

The Implementation of Reading Strategies to Understand English Text: A Case Study of English Reading Class

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Abstract

Reading is not just pronouncing words. It requires understanding. Most experienced readers use a variety of strategies to understand text. Those strategies should be taught and applied to students in any different levels, starting from beginner until advanced learners. Teachers can, and should, teach some strategies to beginning readers in order to help students understand any text in any subject.

This paper discusses how some reading strategies are implemented in understanding some English text. The reading skills strategies consist of Scanning, Previewing and Predicting, Understanding Vocabularies, Finding Topic, Stating Main Idea, and Supporting Details according to Mikulecky & Jeffries, 1996. This paper is aimed to find out (1) what reading strategies are the most difficult to be understood by the students and (2) what is the impact of learning reading strategies through the students' academic result. The respondents are the 2nd semester students of English Department who take Reading for Basic Strategies subject.

The result shows that Finding Topic and Stating Main Idea is the most difficult reading strategies understood by the students. Some of them find difficulties to differentiate between identifying topic and determining main idea. The academic result at the end of the semester is mostly excellent. By implementing the reading skills strategies, students can answer the reading questions fast and correctly so that they can understand the English text effectively.

(Key Words: Reading strategies, Scanning, Previewing, Predicting, Understanding vocabularies, Topic, Main Idea, and Supporting Details)

I. Introduction

Reading is an activity of conception, analyzing, and interpreting that is done by the reader to obtain the message that is to be submitted by the author in the writing media. In terms of linguistic reading is a process of re-encoding and discussion of passwords (a recording and decoding process), different from speaking and writing which precisely involves encoding. An aspect of the password readout (decoding) is to connect the written word with the meaning of the oral language meaning which includes the rendering of the writing to a meaningful sound (Tarigan, 1984:8).

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Reading involves mental processes to be able to understand word by word and associate the intent and direction of the reading media, where in the end readers can conclude/memorize/retell/write something with the thought of each reader. This process has to be experienced by every reader, not only among the general but also in the educational environment.

For language learners, there are skills that must be mastered well, namely listening, speaking, writing and reading. These skills are four basic skills of language learning. To achieve maximum results in every skill learned need training which is certainly equipped with a variety of strategies to achieve maximum results. One of the focus discussions in this study is the implementation of various reading strategies to understand the English reading text among college students. Reading is not just saying a string of words in the form of sentences. That is why to understand a sense of reading text in theory requires various strategies to be able to understand the meaning of a text well. This raises a phenomenon that in the level of education, especially higher education the ability to understand a reading text in the form of reading skill strategies taught in the lecture in the form of special subjects. The main objective is to allow students to understand the reading text more quickly, and precisely so that the time to understand the reading text can be more effective and efficient. This activity was introduced and studied as an attempt to improve one's language skills, namely reading comprehension. According to Olson and Diller (1982:42), what is meant by reading comprehension is a term used to identify those skills needed to understand and apply information contained in a written material. This statement is supported by Harris and Sipay (1980:179), who say that reading comprehension ability is taught to be a set of generalized knowledge acquisition skills that permits people to acquire and exhibit information gained as a consequence of reading printed language.

The reading course is one of the courses given up to 5 tiers in the English curriculum at English Department of Widyatama University in Bandung, starting from the following subjects: Reading for Basic Strategies, Reading for Intermediate Communication, Reading for Business Context, Reading for Scientific Context and Extensive Reading. Reading for Basic Strategies course is a basic course that contains various reading skill strategies material used to better understand the text quickly, precisely and effectively. With these strategies, students are expected to implement various reading strategies to understand the text with different level of difficulties of texts in the next semester.

II. Research Questions

This paper is aimed to find out (1) what reading strategies are the most difficult to be understood by the students and (2) what is the impact of learning reading strategies through the students' academic result.

III. Methods

The research method used is descriptive analysis. This is in line with the opinions expressed by Fraenkel and Wallen (1993:23) stating that the descriptive method is a method used to explain, analyze and classify something through various techniques, survey, interview, questionnaires, observations, and text. In addition, L.R. Gay (1987) also stated that "Descriptive method is a method of research that involves collecting data in order to test hypothesis or to answer questions concerning the correct status of the subject of the research. The descriptive research determines and reports the way things are.

IV. Respondents

Respondents of this research are the second semester of English department students who take Reading for Basic Strategies subject as one of the subjects they should take in that semester. The class consists of 27 students.

English department students are introduced reading comprehension subjects starting from the first semester until the fifth semester which include: Reading for Basic Strategies, Reading for Intermediate Communication, Reading in Business Context, Reading for Scientific Context, and Extensive Reading. Those reading subjects are given with different focus and level of difficulty.

V. Literature Review

a. The Essences of Reading

Syaffi'e (1994:6-7) mentions that the essences of reading are:

1. Development of skills, ranging from the skills of understanding the words, sentences, paragraphs in reading up to the critically understood and the overall evaluative contents of the readings.
2. Visual activity, the form of a series of eye movements in following the lines of writing, the concentration of vision on the word and group of words, to look at the words and groups of words to gain an understanding of the reading.
3. The activity of observing and understanding the written words and giving meaning to those words based on the knowledge and experience that has been had.
4. A thought process that takes place through the process of the conception and understanding of information and giving meaning to reading.
5. The process of processing the information by the reader by using the information in the reading and knowledge and experience that has been previously relevant to the information.
6. The process of connecting the writing with the sound according to the writing system used.
7. Ability to anticipate meaning to lines in writing. Reading activities are not only mechanical activities, but rather is an activity to capture the intent of the word groups that bring meaning.

b. The Purposes of Reading

The purpose of reading is to seek and obtain information from a written source. This information is obtained through the process of purposing of the displayed forms. More specifically reading as a skill aims to recognize characters and punctuation marks, recognizing the relationship between characters and punctuation with formal linguistic elements, and recognizing the relationship between form and meaning (Broughton et al in Sue 2004:15).

Based on intent, purpose or intensified and the way in reading below, Anderson in Tarigan (1979:9-10) suggests some reading objectives, among others:

1. Read to get details or facts (reading for details or facts). The reading aims to find or know the discoveries have been made by the character, to solve the problems made by the character.
2. Read to get the main ideas (reading for main ideas). Read to know the topic or issue in the reading. To find the basic idea of reading by reading pages by page.
3. Read to know the size or arrangement, the organization of the story (reading for sequence or organization). The reading is aimed at knowing parts of the story and the relationship between parts of the story.
4. Read to conclude or read inferences (reading for inference). Readers are expected to feel something the author feels.
5. Read to group or classify (reading for classify). This type of reading aims to find unnatural things about something (Anderson in Tarigan 1979:10).
6. Reading to assess or evaluate (reading to evaluate). This type of reading aims to find a success based on certain sizes. This type requires thoroughness by comparing and testing it back.
7. Read to compare or contrast (reading to compare). The purpose of the reading is to discover how to, differences or equations of two or more things.

c. Using Reading Strategies

Miculecky and Jefrie (1996) explain strategies that can help students read more quickly and effectively, such as:

1. **Previewing:** When students see the text, they enter into what they already know that will help them understand the text they want to read. This sets a place for the new information they read. *In previewing, this activity is to help you predict or make some “educated guesses” about what is in book*”. Students’ activities in previewing are to review the book, such as titles, section headings, and photo captions to get a sense of structure and content of a reading selection.
2. **Skimming and scanning:** Beale (2013) quotes “*Skimming refers to looking only for general or main ideas, and works best with non-fiction (factual) material*”. You read only what is important to your purpose. With skimming, your overall understanding is reduced because you don’t read everything. Meanwhile, Beale (2013) defines “*scanning is very high speed reading. Unlike skimming, when scanning, you look only for a specific fact or piece of information without reading everything.*” When we scan, we have a question in mind. We do not read every word, only the words that answer the question. When you scan, you can skip the unimportant word to make you read faster.
3. **Predicting:** this strategy is used to check comprehension; to make predictions about discourse structure using knowledge of the text type and purpose; to make prediction about writing style, vocabulary and content using knowledge about the author. When students make predictions about the text, they will determine expectations based on their previous knowledge of a similar topic. As they read, they may mentally revise their predictions as they get more information.
4. **Stating topic and main idea:** This help students connect what they read to what they already know. Topic is the overall subject of the paragraph. Identifying the main idea means asking students to determine what is important and then express it or explain it to their own word or language. Implicitly in this process, the students are trying to understand the author's purpose in writing the text. In other words, main idea is a topic plus the author’s point about the topic. The model of practicing finding topic and main idea is by underlining the sentence containing the topic or main idea in a paragraph or writing by their own language about what the writer actually discusses on the text.
5. **Guessing meaning from context:** using prior knowledge of the subject and the ideas in the text as clues to meanings of unknown words, instead of stopping to look them up. It is also claimed by Miculecky and Jefrie (1996) “*When you try to guess the meaning of unknown word, you use the text surrounding the word-the context.*”

VI. Discussion

In the teaching learning process, there are some materials used in reading class. Those materials are taken from several text books, newspapers, and sources from internet. Every student must have the text book suggested starting from the first meeting. Handouts are provided to the students for group, pair and independent activities. Some activities in the class are informed to the students so that they can follow and take a part in the reading activities actively and efficiently, such as:

- a. **Setting the goal of reading**

At the beginning of class (1st Meeting), students are informed of the purpose of reading classes, for example, at the end of semester students will be able to get an overall idea of the text, learn new vocabulary, learn new information, and style of news articles. Then, the teachers also introduced the appropriate types of reading strategies to be used depending on reading texts such as newspapers, articles and other sources. This strategy can also help students develop their foreign vocabulary skills without using a dictionary.
- b. **Preparing Questions**

Teachers prepare questions with the aim of motivating the reader and activating their background knowledge of the text to be used in the reading strategies taught
- c. **Implementing some reading strategies**
 1. In predicting activity, the teacher assigns students to bring a book, any kinds of book individually. Students are assigned to predict the book based on the previous questions, prior knowledge, and the title of the book. Students are expected to be able to identify the author, can predict that the book is about, and additional information related to the book they bring.

2. In skimming activity, the teacher shows the whole text printed on the text book to the students. First, the teacher models skimming strategies to assist the readers. After modeling, the teacher assigns students to answer questions such as explaining what the text tells about, whether students know about the topic of the text or not, and whether the students know how the text is organized. Some group work discussions will be available in the class.
3. In implementing the scanning strategy, the teacher assigns students to find the specific information needed by questions given, such as scan list of menu to find the specific food or drink, table of content, supermarket ads, newspaper listings, best seller list from a newspaper, or even magazine articles. Then, teacher asks students to answer the written questions and write down the answer on a piece of paper or give the responses on the white board.
4. In guessing meaning from context, some types of exercises are introduced to test students with some kinds of vocabulary knowledge, such as finding the unknown word from context in sentences, using grammar to guess word meaning; the teacher gives some sentences containing one word that the students probably do not know the meaning. Students should look at the grammatical structure of the sentence and decide the part of speech of the word.
5. In implementing stating topic, main idea and supporting details, the teacher makes a diagram or chart to design the organization and correlation of topic, main idea and supporting details. This diagram or chart will open students' mind that topic, main idea and supporting details work together. The main idea tells the author's point about the topic, and the details offer support for the main idea. The teacher gives three models of question in understanding topic, main idea and supporting details, such as giving some passages and asking what the topic of the passage is, what the author wants to know about the topic and which sentence contains the main idea. Another activity implemented is asking students to identify whether every sentence in the passage is categorized into main idea or supporting detail.
6. There are three kinds of evaluation in one semester that the teacher applied. They are quiz, take-home assignment, middle test and final test.
 1. Quiz is given in meeting 3, 7, 11 and 14.
 2. Take-home assignment is given individually and in a group in meeting 5 and 12.
 3. Middle Test is given in meeting 8 and organized by university.
 4. Final Test is given in meeting 16 and organized by university.

VII. Conclusion

From this research it can be concluded that understanding and implementing reading strategies to understand English text is very important for English language learners in university level. Starting in the early semester students are introduced with problem solving in analyzing text so that when they find some more difficult text they are able to implement appropriate strategies to understand the given model of reading comprehension text. From the reading strategies explained above there are two strategies that students still confused to differentiate: stating topic and main idea. They also find difficulties in developing details after creating main idea. More reading practices are suggested solution. Students should more practice by identifying topic and main idea and following with creating by their own words. Their limited capability in comprehending the text perhaps becomes another cause because they are still in the second semester. Therefore, many exercises and examples still need to be explored to overcome their confusion.

The implementation of reading strategies gave a positive impact to the academic students' result. It was shown from the result of final examination grade. From 27 students there 14 students got A (51.8%), 10 students got B (37%), 3 students got C (11%). No students got D and E.

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