Readability Assessment of Reading Texts in Pathway to English for SMA/MA Grade X

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Abstract : The purpose of the study is to describe readability of reading texts in textbook, 'Pathway to English' for SMA/MA Grade X' published by Erlangga. The study is a quantitative content analysis. The source of the data was the textbook, and only reading texts with minimally 150 words in length were taken as the sample. 22 reading texts that matched the criteria were analyzed quantitatively in percentage form. Result of the data analysis shows that reveals that 9 (or 41%) reading texts match tenth grade level, but the rest, 4 (or 18%) reading texts are to easy, at 7th-8th grade level. and 9 (or 41%) reading texts are are fairly difficult to difficult, at 11th-16th grade level. Put it another way, 59% reading texts with minimally 150 words in length selected for use in EFL textbook 'Pathway to English' published by Penerbit Erlangga in 2016 were not in accordance with tenth grade SMA students' readability level. In addition, It was also found that the data show that readability level of a text do not depend on text length.

Keywords : ***Readability, Reading Text, Textbook***

1. INTRODUCTION

Reading is a significant skill that learners should know. Learners read texts for various goals from gaining information to enjoyment. It helps EFL learners to be familiar with the subjects of their majors and improve their language knowledge. Kim and Anderson (2011) and Salehi, et al (2014) pointed out that reading has a key role in completing all university courses. The ultimate purpose of reading is comprehension. However, although EFL learners are proficient in English, they usually have a lot of problems in comprehending texts. Thus, it can be stated that there are some problems that students faced when trying to comprehend reading texts.

A number of studies on reading comprehension problems both in abroad and in Indonesia reveal that the major problem in reading comprehension is vocabulary. Kasim and Raisha (2017), for example, found that the biggest reading comprehension problem was with semantics in which 81% of the participants considered unfamiliar vocabulary was their major problem in comprehending English texts. Another study by Qrqez and Ab Rashid (2017) reveal that the respondents are motivated to learn as they are in dire need for acquiring English. However, they face several problems in the reading process, such as ambiguous words, unfamiliar vocabulary, and limited available time to cognitively process the text. Similarly, Al Seyabi and Tuzlukova (2015) found that students in both contexts face multiple problems with reading, especially with vocabulary. In similar line, O'Sullivan (2009) argues that reading problems can be attributed to two main issues: the first one is

deficient lower level processes such as letter and word identification; the second one is vocabulary and lexis. At the university level, Al Brashdi (2002) reports that difficult vocabulary was the most encountered challenge faced by Omani university students.

As one of the most significant factors in teaching English as a second or foreign language, reading comprehension is an important element and the question of the readability of the texts has special importance. Stephen (2018) is quoted as saying:

- If you are writing for children, aim for their specific grade level or lower.
- If you are writing a future bestselling novel, aim for a grade level of 6 or lower.
- If you are writing for the general public, aim for a grade level of 8 or lower.
- If you are writing for a graduate audience, aim for a grade level of 10 or lower.
- If you are writing for a postgraduate audience, aim for a grade level of 12 or lower.

What Stephen would like to stress is that the text selected for certain group of EFL students should be in line with their readability level. Put it briefly, in order for it to be successfully comprehended, the text should be readable.

Studies on text readability have already been done. Yulianingtyas (2016) found that BSE for second year junior high school published by Department of National Education were readable but it was not appropriate for the second year junior high school students because it was very easy for them to understand. Maryansyah (2016), who studied 63 texts used in teaching reading for IX grade students at MTsN 2 Kota Bengkulu, revealed that 54% out of 63 texts are easy for grade IX students of MTsN 2 Kota Bengkulu; 27% out of 63 texts are difficult; 10% out of 63 texts are invalid; and 9% out of 63 texts are appropriate. Yulianto (2019) who studied readability of reading texts in Pathway to English 2 Textbook for the Eighth Grade of Junior High School Students published by Erlangga found that there were 6 texts appropriate elementary students; there was only one text from eight texts is relevant to the eighth grade students of Junior High School. Budiarti (2014) who studies reading texts in English in Focus for Grade VIII also found that of sixteen texts, only five texts are relevant to the students of Junior High School

Concerning readability level of texts in English textbooks for senior high school, Indrawan (2018), who studies textbook grade level and text readability of English textbooks provided by Ministry of Education and Culture, finds that the distribution of text readability and syntactic complexity is not appropriate because reading texts in grade 10 overall is harder than in grade 11. Sholihah (2018), who studied readability of reading texts in Bahasa Inggris for senior high school students grade XII, finds that 6 texts out of 16 texts are readable or suitable with senior high school students grade XII. The rest are fairly difficult and difficult. Rohmatillah (2015), who dealt with reading texts in English Alive for senior high school grade X published by Yudhistira, revealed that, in terms of readability, only five texts from sixteen texts are relevant to the students of senior high school. Similar results were also revealed by Rahmawati (2012) found that the texts in Developing English

Competencies for Grade X are easily to be read by tenth grade students, but some texts in English Today 1 have higher difficulty level than Developing English Competencies for grade X.

Textbooks must be carefully selected so it does not mismatch with the students' reading level. In our schools, English teachers both at SMP and SMA (SMK) do not choose reading materials by themselves. They heavily rely on reading materials in English textbooks. The danger is they do not know whether the reading texts in the textbooks they use are easy or difficult for their students. They may wrongly select textbooks containing reading materials which are too easy or too difficult. It is in this context, preventive actions must be taken to help English teachers decide which textbook to use. It is the desire to help textbook writers and English teachers, this study was conducted.

Statement of the Problem

The above mentioned findings of previous studies show that textbooks, especially reading texts, are not appropriately selected by textbook writers seen in terms of readability level. There are still lot of textbooks used at junior and senior high schools that have not been studied. For this reason, this research problem is addressed: Are reading texts in textbook 'Pathway to English' for SMA/MA Grade X appropriate for the tenth grade senior high school in terms of their readability level?

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Description of Reading

Reading is fundamental in our life. It can serve many purposes. Firstly, it makes the reader relax. Lots of people prefer to read their favorite books in their spare time. Secondly, reading is crucial for business purposes. The business people face a ton of emails in their daily work. The reading skill then supports a lot on this interaction. Lastly, the readers may read for knowledge. For example, the students are usually required to read textbooks, journals or academic books in all courses they registered. In Indonesia, reading is also very important for Indonesians, especially English reading. It is the medium for people for cooperating with the neighbors in not only the Southeast Asian nations, but also other countries which use English for communicating for various purposes.

There are three basic views in theory of reading, namely; bottom-up views, top down views, and interactive (or integrative) views (Hedgcock and Ferris, 2009). In bottom-view, reading is as a decoding process of constructing meaning at the "bottom", e.g. letters or words to the larger units at "the top", e.g. phrases, clauses, and inter-sentential linkages. Dole et al (1991) stated that this model is considered as to a single-direction, part-to-whole processing of a written or printed text. It is also called a sequential approach in that to get information from the printed pages, readers should be able to pronounce and comprehend the printed words, signs, letters, and symbols by assigning meaning to them. The term "bottom up" is exactly how this process works.

Reading, according to top-down model, is about guessing the meaning of the target reading material. Goodman (1971) firstly comment on top-down model as "a psycholinguistic guessing game', by showing that the readers predict text's meaning primarily based on their existing or

background knowledge. In addition, the top-down model is recognized under cognitive process that the processing of a text begins in the mind of the reader. The meaning which is retrieved from the reader's knowledge, expectation, assumption, and questions to the text is reconfirmed by identifying the letters and words appeared on the text (Aebersold & Field, 1997). In the other words, the readers activate their experience and background or world knowledge in order to understand the text. Successful comprehension relies more on what the reader brings to the text.

The last model considered reading as an interactive process. This approach is built on the combination of the bottom-up and top-down models. The efficient and effective reading requires both top and bottom decoding in which this model fill the gap between two models since it emphasizes both what is in the print and background knowledge. The process of constructing meaning from the print of the bottom-up model and the process of using background knowledge of the top-down have a place in the interactive model. The readers, for example may use top-down reading to compensate for deficiencies in bottom-up reading. A deficit in any particular process will result in a greater reliance on the other knowledge sources (Stanovich, 1980). That is why reading defined as an interactive-compensatory process.

Comprehending a text is a complex process. Experts in reading had dealt with texts to find ways of how to ease learner and teacher work out learning and teaching reading through the discussion of text. The effort of easing teacher in teaching reading also demands preventive action before deciding which text to use. This should be done to obtain appropriate text for particular group of learners; otherwise, the text may be too easy or too difficult for them. In dealing with this matter, Hedgcock and Ferris (2009) provide several considerations before selecting a text for secondary learners. They argue that the variables below should be put in consideration when a teacher selects text for their learners;

1. Text length (both individual text and course reader)
2. Extra-textual characteristics (vocabulary glosses, pictures, headings, special text, formatting, audio, video, graphics and hyperlinks in digital text)
3. Vocabulary (proportion of unfamiliar content-specific, general, and academic words, frequency of occurrence; helpfulness of surrounding contexts)
4. Morphology (inflectional and derivational morphemes that could assist readers with sentence processing and word analysis)
5. Syntax (sentence length/complexity, sentence type, "advanced" structure such as passive constructions, relative clauses, and so on)
6. Explicit cohesive devices such as connectives and referential ties
7. Text macrostructure: logical ordering of ideas, transparency of logical relations, and overall discourse structure.

The seven considerations are all important in selecting a text. Teacher should carefully analyze text before it is taught to her learners. After all, the discussion on concept of text above implies that text has numerous elements and information types. Consequently, in planning a lesson in teaching reading, a teacher could not just pick or select any text without any strong analysis and consideration. She may work with a specific text for several days or even weeks. Thus a careful analysis of that text is extremely important for the success of that lesson.

No matter how much an English teacher learns about her learners' reading skills and attitudes, she needs to evaluate books, modules, or materials she is going to ask her learners to read. If materials are too easy, students are unchallenged and bored, and no learning occurs; if materials are too difficult, students are frustrated and withdrawn, and again no learning occurs (Carrell, 1987). If the teacher does not evaluate the materials she expects learners to read, she may be presenting her learners with reading that is far too difficult, too easy, too inaccessible, or too unfriendly. It is important to note that a good fit between learners and the texts to be read is crucial. Instrument which is available to help teachers engage in this matter is a concept called as readability.

Readability

There are some broadly known definitions of readability. The first is suggested by Dale and Chall (1949). They define readability as the sum total (including all the interactions) of all those elements within a given piece of printed material that affect the success a group of readers have with it. The success is the extent to which they understand it, read it at an optimal speed, and find it interesting. Nineteen years later, Klare (1968) states many validity studies of readability formulas indicates that the readability of a passage or text can be operationally defined in terms of; efficiency of reading, reader judgment, and comprehension and learning. These definitions are drawn based on variables which are measured by a particular formula.

McLaughlin (1969) defines readability as the degree to which a given class of people finds certain reading matter compelling and comprehensible. This definition stresses the interaction between text and a class of readers of known characteristics such as reading skill, prior knowledge, and motivation. Richard and Schmidt (2002), state that readability is how easily written materials can be read and understood. They add that readability depends on many factors, such as; the average length of sentences in a passage, the number of new words a passage contains, and the grammatical complexity of the language used. This definition mentions some factors that may affect a readability of a given material. Furthermore, Pikulski (2002) suggests that readability is the level of ease or difficulty with which text material can be understood by a particular reader who is reading that text for a specific purpose. Readability is dependent upon many characteristics of a text and many characteristics of readers. The last definition is suggested by Fry (2002), he defines readability as an objective numerical score obtained by applying a readability formula.

All definitions above are varying in some senses. However, all of them describe a general impression that we can catch. One important characteristic of a useful informed definition of readability is that it reflects the interactive nature of the construct. Interaction between reader and particular reading material is a foremost consideration in readability. Additionally, there are factors which affect readability from both, reader and material read (books or texts). These all are important to be taken into account in measuring readability.

Oakland and Lane (2004) state that basically there are two approaches in measuring readability of text: quantitative and qualitative approaches. This is also suggested by Ulusoy (2006). They agreed that quantitative approach is the approach in

measuring readability which relies on two quantitatively measured qualities: vocabulary (e.g., typically assessed by word familiarity and/or the number of letters or syllables within a word) and syntax (e.g., typically assessed by sentence and paragraph length and/or sentence and passage complexity). This approach is mostly represented by readability formulas. On the other hand, qualitative approach is the approach in measuring readability which concerns about some important text variables such as structure, coherence and cohesion; and important reader variables such as prior knowledge, interest, motivation and purpose for reading, and idea density and conceptual difficulty. Additionally, Ulusoy (2006) suggests combination of both; quantitative and qualitative approach in measuring readability of a passages, texts or even books to accommodate all aspect of an assessed material.

The greatest difference among these approaches is in their primary concern for either practice or theory. The cognitive-structural and qualitative approaches of readability focus on most heavily theory, specifically on cognitive and linguistic theory. While the classic readability, holistic-judgment, and quantitative approaches are concerned more with practical use. To sum up, they are all have the same goals but different on practice. Thus, for the user of readability formulas, no matter the approach is, all of them are acceptable scientifically.

Readability may be viewed either as legibility, interest, or ease of comprehension; and the terms readability and legibility are sometimes used interchangeably to mean ease and speed of reading printed material. Readability may be used to mean understanding or comprehension of the printed text. Such elements as vocabulary and sentence structure, percentage of hard words, and long sentences distinguish between those persons who are literate and those who are highly literate.

3. RESEARCH OF METHOD

The purpose of this study is to describe the readability of reading texts in "Pathway to English' for SMA/MA Grade X. In this context, the study was categorized as an evaluative study in that it tried to evaluate whether or not reading texts in those textbooks were appropriate in terms of students' grade levels. Since data were reading texts in the textbook, the study is categorized as content analysis. Berelson (1952) defines it as, "A research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication". In this case, reading texts were considered as the manifest of content of communication. Furthermore, the data collected were quantified, therefore, the study was classified quantitative content analysis (Franzosi, 2004: 547).

The source of data in this study was English textbook "Pathway to English for SMA/MA Grade X". The data were reading texts in the textbook with minimally 150 words in length.

Data in this study was collected using documentation technique. Documentation technique was carried out in two steps: firstly identify and collecting all the reading texts in the textbook, and put them in the data collecting sheet. The next step is to count the length of each selected texts, and select only texts which consisted of minimally 150 words for the analysis.

The data were analyzed using the New Dale-Chall Readability formula. For the purpose of data analysis, Dale-Chall Readability Tool, namely ReadablePro (or calculator) was run. Result of the data analysis was interpreted based on the criteria in the following table.

Table 1. Readability criteria

Adjusted Score	Grade LEVEL
4.9 and Below	Grade 4 and Below
5.0 to 5.9	Grades 5 - 6
6.0 to 6.9	Grades 7 - 8
7.0 to 7.9	Grades 9 - 10
8.0 to 8.9	Grades 11 - 12
9.0 to 9.9	Grades 13 - 15 (College)
10 and Above	Grades 16 and Above (College Graduate)

(Dale & Chall, 1949)

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As pointed out before in 3.3, texts selected for analysis in the present study consisted of minimally 150 words. Based on the calculation of text length, there were 22 texts with minimally 152 and maximally 298 words in length. These texts were analyzed using ReadablePro (or calculator).

The results are shown in table 2.

No	Text Title	Raw Score	Adjusted Score	Final	Grade Level	Text Lengt
1	Dear Flightunit	2.5197	3.6365 + 2.5197	6.2	7 - 8	*298 words*
2	130 Cars in Foggy UK Pile-up	2.567	3.6365 + 2.567	6.2	7 - 8	*233 words*
3	What is so unlucky about the no. 13	2.9645	3.6365 + 2.9645	6.6	7 - 8	*168 words*
4	Dear Sir, …	3.1603	3.6365 + 3.1603	6.8	7 - 8	*171 words*
5	Orchard Fashion Runway	3.4494	3.6365 + 3.4494	7.1	9 - 10	*152 words*
6	The Eearly Life of Marie Curie	3.6536	3.6365 + 3.6536	7.3	9 - 10	*291 words*
7	Advise Column	3.6629	3.6365 + 3.6629	7.3	9 - 10	*211 words*
8	Advise Column	3.7354	3.6365 + 3.7354	7.4	9 - 10	*298 words*
9	Marzuki	3.897	3.6365 + 3.897	7.5	9 - 10	*172 words*
10	Ocean Liner	3.8741	3.6365 + 3.8741	7.5	9 - 10	*170 words*
11	The Eearly life of Abraham Lincoln	4.1575	3.6365 + 4.1575	7.8	9 - 10	*158 words*
12	Sanusi Pane	4.1232	3.6365 + 4.1232	7.8	9 - 10	*206 words*
13	Don't Cry Argentina	4.2527	3.6365 + 4.2527	7.9	9 - 10	*252 words*
14	The Electric Torch or Flashlight	4.4028	3.6365 + 4.4028	8	11 - 12	*191 words*
15	Dishwasher	4.4084	3.6365 + 4.4084	8	11 - 12	*180 words*
16	Margaret Hilda Thatcher	4.4284	3.6365 + 4.4284	8.1	11 - 12	*274 words*
17	Plasma TV	4.5764	3.6365 + 4.5764	8.2	11 - 12	*197 words*
18	Future Ahead	4.7323	3.6365 + 4.7323	8.4	11 - 12	*255 words*

19	Advertisement Language	5.0834	3.6365 + 5.0834	8.7	11 - 12	*193 words*
20	What is Your Zodiac Sign?	5.6612	3.6365 + 5.6612	9.3	13 - 15	*178 words*
21	Adam Malik	5.8413	3.6365 + 5.8413	9.5	13 – 15	*161 words*
22	Heal the World	9.3233	3.6365 + 9.3233	13	16 - ≥	*163 words*

Results of the analysis presented in Table 2 indicate that four texts, namely Dear Flightunit, 130 Cars in Foggy UK Pile-up, What is so unlucky about the no. 13, and Dear Sir, … are appropriate for grade 7-8; 9 texts namely Orchard Fashion Runway, The Eearly Life of Marie Curie, Advise Column (1), Advise Column (2), Marzuki, Ocean Liner, The Eearly life of Abraham Lincoln, Sanusi Pane, Don't Cry Argentina are appropriate for grade 9-10; 6 texts are appropriate for grade 11-12 namely The Electric Torch or Flash-light, Dishwasher, Margaret Hilda Thatcher, Plasma TV, Future Ahead, and Advertisement Language; and 2 texts namely What is Your Zodiac Sign and Adam Malik are appropriate for college students, and 1 text namely Heal the World is appropriate for graduate students. The distribution of text readability across grade levels is displayed in Figure 1

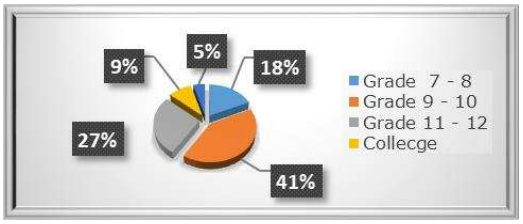

Figure 1. Distribution of tests in terms of grade levels

In addition to the distribution of texts just described, it is also interesting to observe the data mentioned in Table 3.

No	Text Title	Readability score	Text length
1	Dear Flightunit	6.2	298 words
2	130 Cars in Foggy UK Pile-up	6.2	233 words
3	Orchard Fashion Runway	7.1	152 words
4	The Eearly life of Abraham Lincoln	7.8	158 words
5	Margaret Hilda Thatcher	8.1	274 words
6	Advise Column	7.4	298 words
7	Don't Cry Argentina	7.9	252 words
8	Future Ahead	8.4	255 words
9	Adam Malik	9.5	161 words
10	Heal the World	13	163 words

Some longer texts such as (1), (2), (5), (6), (7) and (8) have lower readability scores than shorter ones, such as (3), (4), (9), and (10). These data indicate that texts which are longer do not necessarily mean that they are more difficult to comprehend; conversely, texts which are shorter do not mean that they are easier to comprehend. Although it cannot be generalized, the data show that text length does not correlate with level of comprehensibility.

The data analysis which covers only reading texts having minimally 150 words in length leads the researcher to summarize the finding ad follows: (1) of 22 texts that were analyzed, 4 (or 18%) appropriate for 7-8 grade; 9 (or 41%) for 9-10 grade, 6 (or 27%) for 11 – 12 college students, and 1 (or 5%) for graduate students. In addition, the data also shows that length of text does not correlate with text difficulty.

Disscusion

The data analysis reveals that 9 (or 41%) reading texts match tenth grade level, but the rest, 4 (or 18%) below and 9 (or 41%) above tenth grade SMA students' grade level. Put it another way, 59% reading texts with minimally 150 words in length selected for use in EFL textbook 'Pathway to English' published by Penerbit Erlangga in 2016 were not in accordance with tenth grade SMA students' readability level. In addition, the data show that readability level of a text do not depend on text length.

Similar findings were also reported by other researchers. Rohmatillah (2015) who studied reading texts in English Alive for Senior High School Grade X published by Yudhistira found that only five texts from sixteen texts are relevant to the students of Senior High School in terms of readability level. Rahmawati and Lestari (2012) who studied reading texts in Developing English Competencies for Grade X" published by the Department of National Education and English Today 1" published by Quadra revealed that English Today 1 has some texts with higher difficulty level than Developing English Competencies for grade X. Similarly, Yupika Maryansyah (2016) found that 54% out of 63 texts are easy for grade IX students of MTsN 2 Kota Bengkulu; 27% out of 63 texts are difficult; 10 % out of 63 texts are invalid; and 9% out of 63 texts are appropriate. Indrawan (2018) and Sholihah (2018) revealed similar results. However, the findings cannot be generalized because as revealed by Hidayat (2016), the reading texts in textbook he studied were relatively suitable for eleventh grade students.

EFL textbooks are developed to help students learning English as a foreign language develop their skills in reading in English. Therefore, reading texts in the textbook should be at students' readable level. The reason is when text is too difficult or awkward to read, messages may not be engaged with or understood. On the flipside, when writing is too simplistic, readers might feel patronized or just plain bored. Either way, the readability of a given text influences the extent to which people engage with and take on a message. For this reason, textbooks must be carefully evaluated and selected so it does not mismatch with the students' reading level. As Carrell (1987) put it, if materials are too easy, students are unchallenged and bored, and no learning occurs; if materials are too difficult, students are frustrated and withdrawn, and again no learning occurs. If the teachers do not evaluate the materials they expect learners to read, they may be presenting their learners with reading that is far too difficult, too easy, too inaccessible, or too unfriendly. It is important to note that a good fit between learners and the texts to be read is crucial. The texts selected should be those that students understand them, read them at an optimal speed and find them interesting.

Reading texts for users with limited reading skills is still an open problem. This may include people with language disorders (eg. dyslexia makes readings low and complex) as well as those not proficient enough in the language of a text/passage or that have to read a content whose necessary expertise for understanding is too high. That is why, the issue of measuring the readability of a text is important in many other areas. For example, it allows to estimate the level of difficulty of a text when a student learns reading or learns a foreign language. For this reason, it is important for English teachers and textbook writers to take into account the

reading skills of users and their level of expertise.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The present study deals with texts readability. 22 texts with minimal 150 words in lengths were selected and analyzed. Result of the analysis lead to the conclusion that 9 (or 41%) reading texts in EFL textbook 'Pathway to English' published by Penerbit Erlangga in 2016 are appropriate for tenth grade level, but the rest, 4 (or 18%) below and 9 (or 41%) above tenth grade SMA students' grade level. In addition, the data show that readability level of a text do not depend on text length.

Based on the above conclusion, the researcher finds it necessary to put forward her suggestions to those who are concerned. First, though not all, empirical findings revealed that reading texts in textbooks are below or above readability level of students at junior and senior high school. For this reason, English teachers at Junior and Senior high schools are expected to pay attention to text readability in selecting textbooks for use at their schools; (2) Writers of English textbooks which are intended to be used by junior and senior high school students are suggested to be aware of readability of texts selected for inclusion in EFL textbooks.; and (3) other researchers are suggested to conduct further studies on the findings of this research by employing other readability formulas or other methods of readability analysis.

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