

Reading Journal as a Way to Improve Students' Reading Comprehension

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Abstract

Reading journal is one way to record students' independent learning based on text they read. This study was conducted to find out the students' level of reading comprehension through some notes written in the reading journal, the extent to which the activity of writing reading journals improved students' reading comprehension, whether the students got benefit from reading journal. There were 80 respondents coming from three different classes in Majalengka University were asked to read a text related to the subject they learned in a certain session. Then they were assigned to write a journal that records the things they had read. When this task was finished, the lecturer ran a quiz containing related questions to check whether they really understood the content of the text. Afterwards, students were to fill in a questionnaire regarding their opinion on the impact of the reading journal toward their reading comprehension. The findings indicate that more than half of the participants appear to understand the material well, and the task plays a certain role in improving students' understanding in reading comprehension. The most crucial thing is that most students think they get benefit by writing the reading journal.

Keywords: *reading journal, writing, reading comprehension*

INTRODUCTION

Textbook reading comprehension is critical in the individual educational successes. Without adequate textbook reading comprehension, students may struggle in many subject areas. Subjects, other than reading comprehension, where comprehension is significantly important, include science, social studies, programming, and many more. In the area of science, culture, and social studies, research indicates that many students lack of prior knowledge and reading strategies to generate inferences; thus, the students

comprehend the textbook poorly. It is also found that students lack of specific reading strategies to generate inferences that aid in the understanding of texts. (McNamara, 2004) In relation to university students' ability in comprehending the content of a textbook, educators need to provide instructions as well as tools to improve their students' comprehension ability, since the research indicates that reading comprehension plays an important role in increasing academic achievement and in gaining problem solving ability as well. Talking about tools that are used in

gaining students' textbook reading comprehension ability, research shows that some various tools can be applied, such as reading and vocabulary inventory, qualitative reading inventory and reading journal. Reading journal itself is one method that lecturers can use to improve students' textbook reading comprehension ability. The use of reading journals may bring students' academic attainment to meet the standard competencies, and students will ultimately perform better in their academic work where reading plays a primary role. This study tries to explore the effects of reading journals toward the comprehension of a textbook material. Journal writing/learning logs/reading response logs is a process that allows learners to move between low and high levels of reasoning (Murray, 1990). Journal writing belongs to writing for learning which internalizes the information that the students are trying to learn and allow the students to become active participants in their own. Furthermore, journal writing is one way to promote metacognitive development, making the students aware of what they do not know (Rowan, 1990). Vacca and Vacca (1999) stated when teachers integrate writing and reading, they help students use writing to think about what they will read and to understand what they have read. McIntosh

and Draper (2001) added that learning logs take neither a great deal of time nor much class time, but they have tremendous value for teachers and students. In relation to the reading activity, composing a journal is a very motivational instrument when utilized as a part of the activity that it makes a student read with a reason subsequently focusing on a deeper level of perception.

Reading journal is designed to aid students with critical reading skills. It means active and skillful conceptualizing, applying, synthesizing and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experiences, reflection, reasoning or communication as a guide to belief and action (Scriven & Paul, 1996). They allow the students to admit confusion, to ask questions, to make connections and to read with attention (Wilson, 1989). The journal gives students a place to record their thoughts, feelings and reactions to the text they are reading. Students use the reading journal to record questions about the text as well as responses to it. When there is a purpose for reading, the students become more critical, thus improving their textbook reading comprehension (Wilson, 1989). As students read to eliminate their confusion and develop their comprehension, they begin to make connections between

passages of the text and their own experiences.

Bean (1996) encourages creating reading logs to make students interact with texts. He mentioned that students can summarize the text, connect it to personal experience, argue with it, and evaluate it. Writing a reading journal make students to grope, wrestle with confusion on their own and they often make surprising discoveries (Wilson, 1989). Furthermore, Wilson (1989) stated that reading journal allows students to pause and mull and ponder, then it slows them down and encourages them to pay attention to the slow unfolding of a work of a textbook. It creates readers.

REVIEW OF RELATED THEORIES

RESEARCH METHOD

The participants of this research are 80 students from three departments in Majalengka University. They are 30 students of Bahasa Indonesia Department, 30 students of PJKR Department, 20 students of English Department. There are three instruments used in the research: reading journal, quiz, and questionnaire. First, the students are assigned to read a text at home. This text is supposed to be discussed in the classroom in the following week. After reading the text, they are

asked to write a journal that reports things they have read.

This reading journal consists of five items: those are title of the text, a short summary of the text, things the students have learned: new vocabularies/terms and knowledge, comments or opinion: Students' own comment or opinion toward the content of the text, and questions arise: Students might ask questions regarding their understanding toward the content of the text. To make sure their real understanding, the students have to do a simple quiz related to the text material they read. The result of the quiz supports the result of writing the reading journal, with regard to the improvement of the students' comprehension toward textbook reading materials.

In addition, after the activity of reading journal is finished and the lecturer has already held a quiz, the students are asked to fill in a questionnaire which is distributed in order to know their opinion toward the activity of writing a reading journal. Several questions regarding students' understanding and journal's function are asked. The questions use Indonesian language since the respondents coming from the two departments are not of English Department.

1. Menurut Anda, apakah penulisan "reading journal" secara keseluruhan

bermanfaat untuk menunjang proses pembelajaran?

(Do you think that writing a “reading journal” is generally useful to support the learning process?).

2. Apakah seluruh konsep dan istilah yang ada dalam bacaan yang ditugaskan kepada Anda dapat dipahami?

(Can the whole concepts and terms in the assigned reading be understood?)

3. Kalau jawaban atas pertanyaan no.3 di atas adalah “tidak”, apakah Anda menyiapkan pertanyaan yang berkaitan dengan hal itu untuk diajukan kepada dosen pada saat kuliah?

(If the answer to question number 3 is “No”, do you prepare the related questions to be submitted to the lecturer in the class session?)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The evaluation of the reading journal is based on the overall comprehension that the students get after reading a text, which is categorized into three: good, fair, and poor. Afterwards, to ensure whether they really understand the text, their general comprehension written in the journal is compared to the result of the quiz. This quiz result is also categorized into three: good—if the score is above or equals to 80, fair—if the score

is ranged from 70 to 79, and poor—if the score is below 70.

Furthermore, to know the students' opinion toward the journal writing, whether it is useful for them, the result of the questionnaire is also analyzed as seen in Table 2. The table describes the result of the journal shown by the students of Pjkr as well as their quiz scores.

Out of 30 students of Pjkr Department, 22 of them have written their journal quite well, 7 students have done it fairly, and only 1 student has performed poorly. It means that 73,3% of them comprehend the text quite well, 23,3% do it fairly, and only 3,3% does it poorly. However, the result of the quiz does not always prove exactly the same. In other classes 13 students (43,3%) have performed well in the quiz, meaning that they have got score above or equals to 80. The rest of them, 17 students (56,7%), have achieved scores between 70 and 79, meaning that they perform fairly in the quiz. Interestingly, no student performs poorly in the quiz. Compared to the result of the reading journals, these numbers do not prove the assumption that those who write their reading journal well will also perform well in the quiz. There is a decrease as many as 40,1% in the quiz in the good category (9 from 22).

Accordingly, an improvement of 42,9% is shown in the fair category.

Out of 30 students of Bahasa Indonesia Department, 22 of them (73,3%) show good comprehension in their reading journal and the rest (8 students or 26,7%) have comprehended the assigned reading fairly. Surprisingly, no student has written the journal poorly. However, the quiz scores do not always prove the same. There are 20 students in English department there are 5 students (45,5%) who have well comprehended the assigned reading, while 5 students (45,5%) have written their journal fairly and only 1 student (9%) has comprehended the reading poorly. There are 8 students (72,7%) who have performed well in the quiz, while there is only 1 student (9%) who shows his/her average performance, and two students (18,2%) have performed poorly in the quiz. These numbers suggest that there is an improvement in the good category (100%). Consequently, the number of those who have performed fairly in the quiz has decreased as many as 80% (4 from 5). Unfortunately, the number of those who shows their poor performance has doubled 100% (1 from 1).

From explanation above, it can be seen that from three department above show improvement in the good category. It means that in these departments, the

number of students who perform well in the quiz has increased as compared to the whole results of the journals. Correspondingly, the number of students who has performed fairly in these departments has decreased. However, there are two departments whose students are of poor category show improvement also. In other words, the number of students in this category has decreased, and one department has no student to perform poorly.

After the reading journal is assigned and the quiz is held, students are then asked to fill in a questionnaire which contains five questions. The analysis toward the answers of these questions is conducted apart from the analysis of the journal results and quiz scores. The answers are analyzed to find out whether or not the reading journal is useful for the students.

CONCLUSION

From three departments—Bahasa Indonesia Department, Pjkr Department and Department of English Language, it is found that 58,7% students in average have achieved good category resulted from the journal they have written. In other words, more than half of the participants appear to comprehend the assigned reading well. Meanwhile, 27,9% of the participants are

of fair category and only 13,4% of them do not comprehend the assigned reading well.

It is also found that from three departments, one departments –English – show improvement in the quiz scores, which is in the good category. In these departments, the number of students who perform well in the quiz has increased 49% in average as compared to the whole results of the reading journals in the same category. Correspondingly, in these departments the number of students who has shown fair performance has decreased 57% in average.

Furthermore, it is crucial to find that 88% of the students think that the task of writing the reading journal helps them understand the whole idea of the assigned reading text. Even though the effect of writing a reading journal is not very significant toward the improvement of students' understanding toward a text, the questionnaire results suggest that most students agree with the usefulness of this activity.

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