

# EFL LEARNERS' READING COMPETENCE LEVEL AT ENGLISH DEPARTMENT JAMBI UNIVERSITY

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**Abstract:** The importance of identifying learners' level of reading comprehension is viewed as a fundamental aspect in creating and producing an effective teaching and learning outcome. This is due to the fact that reading provides learner with the literacy skill which is necessarily essential to achieve a better understanding and transforming information in meaning making process. There are levels of reading comprehension that are already highlighted as an indicator to know learners' competence in reading level namely literal, inferential and critical. This paper figure out the level of reading comprehension experienced by EFL learners at English Department Jambi University. The rationale for conducting this study is to provide a general frame of learners 'competence in reading to be useful to decide and develop reading instructional model as well as teaching and learning practices in reading courses at English Department Jambi University. This study employed descriptive quantitative which involved seventy-eight EFL Learners as participants. They are assigned to complete a set of reading test which is arranged based on those level of reading comprehension . The obtained data are calculated by presenting the result into a percentage. The result revealed that 99% of participants positioned at Literal level, 69% of participant were at the level of Inferential and 24% of them achieved Critical Level. This result is actually under expectation since the learners in this class should be at the level of competency in Inferential , moving toward to critical stage. This brings further implication on suitability between their reading level and learning instructional tools to be practiced. By designing an appropriate instructional model, the learners can improve from their actual to potential of reading skill.

**Keywords:** *Reading Comprehension Level, Reading Competence*

A process of communication between readers and author that has a direct cognitive relationship has become a major concept of Reading. It contains both Psychomotor and cognitive element used by the readers to express their thought or ideas and to learn other skill or knowledge. For this reason, Reading skill is necessary to achieve since it is the most essential part of many aspects to make readers open their mind and insight. In English teaching at college or university level, reading is taught to assist students to achieve certain goals and objectives. In this way, reading skill is regarded as a complex skill that can provide students with a good comprehension toward the written text. In line with this,

Romadhoni (2010) claims that reading skill has actually been categorized into several levels of comprehension. The first level is recognized as Literal comprehension, a very lower or basic level of comprehension. Readers in this level can get information from the text explicitly that includes detail of the text, pronoun and the sequence of story in the text. The second level is known as Interpretatif or inferential comprehension, as an understanding of reorganization and inferential. Readers in this level are able to understand a definition between sentences implicitly and draw a conclusion from the texts. They also can find main ideas of the texts, causal relationship, pronoun reference and omitted words or expression in the texts. The third level is called Critical comprehension, the ability to evaluate the material of the texts. This skill is commonly applied in critical reading activities. The last level is Creative comprehension, as the highest level of reading comprehension. In the process of this creative comprehension, the readers develop their own thought to create and improve new ideas, to make new approach and point of view. To achieve this reading level, students may use variety of strategies which are related to understanding factors by reading text and its contexts. Besides, students should emphasize the process of coding mechanically in order to get understanding on other written language to improve knowledge.

At English Education Study Program FKIP UNJA, Reading course is taught structurally for the first three semesters. Each Reading course has specific learning objective, competence and

outcomes. This structured course is carried out to accommodate and facilitate learner's needs in mastering reading and learning. In addition, this course is one of prerequisite courses or academic requirement in English Department, so that, in reading classroom practice, learners must be pass in general or basic Reading Course at first semester otherwise they cannot continue to apply other advance reading course taught at second and third semester and this already becomes an academic rule. However, the implementation of teaching and learning of this course still remains problem in some aspect. This is because of the fact that learners who applied for this Department have different background of reading knowledge or skill. Meanwhile, in real teaching and learning practice in classroom, they are grouped into two classes with different ability and cognitive competence in reading skill and experiences. This brings into some potential issues on teaching learning process such as selecting and choosing suitable course materials, deciding teaching and learning strategy and conducting an assessment process. Those problems might induce ineffective and insufficient teaching and learning process. To respond this problem, it is needed to do research as an effort to identifying or mapping learners' level in reading competencies in order to assist lecturer to create and to choose an appropriate teaching instructional model or approach that fit to the level of learners' competence. It is expected that the lecturers can create and produce an effective teaching and learning that can facilitate a valuable learning environment and achieve better reading learning outcomes.

Thus, this research formulates the research problem on "what is the level of reading competences experienced by students at English Education Study Program?" This focus has become a main concern in which the researcher tries to explore in this study. So, it is expected that the finding might be useful to facilitate learners at English Department to improve their competence in reading skill and lecturers can obtain benefit to make a dynamic and interesting learning environment in teaching Reading Comprehension.

### **Reading Methods and Strategies**

In a learning process, reading skill is applicable in several methods or strategies (Songsingchai 2010) divides the strategies into five essential aspect. The first is Planning and Monitoring. It focuses on controlling reader's awareness and comprehension. When a reader merges with this strategy, he would then know more on how to get any information and to determine the reading objectives as well as to make a prediction. He would be able to explain any idea by using the proper strategies and knowing what a writer would exactly like to share in a reading text. The second is Identifying Important Ideas and Information. This strategy trains the readers' skill to sort out any important things in the text, to identify any implicit and explicit main ideas, to conclude the text, and to relate the ideas and information. This strategy is also applicable for the readers to differentiate either any important information, or any interesting but less important information to understand in the text. The implementation of this strategy helps students as the readers to distinguish which information is important or less important in fiction or non-fiction books and references. The third is making a Question. This strategy is used to examine readers' understanding about a text. This is also to know the reader's objectives in reading the text. This one would help the readers have deeper understanding on the text. The next is making a connection/relation. It concerns on helping students to establishing a link between each paragraph. The readers are able to relate their educational background to the text they read. The connection may be between the texts, the text with the readers, or the text with the reality and the last is Synthesizing. It is applicable to train the readers' skills in summarizing some ideas from different sources, taking a conclusion and comparison, and generalizing a text.

### **Levels of Reading Skill**

The development of effective reading skill is achievable when a reader reaches the competence levels in reading skill. Romadhoni (2010) categorized competence levels of reading skills into several level, Literal, Inferential, and Critical levels. The literal level includes an understanding of what the writers write literally. In this level, the reader needs to understand explicit ideas and information of the reading text. Some of the information is in form of introducing or remembering a fact, identifying main and supporting ideas, categorizing, and concluding. Besides, the readers are able to catch the information by following any contextual clues to give the

text meaning. Another thing is following the specific clues, sequences, identification of conclusion, connection among explicit statements, and any structure involving causality, comparison, and contradiction. The following questions may be provided to identify this level such as What is the main idea of the text?; How does the writer make a conclusion in the text?; What is the general description of the first paragraph in the text?; What happened firstly, secondly, and lastly in the text, and what are the difference among those parts?. The inferential level of competence is about the understanding of what the writer intent to share through what the writer mentions. It simple means that the readers have to read every lines and concluding based on the statements with indirect meanings. The readers may do it by paying attention to main ideas, supportive ideas, and their causality. This skill also covers the interpreting of figurative language, concluding, predicting final result, determining types, and predicting the writer's ideas. The typical questions of this level vary as: What is the writer's intention? What is the topic of the text?; What is the impact of the text?; and How is the end of the text/story?. The Critical level includes the understanding of what the writers should express. This level is a quite high level in reading skill which requires the readers using external criteria from their experience or knowledge background to test the quality, value of a text, writer's excuses, simplification, and generalization. The readers respond the text emotionally and intellectually because their experiences vary. The typical question will be: What will possibly happen next in the text?; Is the writer argumentation logical?; Is there any alternative argument?; Is it a fact or the writer's opinion?; Do you agree with the writer's argumentation?; What is the best solution of the case in the text

### **Phase of Reading**

Reading skill is divided into several phase. The first phase is known as *Beginning Phase*. It is defined as emphasizing the coding process of reading mechanically. The beginning phase of reading set the recoding and decoding. Through the recoding process, the readers associate pictures of sounds and their combinations. This process involved knowledge of the world in a scheme categorizing an amount of knowledge and experience in mind. This phase includes three components: visual, phonological, and semantic memories. In visual memory level, letters, words, and sentences are viewed as graphic symbols. In phonological memory, there happens voicing the symbols which are also in form of words and sentences. In semantic memory, a process of understanding the words and sentences occurs. Then, it was stated that to achieve the beginning phase of reading skill, a reader has to be able to voice the written symbols, master the vocabulary, and include the meanings of the language acquisition. The purpose of experiencing the beginning phase of reading skill is to achieve students' ability in reading simple words and sentences fluently and appropriately.

The second phase is *Advance Phase*. The objective of advance phase in reading skill is to understand other people's written language and to add the readers' knowledge as well as to develop readers' emotions. In the advance phase, there are technical reading method, silent reading including fast reading, understanding reading, and so on. The advance phase of reading is based on the cognitive complexity, classified into literal reading and high-level reading. The high-level understanding covers interpretative, critical, and creative understandings. Critical and creative understandings are classified into evaluative understanding. Reading also has level of competence which is included; Firstly Literal Comprehension. It is the ability to catch explicit information in the text. It includes all details in the text, pronoun reference, and sequence of events. Secondly Interpretative / Inferential comprehension. It stands as reorganization and inferential understanding. It is a comprehension on the implicit meanings or conclusion of the reading text. Interpretative comprehension covers concluding the main ideas of the texts, causality stated in indirect way, pronoun reference, adverb and cloze reference. The third is Critical comprehension. Critical or evaluative comprehension is an ability to evaluate the text material. Evaluative comprehension exists in critical reading activity. Critical comprehension depends on literal, interpretative, and significant ideas comprehensions. The last is Creative comprehension. It is the highest level in reading skill. In the process of creative comprehension, readers develop their thoughts to create new ideas, improve their new ideas and the approaches, and create their own mindsets.

### **Method**

This research used descriptive quantitative method. This kind of research aims to portray the existing phenomenon, use numbers to describe individual or group and measure characteristic of a condition (Syamsu, Damiyanti ; 2001). In this research, the researcher tries to identify learners' level in reading competence to figure out their individual competence in Reading Comprehension. 78 students of English Department FKIP University of Jambi registered in academic years 2018/2019 were assigned to be research participants and they have just completed a Basic Reading Course (Reading for General Purposes) as a compulsory subject in this Department. The source of data in this research was obtained from the result of literary reading test. The multiple choice and essay model have been applied. As it is claimed by (Overton: 2012) Reading test is administered to measure students' achievement or competence in completing certain tasks or mastering skill. In this research, a set of reading test adapted from several literary readings has been administered to participants. The test consists of several items which is reflected to measure three level of reading competence ; literal, Inferential/Interpretative and critical comprehension. The test result has been analyzed by calculating and scoring each items based on the indicator of the scoring system and criteria. It then classified into each level of competence which is described in the form of percentage and presented through diagram and chart

### Result and Discussion

The finding of this research can be obviously seen from the test result derived from each level of competence. In Literal level, there were 77 or (99%) participants can complete most of the test items. But there was only 1 or (1%) participant who can complete partly the test. From this result, it can be inferred that most of participants were just achieve literal level of competence. For the detail, they have achieved a basic understanding of the reading such as finding explicit meaning or information of the text, series or chronological events and understanding a basic question of the text.

The test result of Inferential indicated that there were 24 or (31%) participants can complete some of the test items and the other 69% were still unable to answer all test items successfully. So it can be highlighted that majority of participants were still unable to respond the test items and they generally failed to gain inferential level and only few of them just reached a level of inferential. For the detail, participants who can reach inferential level have understood the meaning between sentences or implicit meaning or information of text, draw a conclusion from the text, and understand the implicit causal effect. This condition bring into final conclusion that although only few of them reached inferential level, but all participants potentially can achieve the level of inferential as they just passed the literal one.

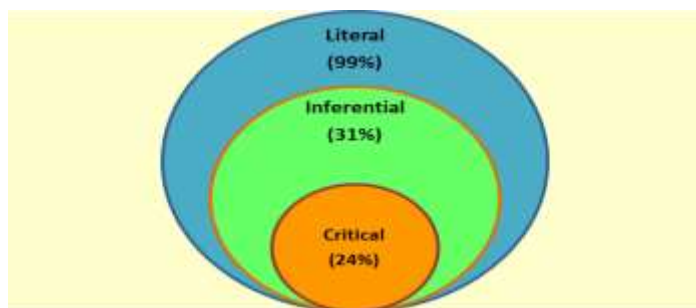
The test result of Critical Level inferred that there were only 19 participant or 24% from the total number can reached this level successfully. It is indicated that they have critical understanding or evaluative to show their ability to evaluate the information of the text. In addition, they can evaluate the text by using their own prior knowledge. In answering descriptive questions, they tended to express or describe simply the ideas by considering some supporting facts to strengthen their thought. So that, to reach this critical level effectively, they have to improve their level of inferential optimally since both of these levels work in line.

The calculated test result can be seen in the following recapitulation:

Class	LITERAL				INFERENTIAL				CRITICAL			
	>50%		<50%		>50%		<50%		>50%		<50%	
R1	25	32%	1	1%	4	5%	22	28%	10	13%	16	21%
R2	19	24%	0	0%	7	9%	12	15%	1	1%	18	23%
R3	33	42%	0	0%	13	17%	20	26%	8	10%	25	32%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>(77) 99%</b>		1%		<b>(24) 31%</b>		69%		<b>(19) 24%</b>		76%	

From this table, it can be noted the different ratio of each level of competence. It is interpreted that most participants were still in the position of literal level. Some of them have obtained the inferential level and few of them have achieved critical level. In addition to the result

above, there is a relationship between each level of competence that can be illustrated in the following graph:



This graph particularly indicated that 99% of participants have completed the literal test and they were categorized into literal achiever. Within 99% of the literal achiever, there were 24 participants (31%) have successfully completed both literal and inferential test and they can reach the inferential level. Among all participants who achieved both literal and inferential, it was also found about 19 participants (24%) have successfully done all test items and they were categorized into critical level.

### Conclusion

From the finding of the research, it can be inferred that majority of learners have just achieved the literal level as a basic level of competence in reading skill and it reached about 99%. A part from this achievement, there were 31% among the literal achiever have gained the position of inferential level of competence. Practically the learners in this level have got an understanding of finding the implicit meaning of the text or between sentences. They also can conclude the information of text which involves main ideas and implicit causal effect relationship. Besides, they were able to obtain the information explicitly in a text and find the chronological event of the text. More interestingly there were 24% among all learners have been successful to reach the level of critical competence in which they were able to give comment about the information in the text, develop their own idea to build new concept that fit to their own perspective. But unfortunately, there were still few learners, 1% who failed to reach both inferential and inferential. In practical, they only gained a very basic skill in reading such as understanding a little bit about text and they cannot answer successfully the questions which were reflected to the level of Literal, inferential and Critical competence. So, this finding brings the implication that in teaching reading, learners should be provided with kind of readings and its practice that can foster and accelerate their comprehension in order to reach the higher level of competence in reading skill.

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