

THE READABILITY LEVEL OF READING PASSAGES ON ENGLISH TEXTBOOK FOR GRADE NINE IN INDONESIA

Eka Kusuma Adianingrum

English Department, Faculty of Education and Teachers Training, Universitas Tidar
Indonesia
ekakus4@gmail.com

Abstract

Textbook is a major resource for students in teaching and learning process of English. The basic component of textbook is text. This is in line with text-based or genre-based approach applied by the K-13 curriculum in Indonesia. However, the publication from Ministry of Education (2016) in achievement of 15 year-old Indonesian students in Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) shows that they did not have significant improvement in reading skill. One factor assumed is the readability level of reading passages on the textbook used in teaching and learning process. It is concerned with the level of difficulty from the text to be understood by the students. This study aims to investigate how the readability level of reading passages on English textbook for grade nine in Indonesia is. The writer uses “Think Globally Act Locally (2018 revision)” which is written and published by Ministry of Education in Indonesia. A descriptive qualitative research is employed in this study. There are three genres of reading passages in the book to be analyzed: procedure, narrative, and report text. The data was collected by documentation technique. To analyze the data, the writer used Flesch Reading Ease formula. This formula is the most widely used formula, the most tested, reliable, and the best in school text. The results of this study show that the readability level of 12 reading passages on English textbook for grade nine in Indonesia is varied. The range is from very easy to fairly difficult.

Keywords – readability, textbook, passages

Introduction

In teaching and learning process of English, textbook is the major resource for students’ input and practice. Besides, it is used as guidelines for teachers and lecturers as it has to be created in accord with the syllabus. Teachers also have to select the appropriate textbook based on the needs of the students in school. This printed material is important to facilitate the students’ learning. The only textbook which is clearly based on K-13 is the one published by Ministry of Education. Moreover, the textbook is classified into student book and teacher book. The basic component of textbook is text. This is in line with the text-based or genre-based approach applied by the K-13 curriculum. However, Ministry of Education (2016) published the achievement of Indonesian students in Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). It shows that the reading skill of 15 year old students has not improved significantly. The participants of this programme are the 15 year old students.

Based on the writer’s assumption, understanding the text is influenced by three factors. They come from the teacher, within the students, and the textbook. The problem which comes from the textbook itself is many students commented that the selected textbook provides texts which are sometimes very easy or too difficult to read. Regarding this phenomenon, readability is concerned with how difficult or easy the texts are to be understood by the readers or students.

Dubay (2004) defines readability as what makes some texts easier to read than others. Readability is concerned with the degree to which the text is easy or difficult to understand what is being communicated through written texts (Bailin & Grafstein, 2016). The



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readability of the text hinders learners' comprehension of the text (Arifani, 2016). Therefore, based on the explanation, readability is the degree of difficulty from a text is to be understood by the students according to their level.

From the above elaboration of the factors influenced the students' reading comprehension, the writer is interested to investigate one of the factors that comes from the textbook. Therefore, this study analyzes the readability level of reading passages on English textbook for grade nine in Indonesia.

According to Dubay's idea (2004), there are many ways to measure the readability level of a text. The popular ways are by using Flesch Reading Ease, Dale-Chall, Gunning Fog (FOG Index), Fry Readability Graph Formula, and Cloze Test Procedure. However, the writer of this study uses the most widely used formula, the most tested, reliable, and best in school text called Flesch Reading Ease formula. The Flesch Reading Ease Formula is a simple approach to assess the grade-level of the reader. It's also one of the few accurate measures of readability. The formula is used to assess the difficulty of a reading passage written in English. Below is the Flesch Reading Ease formula:

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

RE = Readability Ease of English text

ASL = Average Sentence Length

ASW = Average number of syllables per word

To get the number of ASL, the method is to divide the number of words by the number of sentences. For ASW, the number of syllables divided by the number of words. Then, by using the formula in a text, RE is the result of it ranging from 0 to 100. The higher the number, the higher the readability score is. Thus, the text is easier to read. After calculating the result, there is also a judgment to categorize the grade.

Methodology

A descriptive qualitative research is employed in this study. Descriptive research is defined as a research method used to describe the existing phenomena as accurately as possible (Atmowardoyo, 2018). The object of this study is reading passages. The passages are taken from English textbook used by grade ninth students entitled "Think Globally Act Locally (2018 revision)". The writer decided that the passages to be analyzed are the three genres of reading passages: procedure, narrative, and report text.

The data was collected by documentation technique. The writer collected the English syllabus for grade nine and student book of "Think Globally Act Locally (2018 revision)" which includes the reading passages. Then, the writer went through these steps after the data was collected:

- 1) The first step after getting the book, the writer identified the reading passages on the textbook.
- 2) Then, the writer counted the words, sentences, and syllables on each reading passages.



- 3) The number of words is divided by the number of sentences to get Average Sentence Length (ASL).
- 4) To get Average number of Syllables per Word (ASW), the number of syllables is divided by the number of words.
- 5) After getting ASL and ASW, the writer analyzed the readability level of the reading passages by using Flesch Reading Ease formula as follows:

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

Notes:

RE = Readability Ease of English text

ASL = Average Sentence Length

ASW = Average number of syllables per word

- 6) Next, the result of the Flesch Reading Ease formula is justified by Flesch Reading Ease scale.

Table 1. Classification of Flesch Reading Ease Grade

Reading Ease Score	Style Description	Estimated Reading Grade
0 to 30	Very Difficult	College graduate
30 to 40	Difficult	13 th to 16 th grade
50 to 60	Fairly Difficult	10 th to 12 th grade
60 to 70	Standard	8 th and 9 th grade
70 to 80	Fairly Easy	7 th grade
80 to 90	Easy	6 th grade
90 to 100	Very Easy	5 th grade

- 7) Finally, the writer concluded the data analysis.

Findings and Discussion

This research aims to investigate the readability level of reading passages on English textbook for grade nine in Indonesia. There are 12 reading passages in the textbook that the writer analyzes.

To analyze the data, the writer uses a theory or formula of Flesch Reading Ease. This formula uses the average sentence length (ASL) and average syllables per word (ASW) as the variables to estimate the level of the reading grade. To get ASL, the writer divides the number of words from the text by the number of sentences from the text. Then, ASW is calculated by dividing the number of syllables by the number of words from the text.



Table 2. Type of Text, Number of Words, Sentences, and Syllables

No	Text	Type of Text	Number of Words	Number of Sentences	Number of Syllables
1	Text 1	Procedure	125	13	165
2	Text 2	Narrative	556	40	687
3	Text 3	Report	118	8	175
4	Text 4	Report	125	12	166
5	Text 5	Report	92	9	133
6	Text 6	Report	65	4	86
7	Text 7	Report	121	11	165
8	Text 8	Report	142	14	189
9	Text 9	Report	60	7	73
10	Text 10	Report	68	6	103
11	Text 11	Report	119	11	162
12	Text 12	Report	115	9	189

Next, the writer divides the number of words from the text by the number of sentences from the text to get ASL.

a. Calculating ASL (Average Sentence Length)

$$ASL = \frac{\text{Number of Words}}{\text{Number of Sentences}}$$

This shows that there are approximately 11 words in a sentence. Thus, the average length of the sentence is 10.8 words.

b. Calculating ASW (Average Number of Syllables per Word)

$$ASW = \frac{\text{Number of Syllables}}{\text{Number of Words}}$$

ASW is calculated by dividing the number of syllables by the number of words from the text. This means that each word of the text has approximately 1 syllable. Furthermore, the average of syllable is 1.4 in one word.

The higher the number of ASL and ASW, the lower the readability score is. The readability score is related with the estimated reading grade. Thus, the higher the readability score, the easier the text is to be read by the students and the lower the estimated reading grade of the students.



c. Counting the readability (RE) by using Flesch Reading Ease Formula

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

For each text, the readability score calculated after putting ASL and ASW into the Flesch Reading Ease formula.

After identifying the type of text and counting number of words, sentences, and syllables of 12 reading passages, the writer calculates the ASL and ASW. Then, the writer puts them into the formula and gets the readability score. Below is the result of readability analysis.

Table 3. Result of Readability

No	Text	ASL	ASW	Readability (RE)
1	Text 1	9.6	1.3	87.1
2	Text 2	13.9	1.2	91.2
3	Text 3	14.8	1.5	64.9
4	Text 4	10.4	1.3	86.3
5	Text 5	10.2	1.4	78
6	Text 6	16.3	1.3	80.3
7	Text 7	11	1.4	77.2
8	Text 8	10.14	1.3	86.6
9	Text 9	8.6	1.2	96.6
10	Text 10	11.3	1.5	68.5
11	Text 11	10.8	1.4	77.4
12	Text 12	12.8	1.6	58.5

Discussion

Based on the data analysis, the writer describes the readability level of each reading passage of English textbook for grade nine entitled “Think Globally and Act Locally (2018 revision) and also discusses the estimated reading grade of the passages by using the Flesch table. Below is the result of analyzing the readability level of reading passages and its estimated reading grade.



Table 4. Readability and Estimated Reading Grade

No	Text	Type of Text	Readability (RE)	Description	Estimated Reading Grade
1	Text 1	Procedure	87.1	Easy	6 th grade
2	Text 2	Narrative	91.2	Very Easy	5 th grade
3	Text 3	Report	62.8	Standard	8 th and 9 th grade
4	Text 4	Report	86.3	Easy	6 th grade
5	Text 5	Report	78	Fairly Easy	7 th grade
6	Text 6	Report	80.3	Easy	6 th grade
7	Text 7	Report	77.2	Fairly Easy	7 th grade
8	Text 8	Report	86.6	Easy	6 th grade
9	Text 9	Report	96.6	Very Easy	5 th grade
10	Text 10	Report	68.5	Standard	8 th and 9 th grade
11	Text 11	Report	77.4	Fairly Easy	7 th grade
12	Text 12	Report	58.5	Fairly Difficult	10 th to 12 th grade

The writer found that the readability level of reading passages on the textbook is varied. Based on the Flesch Table (Table 1), the range is from very easy to fairly difficult.

1) Very Easy to Read

There are two reading passages which are categorized as very easy to read on the textbook, namely text 2 and text 9. Based on the Flesch table, their scores belong within 90 to 100 reading score. Furthermore, the suitable estimated reading grade for both texts is for 5th grade.

2) Easy to Read

There are four reading passages which are categorized as easy to read on the textbook. They are text 1, text 4, text 6, and text 8. Based on the Flesch table, their scores are within 80 to 90 reading score. Furthermore, the suitable estimated reading grade for both texts is for 6th grade.

3) Fairly Easy to Read

There are three reading passages which are categorized as fairly easy to read on the textbook. They are text 5, text 7, and text 11. Based on the Flesch table, their scores are within 70 to 80 reading score. Furthermore, the suitable estimated reading grade for both texts is for 7th grade.

4) Standard

There are two reading passages which are categorized on standard level of difficulty. The reading passages are text 3 and text 10. Based on the Flesch table, their scores belong within 60 to 70 reading score. Both texts are the only texts suitable for grade nine.



5) Fairly Difficult to Read

Lastly, text 12 is the only reading passage categorized as fairly difficult to read. Text 12 is report text and its readability score is 58.5. Based on the Flesch table, the score 58.5 belong within 50 to 60 reading score. It is estimated for 10th to 12th grade.

Conclusion

Based on the data analysis and discussion, the writer concludes the result of this study that the readability level of reading passages on English textbook for grade nine in Indonesia is varied. In this study, there are 2 texts categorized as very easy to read (text 2 and text 9), 3 texts categorized as easy to read (text 1, text 4, text 6, and text 8), 4 texts categorized as fairly easy to read (text 5, text 7, and text 11), 2 texts categorized as standard and suitable for grade nine (text 3 and text 10), and a text categorized as fairly difficult to read (text 12).

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