

## STUDENTS' ATTRIBUTIONS ON ENGLISH READING SKILL IN AVIATION FIELD

<sup>1</sup>Maria Asumpta Deny Kusumaningrum\* and <sup>2</sup>Made Frida Yulia  
Institut Teknologi Dirgantara Adisutjipto and Universitas Sanata Dharma,  
Yogyakarta

\*correspondence: [mariadeny@itda.ac.id](mailto:mariadeny@itda.ac.id)

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### Abstract

Learning activities have a close relation with progress, achievement or even failure. Attribution is the clarifications and reasons that individuals give for advance, accomplishment, and indeed disappointment towards something they have experienced, especially in their language learning. This study aims to investigate the students' attributions on their English-reading skill especially in reading aviation text. Thus, we know the progress, the achievement and also the failure of the learning activity in students' reading skill. The participants of the study were sixty-nine students who took *Bahasa Inggris Teknik II* class. Open-ended questionnaire and interview were used as the instruments to collect the data. The results showed that interest was the major attributions for doing well and ability was the major factor for not doing well.

**Keywords:** attributions, aviation field, English reading skill

### Introduction

In the educational setting, it is irrefutable that attribution on students' learning processes has been distinguished as a key figure impacting their learning motivation and academic accomplishment. According to Weiner (1972), the attribution prepares the students to get the basic determinant of learning and performance. Ellis (2008) also said that the attribution may have an impact on students' motivation. In line with Weiner and Ellis, Lei (2009) highlighted that the success or failure's attribution in learning activity will result in changes for expectations and emotions, which may affect people's motivation for learning and, it will also affect their academic achievement. With similar point of view, Asonibare (1986) pointed that attribution is defined as a cognitive process in which people perceive an impact caused by themselves or other people in regards to what has happened to the person. In this case, it is more challenging because students have to face the second language learning in reading a text. It is supported by Ellis (2008) that students provide for their improvement in second language learning. In addition, Gonzales (2011) highlighted that students have to know the attribute to their success or failure when they are in the process of learning the second language.

This study only focuses on one skill, which is reading skill for aviation field. The reason is that the participants of this study are the students of aviation institute who have an obligation to read English aviation texts in all of their modules. As we know, reading is widely recognized as an important skill for English language learners in today's world. It improves overall proficiency and provides access to valuable information at work and school. Understanding second language written text is thought-provoking. According to Grellet (1987), when the readers understand the second language written text, they have to extract the necessary information as accurately and efficiently as possible. Besides, it must be followed by some cognitive abilities, such as predicting, checking, asking questions and interpreting the written materials. Among the four skills in the second language, reading is the most important skill of all (Carrell, 1989).

Although reading is said to be the most important skill of all, it is not easy to achieve reading comprehension. It happens in this study setting that most the participants are not excited when they have to read English text books, even when they are about the aviation field. As a matter of fact, it is compulsory for the students to join an add-on English course every day. During the course some activities to promote their English fluency have been done, such as vocabulary enhancement through drilling, doing presentation, and listening activities. However, some of the students still find difficulties in the four skills, including reading. This may be due to lack of enjoyment which they feel in undertaking reading tasks. Enjoying English reading text is vital because they have to perform L2 reading in all of their modules which are related to aircraft safety. On top of that, they are required to understand the content of the texts well in order that they will become eligible for employment whenever later they are tested by Garuda Maintenance Facility.

The graduates of aeronautics engineering should be able to involve and participate globally, especially in aeronautics matters through English. It is because most of students are from vocational high school in aeronautics, the students will have enough knowledge for the aeronautics subjects. However, the problems appear when they have to apply it in English. The students can learn English through English courses and trainings outside the campus in order to improve their English proficiency and prepare for their job hunting. Nevertheless, so far, it is not easy to build the students' confidence in applying their English skills. Therefore, it is necessary to know the obstacles that students face.

The problems raised in the study were based on students' experience in following learning activities. The students are expected to gain knowledge and skills of the language so that they can be professional engineers in the future. Seeing its importance, this study tried to investigate the relation between aviation reading and second language learning. However, the students' attributions are the focus of this study. It is intended to generally explore students' attributions in reading skill since the students may have their personal attributions for their learning experiences. In addition, given the importance of exploring the attributions, this study specifically aimed to answer this research question: What are students' attributions for the improvement of their English reading skill in aviation field?

Some experts around the world have investigated attribution. Tse (2000) conducted a qualitative study involving fifty-one university students who learnt a foreign language while they were studying in the United States. The study showed that the most frequent attributions stated by the students for the success in their

learning are the teachers and professors' willingness to support the learning activity and language input received from the students' family and community interactions. The students also said that they have low level of success in the study of foreign language/second language. Most of the students said that they did not have enough practice and they did not spend their time to study the language.

Williams, Burden, Poulet, and Maun (2004) investigated attributions of two hundred and eighty-five students studying French, German, and Spanish in five secondary schools in the United Kingdom. The result showed that twenty-one attribution categories, such as effort, strategy, ability, and teacher are the attributions for doing well in their learning. On the other hand, sixteen attribution categories, such as effort, ability, and interest, become the primary reasons for not doing well in their learning. More recent study, Lei and Qin (2009) as cited in Pishghadam and Zabihi (2011) undertook another related study. They attempted to explore the relationship between Chinese English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' attribution and their English learning achievement. Significantly, they revealed that teacher and effort became attribution factors that predicted their success in learning EFL.

### **Method**

As the goal of this study was to investigate the attributions of students' English reading skill, a survey was employed. The process was intended to collect information about the students and to define the target situation and the problems in learning English reading skill. Surveys ask many people (called participants) about their beliefs, opinions, characteristics, and behaviour through the same questions (Neuman, 2006). This study was conducted for one semester in Aeronautics Engineering Department, Institut Teknologi Dirgantara Adisutjipto, Yogyakarta. The research involved sixty-nine students who joined *Bahasa Inggris Teknik II* class. The reading skill is important for them since they have to read all of their modules in English. Moreover, they are also forced to communicate in English.

To make the study well-organized, the procedures from Neuman (2006) were adopted.

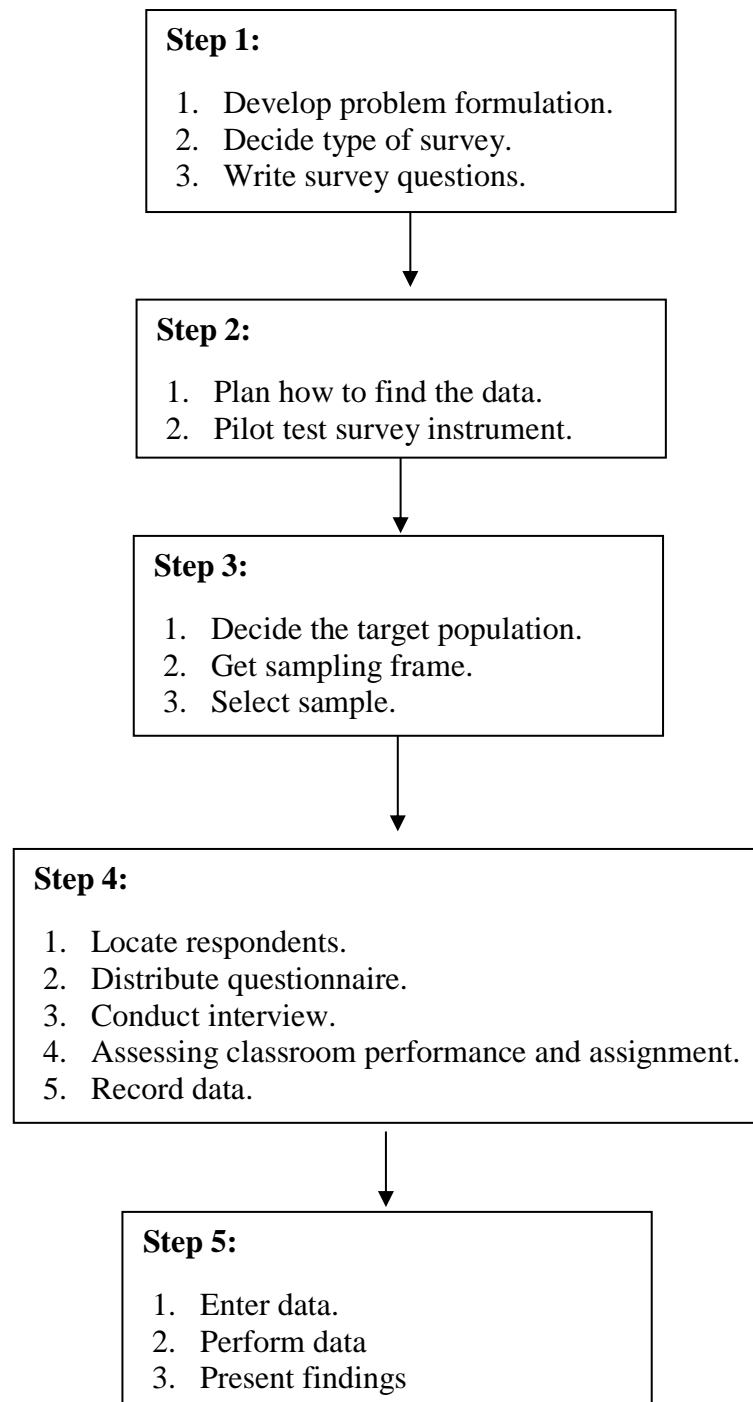


Figure 1. Research Procedure (Neuman, 2006)

An open-ended questionnaire was distributed to the participants during the class time. As stated by Neuman (2006), an open-ended questionnaire leads the participants to give detailed information and a number of possible answers. Before asking them to provide their written responses, the participants were initially explained about the purpose of the study and the meaning of each statement written on the questionnaire. The purpose was to ensure that the

participants clearly understood the meaning of the statement to which they responded.

Indonesian language was used in the questionnaire to make the questions clearer. In addition, the participants were also allowed to respond in the same language. In this way, the participants could easily understand the questions and they could give clear and deep responses to each question. The items in the questionnaire were adapted from Tse (2000), Williams, et al. (2004) and Lei Quin (2009). The questions are:

1. Apakah ada perbedaan membaca text umum (cerita) dengan membaca text dalam lingkup aviasi seperti task card dan manual book?
2. Jika ada perbedaan, coba ceritakan apa perbedaannya?
3. Ketika saya bisa memahami bacaan (task card dan manual book) dengan baik, beberapa faktor yang mempengaruhi adalah.....
4. Ketika saya tidak bisa memahami bacaan (task card dan manual book) dengan baik, beberapa faktor yang mempengaruhi adalah.....

Afterwards, the written responses on the questionnaire were analyzed using the grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, as stated in Neuman, 2006). The approach had a purpose to build a theory that authentically reflects the evidence or, in other words, to figure a theory created and grounded in the data. According to the ideas by William, et al. (2004), this study tries to understand the meanings that the participants proposed and display the category that occurred from the data. In this study, the data from the questionnaire became the attributions on the students' English-reading development. The attributions then displayed in some tables based on each indicator.

The interview section was conducted after distributing the questionnaire. During the interview process, the participants' written responses got from the questionnaire were also observed. In that case, the participants were directed to provide further explanation towards what they had written on the questionnaire. The information from the interview was then analyzed in order to support the data gained from the questionnaire. The interview was conducted to three participants who were chosen based on their varied answers. Similar to the data gathering process through the questionnaire, the participants were also allowed to respond to the interview questions in Indonesian.

### **Findings and Discussion**

This study aimed to answer the question: What are students' attributions for the improvement of their English reading skill in aviation field? In an attempt to find answers to the research question, two specific indicators derived from the participants' English reading attributions were formulated. The first indicator was concerned with factors when the participants were able to understand the reading texts well. Meanwhile, the second indicator had to do with the factors when the participants were not able to understand the reading texts well. The research results of the attributions based on each indicator would later be elicited. The data obtained from the questionnaire would provide attributions categories that the participants had for each indicator. The name of the attributions' categories shown in some tables in this part were adapted and developed from Williams, et al. (2004). In addition, the data obtained from the interview would also support the research

results from the questionnaire, which eventually would become the answer to the research question stated in this study.

### *Attributions for Doing Well*

To begin with, the term English reading text in this study context should be clarified. English reading text mentioned here is aviation reading text. It refers to an activity when the participants read the manual service, task card, or the module related to their subject in aviation. The results' analysis showed that there were seven attributions that the participants had for their ability in reading English texts. Table 1 explained the attributions for doing well into a ranked order.

Table 1. The Students' Attributions for Doing Well

<b>Attributions</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Interest	22	32 %
Ease	16	23%
Peers	13	19 %
Teacher	11	16 %
Strategy	4	6 %
Need / importance	2	3 %
Ability	1	1 %
<b>Total number</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>100 %</b>

As displayed in Table 1, interest category was mentioned 22 times (32%) in the questionnaire. Additionally, it became the major category which was frequently mentioned by the participants. The examples of interest category mentioned by the participants were they liked the field of aviation, they liked English, they enjoyed reading, and they wanted to learn. One of the participants wrote in the questionnaire:

*Saya sangat suka dengan dunia aviasi. Keingin tahuan saya sangat besar sehingga saya tertarik belajar hal baru salah satunya dengan membaca bacaan tentang aviasi dan buku aviasi hampir semua dalam Bahasa Inggris. (R1, questionnaire)*

(I was really interested in aviation field. I was eager to know all about aviation by reading aviation text books. And as I know, most of aviation books are written in English.)

Dealing with the interest, one participant conveyed:

*Saya berasal dari keluarga yang bekerja di dunia penerbangan, papa saya adalah seorang teknisi pesawat. Sejak kecil papa sering bercerita tentang pesawat, mungkin itu salah satu yang menumbuhkan ketertarikan saya dengan dunia aviasi. SMK penerbangan dan bangku kuliah dengan jurusan penerbangan juga merupakan pilihan saya karena sudah suka dari kecil. Padahal papa juga tidak pernah memaksa saya terjun di dunia aviasi. (R1, interview)*

(I came from a family which worked in aviation field, my father worked as an airplane technician. When I was a child, my father loved to tell the story about aviation. Maybe it was one of the reasons why I liked aviation. When I wanted to continue my study, aviation vocational high school and diploma program in aviation were my own selections. As a matter of fact, my parents never told me to study aviation and gave me full freedom to decide.)

The second rank is ease. It was mentioned 16 times (23%) by the participants. It was closely related to the interest. Most the participants said that because they are interested in the field, then it is easy to understand and learn the aviation field. One of the participants wrote in the questionnaire:

*Sudah suka duluan sih, jadi ya mudah aja bawaannya kalau belajar aviation. (R2, questionnaire)*

(I really loved aviation, then I felt easy to learn all of aviation matters.)

Another participant wrote:

*Berbeda dengan membaca bacaan yang umum, kalau membaca bacaan tentang aviasi gampang karena pikiran kita sudah fokus ke satu topik saja, yaitu penerbangan. (R3, questionnaire)*

(Unlike reading general texts, reading in aviation was easy because our minds were already focused on just one topic, which was aviation.)

Those statements in questionnaire were also supported by the results in interview section. One of the participants said:

*Lingkupnya kan jelas penerbangan, jadi ya gampang aja mengikuti alurnya. Apalagi ada gambar yang makin membantu biar cepet paham. (R2, interview)*

(The scope was clear in aviation, so it was easy to follow the materials. Moreover, there were some pictures that were increasingly helpful so that I could quickly understand the text.)

Third is peer. It was mentioned by the participants 13 times (19%). Peers refers to the task given by the lecturers and the participants can do the task both in a small group and a big group. Working with others, discussing the problems, sharing the knowledge are statements frequently mentioned by the participants. They thought that by having those activities they could be motivated and learn easily. In the questionnaire, one of the participants wrote:

*Enak sih kalau kerja kelompok, sangat membantu. Bisa diskusi, yang saya tidak tahu jadi paham. (R4, questionnaire)*

(It was good to work in groups, it really helped. I could discuss the materials which I did not really understand.)

The participant also said in the interview section that having discussion with friends in a group work was really helpful.

*Karena kemampuan saya biasa-biasa saja, jadi saya senang kalau dosen meminta kami untuk kerja di kelompok. Saya bisa belajar banyak dari teman-teman kelompok. Banyak istilah penerbangan yang masih perlu saya kuasai. (R3, interview)*

(Because my ability was not good enough, I was happy when the lecturer asked us to work in groups. I could learn a lot from my friends. There were many aviation terms that I still needed to master.)

Next rank is teacher. It was mentioned 11 times (16%). It has generally been understood that a teacher takes an important role in learning activity. It was revealed that the participants liked the teacher or not, the teacher explained the materials well or not, the teacher was nice or not, the teacher made language interesting or not, the teacher was helpful or not were all included in this category. It was in line with the result of questionnaire whereby one participant wrote:

*Dosen yang baik dan mengerti kemampuan mahasiswa. (R3, questionnaire)*

(Good lecturers were able to understand the students' ability.)

Related to the teacher, one participant said in interview section:

*Dosen berpengaruh banget. Kalau dosennya gak galak, mau mendengarkan mahasiswa, mau memotivasi ya pasti kita lebih semangat untuk belajar. Kalau dosennya gak menyenangkan, gak bisa kasih penjelasan, gak mau memahami mahasiswa, udah males duluan belajar. (R2, interview)*

(Lecturers were very influential. If the lecturers were friendly, willing to listen the students, eager to motivate us, of course we would be more enthusiastic in learning activity. But, if the lecturers were not nice, they could not give good explanation, they did not want to listen to the students, we were unmotivated to learn.)

Strategy was mentioned 4 times (6%). In Williams, et al (2004), the category strategy and effort were different. However, it was not easy to differentiate both categories. Thus, the term strategy in this study was meant as a directed effort. This category included the statements such as concentrate, had a good mood, found the quiet place, asked when I needed the explanation, used aviation dictionary. Some participants wrote in the questionnaire:



*Suasana tenang, mood yang bagus akan sangat membantu memahami bacaan. (R1, R2, R5, questionnaire)*

(A quiet atmosphere and a good mood would really help to understand the texts.)

Related to the strategy, one of the participants unveiled as follows.

*Materinya sudah susah, ya harus cari suasana yang tenang. Selain itu suasana hati juga harus bagus. Dijamin bisa lebih konsentrasi dan cepat paham bacaannya. (R1, interview)*

(The material was by nature difficult, so I had to find a quiet atmosphere. In addition, having a good mood was also important. Then, I could be more focused and quickly understand the texts.)

The need/importance category was mentioned 2 times (3%) by the participants. They said that they needed it. They would apply those materials when having a test from GMF and from the campus. Thus, it was important for them to learn and understand. Finally, the last category was ability. It was only mentioned 1 time (1%). The participant said that he had enough ability in aviation since he studied in the vocational high school. Thus, it supported him to understand the reading texts.

#### ***Attributions for Not Doing Well***

Besides the attribution for doing well, the attribution for not doing well when the participants read the aviation English texts were also analyzed. There are five attributions for not doing well. The attributions for not doing well were elaborated in table 2.

Table 2. The Students' Attributions for Not Doing Well

<b>Attributions</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Ability	32	46.5%
Teacher	13	18.8%
Interest	10	14.5%
Strategy	9	13%
Mood	5	7.2%
<b>Total number</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>100 %</b>

Ability was the major category of attributions for not doing well, which was mentioned 32 times. Forty-six-point five percent (46.5%) of the participants felt their failures were because of their lack of ability both in English and aviation. They said that they had poor ability to memorize vocabularies, to know the aviation terms, to understand the materials, and to know the tools. One participant wrote in a questionnaire form:

*Saya susah menghafal kata-kata dalam Bahasa Inggris, apalagi konteksnya penerbangan, tambah bingung. (R4, questionnaire)*

(I found it difficult to memorize English words. Let alone, the context was in aviation, I was even more confused.)

Related to the category in ability, one participant shared his attributions by saying:

*Kesulitan saya double, kemampuan Bahasa Inggris saya lemah, saya bukan dari sekolah penerbangan. Jadi banyak hal baru yang harus saya pelajari ditambah semua bacaan dalam Bahasa Inggris. Loadingnya lama he..he.. karena harus mikir dua kali. (R2, interview)*

(I had double difficulties. My English skills were weak. I was not from an aviation school. There were many new things that I had to learn. In addition, all the reading texts and modules were in English. It took times to think he..he .. )

The second category mostly mentioned by the participants after ability was teacher. Eighteen-point eight percent (18.8%) or 13 times participants mentioned teacher as the attributions for not doing well in reading English aviation text. As previously mentioned, teacher was also identified as a significant factor in student' ability. The statements like the teacher explained too fast, I did not like the teacher, the activity made me bored, the teacher didn't help the students were given by the participants. This statement came from the questionnaire data:

*Dosen yang kurang memahami mahasiswanya. Hanya memberikan tugas saja. (R3, questionnaire)*

(The lecturers did not understand the students, they just gave the task.)

This statement mentioned from the questionnaire data was in line with what one participant said in the interview:

*Dosen yang kurang bisa membantu mahasiswa. Kalau menjelaskan cepet banget, kita belum jelas, eeehh sudah dikasih tugas. Banyak lagi tugasnya. Kita tambah pusing. (R3, interview)*

(The lecturers were not helpful. They explained really fast, the students were not clear yet, then directly gave the task, many tasks. We were more confused.)

Lack of interest was cited 10 times (14.5%) as a reason for not doing well. It means that the interest also influences the students' success in learning something. The statements such as "I don't like English", "it is boring", "I like aviation but I really hate English" are the participants' attributions related to interest. Most participants said that they are bored with the learning activity. One wrote in the questionnaire:

*Kadang bosan sama kelasnya, baca modul pake Bahasa Inggris terus. (R1, questionnaire)*

(Sometimes I felt bored with the learning activity in the classroom; the modules were in English and I had to read them.)

As it was clarified in the interview, the participant said:

*Saya tidak suka Bahasa Inggris, jadi seringnya bosan kalau di kelas. Ditambah semua modul dalam Bahasa Inggris. Kalau aviation saya suka, tapi Bahasa Inggrisnya itu lho bikin males. (R3, interview)*

(I did not like English, so I was often bored in class. In addition, all the modules were in English. I loved aviation field, but the English made me lack of interest.)

The participants who did not have suitable strategies lead the failures in the learning process especially in reading aviation English text. The strategy was mentioned 9 times (13%) by the participants as the failures in reading. This category included the statements concerning they did not practice well and they did not improve their vocabulary mastery. Whereas mood was mentioned 5 times (7.2%) by the participants. This category included they had a personal problem and they had a lot of tasks.

## **Conclusion**

To summarize, it can be said that the main attributions for students in English reading learning were interest and the good relationship between the students and the teachers, in addition the positive relationship among the students was also needed. Some pedagogical implications are also served in the findings of this study. First is from the teacher side. The teacher should not only focus on giving the materials but also should maintain the good relationship between the students and the teacher and among the students. Second is from the student's side. The students need to keep developing themselves to find the best learning strategy for improving their Reading skill. Thus, the students can follow with the materials well. And the last, this study is expected to contribute in the development of teaching and learning activity especially in aviation context.

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