

THE READABILITY OF READING TEXTS ON THE ENGLISH TEXTBOOK

Rahmad Hidayat

rahmad.hidayat@iain-palangkaraya.ac.id

State Islamic Institute of Palangka Raya

Abstract

Many English teacher in Indonesia use textbooks as the primary reading in their classroom. Generally, the textbooks written at a higher readability level than the grade level for which text is intended even published by the government, in this case *Pusat Kurikulum dan Perbukuan, Balai Penelitian dan Pengembangan, Kementerian Pendidikam dan Kebudayaan*. This research sought to explore the readability of textbook for use by Senior High School Grade XI Semester 1 student in the year 2014. The research question in this study was: What is the readability level of reading texts on the English textbook? This book used as the newest and first English textbook under *Kurikulum 2013* at that time. In the study, Flesch Reading Ease Formula was chosen to analyze the reading texts. The formula were used to determine the readability level. The results show that the book were in Standard level with score 69.392. In other words, the reading texts was relatively suitable for eleventh grade students.

Keywords: *readability, textbook, English text book*

INTRODUCTION

The government of Indonesia has decided that English is one of the compulsory subjects especially for Junior High Scholl and Senior High School students. They composed it being one of curricular program that aims to develop attitude, knowledge and skills competence of learners as basic skills and strengthening capabilities in the life of society, nation and state in every Senior High School.

Krashen (1995:55) in his input hypothesis, the most important element of any language teaching program is input, so language acquisition can take place when a message which is being transmitted is understood. In language teaching process, teacher actually need course materials to enhance and support them. What would be language classes be without books, pictures, charts, and technological aids such computer, tape, LCD. Another options were the teacher could have a conversations,

discussions, and games, but it needed a lot of energy. It also deriving much of instructions from supporting materials. Then, what kind of materials is available, how the teacher decides what will work and what won't, and is it worthwhile for the teachers' learning.

Brown (2000:137) stated that the most obvious and most common of material support for language instruction comes through textbooks. Textbook is a kind of teaching and learning media that most commonly used in every teaching and learning process although many innovative media has been developed for educators to teach in new ways. Textbook used to support and enhance the student learning process. Brown also said that textbook is one type of text, a book use in an educational curriculum. In short, the book has many roles in order to improve students' understanding and learning process. It was also why textbook being an important medium to teach English especially in the Senior High School. For the students, textbook can be guidance to organize their learning both inside and outside the classroom. It helps them to learn the material better and easier. For the teacher, they could find creative use for the textbook used by handed it like a supervisor.

Reading is an activity to understand what the texts contains. As one of the language skills, reading contributes to the success of language learning together with other skills. John E. Pennick and Robin Lee Harris (2005:4) have asked the parents, teachers, administrators and scientist in more than 25 cities during a 10-years about their goals for students. They wanted their students to be more creative and an effective communicators, use science to identify and solve the problems, know how to learn science, and develop a positive attitude toward science.

In learning a language, it is important to make sure that the reading material is readable for the students. The readable material is quite important to be considered by the teachers as long as to improve students' ability in understanding the materials. The English textbook used in learning process can help them in understanding the material better and easily. These challenge many teachers to determine the right textbook for their students.

Several options of English language textbook were available under the guidance of National Curriculum Standards in Indonesia. The Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia has provided English language textbook for every level called BSE (*Buku Elektronik Sekolah*) which originally published in the form of electronic book and freely printed by educators. This kind of English textbook is mostly used by the teacher and students to teach English lessons especially for those

who teach in public school. Another choice of English language textbook is the commercial textbook that also based in the current curriculum guidelines. Even most of the textbooks are use standard of curriculum (*Kurikulum 2013*), it is not guarantee that the book is appropriate for students.

One of the methods to help the teacher choosing appropriate English textbook for the student is by considering the readability of reading material found in the textbook. What is readability? Readability is the ease of understanding or comprehension the text. Readability is how easily written materials can be read and understood (Richards and Schmidt, 2002:442). Readability has made writers very aware of what we "write at the level of words and sentences". Technical writers have accepted the limited benefit that these measurements offer in giving a rough sense of the difficulty of material. Readability as an aspect of the quality of information through its pervasiveness. Readability formula also have put into practice, through user-centered design, ways to stay focused on the needs of the audience and the problems in using the information or assistance that provide with computer products (William H. DuBay, 2004:57). However, the predicted readability of reading text was not always the most accurate and did not always reflect the ease or difficulty of the text. Two factors that are often examined closely are vocabulary and sentences within the text. Jeanne Chall (1981:2) stated that, "A vocabulary and a sentence factor together predict comprehension difficulty of written text to a higher degree of accuracy". Nevertheless, readability formula, today, were more popular used by many researchers' and educators since the technique is simple and objective.

Many readability formulas have been developed to predict the readability of reading material. Some of the formulas were The New Dale-Chall Readability Formula, The Dale-Chall Formula, Fry Graph, SMOG Reading, ATOS, Gunning Fox Index, Coh-Matrix and Reading Ease Formula. In this study, the researcher used the Flesch Reading Ease Formula. The Flesch Reading Ease Formula is selected by the researcher because the formula has been widely and popular used by many researchers in academic field. Dubay (2002:22) argued that Flesch readability is the best used and appropriate on school text (to assess the difficulty of a reading passage written in English).

In 1948, Flesch published a second formula with two parts. The first part, the Reading Ease formula, dropped the use of affixes and used only two variables, the number of syllables and the number of sentences for each 100-word sample. It predicts reading ease on a scale from 1 to 100, with 30 being "very difficult" and 70 being "easy." Flesch (p. 225) wrote that a score of 100 indicates reading matter understood by readers who have completed the fourth grade and are, in the

language of the U.S. Census barely “functionally literate.” The second part of Flesch’s formula predicts human interest by counting the number of personal words (such as pronouns and names) and personal sentences (such as quotes, exclamations, and incomplete sentences) (Dubay 2004:21).

The subject of this study was five reading texts in English textbook entitled “*BAHASA INGGRIS SMA/MA/MAK FOR GRADE XI SEMESTER 1*” published by The Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia in 2014 under *Kurikulum 2013*. This book have used by the eleventh grade students of SMK Negeri 2 Palangka Raya, one of chosen school by the government implemented the book. This book is analyzed because of some reasons. Based on teacher experience, the students face some difficulties in comprehending some reading texts in the textbook. Then, the students said overall reading material was hard to be understood. Moreover, this textbook is the first and the only one English textbook which consider to the curriculum used. Meanwhile, the readability of the reading texts in the textbook is questionable. Another reason is this textbook has never researched before.

METHOD

The research design of this study content analysis since this research try to elaborate the data calculated by analyzing the content readability of textbooks (Donald Ary 2010:457). The subject employed in this study was “*BAHASA INGGRIS SMA/MA/MAK FOR GRADE XI SEMESTER 1*” published by The Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia in 2014 under the *Kurikulum 2013*.

The readability data was collected by researcher himself as the instrument. The leveling of data analyzed by readability formula. Rush (1984:5) stated, “Readability formulas are objective, quantitative tools for estimating the difficulty of written material without requiring testing of readers”. This means that subjectivity does not exist when determining readability and this makes the use of formulas more reliable than other methods. Descriptive statistics were used to determine the statistical significance of the variance amongst the results of the study.

Steps in collecting the data were firstly by reading all units of English textbook. The study only focus on the reading material selected from five units in the English textbook. The reading texts from the first until the fifth unit were: unit 1 of the reading text was *The Enchanted Fish*, unit 2 was *Bullying: A cancer that must be eradicated*, unit 3 was *President Soekarno of Indonesia*, unit 4 was *Vanity and Pride*, and last unit 5 was about *Letter to God*. Then, grouping all words, syllables, and sentences to be analyzed by using Flesch Reading Ease Formula. The readability score of each text is converted into readability level based on scoring table made by Flesch. The

number of words, syllables and sentences of each text are counted automatically on <https://readability-score.com/>.

In the implementation stage, the researcher always recheck the online calculation manually as Flesch Reading Ease Formula have explained as below:

$$RE = 206.835 - (1.015 \times ASL) - (84.6 \times ASW)$$

RE = Readability Ease

ASL = Average Sentence Length (the number of words divided by the number of words)

ASW = Average Number of syllables per word (the number of syllables divided by the number of words).

Table 1. Flesch Reading Ease Score table

Flesch Reading Ease Score	Readability Level/ Category	Estimated Reading Grade
0-30	Very Difficult	College graduate
30-40	Difficult	13 th to 16 th grade
50-60	Fairly difficult	10 th to 12 th grade
60-70	Standard	8 th or 9 th grader
70-80	Fairly easy	7 th grader
80-90	Easy	6 th grader
90-100	Very Easy	5 th grader

FINDINGS

After all cycles of reading whole English textbook, the researcher found some premature data which book was consist of 116 pages and 5 units. Each unit is presented in skills of reading, speaking and writing. Furthermore, this textbook also take a concern in grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary building. The whole units have a topic based on the genre of the text such as descriptive text, narrative text, and spoof text. For the reading sections, there are 2 descriptive texts, 2 narrative texts, and 1 spoof text.

Then, the result of calculating the sentences, words and syllables of each text is presented in table 2 below:

Table 2. The Description of Sentence, Word, and Syllable Calculation of Reading Text

Text	Number of Sentences	Number of Words	Number of Syllables
Text 1 <i>"The Enchanted Fish"</i>	80	985	1297
Text 2 <i>"Bullying: A Cancer that Must be Eradicated"</i>	43	747	1191
Text 3 <i>"President Soekarno of Indonesia"</i>	37	485	755
Text 4 <i>"Vanity and Pride"</i>	110	1001	1486
Text 5 <i>"A Letter to God"</i>	91	1131	1574

The following table summarized the result of ASL and ASW calculation of each text which it can be seen in table 3:

Table 3. The Result of ASL and ASW Calculation

Text	Average Sentence Length (ASL)	Average Syllable per Word (ASW)
Text 1 <i>"The Enchanted Fish"</i>	12.31	1.32
Text 2 <i>"Bullying: A Cancer that Must be Eradicated"</i>	12.37	1.59
Text 3 <i>"President Soekarno of Indonesia"</i>	13.11	1.56
Text 4 <i>"Vanity and Pride"</i>	9.1	1.48
Text 5 <i>"A Letter to God"</i>	12.43	1.39

All data of reading texts then counted on Flesch Reading Ease formula. The result of Reading text can be tested by formula manually as above and automatically by online counting on <https://readability-score.com/> . The research always did rechecked online result by confirmed it to the qualified guide because of validity of data is important. The online result is shorted in the table 4 below.

Table 4. The score of the reading texts based on Reading Ease Scale of the Flesch Formula

Text	Readability Level	Difficult Level	Reading Grade
Text 1 (Narrative)	82.94	Easy	6 th Grade
Text 2 (Descriptive)	54.70	Fairly Difficult	10 th to 12 th Grade
Text 3 (Descriptive)	61.83	Standard	8 th or 9 th Grade
Text 4 (Narrative)	71.01	Fairly easy	7 th Grade
Text 5 (Spoof)	76.48	Fairly easy	7 th Grader
Total	346.96:5	-	-
Average	69.392	Standard	8th or 9th Grade

DISCUSSION

Flesch Reading Ease Formula predicted that if the readability score of a text is higher than other texts, it will be easier to be understood by the students. However, if the readability score of a text is lower than other texts, it will make the text difficult to be understood by the students. In education context, we were agreed always improve our skills. It was important to give a varieties input. Textbook is one of input should be challenging for the student. It is also supposed by Krashen in his *i+1* theory which stated that a handbook or supporting media for learning should be challenging one more step higher than their level. If it reached, this supporting media expected that classroom would full a lot of enthusiasm, active students and creative idea.

Based on the table above, the closest result to the readability level for was only one text. The text has the fairly difficult level. In this case, the descriptive text entitled *"Bullying: A Cancer that Must be Eradicated"* predicted suitable for tenth to twelve students. Another one text *"President Soekarno of Indonesia"* in the standard level, which assumed eighth or ninth grade students were easy to read the reading text. In Indonesia, those grades belongs to Senior High School students except standard, easy, and fairly easy level. The score also showed that no one of other four selected reading texts which exactly predicted to be appropriate for eleventh grade students. Most narrative and spoof text, three of five reading material, were easy to read for the student. They are *"The Enchanted Fish"*, *"Vanity and Pride"*, and *"A Letter to God"*. Even though, *i+1* theory, said that descriptive text relatively more challenging. It is in line with Krashen to motivate our students learn harder.

The result of this study also predicted average of all reading text is in the standard level, with score 69.392. It was indicated that all selected reading materials was suitable for their level on eleventh grade at Senior High School. Actually those

result showed a fair reading composition/input with three texts relatively were easy. Two lefts were difficult. The result of this study perhaps these selection of reading input from textbook Krashen mean to give for students. The student actively participated in asking to respond the text in learning process.

CONCLUSSION

The English is taught as foreign language which publishers should to know and measure handbook or learning material, be qualified. The research was conducted to analyze, what is the readability level of English textbook. The readability formula was used because it provided an objective prediction of text difficulty. Reading texts which calculated by Flesch Reading Ease Formula, showed that the level of reading texts entitled "*BAHASA INGGRIS SMA/MA/MAK*" for grade XI semester 1 published by The Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia, was in the Standard level with score of 69.392. The textbook assumed readable for eleventh students. In short, it concluded that English textbook here was relatively suitable for eleventh grade students.

Even the "readable" text would be differences that came from the culture, learning habitual, peer-learning, and the source of language itself. In other word, these readability predictions could not be a main reference to choose English textbook for Indonesian students. The readability of Flesch is an alternative prediction, at least it is approved tool which used by many publisher today. There are more readability formula used outside for many subject matters. Dubay (2004:35) suggest other text leveling. It consist of renewed cognitive and linguistic which involved a subjective analysis of reading level that examines vocabulary, format, content, length, illustrations, repetition of words, and curriculum. Of course, was that took some effort to learn how to do leveling accurately. At least, the teacher how to detect textbooks that toward students' interest and thus immediately support their knowledge through Flesch Reading Ease Formula.

References

- Brown, H. Douglas. Teaching by Priciples, An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy; Second Edition.
- Daniel Rfee, et. Al, Analyzing Media Messages, New Jersey: Lawrebce Erlbaum Associates, Publisher Mahwah.
- Donald Ary. 2010. Introduction to Research in Education. Canada: Nelson Education Ltd.,
- Jack C. Richards and Richards Schmidt. 2002. Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics, Malaysia: Longman Pearson Education.

- John. E. Pennick and Robin Lee Harris. 2005. *Teaching with Purpose: Closing the Research-Practice Gap*. Arlington, Virginia. NSTA Press.
- Krashen, Stephen. 1995. *The Natural Approach, Language Exposition in the Classroom*, Prentice Hall Europe.
- Maryam Jalilehvand. 2012. The Effect of Text Length and Pictures in Reading Comprehension of Iranian EFL Students. *Asian Social Science Journal* Vol. 8 No. 3.
- Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Nomor 59 Tahun 2014 Tentang Kurikulum 2013 SMA/MA
- Roger Sequin, *The Elaboration of school textbooks Methodological Guide*, Division of Educational Sciences, Contents and Methods of Education UNESCO. 1989.
- Rush. R (1984). Assessing readability: Formulas and alternatives. *Reading Teacher*. 39 (3). 274-283
- Scott A. Crossley, et. Al. 2001. Text readability and intuitive simplification: A comparison of readability formulas, *Reading in foreign language Journal*.
- William H. Dubay. 2004. *The Principles of Readability*. Impact Information, Costa Mesa, California