

## Pre-Reading Activities For Muslim and Non-Muslim Students

M. Sayid Wijaya

IAIN Raden Intan Lampung  
Email: sayidwijaya@gmail.com

**Abstract.** *This article tries to propose some possible pre-reading activities in teaching reading comprehension for Muslim and non-Muslim students, especially for junior high school students. Since the teachers directly have their students read the text without noticing any appropriate pre-reading activities which can help them activate their prior knowledge makes them hard to make meaning of new information they are to obtain from the text. Therefore, designing pre-reading activities which is appropriate to the reading materials becomes a priority. Integrating pre-reading activities such as Think Sheet and Scanning greatly affects students' ability in comprehending new information containing in the text.*

**Keywords:** *pre-reading activities, teaching reading, reading comprehension*

### A. INTRODUCTION

Children get bored with school, indeed. They get bored especially with reading instruction. They basically manage to be able to communicate. If this were not so, they would never develop the language abilities they do before they even enter school. Unfortunately, they too often miss the connection between reading and communicating, perhaps because their teachers have themselves failed to see, or at least have failed to teach, the connection (Smith & Johnson, 1980:7). Therefore, it is imperative that the teacher be able to create such activities prompting students to read and communicate in one time.

In a great many classrooms the reading lesson is used as an opportunity to teach pronunciation, encourage fluent and expressive speaking, and so on (Nuttall,

1982:2). This is in contrast to what Witty (1968, in Smith & Johnson, 1980:4) pointed out that pronunciation, certainly, without understanding is not the aim of modern reading instruction. Nor is meaningless pronunciation thought of as reading. Reading is considered by some as a thinking process through which meaning is obtained from printed symbols. In this case, having knowledge in reading process is inevitably crucial to be in line with the purpose of reading instruction.

The process of communicating in reading may be illustrated as follow: a writer has messages or ideas to communicate, which is then communicated in the form of written texts. The reader then reads the text that contains messages from the writer. The process of uncovering the writer's messages in the written text is commonly called reading (Sulistyo, 2011:20). That process explains that the main point of reading is to grasp the message or ideas the writers want to convey to the readers. This explains why teaching them pronouncing words is not the core of reading instruction. They may be able to pronounce words in a sentence correctly but they may not know the message contained in that sentence. Thus, by providing appropriate reading activities which prompt students to get involved in the act of reading will help and assist them to get the ideas in the reading texts or passages.

In teaching reading comprehension, the teachers should be aware that reading comprehension depends on many factors. The first one is the reader's ability to attend to the printed ideas. The second is the reader's background knowledge to which new information must be added. The third is the quality or lucidity of the writing itself. The last one is the reader's purpose or goal in reading the material (Smith & Johnson, 1980:128). By considering those factors in constructing reading activities, the teachers are able to predict the expected result of the reading instruction. The predetermined achievements will be reached by having appropriate reading activities.

In Indonesia, teaching reading is a part of English subject which is taught in either junior high school or senior high school (see the copy of attachment published by Minister of Education and Culture Number 64 in 2013 on Standard of Content for Primary and Secondary Education page 79). It is clearly stated that enhancing students' reading skills becomes the awareness of English instruction as a part of English skills. The students are expected to be able to identify social function, generic structure, and language features of short or simplified texts in certain genres like recount, narrative, descriptive, factual report, or procedure text. Those basic competences are addressed to junior high school students.

Junior high school students need more concern since they start learning English formally. In that case, students demand the teachers to avoid teaching them in common practice. Asking them directly to read the texts in a given time and testing their comprehension after that by giving questions are the actual happenings in reading instruction. Those happenings will not enhance students' reading comprehension instead of creating boredom. Therefore, giving students activities which activate their prior knowledge will ease them to dive in the act of reading.

According to Harris and Sipay (1985:450), prior knowledge can be defined as all the information an individual has in her or his long term-memory. Adams and Bruce (1982, in Harris & Sipay, 1985:450) pointed out that comprehension is the use of knowledge to create new knowledge; for without prior knowledge, written material would be meaningless. The more knowledge the reader can bring to bear (prior knowledge must be activated to be useful), the more likely it is that the material will be understood.

Prior knowledge or background knowledge becomes a primary factor in students' meaningful learning (McNamara, 2007:75). Good readers attempt to bridge incoming sentences with previous text content and with their background knowledge (McNamara, 2007:14). It means that background knowledge provides

information related to the incoming information which will be discussed. In this case, activating background knowledge at pre-reading activities is very determinant to students comprehend the text well. If a reader has sufficient background knowledge, he or she will automatically create visual pictures in an attempt to clarify and deepen understanding (Dorn & Soffos, 2005:9). Therefore, the activation of prior knowledge or background knowledge is definitely crucial to lead the students to comprehend the reading texts. Designing pre-reading activities is beneficially important towards students' comprehension.

## **B. SCHEMA THEORY**

To design pre-reading activities which make comprehension happens, we should understand first how prior information are stored in our mind. Piaget argued many years ago that we understand new things and events we encounter by matching them with our store of mental frameworks that he called schemas or schemata (Gillet & Temple, 1994:35). In other words, schemas or schemata is the place where we keep and recall related information we have in our mind. According to one version called schema theory, readers have in their mind frameworks that organize our knowledge of the world (Gillate & Temple, 1994:35-36).

Schema theory attempts to explain how knowledge is represented in the mind and how those representations facilitate the use of knowledge. According to schema theory, all knowledge is packed into units referred to as schemata (Harris & Sipay, 1985:481). Schemata are abstract – that is, they are inexact enough to be called in to fit a range of new situations, and incomplete – they have slots in them that are available to be filled by details in the text that is being considered (we say text, but this theory of comprehension can apply, of course, to events in the world as well). When we fit details from the text into the slots in our schemata (schema theorists call this process instantiation) we and the text jointly create meaning (Gillet & temple, 1994:36). In this case, to grasp the meaning of the reading texts, it needs to

relate what is being read to what has been already known since the information in our mind is stored in different slots. In order to retrieve information stored in our schemata, such appropriate pre-reading activities should be applied.

Schemata are divided into two kinds, contextual schemata and textual schemata. Contextual schemata refer to the person's knowledge of real or imaginary worlds. Textual schemata involve knowledge of discourse conventions (Harris & Sipay, 1994:450). Different from Harris and Sipay, Gillate and Temple (1994:36) named contextual schemata as world knowledge and textual schemata as text structure. World knowledge refers to the things readers know that enable them to fill in the gaps when faced with text, while text structure refers to how a text is organized (Gillate & Temple, 1994:36).

Both contextual schemata and textual schemata should be in the readers' mind since schema theory suggests that reading comprehension depends on the information in the readers' mind, as well, as that in the text, and upon the reader's ability to put together information these two sources, schemata and texts (Harris & Sipay, 1985:482). Therefore, prior knowledge should urgently be activated prior to the reading activities because it allows the readers to comprehend what is implied in the text.

### **C. PRE-READING ACTIVITIES**

Since activating and building prior knowledge are crucial in reading comprehension, some pre-reading activities are built up to promote students' comprehension. Those activities cannot be applied in any reading situations. Therefore, by considering the reading materials, including the topics and genres of the text, the teachers may select one of those pre-reading activities to be applied in the classroom.

Ellery (2005:147) proposes three kinds of per-reading activities that can be selected to activate and build students' prior knowledge. They are Prereading Plan (PreP), Anticipation/Reaction Guides, and Think Sheet.

#### Prereading Plan (PreP)

PreP is aimed at developing, adding, deleting, or modifying new insights to the text. It can be used to early level readers. It needs text and chart paper as the materials.

The procedure of PreP is as follows:

1. identify the central concept in a text selection, and introduce it to the students by saying, "What comes to your mind when you hear the word (or phrase) \_\_\_\_?"
2. individually, have the students write down all of their associations with the topic and what they know about it.
3. note all students' responses on a chart.
4. prompt students to reflect on and clarify their background knowledge by asking, "What made you think of \_\_\_\_?" For new insights to be developed based on the class discussion, follow up by asking, "As a result of our discussion, can you think of any other information that you know about this topic?"
5. continue the discussion until the class is finished developing, adding, deleting, or modifying new insights (Langer, 1981 in Ellery, 2005:147).

#### Anticipation/Reaction Guides

Anticipation/Reaction Guides is aimed at reading and confirming predictions about the text. It can be used to transitional level readers. It needs text and notebook paper as the materials.

The procedure of anticipation/reaction guides is as follow:

1. identify the main topic or concept of a text prior to meeting with students.
2. create five to eight statements that will challenge or support students' beliefs or that may reflect common misconceptions about the subject, topic, or concept.
3. record these statements on notebook paper so students can use the paper as a guide during the lesson. Students read each statement and note whether they agree (+) or disagree (x). suggested teacher talk could be, "Do you agree or disagree with the statement presented? Why or why not? Try to read and confirm whether your answer to the statement is true or false."
4. after students read the text have them return to the statements and engage in a discussion on how the textual information supported, contradicted, or modified their first opinion (Herber, 1984 in Ellery, 2005:17-148).

### Think Sheet

Think sheet is aimed at recording background knowledge to guide reading. It can be used to transitional level readers. It needs text, Think Sheet.

The procedure of think sheet is as follow:

1. copy the Think Sheet and distribute to each student. choose a text to study, and have students write the text's main topic in the rectangular box on their sheets.
2. on the light bulb side of the sheet, have students list ideas that they have about the main topic based on their background knowledge.
3. on the questions mark side, have students record any questions they have about the main topic. Suggested teacher talk could be, "Based on your prior knowledge of the topic, what questions come to mind?"

4. ask students to use what they have recorded on their think sheets to guide their reading of the text.
5. have students read the text. As they locate information related to their original prereading ideas and questions, have students write the information beside their corresponding original statements. Suggested teacher talk could be, “What personal connection did you make from the text?” (Dole and Smith, 1987 in Ellery, 2005:148)

Those pre-reading activities proposed by Ellery can be used by following the procedures provided. In addition to what Ellery proposes, Sulisty (2011:512) explained that surveying, skimming, scanning, phrase reading, careful reading, brain storming and brain patterning, the before-and-after matrix, and the K-W-L technique can be used effectively as pre-reading activities.

#### Surveying, Skimming, Scanning, Phrase Reading, and Careful Reading

These reading strategies are the most well-known reading strategies used in early reading activities. Commonly, teachers teach students those strategies to find main ideas and details in a text. The procedure of those strategies is as follow (Sulisty, 2011:83-84):

#### Surveying

Ask the students to do the following:

1. look at title, headings, diagram, pictures, word font sizes.
2. read the first and the last paragraphs as well as topic sentences

#### Skimming

Ask the students to do the following:

1. glance through the text quickly to get a general impression of the text.
2. read the first and the last paragraphs as well as topic sentences.



### Scanning

Ask the students to do the following:

1. Find explicit specific information: a date, a word meaning.
2. Find implicit specific information.

### Phrase reading

Ask the students to do the following:

1. Ask the students to do the following:
2. Read not every individual word.
3. Read for meanings in a group of words.

### Careful reading

1. Ask the students to do the following:
2. Take notes on the difficult words, expressions, or parts of the text.
3. Mark difficult words, expressions, or parts of the text.

Those five strategies for pre-reading activities can be integrated at once. Skimming and scanning, for instance, can be implemented at once. Careful reading and phrase reading also can be put into pre-reading activities at once. In this case, the selection of pre-reading activities is based on the purpose of reading instruction at that time. Further, pre-reading activities like Brainstorming and Brain Patterning, and the Before-and-After Matrix can be used as prediction activity before students get into the text.

### Brainstorming and Brain Patterning

Sulistyo (2011:85) explained that brainstorming provides the students with the opportunity to link the information they have had and the ones in the text. In other words, the students' knowledge on the topic discussed in the text is being activated.

In this brainstorming activity individual students may contribute as many ideas as they can to the discussion of the topic at random. However, when the ideas are to be organized logically according to a particular pattern of thought, the activity is called brain patterning as its name indicates.

#### The Before-and-After Matrix

This activity is basically linked to brainstorming and brain patterning in that it uses topic as a basis of activating prior knowledge. However, in this prediction activity the students write full account of their knowledge in the form of complete proposition rather than words or phrases. In addition, prediction activities make use of a matrix of two columns. The first column is for the items the students already know about the topic; the second column is for the items the students know about the topic after reading the text (Sulistyo, 2011:86-87).

Table 1. The Before-and-After Matrix table

What I know before I read	What I know after I read

#### **D. IMPLEMENTING PRE-READING ACTIVITIES IN THE CLASSROOM**

Pre-reading activities proposed by Ellery and Sulistyo can be combined in a reading instruction. Combining several pre-reading activities helpfully prepares students for the content of reading materials. Therefore, it is wisely recommended to put several pre-reading activities to assist students working on the reading materials they are going to face.

One example of combing two pre-reading activities is by applying Think Sheet and Scanning at the same time. Scanning works while students get into the text to match

their prereading ideas and questions to the information containing in the text. Here is the example:

In this example, students will be taught a descriptive text entitled “Mr. Kartolo, the Farmer”. They are given a copy of Think Sheet and asked to write down the topic of the text.

- Teacher : I have some pieces of paper. I will give one for each of you.  
(Distributing the copies of Think Sheet.)
- Student : What are we going to do with the paper?
- Teacher : Good question. Now, I will ask you to jot down the word “Farmer” in the up-centered box.

After distributing the copies of Think Sheet and asking students to write down the topic of text, they are asked to make a list of what they know, based on their prior knowledge, about the topic in the light bulb side.

- Teacher : Have you written down the word “farmer” in the box?
- Students : Yes, we have.
- Teacher : Excellent. Now what comes up to your mind when you hear that word?
- Student A : My father. He is a farmer.
- Student B : Rice field
- Student C : Buffalo
- Teacher : Nice. Farmer can be a kind of profession. Rice field refers to the place to grow rice. Buffalo is a commonly found animal around rice field. You are all outstanding.  
(Clapping ...)

Teacher : Now, please list all things pop up in your mind when hearing the word “farmer”.

After asking students to list what they know about that word, they should make questions related to the word in the question mark side.

Teacher : Make sure that you have listed all you know about that word. If you have, then we are going to the question mark side.

Student : I can only list three things related to the word. Is it O.K.?

Teacher : That’s fine. Now, based on your prior knowledge of the topic, what questions come to mind?

Student : Is the question like “What is the farmer doing?”?

Teacher : It can be.

Having completed the instructions, students are asked to read the text entitled “Mr. Kartono, the Farmer”. Remind students to use information in their Think Sheet as guidance in comprehending the text. While reading the text, they are asked to write the information related to their previous information. Here, ask students to use scanning to find out specific implicit and explicit information.

Teacher : Alright, students. I will give each of you a text.  
(Distributing the copies of the text)

Student : Can we make a note on this copy of the text?

Teacher : Yes, you can.  
(Finish distributing the copies of the text)

- Teacher : Now, scan the text for specific information related to ideas and questions you have made in either light bulb or question mark sides.
- Student : I've found the word rice field. Should I add this information?
- Teacher : Yes, you should.

Here is the text entitled "Mr. Kartolo, the Farmer" which is taken from English in Focus for Junior High School grade seven.

*Mr. Kartolo, the Farmer*

*Mr. Kartolo is very happy. The rainy season of this year makes the farm beautiful. It is planting time!*

*Rice fields become fresh and green during this season and by the end of this season Mr. Kartolo is ready to harvest his crops.*

*Mr. Kartolo ploughs the land at the beginning of the rainy season. Then, he usually works early and finishes at noon. Milking the cows, feeding the livestock, and cleaning the barns are among Mr. Kartolo's duties before breakfast. He does most of the hard outdoor work by himself.*

*(Wardiman et.al., 2008:113)*

In those activities, make sure that the teachers assist the students until they finish reading the whole text. Giving feedback to what they read is very crucial since the students cannot independently comprehend the text.

## **E. CONCLUDING REMARK**

Prior knowledge or background knowledge exists to provide students with previous information. This information will help them connect what they are reading to what

they have known. By combining those two source of information, the students will be easier to construct meaning of what they read. Therefore, activating prior knowledge prior to reading the text is the first step leading to comprehension.

To either activate or build students' prior knowledge, pre-reading activities will be so much helpful. Since there are many kinds of pre-reading activities, determining what is appropriate to the material and to the purpose of reading becomes determinant. In addition, implementing pre-reading activities individually is not recommended. By integrating several pre-reading activities, it will make students ready to get the content of the material, activate their schemata, help them in making meaning of the text and make them paid more attention to the text which is going to be read. Thus, those activities are suitable to be implemented for Muslim and non-Muslim junior high school students on different topics of the text, since they have just learnt English formally and this will be the best help for beginner readers.

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