data were described and interpreted as argumentatively as possible to answer the research problems and research questions; (3) the accommodation of all quantitative description, explanation, and interpretation was drawn as the research findings and conclusion. In addition to quantitative data, as the main ones collected in the research, this paper includes the data based on a short direct-practical interview with 5 students selected as informants in order to have qualitative data. The qualitative data were collected after the research was conducted and they are intentionally used for this present paper.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

It is reasonably statedthat most students of English Department of FKIPUniversitas Bung Hatta had serious problems and difficulties in understanding content-based learning materials, in this case, reading texts used for *Language Assessment* subject. Then, *are those problems and/or difficulties affected by low reading skill or inappropriate use of learning strategies*? In order to answer this question, let's firstly see the following tables as the summaries of data collected showing the learning strategies (or learning style) used by the learners in pre-classroom activities, in-classroom activities, and post-classroom activities.

Table 1: Students' Pre-classroom Learning Strategies

No	Pernyataan	Frekuensi Dipilih							
		TP		JR		SR		SL	
		Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%
1	Sayamembacajudulsetiapbabmaterikuliahsebelummembacaisibabtersebut.	1	2.7	1	2.7	7	18.9	28	75.7
2	Sayamembacatujuanmempelajarisetiapbabsebelummembacaisibabtersebut.	0	0	23	62.2	13	35.1	1	2.7
3	Sayamembacaseluruhisibab; dariawalsampaiakhir.	4	10.8	16	43.2	13	35.1	4	10.8
4	Sayamemahamisemuaisibab yang sayabaca.	2	5.4	22	59.5	13	35.1	0	0
5	Sayamenuliskanapa yang sayapahamidengankalimatsayasendiri.	10	27.0	14	37.8	13	35.1	0	0
6	Sayamenulisulangkalimat yang ada di	4	10.8	24	64.9	6	16.2	3	8.1

	bukutanpamemahamimaksudnya.								
7	Sayamendiskusikanmaterikuliahdengantemansebelumkuliahdilaksanakan.	7	18.9	22	59.5	6	16.2	2	5.4
8	Sayamenulisringkasanmaterikuliah (reading report) sesegeramungkin.	1	2.7	11	29.7	19	51.3	6	16.2
9	Sayamembacakembaliringkasan yang telahsayatulis.	8	21.6	16	43.2	13	35.1	0	0
10	Sayamencatatmateri yang tidaksayapahamiuntukditanyakan di kelas.	9	24.3	15	40.5	9	24.3	4	10.8

The data summarized in Table 1 above tell that in pre-classroom learning strategies, there are three dominant learning strategies applied and/or used by the students. The first one was most students (75.7%) always read every title of chapters before reading the content of each chapter they learnt. The second dominant pre-classroom learning strategies applied by the students were that they seldom: (i) read and understand the goals (objectives) of learning; (ii) understand and comprehend the content they read; and (iii) discuss the materials and problems they faced with friends before coming to classroom. These data inform that most students did not have good reading comprehension on main points of concepts and theories. The third dominant pre-classroom learning strategies habitually used by the students was taking notes and writing summary. This good learning strategy is theoretically good and mostly essential for content-based instruction including, of course, *Language Assessment*. The problem is that such strategy was only seldom applied by most students. Moreover, they seldom read the notes and summaries. They also seldom discussed the problematic concepts and theories with friends or asked the teacher in classroom discussion. The information obtained through short-informal interview reveals that the lack of preparation before coming to classroom activities frequently occurred in the teaching-learning processes of this content-based subject.

Table 2: Students' in-classroom Learning Strategies

No	Pernyataan	FrekuensiDipilih							
		TP		JR		SR		SL	
		Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%
1	Sayamendengarkanpresentasitemansayadariawalsampaiakhir.	0	0	2	5.4	12	32.4	23	62.2
2	Sayamemahamisemuamateripresentasitemansaya.	1	2.7	18	48.6	18	48.6	0	0
3	Sayamenanyakanmateri yang tidaksayapahamikepadapenyaji.	13	35.1	8	21.6	15	40.5	1	2.7
4	Jawabanpenyajimenambahpemahamansayaterhadapmaterikuliah.	0	0	14	37.8	17	45.9	6	16.2
5	Sayamendengarkanpenjelasantambahanatauklarifikasi yang diberikandosen.	0	0	0	0	5	13.5	32	86.5
6	Sayamemahamisemuapenjelasantambahan/klarifikasi yang diberikanolehdosen.	0	0	4	10.8	22	59.5	11	29.7
7	Sayamencatatsemuapenjelasantambahan/klarifikasi yang diberikanolehdosen.	0	0	13	35.1	13	35.1	11	29.7

There were also three dominant in-classroom learning strategies applied by students (data in table 2 above). The first one is that almost all students listened to the presentation in classroom presented by their friends. However, some students did not fully understand the materials of presentation; this is of course a serious problem faced by students if the classroom activities were in the form of seminar. The second dominant in-classroom learning strategy used by the students is that they seriously listened to lecturer's additional explanation and clarification after the classroom seminar. It seems that the students were highly expecting to wait for the lecturer's additional explanation and theoretical confirmation. The third dominant in-classroom learning strategy used by the students is noting down all additional explanation and clarification seriously. The data indicate

that some students were diligent to take notes and they felt that it was good to have good scores (marks) at the end of semester. In other side, the data and information obtained tell as well that they did not reread their notes or summaries at home. Unfortunately, some others did not have good notes and even few of them had no notes at all.

Table 3: Students' Post- classroom Learning Strategies

No	Pernyataan	FrekuensiDipilih							
		TP		JR		SR		SL	
		Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%
1	Sayamembacakembalicatatankuliahsetiapsayaselesaikuliah.	9	24.3	20	54.1	8	21.6	0	0
2	Sayamemilikicatatanperkuliahan yang lengkap.	2	5.4	13	35.1	16	43.2	6	16.2
3	Sayamembacasemuacatatankuliahsebagaipersiapanuntukujian.	0	0	6	16.2	9	24.3	22	59.5

For the students' post-classroom learning strategies, the learning problems obviously appeared. More than 70% students did not reread their notes and summaries after the class. They did do the activities of taking notes, but they did not reread the notes once the class got over. The data also tell that all students had lecturing notes and summaries in the forms of individual styles. However, they did not reread the notes in order to build and develop their understanding on concepts, theories, and application of *Language Assessment* instruction. Other data tell that almost all students just read their notes for the preparation of examination as the midterm and final-term tests. These ways of the application of learning strategies are not academically and scientifically good and cognitively helpful for content-based instructions.

The data description and analysis as displayed above reveal that learners' problems and/or difficulties in understanding the content-based learning materials can be stated as the logical consequences of both low level of reading skill and inappropriate uses (choices) of learning strategies. They had not had sufficient reading comprehension yet before they had to read reading texts of the content-based learning materials. Moreover, the learners did not use and apply the appropriate learning strategies in pre-classroom, in-classroom, and post-classroom activities. The conclusion is also empirically supported by qualitative data obtained through short direct-practical interview to the students decided as the informant for qualitative data. The learners did not use the metacognitive approach and metacognitive strategies in reading the content-based learning materials as recommended by Dhieb-Henia (2006) and Masuhara (in Tomlinson (ed.), 2007).

Additional data used in this paper obtained by means of short direct-practical interview with 5 students tell that they faced serious problems dealing with linguistic features of reading text they were reading. There are, at least, three specific-linguistic features causing the EFL learnersto getproblems tooptimallyunderstand the reading texts of content-based learning materials. Problem of vocabulary is the first specific-linguistic feature which caused the learners' problem in understanding content-based learning materials. It is supposed that the learners did not have sufficient vocabulary mastery to read the texts used for content-based learning materials. The second specific-linguistic features causing the problems in reading the content-based learning materials is grammatical problems. The learners told that grammatical features in the levels of phrasal, clausal, and syntactical constructions in English made them face serious problems when they were reading. The next specific-linguistic feature which raised the problem in reading content-based learning materials is the problem of deriving and drawing relevant conclusions based on reading texts. This is a type of problems in discourse understanding. The learners were hard to take main information delivered by the text.

The learners' learning strategies and problems in engaging in linguistic features used in the texts of content-based learning materials are logically supposed to bring about the academic problems. It is obvious that the specific-linguistic features used in texts are relevant with the contents and level of the texts. Based on the curriculum and syllabus used for *Language Assessment* subject at the English Department of FKIP Universitas Bung Hatta, it has been academically considered the content-based learning materials are appropriately used. The materials had been well selected to be suitably used for the level of students. As the candidates of EFL teachers, the learners have to read and

understand the learning materials well. The linguistic factors are those of problems that should be overcome through academic efforts.

It may be argued in this paper that learners' learning strategies used in pre-classroom, in-classroom, and post-classroom activities gave significant influences to the EFL learners in understanding content-based learning materials. The inappropriate learning strategies habitually used and applied by the learners affected their level of comprehension on the content-based learning materials in two main ways. Firstly, the learning strategies habitually used by the learners cannot build and develop language awareness and textual understanding as the students did not prepare themselves before coming to the classroom. In addition, they did not activate their critical thinking and cognitive processes during the classroom activities because they were just waiting for lectures' explanation and having personal notes. This is more on academic and habitual problems in taking content-based subjects in general. Secondly, the learning strategies they used were operationally based on cultural behaviors of the learners. They did not want to move on other academic-intellectual learning habits. This point is more on problem of socio-cultural features and personal habits which are not relevant to use in the teaching processes at university level.

5. CONCLUSION

The EFL learners' problems in understanding content-based learning materials found at the English Department of FKIP Universitas Bung Hatta, Padang are problems of both reading skill and learning strategies. In relation to the fact, it is necessary for the lecturer to inform to the students that suitable learning strategies give significant contribution to learning achievement. In addition, the students need to be ensured that the appropriate learning strategies should be variously applied in learning, not only for examination and marks, but also for better science and knowledge. This information is highly needed in order that the students gain a better understanding on the relevant concepts and theories of content-based instructions. It may be stated as well that the teaching learning processes of reading and writing skills should be reviewed and better developed in order that the students would have had essential reading and writing skills before learning content-based instructions.

The information and discussion about learning strategies, particularly about those which have relations to language learning, should be informed and introduced to the students in order that they have knowledge on (language) learning strategies and they are able to select and to use effectively for various learning instructions. It is also suggested to the principals of English Department and the lecturers as well to review, to revise, and to develop better teaching-learning processes of reading and writing skills. It is also necessary to improve students' motivation to learn English grammar and to add vocabularies as the ways to have better understanding on content-based instructions.The lecturers of content-based instructions need to select and use appropriate classroom methods and teaching techniques. The lecturers of content-based instructions have to design and develop structural-systematic tasks, homework, and particular assignments which make students to study seriously at home and in library. In addition, the learning programs assigned should make students learn independently.

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