

IMPROVING STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION USING DIRECTED READING- THINKING ACTIVITY TO JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Yuanita Candra Dewi Swardiana, Gunarso Susilohadi, Muh. Asrori
English Education Department of Teacher Training and Education Faculty
Sebelas Maret University

Email: yuanitacandrad@gmail.com

Abstract

This article describes a classroom action research held in English class through the implementation of Directed Reading-Thinking Activity to improve the eighth grade students' reading comprehension and students' motivation. This research was conducted in two cycles. Each cycle included four stages: planning, implementing, observing, and reflecting. The data were obtained qualitatively and quantitatively and show that Directed Reading-Thinking Activity could improve the students' reading comprehension. The improvement includes: (1) students' ability to determine the main idea of the paragraph; (2) the students' ability to find the purpose of the text; (3) the students' ability to determine the detail information; (4) the students' ability to infer and grasp meaning of words; and (5) students' ability to determine references. The data also show that DR-TA improves the students' motivation. The improvement includes: (1) task orientation; (2) need for achievement; (3) aspirations; (4) goal orientation; and (5) perseverance.

Keywords: classroom action research, reading comprehension, Directed Reading-Thinking Activity, junior high school

Abstrak

Artikel ini mendeskripsikan penelitian tindakan kelas yang dilaksanakan di kelas bahasa Inggris melalui penerapan Directed Reading-Thinking Activity untuk meningkatkan pemahaman membaca dan motivasi siswa kelas delapan. Penelitian ini telah diselenggarakan dalam dua siklus. Tiap siklus terdiri dari empat langkah: perencanaan, penerapan, pengamatan, dan pencermatan. Data diperoleh secara kualitatif dan kuantitatif dan menunjukkan bahwa Directed Reading-Thinking Activity dapat meningkatkan pemahaman membaca siswa. Peningkatan itu termasuk: (1) kemampuan siswa untuk menentukan ide pokok suatu paragraf; (2) kemampuan siswa untuk menemukan tujuan penulisan teks; (3) kemampuan siswa untuk menentukan informasi spesifik; (4) kemampuan siswa untuk berpendapat dan menyimpulkan makna kata; dan (5) kemampuan siswa untuk menentukan acuan kata. Directed Reading-Thinking Activity juga meningkatkan motivasi siswa. Peningkatan itu termasuk: (1) orientasi tugas; (2) kebutuhan untuk pencapaian; (3) aspirasi; (4) orientasi tujuan; and (5) ketekunan.

Kata kunci: penelitian tindakan kelas, pemahaman membaca, Directed Reading-Thinking Activity, sekolah menengah pertama

It is widely recognized that reading is one of the most important skills for ESL/EFL learners to master. Reading is one of the important skills for learners to expand their knowledge of the language, cultures, and the world. Learners can get more information that they need through reading different materials, such as magazines, newspapers, novels, books, journals, and so on. Appropriate reading strategies will facilitate learners' reading comprehension, especially for L2 readers.

Reading deals with the language message in written or printed form (Urquhart and Weir, 1998: 14). According to Harris and Sipay (1980: 447), reading is "the meaningful interpretation of written or printed verbal symbols". According to Nunan (1998: 33), reading is "an interactive process between what reader already knows about a given topic or subject and what the writer writes". It means that reader can use their background knowledge of a topic in reading. It implies that gaining background knowledge in reading is an important thing. It is needed to recall the concept and relates them to the written materials and gets new meaning.

Comprehending reading text is needed to learn more about English, especially English text and culture. Comprehension is "understanding the ideas and information explicitly stated in the passage." (Heilman, 1981: 246). Davis in Heilman mentions five comprehension skills, that are, recalling word meaning (vocabulary knowledge), drawing inferences from context, following the structure of passage, recognizing a writer's purpose, attitude,

tone, mood, and finding the answers to question answered explicitly or implicitly in paraphrase. Some of these comprehension skills are similar with cognitive skills, which are related with the purpose for reading. The cognitive skills include some abilities to anticipate both the form and the content, to identify the main idea, to recognize and recall specific details, to recognize the relationship between main idea and their expansion, to follow a sequence, to infer from the text, to draw conclusion, and to recognize the writer's purpose and attitude.

From the theories above, it can be concluded that reading comprehension is a process to understand what students read by involving their experience and knowledge through meaningful interpretation involving the determining of main ideas, the writer's purpose, specific details, word meaning (vocabulary knowledge), and word reference.

Based on the pre-observation, the researcher found some problems on students' problems in reading comprehension. The problems are: (1) the students had difficulty in determining main idea of the paragraph. In determining main idea of the paragraph, they used to choose the first sentence or the last sentence of the paragraph without read the paragraph deeply. When the teacher asked why you choose this sentence as main idea, they surprisingly said because that was the first sentence of the paragraph; (2) the students also had difficulty in finding the purpose of the text, including moral value in narrative texts. The students could not find the purpose of

the text although they had read the text deeply and had found the main idea helped by the teacher; (3) the students got difficulty to determine the detail information. They were still doubtful in determining the setting, the characteristics, and the plots of the story. In classroom teaching and learning process, when the students were asked to find the setting of place, most of students answered '*kerajaan*' instead of 'there'. When the teacher asked them why they chose it, they said that because of the usually the story takes place in the "palace"; (4) the students had difficulty to infer and grasp meaning of words. For example, they chose sleep instead of unconscious and smile instead of happily; and (5) students had difficulty to determine references. Some students could not find the reference of certain words, proper noun for example, although it is stated in the sentence preceded the sentence where the noun stated.

Moreover, the students' low reading comprehension is also indicated through low students' motivation in teaching and learning process. Based on the pre-observation during reading class and interviewing the students, the problems found are (1) most students became passive when the English teacher taught reading; (2) students were determined to stay silent rather than risk committing; (3) when they couldn't answer the teacher's question, they just copied the answer of another students; (4) some students dominated classroom interaction, while the rest did not give any aspirations; and (5) some students did chit-chat with their friends when the teacher explained material.

The problems above are caused by many factors related to the teaching and learning process. From the teaching and learning process, it is seen that the teacher did not teach the students the strategies to read and comprehend the text although there is a principle of teaching reading which says that teaching reading means teach the students the strategies to read and comprehend the text. It means that the teacher did not apply the appropriate teaching technique. In this case, she used Three Phase Techniques but she did not implement it well. They were also familiar with translating the text to get the meaning of the words to comprehend the text. In addition, the students are heterogeneous in reading comprehension and in motivation. Besides, the text and the tasks were monotonous and not interesting, taken from LKS, so that the students were not challenged to do the tasks and did not have perseverance in doing the tasks. The students were frustrated when they did not understand of what the teacher tells about and then they were hopeless and avoid to do the tasks. As a result, they tend to copy their friend's work.

Considering the problems in comprehending the text encountered by the students above, the researcher proposed a teaching strategy, that is, Directed Reading-Thinking Activity in teaching reading comprehension as a solution. According to Polloway, Patton, & Serna in Ambe, effective comprehension strategies are those that "encourage student or teacher questioning, connect the text to the reader's background knowledge, set a purpose for reading, and activate higher-level thinking skills" (2007: 636). It

means that teaching reading means teaching the students the strategies to read and comprehend the text. One of the effective comprehension strategies is Directed Reading-Thinking Activity (DR-TA). Burns, Roe, and Ross in Camp (2000: 404) define the DR-TA as “a general plan for directing the reading of content area reading selections or basal reader stories and for encouraging children to think as they read, to predict, and to check their predictions”. Stauffer in Barrera, Liu, Thurlow and Chamberlain (2006: 3) states that DR-TA is “a group problem solving approach to reading that teaches children comprehension skills through making predictions about the text and finding evidence to support or refute those predictions”.

In conclusion, Directed Reading-Thinking Activity (DR-TA) is an instructional strategy that consists of predict-read-confirm cycle used to encourage the students’ critical awareness, to set their purpose of reading, and to encourage their self-monitoring in order to engage them in active reading. It also shows that when the teacher uses this strategy in teaching reading, the teacher also teaching the students the strategy to read and comprehend the text by predicting, reading in detail, and confirming. DR-TA also improved the students motivation. Using DR-TA as a strategy to teach reading comprehension of narrative will make the students enjoy in the classroom because the teaching learning process is more interesting and challenging. It is supported by the use of unfamiliar text and the predict-read-confirm cycle.

RESEARCH METHOD

The method used in this research is action research. Mills (2000: 5) proposes action research as systematic inquiry done by teacher or other individual in teaching or learning environment to gather information about and subsequently improve the ways their particular school operates, how they teach, and how well the students’ learn. The research aimed at improving the students’ reading comprehension. Thus, it is best conducted by using action research. The researcher in her research tries to improve students’ reading comprehension using Directed Reading-Thinking Activity.

In this classroom action research, the researcher used the model developed by Kemmis and McTaggart. Kemmis and McTaggart in Hopkins (1993: 48) state that “Action Research occurs through a dynamic and complementary process, which consists of four fundamental steps in a spiral process”. The steps are identifying problem and planning the action, implementing the action, observing the action, and reflecting the result of the observation.

This action research which concerns on using Directed Reading-Thinking Activity in teaching reading comprehension needs some data to be analyzed. The data were collected by using quantitative and qualitative method. The quantitative data was collected from the students’ reading score obtained from the test, while qualitative data from observations, field note, interview and questionnaire.

In analyzing qualitative data, the researcher used descriptive analysis proposed by Burns (1999: 157-160)

which consists of (1) assembling the data means assemble the data that have been collected over the period of the research: field notes, interview, questionnaire and so on; (2) coding the data means a process of attempting to reduce the large amount of data that may be collected to more manageable categories of concepts, themes, or types; (3) comparing the data means the researcher compares the data; (4) building the interpretations means the researcher moves beyond describing, categorizing, coding, and comparing to

make some sense of meaning of the data; and (5) reporting the outcomes means presenting an account of the research for others.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

After implementing Directed Reading-Thinking Activity to improve students' reading comprehension, the researcher got some results dealing with both reading comprehension and students' motivation. The results are presented in the Table 1

Table 1. The students' improvement in reading comprehension

Aspects	Main Idea	Purpose of the Text	Detail Information	Meaning of the Words	Reference	Mean Score
Passing Grade	70	70	70	70	70	70
Pre-Test	36.61	35.42	31.64	28.57	57.14	37.77
Post-Test	50.00	69.27	33.20	54.02	64.29	53.13
1						
Post-Test	54.91	70.31	74.61	74.56	75	72.59
2						

Table 1 presents the students' improvement in reading comprehension. Before action, it was shown that the students had problem in reading comprehension. The students' mean score of pre-test did not pass the passing grade, that is 70. After the implementation of DR-TA, it was found that the students' mean score improved, although there were only one indicator that achieved the passing grade. The indicator improved through a treatment that was conducted by the researcher, that is, the researchers used predict-read-confirm cycle to make the students actively engaged in reading the text and enjoy the text and the tasks. Some

students who could comprehend the text and found the main idea of the text could determine the purpose of the text. From observation, there was improvement in students' motivation toward teaching and learning process. It could be seen from the students' need for achievement and goal orientation.

In the first cycle, the researcher still found some weaknesses of students' reading comprehension and students' motivation. Some weaknesses of reading comprehension indicators are (1) the students' ability in determining main idea of the paragraph was still low, most of students still determined the first sentence of the paragraph as the main

idea; (2) the students had difficulty in finding characterization in detail information, the still wrote and chose the wrong personality of the character in the narrative text, (3) the students had difficulty in finding the meaning of the words, some students chose the wrong meaning of a word, and (4) some students had difficulty in determine reference, they determined the wrong referent of proper noun. The weaknesses of students' motivation are (1) a few of students did not have willingness to tackle tasks and enjoy the reading task; and (2) the students were not eager in sharing their answer and prediction in class discussion because the class were dominated by some students.

The problems that still happen in the first cycle caused by some factors related to teaching and learning process in the case of reading comprehension and motivation, that are (1) the students found the proof of their prediction instead of finding main idea of the text although there was evidence that represented main idea; (2) the teacher asked the students to answer "5W1H" questions frequently but she paid little attention to the strategy to find the characterization of the narrative text; (3) the researcher were less in allocating enough time to discuss the strategies in finding the meaning of the words and in determining the reference; (4) A few of students did not interested on the text used; and (5) there was not enough time to share their prediction and class discussion for discussing the task. Besides, the discussion was dominated by some students. It made the rest students tended to do not participate in the discussion.

The researcher prepared three meetings for cycle 2. In this cycle, the researcher as the teacher used different task. The researcher revised the next action plan to overcome the problems that appeared in the first cycle. In cycle 2, the researcher would focus on how to make the students had willingness to tackle tasks and enjoy the reading task and the students were eager to share their answers to improve the students' ability on determining main idea, detail information, meaning of the words, and reference. The researcher used different strategy, that are (1) the teacher would use main idea graphic organizer in finding main idea; (2) the teacher would insert character scheme about the verb and adjective words that represent the character; (3) the teacher allocated extra time in discussion session, (4) the teacher would make the task content attractive by adapting it to the students' natural interests or by including interesting and humorous content; and (5) the teacher would use rewards in the form of material rewards and the teacher rewards.

Then, after cycle 2, the finding shows that the score of the students' reading comprehension increased. Almost all of reading comprehension indicators score improved and achieve the passing grade of each indicator except the students' ability in determining main idea of the paragraph. In teaching learning process, just a few students who still used to use first sentence as main idea of the paragraph. It is caused by the students low awareness on the main idea. From the improvement, it can be concluded that the students' reading comprehension was improved by DR-TA.

DR-TA gives students chances to read and comprehend the text using appropriate strategy. In implementing DR-TA, the teacher divides the text into some parts. Each part consists of one, two or more paragraphs. It depends on the stop point that is decided by the teacher before the meeting. The teacher decides the stop point with the consideration that the stop point will make the students anxious with the next part of the text. Students must make prediction about the following part of the text. Then, they must confirm their predictions. These processes are repeated until students get the whole text. Tierney, Readence, and Dishner in Helm (2005: 18) say that “DR-TA has potential to equip readers with the ability to extract, comprehend, and assimilate information”. Lenski, Davis, Wham and Johns in Middle School Edition Content Area Reading (in http://www.tn.gov/education/ci/reading/grades_6-8.pdf, 14) states that “when DR-TA implemented in fiction text, logical stopping points come at key junctures in a causal chain of events in the story line because the reader should have enough information from at least one preceding event to predict a future happening or event”. It makes the students easy to get the main idea in each paragraph. The use of main idea graphic organizer as fun and simple log to find the main idea also helps DR-TA

technique. According to Clark and Ganschow (1995: 2), DR-TA helps students realize that “prediction and verification of predictions are essential parts of the reading process”. Students learn that by reading with a purpose, they can more easily focus their predictions. Fisher and Frey in Helm (2005: 17-18) say that “because the text is divided into smaller portions, students can focus on the process of responding to higher order questions”. Chunking the text in this manner allows the students to focus on the process of responding to higher-order questions. Stauffer in Helm (2005: 17) states that he created the Directed Reading-Thinking Activity that “requires students to use their background knowledge and experiences, decoding skills, and context clues to make sense of the text, either fiction or non-fiction”. Mather and Jaffe (2002: 1) state that “students’ active involvement in the reading process improves comprehension and retention of information”. It means that in the process of prediction, for example, the students could predict the next section if they could comprehend the previous section, involved the references stated in the previous section.

The second finding is the students’ motivation improvement. The improvement of students’ motivation is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The students’ improvement in motivation

Students’ Motivation	The beginning of cycle 1	The end of cycle 1	The end of cycle 2
Students’ task orientation	Most students became passive when the English teacher taught reading.	Most of students more interested in the lesson during the implementation	All of students tackle the task actively. The enjoyed the lesson and challenged in

		of DR-TA. A few of students did not have willingness to tackle tasks and did not enjoy the reading task.	making predictions.
Students' need for achievement	Students were determined to stay silent rather than risk committing.	Some students were risk committing in making prediction.	Most of students was risk committing, so that they have high need for achievement.
Students' aspirations	Some students dominated classroom interaction, while the rest did not give any aspirations.	Some smart students were still dominated the lesson.	The smart students were not dominated the lesson. All of students have equal participations.
Students' goal orientation	Some students did chit-chat with their friends when the teacher explained material.	Some students paid attention to the lesson.	Most of students paid attention to the lesson. There is no students who did chit-chat with their friends when the teacher explained the lesson.
Students' perseverance	When they couldn't answer the teacher's question, they just copied the answer of other students.	Some students were actively engaged in thinking the predictions and the evidence, and there is no students who copied the answer of their classmate.	The students were actively engaged in sharing their predictions and their answers of the tasks. They were brave to raise their hand.

Table 2 presents positive improvements toward students' motivation. The students' motivation improved through some treatments that were conducted by the researcher, that are (1) the researcher used colorful pictures in each presentation; (2) the researcher as a teacher said that there is

no wrong or right predictions and all of the students did not know what would happen next, so the students were free to share their predictions; and (3) the researcher used unfamiliar text to make the students interested in the text and to enhance their thinking skills in predicting.

After implementing this research, the students showed good response toward DR-TA. It can be seen from their task orientation. The teaching and learning process showed that their task orientation improved. The improvement could be seen in their behavior. All of students tackle the task actively. They enjoyed the lesson and challenged in making predictions. Most of students were risk committing, so that they have high need for achievement. The smart students were not dominated the lesson. All of students have equal participations. Most of students paid attention to the lesson. There is no students who did chit-chat with their friends when the teacher explained the lesson. The students were actively engaged in sharing their predictions and their answers of the tasks. They were brave to raise their hand.

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that teaching reading comprehension through DR-TA improved their motivation. Stauffer in Barrera, Liu, Thurlow and Chamberlain (2006: 3) states that "a text used in DR-TA is based on instructional level and is divided into chunks of varying lengths to maintain reader interest". In other words, the chunk text can improve the students' interest. It also has relation with the process of prediction.

The third finding is the students' achievement increased. Based on Ur (1996: 274), the motivation is "very strongly related to achievement in language learning. It means that the improvement of the students' motivation has influenced the students' achievement". Based on the computation of the test scores, the mean score of the students increased in each

cycle. The mean score of cycle one is higher than the mean score of pre-test, while the mean score of cycle 2 is higher than that in cycle one. It means that there is an improvement in each cycle.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that DR-TA can improve the students' reading comprehension and students' motivation. The students had positive progress in reading comprehension indicators as mentioned in the research findings.

The improvement can be seen from the result score of pre-test and post-test. The mean score of pre-test was 37.77 and it improved to 53.13 in the post-test 1 and it also improved to 72.59 in the post-test 2. It proved that the use of DR-TA can improve the students' reading comprehension. The improvement of students' motivation during the teaching and learning process also gives positive contribution in the increase of the mean score. Teaching reading comprehension through DR-TA can decrease the boredom and it also raises the students' task orientation, need for achievement, aspirations, goal orientation and perseverance.

Based on the conclusion, the researcher would like to propose some suggestions for the English teacher, students, school, and other researcher. For the teacher, s/he can use DR-TA as a teaching strategy to improve the students' reading comprehension and motivation. The teacher should be aware that teaching reading means teaching the students to use the strategies to read and comprehend the text. The teacher should create the situation that motivated the

students in joining the lesson. The teacher should choose a high-interest reading selection to maintain reading interest and to optimize the use of DR-TA. The reading selection or the text should include illustrations and pictures to support the development of predictions and students' comprehension. The teacher should choose a text at the students' instructional level. The amount of reading should be adjusted to fit the purpose and the difficulty of the text. Students may get impatient if they are only able to read a sentence at a time or they may get bored or tired if they are required to read paragraphs at a time. For the students, they should be motivated in joining classroom teaching and learning process. Moreover, the students should be active learners, and not afraid of making mistakes during teaching and learning process. They should improve their ability in learning English, they should practice speak up, helps each other, and enjoy during reading class. DR-TA is one of alternative ways that can be chosen in teaching reading. For the school, School can provide those facilities so that DR-TA can be done successfully in teaching-learning process. In addition, school can give some training of the implementation of DR-TA to English teachers. For other researcher, this thesis can be a reference for other researcher to conduct the next research if there are some weaknesses.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ambe, Elizabeth BiFuh. (2007). *Inviting Reluctant Adolescent Readers into the Literacy Club: Some Comprehension Strategies to Tutor Individuals or Small Groups of Reluctant Readers. Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 632-639.
- Barrera, M., Liu, K., Thurlow, M., & Chamberlain, S. (2006). *Use of Chunking and Questioning Aloud to Improve the Reading Comprehension of English Language Learners with Disabilities* (ELLs with Disabilities Report 17). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes.
- Burns, Anne. (1999). *Collaborative Action Research for English Language Teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Camp, Deanne. (2000). *It Takes Two: Teaching with Twin Texts of Fact and Fiction*. Vol. 53, No. 5, 400-408.
- Clark, Mary J., & Ganschow, Leonore. (1995). *Six Reading Strategies for Adult Educators*. Ohio Departement of Education.
- Harris, R. A., & Sipay, E. R. (1980). *How to Increase Reading Ability*. New York: David McKay.
- Heilman, Arthur W., Blair, Timothy R., & Rupley, William H. 1981. *Principles and Practices of Teaching Reading*.
- Helm, Kerry L. (2005). *A Descriptive Study of Northwest Ohio*

- Seventh Grade Math Teachers' Attitudes and Strategy Integration Used to Promote Literacy in the Classroom.* Retrieved from <http://etd.ohiolink.edu/send-pdf.cgi/Helm%20Kerry%20L.pdf?bgsu1120150309> [Accessed on February 13, 2012].
- Hopkins, D. (1993). *A Teacher's Guide to Classroom Research*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Hornby, A. S. (1995). *Oxford Advance Learners' Dictionary*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mather, N., & Jaffe, L. (2002). *Woodcock-Johnson III: Reports, Recommendations, and Strategies*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Middle School Edition: Content Area Reading. *Directed Reading and Thinking Activity (DR-TA)*. Retrieved from http://www.tn.gov/education/ci/reading/grades_6-8.pdf [Accessed on February 21, 2012].
- Mills, Geoffrey E. (2000). *Action Research: A Guide for the Teacher Researcher*. Ohio: Merrill an imprint of Prentice Hall.
- Nunan, David. (1998). *Language Teaching Methodology: A Textbook for Teachers*. New York: Prentice Hall.
- Ur, Penny. (1996). *A Course in Language Teaching: Practice and Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Urquhart, S., & Weir, C. (1998). *Reading in a Second Language: Process, Product and Practice*. London: Addison Wesley Longman.