

**CHAPTER I**  
**INTRODUCTION**

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## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background of the Study

English is an important foreign language in Indonesia. It is the only compulsory foreign language subject in school. English is one of the three subjects to test in the state examination before students leave High Schools. It is a selection criterion for higher studies, and job vacancies. In other words, English is a foreign language required both for academic and workplace reasons.

Many Indonesian students are interested to continue their study abroad in English speaking countries for which they have to meet certain requirements. They should take an English test that is acknowledged internationally to measure their competence in English language. There are various kinds of international English tests available for academic purposes, notably TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) and IELTS (International English Language Testing System). These two tests are the most well known English tests in Indonesia.

Further, English is also needed in workplaces. We can see it from advertisements which offer job vacancies published in newspapers or magazines. Most of the advertisements state that the candidate should master written and spoken English. Many companies require the prospective candidate to take internationally standard tests. One of the standardized English tests for workplace is TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication).

The TOEFL, the IELTS and the TOEIC test the English language skills and components of the test takers. There are three sections in TOEFL: Listening Comprehension, Structure and Written Expression, and Reading Comprehension. IELTS assesses four language skills – reading, writing, speaking, and listening – in English, whereas TOEIC only tests two skills: listening comprehension and reading. Basically, what make them different from each other are the objectives of the tests. TOEFL and IELTS are mainly for academic purposes. Those who are going to study in English-speaking countries should take these kinds of tests as one of the important requirements to enter schools or universities there. These tests will also measure the test takers' mastery of their English proficiency. These tests can be used to predict whether the test takers can linguistically 'survive' or not in the foreign countries. On the other hand, TOEIC focuses on work place needs. In the globalization era, there are some companies use English as important medium communication, such as international business, trade, industry, and diplomacy. This is the reason for some companies to give an English test to their staff candidates.

Among the four language skills – listening, reading, writing and speaking - *reading* is the one the researcher is interested in. It is because good English reading ability is needed by those who are studying abroad. The ability to read English reading texts is an important medium to improve one's knowledge about culture and language itself. In some countries where English is as foreign language, like Indonesia, exposure to English is very limited; not many people speak English in their daily lives. In other words, those learners hardly have a chance to practice their English in their daily conversation. Consequently, one of the ways for those who are very interested in, and for those who really need English in a situation like Indonesia is to read a lot. Other

reasons are by reading a lot the readers can take some information in the text to contribute to a text comprehension. The reader can get accuracy and speed of graphemic perception, that is, perception of written symbols, the control of language relationships and structure, knowledge of vocabulary items and lexical combinations, awareness of redundancy, the ability to use contextual clues, and recognition of cultural allusions (indirect reference). In addition, in reading longer passages, the reader can take additional skills needed, for example, the understanding of the central thought and of supporting statements, the ability to make logical references and the recognition of rhetorical devices and tone. Through reading a lot, a successful reader will master several underlying skills such as vocabulary; comprehension and retention; inferences and conclusions; and critical thinking and analysis. These skills are interrelated to one another in the sense that each contributes to effective reading. So, by improving their knowledge in culture and language, good reading ability can be achieved.

In TESOL, Techniques and Procedures, Bowen et.al. (1985) show ten basic skills needed by the reader: (1) Understanding literal meanings. (2) Paraphrasing the content. (3) Getting the main thought and the details. (4) Distinguishing among fact, inference, and opinion. (5) Seeing relationships. (6) Predicting outcomes. (7) Drawing conclusions. (8) Making generalizations. (9) Understanding figurative language, and (10) Recognizing propaganda. The more advanced the reading texts, the more skills or subskills are needed by a reader. This is true since possessing more subskills will enhance the reader's ability to understand texts.

Harris and Smith (1986:5) offer a third perspective, reading as the intellectual and emotional perception of a printed message. According to them, there are five important aspects to reading, those are, *intellectual, emotional, perception, printed, and*

*message*. The term *intellectual*, here, identifies the activity as cognitive, rational, and meaning-driven, while *emotional* shows recognition of the fact that feelings and connotations prompted by the topic and by the author's formulation of the message will color the reader's perception. *Perception* is a term to indicate the role of a personal construction of the message. It means that perceptions may vary from reader to reader. The fourth, *printed*, refers to the use of an alphabetic code, including spelling and punctuation to approximate spoken language. The last terms, *message*, and refers to communication, intentionally, and organization.

With a more explicit explanation, Harris (1969:59) mentions at least three abilities needed in reading comprehensions:

1. Language and graphic symbols.
  - a. Comprehending a large percentage of the lexical items occurring in non-specialized writing and being able to derive the meaning of unfamiliar items (or special uses of common items) from the contexts in which they occur.
  - b. Understanding the syntactical and morphological forms characteristic of the written language and following the longer and more involved stretches of language (sentences and sequences of sentences) occurring in formal writing.
  - c. Responding correctly to the graphic symbols of writing (e.g., punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing, italicizing) used to convey and clarify meaning.
2. Ideas
  - a. Identifying the writer's purpose and central idea.
  - b. Understanding the subordinate ideas which support the thesis.
  - c. Drawing correct conclusions and valid inferences from what is given.

### 3. Tone and Style

- a. Recognizing the author's attitude toward the subject and the reader, understanding the tone of the writing.
- b. Identifying the methods and stylistic devices by which the author conveys his ideas.

After reviewing some definitions and some requirements of reading, it is also necessary to have knowledge on problems that are usually involved in reading a foreign language as stated by Greenall and Swan (1989: 1-3). Greenall and Swan identify thirteen problems of foreign language learners. Those problems deal with extracting main ideas, reading for specific information, understanding text organization, predicting, checking comprehension, inferring, dealing with unfamiliar words, linking ideas, understanding complex sentences, understanding writer's style, evaluating the text, reacting to the text, and writing summaries. These problems are so important to be noted that they might become inputs for teachers, syllabus or even curriculum designers to form suitable ways to overcome the problems.

It is no wonder, then, that reading is one of the language skills that might be frustrating for some foreign language learners since in fact reading skill requires very complex components. However, according to Bruder and Henderson (1986:1) the development of an ability to read with speed and comprehension is clearly an essential objective of most students of English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL). For learners in non-English-speaking environments, printed material represents the primary medium of communication in the new language. *Therefore, second or foreign language learners should be more skillful in identifying any reading subskills.*

Bruder and Henderson (1986: 25) state that accurate assessment of reading ability is essential. Whether its purpose is to evaluate an individual's potential for success in an academic program or to determine the type and level of instruction that he or she needs in order to achieve the greatest reading proficiency. It means that an appropriate instrument of reading is really essential to facilitate the measurement of one's reading proficiency.

Furthermore, to be of real value, an assessment should provide detailed information regarding the source of the learner's weakness. It might be done by identifying deficiencies in one or more of the sub-components of the reading process: letter identification, word recognition, lexical access, contextual interpretation, background knowledge, integration of meaning, retention of information, and so forth.

Some specialists have conducted research in reading; they have studied about the contribution of certain subskills to the difficulty level of particular reading comprehension tests. Among others are Kyle Perkins (1992); Tom Lumley (1993); Roy Freedl-Irene Kostin (1993), and Robert Hilke – Paul Wadden (1997).

Kyle Perkins (1992) conducted a study on the effect of passage topical structure types on ESL (English as a Second Language) reading comprehension difficulty. This topical structure includes the initial sentence element which is the initially placed discourse material in a sentence; a mood (surface structure) subject; and a topical subject which is a surface subject relating to the discourse topic of a text. The results show that there is a difference in the item difficulty of the questions according to the type of topical structure on which the questions are based.

In the same field, Tom Lumley (1993) conducted a study on the notion of subskills in reading comprehension tests-of EAP (English for Academic Purposes).

This study began by examining the place of subskills in ESL syllabus and test design. He described the issue of teachers' perceptions of subskills and their difficulty, as represented in reading comprehension tests and he also put forward a framework for negotiating agreement between teachers about subskills tested by reading comprehension test items. Using this framework, very substantial agreement between groups of five experienced teachers of EAP was obtained in matching subskills to individual test items in the reading section of a test EAP, as well as judging the difficulty of these subskills. To analyze the reading test items, Lumley employed Rasch IRT (Item Response Theory) and the finding indicated that there was a significant correlation between the teachers' consensus of subskills difficulty level and the Rasch analysis of item difficulty.

Freedle and Kostin (1993) conducted a study on the difficulty of a large sample (n= 213) of TOEFL reading comprehension items. In this study they also examined whether text and text-by-item interaction variables played a significant role in predicting item difficulty. They proposed two hypotheses in their research: (1) that multiple-choice reading tests are sensitive to 12 categories of sentential and/or discourse variables, which are found to influence comprehension, processes in the experimental literature. (2) The categories of variables that are identified in the first hypothesis contribute significant independent variance in predicting item difficulty. The analysis results showed the importance of 11 out of the 12 categories, while stepwise regression analyses, accounting for up to 58% of the variance. In other words, most of the variables identified in the study are important predictors of the item difficulty.

Hilke and Wadden (1997) analyzed TOEFL in which they identified the specific content and question types that appeared in the exam as well as their ratio and placement within particular test sections. This research aimed at investigating the existence of some TOEFL-preparation books available in the market whether they really facilitated future test takers to be ready to do the TOEFL test. In their research, they used a sample of 10 TOEFL exams from the early 1990's. In their study, they did not only examine the reading comprehension section, but also the structure and written expression parts. They identified the question types and topic areas and they created taxonomies for both the Structure and Written Expression (Part II) and the Reading Comprehension (Part III) sections. In the analysis, taxonomies derived from the TOEFL were used to evaluate ten Reading TOEFL-preparation texts. It turned out that commercial texts varied considerably in the accuracy with which they represented the exam.

These studies dealt with *analyzing subskills in* Reading comprehension questions of the Reading Tests. The findings showed that the reading theories previously explained were true, in the sense that reading skill required complex processes. Although there have been several studies on reading, still, reading is such a challenging field to be studied. Those research findings trigger the researcher to conduct a similar study which focuses more on a language test.

The purpose of the present study was therefore to analyze reading comprehension questions of some reading tests. The tests are taken from three preparation books of the international English tests, i.e. the TOEFL, IELTS and the TOEIC Preparation Books published by LONGMAN.

## **1.2. Statement of the Problems**

Based on the background explained previously, this study in general addressed the following questions: as “What do the reading comprehension questions of the TOEFL, IELTS, and TOEIC Preparation Books actually test?” Specifically the study answered the following minor questions:

1. What reading-subskills are tested in the reading comprehension questions of the TOEFL, IELTS and TOEIC Preparation Books?
2. What cognitive domains of Barrett Taxonomy are tested in the reading comprehension questions of the TOEFL, IELTS and TOEIC Preparation Books?

## **1.3. Objective of the Study**

In relation to the above-mentioned problems, the objective of this study was to analyze the reading tests available in the TOEFL, IELTS, and TOEIC test. Specifically the study aimed to describe:

1. the reading subskills tested in the reading comprehension questions of the TOEFL, IELTS, and TOEIC Preparation Books.
2. the cognitive domains of Barrett Taxonomy tested in the reading comprehension questions of the TOEFL, IELTS, and TOEIC Preparation Books.

## **1.4. Significance of the Study**

This study gives some contributions both theoretically and practically to the teachers and writers. From the theoretical point of view, the findings of this study enrich the present literature, especially those related to reading skills and reading

comprehensions tests. Such study is replicable, so that other researchers might get a new insight to conduct a similar study with various test samples and languages skills.

The second contribution is addressed to tests developers in the field of language studies. It is expected that in the future this study will provide input for teachers, syllabus and curriculum designers, and also textbook writers about reading skills and reading tests.

Having read the results of this study, practitioners might have new knowledge on language testing.

### **1.5. Scope and Limitation of this Study**

The scope of this study is analysing samples of reading comprehension questions tests taken from the reading sections of three preparation books of English test; Longman Complete Course for the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) TEST, published by Longman Incorporation in 2001. IELTS (International English Language Testing System) Practice Tests Plus, published by Longman, Fifth Impression 2003, and The Longman Preparation Series for the TOEIC Test, Advanced Course (Test of English for International Communication) Test, published by Longman in 2004.

Furthermore, this study has some limitations. From every kind of tests, only two chapters are selected as samples. Consequently, there are six sets of reading comprehension questions of reading tests analyzed in this research.

## 1.6. Assumption of the Study

The assumptions underlying this study are TOEFL, IELTS, and TOEIC *in this study belong to advanced level.*

- a) *The Longman Complete Course for the TOEFL Test* is a test to measure the level of English proficiency of nonnative speakers of *advanced level* English. Topics of the reading passage varied, but they are often informational subjects that might be studied in *an American university*: American history, literature, art, architecture, geology, geography, and astronomy. This advanced level Test is scored on scale of 500 to 677. This *TOEFL Test* is designed to measure students' ability to read and understand short passages similar in topic and style that students *are likely* to encounter in North American Universities and colleges. It is the registered trademark of Educational Testing Service (Phillips D:2001).
- b) *The IELTS Practice Test Plus* is a test of English language skills designed for students who want to study in the medium of English either at university or college. This IELTS can provide a test result for *advanced level*. *Performance is rated on a score scale of 5-9*. The version of the test is *the Academic Module, for Students wishing to study at postgraduate and undergraduate level*. The module is used in *British, Australia and New Zealand* (Jakeman, V & McDowel, C. 2003:3-5).
- c) *This TOEIC Test* is a test for nonnative speakers of English who use English in *nonacademic situations, such as international business, trade, industry, and diplomacy*. This TOEIC test measures students listening and reading comprehension. This complete course gives *advanced students* the skills, strategies, practice, and confidence they need and is intended for students who achieve TOEIC scores from 450 to 850 (Lougheed.L:2004).

### 1.7. Explanation of Key Terms

In order to have a clear view of this study, it is necessary to elaborate some terms that are involved. In this research, some important points are getting involved: reading comprehension, comprehension question, reading subskills, cognitive domain, TOEFL, IELTS, and TOEIC.

1. Reading comprehension: Reading comprehension is the process of constructing meaning through the dynamic interaction among the reader's existing knowledge, the information suggested by the written language, and the context of reading situation. (Anthony, Pearson, and Raphael. 1993:284).
2. Comprehension Questions: Comprehension Question is question that directs learner's attention to the reading text, although some questions are occasionally answerable from their own experience without referring to the text. (I.S.P. Nation).
3. Reading Subskills: The term "reading subskills" in this study refers to any specific abilities required from test takers in order to understand the reading comprehension texts.
4. Cognitive Domain: Cognitive domain deals with the recognition and recall of knowledge and the development of intellectual abilities and skills (Pumfry, 1977).
5. TOEFL: Test of English as a Foreign Language is a test to measure the level of English proficiency of nonnative speakers of English. Topics of the reading passage are varied, but they are often informational subjects that might be studied in *an American university*: American history, literature, art, architecture, geology, geography, and astronomy. This *TOEFL Test* is designed to measure

students' ability to read and understand short passages similar in topic and style that students *are likely* to encounter in North American Universities and colleges. (Phillips, D. 2001).

6. IELTS: *International English Language Testing System* originally called the ELTS (English Language Testing Service) was introduced in 1980 by The British Council as a test for applicants to British Universities. The test is now administered jointly by the British Council, the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate, and the International Development Programme of Australian Universities and Colleges. It is taken annually by about 35.000 candidates at some 200 testing centers. The test comprises four modules – listening, speaking, reading, and writing. (Douglas D. 2000:145).
7. TOEIC: *Test of English for International Communication* was developed in 1979 by The Educational Testing Service (ETS) in the *US* in response to requests from clients for a standardized test of English listening and reading in the context of international business. The test is now administered by an independent commercial subsidiary of ETS, the Chauncey Group. TOEIC is given world-wide, although the majority of test takers and score users are located in *Asia, particularly Japan and Korea*, and it is taken by over a million candidates a year. It consists of 100 multiple-choice listening comprehension items and 100 multiple-choice reading comprehension items (Douglas D. 2000: 232).

## **1.8. The Organization of the Thesis**

This thesis is presented in six chapters; each consists of more than one sub-chapter. Chapter I is Introduction consisting of eight sub-divisions. In the first one the writer states the Background of the Study, the Statement of the Problems, the Objective of the Study, the Significance of the Study, the Scope and Limitation of the Study, the Assumption of the Study, the Explanation of Key Terms is followed by the Organization of the Thesis.

Chapter II deals with the Review of Related Literature. This chapter consists of four sub-divisions. The first one is about the Reading, Test of Reading, Description of Test of reading, and Content Analysis.

Chapter III concerns with the Research Method. In this chapter the writer talks about Research Design, Data and Data Source, Research Instrument, Procedure of Data Collection, and Procedure of Data Analysis.

Chapter IV is the Research Findings which talks about the Reading subskills employ in the Reading Comprehension Question of the TOEFL, IELTS, and TOEIC Preparation Books, Reading Test Types, and the Cognitive Domains employ in the Reading Comprehension Question of the TOEFL, IELTS, and TOEIC Preparation Books.

Chapter V deals with Discussion. This chapter discusses about two sub-divisions; they are the Reading Subskills and the Cognitive Domain of Barrett Taxonomy.

Chapter VI is the Conclusion and Suggestion. This chapter consists of two sub-divisions, they are Conclusion and Suggestion.