

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Problem

In English teaching-learning program there are four skills required to achieve and must be taught to SMA/MA students; that is listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Grellet (1981) stated that reading as the process of understanding a written text, means extracting the required information from it as efficiently as possible. It means the readers are expected to be able to get a lot of information based on what they read in the text, so they can interpret the idea implied by the author. Therefore, beside those three skills, reading is also very important for the students to learn since it is one of receptive skills, which is usually called as cognitive process of deriving meaning from written or printed text.

Novendra (1999) said that reading is very important skill in order to increase our knowledge, and our way of thinking. It is because to transfer new modern science, technology, and information can be done so fast through reading process. He also explained that reading would give more contribution if we read with a good comprehension. It means comprehending the reading text is really needed in reading process. Therefore, reading ability becomes a greater demand as knowledge and information are presented in print.

In reading, a reader confronts with the text that consists of written symbol, letters, words, and sentence structure. In order to gain a comprehension, a reader does not merely see and identify the written symbols but he or she also must be able to interpret what he or she reads. Since the purpose of reading is to comprehend the content of a text, then word knowledge is one of the important things which should be possessed. Adams and Huggins (1985) in Nation and Coady (1987: 101) claim that word recognition abilities are the single best class of discriminators between good and poor reader. It means that word knowledge is strongly related to reading comprehension achievement. Furthermore, Pearson (1978: 15) states that there is good evidence to suggest that people all levels of development have more difficulty understanding passage composed of infrequently used rather than frequently used words. It means that word knowledge affect the readers comprehending the passage. . In other words, trying to comprehend a text without sufficient knowledge of vocabulary is assumed impossible.

Based on the researcher's experience in the three-month-teaching training program at SMA Negeri 15 Bandar Lampung, he found his students finding difficulty to get messages or comprehend the text well. In other words, it is difficult for the students to understand what the researcher really intends to say. Most of students read slowly and put too much attention on the word rather than on the entire text and stopped at each unfamiliar word which they were unsure about the meaning. Encountering unfamiliar words often annoyed the excitement of the students' reading trip and broke their attention as they became too frequent

to look up the word in the dictionary. Therefore, they spent time more for looking through all the definition and then deciding the appropriate meaning. Furthermore, encountering unfamiliar words in a text is a problem that also may cause misunderstanding of the idea of the text. Grellet (1985: 15) stated that if the reader does not understand some words in the passage, some of the facts and idea will probably escape him. Thus, reading is the result of interpretation between perception or graphic symbols and knowledge of the world.

Dictionary is a good source in finding more detail and specific word meaning. But interrupting students' reading trip to the dictionary to look through each unknown word seems annoy and waste the time since there are many words which have more than one meaning and definition listed in the dictionary. It is also supported by Nuttal (1985: 69) who stated that every time the reader breaks off reading to consult a dictionary, the reader not only slow down the reading speed because of the time involved, but more seriously interrupt thought processes which should be engaged in following the continued development of thought in the text.

Furthermore, there are many alternative ways effort by many experts to solve this problem, learning the meaning of a word through its use in a sentence is one of the alternative proposed. Goodman (1980: 31) stated that a reading context is never as ambiguous as the isolated units of language. Only in context is the reader able to make use of syntax and semantics in order to decide on the most appropriate of the possible meanings of linguistics unit, and therefore approach the meaning of

the author. It also supported by Nuttal (1985: 69) who suggested the reader to develop the skill of inferring the meaning of a word by considering its context.

A reader must be able to create personal and implied meanings from sentence that he or she is reading. A reader concludes the author's meaning using his or her background knowledge and clues from text. Context, words, and sentences surrounding an unknown word can be used to figure out the word meaning. Context usually gives the readers with clues that allow them to figure out the meaning of the word while the words and sentences surrounding the word influence its meaning. In other words, inferring word meaning from context is assumed to be appropriate way someone wishes to read extensively. The more a reader recognizes reference word in written material, the higher his or her reading comprehension achievement will be.

Herlina (1997) has done a research to investigate the effect of teaching reference word towards students' reading comprehension achievement. She conducted her research on second year students of SMA Negeri 9 Bandar Lampung. As the result of her research, she found that there is a positive effect of teaching reference word towards students' reading comprehension achievement. As she stated:

“Based upon the calculation of pretest and posttest, the researcher found the progress of students' reading comprehension achievement after they were taught of reference words. The comparison between the result of pretest and posttest below shows the increase of students' reading comprehension achievement. The mean of pretest is 5.79 and posttest is 7.16. The increase of two tests is 1.37.”

Based on the background above, the researcher is challenged and intends to find out the correlation between students' ability in inferring word meaning from context and their achievement on reading comprehension on the first year students at SMA Negeri 1 Kibang, East Lampung. Mr. Eko Noprianto, S. Pd., English teacher of first year students there, told that his students have the same problem with the researcher's experience at SMA Negeri 15 Bandar Lampung. The problem commonly encountered by the first year students of SMA Negeri 1 Kibang, East Lampung is the difficulty in comprehending the text because of encountering unfamiliar words. Thus, the researcher does expect to find the correlation between students' ability in inferring word meaning from context and their achievement on reading comprehension, in order the result of the research can give the real contribution for the teacher of SMA Negeri 1 Kibang, East Lampung in teaching reading.

B. Formulation of the Problem

In line with the background and explanation above, the problem is formulated as follows:

1. Is there any significant correlation between students' ability in inferring word meaning from context and their achievement on reading comprehension of first year students at SMA Negeri 1 Kibang, East Lampung?

2. How far does students' ability in inferring word meaning from context contribute to their achievement on reading comprehension of first year students at SMA Negeri 1 Kibang, East Lampung?

C. Objective of the Research

In relation to the formulation of the problem above, this research has objectives as follows:

1. To investigate the possibility that there might be significant correlation between students' ability in inferring word meaning from context and their achievement on reading comprehension of first year students at SMA Negeri 1 Kibang, East Lampung.
2. To analyze how far students' ability in inferring word meaning from context contribute to their achievement on reading comprehension of first year students at SMA Negeri 1 Kibang, East Lampung.

D. Uses of the Research

By conducting this quantitative research, the researcher expects it will be useful as:

1. Theoretically, this research can be used as verification and contribution for the previous research.
2. Practically, the result of this research gives information to the English teacher and also the students whether students' ability in inferring word

meaning from context has significant correlation toward their achievement on reading comprehension, therefore, it is also expected to give contribution to the process in learning English, especially in reading skill.

E. Scope of the Research

This research is intended to investigate whether students' ability in inferring word meaning from context has significant correlation toward their achievement on reading comprehension. To gain the data, ability in inferring word meaning from context and reading comprehension, the researcher will administer the tests. They are inferring word meaning from context test and reading comprehension test. As it is a correlation study, the researcher will look at the relationship between the two variables.

This research was conducted to the first year students of SMA Negeri 1 Kibang, East Lampung. The population of this research was the first year students of SMA Negeri 1 Kibang, East Lampung. According to the syllabus of School Based Curriculum 2006 (KTSP) for the first year SMA/MA students, there are three reading text of the first semester that is narrative, that is narrative, recount, and procedure text. According to the syllabus, recount text is the first kind of text taught to the students in the early beginning of the first semester in English teaching-learning program. By considering the effectiveness during the research, the researcher will only focus on one of those three texts – that is recount text as the text examined in reading comprehension test.

F. Definition of Terms

- 1) **Inferring word meaning from context** is the ability of knowing the meaning of a word by considering its context. (Simanjuntak, 1988: 73)

- 2) **Reading** is the process of grasping the main idea and scanning pieces of information from a text.

- 3) **Reading Comprehension** is as a matter of “making sense” of text, of relating written language to what we know already and to what we want to know. It means that a passage and a series of questions are presented that test the readers’ comprehension of the passage.

- 4) **Correlation** is statistical description for determining relationship between two variables.