

.THE USE OF SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION

TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION

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Abstract

The objectives of this research are to describe: (1) how the use of small-group discussion can improve students' reading comprehension. (2) the strengths and the weaknesses of using small-group discussion in teaching reading comprehension. In this action research was conducted in two cycles at the IXB grade students of SMP Negeri 1 Wuryantoro. Each cycle consisted of four steps: planning, action, observation, and reflection. There are two kinds of data: qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data were collected by using observation, questionnaire, interview, field notes, and document. Then, the quantitative data were collected by using test (pre-test and post-test). Qualitative data were analyzed by using 5 stages suggested by Burns (1999: 157- 159) as follows: assembling the data, coding the data, comparing the data, building interpretation, and reporting the outcomes. The quantitative data were analyzed by using descriptive statistics. The research findings show that the use of SGD could improve students' reading comprehension. In addition, SGD could be used to improve the class situation. The researcher also found the strengths and the weaknesses when SGD is used in teaching reading.

Keywords: *reading comprehension, small group discussion, action research*

Abstrak

Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mendeskripsikan: (1) Bagaimana penggunaan diskusi kelompok kecil dapat meningkatkan pemahaman siswa dalam membaca. (2) Kelebihan dan kelemahan penggunaan diskusi kelompok kecil dalam mengajar pemahaman dalam membaca. Penelitian tindakan kelas ini dilaksanakan dua siklus di kelas IXB SMP Negeri 1 Wuryantoro. Masing-masing siklus terdiri dari empat tahap: perencanaan, tindakan, pengamatan, refleksi. Ada dua jenis data: data kualitatif dan kuantitatif. Data kualitatif dikumpulkan dengan menggunakan pengamatan, angket, wawancara, catatan lapangan, dan dokumen. Kemudian, data kuantitatif dikumpulkan dengan menggunakan tes (pre test dan post test). Data kualitatif dianalisis dengan menggunakan lima tahap yang disarankan oleh Burn (1999: 157-159) sebagai berikut: mengumpulkan data, mencatat data, membandingkan data, membangun teori, dan melaporkan hasil penelitian. Data kuantitatif dianalisis dengan menggunakan statistik diskriptif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penggunaan diskusi kelompok kecil dapat

meningkatkan pemahaman siswa dalam membaca. Sebagai tambahan, diskusi kelompok kecil dapat digunakan untuk meningkatkan situasi kelas. Peneliti juga menemukan kelebihan dan kelemahan ketika diskusi kelompok kecil digunakan untuk mengajar membaca.

Kata kunci: *pemahaman dalam membaca, diskusi kelompok kecil, penelitian tindakan kelas.*

In academic setting, reading is assumed to be the central means for learning new information and gaining access to alternative explanations and interpretations (Marriane, 2001: 187). It means that reading stands a basic tool as a means for students to learn new information. All subjects of school lesson provide textbooks as a foundation, so the students should read them if they want to follow the lesson well. In order to understand or to get points of written text, students need comprehension for it.

As stated in SMP Negeri 1 Wuryantoro's syllabus, the standard competence of reading at the ninth grade of Junior High School is the students are expected to understand the meaning of written functional text and short simple essay formed procedure, narrative and report text. Ideally, the students should be able to read aloud with acceptable pronunciation and intonation, response rhetorical ways accurately and fluently in the form procedure, narrative, and report text and they must comprehend the text deeply to find the main idea, meaning of words on the text, detail information,

reference, and mention the purpose/generic structure of the text.

In the pre-research at the ninth grade students of SMP Negeri 1 Wuryantoro, the researcher could identify problems faced by the ninth grade students of IXB in learning reading comprehension. The researcher also directly asked the classroom teacher whether reading is a real problem in her classroom activity. From the students' competence aspect, they still got difficulties in five aspects of reading comprehension as follows: (1) the students got difficulty in finding the main idea; (2) the students got difficulty in finding meaning of certain word; (3) the students got difficulty in finding detail information; (4) the students got difficulty in locating reference; (5) students got difficulty in understanding text organization (social function and generic structure of text). In addition, the class situation was not alive. It was shown as follows: (1) the students tended to be passive learners, only certain students who were active; (2) the students got bored in the middle of teaching and learning process; (3) the students have low motivation and

less confidence in joining reading class.

Some problems above were caused by the students and the teacher. First, the causes came from the students as follows: (1) they did not have enough vocabulary; (2) they were afraid and did not enthusiastic, interested in joining the reading class; (3) they did not use opportunity to share or discuss what they have read with their friends because they studied reading text individually. Second, the cause from the teacher as follows: (1) the teacher did not implement a reading teaching technique that involved all students active; (2) the teacher usually discussed the text with whole class. Consequently, the student did not have opportunity to share or discuss what they had read with their friend and could not comprehend the text deeply; (3) the teacher asked the students just to translate the words by themselves to comprehend to text.

Based on the fact above, teacher's creativity in providing appropriate teaching technique is needed to overcome those problems. It is important to be realized that the results of teaching and learning process are not only determined by teacher's and student's competence, but influenced by the use of the teaching technique. There are many kinds of teaching techniques for reading comprehension. However, the technique chosen in reading comprehension must be suitable with

the purpose of teaching and the conditions of students. One of techniques that can be implemented by teacher especially to teach reading is Small-group discussion.

Before going to the concept of small-group discussion, it will be better to know about the definition of each term in it. It is important to initially define discussion. According Arends (1997: 200) discussion is communication in which people talk to one another, sharing ideas and opinions. It is supported by Hoover (1964: 110) who defines discussion as a process of interchanging ideas. Discussion occurs only in groups, and cannot be studied systematically without considering the concept of the group (Gulley, 1960: 62). Homans (in Gulley, 1960: 63) states that a group is a number of person who communicate with one another often over a span of time, and who are few enough so that each person is able to communicate with all the others, not at second hand, through other people, but face to face. If the class is a large one, a good way to give students opportunities for active practice and feedback is to schedule small-groups in the classroom. Sanchez (2009) defines a small group as having at least three or no more than twelve or fifteen members. Ornstein and Lesley (2000: 294) say that small group occurs when the large group is broken up into subgroups according to ability, interest, project, or other

criterion. From those theories, it can be concluded that SGD is the exchange of information, opinion, and ideas among all members of a group which consist at least three or five members to solve problems occurring in the learning process.

Arends (1997: 201) states that discussion gives students public opportunities to talk about and play with their own ideas and provides motivation to engage in discourse beyond in the classroom. It is supported by Wu (2008) who states small group discussion could stimulate students to be involved in the active process of constructing knowledge. Furthermore, during group discussion, students learn from each other, whether consciously or unconsciously. Jones (2007: 14) adds that the students' confidence will grow little by little as students successfully share ideas and experience when they do work together.

The above statements show that SGD provides more opportunity for students to exchange their opinion, ideas, information among all members of group in a discussion, and take chance in process of understanding: (1) main idea; (2) details information; (3) word meaning; (4) reference; (5) social function/generic structure. The important thing is that the learners can participate actively, more confident, and their motivation improve in joining reading class.

Based on the background, some problems can be formulated as follows: (1) how can the use of small-group discussion improve the reading comprehension of the ninth grade students of SMP Negeri 1 Wuryantoro in 2010/2011 academic year?; (2) what are the strengths and the weaknesses of using small-group discussion in teaching reading comprehension in the ninth grade students of SMP Negeri 1 Wuryantoro in 2010/2011 academic year?

RESEARCH METHOD

This research was held from July 2010 to April 2011 at SMP Negeri 1 Wuryantoro in 2010/2011 academic year. It is located on Jl. Mlopoharjo No. 1, Wuryantoro. The study was done through teaching-learning processes in the classroom of class IXB by using Small group Discussion to teach reading.

There are two kinds of data that the researcher takes: qualitative and quantitative data. 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. The qualitative data are analyzed using qualitative technique as suggested by Burns. Burns (1999:

156-160) states that in general, the process of analysis the data includes assembling the data, coding the data, comparing the data, building interpretations, and ended by reporting the outcomes. Meanwhile, the quantitative data are analyzed by comparing the mean score of students' reading comprehension before and after the action or the result of pre-test and post-test.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The activity of reading lesson in each cycle had covered the important aspects to be mastered by the students in comprehending English text. In each discussion activity the students analyzed an English text to find main idea, detail information, meaning of unknown word, reference, and generic structure or social function.

1. The finding of the research shows that the use of small-group discussion can improve all indicators of students' reading comprehension
 - a. SGD can improve the students' skill in finding main idea.

The students' achievement in finding main idea improves. It can be seen from the result of test. The average score increases from 53.75 in pre-test, 75 in post-test of cycle 1, 78.33 in post-test 2. In addition, the results of interview and

questionnaire also show improvement on the students' skill in finding main idea.

The activities in SGD help the students to develop their skill in finding main idea. Orstein & Lasley (2000: 311) state that small group gives the teacher chance to introduce new skills suited to a particular group. In implementing SGD, the researcher gives the students a guiding about how to use reading strategy in finding main idea. She introduces skimming strategy. Skimming is used to quickly identify the main ideas of text. It is supported by Williams (1998: 96) who states that the purpose of the skimming is simply to see what a text is about.

Firstly, the teacher models skimming strategies to help the students. Here are some strategies to use when skimming: (1) Read the title, headings, and subheadings; (2) Look out for bold, italicized, or underlined words; (3) Read the first and last each paragraph. After the modeling, she gives the students some questions such as; "What is the text about?", "What is the main

idea of each paragraph?”, etc. Then, she asks the students to skim the text in group and discuss the questions above. All the students have opportunity to express opinion or idea in group. They help one another in developing their skill in finding main idea. Klingner & Vaughn (2000) in Wu (2008) stressed that ESL student engaging in collaborative talk during content reading, they assisted one another in getting the main ideas and answer question about what they read. It is supported by Kawabata (2007) who states that discussion with groups and the teacher at this stage might provide general information about the topic and structure of the text, and the students might be able to predict further what the text is about.

- b. SGD can improve the students' skill in finding detail information.

The students' achievement in finding detail information improves. It can be seen from the result of test. The average score increases from 66.79 in pre-test, 75.36 in post-test of cycle 1, 76.25 in post-test 2. In

addition, the results of interview and questionnaire also show improvement on the students' skill in finding detail information.

The activities in SGD help the students to develop their skill in finding detail information. In implementing small group discussion, the researcher introduces scanning strategies. Scanning is used to quickly identify a particular piece of information in a text. It is supported by Brown (1994: 293) who states that the purpose of scanning is to extract certain specific information without reading through the whole text.

Firstly, the teacher models and explains scanning strategies to help the students. To do scanning reading involves some stage: (1) locate or determine what is the keywords in the question; (2) look quickly through the text for those words; (3) read each word of the sentences to know whether the words provide the information that we need being sought. After the modeling, she gives exercise. Then, she asks the students to scan the text in

group and discuss the exercise. According Kawabata (2007) scanning activities are introduced to teach strategies of finding appropriate information in the text that would be necessary for successful reading comprehension. By discussing this exercise with their group, the students might be able to locate specific information about the topic of the text. All the students have opportunity to express opinion or idea in group. They help one another in developing their skill in finding detail information.

- c. SGD can improve the students' skill in finding meaning of unknown word.

The students' achievement in finding meaning of unknown word improves. It can be seen from the result of test. The average score increases from 66.79 in pre-test, 75.36 in post-test of cycle 1, 76.25 in post-test 2. In addition, the results of interview and questionnaire also show improvement on the students' skill in finding meaning unknown word.

The activities in SGD help the students to develop their skill in finding the

meaning of unknown word. In pre- discussion activity the researcher teaches the students to use strategy in finding the meaning of unknown word by using context. According to Rhoder and Huerster (2002: 730-735) using context as a strategy could help assist students to identify unknown word in sentences or longer text. By using context the students have to guess word's meaning by looking at the context of word, sentence surrounding that word. In group, the students discuss and practice to find the meaning of unknown word by doing the exercises. Beck and Mckeown in Kosanovich, et al. (2010: 14) state that students have more opportunities to think about and learn from text when they participate in teacher-guided and small group discussions about vocabulary word in context. In SGD all the students have opportunity to express opinion or idea in group. They help one another in developing their skill in finding the meaning of unknown word.

- d. SGD can improve the students' skill in finding reference of pronoun.

The students' achievement in finding reference improves. It can be seen from the result of test. The average score increases from 60.50 in pre-test, 64 in post-test of cycle 1, 73.50 in post-test 2. In addition, the results of interview and questionnaire also show improvement on the students' skill in finding reference.

The activities in SGD help the students to develop their skill in finding reference. In pre-discussion activity the researcher explains about pronoun and their antecedent. According Karanovich (1999) pronouns are general words that can take the place of noun. There are a lot of pronoun such as *I, me, mine, you, your, he, his, she, her, it, its, they, their, them, we, our, us, and so on*. Antecedents are the specific nouns that pronouns refer. Usually, the students will be given and they will be asked to locate the reference word or phrase in the passage. First, the researcher asks the students to find the pronoun in the passage. Then, she asks the

students to read the sentence in the context of the passage. It will not change when we substitute the correct antecedent. In group, the students discuss and practice to find reference of pronoun by doing the exercise. In SGD all the students have opportunity to express opinion or idea in group. They help one another in developing their skill in finding reference of pronoun.

- e. SGD can improve the students' skill in finding social function and generic structure of text.

The students' achievement in finding social function and generic structure improves. It can be seen from the result of test. The average score increases from 49 in pre-test, 76.50 in post-test of cycle 1, 78.50 in post-test 2. In addition, the results of interview and questionnaire also show improvement on the students' skill in finding social function and generic structure of text.

The activities in SGD help the students to develop their skill in finding social function and generic structure. In pre-discussion

activity, the researcher explains about the characteristic of report text including social function and generic structure. By these explanations, the students have good understanding in report text. In group, the students discuss and practice to find social function and generic structure by doing the exercise. In SGD all the students have opportunity to express opinion or idea in group. They help one another in developing their skill in finding social function and generic structure.

2. The use of SGD during learning process can improve the class situation

After implementing of SGD, the class situation shows improvement. Students become more active during the lesson and they feel more relax, motivated, and confident in joining the reading class. In pre-discussion activities, the students pay close attention to the teacher's explanation. It shows that the students have an interest to the SGD technique and the material. They are also active in answering teacher's questions. During discussion activities, the students are active in discussing the reading task

with their group. All the students feel motivated joining reading class by grouping. They can help one another, share with other freely so it makes the teaching learning process alive. In post discussion activities, they are enthusiastic present their result discussion.

Related to the improvement of students' activeness and participation, Botelho & Donnell (2001:630) state:

Small group students-centered learning creates a safe and active learning environment for all abilities of learners to participate freely in the educational process. Knowledge sharing and interaction is fundamental for enhance learning in a small group student-centered environment.

It is supported by Arends (1997:201) who states that discussion gives students public opportunities to talk about and play with their own ideas and provides motivation to engage in discourse beyond in the classroom.

From those explanations above, it is clear that small group discussion gives chance for the students to become more

active in process of understanding English text, it gives opportunity for the students to participate in discussing reading text, and it makes the students' motivation improve in joining reading class.

3. The strengths and weaknesses of the Implementation of Small-Group Discussion.

a. The strengths when small group discussion is used in teaching reading:

1) It enhances the students' motivation in joining the reading class.

The finding of research shows that SGD improve the students' motivation. By discussing the task in group, they feel comfortable to do the task with their group than by working individually. They also feel more relax to express their idea. Nuttal (1985: 162) who states:

By dividing the class into groups you make it possible for students to help one another, and in successful groups, the interaction that takes place

achieves far more than the individuals can working on their own working on their own working.

Working together can produce excellent motivation, and a slight sense of competition between groups does no harm if it is allowed to get out of hand.

The above statement shows that the students in SGD have high motivation to learn and understand English text.

2) It makes the students become active participant in learning reading

The finding of the research shows that SGD makes the students become active participant in learning reading. In small group there is heterogeneous group consisting of one high achievement students, three average achievement students,

and one low achievement students. They have same responsibility in discussing. They can share ideas and help each other to do the task and understanding the text. If one member of the group gives opinion, their friend should give a comment. It helps the students become active. Richard & Joanne (1989: 84) state:

Small groups facilitate active participation and should be primary form of classroom organization when reading is the vehicle of learning. Students produce more ideas, participate more and take greater intellectual risks in small group or team learning situation.

The above statement shows that SGD gives opportunity for students to be active participant in the learning process of understanding English text all the time.

3) It makes the class atmosphere become comfortable, interesting, and more relaxing.

The finding of the research shows that SGD makes the classroom's atmosphere become enjoyable, interesting, and more relaxing. The students in SGD can work together, share their experiences, ideas, opinion and help each other to do the task and understanding the text with their friend. This condition makes students interested and enjoy following the lesson. Harmer (1991:245) states that working in a group is potentially more relaxing than working in pairs, for the latter put greater demand on the students' ability to co-operative closely with other person.

The above statement shows that SGD makes the classroom atmosphere become comfortable, interesting, and more relaxing.

- 4) It gives a chance to share and exchange information for students in the class.

The finding of research shows that SGD gives a chance to share and exchange information for every student in the class. When they discuss, every member of group must give opinion for their group. They could share with each other what they think in comprehending text. Alexander (1957: 56) states that group discussion provide meaningful learning. In group situation where questions and comments are encouraged, learners have the opportunity to ask about what they do not understand, to get other's ideas, to attack meaning to what might otherwise be meaningless. Harmer (1991: 245) adds that when all the students in a group are working together to produce an advertisement, for example, they will be communicating with each other and more

importantly co-operating among themselves.

The above statement shows that SGD gives opportunity for the students to share and exchange information with their friends.

- b. The weakness when small group discussion is used in teaching reading:

- 1) The situation of classroom is noisy when they make group

In finding of research shows that the class is noisy when the students make groups. They talk to each other when they look for their group friends. They are also busy with their new teams and where they would sit. This condition makes the class situation crowded. Related to this problem, Jones (2007: 11) states that a classroom full of students all talking at once can make a lot of noise. Harmer (1991: 246) adds that the worries that apply to pair work (like the use of students' native language, noise and indiscipline) apply equally to group work;

the problem do not seem insuperable, though and the solution will be the same as those for pair work.

The above statement shows that the situation of classroom is noisy when SGD used in teaching reading. Therefore, the teacher should handle the class well.

- 2) The students speak in their native language, not in English.

In finding of research shows that in SGD the students discuss and speak with each other using native language (bahasa Indonesia), for example: Apa purpose dari teks report ini?" then their friend answer using "Bahasa Indonesia, purpose dari teks report ini adalah: to tell about newspaper in general". Jones (2007: 22) states that sometimes the students keep switching from their native language to English and back again. Brown (2001: 180) adds that students in small group discussion

will covertly use native language

The above statement shows that in SGD the students speak and discuss using native language.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Based on the research findings, the researcher draws some conclusions of the implementation of SGD are as follows:

1. SGD can be used to improve the reading comprehension of the ninth grade students of SMP Negeri 1 Wuryantoro.

The result of the research shows that the use of SGD improves students' reading comprehension skills. The proof of students' reading comprehension improvement can be found from the computation of the test scores. It shows a significant increase. The students' main score in the pre-test which is only 58.50 turns into 71.40 in the first post-test. Then, it gets higher again in the second post-test that reached 78.45. Their main score of five indicators are above the KKM (70). It means that all students are successful in understanding of five indicators of reading comprehension.

In addition, SGD can be used to improve the class

situation of the ninth grade students of SMP Negeri 1 Wuryantoro. The class situation changes after the implementation of SGD, the students become more active than the previous condition. The students become actively involved in the teaching and learning process. The class atmosphere becomes more alive when the teaching and learning process occur. By discussing the text and doing the task in group, the students are interested engaging themselves in improving reading comprehension. They understand more main idea, detail information, reference, vocabulary, and social function/generic structure of text by participating in all activities conducted by the researcher. The students' interest and curiosity support them in learning reading comprehension. When students have chance to be active in the teaching and learning process of reading, they have better reading comprehension. Furthermore, they can improve their confidence and motivation in joining the reading class. From those reasons, it is found that SGD can improve the students' participation in learning reading and the students' reading comprehension.

SGD can be used to improve students' reading comprehension due to the following procedure:

a. Pre-SGD activities

In this phase, the researcher gives information about the technique, procedure, and the steps of discussion. She also guides students by showing the students how to use reading strategies in finding all of indicators of reading comprehension as mentioned above. After that, the researcher divides the students into eight groups. Each group consists of five students. One member is from high achievement students, three members are from average achievement students, and one member is from low achievement student.

b. During SGD activities

In this phase, the students read the text and discuss the questions with their group, write and present the result of discussion in their own group first and the other group in front of the class, while other member of groups may give comment and clarify. The researcher also guides the students and corrects the wrong answer.

During SGD activities, the researcher moves around the class to monitor and make sure that all of members of group participate in their own discussion.

c. Post SGD activities

In this phase, the researcher asks the students to submit their groups' work. She gives reinforcement and feedback to their work. It helps the students understand better about the material since they become aware about their mistakes, especially for the students who are reluctant to ask the things they do not understand and giving the score to each group and members of group who participate in discussion.

2. There are some strengths and weaknesses when SGD is used in teaching reading in the ninth grade students of SMP Negeri 1 Wuryantoro.

a. The strengths of SGD are as follows: (1) SGD enhance the students' motivation in joining the reading class; (2) SGD makes the students become active participant in learning reading; (3) SGD makes class atmosphere comfortable, interesting, and more relaxing; (4) SGD gives a chance to share and

exchange the information for the students in the class.

b. There weaknesses of SGD are as follows: (1) the situation of classroom is noisy when the students make a group. (2) the students speak in their native language, not in English.

Based on the conclusion stated above, the researcher would like to give some suggestions related to this research, as follows: (1) *For teacher*, before conducting SGD the teacher should explain about the procedure of discussion clearly, give the student a guiding about how to use reading strategy, divide the students into small group (the members of each group are mixed: high, average, and low achievement students), set the time, task and activity of discussion, so the teaching learning process can run well. During SGD activities, the teacher should monitor the process of discussion seriously, and make sure that all of members of group participate in their discussion, so all of the students are active learners. In post SGD activities, the teacher should be active in giving feedback to students' work since it helps them get better understanding about the material given. (2) *For students*, they should get involved actively during the lesson and pay full attention to their teacher's explanations and instructions when the teacher taught them in SGD. They also have to

practice reading as much as possible either in school or at home to improve their reading comprehension. (3) *For other researcher*, before conducting SGD the other researchers should know their students well so they can divide the students properly. The members of a group must heterogonous: low, average, and high achievement students. By dividing the group properly, the interaction process can work and they can learn from others directly or indirectly.

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