

THE EFFECT OF APPLYING THE TALK-TO-THE-TEXT STRATEGY ON STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION IN NARRATIVE TEXTS

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Abstract

This study investigates the effect of applying the talk-to-the-text strategy on students' reading comprehension of narrative text. By employing quasi-experimental research design, specifically pre- and post-tests design one, talk-to-the-text reading strategy was implemented as treatment in experimental class and another control class was taught by utilizing conventional strategy. The study was conducted in the eighth grade students of Junior Secondary School in one of school in Bintan, Indonesia. Cluster random sampling was employed in order to determine the samples. In gaining the data, the instrument used was reading comprehension test. Based on data analysis by using t-test, the result revealed that talk-to-the-text strategy give better effect toward comprehension of grade eight students when reading narrative texts.

Keywords: talk-to-the-text, reading comprehension, narrative text

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension Strategies

Reading can be identified simply as making meaning from print (Anderson, 2008). In creating the meaning, there is a cognitive process by the readers involving recognizing the words and connecting information from text to their background knowledge before generating the meaning. Reading by getting meaning is also known as reading comprehension. The comprehension in reading occurs when the readers read information from the text and recall their knowledge or experience related with text to construct meaning. Further, the use of comprehension strategy is crucial in reading comprehension since the strategy helps readers in comprehending the text. This opinion affirms the idea from Duke and Block (2012) that comprehension strategy is a strong predictor of reading comprehension. In short, reading comprehension strategy becomes import-

ant since it influences reader's comprehension about the text.

Teachers are important to provide students some reading strategies in order to handle complex reading tasks. Reading comprehension strategies help students to overcome when they struggle to comprehend a text. Block in Li (2010) argues "reading comprehension strategies indicate how readers conceive a task, what textual cues they attend to, how they make sense of what they read, and what they do when they do not understand". Further, Dole in Schumm (2006) defines comprehension strategies as a set of routines or procedures that help readers become active processors to achieve the goal of comprehension. By practicing the strategies in some activities more, students are expected to achieve the goal of comprehension that is to comprehend the text.

The kind of strategies should help students accessing texts before, during and after reading. It is in the same vein with Vasquez,

Hansen & Smith (2010) who classify reading strategies which engage students with the texts into three groups according to the phases in reading activities. The first is in pre-reading activities which includes understanding the organizational structure of a text, using graphic organizers, text features, anticipation guides, concept maps, predicting and confirming activity. The second is in during reading activities which includes double entry journals, literature circles, directed reading sequence, and Talk-To-The-Text. The last one is in post-reading activities. The activities are such as story map, character maps and charts, and children's information picture books.

This research is dealt with reading comprehension of English Foreign Language (EFL) students in Junior Secondary School context. In Indonesian English teaching and learning context, students in this level are taught to read comprehensively two kinds of texts namely functional and monologue text. Functional text is a short text that helps readers to perform English in daily life. It is presented in the form of letter, invitation, advertisement, announcement, and etc. On the other hand, monologue text is a piece of writing in which the writer presents information, explanation and point of view to the readers. For junior high school, monologue text consists of five genres namely procedure, descriptive, recount, report and narrative.

Unfortunately, based on observations in the school and interview with the teachers, students' score of reading comprehension was low. Many students perceived reading narrative texts as a difficult one since they hardly comprehended what the texts were about, although they were able to read them. Further, the researcher found there are some factors that affected students' reading comprehension scores especially in narrative text. The factors are the students have lack of vocabularies, lack of prior knowledge about topic of the text and less of alternative comprehension strategy in reading narrative text taught by the teacher in the classroom. These factors also confirm with argument from Duke and Block (2012) that vocabulary, conceptual and content knowledge,

and use of comprehension strategies become obstacles in improving reading comprehension.

Some researchers have long been interested in various aspects related reading comprehension. The main focus of these researches are to determine how reading strategies contribute to read effectively and how teachers can incorporate these strategies into reading instruction. Mohd Yussof, Rasid Jamian, Hamzah and Kabilan (2012) have implemented graphic strategy and several cognitive strategies (story structure, questioning, synthesizing, visualizing and inferencing) to enhance secondary school students' reading comprehension of narrative text. The use of graphic organizer was embedded in story structure strategy placed in before-reading strategy. This would communicate the conceptual relation of the story and words' relative spatial locus (Katayama & Robinson as cited in Mohd Yussof et al. 2012). Through quasi-experimental research design, the result indicated these strategies increase students' reading comprehension effectively compared to conventional method. Further, study which is related with the effect of prior knowledge on reading comprehension also has been studied by Vitale and Romance (as cited in Duke and Block, 2012). They applied science IDEAS model which applied reading of age-appropriate text along with hands-on activities to develop knowledge of specific science content. The result showed that the model had positive impact on science achievement.

Other researches who applied some reading strategies which focus on text structure to enhance students' reading comprehension are Zwica and Gomez (2008) who had done the research about applying annotating strategy to support learning in teaching and learning science. They used this strategy to make students' reading comprehension in science materials better. The previous researchers have studied that reading strategy fostered acquisition of new vocabulary, prior knowledge toward reading comprehension, and comprehension strategy that focuses more on text structure to improve reading comprehension. They found that some reading strategies might give solution in the way to improve vocabulary, to enrich prior

knowledge, and also to improve reading comprehension.

Based on my experience as an English teacher in a Junior Secondary School, the current situation in Indonesia may emerge that some teachers actually have applied some classroom strategies, such as discussing, retelling, reading aloud and so forth. However, there is an urgency to implement supplemental strategies regarding specific language skills. In this case, the students need alternative reading comprehension strategies which enhance their knowledge about narrative-text structure to help them understanding the texts. Numerous possible strategies then prepare students to be skilful reader since they may employ particular strategy by adjusting it to the situation needed to tackle the text.

Talk-to-the-text reading strategy

Based on the previous studies, the researcher is interested in applying other reading strategies which require students to focus more on text structure. One of such reading strategies is talk-to-the-text strategy. This strategy requires students to stop and reflect what they have read. When they stop for a while, they write all the information related to the text based on some questions (prompts) given to them before reading the text; the answers are written on sticky notes that they place on the margin of the paper; later, the sticky notes will be used to generate the discussion about the content of the text (Vasquez, Hansen & Smith, 2010). The interesting point in this strategy is the use of sticky notes. Though the students are assigned to write the response based on the reading, the use of this small notes may make them feel less intimidated to write. Further, by combining reading and writing activity perhaps students understand more what a text is about. As supported by Zsigmond (2015), writing instruction could help fostering students' reading comprehension as it deals with metacognitive dimension.

Moreover, talk-to-the-text strategy helps students to read the text in more detail because a text is divided into chunks (certain part or pieces of text) before being delivered. The

whole part of a text is not given in the same time. The students are required to read a certain part in a text first, and then write their responses in sticky notes. Later, it helps them to remember important information from their reading accurately. To help students in creating responses, teachers can offer some prompts or guiding question that guide them to start writing later.

Narrative Text

The use of narrative text in this study is by considering eight grade students study narrative text first before other monologue texts. The students also have been prepared for facing the ninth grade, where they will face national examination. Further, narrative text is also close to students' life, especially in their daily interaction since narrative texts are mostly fiction such as fairy tales and folk tales. According to Anderson (as cited in Olfah, 2013), narrative text is a text that tells a story and, in doing so, entertains the audience. In other words, its purpose is to present a view of the world that entertains or informs the listener or reader.

The most common generic structure of narrative texts is an opening that establishes setting and introduces characters; a complication and resulting events; a resolution/ending. This statement is supported by statement from Knapp and Watkins (2005) the generic structures of narrative text are orientation, complication, and resolution. Orientation is in the beginning of the text which introduces the characters. Besides introducing the participants (characters), it also sets the scene of the story, the time, and place where the story happened (Who, what, when and where). Complication is the time when the problems of characters emerge in a story. It contains a series of events in which the main character attempts to solve the problem. Resolution contains problems solving of character's problems.

Briefly, the researcher expected talk-to-the-text strategy to give significant effects on students' reading comprehension. It is expected that talk-to-the-text would help students to understand each part of narrative text. Therefore, this research tested two hypotheses,

namely the null hypothesis which is talk-to-the-text strategy does not give significant effects on students' reading comprehension in narrative texts, and the alternative hypothesis, which is talk-to-the-text strategy gives significant effects on students' reading comprehension in narrative texts.

METHODS

Participants

The study was conducted in Junior Secondary School level or also called as SMP in Indonesian. The sample was taken from the eighth grade students registered in academic year 2014/2015 in SMP N 17 Bintan, Indonesia. The sample was chosen by using cluster random sampling. There were five classes in grade eight and only two classes were chosen as samples. In order to determine which group belonged to experimental and control group, the researcher threw a lottery. Both number of students in experimental and control class were 25 students so that the total number of the samples was 50 students.

Design

The current study employed quasi-experimental design since of the use of intact classes rather than create new group for experiment class (Creswell, 2012). This occurred due to the availability of classes used to treat certain teaching and learning strategy. Specifically, it used Pre-test Post-test Design. The study took 8 weeks consisting of 10 meetings, covering the administration of pre- and post-tests. In the first meeting, pre-test was given to the students before given a treatment. At the end of the treatment, it would be given post-test to the students in both groups after given the treatment. The post-test scores were then compared to determine the effect of the treatment. Overall, there were 8 meetings for teaching and learning processes in each class that each meeting was ended up in 2 X 40 minutes. Further, there were two groups as samples chosen randomly. One group was the experimental group which was taught by applying talk-to-the-text strategy during reading activities and another is

the control group who had been taught with conventional reading activities, in this case was retelling strategy.

Materials

The narrative passages used in the study were adopted and adapted from National Examination collection. By considering the target learners as Junior Secondary School level, several adjustments were made in order to achieve readability and comprehensibility of the passages. Overall, there were three passages used in treatment phase and all of them may be categorized as short narrative text as most of them only consisted of short paragraphs in each story.

Instruments

The instrument in the post-test was multiple choice question type. Each question has four optional answers, where students have to choose one as the correct answer. The students ought to answer 20 questions in 80 minutes. The content of questions in this instruments were based on the combination of characteristics of good reading comprehension test and the contents of narrative texts. A good reading comprehension questions should cover the features of comprehension, namely topic, main idea, expressions in context, grammatical features, specifically stated detail, excluding facts not written and vocabulary in context (Brown and Abeywickrama, 2010). Moreover, the contents of narrative text also were considered namely generic structure and grammatical features. In generic structure, there are orientation, complication, and resolution. All of the parts contain characters, setting, problems, and solutions of the problems that sometimes have moral and cultural values and temporally in chronological ordered. Knapp and Watkins (2005) state grammatical features of narrative text are: (1) using past tense verb; (2) using temporal connectivity; and (3) using specific character. Briefly, the indicator of reading comprehension used in the study can be seen in the table 1.

Instructions

To commence the hypothesis testing, the

treatment ought to be made sure completely and smoothly applied to the whole students in experiment class. The different with control class is this group was taught by retelling strategy while the experiment one talk-to-the-text strategy was introduced and practiced in the classroom. Students would be provided opportunity and guidance to learn the strategy for further application in reading certain textual type independently.

There are some steps of teaching reading by using talk-to-the-text strategy based on Vasquez et.al (2010). The first step is teachers preview the text and determine effective stopping places for students to respond to the reading selection. Texts can be divided into chunk (certain parts or piece of text) based on length, transition points, difficult passages, important events, and etc. Teachers also consider the time needed by the students to read. Teachers arrange how many times will be taken in every piece of text.

The second step is explaining to students that they are going to record their thoughts about what they are reading and have them write their thoughts on sticky note and place it next to the corresponding section of the text. Using prompt will help students to start writing.

The third step, once students have completed the reading, have them work in pairs and groups to share their responses. Groups should come to a consensus of agreement and disagreement on the information. Teachers as facilitator bridge the discussion and then bring them to the meaning of the text exactly.

The fourth step is reviewing the strategy. Asking them what kinds of questions this particular text created for them. What kinds of strategies/prompts did they find themselves using. Later, teachers ask them whether the prompts are helpful or not in comprehending a text.

Indicators of reading comprehension of narrative texts	Explanation of the questions
Stated details	Detail information of the story that is stated in the text
Implied details	Information from the story that is not stated in the text, the students should understand the story to get implied meaning.
Reference word	Reference word to refer some characters from the text
Vocabulary in context	Understanding the vocabulary from the context, it can be synonym or antonym of the word.
Language features	Understanding the correct language features that are used in narrative text, for example the using of simple past tense and past continuous tense.
Generic structure	Finding information from each generic structure of narrative text, including introduction, complication and resolution.

Table. 1 Indicator of reading comprehension of narrative text

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results

After being taught by implementing the talk-to-the-text strategy in eight time meetings, the students were given a post-test to check their comprehension about reading narrative

texts. The distribution of the post-test scores can be seen in table 2.

The data show the scores from both the experimental and control classes. These scores imply students of the experimental class have higher scores than students of the control class. It can be seen from both mean scores, where

the mean of experimental class is 66.6 and the mean of control class is 56.2. Thus, the difference of both means is 10.4 and in other words it shows that the experimental class performs better than the control class. Based on table 1, in 8A or control class, there are only 4 students who pass the standard score or 70, whereas in 8B or experimental class, 14 students pass the standard score.

The result of hypothesis testing showed that $t_{observed} = 2.99$ and the critical value of

t_{table} at $\alpha = .05$ by $df = 40$ of 1.68. Since the calculated value of t is larger than the critical value, $t_o > t_t$ or $2.99 > 1.68$, it can be concluded that experimental group performed better than control group in answering the comprehension test given. When $t_o > t_t$, it means the alternative hypothesis (H_1) was accepted and the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected. Therefore, it can be said that Talk-to-the-text strategy gives better effects on grade eight students' reading comprehension of narrative texts.

8A		8B	
Score range	Frequency	Score range	Frequency
30-39	1	30-39	0
40-49	5	40-49	3
50-59	9	50-59	3
60-69	6	60-69	5
70-79	2	70-79	10
80-89	2	80-89	4
90-100	0	90-100	10
Total	25	Total	25
Mean score	56.2	Mean score	66.6
Total score	1405	Total	1665

Table. 2 Score distribution from both samples

Discussion

Based on the results, the two groups have different reading ability as reflected by the mean of scores. The experimental group taught by applying talk-to-the-text strategy has a higher mean score than the control group which was taught by applying retelling strategy. In other words, talk-to-the-text is a better strategy than the one used in the school; in this case, it is the retelling strategy.

The difference is caused by the success of talk-to-the-text strategy gaining students' interest in reading. In applying talk-to-the-text strategy, the teacher gave students sticky notes and asked them to write responses. Based on the researcher's observation in the field, the students were attracted to write on sticky notes. Using sticky notes increased students' participation while reading. Although not all of their

writings were about what prompts of talk-to-the-text strategy are, at least they had written their own thoughts about what they read. Writing on sticky notes seems an activity that demands students not only to read a text fast, but also to find essential information from the text.

This opinion also confirms the result of Zwyca and Gomez's study (2008) about "Annotating to Support learning in the content areas: Teaching and learning science" that supported writing activity while reading. In annotating strategy, students are also demanded to find the essential information from the text by marking up or highlighting the text. The finding of this research showed that annotating was correlated with students' comprehension. In a nutshell, writing activity while reading is one of the factors why Talk-to-the-text strategy performed better than retelling strategy.

Likewise, the use of prompts helped students to understand the narrative-text structure from the text. Narrative-text structure actually is a set of elements in the story. They are characters, setting, events, conflict and resolution. The prompts actually deal with cognitive strategy questions by applying question words (5W1H), making connection, summarizing, and visualizing the story in a text (O'Malley and Chamot, 1987). They guided students to know what they should find in the text and what kind of answers they should write in sticky notes as their responses. Although all of prompts were written in the sticky notes, at least the students had been trained to be a strategic reader while they were given a reading test. They would focus on the elements of the text to find the essential information by using prompts.

On the other side, retelling strategy is a good one. This strategy requires the students to reconstruct or retell what they have read in order to comprehend it. Unfortunately, if the students are asked to retell a text in front of the class, not all of the students are able to speak English fluently and accurately. Even though they are helped by the questions from the teacher while they get stuck about the story, not all of students are good in English. In some cases, a student understood what a text was about but he had difficulty in retelling to others. In another case, a student only focused on how to retell accurately without comprehending what the text is.

Based the explanations and the result of hypothesis testing, it can be concluded that talk-to-the-text strategy can be an optional strategy applied by teachers and students in teaching and learning reading narrative text. Though there is no best strategy applied in the classroom, but at least variation of the strategy will be beneficial effect on students' reading skill development. They may experience with different reading strategies and be able to recall each of them anytime they need. Moreover, the data showed students tended to be motivated in using sticky notes. Further, the statistical analysis indicated this strategy was effective. Briefly saying, this strategy has fulfilled

the requirements of good strategies that they should meet the conditions that make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations (Oxford, 2003).

Conclusions and Suggestions

The finding of the research by testing the hypothesis shows that the alternative hypothesis (H1) was accepted and the null hypothesis (H0) was rejected. Based on the data analysis in the previous chapter, it can be concluded that talk-to-the-text strategy gave better effects on comprehension of grade eight students at SMP N 17 Bintan when reading narrative texts.

The researcher also found that by applying talk-to-the-text strategy in the classroom, it could gain students' interest. Further, the prompt that was used in Talk-to-the-text strategy could help students to be more focused on the essential information from the text. The use of sticky notes in talk-to-the-text strategy could be used as sources to make a discussion about the text.

Furthermore, the result suggests English teachers to apply talk-to-the-text strategy as reading strategy for students in reading, especially narrative text to help them focus on essential information from the text. Further, it is also expected that in applying talk-to-the-text strategy, students need more time to be familiar with the strategy. Thus, this is teachers' role to give more practice time to make this strategy becomes an effective one. For other researchers, since talk-to-the-text strategy can be applied in different genres, it is suggested to research other text genres to help students in comprehending texts since for narrative text this strategy has been successful to give effects on students' reading comprehension.

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