

IDENTIFICATION OF DIFFICULTIES IN READING AUTHENTIC
ENGLISH TEXTS AMONG SIXTH- AND EIGHTH-SEMESTER ENGLISH
LANGUAGE EDUCATION PROGRAMME STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Science and technology develop very rapidly in line with the unpredictable change in society. Uncountable journals, books, research reports appear in every series and volume. All of these lead to the fact that there is so much to read today. In the circumstances, reading comprehension ability rises in importance. English Language Education Programme students as members of scientific community are required to cope with never-ending reading activities. As the essence of reading is comprehension and as there is so much to read today, a question may be raised whether those students have any difficulties that impair their reading comprehension ability. This was the reason on which this study is based. This study was an effort to identify the English Language Education Programme students' difficulties in comprehending authentic English texts. The authentic English texts are part of the discussion in this study for English texts easily accessible are the authentic ones, namely those which are not meant for any language learning activities but mainly for communication. Difficulties may arise here caused by many factors.

This study included the Sixth- and Eighth-Semester students of the English Language Education Programme of Sanata Dharma University in the academic year 1993/1994. To obtain the data, this study employed 4 passages with 70 questions followed. Besides the reading test, the respondents were also given a questionnaire to get the data on difficulties in comprehending authentic English texts based on their own perceptions. The reading test given covered the six linguistic elements of the texts, namely punctuation, structure, phrases, sentences, diction, and comprehension.

From the analysis, this study found that comprehension is the biggest problem for the English Language Education Programme students. The mean score they gained was very low, i.e. 7.782 from 17 questions which shows that they could only answer 45.77% of the questions. The next difficulty was in the phrase element. The students' mean in this element, which was 5.275, was lower than the ideal mean of the phrase element which was 6.875 whereas the target score was 11. The next general difficulties were in the sentence and diction elements with the means of 7.006 and 7.134, and the ranges of 9 and 12. The target score of each of both elements was 14. The types of difficulties the

respondents had were not the same for each semester. The total mean of the eighth-semester respondents was lower than that of the sixth-semester ones, but there was no significant differences between the two. The additional finding based on a t-test shows that the female respondents got a better result on the punctuation element than the male ones.

Accordingly, some suggestions were also set up. The first suggestion goes to the English Language Education Programme to really get the students to read more. Giving more book report assignments can be one of the ways. The second suggestion is aimed to the students to accustom themselves to read authentic English texts since these texts are somewhat different in styles from the reading material they get from the reading classes which are meant for language teaching. The third suggestion is given to the teachers to really develop word-attack-skill strategies in their reading classes. This is in line with the fact that the biggest problem of all for the foreign language readers is that their vocabulary is not good enough for the reading they have to do. Teachers are also expected to be able to develop students' prior knowledge before they start reading.

