

STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING READING COMPREHENSION

By
Muslaini*

Syiah Kuala University, Banda Aceh

ABSTRACT

This research was done to find out how reading comprehension was taught at an Islamic boarding school in Pidie Jaya, the strategies that were used by the teachers for teaching reading comprehension, and the responses of the students towards the teaching-learning of reading comprehension. This study was conducted using an action research. The participants of this study were the teachers and their students. The instruments used were an interview guide and observation sheets to collect data. Based on the data collected, the researcher found several problems that needed to be solved, especially in the preparation of lesson plans even though the teachers at the school already had much knowledge of teaching. Based on these observations, the methods and strategies generally used by the English teachers at the school included individual learning, cooperative learning, using media, (games, pictures and picture series), and the grammar translation method. They modified the strategies used in teaching depending on the materials or the genre of the text. The choice of strategy was adapted by the teachers with the materials, the indicators and the purpose of learning based on the syllabus and curriculum. They chose the most appropriate strategy to help the students comprehend the text well. Their reasons for using a particular strategy was to help the students to avoid difficulties in reading the text, especially comprehending the aspects of reading such as the main idea, making inferences, noting detailed information and references. The use of appropriate strategies to reach the purposes of learning was planned in the lesson plan.

Keywords: *English Teachers, Strategies, Teaching Reading Comprehension.*

*Corresponding author: muslaini.hasyim@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

The National Education Ministry, in their guidance book for the School Based Curriculum, state that senior high school students are expected to be able to comprehend written texts either in short functional or simple essay form in the genre of recount, narrative, procedural, descriptive, news item, spoof, report, analytical exposition, hortatory exposition, explanation, discussion, and review in a daily activity context and to be able to access knowledge (Depdiknas, 2006 A, 2006 B and 2006 C).

Reading is the process of getting information from the written text; from the writer to the reader. The goal of all reading is the comprehension of meaning that is conveyed in the written text. According to Dean (2013), reading is more than seeing words clearly, more than pronouncing printed words correctly and more than recognizing the meaning of isolated words. Reading requires you to think and feel. Reading is not just looking and pronouncing words in the text but comprehending all the components of a text.

In teaching reading, a teacher may use many different strategies. In order to use any instructional technique effectively, anyone who teaches must understand the principles and assumptions upon which each specific technique is based. There is certainly no shortage of descriptions or labels for activities that may be classified as pertaining to instruction. Harmer (2007) has said that a strategy is an action that the teacher takes to attain one or more of her teaching-learning goals. The strategy can also be defined as a general direction set for the teaching process. The teacher should use many strategies in teaching reading such as applying various methods, media and games in order to keep the students interested. Brown (2004) has noted that the fundamental feature of teaching strategies is to make it easier to implement a variety of teaching methods and techniques. The key is to create learning environments that are more interactive to apply technology where applicable into the learning experience, and to use appropriate collaborative learning strategies.

In effective teaching of reading comprehension, teachers lead students in the classroom to become proficient and successful readers. Creative teachers do not use only one specific method and technique, but implement many strategies and skills to accommodate the needs and learning styles of each student in the classroom. Slavin (2000) has also noted that effective instruction is not a simple matter of one person with

more knowledge transmitting knowledge to another. Therefore, successful teachers who teach reading realize that reading can be taught by using a variety of strategies. The teaching must be modified by the teachers depending on the students' needs. Allington (2002) notes that creative teachers manage to get better results regardless of curriculum materials, pedagogical approaches and/or reading programs.

The notes above show that the teacher has an important role in teaching students. Based on the writer's interview with an English teacher at Pasantren Dayah Jeumala Amal at Lueng Putu in Pijay district, Aceh on Desember 5, 2014, he found that most of the students at that school had passed their final examinations with a good mean score for English of 75. The students also reached the passing score when the teacher gave them a test for reading comprehension. In that interview, the writer also learnt that the teacher used many strategies for teaching reading. This Islamic Boarding School especially for classes X/1 and XI/1 has implemented the 2013 curriculum as the new curriculum mandated by the government since 2014. But in 2015 the curriculum was changed back to the KTSP (Depdiknas, 2008).

Based on the above, strategies for teaching reading are the processes used for transferring knowledge in order to get good reading comprehension and understanding of a text to achieve the goals of the learning process. Teachers need to use appropriate strategies based on the materials and the purpose of learning. In this study, the writer focuses on the strategies used by the English teachers at Madrasah Aliyah Jeumala Amal for teaching reading.

There has been some previous research done that supports the work of this study, such as the study by Aidil (2014) at SMAN 3 Sabang. The result of his study showed that the implementation of the strategy adopted by the teachers there with the materials, the indicators and the purpose of learning was based on the syllabus and the curriculum. They choose the most suitable strategies which could help the students comprehend the texts well. The teachers' reasons for using those strategies was because the students had had difficulties in comprehending the test, especially the aspects of reading such as the main idea, detailed information, making inferences and noting references. Without using an appropriate strategy, the purpose of learning cannot be reached easily.

Another study was done by Maulizan (2014) at SMPN 16 Banda Aceh. The results of his study showed that the conditions and strategies used for the teaching-learning of reading comprehension with each class

at SMPN 16 Banda Aceh got a positive response for the teaching-learning process in each classroom. All the students were really actively involved in the teaching-learning processes and able to answer questions correctly. They were motivated and interested in the teaching-learning processes particularly for reading comprehension.

There has been some previous research done by other writers especially descriptive studies about teaching reading, but very few researchers are interested in conducting studies at Islamic Boarding Schools, because nowadays the students of these boarding schools have many successful students. Based on the above, the research for this study had two research problems:

1. How do the English teachers at Jeumala Amal Private Islamic High School implement strategies for teaching reading comprehension?
2. What do the students do at Jeumala Amal Private Islamic High School during teaching-learning reading comprehension activities?

After designing the research problems, the researcher determined the objectives of the study which are:

1. To learn the strategies used by the English teachers for teaching reading comprehension at Jeumala Amal High School.
2. To find out the activities of the students in the classroom while teaching-learning reading comprehension at Jeumala Amal High School.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading English is an important skill that students need to learn. When reading a text the goal is to understand its content. Students reading a text at school often have difficulties to understand and comprehend its meaning. So, teachers of reading must have good techniques to teach reading to students to help them get good results.

Teaching reading is not easy because the teachers not only have to get the students to read the text but also they have to think how the students can comprehend all the aspects of English in it. According to Chaudron (2004) studying English is not easy for Indonesian students because the English language and the Indonesian language are very different in terms of spelling, sounds, pronunciation, vocabulary and culture.

The objective of teaching reading in high school is to develop the students' reading skills in order to read texts effectively and efficiently. Ariwiyati (1997) asserts that the specific objectives of reading are: (a) to

enable the students to develop basic comprehension skills so that they can read and understand texts of a general nature, (b) to use reading to increase their general knowledge, (c) to decide about reading purpose, (d) to adapt their strategies of reading, and (e) to develop their ability to read critically. Based on these, a teacher has to have a good technique to build the motivation of students to learn and memorize vocabulary.

A teacher has to implement a strategy so that his students will learn to read and comprehend as well as possible. Brown (2004) has classified strategies into two kinds. The first kind is direct strategies or what are also called cognitive strategies. These include a number of different ways of remembering more effectively and of using all possible cognitive processes and compensating knowledge. The second kind is indirect strategies which focus on some aspects, such as organizing and evaluating learning, managing the emotions and learning from others.

Duffy (2007) has mentioned some strategies for teaching reading comprehension in the classroom. First, teaching of reading is knowledge-based. Thus, teachers are acquired to have knowledge related to the material so that they can explain the material to their students. Therefore, a good teacher has to prepare himself for it. Second, reading is a complex cognitive and linguistic process. It involves decoding alphabetic symbols, drawing upon experiences and language, and using strategies effectively to make meaning. The teacher has to realize that reading is a multidimensional process. Third, learners are different, this means that every student is different, either their ability or their behavior or both. Students have a variety of abilities, especially for comprehending the meaning of a text. Therefore teachers need to analyze the abilities of their students' in order to help themselves to manage the classroom situation. The last strategy of Duffy is that teachers are informed decision-maker who makes many instructional decisions every lesson. In order to make instructional decisions that will positively affect the reading achievements of the students, teachers must be knowledgeable about the reading processes, effective instruction, the diversity of communities they serve, and the expectations for the teaching of reading as outlined in the curriculum.

According to Brown (2004) when teaching reading a teacher should choose a method which depends on the specific purposes of the reading. The teacher will focus on three aspects to consider how to present a text, how to develop the lesson using it, and how to follow up: first, presenting a text. In this part, the teacher will give a meaningful explanation related to the text. This should give the students a sense of purpose. A good short

presentation should be given by the teacher. Second is developing the teaching lesson. In developing the reading materials, the teacher needs to think about the planning of the text stages in the lesson as this will help the student readers to understand well, the topic of the text. Finally, follow up, this means that after presenting and developing the reading materials, the teacher should teach about any other aspects of reading comprehension. The teaching of grammar should be done inductively; this means that no explicit rules of grammar should be given.

The teacher must use her knowledge to plan effective reading lessons and to select and use instructional materials purposefully, thoughtfully, and reflectively; to monitor the progress of each student; to take advantage of opportune moments to reinforce concepts or introduce new concepts and to make decisions about appropriate interventions needed. Thus reading lessons require teachers to prepare well as their role involves education that will positively influence the lives of children and adolescents. Education involves more than just training teachers to use particular approaches, methods, and materials.

According to Brown (2004, p. 229), there are some strategies of reading comprehension: (1) the teacher needs to identify the purpose of the reading. It is important that she have a clear purpose to help her to narrow the choice of book from a reading list, then once she has chosen a book, to select the best chapter(s) and section(s). Having a clear purpose also helps students to locate the most useful part of the text for their needs and to ignore those parts which will not help them. Efficient reading consists of identifying the purposes in reading something so that we know what we are looking for and can weed out potentially distracting information; and (2) Ensure there are graphics and pictures to help beginners in decoding and comprehension (for beginning level learners). Alternatively use efficient silent reading techniques for relatively rapid comprehension (for intermediate to advanced levels).

Adler (2003) has said that comprehension strategies are conscious plans, sets of steps that good readers use to make sense of a text. Comprehension strategy instructions help students to become purposeful, active readers who are in control of their own reading comprehension. The seven strategies he mentions appear to have a firm scientific basis for improving text comprehension. In particular he argues that some strategies in teaching reading comprehension require explanation. First is monitoring comprehension. Here, the teacher teaches the students to be aware of what they do understand, identify what they do not understand and use appropriate strategies to resolve any

problems in comprehension. Second is metacognition. Before reading, the student should clarify their purpose for reading and preview the text. During reading, they should monitor their understanding and adjust their reading speed to fix any difficulty with comprehending the text, and fix any comprehension problems that arise. Third are graphic and semantic organizers which can illustrate concepts and relationships between concepts in a text and/or use diagrams. Graphic organizers are known by different names, such as maps, webs, graphs, charts, frames, or clusters. Graphic organizers can: 1) help students focus on differences in the structure of texts for fiction and for non-fiction as they read, 2) provide the students with tools they can use to examine and show relationships in a text, and 3) help students write well-organized summaries of a text.

Finally, answering the question which questions will be effective because this: 1) gives students a purpose for reading, 2) focuses students' attention on what they are learning, 3) helps students to think actively as they read, 4) encourages students to monitor their comprehension, and 5) helps students to review content and relate what they have learned to what they already know.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research was designed as a descriptive qualitative study. It was intended to obtain information on the teaching of reading comprehension at Jeumala Amal High School in Lueng Putu, Pijay, Aceh. This study is qualitative in nature with observations and, interviews used to do the research. Gay, Mills and Arasian (2006, p. 55) say "qualitative methodology allows researcher to focus on perceptions, behaviors and experiences."

This study collected information on the strategies used for teaching reading comprehension of English at Jeumala Amal High School. Data was gathered on the existing conditions and the methods and techniques used by the teachers for teaching reading comprehension there. This study also asked the students about their responses to the methods used for teaching-learning reading comprehension for English.

Gay, Mills and Arasian (ibid) explained that qualitative research is purposeful in selecting participants and settings. It is assumed to be sufficient to provide maximum insight and understanding of this study since reading was never given to the students as a special drill before and reading was also a basic knowledge for them. The subjects for this study were two teachers who teach English to the tenth and eleventh grades at

Jeumala Amal High School. These two English teachers were chosen because they have been teaching English there for 5 years, since 2010.

The data on the strategies used for the teaching of English reading comprehension was gathered by doing classroom observations. The strategy used by the teachers in the classroom for presenting the English materials especially the reading materials was the focus of this study. Both the teachers and their students were the focus of the observations. Moreover, the physical situation in the classroom was also taken into account.

The classroom observations and the interview results were the main sources of data. The data was classified into two types namely: (1) What were the strategies used in teaching reading comprehension at Jeumala Amal School? and (2) What were the students' responses to the teaching-learning of English reading comprehension?.

Instruments used to get data were the observation sheets, the interviews and other documentation.

1. Observation Sheets

The writer made the observations using sheets prepared with a list of observation guides.

2. Interview Guide

The interview guide was prepared to get data about the preparations made by the teachers for teaching the strategies implemented in teaching English reading comprehension.

3. Other Documentation

Other documentation included the syllabus and lesson plans, the textbook, a list of worksheets from the students plus photographs from the teaching sessions and soon. The documentation helps the researcher to clearly see and understand the phenomena and conditions in the classes studied.

The procedure for the study was as follows: (1) the raw data was collected in the form of field notes, records of interviews and other documents such as the syllabus, lesson plans and photographs; (2) after all the data had been collected, it was classified through making short notes, coding or symbols; (3) all the classified and coded data was presented descriptively so that it could be easily comprehended and conclusions made; and (4) all the data was reviewed and displayed in order to present a highly credible report.

The data in this study was qualitative descriptive. The data was gained from classroom observation, interviews with the teachers and the principal, and document analysis. Then, the data was analyzed, displayed

and conclusions were drawn. This was in accordance with the recommendations of Miles and Huberman (1994, as cited in Jamil, 2010) who have stated that data analysis is a procedure in which data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing take place interactively. Moreover, Biklen and Bogdan (1992) have said that data analysis is the process of systematically searching through and arranging interview transcripts, field notes and other materials in order to understand and present them.

The data analysis in this study used the qualitative-narrative technique with no statistical analysis. This is in line with Maulizan (2014) who notes that qualitative data can be described in qualitative-narrative and the data is not analyzed statistically. Maulizan also added that the data analysis in a qualitative study can be started before all the data has finally been collected, a little at a time, slowly and steadily.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The researcher described the strategies used by two English teachers who were teaching reading comprehension at MAS Jeumala Amal Lueng Putu as recorded in observations and interviews. Based on the observations and interviews both of the teachers used various strategies to teach reading comprehension. They were both very creative in handling their classes and they made the students actively involved in the teaching-learning for English reading comprehension.

Both English teachers managed the teaching-learning processes very well. They could handle the students that had problems in reading comprehension by using a variety of strategies in the teaching learning process. They changed their strategies from one meeting to another. Sometimes they also mixed the strategies. This was made the students interested in learning especially in reading comprehension. So the students did not feel bored in the teaching-learning processes. These various strategies created an attractive atmosphere for the teaching-learning process. McNamara (2007) has proposed that strategies for learning are the way in which teachers transfer, information, experiences and cognitive processes to their students. Teachers use strategies to teach, enrich and give experiences to their students related to the materials used.

Meanwhile, using media is also important for English teachers to help their students understand. There are many kinds of media which can be used by teachers in the teaching-learning process, especially for

teaching reading comprehension for senior high school students. The teachers must be selective in choosing the media to use.

From the observations, the researcher found that Teacher 2 and Teacher 1 had some differences in teaching reading comprehension. Teacher 2 used an overhead projector whilst Teacher 1 did not. Instead she guided the students to work in groups with descriptive texts that are easier to understand than other genre of texts. Teacher 1 helped the students who could not understand the materials by giving them an explanation or directing them how to use a dictionary. Actually, there were no significant differences amongst the two teachers in applying the strategies, because they discussed the strategies for teaching English together. They shared the good strategies which could be used in teaching reading comprehension.

There were some potential weaknesses in the way the English teachers taught reading comprehension to their students. First, the teachers did not only use English as the medium for instruction in the reading comprehension classroom. They sometimes used Indonesian to help the students understand the material. Second, the teachers spent much time in managing the classroom using co-operative learning and/or discussions. This influenced the purpose of study, and therefore, some of the students did not study seriously while working in a group.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

After conducting this research, the researcher has made some conclusions related to the effect of the classroom management of these two teachers in teaching reading comprehension. These two teachers at Jeumala Amal used various strategies for teaching reading comprehension, such as using the Grammar Translation Method and Co-operative Learning techniques via: Jigsaw, Snowball, Think Pair Share, Numbered Heads Together etc. They also used various media e.g.:- games, pictures and picture series. They modified the strategies used for teaching depending on the materials and/or the genre of the text studied. By using various strategies, the process of teaching-learning reading comprehension was made more interesting.

The choice of strategy used by the teachers depended on the material(s), the indicators and the purpose of learning based on the syllabus and the curriculum. They chose strategies most likely to help the students comprehend the text well. The teachers used these strategies to help their students overcome difficulties in comprehending the texts, especially the various aspects of reading such as the main idea, detailed

information, making inferences and noting references. Without using appropriate strategies, the purpose of learning reading comprehension cannot be easily reached.

The writer also provided some suggestions to be considered by the teachers, especially for managing the teaching process of reading comprehension. The teachers should have a good basic knowledge of designing lesson plans and managing teaching-learning strategies since these approaches will help them to teach their lessons effectively and efficiently. It will influence the process of teaching-learning in the classroom and help the students to achieve the objectives of learning reading comprehension.

The teachers should evaluate the students' achievement by giving them appropriate tests based on the lessons which have been taught. These tests will be the instruments to measure their comprehension of the reading texts. This can be used as the evaluation to know the effectiveness of the strategies used by the teachers.

The teachers should be creative in teaching the materials to the students. They should teach using a variety of strategies. The strategies should be chosen based on the materials to help the students to easily understand the materials. The use of models, media, and games should be done to motivate the students to learn reading comprehension. Finally, other researchers should investigate other problems which were not investigated in detail in this study.

REFERENCES

- Adler, D. (2003). *The Comprehension Strategies Instruction for Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Aidil, M. (2014). *A Descriptive Study on Teaching Reading Comprehension Strategies at Junior High School Students SMPN 3 Sabang*. Unpublished Thesis. Syiah Kuala University, Banda Aceh.
- Allington, R. (2002). What I've learned about effective reading instruction: From a decade of studying exemplary elementary classroom teachers. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 83, 740-747.
- Gay, L. R., Mills, G. E., & Arasian, P. (2006). *Educational Research: Competencies for Analysis and Application*, 8th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Ariwiyati. (1997). *Course Outline Senior High School Textbooks. Penataran Guru Inti MAN Model Bidang Studi Bahasa Inggris Se Indonesia*. Malang: UUM Malang.

- Biklen, S., & Bogdan, R. C. (1992). *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Method*. London: British Library.
- Brown, H. D. (2004). *Teaching by Principles*. New York: Longman.
- Chaudron, C. (2004). *Models and Methods for Discovering learners' Processing of input*. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 7, 1-14.
- Dean, G. (2013). *Teaching Reading in the Secondary Schools*, 2nd ed. London: David Fulton.
- Departemen Pendidikan Nasional. (2008). *Perangkat Pembelajaran KTSP SMA*. Jakarta: Depdiknas.
- Departemen Pendidikan Nasional. (2006a). *Petunjuk Teknis Pengembangan Silabus dan Contoh/Model Silabus*. Jakarta: Depdiknas.
- Departemen Pendidikan Nasional. (2006b). *Ujian Akhir Nasional untuk Sekolah Menengah Atas*. Jakarta: Depdiknas.
- Departemen Pendidikan Nasional. (2006c). *Kurikulum Standar Kompetensi*. Jakarta: Depdiknas.
- Duffy, G. (2009). *Explaining Reading*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Harmer, J. (2007). *The Practice of Language Teaching*, 4th ed. London: Pearson Longman.
- Jamil, M. (2010). *The Implementation of English Language Teaching at Elementary School (A Case Study at MIN Jambo Tape – Banda Aceh)*. (Unpublished Master's thesis). Syiah Kuala University, Banda Aceh.
- Maulizan. (2014). *A Descriptive Study on Teaching Reading Comprehension*. (Unpublished Master's Thesis). Syiah Kuala University, Banda Aceh.
- McNamara, D. S. (2007). *Reading Comprehension Strategies*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum and Associates, Inc.
- Slavin, R. E. (2000). *Cooperative Learning: Teori, Riset, dan Praktik*. Bandung: Nusa Media.