IMPROVING STUDENTS' READING SKILL THROUGH

NUMBERED HEADS TOGETHER TECHNIQUE

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Abstract

This thesis is written to: (1) identify whether the use of Numbered Heads Together (NHT) can improve students'reading skill', and (2) describe the class situation when the teacher implements Numbered Heads Together (NHT) in reading activity. The research was conducted from March 15th 2012 until July 5th 2012 at the eight grade of SMP Purnama 2 Surakarta. The research was conducted in two cycles, in which in the there were three meetings in the first and second cycle. Every cycle consisted of four steps: planning, implementing, observation, and reflection. The research data were collected by using qualitative and quantitative method. The qualitative method consisted of observation, questionnaire, field notes, and interview. Meanwhile,a test used in the technique of collecting data used quantitative method. The qualitative data were analyzed in five stages consisting of assembling the data, coding the data, comparing the data, building interpretations, and reporting the outcomes. The quantitative data were analyzed by comparing the mean scores of the pre-test and the post-test. The results of the research show that Numbered Heads Together technique can improve students' reading skill and class situation.

Keywords: reading, reading skill, numbered heads together

Nowadays, English becomes the most important language to learn because it is the common language used in international communication. No language is more broadly studied and applied as foreign language than English. People may see the increasing need for teaching English in Indonesia because of its wide spread use in various fields in facing the globalization such as education and information. Related with those fields, we can see the proof of it through a number of international seminar, talk shows, and workshops held throughout the world, certainly the speaker will use English in their topic.

Indonesia is one of many countries that place English as one of important languages that has to be taught in the educational system. It becomes one of subject matter in schools, especially in Junior and

Senior High School. Students are obliged to learn English because it is stated in the National Education curriculum and one of important factors that influence their graduation. English has to be mastered by many students.

Reading is major way to learn English. It means many things to people, and it is not simple. It is not only the activity of pronouncing the printed materials or following each line of written pages carefully. Realizing the importance of reading, we have to look for the nature of reading based on some definitions. Nuttal (1996: 4 & 7) defines reading as a way to get meaning (message) from a text. In other words, it presents about the process of communication, as the sender encodes a message in a text, which is in turn decoded by the receiver. In relation to what Nuttal says, Grabe (1991) in Phan (2006: 1) states that reading is not merely a receptive process of picking up information from the page in a word-by-word manner.

Meanwhile, Aebersold and field (1997: 15) give their opinion in defining reading as follows:

"In general sense, reading is what happens when people look at a text and assign meaning to the written symbols in that text. The text and the reader are the two physical entities necessary for the reading process to begin. It is however, the interaction between the text and the reader that constitutes actual reading. Granted, the meaning the reader gets from the text may not be exactly the same as the meaning the writer of the text wished to convey."

Aebersold and Field believe that the interaction process also involves between the text and the readers when they try to look for the meaning of the text. The similar definition is stated by Nunan (1998: 33) that reading is a process of decoding written symbols, working from smaller unit (individual letters) to larger ones (words, clauses, and sentences).

According to Wallace (1996: 4), reading is as interpreting; it means reacting to a written text as a piece of communication. Then, Grellet (1998: 7) defines reading as a constant process of guessing, and what one brings to the text is more important than one finds it. Further, Grellet states that reading is an active skill that constantly involves guessing, predicting, checking, and asking oneself question.

Skill is defined as ability to perform a task or activity consistently over period of time (Glossary, 2010). The expertise required for a particular task or occupation may include manual

dexterity and manual aptitude. It is also stated in Encharta dictionary (2009) that skill is the ability to do something well, usually gained through training or experience. Thus, having skills in reading helps learners in accomplishing a task. Moreover, reading skill is defined as specific abilities which enable a reader:

1) To read the written form as meaningful language
2) To read anything written with independence, comprehension and fluency
3) To mentally interact with the message

Then, reading skills acquisition is the process of acquiring the basic skills necessary for learning to read; that is, the ability to acquire meaning from print (SIL International, 2010).

Reading involves a variety skills and the main ones are recognizing the script of language, deducing the meaning, and using unfamiliar lexical items, understanding explicitly stated information, understanding information when not explicitly stated, understanding conceptual meaning, understanding the communicative value (function) of sentences and utterances, understanding the relations within the sentences, understanding between the parts of the text through lexical cohesion devices, interpreting text by going outside it, recognizing indicators in discourse, identifying the main point or important information in a piece of discourse, distinguishing the main idea from supporting details, extracting salient points to summarize (the text an idea etc.), selective extraction of relevant points for a text and the basic reference skills, skimming, scanning to locate specifically required information, and transcoding information to diagrammatic display (Grellet, 2000: 4).

From the explanation above, it can be concluded that reading skill is an ability to accomplish a task that involves some processes that are used to get the meaning and ideas from the written text which is symbolized in written or printed language. It is an active and communicative process that goes on between the reader and the text. It is a means of communication between the reader and the writer. It is an active skill that constantly involves guessing, predicting, checking, and asking oneself question. The process involves the reader, the text, the interaction between the reader and text. The text presents letters, words, sentences, and paragraphs that encode meaning. Whereas the indicator to measure student's reading skill are identifying main idea, identifying stated detail information, identifying implied information, guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words based on context,

identifying referents, and identifying the purpose of the text.

In this case, the writer conducted the research on second grade of Junior High School. Thus, the indicators of reading skill are: identifying main idea, identifying stated detail information, identifying implied information, guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words based on context, identifying referents, and identifying the purpose of the text.

In the pre-research at the second grade students of SMP Purnama 2 Surakarta, the writer found that the students had difficulties dealing with the indicators of reading skill: (1) the students have difficulty to identify main idea; (2) the students have difficulty to identify stated detail information; (3) the students have difficulty to identify implied information of the text; (4) the students have difficulty to guess the meaning of unfamiliar word; (5) the students have difficulty to identify referents; and (6) the students have difficulty to identify the purpose of the text. Besides, the problems were also indicated from the class situation. They are: (1) the students' motivation was low; (2) the students' confidence was low; and (3) the students tended to be passive learners. From the pre-research, there were also several causes why the problems above arose in the classroom. They are: (1) the teacher's technique of teaching was teacher-centered; (2) there is limited teaching and learning technique to conduct English lesson; (3) teaching technique was monotonous; (4) the students were not interested in English class; and (5) the interaction among students was still low.

Knowing the facts above, it is seen that there is one way needed to be found to solve the problem. One of the ways is teaching using Numbered Heads Together technique. Numbered Heads Together is technique which makes the students as a center of the learning process rather than teacher-centered (Kagan, 1994). NHT is under cooperative learning strategy that holds each student accountable for learning material. NHT allows students to be actively involved in reading discussion, fostering positive independence among groups, and developing communicative skill (Kagan, 1994).

High (1993) in Stack (2007: 2) emphasizes that NHT is effective because all students in group are held equally responsible and have motivation to support one's another learning. Then, it is possible to create a good or high learning motivation to every student and create good social interaction to against the student's character differences. The numbering system in NHT makes students energetic, keep aware, and discipline. As Kagan (1994) this strategy emphasizes the cooperation, work

team or social interaction in order to construct the knowledge and concept in learning reading. Instead of directing questions to the whole class, teachers use the following four-step steps: (1) Step 1: Numbering; (2) Step 2: Questioning; (3) Step 3: Heads Together; and (4) Step 4: Answering.

Numbered Heads Together (NHT) involves task structures that enable learners to help and support each other in completing the task structures. Students are placed in groups and each person is given a number. It has clear steps to follow and interesting features that will not make students bored. It is a cooperative learning technique that holds each student accountable for learning the material.

The main concept of this technique is that students achieve their learning goal through small learning group in which students work together through structured activities (Olsen and Kagan in Klesser, 1992: 8). When they are in-group, there will be interaction involving speaking and listening activities. Interaction helps students more active. It will be more discussion among students in-group so it is easy for the students easy to comprehend reading text by discussing with teammates in structured activity. Kennedy (1981: 197) says that the use of oral language will aid in developing comprehension skill. Moreover, the use of this technique enables each student to participate actively in teaching learning process. The writer would like to make junior high school students interested in reading and comprehending English written text through Numbered Heads Together technique. By using Numbered Heads Together technique, the students can be relaxed and enjoy teaching and learning process. Students also give contribution to their own and friends' learning.

By applying Numbered Heads Together (NHT) Technique, students will learn by themselves, learn more, feel more confident, feel more dedicated, enjoy the class, teach each other, and become independent learners. By using Numbered Heads Together (NHT) Technique in teaching and learning, the students can also use their own knowledge and share their knowledge with their friends.

Based on the description above, the writer is interested to implement Numbered Heads Together to improve the students' reading skills and class situation.

RESEARCH METHODS

In this study, the researcher conducted the research at SMP Purnama 2 Surakarta which is located in Sumber, Surakarta. The study was conducted through teaching-learning processes in the classroom of class VIIIB by using

Numbered Heads Together to teach reading. The research was conducted in May-July 2012. It was held on second semester in the academic year of 2011/2012.

In this research, the qualitative data were collected using some techniques, namely: interview, observation, and questionnaire. The quantitative data of the research were collected by tests: pretest and post test. To know the instrument used in pre-test and post-test is valid and reliable, the researcher tried out the test. After the data have been collected, they have to be analyzed. In this research there are two types of data that were analyzed, namely quantitative data and qualitative data. Related to the technique of analysis data in action research, Burns (1999: 156-160) proposes 5 steps in analyzing qualitative data. The process of analysis data are: assembling the data, coding the data, comparing the data, building the data, reporting the outcomes. Whereas, in analyzing the test score of the vocabulary test, statistics descriptive is used to compare the students' mean score.

DISCUSSION
1. NHT improves the students'
    reading skill

The implementation of Numbered Heads Together (NHT) as a teaching technique improves the students' reading comprehension. The focuses of the research involved seven aspects of reading skill: identifying main idea, finding implied information of the text, finding stated detail information, guessing the meaning of unfamiliar word based on the context, identifying referents, and identifying the purpose of the text. The findings show that those aspects have higher final achievement after the research.

The students' competence to comprehend reading increased after the implementation of Numbered Heads Together (NHT) and the indicators of problems related to students' comprehension problem drastically decrease. The researcher would relate the finding with some theories about Numbered Heads Together (NHT).

According to Cruickshank (1999: 205), cooperative learning (a variation on the theme of student-team learning) is the term used to describe instructional procedures whereby learners work together in small groups and are rewarded for their collective accomplishments.

NHT technique improves reading skill in identifying main idea. After the research, the researcher found that the students could find main idea easily. Focusing on certain paragraph in a time in group that the group consists of the low achiever, two average achiever and high achiever (heterogeneous) made the students able to discuss

their difficulty in getting the main idea through sharing with their heterogeneous group. Thus, it can be concluded that NHT improves skill in finding main idea. The finding is in line with the theory given by Lie (2002: 58) that states NHT is a cooperative learning technique that is especially helpful in checking students' understanding the content of the text. The students' improvement in identifying main idea in pre test was 15, it improved in post test 1 that was 50, and in post test 2 became 70.

NHT technique improves reading skill in identifying stated detail information. Numbered Heads Together (NHT) could make the students get information in the text from group to other groups. The whole class discussion and response from the other groups make all of the students have any answer references, so they could choose the best answer that is suitable to answer the question dealing with stated detail information. The finding is in line with the theory given by Cruischank's opinion, Kagan and Olsen (in Kessler, 1992: 8) that states cooperative learning including NHT technique is group learning activity so organized that learning is dependent on the socially structured exchange of information. The students' improvement in identifying tated detail information in pre test was 44, it improved in post test 1 that

was 49, and in post test 2 became 64.40.

NHT technique improves skill in identifying implied information. The students' improve their mean score in identifying implied information. 70% of the students agree that NHT helps them in this skill. The first step to identify implied information is analyzing all of the information in the text. The way to analyze the information is using the questions dealing with the text. The questions explain orally , before the students face the questions in the paper. It shows that reading skill in identify implied information is got from analyzing information through some questions dealing with the text that explain orally. The finding is in line with the theory given by Kagan (1994) that states NHT is flexible technique that can be used at a variety of levels. The teacher may start with factual information questions, and as students become more familiar with the technique, ask questions that require analysis or synthesis of information. The students' improvement in identifying implied information in pre test was 39, it improved in post test 1 that was 60, and in post test 2 became 77.50.

NHT technique improves reading skill in guessing meaning of unfamiliar word based on the context. The students' mean score in guessing the meaning of unfamiliar word based on the context increases.

The students' mean score in guessing the meaning of unfamiliar word based on the context increases. In the questioning steps of NHT technique, the teacher distributes the text that will be discussed by the students. Teacher asks some triggering questions to the students by giving them 'word splash' strategy or other variations of brainstorming way to analyze the vocabularies of the text. So, the students' vocabulary mastery increases. The students' reading skill in guessing the meaning of word, sentence, and clause including unfamiliar word based on the context is build. It shows that NHT can improve students' skill in guessing meaning of unfamiliar word based on the context The finding is in line with the theory given by Lai (in Yeh, 2004) that states cooperative learning strategies including NHT technique is helpful in fostering the four language skills, strengthening grammar and vocabulary power, and improving English competence. The students' improvement in gussing the meaning of unfamiliar word based on the context in pre test was 51, it improved in post test 1 that was 78, and in post test 2 became 80.

NHT technique improves reading skill in identifying references. After the implementation of NHT method in reading class, the students were able in identifying reference. Heterogeneous groups provide more opportunities for asking question, receiving information, recommending that four-person teams consist of a high achiever, a low achiever, and two average achievers. By having students work together in a group, this technique ensures that each member knows the answer to problems or questions asked by the teacher. The questions are dealing with the indicator of reading skill. Identifying reference is one of indicator of reading skill. Besides that, they can discuss together, if they get difficulty in identifying reference. So, they can solve their difficulty in identifying reference together. The finding is in line with the theory given by Terenzini and Pascarella (1994). They state that group learning techniques encourage students to take greater responsibility for their own learning and to learn from one another, as well as from the instructor. It is also supported by the theory given by Lie (2002: 42) that states heterogeneous groups provide more opportunities for asking questions, receiving information, recommending that four-person teams consist of a high achiever, a low achiever, and two average achievers. The students' improvement in identifying references in pre test was 43, it improved in post test 1 that was 62, and in post test 2 became 66.

NHT technique improves reading skill in identifying communicative purpose of the text.

Explaining communicative purpose of the text is the core part of reading activity, before the lesson begins. It builds the students' background knowledge about the material that will be discussed in the class. At the end of the NHT session, the question is given in order to check their understanding of the reading material and in order to improve their individual accountability in reading skill. The question is surely including the information about the communicative purpose of the text. The finding is in line with the theory given by Arends (1998: 322) that states Numbered Heads Together (NHT) is an approach developed by Spencer Kagan (1993) to involve more students in the review of materials covered in a lesson and to check their understanding of a lesson's content. This theory and the explanation above show that NHT can help the students to review of material, and they can reach the reading skill in identify the communicative purpose of the material. The students' improvement in identifying purpose of the text in pre test was 38, it improved in post test 1 that was 53, and in post test 2 became 62.50.

2. NHT technique improves the class situation

NHT technique improves students' learning motivation. The use of Numbered Heads Together (NHT) Technique leads the situation of reading class to get better than the situation prior to the research implementation. At first, the students spent longer time to be ready to have a class. Yet, during the research implementation, the students' readiness got better and better. It indicated that the students were motivated in reading class.

NHT can motivate students since the technique has the sense of cooperation and fun for students. Besides, students will be motivated because they are helped by their teammates. Being motivated, students will participate actively during the lesson. The researcher found that the students did the homework, the students paid attention, the students were interested in the lesson, they enjoyed and relaxed during the lesson, they tended to be active learners, and enthusiastic during the lesson. When the teacher led the students to the topic by giving some questions, showing pictures, and connecting the topic with the students' real experience, the students' motivation to study narrative texts improved. Besides, they could discuss reading text with their friends; therefore the students could build their communication with others. It is supported by the theory given by Liang (1998) and Olsen and Kagan(1992) in Richard' book (1998: 53) that second and foreign language learning theorists propose several advantages for cooperative learning including NHT: increasing

students talk, more varied talk, a more relaxed atmosphere, greater motivation, more negotiation of meaning, and increased amounts of comprehensible input.

NHT technique improves the students' confidence. NHT technique improve the students' confidence when speaking English. All of the students have a chance to speak up. They have same opportunities to share their result of discussion in their group. NHT decreases dominance from clever students so that students' equal participation is apparent. Since students have to answer the questions, all students including the shy or weak ones should participate in reporting the answer. The improvement the students' confidence is supported by the theory given by Kessler (1992: 17) that states Numbered Heads Together (NHT) is a simple four-step cooperative learning structure as follows: students number off within groups. If students are in groups of four, every student will be 1, 2, 3, or 4. The teacher asks a high-consensus question. Students put their heads together to make sure that everyone on the team knows the answer. The teacher calls a number from one to four. The teacher pointed the different students in each question for low achiever; average achiever and high achiever to report the answer.

NHT technique makes the students active. When they are in-

group, there will be interaction involving speaking and listening activities. Interaction helps students to be more active. It will be more discussion among students in-group so it is easy for the students to comprehend reading text by discussing with teammates in structured activity. The finding is dealing with the theory given by Kagan (1994) that states NHT allows students to be actively involved in reading discussion, fostering positive independence among groups, and developing communicative skill.

CONCLUSION

Based on the result of the research findings, some conclusions can be drawn. First the result of this action research shows that the use of NHT improves the students' reading skill. It is shown from the scores they got in the tests either in the first or second cycle. The students' improvement on reading skill is shown from the difference of the students' mean score before and after the action. The improvement involves the students' skill in identifying main idea, finding implied information of the text, finding stated detail information, guessing the meaning of unfamiliar word based on the context, identifying referents, and identifying the purpose of the text. Compared to the mean score of pre-test which is 40.47, the mean score of post-test 1 increased up to 58.55. Then, the

mean score of post-test 2 increased up to 71.16.

Besides, the class situation in the English lesson gets better. The students were not noisy during English teaching learning process in the classroom; students tend to be active learners through responding the other groups' discussion result; students are willing to speak English in the classroom. Students had confidence when speaking English. It can be shown from their desire to share the result of their group discussion; students pay attention toward the teacher's explanation during teaching learning activity. No one student that busy with their non-academic bussiness; students are diligent to do their homework. It can build from the punishments that given by the teacher if they are not do their homework; students' responsibility increases and students can interact to their friends. They are very enthusiastic and not reluctant to do the task. NHT, as interesting technique, helps them to have higher motivation and interest in joining reading class.

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that Numbered Heads Together technique is able to improve the students' reading skill and the class situation during the teaching and learning process.

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