EFL Students’ Responses to Learning Basic Reading and Writing Skills

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Abstract
This research presents the responses from Indonesian EFL students to teaching-learning basic reading and writing skills in the context of Indonesian higher education. The 120 respondents, who completed questionnaires, were students enrolled in Writing 1 and Reading 2 courses in the English Education Study Program of the Teachers Academy in West Sumatra [STKIP PGRI Sumatera Barat]. There were four findings from the survey, namely: 1) EFL students preferred studying reading (37%) more than writing (27%), 2) EFL students read about the same amount of literary texts (25%) as they did popular texts (23%) and academic texts (22%), 3) grammar and spelling are the most difficult aspects for EFL students to learn with 33% having difficulty with basic reading skills, and 53% with basic writing skills, and finally 4) EFL students prefer to open a dictionary when they encounter difficult words in reading a text (62%) and do the same when they have difficulties in expressing their thoughts in writing English (38%). These findings show that EFL students have a variety of responses in terms of learning basic reading and writing in EFL English. In addition, the findings show that the tendency of EFL students to prefer reading to writing is relatively high.

Keywords: Basic reading, basic writing, EFL students, English literacy.

1. INTRODUCTION

The growth of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) in Indonesia has shaped the way that English is being taught in the country. The first language that many Indonesian students need to master is Bahasa Indonesia, or the Indonesian language. In the context of daily life in Indonesia, students also learn vernacular language(s) or traditional...
language(s), which may be the same or different from their first language. Some students possess vernacular language(s) or traditional language(s) as their mother tongue. Within this rich linguistic atmosphere, English is considered as a prominent foreign language, which is familiar to most Indonesian students. As a foreign language, English demands its learners to comprehend this language not only in an academic setting but also in a communicative context. The use of EFL within the international context demands that students are able to master the four basic language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing to use their English appropriately. Research studies that address issues on how students respond to these four skills in teaching-learning EFL are numerous. However, the foci of those studies deal mainly with classifying students’ learning types. In this study, it is specifically argued that listening and speaking are adjustable essential skills for the students, not only in the academic setting but also in the communicative setting. Meanwhile, reading and writing are essential skills that need to be developed more in an academic setting than in the communicative setting. The question worth asking at this point is how far students link teaching-learning reading and writing skills when they learn English.

Studies that focus on advancing teaching strategies, developing curriculum for teaching-learning EFL, and fostering the assessment processes are abundant. However, studies that focus on learning about students’ responses to teaching-learning basic reading and basic writing as well as how these two skills are connected in the minds of the students within the idea of English literacy are in short supply. This study was an initial step to understand the complexity of teaching-learning EFL in Padang, the capital city of West Sumatera Province, Indonesia. As such, the problem of this research is related to how far we, as English instructors, get to know the students better in terms of knowing the connection between basic reading and writing in teaching-learning EFL directly from the perspectives of the students.

1.1 Objectives of the Research

This research has the following objectives:
1. Investigating EFL students’ preferences between teaching-learning the skills of reading and writing;
2. Investigating EFL students’ preferences for the types of text they prefer to read for teaching-learning EFL English;
3. Investigating the most difficult aspects that students encounter when they have to read a text in EFL English;
4. Investigating the most difficult aspect that students encounter when they have to write a text in EFL English;
5. Investigating what students will prefer to do when they encounter difficult words in reading a text in EFL English;
6. Investigating what students will prefer to do when they encounter difficult words in writing a text in EFL English.

1.2 Significance of the Research

This study will provide a significant contribution to teachers of EFL in Indonesia. Teachers of EFL reading and writing in Indonesia will benefit from the results of this study. From this study, it is believed that the students’ perspectives will be seen as a lot
more important than the perspectives that we, as teachers, have had about what the students prefer.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents a review of literature related to the topic of this research. It highlights ideas in the context of teaching-learning EFL in Indonesia. In addition, a few related findings on basic reading in the context of EFL and how the findings relate to writing in the context of EFL in Indonesia as well as notions about English literacy are briefly presented as well.

2.1 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Indonesia

Indonesia views English as a foreign language. As a language, English provides peculiarities to be studied further, especially when issues of how this language is being learned by Indonesian students. Interesting literature regarding EFL in Indonesia is related to theories emerging in the scope of teaching-learning EFL. For instance, theories on how cognitive elements influence learning and how students can be motivated more to learn a foreign language are constructed within the notions of English as a foreign language. In this case, two theories that contradict but also complement each other in terms of motivation for learning a foreign language are the cognitive theory and the needs theory.

The cognitive theory views the process of learning a foreign language from the notion of cognitive aspects. Weiner (1985) who wrote about cognitive theory in relation to human motivation, in Arends (1998, p. 79) has stated that “individuals’ actions are influenced by their beliefs and attributions, particularly attributions about success and failure situations”. Meanwhile, needs theory, as it was proposed by Maslow, Deci, and McClelland, declares that “individuals strive to satisfy needs such as self-fulfillment, self-determination, achievement, affiliation and influence” (as cited in Arends, 1998, p. 81). Needs theory, when supplemented by cognitive theory, produces the core idea that students have a strong willingness to study English in an EFL context as they are predominantly influenced by inner drives and external influences.

The context of this research is geared toward the understanding of teaching-learning English in higher level education in Indonesia. Teaching-learning English, in this context, means that the students learn EFL not only as a language that needs to be mastered but also as a language that needs to be fully understood so that it can be taught later on. As such, “the only way to improve the quality of the candidates to be EFL English teachers and make them marketable in the international labor market is to make teaching-learning in English part of the curriculum and as one of the mediums of teaching in Indonesia” (Mappiasse & Sihes, 2014, p. 113). Unfortunately, as far as the current curriculum is concerned, English is only seen as important when students have to have a good TOEFL or IELTS score to graduate from college or university. Using English to teach other subjects in the curriculum has many advantages, although it invites pros and cons from different parties. As a matter of fact, English only has a chance to be used in such wider scope when it is used in an international or bilingual school. It is very rare for this to be found, where the teachers use English all the time during the teaching-learning processes, unless the class is managed within an
international atmosphere. Such classes are, in fact, in limited numbers, spread across the nation.

In short, the understanding of English in Indonesia is basically framed within the notion of English as a foreign language. As cognitive theory claims, most students with an EFL background are driven by individual motivation when they learn English; however, external motivation is also a key influential factor as the needs theory claims. These two theories are the foundation for this research, which is linked to the overall picture of teaching-learning EFL English in the context of Indonesian higher education.

2.2 Learning Basic Reading in an EFL Context

Reading is an important skill in teaching-learning English in the context of Indonesia. This skill helps learners to grasp information that is available from within different layers in the society where the learners live. The more students read, the easier the students will be able to recognize the variety of ways by which authors provide information for readers. Mastering good ability in reading, in this context, basically starts from what the students learn in studying basic reading which leads to an overall self-image of being successful in terms of literacy.

“One of the key differences between students who experience success in their literacy learning and those who experience difficulties has to do with the sheer amount of reading that they undertake” (Kuhn & Rasinski, 2009, p. 363). As such, basic reading involves multiple forms of reading activities that are performed by EFL student learners. The activity of reading can basically be divided into three inter-related components namely (Joshi & Aaron, 2011, p. 306):
1. Cognitive components – word recognition and comprehension;
2. Psychological components – motivation and interest; and

The cognitive, psychological and ecological components work together in shaping the overall image of reading as a skill in the context of English as a foreign language. Thus, viewing reading activity within the perspective of learning means that reading assignments that are given to EFL students need to meet the three components above.

Besides, reading assignments in basic reading classes demand strategic planning by reading instructors who understand and recognize the importance of the basic skills in reading. “Ensuring effective language knowledge and general comprehension skills” are “component abilities of learners that need to be developed for effective reading skills” (Grabe, 2004, p. 46). The EFL context, in this case, requires good understanding from the reading instructors to design courses that fulfill the needs for acquisition of reading as a skill. Apparently, language knowledge and comprehension skills, as Grabe mentions, seem to be difficult to achieve when the learning instructions for reading as a skill do not provide sufficient instruction to support these two purposes.

Studies in the field of EFL that discuss findings and connections between first language (L1) and second language (L2) highlight that there are transferrable items between the L1 and the L2. Interestingly, “…there was some positive transfer from the L1 reading processor to the L2 since both the L1 and L2 use the Roman alphabetic system” (Birsch, 2002, p. 33). In other words, Birsch’s research resembles ideas that within the context of EFL in Indonesia, “positive transfer” might exist from Bahasa Indonesia as L1 to English as L2 for many Indonesian students. Instructors who teach basic reading in the EFL context, therefore, need to be aware that acknowledging the L1
of EFL students during the process of learning basic reading can support their ability to ‘transfer’ what they know in L1 to what they are about to learn in L2. Being able to transfer their background knowledge that is constructed in Bahasa Indonesia to English as the target language for their learning is a sign that they can do the basic reading.

The notion of EFL students learning English as their L2 within the Indonesian context does not get away from the role of reading instructors in shaping the students’ literacy. English language learners (ELL) in general view English and all forms of its skills as subjects that need to be learnt at school. Even though viewed as a foreign language, English is mandatory for Indonesian students. As for teachers, “effective teachers of ELLs therefore integrate language and content objectives and organize their instruction accordingly” (Harper & Jong, 2004, p. 159). Without integrating and organizing language and content in a basic reading course, as Harper and Jong have claimed, the very purpose of a basic reading course will likely be harder to achieve. Since the purpose of a basic reading course is to equip EFL students to have a modality in reading skills, consequently, instructions that are given in a basic reading class need to be designed properly. Otherwise, the connection between Bahasa Indonesia and English will be separated from the students’ minds and this circumstance can possibly lead to disengagement of language in the growth of their EFL literacy level.

Research shows that in the level of senior high school in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, students who enrolled at science major liked English subject, with 60% frequency from all students in Science category; while students who enrolled at social science major disliked English subject, with 50% frequency from all students in Social Science category (Muliawati, 2017, p. 99). Her research also depicts interesting facts from the students’ responses about attending English Private Course. Science students responded that 60% from all of them attended the English Private Course and Social Science students responded that 75% from all of them never attended any English Private Course (Muliawati, 2017, p. 100). This research provides us the notion that in terms of learning English, students in Indonesia have particular condition that influences them to be in the like-or-dislike attitude toward English. Is attending any English Private Course be of any influence to their motivation? The answer for this question indeed needs further research. Partially, such internal condition also influences students’ motivation in learning English reading and writing at college level.

In brief, basic reading in an EFL context means that EFL students need to do a rigorous amount of reading activity in English. This activity leads to improvement of literacy level, not only the cognitive component that influences the shape of the reading development amongst the EFL students, but also improvement in the psychological and environmental or ecological components which also play a crucial role in the development of reading skills. Relevant factual instructions in the reading classroom are as important as providing sufficient reading materials for the EFL students.

2.3 Learning Writing in an EFL Context

Unlike basic reading, learning writing in an EFL context demands further complexity of grasping linguistic modalities, such as grammar and syntax. Being able to understand syntax and grammar in the context of the EFL classroom can be realized by the EFL students when they understand these two subjects through separate learning subjects. In other words, learning syntax and grammar should be done before learning writing; however, the format might be geared towards simple forms. As such, “…EFL
learners need to develop some writing skills such as: the ability to write complete and meaningful sentences, coherent, clear and well-organized ideas, use communicative language, choose suitable words and idioms and use writing mechanics properly” (Ibnian, 2011, p. 263). Writing in English, therefore, is even more complex than reading in English. All of these abilities, as they are needed in writing skills, demand students to understand as well as to acknowledge that mastering writing skills in EFL English really do take time and it needs high motivation from the students.

Research shows that EFL students and learners who want to master English writing skills to an advanced degree, need a large amount of writing exercises. These exercises need to be supported with sufficient feedback from peers and teachers or instructors teaching this skill. Salma emphasizes that “…writing skills should get more emphasis and practice in an EFL context” (Salma, 2015, p. 70). She also stated that “the curriculum designers of EFL settings should feel the immediate need of writing skills because of the intentional demands and they have to focus on it with stepwise plans so that learners can take the steps and learn to be able to write effectively” (Salma, 2015, p. 70). Without students practicing what they know about English in their writing, mastering writing skills as a sign of a good level of EFL literacy will be difficult to achieve. In this respect, learning a foreign language means, indeed, both knowing its circumstances linguistically and using it communicatively.

However, as pedagogy in learning writing skills concerns, “…the type of writing we get students to do will depend on their age, interests and level” (Harmer, 2003, p. 80). For example, junior high school students may learn about formats of genres in writing, but they should be empowered to firstly express their ideas more than to imitate writing formats. The substance or context of their writing is the important element to be assessed. Unlike junior high school, students in senior high school should be trained in writing their arguments with formats and acceptable conventions in their curriculum. Next, students enrolled in college or at university level should be taught not only how to incorporate their background knowledge but also to synthesize their own thinking into correct forms of English writing academically and communicatively.

To summarize, learning to write in an EFL context has more complex patterns and modalities. It also demands that students spend most of their time at school and possibly in daily life to write in English. Very rarely will teachers find EFL students, who have a good ability at writing in English when they themselves rarely use English for written communication. This circumstance is the challenge for EFL instructors teaching English writing in the EFL context. This research therefore, captures the students’ responses to what they learn in basic reading and writing through a questionnaire.

2.4 Related Findings on the Topic of English Literacy

Research that highlights findings in the topics of English literacy has been conducted in many different places in the world. Japan, Indonesia and Bangladesh, for example, may address issues on English literacy within the context of English as a foreign language and English as an international language. In Japan, research on reading emphasizes that students’ achievement in learning reading skills is different from students’ ability to use their reading skills successfully.

“Extensive research on reading in a first language has shown the critical role fluency plays in successful reading. Fluency alone, however, does not guarantee successful reading” (Taguchi et al., 2004, p. 70). In other words, these researchers’
Remarks show that students need to reach the fluency stage first, and then they can come to the stage where they can be considered successful in achieving reading skills. This notion resembles similar patterns in writing skills for English. EFL students’ fluency in learning writing does not make the students to be automatically considered as having mastered writing skills. The students’ literacy in English, at this point, indicates that they need ongoing processes for learning English.

Learning reading skills is different from learning writing skills in English; however, even though these two skills support each other. Certainly, the amount of reading that the EFL students do will influence the students’ background knowledge, which in turn will influence the quality of their writings. Research on EFL reading and writing in Indonesia may take the form of a survey study.

In terms of English language skills, EFL students have different responses. Sukandi and Sani (2017) conducted a research in the form of a survey about students’ responses after teaching-learning to write academic essays in English. The research was done in the first semester of 2016/2017. The result of the study found that from 102 students, listening skills received “cukup disenangi”, or desirable enough, with 29% (30 respondents); reading skills received “paling disenangi”, or most desirable, with 37% (38 respondents); speaking skills received “cukup disenangi”, or desirable enough, with 30% (31 respondents); and writing skills received about the same number of respondents as listening i.e.: “cukup disenangi”, or desirable enough, with 27%, or 28 respondents (Sukandi & Sani, 2017, p. 41).

Table 1. Preferences for skills amongst EFL students (Sukandi & Sani, 2017).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>No. of respondents</th>
<th>Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sukandi and Sani’s research concludes that EFL students have different responses toward the four skills they learn in an EFL classroom. Knowing that reading skills got a higher level of response indicates that the students’ motivation may be relatively higher in learning reading as compared to learning the other skills in English.

The literacy level of EFL students may, individually, be different, even though they come from the same general background. When they learn writing in English, the instructor’s feedback is considered an important element to support their learning processes. Research done in Bangladesh by Zaman and Azad (2012) has shown that feedback is very desirable and important for both the teacher and the students. The research resulted in the statement that “both the teachers and learners have a very positive attitude towards corrective feedback and they pay considerable attention to the feedback on the form” (Zaman & Azad, 2012, p. 139). Zaman and Azad have pointed out that without having feedback in the process of learning, writing is seemingly losing an important element in the process of teaching-learning English in the context of EFL.

Taguchi et al. (2004) have emphasized in the results from their research, fluency can influence the students’ success in achieving reading skills. In line with this notion, giving supportive feedback to students’ writing can help the students to reach the stage of fluency in their writing. In the end, the intertwining relationship in the process of teaching-learning reading and writing within the context of the EFL classroom can positively contribute to the growth of the EFL students’ literacy level in English.
To conclude, research that presents findings on the topic of English literacy within the context of EFL is presented through the reading and writing skills. In learning reading skills, for example, EFL students cannot depend on being fluent per se. Meanwhile, although they may prefer writing skills as the skill they like more than other skills, they need to process this writing skill gradually. Feedback in the process of teaching-learning writing, for example, can provide the students with further understanding on learning to write well in English. Finally, the interconnection between reading and writing in the EFL classroom can affect the literacy level of the students.

3. METHOD

This research was done as a survey study that could also be classified as a quantitative study. Methodologically, this research was started through observations; however, the main instrument to obtain data for this study was a questionnaire. “Both quantitative and qualitative methods can be observational or experimental and both are used in at least some of the sciences” (Cooper, 1997, p. 557). Hence, this study used a quantitative method. The findings from this study are presented using numerical presentation that is accompanied by a description of the findings.

An important aspect that is considered highly in this study is the element of objectivity. In fact, “objectivity […] is the goal of all good research” (Cooper, 1997, p. 561). In order to be objective, findings of this research have been interpreted through a holistic technique. In brief, this research was conducted quantitatively in the form of a survey study, in which a questionnaire was used as a research instrument.

The following sub-sections provide information on: 1) design of this study – in the form of a survey study, 2) the population and the sample size of this study, and 3) the instrument of this study – a questionnaire.

3.1 Research Design: A Survey Study

An important element that is also considered well in this research is related to ethical issues. Blakeslee and Fleischer (2007, p. 58) have stated that “…being an ethical researcher involves being responsible and caring, and being concerned with the safety and well-being of the individuals who participate in [the] research”. The identity of the respondents is not displayed in this study; however, permission was granted prior to distribution of the questionnaire to use the responses for this research. After the questionnaire was distributed and the respondents, i.e. the EFL students, had returned the questionnaires, their responses were measured for each item.

The analysis of the respondents’ responses leads to the description of data that is related to the answers to the research questions. This technique also justifies that this research is descriptive research in its nature. Descriptive research “entails[s] observation of phenomena and analysis of data with as little restructuring of the situation or environment under scrutiny as possible” and surveys are defined as “seeking information about larger groups usually by means of sampling techniques” (Lauer & Asher, 1988, p. 15). It also “provides information about conditions, situations, and events that occur in the present” (Postlethwaite, 2005, pp. 2-3). A survey study, as Laver and Asher, have claimed, has a close connection to a descriptive research design.
Being factual, as Postlethwaite (2005) has declared, leads to the notion that the essence of this study is to provide data that emerges at present as it is.

Another way of relating this research to teaching-learning of EFL English in Indonesia is that this research is in the form of teacher observation. Teacher observation is one of “three feasible methods of assessing affective targets in the classroom” (MacMillan, 1997, p. 269). Teacher observation may be done with an observatory participant technique; however, observation in this research means that efforts were made to observe the responses of the EFL students by means of a questionnaire.

Although this research is classified as descriptive research with a survey study design, this research depends on a quantitative technique, in order to obtain quantitative data in the form of descriptive statistics, or percentages or frequencies. There is a moment when a qualitative study depends on a quantitative technique for the conduct of the study (Bell, 2006, p. 4). Obviously, the idea of classifying this study as a descriptive study is framed within the notion that quantitative data can be used not only for a quantitative study approach but also for a qualitative study approach.

In brief, this study is categorized as a descriptive study that uses quantitative data. The data was obtained using a questionnaire that was distributed to all respondents. The reason of doing so is because it relates to the ways performing action research.

### 3.2 Population and Sample Size

The population for this study was 120 students who were enrolled in the subjects Reading 2 and Writing 1 in the English Education Study Program of STKIP PGRI Sumatera Barat in the first semester of the 2016/2017 academic year. All these students were requested to fill in the questionnaire. The method that was used for this survey study was the census method which is often used for such studies. The census method means that a questionnaire is given to all the respondents in the sample (Bell, 2006, p. 12). Hence the sampling technique used in this study was the total sampling technique where the size of the sample is all students or 100% with a total of 120 respondents that came from three classes namely: 2016 A, 2016 B & 2017 C.

### 3.3 The Research Instrument: The Questionnaire

This study used the questionnaire as shown in Table 2; it was distributed to all the students enrolled in the Reading 2 and Writing 1 courses in the first semester of the 2016/2017 academic year at STKIP PGRI Sumatera Barat. The questionnaire was designed in order to find out the responses of the students to their perceptions of learning basic reading and writing skills in English in an EFL context.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Misc.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Which skill that you prefer between reading and writing skill?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading                    (........)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing                    (........)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Both                       (........)</td>
<td>Tick the one that applies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>What kind of text that you read often as a college student?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Literacy                   (........)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Popular                    (........)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic                   (........)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2. The Questionnaire i.e. the research instrument.*
Table 2 continued...

3. As ESL learner, what is the most difficult aspect that you encounter when you read a text in English?
   Grammar/Spelling (......)
   Vocabulary (......)
   Content of the Text (......)

4. As an EFL learner, what is the most difficult aspect that you encounter when you read a text in English?
   Grammar/Spelling (......)
   Vocabulary/Word Meaning (......)
   Content of the Text (......)

5. What will you do when you encounter difficult word(s) when you read a text in English?
   Open a dictionary (......)
   Discuss with the classmate (......)
   Ask the lecturer (......)

6. What will you do when you encounter difficult word(s) when you write a text in English?
   Open a dictionary (......)
   Discuss with the classmate (......)
   Ask the lecturer (......)

4. RESULTS

The results from this study can be seen in the tables that follow. The findings from the questionnaire presented in Table 2 are further elaborated below. Thus, the result of the first question, which is “Which skill that you prefer between reading and writing skills?” is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Responses to Question 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on Table 3, it can be seen that the most preferred skill amongst the students was reading; 44 or 37% preferred reading. Only 21 or 18% preferred both reading and writing.

The result of the second question, which is “What kind of text that you read often as a college student?” is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Responses to Question 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Literacy</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Popular</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4 provides the various numbers of respondents based on the kind of texts that the college students read. Thirty, or 25%, of them chose reading academic genre only slightly more than the others and still much less than the “no” answers.

The results of the third and fourth questions, which are “As an EFL learner, what is the most difficult aspect that you encounter when you read a text in English?” and “As an EFL learner, what is the most difficult aspect that you encounter when you write a text in English?” are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Responses to Question 3 and Question 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Grammar/Spelling</th>
<th>Vocabulary/Word meaning</th>
<th>Content of the text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Q.3-Reading % #</td>
<td>Q.4-Reading % #</td>
<td>Q.3-Reading % #</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Literacy</td>
<td>33% 30% 40</td>
<td>32% 38 20% 24</td>
<td>12% 24 7% 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Popular</td>
<td>18% 22 13% 16</td>
<td>20% 24 28% 34</td>
<td>28% 34 22% 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>18% 21 11% 13</td>
<td>13% 15 15% 18</td>
<td>15% 18 35% 42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>31% 37 23% 28</td>
<td>36% 43 37% 44</td>
<td>37% 44 37% 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>100 120 100</td>
<td>100 120 100</td>
<td>100 120 100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: # = Number of Respondents

The results in Table 5 show that grammar and spelling were considered the most difficult aspects encountered by the students either in reading or in writing English. More than half of the respondents agreed that grammar/spelling was a major problem in writing in English. It further shows that vocabulary/word meaning was the hardest problem found in reading English texts, as it was chosen by 32% of the students. Most of the students did not respond to the content of the text question, which was 32% for reading and 37% for writing. Meanwhile, only fourteen (12%) chose the content of the text as their first choice for difficulty in reading, while 8 (7%) chose writing.

Table 6 shows the results of the fifth and sixth questions, which are “What will you do when you encounter difficult word(s) when you read a text in English?” and “What will you do when you encounter difficult word(s) when you write a text in English?”

Table 6. Responses to Question 5 and Question 6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>%</th>
<th># of Respondents</th>
<th>%</th>
<th># of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Open Dictionary</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Discuss with classmate</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Ask the Lecturer</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Table 6, the students’ reaction when facing difficulties is crystal clear. About 62% of students prefer to open a dictionary if they have a problem in reading; meanwhile, 38% of the students will go to the dictionary if they encounter difficulties when writing an EFL text. It seems that the dictionary was very helpful for most students in both these skills. On the other hand, 48% of the students would discuss their
writing problem with their classmates or ask their teacher meanwhile no student chose other techniques to get over difficulties in reading, and only one student chose it to get over difficulties in writing.

5. DISCUSSION

The study results reflect four points:
1. EFL students’ motivation for learning writing skills needs further encouragement;
2. EFL students’ personal preference on types of reading materials needs improvement;
3. EFL students’ learning processes for reading and writing need to be accompanied with more learning of grammar and spelling; and
4. An important tool for EFL students learning English is a dictionary.

The first point is that encouragement of EFL students’ motivation to learn writing skills needs to be pushed. Knowing the fact that they prefer reading more than writing implies that they already have modalities in the form of background knowledge for reading; however, they need to be taught how to incorporate and develop background knowledge when learning writing skills possibly including transcribing quality writings to build memory banks of quality writing structures including idioms and collocations.

The second point is that variety in the types of reading materials that the EFL students personally prefer to read in the reading course needs to be improved. The students have almost equally chosen academic, popular and literary texts. This indicates that the tendency for English instructors to use various types of reading material in their classes is relatively open and high. Consideration to using more literary and popular texts may be made in order to stimulate motivation and interest from the students to learn reading and writing skills from different angles.

The third point is that when EFL students learn reading and writing skills, their learning processes need to be accompanied by learning more grammar and spelling at the same time. They also need to be informed about ways to increase their vocabulary both in of these skills. Surprisingly, understanding the content of texts both in learning reading and writing skills was not a difficult aspect for the students, although the data shows that they need to be accompanied in terms of recognizing grammar and spelling as well as understanding the meaning of words in the texts. Simply put, students who are in the process of learning reading and writing skills in English should not be ‘left alone’ and teachers still need to play an important key role in this matter.

The fourth point is that dictionaries are very important tools for EFL students; this is an undeniable truth. Use of good dictionaries, both hard copy and on-line, can support the work of the lecturers, especially when their students are reading or writing in English at places outside the school or university. Certainly, EFL students who like to learn independently can grow their literacy levels much faster than their peers who only study when they are in the classroom. However, encouraging EFL students to have discussions with classmates about texts that they are reading and to ask questions of their lecturer about what they are reading and writing is also important. In other words, having discussions with classmates helps develop the communication skills of the students, while asking questions of the lecturer signifies that they are developing good abilities in critical thinking.

In brief, EFL students need to be encouraged in learning writing and in reading with more variety in the types of reading materials provided. The students also need to
be accompanied while learning reading and writing in order to learn more grammar and spelling, and they need to use their dictionaries more.

6. CONCLUSION

The overall notion of this study was to understand EFL students’ responses to learning basic reading and writing skills. EFL students in Indonesia need to be informed as well as taught that writing and reading skills are related to one another. Learning writing needs much more effort than learning EFL reading. To learn basic reading in English, EFL students should be given diverse types of texts; however, the texts should be in line with academic texts that support the students’ learning processes. Grammar and spelling exercises should be taught-learned as well to EFL students in order to help them to achieve competence in English linguistically. Although EFL students may prefer to use a dictionary in the process of teaching-learning English writing and speaking, they should also be encouraged to be more active in terms of asking questions and having discussions with their peers and their lecturers.

REFERENCES


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