

TEACHING READING COMPREHENSION TO EFL JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Teachers have a vital role in the teaching learning process; their role supports the development of students' competency through learning. A teacher is required to possess comprehensive knowledge in pedagogy. In fact, a teacher can choose from a variety of methods to teach reading. In this study the researcher tried to find out the relationship between theory and facts. This study used descriptive research methods. The populations of this study were the English teachers and students in a junior high school in Banda Aceh. The instruments used were: observation sheets, questionnaires and interviews. Based on the data gathered, the researcher found several problems that needed to be solved, even though the teachers at the junior high school in Banda Aceh already had standard knowledge in teaching, especially in preparing lesson plans, but, they lacked the ability to implement their knowledge especially in teaching reading comprehension. Based on observations the researcher concluded that the methods and strategies generally applied by the teachers at the school were: Direct Method, Grammar Translation Method and Think Pair Share Method, which still required supervision. Therefore, the researcher hopes that this study can be continued by subsequent researchers in the future in order to provide more input for better implementation of methods in teaching English, especially for teaching reading comprehension.

Key Words: *Teaching Reading, Teachers' Methods, Teachers' Strategies, English.*

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays (mid 2015), English is taught, not only at *Sekolah Menengah Pertama* (SMP) or middle school, but also at elementary schools although at the latter it is not compulsory. English is taught as a compulsory subject covering the four language skills: speaking, listening, writing and reading. SMP students must learn reading comprehension because reading is a skill needed to get information (BNSP (*Badan Standar Nasional Pendidikan*) or the Body of National Education Standards, 2006). This standard states that one of the main objectives of English lessons at this level of education is comprehension of various short functional types of text, monologues and also essays concerning procedures, descriptions, recounting, narratives, and reports.

The teaching of reading comprehension is essential for preparing students with the basic reading skills in order to be able to gain information and knowledge from reading more effectively (Pardo, 2004). With good proficiency in reading comprehension, students are expected to glean knowledge from a specific text given to them to read. They are also expected to be able to extract meaning from specific cues in the text.

English teachers have made several attempts to teach students on how to read to gain adequate information. However the results still do not meet their expectations. The students are expected to be able to elicit the main idea, understand what they read, get explicit and implicit information and glean details from a simple text after they finish reading it. These important skills of reading comprehension need to be mastered by the students before they continue to the next level. Unsatisfactory results from the teaching of reading comprehension in SMP, which is frequently integrated with learning vocabulary, seem to be caused by several factors. One of the problems is the students have not mastered the lexical items. If the students do not master the vocabulary, they probably can not understand the meaning of the words used, so, the sentences do not make sense to them. Thus, reading is difficult and boring for them. If they do not like reading, they will not be able to increase their knowledge. Those who do not have sufficient vocabulary will not understand what they read. In addition, the teachers don't seek the best methods and techniques to develop students' reading proficiency. Likewise, the English teachers do not possess

enough knowledge of their students' needs in reading, and also the time allotted for teaching reading comprehension appears to be insufficient.

In teaching reading comprehension at SMP, English teachers are expected to prepare their students with a good foundation of reading skills. This includes the skills of finding main ideas, finding specific information, learning word meanings and consulting references, as requested in the School Based Curriculum (SBC) 2006, in order to help them achieve adequate proficiency in reading English texts. The teachers are also responsible to prepare the students with the ability to read for comprehension, in particular to enable them to answer questions based on the texts read.

Based on the above explanation, the writer was stimulated to conduct research into the teaching of reading comprehension of English to junior high school students in SMP Negeri 16, Banda Aceh.

Research Problems

The questions raised in this research are as follows:

1. What are the existing conditions of teaching reading comprehension at SMP Negeri 16 Banda Aceh?
2. What methods are employed by teachers in teaching reading comprehension at SMP Negeri 16 Banda Aceh?
3. What is the response of students towards the present methods of teaching reading comprehension at SMP Negeri 16 Banda Aceh?

Research Objectives

This research is intended to discover:

- The existing condition of teaching reading comprehension at SMP Negeri 16 Banda Aceh.
- The teaching methods at present used by teachers in teaching reading comprehension at SMP Negeri 16 Banda Aceh.
- The response of the students towards the present methods of teaching reading comprehension at SMP Negeri 16 Banda Aceh.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Reading Comprehension

According to Grellet (1981:3), learning reading comprehension of a written text is done in order to learn how to extract required

information from it as efficiently as possible. This means that what the readers do in reading is to find the key or basic information from the text. Hence, the student readers must be able to read a text to catch the author's ideas. In reading comprehension, as students read, they must hold important information and concepts in their mind. They must process words, sentences and paragraphs together in order to gain their full meaning. In addition, the student readers must be able to recall relevant information they already should know.

The students are expected to comprehend the ideas that are written in the reading passages. In order to make the students understand it well, they should have comprehension skills to lead them to a total understanding of the passages read so that they will be able to express what they have read in their own language. Moreover, reading comprehension is a process in which the reader constructs meaning using as the building materials the information on the printed page and the knowledge stored in the reader's head (Samuels, 1997:169). Based on this view, the readers must understand the meaning of the words used not only the literal meaning but also the meaning based on the context using their knowledge and/or experiences of the language. To achieve comprehension, fluency, vocabulary and semantic processing, visualization, working memory, reasoning and inference (see Moore, n.d.:3-7). They are the basic skills needed to understand what is read and those abilities combined are the skill of comprehension. Nonetheless, the identification of these comprehension skills is only a preliminary step. In brief, reading with comprehension means getting meaning from what is read.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is a qualitative descriptive study. The goal of this type of study is to provide a comprehensive summary of events in the everyday terms of those events where researchers stay close to their data and to the surface of words and events (Sandelowski, 2000). Accordingly, this study intended to obtain information on the teaching of reading comprehension at SMPN 16, Banda Aceh. This study collected information on the existing conditions of teaching English reading comprehension. This study also investigated the methods and techniques being used by teachers in teaching it.

The method used in this study is basically stated by judging the procedure of data collection, the subject (the nature of the subject) and

the objective of the study. The method of this study is descriptive and analytic in which describing the occurrences of teaching-learning processes and analyzing the results from data gathered.

Arikunto (2005) defines population as the large group to be learned something about. The populations in this study were the English teachers namely TK, TF and TM. In this study, because the sample was less than 100, the researcher took all the population as the sample.

The sources of data for this study were classroom observations, a questionnaire (closed-ended) and interviews. The data on how the teaching of English of Reading Comprehension was implemented in SMP 16 was gathered by doing classroom observations with a guideline. The focus was the way the teacher presented the English material to students. The activity used by teacher in the classroom in presenting English material was also investigated. Both teachers and students were the focus during the observation. Moreover, the physical situation of the classroom was also taken into account.

In addition, the existing conditions in the teaching-learning processes used by the teachers were obtained by using questionnaires with the students, and by conducting interviews as well.

All the data obtained from the questionnaire was analyzed to get simple percentages. This study is qualitative descriptive, the suitable formula to analyze the data is by using a simple formula as mentioned by Arikunto (2005:45) the formula is:

$$p=f/n \times 100\%$$

Where: P = percentage
F = Frequency of responses
N = Total Number of responses
100 = constant used to calculate percentages.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Existing Conditions in the Classroom

The existing conditions of teaching reading comprehension consisted of the activities run in the classroom, teachers' lesson plans, teachers' performances, teachers' pedagogy skills, students' responses, and classroom management.

Lesson Plans of the Teachers

Based on the data, it was found that all the teachers had the same format and items in their lesson plans. Nevertheless, almost all the teachers had various strategies that they used to encourage the students to develop their skills. Meanwhile, the teaching of reading was set in the opening phases in which the teacher review the vocabulary that the students had learnt previously and learn new vocabulary words in English which was suited to the entire topic that the students would learn at that time.

Teacher's Performance

Based on the data, it has found that all teachers did not perform good opening phase. In all of the classrooms, the writer found that the routine activities were almost the same. First, after all the students came into the classroom, they would greet the teacher. Then, the teachers would check the attendance. Two of the teachers did apperception while the other did not. Two of the three teachers had good apperception; this means that these teachers motivated the students for each lesson. Two of the teachers also did reviews while the other one did not. Reviewing the previous lesson is needed to refresh the students' minds about what was taught in that lesson.

Teachers' Pedagogy Skills

In the main activity, two of the teachers could not manage the activity systematically, while the other one could. It was due to the fact that the teacher was newly stationed in the school, and as a result she needed to adjust to her new teaching place. Consequently, it would be little bit hard for the teacher to manage the classroom as exactly as what had been planned as she had to face new students and environment. Nevertheless, all of the teachers could get the students' enthusiasm running and answer their questions about the lesson. All of the classes were student centered whereby the students were more active than the teachers. Moreover, all teachers had good interaction with the students, and also gave realistic examples during the lesson that the students could understand. In the closing session, two of the teachers summarized the lesson and gave feedback that motivated the students at the end of the class whilst the other one did not.

Students' Responses

The following six areas of student learning, the writer focused in seeing the students' responses during the teaching and learning process. The related data that the writer got could be seen at Table 1 below.

Table 1. Responses of the Students.

No.	Items			Class			Total	Percent %
				C1	C2	C3		
1	Students ready to study	a.100%			√		1	33.3
		b.>50%		√			1	33.3
		c.<50%	√				1	33.3
		d.0%					0	0.0
2	Students focused on the lesson	a.100%					0	0.0
		b.>50%		√	√		2	66.7
		c.<50%	√				1	33.3
		d.0%					0	0.0
3	Students gave questions	a.100%					0	0.0
		b.>50%					0	0.0
		c.<50%	√	√	√		3	100.0
		d.0%					0	0.0
4	Students actively taking part	a.100%					0	0.0
		b.>50%		√	√		2	66.7
		c.<50%	√				1	33.3
		d.0%					0	0.0
5	Students are confident	a.100%					0	0.0
		b.>50%	√		√		2	66.7
		c.<50%		√			1	33.3
		d.0%					0	0.0
6	Students understood the lesson	a.100%					0	0.0
		b.>50%	√				1	33.3
		c.<50%		√	√		2	66.7
		d.0%					0	0.0

Note: C1 = Class Ia, C2 = Class IIb, C3 = Class IIIc

Based on the questionnaire, it can be concluded that the students' responses in learning were good in average, as the percentage scores showed more than sixty percent of the students were focused on the lesson, gave questions, took part in classroom activities, confident and understood the lesson. Except for being ready to study was still given little positive responses and this indated that they had problems in this issue.

Classroom Management

There are some problems in the classroom management done by the teachers that need to be developed, there was still little thing to improve by the teacher, especially for the point of control and discipline and seating arrangement. It can be understood that it was because all of the teachers lived far from the school, but this should be considered by the stake holder in making policy in the first place.

Evaluation Process

It has been found that all of the teachers did not have exact session to test the students. The teacher would test them whenever the teacher thought was a good time for it. And also, all of the teachers scored the students directly during the time they gave the test. The reason was because most the test was oral test, for example, asking the students to read, and then the teachers scored the student competency directly. Two of the teachers had no specific rubric as a guideline for evaluation of the students. Despite the other one had it, thus, she rarely used it.

Methods and Strategies Used in Teaching Reading Comprehension

Related to the second question above, the writer found three methods or strategies used by the teachers in teaching reading comprehension at SMPN 16 Banda Aceh. They used the Direct Method, the Grammatical Method and the Think Pair Share Method.

Direct Method (DM)

Direct Method attempts to make the language learning situation one of the language use, and demands inventiveness on the part of teachers and led to the development of new techniques of language (Liu & Shi, 2007:67). The steps in teaching reading comprehension using the Direct Method as taught by TM in the 8th grade are as follows.

Opening

TM greeted the students, then she asked the students about the reading passage, for example: "How many paragraphs are in the passage? What are in the pictures? Where is each scene taking place? What is happening?" TM wrote the key words for the topic on the board and explained them to the students by giving simple information about the reading topic at the students' level of understanding.

Material delivery

TM gave a detailed explanation about the reading passage and also the examples to the students. She asked the students to read the passages in 20 minutes then asked them to find some difficult words. Speech method is the way she gave explanations. She presented the details by using simple English. For instance, she asked the students to discuss the reading passage for the first topic about Methods of Education: East Versus West: “What is the system of education in your country like? How is it different from the American System? Which system do you prefer? What other educational methods are there? Describe them and tell some of their advantages and disadvantages?”

Closing

TM further gave an evaluation; this included answering the book’s exercises and questions related to the reading passage. If the students answered these questions correctly with less interference from the teacher, the goals of the lesson had been achieved.

Grammar-Translation Method (GTM)

This method was used by TF in teaching reading comprehension to the 1st graders. GTM emphasizes the teaching of second language grammar where its principle techniques is translation from and into the target language, and in practice, reading and writing are the major focus with little or no systematic attention is paid to speaking or listening (Li & Shiu, 2007:69). The steps TF used in teaching with this method were as the following.

Opening

TF greeted the students, then she asked the students about the reading passage, for example: “How many paragraphs are in the passage? What are in the pictures? Where is each scene taking place? What is happening in each picture?” She wrote the key words of topic on the board and explained them to the students. She gave simple information about the reading topic relevant to the students’ level of proficiency. For example, translating the idea of the topic by giving them the idea in their language and culture.

Material delivery

TF explained the benefits of comprehending the passage, for instance by developing students’ awareness of the reading process and reading strategies by asking them to think and talk about how they read in their native language. They were then given 20 minutes to read the passage, and TF encouraged the students to read and learn by giving

them some choices of reading materials. She explained about any difficult words found in the reading passage by the students. In this case, she usually asked the students to translate the reading passage.

Closing

TF gave an evaluation that included answering the book's exercises and questions related to the reading passage. If the students answered these questions correctly with little assistance from the teacher, the goals of the lesson had been achieved.

Think Pair Share (TPS) Method

TPS is a classroom-based active learning strategy, in which students work on a problem posed by the instructor, first individually, then in pairs, and finally as a class-wide discussion (Kothiyal, et al., 2013:51). Based on the observation, TM conducted the following steps in teaching reading using the TPS Method.

Opening

The first step was in the opening where TM gave the main mastery and the target competency. She then asked the students to think the problem or mastery which had been given.

Material Delivery

The process of teaching reading comprehension in the class is of course based on the syllabus and the lesson plans. In TPS, the students were provided with a text that they had to share and communicate with each other, in which the text was about transportation. They were given some questions related to the text to be thought about individually before they shared their ideas in pairs to the whole class. In the individual thinking activity, they were not allowed to ask each other. Then in pair time, the students were to share their ideas to each pair so they could reach more understanding. In this phase of activity, they were more active, argumentative and selective. And the last activity was sharing. Every pair had to share the ideas which they had discussed as a pair with the whole class.

Closing

TM made a simple conclusion from the mastery and ended the class.

Discussion

The study found that the teachers chose instructional materials merely from magazines and textbooks published by Scholastic. Thus,

they should have used other learning resources to avoid monotone and raise motivation of the students to be more active in class. The evaluation system seemed to need revision, because no standard evaluation method was used by the teachers. This was poor for the assessment process and could be detrimental to the students because it was not objective.

Thus, the teachers' performances were all good, though there were still little things that could be improved, especially in making the classes to run smoothly as planned. The teachers should always be prepared for problems that might happen during the teaching-learning process.

The teacher's pedagogy skills were sufficient. They were active in asking students to respond to their friend's questions or comments. They helped students overcome shyness so that they were brave enough to improve themselves. However, their evaluation process still needed improvement. There were still many things that the teachers should revise in the evaluations for the teaching-learning process. Systematic evaluation was not found, so the teaching-learning process would not achieve the purpose of learning.

Regarding to the classroom management, some improvements could be made, especially on the seating arrangements. There was a large number of students in each class and rules on noise management could be enhanced.

In implementing DM, GTM and TPS methods, they had used simple speech and simple sentences in speaking to get the students to understand them easily. The responses of students towards these methods were mostly positive except being ready to study. Therefore, this issue should be resolved by the teachers by making more interesting opening activities to start the classes.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusions

This study focused on the existing conditions and methods used in teaching reading comprehension at a junior high school in Band Aceh. Lesson plans are very important to help teachers plan their classroom activities and the teachers at the school did almost all the main items in their lesson plans, such as: competency standard-basic competency, theme/topic, timing, indicators, activities, and aids. Nevertheless, there were still two items that they did not put in their lesson plans, namely

source and assessment. Even though they have their own ways to assess the work of their students, none of the teachers wrote it up in their lesson plans. Therefore, the evaluation system still needed improvement because the teachers did not have standard evaluation systems. Without them, it could be detrimental to students because then it could not be objective.

Three different methods were used by the teachers for teaching reading comprehension, the direct method, the grammatical method and the think pair share method. The three methods were implemented successfully by the teachers, despite readiness was not found from the students' part at the beginning of classes. The students gave mostly positive responses toward the teaching learning processes for reading comprehension. They were active, involved in the teaching-learning process, and were able to answer most questions correctly.

Suggestions

To improve the teaching of reading comprehension in English, it is suggested that at the beginning of class, a teacher should build knowledge of the topic by giving students new vocabulary or expressions that will be used in the topic, giving simple texts (related to the topic) to start with and adding more background knowledge on the topic. Hence, since this study was limited to the existing conditions and methods used by only three teachers in teaching reading comprehension, further research should consider in focusing on benefits and challenges which are faced by teachers in teaching reading comprehension, and further analyze the problems that students face in reading comprehension classes.

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