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Improving Students' Reading Comprehension Through Text Structure Tasks

Abdul Rohman

Widya Gama Mahakam Samarinda University

rohmanidahaja@gmail.com

Abstract: Reading skill is one of the four main language skills taught in the classes of the English Department of Faculty of Education of Islamic University of Malang (FKIP Unisma). As the result of teaching reading had not achieved satisfactory result, the researcher conducted a study to find out how texts structure tasks can improve the students' reading comprehension. This research was using a classroom action research. It comprised four phases: planning, implementation, observation and reflection, those were adopted from Kemmis and Taggart's action research model (1988). The subjects of the study were the four semester students of the English Department of FKIP Unisma in 2006 academic year. In the procedures and implementation process, one cycle consisting of four actions was done. The instruments used in the study were observation sheets and test. The observation sheets were made two forms. One form of observation sheets was to observe the teacher in implementing the action and the other observation sheets were used to observe the students' activities or reaction to the teachers' activities during the learning-teaching process. The second instrument used was a test. The test result showed that the students' mean score was 75.88 and the lowest score the students obtained was 65. The researcher decided that no more cycle was needed for the study had met the criteria of success. The action was considered successful if the students' mean score reached 75 or under the category of B+, and the lowest score the student obtain was not less than 65.00.

Keywords: students' preferences, corrective feedbacks, and mismatch

INTRODUCTION

One way to increase the students' comprehension is by assisting them to understand text structure. Pirozzi (2003) says that the writer often helps readers recognize important details by arranging them in a certain way like a pattern of organization. He says that it helps the students see not only details but also the main idea and the specific pattern of organization.

Text structure has a built-in "map" that can give directions to readers and let them know where they are located midst the developing information and ideas (Herber & Herber, 1993). Meyer & Rice (1984) that text structure is used to refer to how the ideas in a text are interrelated to convey a message to a reader. Some of the ideas in the text are of central importance to the authors message, while others are of less importance. Thus, text structure specifies the logical connections among ideas as well as subordination of some ideas to others.

The idea of the usefulness of having text structure skills is proved by the study done by Shih (1992) that skilled readers comprehend texts by actively constructing meaning, integrating information from the text with relevant information from their background knowledge. Conceptual knowledge, text structure knowledge, and knowledge about text processing strategies are the foundation for successful construction of meaning.

Other way to increase the students' comprehension is by doing the text structure tasks. What the students do is doing the text structure tasks orally. Why tasks? One research done by Gordon & Hanauer (1955) show that testing tasks functions as an additional information source which interacts in one four ways with the continuing development of the test taker's mental model: (a) integrating new information into an existing information structure; (b) constructing new information structure; (c) confirming an existing information structure; (d) newly integrating existing information structure.

From the idea above, it can be clarified that to help the students construct meaning, integrating information from the text, the teacher can use text structure tasks because by doing the tasks for example by asking the students some questions related to text structure the students will get easily to understand the comprehension questions.

Take one example of story genres, recount, its text structures are orientation, events, and reorientation. To guide the students understand orientation, the teacher can ask them

some questions by using wh-questions like who, where, when and what. To guide the students understand about events, the teacher can ask them by asking them what happens, and how it happened, and to guide the students understand about reorientation, the teacher can the students to summary the events. Therefore, after the students have been able to answer the questions related to text structure, they are supposed to be able to answer the comprehension questions.

Realizing that the researcher has struggled with the problem of teaching text understanding to a classroom full of students who come from diverse cultural and language backgrounds, the researcher has to take responsibility and take my individual initiative for improving the classroom in which the researcher work. The facts show that his students find difficulties in understanding text; therefore, some efforts have to be conducted to improve the students' reading comprehension. These are the reasons why the researcher is interested in conducting his study titled *Improving Students' Reading Comprehension through Text Structure Tasks*.

METHODOLOGY

The design of this research was categorized as Classroom Action Research (CAR) since this research was focused on the teaching and learning activities in the classroom. This action was designed to improve the students' reading comprehension skill through text structure tasks. Every semester the writer, a teacher of the English Department of Unisma, taught a reading subject, he found almost the same problem. The classes that he taught gained low scores in reading. He believed that the students' score in reading could be increased as long as he was able to use the appropriate strategy.

In implementing the action, the researcher applied the action in his own reading class, so he acted as a reading teacher. This idea was taken under the consideration that this research was done to improve his own students' reading comprehension. To avoid subjectivity in data collection, two observers were needed to observe the class. One observer observed the students' activities and the other observer observed the teacher's activity during the classroom instruction.

In accordance to the research design, this study was implemented in cycles. If Cycle 1 did not meet the criteria of success, the action plan would be revised and then Cycle 2 would be implemented. If the action showed positive result, it means that the results meet the

criteria of success then the action was stopped. The study was conducted at the English Department of FKIP Unisma which is located at Jalan MT. Haryono 193 Malang. Unisma is one of the private universities under the controlled of KOPERTIS Region VII. Unisma has ten Faculties with twenty departments. English program is one of those twenty departments at Unisma.

The researcher was one of the teachers of the English program of Unisma; therefore, he was familiar with this program. The program was founded in 1985. It has twenty three classes this year (five classes of the first year, four classes of the second year, six classes of the third year, and seven classes of the fourth year). Each class consists of about 20 to 27 students.

To support and facilitate students to learn, the English program has (a) Student Access Center where the students can practice their reading, speaking and writing. The number of the available reading materials in this room is far from sufficient compared to the number of students (750 students); (b) a language laboratory. It consists of 40 units and equipped with two room speakers, forty headphones, two television sets, video and cd player, radio and set of white board; (c) a library. It consists of numerous English books but limited in series.

The students who enroll at this department are generally those who are not accepted at SPMB; moreover, there is no entrance test needed to study at this English department. That is why the researcher himself experienced many difficulties in teaching the students. This condition was also experienced by the researcher's colleagues, they often complained that the new students did not have even moderate English background. Realizing the input, the department decided to manage small class (20 to 27 for each). The subjects of this study were the fourth semester students who were taking reading IV.

An action research started with classroom situations that teacher found unsatisfactory and in need of improvement. The study started with an observation to the class activities for the first half of the semester. The students' scores obtained from mid-term test showed unsatisfactory result. He felt unsatisfied with the score the students got. From this problem, the researcher then prepared a plan.

FINDINGS

Presenting the reading materials is the main task of the teacher in teaching reading comprehension. The teacher may use a wide range of procedures in presenting the reading materials in the classroom. The findings of the study showed that Action Plans was applied in whilst-reading stage. Meanwhile, the other stages such as pre-reading, post-reading will also be presented. The three steps are discussed in the following section;

Pre-Reading

There were three activities that the teacher did in this stage. First, opening the lesson, the teacher usually did that by greeting the students by saying, “Good morning,” Second, checking the students’ attendance. To spend the time efficiently the teacher usually asked the captain who were absent and he mentioned the names of his classmates who were absent that day.

Third, activating the students’ schemata is the main part of pre-reading stage. Schemata activation is the mechanism by which the students access what they know and match it to the information in the text (Vacca & Vacca, 2005). To meet this purpose, the teacher asked some preliminary questions related to the topic to lead the students to the topic discuss. Writing the topic on the whiteboard is done to get the students’ attention. From the topic written on the whiteboard the teacher can ask the students to predict what the passage will be about. All the activities can activate the students’ previous knowledge or schemata on the topic and can make the students ready to study.

Whilst-Reading Stage

In the whilst-reading phase some activities are done. First of all, the teacher passes out copies of questions concerning to the text structure. This helps the students focus on the text structure tasks. The second time is for the students to identify the signal words. After the students find the signal words then the discussion goes on to text structure identification.

a. Step One

Asking type of writing the writer uses. At the beginning the question on the type of writing is not easy for the students to answer. But after the teacher distributed a piece of paper summarizing three components of reading comprehension, the students get easier to decide the type of the text the writer uses. By asking the students the type of writing or text, the students are led to understand the rhetorical component

b. Step Two

Asking the students to find the way the writer organizes the text. This question led the students to understand the organization of ideas which are consisted of chronological order, spatial order and logical order. It was found from the data that the students could find the way the writer organizes the text.

c. Step Three

Asking the students to find how the text is developed. The question led the students understand the development of ideas. The possible answers are that the writer developed the text through examples, definition, classification, comparison and cause and effect. Based on the data, it was found that the students are able to answer this question.

d. Step Four

Asking the students to work in pair and find how the idea is classified into groups. This activity is the most attractive one, working in pair give students a chance to share their ideas. The students are very active doing this task but the students' ability in finding the division of the text is still low.

e. Step Five

Asking the students to find what the main idea of paragraphs is. This task is asking the student read paragraph by paragraph and asking the students to find the main idea of each paragraph. The students' idea may be presented in a word, phrase or sentence. From the data, it was found that from the four meetings, the main idea is presented in a word; moreover, the students are able to do this task.

f. Step Six

Asking the students to find how each paragraph is related to each other. After the students understand what each paragraph about, they are led to learn how each idea are related, by doing this task the students are hoped to learn about the unity of text, and also language component. In this task the teacher helps the students step by step summarize the related ideas among paragraph and this is very important for the students to draw the content construction of the text. By doing this, the students will have overall understanding of the text.

g. Post-Reading Stage

In the post-reading Stage, comprehension questions are used as post test. This is done to reinforce the skill or knowledge gained in the lesson; besides, the students get feedback from the teacher so that the students know whether their answers are right or wrong. This post test is also used to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy the teacher uses, and to emphasizing the main points of the teaching. Then the class ended.

DISCUSSION

Discussion of the Improvement of the Students' Reading Comprehension Achievement Using Text Structure Tasks.

The facts show that my students found difficulties in understanding text; therefore, some efforts have to be conducted to improve the students' reading comprehension. The problem could be seen from the pre-test scores. It shows 67.65. For the English Department students 67.65 is considered not sufficient for those who would become teachers of English. It would be reasonable if their mean score was at least 75. To improve the students reading comprehension, the teacher applied Text Structure Tasks in the learning-teaching process. When the strategy was applied, the students' reading achievement gradually improved. From evaluation done for each meeting, the students' mean scores increased. The first meeting, the students' mean score reached 57.05, with the range 40 to 80, and with 6 students got below 60. it increased 15.3, for the second meeting the students' mean score reached 72.35, with the range of 55 to 100, and with 2 students got below 60. From the third meeting, it was found that the students' mean score increased 7.65 for their mean score reached 8, with the range of 60 to 100, and no students got below 60. From the last meeting it was found that the students' mean score increased to 2.35, for their mean score reached 82.35 with the range of 70 to 100. To prove that the students' mean scores increased not because of the easier passages or easier questions given to the students, the post-test was conducted.

From the post-test, it was found that the students' mean score had an increase of 8.23. This is because the post-test mean score reached 75.88, with the range of 60 to 95. From the learning result, the four actions designed for Cycle 1 had produced the expected outcome, i.e. first, the students' mean score reached 75.88. The mean score is above the determined score in the criteria of success saying that the study is considered successful if the students' mean

score reached 65. The second criteria of success say that the study is considered successful if no student obtains the score under the category of poor or below 55. Thus, the next cycle was not necessary. It means that the criteria of success can be achieved in one cycle. One cycle can be used to achieve the criteria of success because it consists of four actions; besides, the criteria of success designed are not too extremely difficult.

Discussion from Theoretical Perspective

Under this sub-heading, the researcher discusses some important steps used in the lesson plan recommended from theoretical perspective. This gives clearly explanation on how such step used can contribute to the success of teaching reading.

The Use of Questions in Pre-Reading Phase

The use of complementary question at the beginning of each pre-reading activity proved effective to prepare the students for the topic discussed. The questions used as long as they relate to the topic, they can activate the students' prior knowledge, or schemata.

With questions related to the topic, the teacher invited the students' schemata to the content of the topic. By this activity, the teacher also helped them remember vocabularies, ideas and anything the students have known about the topic. According to the information got from internet accessed on 03/01/2007, pre reading creates a framework for the details of the information about to read. This idea is the same as what <http://www.sbuniv.edu/> says that pre-reading activities such as title discussion and vocabulary training have been shown to be effective in decreasing oral reading errors and increasing reading rate and comprehension across a range of reading levels.

What the teacher does to help the students relate their previous knowledge to the incoming topic is called as an advanced organizer. According to Hidayati (2002) the term "advanced organizer" was proposed by David Ausubel. He says that meaningful learning is determined by how the learner's prior knowledge is organized to incorporate the new knowledge. A main component of learning is how to put new material in relation to relevant ideas in existing schema or knowledge.

The use of advance organizer can activate information processing on the part of the learner. Advance organizers help to prepare the student for active learning. By using advance organizers, the teachers give the students the opportunity to "tune in" to what is to be learned and use the prior knowledge well. The teacher-led brainstorming about some questions more or less served this purpose.

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The Role of Text Structure Tasks in Learning Reading

Reader's comprehension on a text is in part dependent upon the text itself. The reader's ability to see the relationship between one part of a sentence and another, and between one sentence and another contributes to the ability to comprehend the meaning of a sentence or a group of sentence in a paragraph. (Thompson & Daines, 1982) say that comprehension, the cognitive processing of language, is a multidimensional operation. It consists of understanding sentences in paragraphs and paragraphs in longer discourse. The comprehension of a paragraph requires the comprehension of its sentences and their relationships in the paragraph.

If the readers are skilled, they can use their knowledge of text structure to aid their comprehension. They are aware of the hierarchical relationships that characterize expository material and that these relationships fall into discernable patterns. They use this knowledge to identify the particular pattern(s) being used in materials they are reading. They use their understanding of the structure of the patterns to interpret relationships and connections that authors make across the information and ideas they present. Each pattern has verbal clues that indicate its presence in a text. Skilled reader uses these clues to identify the predominant pattern being used by the authors of what they are reading. Herber & Herber (1993) say that the ability to use the patterns helps them interpret what is being presented.

Karlin & Avni (1981) also say about the theory underpinning text structure that the ability to comprehend is enhanced when the reader sees the relationships among the idea in the passage and recognizes the structure that ties the sentences together. A main idea comprehension task usually requires reading several statements in a passage and synthesizing these ideas into a single central thought. It seems reasonable, then, that text structure or passage organization is a factor that may affect main idea of comprehension.

The chapters, topics, and sentences are related to each other vary from text to text. These relationships and the organization of information within the topics are referred to as the text structure. Gillet (1994) says if readers can recognize how a text is organized, comprehension proceeds more smoothly than if the reader experiences difficulty identifying the author's organizational plan for the text. So when students understand the way an author has organized the text, identifying the major points become easier.

All the writers above agree that understanding text structure help comprehend the text. On the other word, students who do not understand the structure of the text will find difficulties in comprehending the text as Blaricom (1979) says that students have difficulty comprehending a passage if they do not organize the ideas presented in a meaningful way. Moreover, good readers organize what they read, poor reader do not.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings conducted in one cycle consisting of four acts, the conclusion can be drawn to answer the research questions of the study. Text Structure Tasks which are prepared can improve the English students' reading comprehension skill of Unisma. It is shown by the increasing students' mean score 67.65 in pre-test to 75.88 in post-test. From four acts in the cycle, it can be concluded that there are six steps done to improve the students' reading comprehension through text structure tasks. They are: 1). asking the students the type of writing the writer uses; 2). asking the students to find the way the writer organizes the text; 3). asking the students to find how the text is developed; 4). asking the students to work in pair and find how the idea is classified into groups; 5). asking the students to find what the main idea of paragraphs is; and 6). asking the students to find how each paragraph is related to each other.

The Stages of Teaching

The implementation of text structure text which improves students' reading comprehension skills entails three stages. For more detail, the three stages are concluded as follows.

Pre-Reading

There are three activities that the teacher does in this stage. First, opening the lesson, the teacher greets the students and the students greet the teacher with the same greeting. To spend the time efficiently the teacher asks the captain who is absent.

Third, activating the students' schemata is the main part of pre-reading stage. Schemata activation is the mechanism by which the students access what they know and match it to the information in the text (Vacca & Vacca, 2005). To meet this purpose, the teacher asks some preliminary questions related to the topic to lead the students to the topic discuss. Writing the topic on the whiteboard is done to get the students' attention. From the topic written on the whiteboard the teacher can ask the students to predict what the passage

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Whilst-Reading Stage

In the whilst-reading phase some activities are done. First of all, the teacher passes out copies of questions concerning to the text structure. This helps the students focus on the text structure tasks. The second time is for the students to identify the signal words. After the students find the signal words then the discussion goes on to text structure identification. The teacher asks on (a) what type of writing the writer uses, (b) in what way the writer organizes the text, (c) how the text is developed, (d) how the idea is classified into groups, (e) what the main idea of paragraphs, (f) what topic of each paragraphs, (g) how each paragraph is related to each other.

While the teacher and the students are discussing those questions above, the teacher helps the students step by step summarize the related ideas among paragraph and this is very important for the students to draw the content construction of the text. By doing this, the students will have overall understanding of the text.

Post-Reading Stage

In the post-reading Stage, comprehension questions are used as post test. This is done to reinforce the skill or knowledge gained in the lesson; besides, the students get feedback from the teacher so that the students know whether their answers are right or wrong. This post test is also used to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy the teacher uses, and to emphasize the main points of the teaching. Then the class ended.

Evaluation Stage

Evaluation on the implementation of text structure is done to the process evaluation and achievement evaluation. From the evaluation of process, it can be said that the teacher conducts the teaching-and learning based on scenario prepared and the students show enthusiastically in involving in the class activities. From the evaluation of the achievements , it can be concluded that the students' mean score increases 67.65 from pre-test to 75.88 in post test, and the mean gained 75.88 is under the category of B+ and no students get below 60. This is the main reason that no more cycle is needed because this result has met the criteria of success.

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