

TEACHING READING SKILLS IN IAIN SULTAN AMAI GORONTALO

Jhems Richard Hasan
Institut Agama Islam Negeri Sultan Amai Gorontalo

ABSTRAK

The importance of reading in IAIN Sultan Amai Gorontalo cannot be denied. To make the students fit nationally and internationally, their reading skills must be of an advanced level. If reading skills are improved, learners will be able to utilize maximum resources for acquiring knowledge and information, and it will change the whole educational scenario of the Institute. So, the present study on 'An Evaluation of the Teaching of Reading Skills in IAIN Sultan Amai Gorontalo' is of great importance. Considering the importance of this research, some attempts should be done in minimizing the problems faced by students and improving the implementation of the teaching of reading for the sake of the development of students' reading skill and pedagogy in IAIN Sultan Amai Gorontalo. Therefore, further research in this field is highly recommended.

Key Word: Teaching, Reading, Skills

A. Introduction

English Language Teaching methodology has developed very hurriedly and has been issued to changes and controversies. Communicative approach to teaching and learning English has been a significant development; at present, it is used worldwide in teaching and learning English, especially, in EFL and ESL situations. Instead of grammar-based approach, practice-based learning is considered important in recent theoretical approaches. This practice covers training of all four basic skills- listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Success of the teaching of English through communicative approach depends entirely on the practice of these skills. Among the major skills, teaching of reading has a significant place in IAIN Sultan Amai Gorontalo as it is still very important for higher education. Teaching of reading, therefore, needs special attention from the experts and professionals for a meaningful higher education in the country. Students' proficiency of reading English is very poor here. A large majority of students at the undergraduate level in our Institute cannot access English textbooks prescribed in their syllabus for their lack of required proficiency of reading skills in English. Therefore, they depend only on Lecturers books, and the vast resources in the libraries being in English remain

unutilized. As a result, in most cases, higher education in this Campus suffers miserably; it falls far below the international standard.

Though students do some reading in school, they prefer memorizing things–words from dictionaries, sentences from various books, and rules of grammar from different grammar books.

Reading component of English course in the Institute focuses on understanding word meaning and answering specific questions which students mostly get done by private tutors or at coaching canter. At no stage of the whole education system, students are encouraged to process the information from texts by themselves through an intellectual engagement, analysis and interpretation of the text. Reading is not taught properly in scientific methods. Teachers also do not have necessary training for that. Greenwood rightly points out that teachers fail to recognize the potentiality of reading, and they neglect and/or ignore it in the classroom. According to him, the responsibility of this failure goes to the attitude first of the teacher and then of the students.¹

The most acknowledged cause of failure of the students in effective reading is the lack of vocabulary. Many students inspired by friends or guided by teachers sometimes try to read a book but soon they lose the eagerness and interest with which they start reading the text. In every paragraph, or even in every sentence, or every phrase they come across some new words, which create a constant barrier for them to understand the meaning. Sometimes, they do not understand long sentences, and they miss the links between parts of a text. As a result, they lose their patience and their interest, and they give up reading. Sometimes they may feel inspired to look up the words in the dictionaries, but checking the dictionary too many times proves boring, and at last, their enthusiasm for reading the text dies down.

There are some other problems that discourage the students to continue reading a text. Most students fail to understand the syntax, especially when the sentence structures are long. They also have problems with understanding text organization.

B. The problems faced by students in reading lesson

Based on the result found in the data collection, there are four categories of students' mean score from the answer of 15 question on the survey. The categories are determined based on the range of mean score achieved from the survey. The categories are very high, high, medium, and low. The 'highest' and 'high' categories of mean score mean that the level of difficulties of the question is high and it can potentially be the main problem

¹ Greenwood, *Class Readers*, (Hongkong: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.

faced by students in reading. Those categories can be seen from the following two tables (Table 1 and Table 2).

Table 1. ‘Highest’ Mean Score on Students Survey.

No	Questions	Result	
		Mean	SD
1	Apakah anda dapat memahami maksud tersirat penulis dalam sebuah text yg and baca?	4.08	0.98

Table 1 shows the question with the highest score on the students answer mean score. With that questions students are asked whether they understood the unstated statement of the writer of the text. Students found this very difficult. The rationale that can be given to this is that the participants of this survey are not English Department students; therefore, their mastery of vocabulary is considerably limited. They even found it difficult to understand the word by word meaning, not to mention understanding the unstated meaning. Understanding unstated meaning requires a certain level of language mastery. Thus, when the participants with no English language background considered this as something very difficult to do, it can be considered normal. However, this difficulty can be highlighted as a potential problem to be addressed in teaching reading. Teacher should actively encourage students to think critically and increase their vocabulary mastery in order to understand any unstated statement they will find in an English text.

Table 2. ‘High’ Mean Score on Students Survey.

No	Questions	Result	
		Mean	SD
1	Pada saat membaca suatu text, apakah anda mampu menebak arti dari kata-kata yang tidak di mengerti dengan menggunakan petunjuk yg ada?	3.71	0.93

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2	Apakah anda mampu mengingat kembali pengalaman atau pengetahuan yang relevan pada saat anda membaca sebuah text?	3.53	0.79
3	Apakah anda bisa membaca sebuah text panjang untuk mendapatkan ide umum tentang text tersebut?	3.82	0.98
4	Apakah anda bisa menggunakan pengalaman dan pengetahuan awal anda untuk memahami suatu text?	3.62	0.56
5	Apakah anda bisa menganalisis Text yang Panjang?	3.90	0.95
6	Apakah anda bisa menemukan oganisasi suatu text?	3.45	0.64
7	Apakah anda bisa mengikuti perpindahan ide dari penulis?	3.42	0.64

Table 2 shows 7 questions that considered difficult by the participants. The table shows that the most participants found it difficult to deal with a long text. Analyzing a long text, and even only to find a general idea of the text appeared to be a problem for the students.

Besides the problem that deals with long text, students are also faced a difficulty in using or recalling their previous experience or background knowledge to help them understand the reading text. This problem should be adequately addressed because efficiency of a reader is largely depends of the previous knowledge and sufficient experience about facts and events in a real life. A reader's knowledge and experience are significant in manipulating the meaning of a text because they are influential.

Students or the participants of this research also assert that they have problem understanding the authors' transition of ideas in a text. This can be considered as a problem because it will prevent students from active reading. Reading is an active and alert thinking process "where reader matches the writer

thought for thought”² Shaw further argues that reading is “thinking with the author, absorbing his ideas”.³

Table 3. Medium ‘Mean’ Score on Students Questionnaire.

No	Questions	Result	
		Mean	SD
1	Apakah anda bisa menemukan informasi hanya dengan melihat index atau daftar isi?	2.29	0.69
2	Apakah anda bisa cepat menemukan informasi khusus yang ditentukan dalam sebuah text?	2.43	0.64
3	Apakah anda bisa memprediksi ide/gagasan berikut setelah text yang anda baca?	2.92	0.72
4	Apakah anda dapat membaca cermat untuk mengetahui lebih detail tentang informasi sebuah text?	2.73	0.70
5	Apakah anda bisa menjawab pertanyaan dalam bahasa Inggris?	2.94	0.89

The table shows that some students are able to locate specific information on the text just by looking at the book index or table of content. Even though not all students considered this easy to do, the mean score and the standard deviation shows that some of them did not face any difficulties in locating the specific information they need from the text. The table also shows that students did not have problem predicting what come next in the text, it can be seen from the mean score and standard deviation that can be categorized medium; however, this can also mean that some students still considered it

² Rauch, S.J. and Weinstein, A.B. *Mastering Reading Skills*. (New York: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1968), p. 70

³ Shaw, H. *Expository Reading for Writers*. (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1959), p. viii

difficult predicting what come next in the text. We think that this problem is not a major problem to be addressed; conducting a remedial for the specific students can be done to overcome this problem.

Interestingly, the participants in this research did not state that answering the questions in English become a major difficulty for them, although they are not students who majoring English Education in IAIN Sultan Amai Gorontalo. This phenomenon can probably emerged from the fact that in answering a question of a reading text, students are usually find the key words from the text then copy the whole sentence from the text as their answer. So, even though the mean score and standard deviation still confirm that some students might still considered this as a problem, it is not a major problem to be concerned in developing students' reading pedagogy.

Table 4. Low 'Mean' Score on Students Questionnaire.

No	Questions	Result	
		Mean	SD
1	Apakah anda bisa menentukan judul dari sebuah tulisan/wacana?	1.77	0.60
2	Apakah anda bisa menemukan ide utama dari sebuah text?	1.55	0.55

The mean score and standard deviation shows in table 4 shows that students have already acquired the skill of determining a title of a text and finding main ideas of a text. Thus, these two skills are not considered a problem for them.

Besides the affirmentions problems, there are five other light problems that emerged from the survey. We called this light because based on the result of the survey, the number of participants who considered these as problems is not a majority number. Therefore, even thought it still requires a proper solution, the problems are not as urgent as the six problems mentioned before. Those problems are arranged based on the level of difficulties started from number 1 and so on:

1. Answering the question in English
2. Predicting what come next in a text
3. Reading closely to find the detailed information in a text
4. Finding fast the specific and detailed information in a text
5. Guessing unfamiliar words/vocabulary using clues.

It is important to bear in mind that those five problems are not considered problems for some other participants in this research, therefore specific treatment needed to solve the problem for students who considered these as problems.

C. Teachers’ implementation of the Teaching of Reading

The implementation of the teaching of reading in IAIN Sultan Amai can be categorized into three classes. It is determined from the data given at the previous part of this research. The required implementation of teaching reading has been formulated into 16 questions given to the participant to evaluate their reading teachers’ performance in teaching reading.

We design those 16 questions based on three major approaches suggested by Ransom that includes basal reading program, individualized reading and management system. Thus, teachers who often or even always conducting the steps and activities presented in the questions are considered credible and implement a well designed strategies and methods in teaching reading.⁴

The result we find in this research indicated three categories of teachers’ implementation in their teaching of reading. The category ‘bad’ shows that teachers are rarely or never conduct the activities; ‘fair’ category means teachers are only sometimes conducting the activities, while ‘good’ category means teachers often or always conducting the activities during their teaching of reading.

The following table (Table 5) shows the questions with the mean score and standard deviation of the students’ answers on the questions.

Table 5. ‘Bad’ Category the implementation of The Teaching of Reading

No	Pertanyaan	Mean	SD
1	Does your teacher point out your problems regarding reading? Apakah dosen anda memberi tahu masalah anda terkait dengan Reading?	4.19	0.59

⁴ Ransom, G.A. *Preparing to Teach Reading*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1978), p.43

2	Does your teacher divide reading lesson into pre-reading, while- reading and post-reading activities? Apakah dosen anda membagi pelajaran tentang Reading kedalam aktivitas: Pra-Reading, Proses Reading, dan Post reading?	3.97	0.9
3	Does your teacher ask you to read additional materials (stories, novels, magazines etc. written in English) at home also? Apakah dosen meminta anda membaca materi materi tambahan seperti (buku cerita, novel, majalah dll yang berbahasa Inggris) di rumah?	3.43	0.64
4	Is your teacher an active partner in reading activities? Apakah dosen anda adalah partner yang aktif pada kegiatan membaca (reading) di kelas?	3.4	0.82
5	Does your teacher encourage you to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words by using contextual clues? Apakah dosen anda mendorong/mengarahkan anda untuk menebak kata kata yang tidak dimengerti dengan petunjuk-petunjuk kontekstual?	3.4	0.67
6	Does your teacher make sure that each of you reads in the class? Apakah dosen anda memastikan setiap mahasiswanya membaca di dalam kelas?	3.21	0.66

The table shows that most students who are the participants of this research claim that their teachers are rarely or even never point out the problems the students faced in their reading. This becomes a major concern because students need to have feedback from teachers about their weaknesses that becomes a problem for them especially in reading. By pointing out their problems, students would have an opportunity to seek solution to the problems, otherwise they will stuck on the problems without knowing that it is needed to be overcome.

The result of this research is also found that teachers are rarely or even never divide their reading lesson into pre-reading, while- reading and post-reading activities. Dividing lessons into pre-, while, and post- reading is

important to be conducted because it cannot be denied that students have limited language mastery, forcing them to read a text without pre-reading activity will make them lost and hard understand the text. Reading is not only looking at the flow of sentences and words but also recognizing and understanding it intellectually. Moreover, a ‘complete reading’ involves four steps: recognition of written symbols, understanding reading and integration of the whole process⁵. Thus, dividing a lesson into several activities during the lesson will help students to achieve ‘complete reading’.

Another result from the survey is that teachers rarely ask students to read additional materials such as stories, novels, magazines etc. written in English at home. Encouraging students to read additional materials they like to read such as stories, novels, magazines, etc. is appropriate as far as foreign language learning concerned. Students will find pleasure from reading the text. The intention for seeking pleasure from a text will lead students towards better understanding and enrich their vocabulary, and in turn will help them develop their reading skill in ESL or EFL.⁶ The role of teachers in the class will bring a great impact on students’ development of their reading skill. This research indicates that teachers, in general, are rarely actively engaged and become an active partner in the reading lesson activity. They rarely encourage students to guess unfamiliar words from the context of the sentences in the text, and do not have a full control to make sure that every student in the class to read.

Apart from the activities that rarely conducted by teachers in reading lesson, this research also found that teachers sometimes conducting the following activities presented in Table 6.

Table. 6 ‘Fair’ Category of the Implementation of the Teaching of Reading

No	Pertanyaan	Mean	SD
1	Does your teacher arrange the class in groups/pairs in order to find meaning of texts through discussion? Apakah dosen anda mengelola kelas dengan membentuk kelompok/pasangan agar setiap mahasiswa dapat memahami teks melalui diskusi?	2.79	0.64

⁵ Dechant, E.V, *Improving the Teaching of Reading*, (New Delhi: Prentice-Hall of India Private Limited, 1982), p.335

⁶Eagleton, T. *Literary Theory: an Introduction*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd. 1996), p. 29

2	Does your teacher encourage you to consult dictionary when you come across unfamiliar words during reading? Apakah dosen mendorong anda untuk memanfaatkan kamus ketika mengalami kesulitan dengan kata kata asing pada saat membaca?	2.71	0.56
3	Does your teacher encourage you to read by yourselves? Apakah dosen anda mendorong anda untuk membaca sendiri?	2.55	0.85
4	Does your teacher guide you how to read texts in the class? Apakah dosen anda memandu mahasiswanya bagaimana membaca (reading) di dalam kelas?	2.49	0.82
5	Does your teacher allow you to read in the class? Apakah dosen anda mengizinkan anda untuk membaca di dalam kelas?	2.35	0.89

The table presents the data found in this research related to the activities that sometimes conducted by teachers according to the students or the participants' answers to the above questions.

The table is clearly shows that teachers sometimes arrange the class in groups/pairs in order to find meaning of texts through discussion. This activity will help students to brainstorm their understanding of the text which is in turn will help them building their individual reading skill.

Managing the classroom activities is equally important compared to the role of teachers in the classroom. This research found that teachers sometimes encourage, guide, and allow the students to read in the class. Argues that a student should read individually based on his/her own interest and rate, because the purpose and speed of each student are not similar. The role of teacher to encourage, and to lead each individual is significant.

The class management and role of teachers that has been discussed previously are significant; therefore, it is recommended that teachers should do the activities more often from just being sometimes conducting it.

This research also indicates that teachers often or always conducted some activities in their teaching of reading. Those activities can be clearly seen in the following table (Table 7).

Table 7. ‘Good’ Category of the Implementation of the Teaching of Reading

No	Questions	Mean	SD
1	Does your teacher read the text himself/herself, and then explain and interpret it to you? Apakah dosen anda membaca sendiri teks dan kemudian mengartikan dan menjelaskan kepada mahasiswanya?	1.87	0.75
2	Does your teacher read out the text first and then let you read and explain/interpret it? Apakah dosen anda membacakan teks terlebih dahulu dan lalu menyuruh mahasiswanya membaca dan menjelaskan/mengartikan teks tersebut?	1.81	0.59
3	Does your teacher explain the background of the text before you start reading lesson? Apakah dosen anda menjelas latar belakang dari teks sebelum anda mulai membaca materi ‘reading’?	1.75	0.76
4	Does your teacher ask you questions to check comprehension after each reading? Apakah dosen anda meminta mahasiswanya untuk mengecek pemahaman anda melalui pertanyaan setelah membaca teks?	1.52	0.64
5	When you come across a new word, does your teacher help you by supplying the meaning of the word? Jika anda menemukan kata kata baru dalam teks, apakah dosen membantu anda memberitahu arti kata kata tersebut?	1.38	0.61

Significant findings of this research are shown in table 10 above. First, The table shows that teachers almost always help students by giving the meaning of the new words when the students come across some of it. In terms of saving time, this strategy can be effective, however, if it is aimed to develop students’ reading skill, then this strategy should be given a second thought.

Students should be able to find the meaning of the new word based on the context of the text, because discovering the intended meaning of the text

should be the purpose of the teaching of reading.⁷ Thus, instead of directly supplying and giving the meaning right away, teacher should be better encourage and guide students to find the meaning. This will help them develop their language and improving their understanding the power of meaning the text conveys. Checking students' comprehension is equally significant to do in teaching of reading. It is found in this research that teachers often or even always check students' comprehension of the reading text under focus by asking them several questions.

Another significant finding is that teachers often or always explain the background of the text before starting reading lesson; read out the text first and then let students read and explain/interpret it; and teacher read the text himself/herself, and then explain and interpret it to students. These can be found in table7, question 2, 10, and 11. These steps are in line with one of the steps in Ransom's Basal Reading Program.⁸ The step is the introductory. Giving introductory, such us explaining the background of the text or read out the text first then explain it to students will help students set the purposes.

D. Conclusions

To sum up, based on the survey result and the discussion at the previous chapter, it can be concluded that the problems faced by students in developing their reading skill are as follow (the level of difficulties is arranged based on the order of the number, started from number 1 as a major problem, and so on):

1. Dealing with long text. They found it difficult to find a general idea of a long text.
2. Analyzing a long text.
3. Guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words/vocabularies by using clues.
4. Using or recalling their previous experience or background knowledge to help them understand a reading text.
5. Students have problem to understand the organization of a text.
6. Understanding the authors' transition of ideas in a text.

These six problems require adequate solutions to help students develop their reading skill.

The research is also found that teachers in IAIN Sultan Amai Gorontalo has already implemented some activities such as:

⁷ Shahidullah, M. "Basic Paradigms of English Language Teaching and Their Limitations" in *Gabeshana Patrika (Research Journal)*. Vol: 4, (Rajshahi: Uttara Offset Printing Press, 1995). pp. 241-54.

⁸ Ransom, G.A. *Preparing to Teach Reading*. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company. 1978), p. 57

1. Helping students by giving the meaning of the new words when the students come across some of it.
2. Explain the background of the text before starting reading lesson.
3. Reading out the text first and then let students read and explain/interpret it.
4. Reading the text himself/herself, and then explain and interpret it to students.

Teachers has also sometimes implemented some activities such as arranging the class in groups/pairs in order to find meaning of texts through discussion; encouraging, guiding, and allowing the students to read in the class.

On the other hand, this research found that there are some activities that rarely or even have never been conducted by teacher in their teaching of reading. Those are:

1. Pointing out the problems the students faced in their reading.
2. Dividing their reading lesson into pre-reading, while- reading and post-reading activities.
3. Asking students to read additional materials such as stories, novels, magazines etc.
4. Actively engaging and becoming an active partner in the reading lesson activity.
5. Encouraging students to guess unfamiliar words from the context of the sentences in the text.
6. Did not have a full control to make sure that every student in the class to read.

In conclusion, all activities that have never been or rarely conducted should be of our concern. Teachers should be encouraged to implement them in their reading instructions.

E. Recommendation

Like other EFL/ESL contexts, it is very important for IAIN Sultan Amai Gorontalo to produce graduates of an international standard in today's globalized world; it is necessary to improve students' reading proficiency in English for that. Though it will take time to bring about changes in the present state of teaching and learning reading skills, it is not altogether impossible. If recent pedagogical approaches are used, if proper materials and tests are designed, the situation will improve significantly. This study, therefore, will prove very useful for the students.

The importance of reading in IAIN Sultan Amai Gorontalo cannot be denied. To make the students fit nationally and internationally, their reading skills must be of an advanced level. If reading skills are improved, learners will be able to utilize maximum resources for acquiring knowledge and information, and it will change the whole educational scenario of the Institute. So, the

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Considering the importance of this research, some attempts should be done in minimizing the problems faced by students and improving the implementation of the teaching of reading for the sake of the development of students’ reading skill and pedagogy in IAIN Sultan Amai Gorontalo. Therefore, further research in this field is highly recommended.

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