

IMPROVING STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION IN MIXED-ABILITY CLASS OF THE SEVENTH GRADE SMPN 1 MEPANGA THROUGH THINK-ALOUD STRATEGY

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan pemahaman bacaan deskriptif bagi siswa kelas VII di SMPN 1 Mepanga melalui strategi think-aloud. Subjek penelitian ini adalah siswa kelas VII yang terdiri dari 26 orang. Pada tahun pelajaran 2014/2015. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian tindakan kelas yang dilakukan dalam dua siklus. Setiap siklus terdiri dari perencanaan, pelaksanaan tindakan, pengamatan dan refleksi. Data dalam penelitian ini diperoleh dari hasil lembar pengamatan, catatan lapangan guru dan tes. Hasil dari lembar pengamatan dan catatan lapangan guru menunjukkan bahwa siswa memiliki motivasi yang tinggi dan aktif berpartisipasi dalam kegiatan di kelas. Hasil test dari ke dua siklus menunjukkan bahwa think-aloud efektif meningkatkan pemahaman bacaan siswa. Sebagai bukti ditunjukkan pada siklus pertama bahwa 15 siswa (57.69%) berhasil melalui tes bacaan dan 11 siswa (42.31%) belum berhasil. Terdapat peningkatan hasil yang memuaskan pada siklus kedua dimana 23 siswa (88.46%) dinyatakan berhasil dan hanya 3 siswa (11.54%) yang tidak berhasil mencapai kriteria kesuksesan. Karena 88.46% siswa yang berhasil mencapai kriteria kesuksesan maka disimpulkan bahwa strategi think-aloud efektif meningkatkan pemahaman bacaan siswa.

Kata Kunci: Meningkatkan, Pemahaman Bacaan, Kelas kemampuan yang bervariasi dan Strategi Berpikir dengan keras.

In Indonesia, English has been taught as a foreign language both as local current subject for elementary school students and as compulsory subject for junior and senior high school students. The 2006 School Based Curriculum gives opportunity for every school to develop their own curriculum that taking account the standards designed by the government. According to the 2006 curriculum, student of English are expected to master language skills namely listening, speaking, reading, writing and to have communicative competence in using it. Having communicative competence means students have competencies in understanding and producing discourse in spoken and written under meaningful context which influenced by situation and culture.

The standard competency of reading skill mentioned in KTSP of SMP for the seventh grade students is understanding the

meaning of very simple functional written text and essay text in the forms of descriptive and procedure which is related to closest environment. The achievement indicator the students must gain is being competent in the sub reading skills, including comprehending main idea, specific information, word meaning and textual reference of the text.

However, the thing that many students find difficulties in reading activity is to comprehend the information of the reading material. The fact of the students' problem in comprehending reading text above also become the problem encountered by the seventh grade students of SMP Negeri 1 Mepanga. Almost all students have problem in comprehending reading text. There are some factorsthat might cause the students find difficult to comprehend the text, for example; the students are passive when

reading class held. They find it difficult to make inferences about the main idea of the text by their own word, so the students must reread the text.

One of the four skills that become problem in teaching English at SMPN 1 Mepanga is reading skill. This statement is based on the results of the observation in the classroom when the researcher conducted teaching practice, the researcher gave a text to the students and asked them to answer the questions that was prepared previously by the researcher. Most students could not answer the questions because they got difficulties to understand the contents of the passage.

The researcher conducted also an interview to some students from the classroom. The results of the interview showed that the students did not understand, because of some problems. Firstly, they have not enough vocabularies about the text. It is difficult for them to analyze and interpret the meaning of sentences. Secondly, the students were not interested in participating in English during the teaching and learning process. It is realized that these problems arose because of the teaching method that is used by the teachers. The teaching method did not build the students motivation to participate in teaching and learning process. Based on the information obtained from the students interview, it is noted that the students needs appropriate strategies and guidance on how to understand and to do tasks.

Most of them do not know how to read with purpose and still always rely on dictionary to find the meaning of word by word in a text. It is hard for them to read English text and they always run out of the time to answer the question about specific information. Most of them often get low achievement in reading test, they often get below 65. It is the minimum standard criteria determined by the Meeting of Junior High English Teachers Mepanga (MGMP). Students in the class 7A sometimes lose their motivation in reading since they think if they

do not bring dictionary, they would not able to do anything in reading activity. They do not know the reason why they read. They usually begin to read a text word by word and stop at word that unfamiliar to them. It makes reading activity is boring and wasting time without reaching the curriculum target.

In line with the above reality, it is important to take a consideration in order to solve the problem and to improve the students' achievement in reading comprehension. One thing that must be taken into account is the strategy in teaching reading. The strategy will be used in this study called *Think-aloud strategy*. The think aloud was originally developed by Newell and Simon. its roots in psychological research. It was developed from the older introspection method. Introspection is based on the idea that one can observe events that take place in consciousness, more or less as one can observe events in the outside world. The researcher conduct this study for purpose of improving the seventh grade students in reading comprehension. The junior high school students at grade seven are still in the level of literal comprehension. The students of grade seven at SMPN 1 Mepanga find it difficult to get specific information from descriptive text which is aimed to answer questions based on the text intended. It means that the students still have problems in understanding the ideas and information explicitly stated in the passage. The results of achievement test at the first semester in academic year 2014/2015 can be the evidence. There were sixteen students who obtained scores lower than 65, and twelve others students obtained scores higher than 65, at class 7A.

Most English classes are heterogeneous. Students of different ability are put in the same group in other words it is a mixed ability class. Mixed ability level teaching is related to working together with students who have different personalities, skills, interest and learning needs. These

classes consist of students with varying levels of English skills from a pure beginner to upper – intermediate. When there are students having mixed ability in the same classroom, each individual can bring different and new ideas. They may be from different cultural backgrounds, which mean many different experiences and many styles of learning. It is very difficult for teachers to implement their lesson plan because they need to take care each student. Some challenges that a teacher might face in a mixed-ability classroom are often feel out of control, difficulty to activate student and large class size.

The students who come from a remote area such as Kotaraya face those problems. It is found out that the students at SMP Negeri 1 Mepanga, especially those who are in Grade VII.A face problem in learning English. They have different ideas and experience due to the fact that they are coming from different social background. In this class, it is found twelve students whose English levels are different from other students. Nine of the students in this class have problem with their concentration and motivation, three other students always get bored, uncooperative and insecure. When learning process take place, for example discussion on home assignment, they usually ask for permission to go to the toilet and never come back to the classroom until the end of a class. And also some of their gained scores on final test still under the minimum criteria of success.

Reading

Reading is a completely individual activity which take place in all different ways from reading newspaper, magazines, written texts, labels on medicine, etc. The ability to read such a natural part of human being that they seldom try to define reading.

There are many opinions about reading but the researcher took two authors opinions such as Nunan (2003) claims reading is a

fluent process of readers combining information from a text and their own background knowledge to build meaning. On the other hand reading is a process of reader's background knowledge with information from the text which readers read.

Reading is a process by readers in order to get information or build meaning from a word or a group of words. Seyler (2004) claims reading is the process of obtaining or constructing meaning from a word or a cluster of word. Readers must get the meaning from the words. It does not mean the readers only have ability to say the words or to know definition but the readers must understand. So, reading is a process of readers to study about each word and then understanding the meaning of the words.

In conclusion, reading is a process to study about the words and then build meaning from the words or group of words in order to understand the text. Reading is a process to get information from the text by combining reader's background knowledge with the information from the text which reader read. So readers background knowledge is very important to comprehend the text in order to get the new information.

Reading Comprehension

Comprehension is understanding what is being said or read. When it comes to reading, it is an active process that must be develop if a learner is to become a proficient reader. Reading comprehension means understanding, evaluating and utilizing information or interaction between the author and the reader. According to Heilman, et al. (1981:242).” Reading comprehension is a process of making sense of written ideas through meaningful interpretation and interaction with the language”. To comprehend and understand whatever the students reaad from the text, they are expected to be able to interpret the text itself to get the massage sent by the writer. Therefore, they should apply their

understanding about components of English language (structure and vocabulary) and between words or sentences in the reading text.

In reading comprehension, processes in reading play an important role. Reading comprehension is the process through which the dynamic interaction of the reader's background knowledge, the information inferred from the written language, and the reading situation context is constructing meaning. Furthermore, Klingner (2007) state reading comprehension is a multi component, highly complex process that involves many interactions between readers and what the reader's bring to the text (previous knowledge, strategy use) as well as variables related to the text itself (interest in text, understanding of text types). It means that reading comprehension is a complex process which include reader's interaction with readers background knowledge and strategy that readers As noted earlier that reading comprehension is the ability to take information from written text and do something with it in a way that demonstrate knowledge or understanding of that information.

The most detailed one, Snow (2002) defines reading comprehension as the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language. They classify that comprehension entails three elements: They are the reader (considering with capacities, abilities, knowledge and experiences that a person brings to the act of reading), the text (including printer text or electronic text) and the activity (considering the purposes, process, and consequences associated with the act of reading). However, reading comprehension abilities are quite complex and difference in numerous ways depending on tasks, motivations, goals and language ability.

Given the above discussion, it can be concluded that reading comprehension is the

reader activity to understand and to get information from a text with the simultaneous process.

Literal Reading Comprehension

Literal comprehension refers to the ability to understand and recall information that has been explicitly stated in a text. The text may be written or spoken . Literal comprehension differs from inference or inferential comprehension which has to do with understanding information only implied in the text. To comprehend literally we have to remember only what was clearly and specifically said.

Literal comprehension involves what the author is actually saying. The reader needs to understand ideas and information explicitly stated in the reading material. Some of this information is in the form of recognizing and recalling facts, identifying the main idea, supporting details, categorizing outlining, and summarizing. The reader is also locating information, using context clues to supply meaning, following specific direction, following a sequences, identifying stated conclusion, and identifying explicitly stated relationship and organizational patterns. These organizational patterns can include cause and effect as well as comparison and contrast. For example, some questions and activities may include: What words state the main idea of the first paragraph? How does the writer summarize what she/he is saying?.What happened first, second and last? How are these things alike?

Teaching Reading

The significance of reading strategy is indicated implicitly in the Indonesia National Curriculum of 2006. In this curriculum, it is stated that the objective of teaching reading, as one of the four major skills, in learning English as one of the foreign language in junior high school is to develop the students' ability to read and to get the message

comprehensively from particular reading texts (BSNP, 2006).

The teacher should understand about the students' psychology that they need something fun and not a boring activity. When students learn English, they are developing their intellectual. According to Badan Standar Nasional Pendidikan (2006) English has an important role in developing intellectual, social and emotional of the students.

There are some principles underlying the teaching of reading according to Harmer (1998): (1) Reading is not a passive skill. (2) Students should be encouraged to respond to the content of a reading text, not just to the language. (3) Prediction is a major factor in reading. (4) match the task to the topic.

Characters of Mixed-Ability Class

Mixed-ability class consist of a group of overage and able children with a subset of children who have learning problems. McKeon (2004). A class is mixed-ability because children have different strengths and weaknesses and develop at different rates. They have different preferences for learning and displaying their work. A mixed ability class does not just consist of a range of abilities but also a range of learning styles and preferences, All students will show strengths at different times depending on the topic being studied and the learning style being used. When students are working out with their preferred learning style then they will not perform as well. All classes even those that have been set are mixed ability to a certain degree. Therefore the following strategies are valid for all classes.

A metaphor of a mixed ability class which works is to think of the class as a lift. Everyone needs to get into the lift to start with. Some students will run into the lift, some will have to move in. Some students will travel right to reach the first floor, but everyone will have travelled somewhere successfully. At the end of class, every student

can leave the room feeling that they been challenged and they have achieved something.

Teaching in Mixed-Ability Classes

Mixed-ability teaching is related to working together with students who have different personalities, skills, interests and learning needs. Though most classes are usually multi level, teacher especially those with little experience, find teaching such classes a very difficult and challenging task as it involves planning lessons include a rich diversity of tasks corresponding to a variety of learning styles and abilities.

Mixed ability as used in teaching English usually refers to the differences that exist in a group in terms of different levels of language ability. The differences which cause problems in heterogeneous classes are in language learning ability, learning experience, mother tongue, cultural background, preferred learning style, motivation and others. Even though students are grouped according to their placement test scores, their progress rates are bound to be at different levels. Due to the mentioned differences students react to the teaching material and teaching methods individually. It is difficult to find activities that involve all the students without some getting bored and others being confused, insecure or discouraged. Weaker students not being able to follow the pace, to understand information or to express their ideas and stronger students not being tolerant to them may result in classroom management problems. Thus, teachers need to have a range of strategies for managing mixed ability classes.

Think-Aloud Strategy

Think-aloud is common strategy used for all students to help them develop comprehension . The main goal of reading is comprehension. It is important that students read with a purpose and understand all types of text. Think –aloud is a very practical

strategy that can be use in a whole class setting, in a small group setting, and with students without disabilities. This strategy is often used in reading to improve comprehension, and to help students express what they are thinking as they read. Although think-aloud can be used in reading, this strategy also can be used in any subject area.

Think-aloud means the readers report their thoughts while reading, but they are not expected to analyze their behavior as in introspection. According to Someran (1994,: 30),” The think aloud method avoids interpretation by the subject and only assumes a very simple verbalization process. The think aloud method treats the verbal protocols, that are accessible to anyone, as data thus creating an objective method”.

A think-aloud is a procedure in which students or teachers simply think out loud as they work through a procedure. Think-aloud may be use before, during or after reading. Think-aloud is useful also after reading as an assessment device in a reading conference. Students read a text aloud and say what they think as they read.

With the think-aloud procedure the student is asked to voice his or her thoughts while reading. Asking students to “think aloud” can provide useful insight into their metacognitive and cognitive processing strategies, as well as their word learning strategies and working memory. It also provides information.

The Advantages of Think-aloud Strategy

Think-aloud has a number of advantages over other types of methods. Youko (2005:36) proposed advantages of Think-aloud Strategy, the following are: the instructional problem in reading process is clear, knowing the readers’ problem solving, comprehension to obtain and transfer knowledge process can go simultaneously with problem solving process. In addition Olson, Duffy and Mack (1984) regard ‘ thinking-out-loud’ as a tool for collecting

data about the otherwise unseen, unobservable processes, such as inference or the use of prior knowledge. They also find the method promising for the study of individual differences. For example, in the level of reading skills or the amount of background knowledge activated.

Another important outcome of modeling a think aloud is the realization that reading is complex. When the teacher models, false starts, guesses, confusions, revisions, and questions he or she demonstrates the thinking or reading process. Think–aloud slow down the reading process and allow students to monitor their understanding of a text. An additional advantage to the think-aloud procedure is that students become more aware of the mental processes they use while reading and that students become more aware of the mental processes they use while reading and can thereby iprove their reading comprehension. (Oster, 2001).

Procedure of Think-aloud Strategy

Think-aloud must be administered individually. As with other approaches to comprehension assessment, begin by selecting a passage that is at a students’ instructional level. The passage should be readable but not too easy for the students.

The procedure of think aloud state by Cecil and Pleifer (2011) from the way of teacher until the way of students to use this strategy as follows:

- a. Before hand, make copies of the text passage, the teacher will demonstrate with or prepare to display the copy so that students can follow . Explain to students that they follows what teacher read, teacher will applies think aloud strategy so that student can hear teacher’s thought.
- b. Read the passage aloud while the students follow. (the passage should be difficult for the students, with concept and vocabulary slightly above the reading level of the students).

- c. As the teacher's read aloud, talk through what strategies that teachers use to figure out vocabulary through the context, to relate the ideas in the text with those with which familiar.
- d. After modeling several paragraphs, invite students to add the students own problem-solving tactics and personal impression to teacher's thought process.
- e. Then provide students with short passage of similar difficulty.
- f. Encourage students to try the Think-Aloud strategy with partners, rotating the oral reading and taking turns adding to the other person's thinking process.
- g. As students become adept at Thinking-Aloud with partners, give them opportunities to read selective passage individually and to practice the newly learn thinking skill silently.

In order the students focus on the appropriate thinking procedures while they using this strategy silently, give the students the following questions:

- 1) Predicting. After looking at the cover, the title, and the picture (if any) in this passage, what do I think it is going to be about?
- 2) Organizing image. What is going in right now in the passage? (to be ask at least after each paragraph)
- 3) Using prior knowledge. What am I reminded of here that I already know about?
- 4) Monitoring understanding. What do I think these unfamiliar words might mean? What are some ways I can get clues to their meaning?
- 5) Rectifying comprehension's error. Do I want to change any of my original thinking as I read (to be ask after every paragraph).

Similarly, the steps in using think-aloud are proposed by Richarson et al (2012) First, a teacher show students how think-aloud works. Teacher can make prediction and show how to develop hypothesis. Then,

the teacher describes the visual image that comes to mind. After that,, he or she shares analogies and otherwise link new knowledge to prior knowledge. Next, he or she discusses confusing points or problems . Then the teacher figures out meaning from the context. After teacher models think-aloud a few times, students can work with partner to practice think aloud, taking turns in reading orally and sharing thoughts.

Wilhelm (2001) in (Glass and Coe, 2005:1) reminds that the implementation of Think-aloud Strategy should be carried out in explicit instruction as follows:

- 1. Teacher explains what the strategy consist of;
- 2. Teacher explains why the strategy is important;
- 3. Teacher explains what to use the strategy in actual reading;
- 4. Teacher models, using think-aloud, how to perform the strategy in the actual context of reading;
- 5. Teacher provides guided practice. Teacher gradually releases responsibility to the students. Students practice what they are capable of doing on their own and teacher intervenes when support is needed;
- 6. Students independently use the strategy in their own reading.

Finally, the teacher draw conclusions about the extent to which the student appears to use strategies effectively and efficiently for monitoring understanding. Use this information to come up with recommendation for instruction.

METHOD

The researcher applied Classroom Action Research design. She collected data qualitatively and quantitatively. This research consisted of planning, acting, observing and reflecting as what has been suggested by Kemmis and Mc Taggart (1988:25) “ action research start with small cycles of planning, action, observing and reflecting which can

help to define issues, ideas and assumption more clearly so that those involved can define more powerful question for themselves as their work progresses”.

The research was conducted on May 2nd 2015 to June 5th 2015 at SMP Negeri 1 Mepanga in which the researcher is one of the English teachers there. It is located at Jl. Siswa No 9 Kotaraya. It is about 275km from Parigi.

The subjects of the research were the students of grade VII.A consisting of 26 students, 13 girls and 13boys. Class 7A was chosen because most of them did not know how to read for comprehension and still always rely on dictionary to find the meaning of word by word in a text.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Accurate data were required in this research. Therefore, the researcher used some instruments to collect the data accurately. These instruments will be explained one by one as follows:

1. Observation sheet. It was a form of data collection that contains some statements about the students' activity, teacher performance and the process of action and the result later in the form of giving check list to the statements.
2. Field notes. It was used for the researcher to notes all things happened during the process of giving action. It helped the researcher to add some additional information or impression that useful for reflection later.
3. Achievement tests. These were valuable tools for measuring the data. The form of test would be conducted was objective test in the form multiple choice and True-False.
4. Photograph. It was a way for documenting the activities being done by the students and the teacher. Took photograph was also useful to show picture of the research

process by documenting the activities as the real evidence.

Observation sheet was conducted to know whether the researcher had accomplished all the activities which had been planned in the lesson plan into the action in the classroom. It also functioned to measure and see the students' improvement and participation during the teaching and learning process. The students' participation were observed and analyzed through the result of observation sheet done by both the researcher and the collaborator. The observation sheet on teacher's performance was employed by the collaborator The result of observation sheet indicates that the students and the researcher had covered all the activities based on the lesson plan.

This research needs reflection to know and evaluate the weaknesses during teaching and learning process .The collaborator and the researcher did the reflection together. We did some flash back or recalled all the activities we had done in this research. We evaluated data taken from observation sheet, field notes and test. Furthermore we analyze students' and teacher's performance in the think-aloud strategy. The weakness from both students and teacher that we found in the first cycle are (1) the teacher dominated the discussion too much in the first meeting and the students talked out of topic in the classroom and some of them did not involved in doing the task; (2) the teacher consume too much time in applying think-aloud strategy, and the students did not pay attention well to the instruction given by the teacher. (3) Teacher just asked students be in group did not manage it well and the students got confuse and not all them enjoy it. The collaborator and the researcher found many things to be repaired during the teaching and learning process. Having review the result of the cycle 1 we reconstructed the plan in the cycle 2 covered three things, *the time management, group arrangement, and continual guidance with clear instruction.*

The teacher needs to use very clear instructions. It is not only say something. Teacher needs to write on the board, repeat, walk around and make sure students know it. Always give clear information and instruction, should introduce tasks clearly, show concrete example and illustration then give students time to think and discuss with their pair or group then ask questions.

The result of reading test indicates that every students has different qualifications and scores. There were four categories determining their comprehend, they were Very good, good, poor, and very poor. Also the students were qualified as successful and failed. There were twenty three students who successful and three students were failed. The mean scores was 76 it means it met the minimum standard achievement. And the classical achievement also met the criteria of success which they obtained 88.46%.

Based on the data above the students of grade VIIA SMPN 1 Mepanga have improved their reading strategy in getting information. The observation sheet, field notes and test achievement are the evidences to ensure that the students have changed their way in reading. Interaction in the classroom plays an important role for reading comprehension in students because whole group interaction involved students comprehend reading tasks more easily. From the above explanation , we saw that the students' reading achievement was improved. The result of the test in the second cycle showed that the students made good improvement in reading literal comprehension proved by the students' score average. It means that we did not need the next cycle anymore. The researcher and the collaborator conclude that improving students' comprehension in mixed-ability class at the grade seventh of SMPN 1 Mepanga through *think-aloud strategy* was successful.

CONCLUSSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

After conducting this research, the researcher conclude that during the reading process carried out with seventh grade students, the impact produced by think-aloud strategy reflected on three aspects. First of all, the results obtained in this research showed that students increased their involvement in the activities because of think-aloud strategy. By the use of this strategy the low student could interact and construct meaning from the texts. Second, the role of the teacher as a guide was necessary in think-aloud because she could help students to use reading strategies such as predicting, visualizing and prior knowledge in order to comprehend the reading text. Finally, through think-aloud strategy students had a positive change in terms of English literary reading comprehension. The problem which dealt with the learning and teaching process in mixed-ability classroom, could be solve by use variety managing class by created pair work and group work. Develop a positive and collaborative working atmosphere and providing a variety of work which is appropriate with students different levels of proficiency and motivation in learning. English teacher should always try make the whole class involved in the studying process. Always be calm, fair and consistent.

Those who would like to apply think-aloud strategy in mixed-ability class, they should consider the level of the students, the instructional materials provided to the students, and the design of classroom management.

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