
**A STUDY ON THE ABILITY OF THE SIXTH SEMESTER STUDENTS
OF ENGLISH STUDY PROGRAM OF FKIP OF RIAU UNIVERSITY IN
IDENTIFYING THEME AND ELEMENTS OF PLOT IN THE SHORT
STORIES**

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Abstract

This is a descriptive research. The objective of the research is to find out the ability of the sixth semester students of English study program of FKIP of Riau University in identifying theme and elements of plot in the short stories and to identify the most difficult and easiest aspects for them. The research was conducted at English Study Program of Riau University from April up to June, in the academic year 2012-2013. The subjects of this research were 27 students of class B at English study program of Riau University. The writer took the sample by using cluster sampling. Before giving the real test, the writer did a try out to 27 students of class A to get validity and reliability of the test. After validating the instrument, the real test was given to the students. After collecting the data, the writer analyzed the result of the test by using statistical analysis as quoted from Wayan and Sunartana based on theme and elements of plot; exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. The analysis found that the mean score of the students in identifying theme was 49.37 which fell into Poor level. Moreover, in identifying elements of plot, the most difficult part for the students is in identifying exposition with the mean score 53.71 while the easiest part is resolution with the mean score 70.37. Finally, based on the data finding, the students' ability in identifying theme and elements of plot was at Poor to Average level.

Keyword : *Ability, Theme and Elements of Plot, Short Stories.*

INTRODUCTION

In learning English, reading is one of the skills that students need to acquire. Due to the importance of mastering reading skill, students should be able to read and comprehend English texts properly. To catch the information of the text, the students should understand the content of the text in order they know what the text is about. However, not all of the texts are easy to be read. It depends on the type and the form of the text.

At university level, particularly in English Study Program of FKIP of Riau University, prose is a compulsory subject taught in the sixth semester, along with other language skills. In learning prose, students are expected to be able to identify the elements of prose, which are the following: plot, setting, character, theme, point of view, symbol and allegory, and style and tone (Roberts and Jacobs, 2007).

There were many problems faced by the sixth semester students of English Study Program of FKIP of Riau University in identifying elements of prose, especially theme and elements of plot. The first problem that they face was the poor knowledge about prose, especially how to differentiate one element of plot from other elements. Moreover, they did not know what exactly a theme means. So, the questions about theme of the short stories could not be answered by them. The next factor was the vocabularies used in the short stories given were not familiar to the students, so that it was hard for them to understand the story. In addition, the materials of the elements of plot did not attract the interest of the study. So that, they got difficulties when answering questions about theme and elements of plot.

Short story, as an authentic reading material, is one of the media commonly used to teach Prose. Considering the time spent in a class, short story is suitable and effectively applicable. Viewed from language case, since the learners in this case are considered intermediate to advance level, short story is not just as simple and of course in certain language difficulty level to develop language learning skills.

Considering those factors, the writer chooses short story as the media used to find out the students' ability in identifying theme and elements of plot in prose. The problem of the research is formulated as follows: How is the ability of the sixth semester students of English Study Program of FKIP UR in identifying theme and elements of plot in the short stories?

Hornby (2000) defines short story as a story, usually about imaginary characters and events, which is short enough to be read from beginning to end without stopping. It is usually simpler and more direct compared to longer works of fiction such as novels. Therefore, because of their short length, short stories rely on many forms of literary devices such as, plot, setting and characters to convey the idea of a uniform theme seen throughout the script.

As a point of reference for the science fiction genre writer, the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America in Ristina (2011) defines short story length in its Nebula Awards for science fiction submission guidelines as having a word count of less than 7,500. Moreover, short story is a work of at least 2000 words but under 7500 words (Maisrul (2009)). A short story is a form of short fictional narrative prose. Short stories tend to be more concise and to the point than longer works of fiction, such as novels.

Actually, based on the syllabus of prose 2013, there are six genres of short stories taught at university level. They are: Crime, Detective, Horror, Mystery, Romance, and Thriller short stories. In this study, the writer chooses romance short stories. The reasons for choosing romance short stories are: it is more widely used than other genres in teaching prose (based on the syllabus of prose, 2013), in this case is to identify theme and plot; and romance tells about love, so it is interesting and suitable for the sixth semester students since they are still teenager.

In this study, the sixth semester students have to identify theme and plot that are included as elements of prose. So, the objective of this research is to find out the ability of the sixth semester students of English Study Program of FKIP UR in identifying theme and elements of plot in the short stories and to identify the most difficult and the easiest aspects for the students.

The first is theme. Theme of a story is whatever general idea or insight the entire story reveals (Kennedy, 1976). The theme is like a length of rope with which the writer, patently and mechanically, trusses the story neatly into meaningful shape. Moreover, according to Laura Bokesch in Indrayani (2009), theme is one of the elements of prose which means the main idea or underlying meaning of a literary work. In other word, it is the message that the author wants to convey to the readers. In addition, theme is the unifying or central concept of a story. It is a theory of life which acts as the unifying force in a story, or the universal truth which the story illustrates.

Furthermore, according to Honey Denson in Indrayani (2009), there are some ways to identify the theme because they may be stated or implied: (a) Identify the central topic or "big ideas". Before read a literary work, look at the title and try to find the clues of what the content about. And then write them down to help in identifying possible themes. (b) Identify how the characters relate to the central topic. While reading the story, try to see how the characters relate to the central topic. Pay attention to key events, dialogue, ideas, metaphors, and changes in a character's action or belief. (3) Organize thought. Try to organize thought by writing them down. Write down the central topic and then include examples from the story that support that topic.

The next is plot. According to Kennedy (1976), plot is such a structure of events arising out of a conflict. In addition, plot means the artistic arrangements of those events. A writer might decide to tell of the events in chronological order, beginning with the earliest; or he might open his story with the last event, then tell what led up to it.

Moreover, there are five structural elements of plot, they are: (1) Exposition. A story begins with an exposition. It is the opening portion that sets the scene (if any), introduces the main characters, tells us what happened before the story opened, and provides any other background information that we need in order to understand and care about the events to follow. (2) Rising Action/Complication. The rising action breaks the existing equilibrium and introduces the characters and the underlying or inciting conflict (if they have not already been introduced by the exposition). The conflict is then developed gradually and intensified. (3) Crisis/ Climax. Climax is the moment of the greatest tension in a story. It also can be called the “turning point”. The climax is an important turning point for the characters or the story, directly precipitating its resolution. (4) Falling Action. Once the crisis, or turning point, has been reached, the tension subsides and the plot moves toward its appointed conclusion. (5) Resolution. It records the outcome of the conflict and establishes some new equilibrium or stability (however tentative and momentary). The resolution is also referred to as the conclusion or the denouement.

The sixth semester students should understand and know how to identify theme and elements of plot since they have learned about that. So, the writer gave a written test to the students in the form of multiple choices. They were asked to answer questions based on the short stories given.

METHODOLOGY

The design of the research is descriptive research that has one variable to be observed which involves collecting data to test hypothesis or to answer question concerning the status of the subject of the research (Gay, 1987). In this study, instruments are used to collect the data that will be used to answer the hypothesis.

This study consists of one variable since the writer wants to find out the ability of the sixth semester students of English study program of FKIP of Riau University in identifying theme and elements of plot in the short stories. Since the number of the population of this study was quite large, and have same characteristics, the writer took a sample using clustering sample. So, the sample was class B of the sixth semester students of English study program. There were 27 students who were included in sample.

In this study, the writer used written test in the form of multiple choices to collect the data. In setting the test, the writer adjusted it with the syllabus of the sixth semester students. The students were given three different short stories to be read. Then, they were asked to answer questions related to identify theme and the elements of plot of the short stories. There were 30 questions given to the students and the test had to be done in 100 minutes

Before conducting the real test to the respondents, the writer conducted try out in class A of the sixth semester students of FKIP of Riau University who were not included in the sample in the last week of April. The try out was conducted to prove the reliability and validity of the test. There were 27 students who took this test.

After conducting the try out to the respondents, the writer calculated the difficulty level of each test item and discrimination index to know whether the test items were too difficult or too easy for the purpose of the research. According to Zainul and Nasution (1997), the level of difficulty of test items can be classified into three groups as shown in the following table.

The Range of Difficulty Level of Test Items

Level of difficulty	P (score)
Hard	0.0 – 0.25
Moderate	0.26 – 0.75
Easy	0.76 – 1.00

Then, index of difficulty (facility value) was calculated by using the following formula:

$$FV = \frac{R}{N}$$

Where:

FV = facility value (index of difficulty)

R = the number of correct answers

N = the number of students

(Heaton, 1991)

Discrimination index intended to separate the students who are success to answer the test items from those who are not. The formula used was as follows:

$$D = \frac{Ba - Bb}{0.5 T}$$

Where:

D = Discrimination index

Ba = Upper group answering

Bb = Lower group answering

T = Number of candidates (if the number of candidates is odd, so

T = number of candidates – 1)

(Zainul and Nasution, 1997)

Discrimination index that is sufficient to a test item is ≥ 0.25 . If it is lower than 0.25, the test item is not suitable enough to differentiate the respondents who prepare for the test with the respondents who do not. So, the test item has to be rejected and revised with the new one (Zainul and Nasution, 1997).

After knowing the difficulty level and discrimination index of the test items, the writer measured the central tendency by using the mean score. To know the mean score of the students' ability, the writer presented the data by using the formula:

$$M = \frac{\sum FX}{N}$$

Where: M = Mean score/ average
 $\sum FX$ = the sum of the respondents' score
 N = total number of the students

(Heaton, 1991)

To get the standard deviation, the following formula was used:

$$Sd = \sqrt{\frac{\sum d^2}{N}}$$

Where: Sd = Standard deviation
 $\sum d^2$ = Total of square mean deviation
 N = The number of test items
 (Heaton, 1991)

The next step is to compute the reliability of the test. According to Heaton (1975), reliability is necessary characteristic of a good test. In order to find the reliability of the test, the following formula is used:

$$Rii = \frac{N}{N-1} \left[1 - \frac{m(N-m)}{N(Sd)^2} \right]$$

Where:
 Rii = reliability
 N= the number of items in the test
 M= the mean score on the test for all the students
 Sd= the standard deviation of all the tests' scores

(Heaton, 1991)

Guilford (1956) as quoted by Indrayani (2009) said that the reliability of a test is as follows:

0.00-0.20 = reliability is very low
 0.20-0.40 = reliability is low
 0.40-0.70 = reliability is average
 0.70-0.90 = reliability is high
 0.90-1.00 = reliability is very high

In order to know the percentage of the classification of the students' ability in identifying theme and elements of plot, the writer used the following formula:

$$P = \frac{F}{R} \times 100\%$$

Where: P = percentage
 F = frequency
 R = number of students

(Hatch and Farhady, 1982)

Then, the level of the ability of the students was classified according to the scores they got from the test. Their ability was classified in four levels. The level of the ability is quoted from Harris (1974):

TABLE 3
THE LEVEL OF ABILITY

No.	Test Scores	The Level of Ability
1	80-100	Good to excellent
2	60-79	Average to good
3	50-59	Poor to average
4	0-49	Poor

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

After getting the students' score of the test, the writer classified the students' score based on theme and elements of plot that consist of exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. The result can be seen in the following table:

TABLE 1
The percentage of the Students' Ability in Identifying Theme in the Short Stories

Scores	Frequency	Percentage	Level of ability	Mean Score
80 – 100	3	11.11%	Good to excellent	49.37
60 – 79	9	33.33%	Average to good	
50 – 59	0	0%	Poor to average	
0 – 49	15	55.56%	Poor	
Total	27	100%		Poor

From the table above, it can be seen that there were 27 students who took the test. In identifying theme in the short stories, out of 27 students, there were 3 students (11.11%) who were in *Good to Excellent* level, 9 students (33.33%) who were in *Average to Good* level, none of the students (0%) who was in *Poor to Average* level and the rest (15 students/ 55.56%) who were in *Poor* level. In other word, in identifying theme in the short stories, the highest frequency of the

students was in *Poor* level, while the lowest frequency was in *Poor to Average* level which meant that the students have not really understood what exactly what a theme meant and the way to identify it in the short stories.

In order to get the exact result of the students' ability in identifying exposition, it was needed to find out the mean score of the students. The calculation pointed out that the mean score of the students was 49.37. It meant that the ability of the sixth semester students in identifying theme was in *Poor* level. It indicated that students had some difficulties in doing the test. Furthermore, it could be concluded that most of the students could not answer the questions about identifying theme of the short stories. In a story, theme is the unifying or central concept. By looking at the result, we know that the students could not understand the story because they did not know the central concept of the story. In short, the students really have serious problems in identifying this aspect. Therefore, they have to keep in practice in order to improve their ability.

TABLE 2
The percentage of the Students' Ability in Identifying Exposition in the Short Stories

Scores	Frequency	Percentage	Level of ability	Mean Score
80 – 100	3	11.11%	Good to excellent	53.71
60 – 79	13	48.15%	Average to good	
50 – 59	2	7.41%	Poor to average	
0 – 49	9	33.33%	Poor	
Total	27	100%		Poor to Average

From the table, it could be concluded that the highest frequency of the students in identifying exposition in the short stories was in *Average to Good* level, while the lowest frequency of the students was in *Poor to Average* level. It meant that the ability of almost half of the students was above average. But, after calculating the mean score of the students' result, it showed that the mean score was 53.71 which the level was *Poor to Average*. In short, the students really faced problems in identifying the exposition of the short stories. Consequently, the students should improve their knowledge and their interest in prose.

TABLE 3
The percentage of the Students' Ability in Identifying Rising Action in the Short Stories

Scores	Frequency	Percentage	Level of ability	Mean Score
80 – 100	5	18.52%	Good to excellent	54.33
60 – 79	9	33.33%	Average to good	
50 – 59	5	18.52%	Poor to average	
0 – 49	8	29.63%	Poor	
Total	27	100%		Poor to Average

The table above clearly points out the ability of the students in identifying rising action in the short stories. Out of 27 students who took the test, there were 5 students (18.52%) who were in *Good to Excellent* level, 9 students (33.33%) who were in *Average to Good* level, 5 students (18.52%) who were in *Poor to Average* level, and 8 students (29.63%) who were in *Poor* level.

From these explanations, it could be said that the highest frequency of the students who took the test was in *Average to Good* level in identifying rising action in the three short stories. In other word, some students could identify the rising action almost well. Although the highest frequency of the students were in *Average to Good* level, but based on the mean score of the students (54.33), it can be concluded that the ability of the students was considered in *Poor to Average* level. It meant that some students could not identify rising action as one of the elements of plot.

TABLE 4
The percentage of the Students' Ability in Identifying Climax in the Short Stories

Scores	Frequency	Percentage	Level of ability	Mean Score
80 – 100	2	7.41%	Good to excellent	55.56
60 – 79	11	40.73%	Average to good	
50 – 59	7	25.93%	Poor to average	
0 – 49	7	25.93%	Poor	
Total	27	100%		Poor to Average

From the table above, it could be seen that in identifying climax of the short stories, out of 27 students who took the test, the frequency of the students who were in *Good to Excellent* level was less than the frequency of the students who were in *Average to Good* level, *Poor to Average* level, and *Poor* level. By looking at the mean score of the students (55.56), it could be concluded that the students' ability in identifying climax in the short stories was categorized in *Poor to Average* level. That meant that the ability of the students in identifying climax was under the average. Moreover, they still have difficulties in identifying this element of plot.

TABLE 5
The percentage of the Students' Ability in Identifying Falling Action in the Short Stories

Scores	Frequency	Percentage	Level of ability	Mean Score
80 – 100	9	33.33%	Good to excellent	58.64
60 – 79	7	25.93%	Average to good	
50 – 59	2	7.41%	Poor to average	
0 – 49	9	33.33%	Poor	
Total	27	100%		Poor to Average

The table above shows in detail that out of 27 students who took the test, there were 9 students (33.33%) who were in *Good to Excellent* level, 7 students (25.93%) who were in *Average to Good* level, 2 students (7.41%) who were in *Poor to Average* level, and 9 students (33.33%) who were in *Poor* level. That meant that the highest percentage of the students in identifying falling action were in *Good to Excellent* level and *Poor* level. The percentage of the students who could answer the questions about falling action well with the students who could not answer the questions was balance or the same. In contrary, the lowest percentage was in *Poor to Average* level.

In order to get the mean score, the writer had calculated all the students' score divided by the number of the students. It was found that the mean score of the students was 58.64. Based on the mean score, it could be concluded that the students' ability in identifying falling action in the short stories was in *Poor to Average* level. That was the same with the ability of the students in identifying exposition, rising action, and climax in the short stories which meant that the students have not understood yet about that element of plot.

TABLE 6
The percentage of the Students' Ability in Identifying Resolution in the Short Stories

Scores	Frequency	Percentage	Level of ability	Mean Score
80 – 100	12	44.44%	Good to excellent	70.37
60 – 79	8	29.63%	Average to good	
50 – 59	0	0%	Poor to average	
0 – 49	7	25.93%	Poor	
Total	27	100%		Average to Good

The table above shows in detail that in identifying resolution of the short stories, from 27 students who took the test, the number of students who were in *Good to Excellent* level was the highest frequency that indicated that most of the students can identify the resolution of the short stories very well. On the other hand, the lowest frequency of all was in *Poor to Average* level since nobody was in that level. Meanwhile, the number of the students who were in *Poor* and *Average to Good* level was almost balance.

After calculating all the student's score, it was found that the mean score of the students was 70.37. Based on the mean score, it could be concluded that the students' ability in identifying resolution in the short stories was in *Average to Good* level. That meant that the students have understood about resolution almost well. They also have known how to identify the resolution in the short stories more than other elements of plot.

TABLE 7
The percentage of the Students' Ability in Identifying the Theme and Elements of Plot in the Short Stories

Scores	Frequency	Percentage	Level of ability	Mean Score
80 – 100	1	3.70%	Good to excellent	55.92
60 – 79	11	40.74%	Average to good	
50 – 59	8	29.63%	Poor to average	
0 – 49	7	25.93%	Poor	
Total	27	100%		Poor to Average

This table explains about the ability of the sixth semester students of FKIP of Riau University in identifying theme and elements of plot in the short stories. From the table above, it could be seen that out of 27 students who took the test, there was only 1 student (3.70%) in *Good to Excellent* level, 11 students (40.74%) in *Average to Good* level, 8 students (29.63%) in *Poor to Average* level, and 7 students (25.93%) in *Poor* level.

After calculating all the scores, the writer got the mean score of the students was 55.92. Based on the mean score, it could be concluded that the students' ability in identifying the theme and elements of plot in the short stories was in *Poor to Average* level. In other word, the sixth semester students have poor to average level of ability in identifying theme and elements of plot in the short stories. Even though there were some students who could reach *Average to Good* level and one student could reach *Good to Excellent* level, but there were still many students who were in *Poor to Average* level even the lowest level, which was *Poor* level. That meant that the students still have problems in identifying theme and elements of plot in the short stories. Consequently, they have to improve their ability by reading many kinds of short stories and books about prose. Moreover, they have to pay more attention to the lecturer when giving explanation and the way to identify theme and elements of plot.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research is to know the ability of the students in identifying theme and elements of plot in the short stories and to find out which part are the most difficult and the easiest for the students.

In this research, the students were given three short stories. Each short story consists of 10 questions. So there were 30 questions the students need to answer about identifying theme and elements of plot. After conducting the test and analyzing it, the writer found that the students' ability in identifying theme and elements of plot in the short stories and to find out which part are the most difficult and the easiest for the students.

Finally, based on the data findings and the presentation of the data above, the writer found that the ability of the sixth semester students of English study program of FKIP of Riau University in identifying theme and elements of plot was at *Poor to Average* level. It was proven by the mean score of the students' ability that was 55.92, which was considered as *Poor to Average* level. In addition, in identifying elements of plot, the most difficult part for the students is in identifying exposition with the mean score 53.71 which fell into *Poor to Average* level while the easiest part is resolution with the mean score 70.37 which fell into *Average to Good* level.

SUGGESTION

The conclusion above is the description of the ability of the sixth semester students of English study program of FKIP of Riau University in identifying theme and elements of plot in academic year 2012/2013. The students' ability was at *Poor to Average* level. After looking at the result of the research, the writer would like to offer some suggestions.

For the students, they should motivate themselves to read more prose material such as short story, novel, and so on. That can be useful not only to answer the questions given but also to enrich their vocabulary. They should keep on practice their ability in identifying theme and elements of plot using short stories to improve their skills. Moreover, they students need to pay more attention to the lecturers' explanation about elements of prose, especially theme and plot, as well as how to identify them.

Furthermore, for the lecturers, in teaching prose especially identifying flat and round characters, the lecturer should give clear information about theme and all elements of plot, and the way of identifying them. Besides, the lecturer should motivate and encourage students to read more prose material that is related to identify theme and elements of plot and also and prepare more reading material such as short story, novel, etc for the students.

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