

THINK-ALOUD STRATEGY FOR TEACHING EFL READING

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ABSTRACT

One of the English language skills that has to be mastered by Senior High School Students in Indonesia is skill in EFL reading. This research was aimed at investigating the effectiveness of using the Think-Aloud Strategy in teaching EFL reading. It also investigated the students' responses to the implementation of the Think-Aloud Strategy in teaching EFL reading. A quasi-experimental design with pre and post-tests was used for this research. Two classes, each with 25 second grade students from SMA Lab school in Banda Aceh were chosen as the sample for the research using a random sampling technique. The reading tests (pre and post-tests) and a questionnaire were used as the instruments for the research. The data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics with SPSS 20. The results showed that the use of the Think-Aloud Strategy improved the experimental group (EG) students' reading scores and then, these students also gave positive responses to the use of the strategy in teaching-learning EFL reading. Therefore, the hypothesis of this research were accepted. This means that the use of the Think Aloud Strategy significantly improved the students' EFL reading scores as compared with those students who were taught EFL reading by using a conventional EFL reading strategy. The EG students also gave positive responses to the implementation of the strategy in teaching EFL reading. It can be concluded that the use of this strategy significantly improved the second grade, year 11, students' EFL reading ability.

Keywords: *effectiveness, think-aloud strategy, teaching EFL reading, reading skills, metacognitive awareness*

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INTRODUCTION

From all of the four language skills for English, reading is a very important skill for mastering the language and studying it needs to be highly intensive. This will not only help students to develop their EFL English reading ability and comprehension, but can also enhance their abilities at EFL English speaking, writing and listening (Richards, 2005).

In Indonesia, the goal for teaching reading to senior high school students in grade 2, year 11 is, as stated in the 2013 Curriculum; “to respond to meanings and rhetorical steps in an essay using written language accurately, fluently, and acceptably in a daily context and to access knowledge in *narrative, spoof, and, hortatory exposition*”. (Depdiknas, 2013).

However, some paradoxical facts were found based on a preliminary study carried out by the writer on 23rd of February, 2015, when the writer carried out an interview at SMA Lab School, at Unsyiah in Banda Aceh with one of the English teachers at the school in order to get information about the students’ reading comprehension and their problems in learning EFL English. Based on that teacher’s report, there were several problems as follows: Firstly, most of the students could not identify the main idea and the supporting facts of the passages that they were reading and secondly, they missed many details from the passages that they read. After several interviews with the students, the researcher was informed that there was a lot of unfamiliar vocabulary in the texts, besides that, they admitted that they hardly read any English materials outside of school hours. Apparently, they hardly ever did any extensive reading even in the Indonesian Language. The writer assumed that the absence of a reading habit leads to reading comprehension failure especially when they read specifically selected passages in EFL English at school.

A student is considered successful in passing English if she can achieve the minimum standard criteria score (KKM) determined by the school, which in this case is 70. In addition, the teaching-learning processes at the school were as follows. The method used was mostly the GTM (Grammar Translation Method). In an attempt to overcome some of the problems he found at this school, the writer decided to try a strategy that he believed could be more effective for better teaching-learning of EFL English reading; this strategy is called the Think-

Aloud Strategy which gets the students to verbalize their thoughts during the reading processes.

Several studies have been conducted about the implementation of the Think-Aloud Strategy. In 2004, a study by Zabala (2004) investigated the development of reading skills using the Think-Aloud Strategy in enhancing eleventh graders' reading comprehension in EFL English. This study was done with 31 eleventh graders in Bogota, Colombia. The researcher found that the strategies most used by students in reading were studying the vocabulary and analyzing the main idea of the text. Zabala (2004) also found that the students also used imagination, predictions, translations and inferences to make sense of what they were reading. Next, was a study by McKeown and Gentilucci (2007), that used quantitative methods to investigate middle-school students using metacognitive awareness while reading using the Think-Aloud system. 27 students divided into two groups, intermediate and advanced, were involved in that study. The findings showed an increase in comprehension of the intermediate students. Lastly, a study by Mockel (2013) investigated the effect of using the Think Aloud protocol on students' ability to learn from the text in a secondary science classroom, while reading an informational text. The participants were 47 high school students. The findings provided evidence that the Think Aloud protocol improved the students' ability to read and understand a scientific text. This study was considered different from those previous studies mentioned in the matter of the materials used and of the test instruments used during the data collection process.

Research Questions

1. Will there be any significant difference in the scores from reading tests in EFL English of year 11 students between those taught-learning using the Think-Aloud Strategy (TAS) and others taught-learning reading using the usual teaching strategy?
2. What will be the response of the students to being taught-learning reading EFL English using the Think-Aloud Strategy?

Research Objectives

1. To find out whether the Think-Aloud technique can increase students' EFL English reading scores.
2. To find out students' responses on the use of Think-Aloud strategy for reading EFL.

LITERATURE REVIEW

An Overview of Reading

Reading is an important one of the four language skills taught-learned in schools. This is supported by Hatch (2001) who has asserted that reading is the most important of the four skills in English as a second or foreign language, especially as English is the largest second or foreign language around the world. Reading can also help the EFL student develop the other language skills viz: writing and listening and speaking besides improving their components of language namely vocabulary and grammar since reading and speaking are highly inter-related (Ismail, 2016).

Some aspects of the reading tasks that are asked for in reading studies are highly related to each other and virtually cannot be separated. According to Mickulecky and Jeffries (1996), these aspects are the main idea, detailed information, references, vocabulary and inferences. Firstly, Mickulecky and Jeffries (1996) argue that the main idea is the writer's idea about the topic that is formed by both the topic and the ideas. Secondly, identifying the main idea and the supporting details are an important part of reading skills. Thirdly, reference words are one of the cohesive devices used in reading/writing that help tie sentences and paragraphs together to create a cohesive text. Fourthly, in studying a language, understanding vocabulary becomes a very important skill that the students have to master (Harmer, 2007). Lastly, Mickulecky and Jeffries (1996) have noted that sometimes the topic of a text may not be directly stated anywhere in the text.

Concerning reading strategies, there are three categories proposed by Nunan (2004) which are frequently used when comprehending reading texts or materials. They are as follows: The first is called the *Bottom-Up Model*. This model usually serves the lower-level reading processes where students start with basic knowledge about reading comprehension. Next, is the so-called *Top-down Model*, where, the activities from this model encourage the students to recall their background knowledge by making predictions and searching the text for purposes. Last, is the *Interactive Model*, this model is carried out by combining both the bottom-up and the top-down models.

Metacognition in Reading

There are three main aspects of metacognition mentioned by Schraw and Impara (2000). First, metacognitive knowledge; the first

group consists of cognitive learning strategies which the learner uses to regulate the processes of knowledge acquisition. These include, for example, elaboration strategies such as the building of links to prior knowledge, or memory strategies such as note taking. Second, metacognitive monitoring; this second group consists of metacognitive control strategies. Central activities like the planning and monitoring of learning activities, the evaluation of learning outcomes and the adaptation to varying tasks, demands and (unexpected) difficulties, for example, an increase in directed efforts. Lastly, self regulation and control; this model is dedicated to resource management. These strategies are concerned with the control of the general conditions associated with learning, for example, time management and management of the learning environment.

The Think-Aloud Strategy

As proposed by Richards and Vacca (2011), after forming groups, there are five steps in implementing the Think-Aloud Strategy viz:

- (1) First, is prediction making, in which the students make predictions based on the chapter titles and/or the sub-headings found within the chapters.
- (2) Second, is image developing where the students get mental pictures of information found in the text.
- (3) Third, is sharing analogies. In this step, the students use analogies to bridge the information they just have with their background knowledge.
- (4) Fourth, is monitoring comprehension where the students should control and verify to themselves the information that is difficult and that they are in doubt about or unsure of.
- (5) Last, is the regulate comprehension phase, the students keep on reading and skip their confusion and find out whether the next lot of information can clear up their confusion.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used a quantitative experimental design with a pre-test and post-test control group design. This means that there were two groups, one the experimental group (EG) and the other the control group (CG); both groups did the pretest; then only the EG had the Think-Aloud Strategy teaching treatment while the CG had the usual

reading classes; lastly, both groups did a post-test. Besides, the EG were also asked to answer a questionnaire on their attitude towards the Think-Aloud Strategy for improving teaching-learning of EFL English reading.

In this kind of study, the research tries to prove the hypothesis made earlier between the two variables (Allwright & Bailey, 1991). There are two variables in this study, the first one the independent variable, is the *Teaching Reading Technique* or the treatment; and the other one, the dependent variable, is the *Reading Ability* of the students.

Population and Sample

The population for this research was all of the English classes at SMA Lab School at Unsyiah, Darussalam, Banda Aceh. The samples for this research were two of the 11th grade classes, selected at random, one of which became the EG and the other became the CG, each class had 25 students. The randomization used was class randomization instead of individual randomization as proposed by Chaudron (1988).

Research Instruments

The research instruments used in this study were the tests and the questionnaire. Firstly, the instrument used in collecting the data was 40 multiple choice questions which were adapted from the book *Detik*. It is an examination preparation book specially written for high school students by Taufik (2014). There were 20 questions for the pre-test and another 20 questions for the post-test. These questions had to be answered based on two passages and were administered in two sessions, namely the pre-test and the post-test. Secondly, to find out the EG students' response to using the Think-Aloud Strategy, for teaching-learning reading the researcher used a questionnaire which he adapted from Cardenas and Montez (2009).

Technique of Data Analysis

Five steps were used to analyze the data. First, identifying the score weight for each correct answer; second, determining the normality; third, determining the homogeneity; fourth, determining the standard deviation; and lastly determining the t-test. To analyze the data several formulas were used taken from Arikunto (2006) and Brown and Rodgers (2002). First, the normality and homogeneity of the data were tested. When the data was found to be normal and homogenous, the mean score was determined as well as the standard

deviation. The last analysis was done to get the t-count so that the researcher could prove whether the hypothesis was accepted or rejected.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results

Normality and Homogeneity Tests

The results of the Normality and the Homogeneity tests showed that all the results from all the tests were normal and homogenous.

Hypothesis Testing

The following table shows the results for the hypothesis testing:

Table 1. Statistics for Testing of Hypothesis

No	Testing	Mean	t-value	t-table	Significance
1	Pre-test EG	60.2	-1.4	≤ 1.6	0.02
	Pre-test CG	62.3			
2	Pre-test EG	60.2	2.3		0.4
	Post-test EG	75.4			
3	Pre-test CG	62.3	-2.7		-0.9
	Post-test-CG	66.5			
4	Post-test-EG	75.4	2.9		0.7
	Post-test-CG	66.5			

The table above shows that in Test 1, there was no significant difference between the mean scores from the Pre-tests of both groups. as the significant value is lower than 0.05 which is 0.02.

Then Test 2 shows that there was a significant difference between the mean scores from the Pre-test and the Post-test of the EG with a level of significance value of 0.4.

Next Test 3, which compares the mean scores Pre-test and Post-test of the CG shows that the value of significance was -0.9 which means that there was no significant difference in the mean scores.

Finally Test 4, which compares the Post-test mean scores of the EG and the CG shows that the EG Post-test mean score of 75 was significantly higher than that from the CG post-test, which was 67 and the significance of the difference was confirmed by the T-Test.

The results from the questionnaire are shown below:

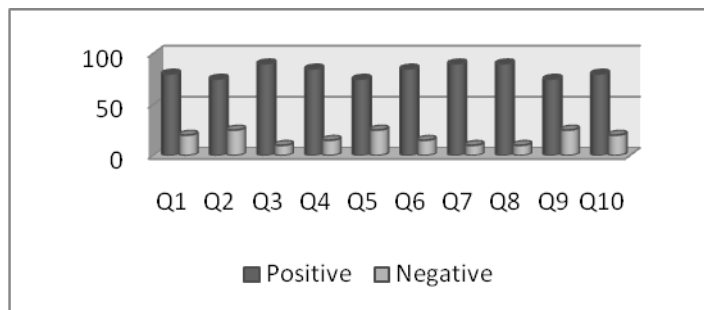


Figure 1. EG Response to The Use of The Think-Aloud Strategy

From Figure 1, it can be seen that there was a highly positive response from the EG students to the use of the Think-Aloud Strategy.

Discussions

From the findings above, there was a significant improvement in reading ability which was in line with Mockel's (2013) findings which found that after using the Think-Aloud Strategy, the students concerned showed greater understanding of the test texts. As supported by McLaughlin (2001) and Almelhi (2000) one of the most important principles in teaching reading comprehension is to construct knowledge-constructivism, which refers to the process of learning when new information is integrated with what is already known. In this technique, the knowledge construction happened during the steps in the Think-Aloud Strategy.

Further, McKeown and Gentilucci (2007) also found that the Think-Aloud Strategy exposed their students to better understanding of what they were reading. They suggested that this technique works a lot better with intermediate students in activating their metacognitive awareness during reading. And as soon as their metacognitive ability is enhanced, they will have higher motivation in reading for motivation is another key factor in reading (Gambrell, 1996). The students who have a higher motivation will engage more in reading comprehension because they want to understand the text.

Then, from the ten questions in the questionnaire for the EG students - on average 84% of the students had a positive response to the use of the Think-Aloud Strategy for teaching-learning in their reading class. This is in line with the point of view of Wilhelm (2001) who has said that the Think-Aloud Strategy helps students learn to monitor their

thinking as they read and thus helps to improve their comprehension. Besides, it teaches students to re-read a sentence, to read ahead to clarify, and/or to look for context clues to make sense of what they are reading.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusions

Based on the study findings from teaching-learning EFL English reading comprehension using the Think-Aloud Strategy with year XI students at SMA Lab School, the conclusions that can be drawn are as follows:

First - there was a significant improvement in the reading comprehension ability of the students who were taught-learned EFL English reading comprehension using the Think-Aloud Strategy while there was no significant change in the ability of those who were taught using the traditional way.

Second - the EG students who were taught-learned EFL English reading comprehension using the Think-Aloud strategy had an 84% positive response toward reading after the implementation of the Think-Aloud Strategy.

Suggestions

First for English teachers, the implementation of the Think-Aloud Strategy needs very little extra preparation. The only thing that the teacher has to do is to clearly explain the Strategy to her students and she should be very good at managing the students since this technique involves the students moving around the class to discuss the material. So the teachers must ensure that her students are not distracted. English teachers should use this technique since it can make their students more active in reading English.

Then, it is also suggested to the school Principal to support any process that can be used by the teachers to improve the value of their teaching-learning by providing any instruments and materials that might be needed by the teachers during the teaching process.

Finally, to other researchers, it is expected that there will be more studies after this one on the application of the Think-Aloud Strategy concerning its use with other language skills such as listening, speaking, and writing.

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