

THE EFFECT OF THE THINK ALOUD STRATEGY ON STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION ABILITY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the efficacy of the think aloud strategy in improving students' reading comprehension ability. Think aloud is a learning strategy in which students verbalize their thoughts as they read. This quantitative study included twenty second-grade students from MAS Darul Ulum Banda Aceh. A pre-experimental design with a one-group pretest-posttest was used in this study. According to the findings, the think aloud strategy improves students' reading comprehension ability, particularly in analytical exposition texts. It is clear from the post-test mean score (54.4), which was higher than the pre-test means score (36.4). The t-test analysis revealed that the t-score (4.255) outperformed the t-table (2.085). This strategy successfully assisted students in improving their overall reading comprehension ability, particularly in identifying main ideas, making inferences, summarizing, and interpreting vocabulary. As a result, the think aloud strategy can be regarded as an effective instructional tool for teaching reading proficiency.

Keywords: *reading comprehension, teaching reading, think aloud strategy*

INTRODUCTION

People have different points of view towards the definition of reading. Some people say that reading is a way to gain knowledge

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through the recognition of words, while for others reading is just for pleasure since everyone can do it. Reading occurs when the eyes receive written symbols and the brain processes the symbols to derive meaning from a text. Reading activities occur in order to obtain information from various sources including books, texts, articles, magazines, and websites. Snow (2002) stated that reading activities involve several outcomes such as increasing knowledge, application, engagement with the text, and learning new vocabulary. As stated by Pang et al. (2003, p), reading is crucial for children and adults. Reading skill helps readers gain knowledge, enjoy literature, and do everyday things such as reading newspapers, job listings, instructional manuals, and maps.

On the other hand, comprehension is critical in reading because reading skill is meaning if the reader does not comprehend the text, for reading and comprehension work together. The need to improve student's reading comprehension is a crucial issue. Improving students' reading comprehension positively affects their further academic achievement. The higher education students take, the more books they have to read, which requires the ability to comprehend the reading material. In short, through comprehension, an individual will be able to grasp or interpret information with what he/she has known, or to make the connection to his/her prior knowledge.

However, a study by Central Connecticut State University (www.ccsu.edu) revealed that Indonesia faced a severe reading problem, where it was 60th out of 61 countries. It was also reported by PISA 2018 that the reading ability of Indonesian school students was scored 371, which was placed 74 out of 81 countries. This is a serious problem that we have to overcome, for reading is one of the most used skills to acquire knowledge and information.

On the 10th of January 2020, the researchers conducted a preliminary study at MAS Darul Ulum Banda Aceh.. The preliminary study was carried to assess the reading comprehension of an analytical exposition text. The test result revealed that the students' reading comprehension skill were below the minimum passing criterion. The researchers discoveres some factors that contributed to the students' difficulty understanding the reading text. First, a lack of vocabulary was the source of the students' poor reading skills, which rendered them unable to comprehend the text. Second, the students were unable to comprehend the text's content, which most likely due to insufficient background knowledge on the subject.

In order to overcome students' reading comprehension issues, the researchers chose the think aloud strategy.. According to Sönmez and Sulak (2018), the think aloud strategy is a strategy in which the teacher vocally expresses their thought to students while reading a text in order to improve their awareness during the comprehension process. In this regard, this strategy can help students to monitor their comprehension process and build a good social interaction among the students since they work in pairs and small groups of 5 to 6 students.

Researchers have conducted a number of research studies on the application of the think aloud strategy in classrooms.. Research by Sönmez & Sulak (2018) investigated the effect of think-aloud strategy on reading comprehension skill of 4th grade students of primary school in the central district of Turkey; their findings show that think aloud strategy improved students' reading comprehension. It is related to the findings of Jackson (2016) on elementary students' reading comprehension in the science content area. The research indicates the students who were involved in the think aloud treatments had higher comprehension than those who did not. Furthermore, Block and Israeli (2004) stated think aloud is beneficial for students to improve their understanding, decoding, vocabulary, as well as fluency.

Meanwhile, a study conducted by Barjesteh (2010) on the reading comprehension skills of Iranian EFL readers found that the think aloud strategy improved students' ability to monitor their comprehension during the reading process and developed student's fix-up strategy when they encountered difficulty comprehending the text. In addition, Xiao (2016) found that the think aloud strategy successfully increased students' vocabulary deficiencies as well as their metacognition knowledge when she investigated the impact of the think aloud strategy on improving poor readers' vocabulary in China. In conclusion, previous research on the use of the think aloud strategy significantly improved students' reading comprehension.

In general, all of these studies have contributed to our understanding of how to use the the think aloud strategy in teaching reading comprehension. Furthermore, the majority of these studies focused on applying the think aloud strategy toward elementary students (for example, Jackson, 2016; Sönmez & Sulak, 2018) and university students (for example, Barjesteh, 2010; Jahandar et al., 2012; Pritchard & O'hara, 2006; Yayli, 2010). However, there are still a comparatively small number of such studies focusing on high school students (see e.g. Wang, 2016). As a result, the current study sought to

investigate the implementation of the think aloud strategy among high school students, which has received little attention. Hence, the researchers formulated the following research question: “Does the use of the think aloud strategy in the teaching and learning process improve students’ reading comprehension ability?”.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Nature of Reading

Alyousef (2006) defines reading as an “interactive” process between a reader and a text that leads to reading fluency. The action of synthesizing the meaning of a text with the involvement of linguistic or systemic knowledge as well as schematic knowledge is referred to as an interactive process.. Spranger et al. (2011) explain reading activity as a combination of many skills, including prior knowledge, the ability to make connection, and questioning throughout the reading process. In other words, reading skill entails a variety of activities in order to comprehend the meaning. Reading ability is more than just being able to read the words. Readers must deduce the meaning of the written words by connecting prior knowledge to the information in the text.

Pang et al. (2003) provide a similar definition, describing reading as an activity that involves both perception and thought in order to comprehend written text.. Furthermore, Mckeown and Gentilucci (2007) define reading as a covert process of creating meaning from text, as well as readers’ practice of thinking about their metacognition while engaged with the reading text.

Besides, reading has different purposes. Berardo (2006) [says that](#) reading serves three functions: survival, learning, and pleasure. Reading for survival refers to the ability to read written words or symbols found in everyday activities such as street signs, prescriptions, and food ingredients, etc. Meanwhile, reading for learning is an activity that involves reading for study or academic purposes. In contrast, reading for pleasure is considered as reading activity that is primarily for enjoyment.

Based on some aforementioned statements, the researcher concludes that reading skill is an active skill in which readers attempt to process the text by making a connection between the information written in the text and the readers’ prior knowledge. Moreover, reading

is necessary because it allows readers to broaden their perspectives and opportunities (Pang et al., 2003).

Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is an important element in reading because readers who lack reading comprehension skill are unable to understand what they read because they are unable to synthesize the message in the text. Thus, readers must have strong comprehension skill. Snow (2002) defines reading comprehension as a process of extracting and constructing meaning through interaction with written language. This statement is similar to Jackson (2016), who stated that reading comprehension is the act of understanding and constructing meaning from written words.

Moreover, comprehension is defined as the act in processing information by connecting the information to the readers' prior knowledge. Reading comprehension is influenced by background knowledge, culture, and experience in addition to fluency and decoding (Jackson, 2016).

Reading comprehension occurs when readers comprehend the text by associating, integrating, and interacting with the written text's content. In this case, comprehension can be determined by employing various reading strategies (Yang, 2016). According to Ortlieb and Norris (2012), comprehension entails a variety of strategies that allow a reader to comprehend what they are reading.

Teaching Reading

Teaching reading is a process of passing on knowledge about how to comprehend a written text. In reading instruction, the teacher is also referred to as facilitator because she or he assists students in employing various reading strategies. The teacher is crucial in developing students' reading ability, particularly in English text. According to Alyousef (2006), it is the responsibility of the teacher to motivate students to read by selecting appropriate materials.

Furthermore, as stated by Hedge (2003) in Alyousef (2006), teaching reading has six goals. First and foremost, teaching reading aims to improve students' ability to read a wide range of texts in English which is beneficial for students' career, study, or pleasure. Besides, teaching reading helps students develop language knowledge which improves their reading ability. It also helps students improve

their schematic knowledge. This activity refers to the ability of students to extract the meaning of a text by connecting their experience and knowledge. The ability to adapt the reading style to the reading purpose is the next goal of teaching reading.. Students will be able to skim and scan the text, which will make the reading process more efficient. Teaching reading also aims to develop an understanding of the structure of written English text. Lastly, it intends to be critical of the text's contents. In other words, it seeks to engage students in critical thinking about a text.

Think Aloud Strategy

Several experts have defined the term "think aloud strategy.". Sönmez and Sulak (2018) define the think aloud strategy as a strategy in which the teacher vocally expresses his/her thought to students while they are reading a text, with the goal of improving students' awareness during the comprehension process. In other words, the think aloud strategy requires the teacher to model the visualization processes while reading a text by talking out loud about his or her thoughts in order to describe the comprehension process to the students. Block and Israel (2007) mention the possibility of revealing the thought process. It is claimed that think aloud enables readers to pause periodically, reflect on the thinking they do to comprehend a text, and verbalize this literacy process orally.

Besides, Barjesteh (2010) pointed out that think aloud strategy instructs students to think aloud while speaking to themselves as if they were alone in the room. Students must verbalize in order to benefit from this strategy. When students begin reading a text, many ideas will arise in their minds as they process the information. During the process, they may have questions about the topic of the text or the meaning of the given photograph. Thereby, the teacher employs visualization to help students feel more connected to the material by asking them to explain their mental image as they read, which aids in their comprehension of the reading material.

Moreover, Mckeown and Gentilucci (2007) provide another definition, explaining that the think aloud strategy is used as a method of measuring the cognitive reading process and then as a metacognitive tool in monitoring reading comprehension. In this regard, the think aloud strategy is defined as a strategy for readers to monitor their reading comprehension. Furthermore, Jackson (2016) believes that the

think aloud strategy allows students to monitor their thinking process while engaged with a text to gain comprehension of what they read.

Furthermore, McKeown and Gentilucci (2007) define think aloud as one of the “transactional strategies” because it is a collaboration process in which the teacher and students are working together to construct the meaning of the text. The think aloud strategy for reading instruction engages students in comprehending a text by associating their prior knowledge, interests, motivation, and reading purposes with the reading material.

Baumann, Jones and Seifert-Kessell (1993) state that the purpose of the think aloud strategy is to enable second language learners to monitor their reading comprehension and to employ reading strategies to facilitate text comprehension. Similarly,, Sprainger et al. (2011) propose six purposes of the think aloud strategy as follows: (1) to measure students’ comprehension of the text, (2) to observe students’ reading behavior and their cognitive strategies, (3) to determine students’ metacognition knowledge, (4) to know the effectiveness of reading comprehension instruction, (5) to know the reader’s motivation and engagement, and (6) to know how students perceive themselves as readers.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Think Aloud Strategy

Several scholars have examined the literature and found evidence of the effectiveness of think aloud as an instructional strategy in improving reading comprehension. One major advantage of the think aloud strategy is to assist students to improve their thinking process, understand the reading text, and verbalize their thought while being engaging with the reading text (Barjesteh, 2010; Block & Israel, 2004). Moreover, Baumann, Seifert, Kessel, and Jones (1993) state that think aloud instruction is highly effective in acquiring reading strategies to improve students’ comprehension, and deal with comprehension difficulties. Correspondingly, think aloud encourages students to engage in more deliberate strategic reading (Jahandar et al., 2012).

Another advantage of the think aloud strategy is that readers can report their thoughts while also participating in the reading process (Barjesteh, 2010). Verbalization is the act of sharing readers’ inner thoughts.. The think aloud strategy relies heavily on verbalization.. When readers verbalize their thoughts while reading, they are combining information in the text with their prior knowledge. In

consequence, this activity helps readers comprehend the text and keeps them engaged with it.

According to Ortlieb and Norris (2012), a good implementation of the think aloud strategy has a positive impact on students' reading comprehension achievement. This is because the think aloud strategy assists students in comprehending the reading text and to monitoring their comprehension as they engage with the text. Block and Israel (2004) note that the think aloud strategy helps students to connect with the text, provides examples of how expert readers deal with reading difficulties, and has been proven to assist students with reading comprehension.

Besides the advantages mentioned above, the think aloud strategy has some disadvantages. According to Afflerbach and Johnston (1984), think aloud can be disruptive for early advanced English learners. This might happen because the students are already able to judge whether comprehension is occurring and when to stop and clarify meaning (McKeown & Gentilucci, 2007). The use of think aloud strategy during reading may be distracting to early advanced students.. They might also complain about having to stop and verbalize their thought when they already understand it.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative experimental research design. Arikunto (2010) states that quantitative research is one type of research that employs numbers for data collection, data interpretation, and the presentation of results. In other words, a quantitative research method is a type of research method that uses statistics to investigate the surrounding phenomenon and examine data collection.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of the think aloud strategy has on students' reading comprehension. The relationship between two different variables, reading comprehension and the think aloud strategy, was investigated in this study. The dependent variable is students' reading comprehension, while the independent variable is the think aloud strategy. The independent variable is the cause whose value is unaffected by other variables. Meanwhile, the dependent variable is the effect that depends on the independent variable.

Moreover, this study employs a pre-experimental design with a one-group pre-test and post-test design in which the researchers

administered two tests to one class group. Mackey and Gass (2005) describe that the participants are given a pre-test to ensure their ability prior to treatment, and a post-test to measure the effects of the treatment. Furthermore, the results of pre-test and post-test were compared to determine the effectiveness of the think aloud strategy in improving students' reading comprehension.

This study was conducted at MAS Darul Ulum Banda Aceh, an Indonesian senior high school. The population for this study consisted of all 11th grade students at MAS Darul Ulum Banda Aceh. Meanwhile, for the samples, the researchers chose one class, . XI IS 2 which consisted of 33 female students. The researcher used a random-sampling technique to determine the samples. According to Johnson and Christensen (2014), a random sampling technique or also known as simple random sampling is a sample in which every possible sample of a given size has an equal chance to be selected. Simply put, it is a sampling technique in which each participant has an equal opportunity to be chosen for a study. In this research, Class XI IS 2 was chosen as the sample.

The researchers implemented instructional procedures of the think aloud strategy in the classroom activity as outlined by Sahebkhair and Aidinlou (2014). However, the researchers combined and adjusted all the instructional procedures to meet the needs of the students' . Additionally, the researchers also calculated the t-score by using the following statistical formula.

$$t = \frac{\bar{x} - \mu^0}{\frac{s}{\sqrt{n}}}$$

From the formula, t represents the t-score, $\bar{x}$ is the mean score, μ^0 is the passing score, s is the standard deviation and n is the number of students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results

At the beginning of the first meeting, the researchers administered a pre-test before the think aloud strategy was implemented. Figure 1 shows the students' pre-test scores.

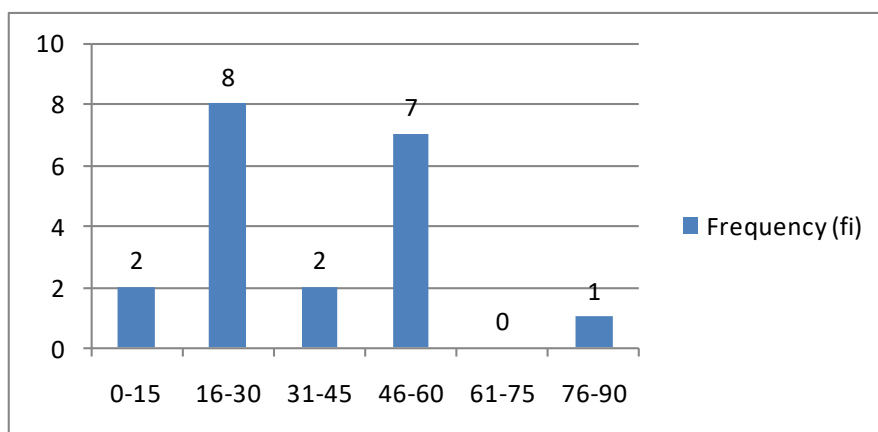


Figure 1. Students' pre-test scores

Figure 1 indicates that the students' reading comprehension ability was low. Based on Figure 1, two students received 0-15 (the lowest score); eight students received 16-30; two students received 31-45, seven students received 46-60; no student received 61-75; and one student received 76-90 (the highest score).

After the pre-test, the treatments were administered to the students over three meetings. The post-test was administered in order to compare students' pre-test and post-test scores. The data of post-test scores is presented in Figure 2 below.

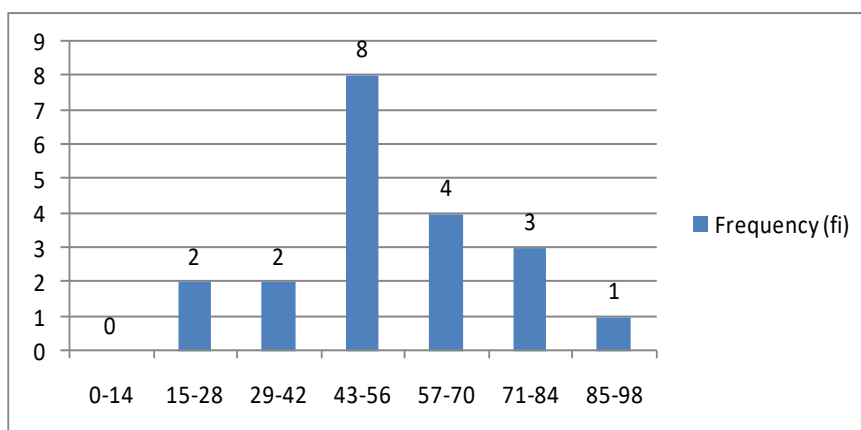


Figure 2. Students' post-test scores

As shown in Figure 2, no student received 0-14; two students received 15-28; two students received 29-42; eight students received

43-56; four students received 57-70, three students received 71-84; and one student received 85-98.

The researchers then calculated the mean scores, variance and standard deviation of the pre-test and the post-test, and the results are as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Group of the study

Group	N	Mean	Variance	Std.Deviation
Pre-test	20	36.4	355	18.8
Post-test	20	54.4	319	17.8

In the case of the pre-test, the mean score is 36.4, the variance is 355, and the standard deviation is 18.8. Meanwhile, the mean post-test score was 54.5; the variance for the post-test was 319, and the standard deviation of the post-test was 17.8

Furthermore, a more detailed analysis of the data revealed the mean pre-test and post-test scores for each aspect of reading comprehension as presented in Figure 3 below.

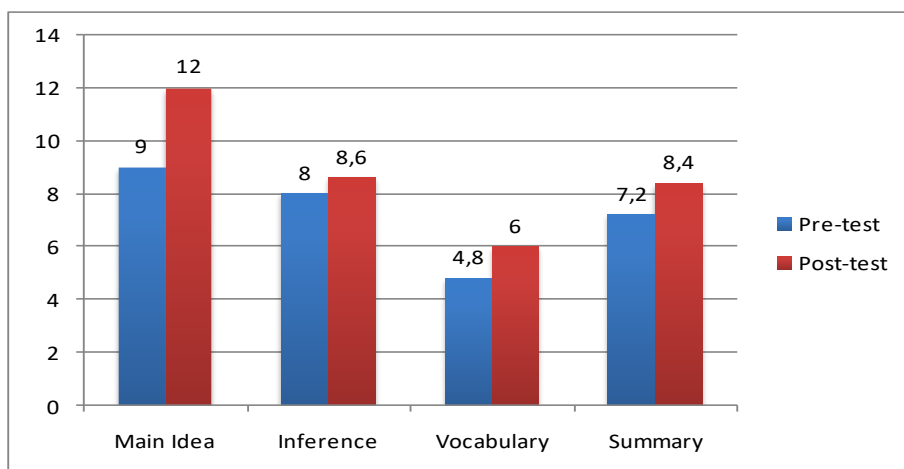


Figure 3. The mean scores of reading comprehension for each aspect

The figure above shows that the mean score of the main idea increase the most, from 9 to 12. The mean score for inference increased slightly from 8 to 8.6. For vocabulary, the mean score increased from 4.8 to 6. Other than that, for the summary aspect, the mean score increased from 7.2 to 8.4. Based on the data, there was an upward

movement in all the aspects of students' reading comprehension after using the think aloud strategy.

Furthermore, a paired samples t-test was conducted in order to prove the hypothesis and determine whether there was a difference between pre-test and post-test. Thus, the researchers drew the following diagram in order to present the comparison between the t-table and the t-score.

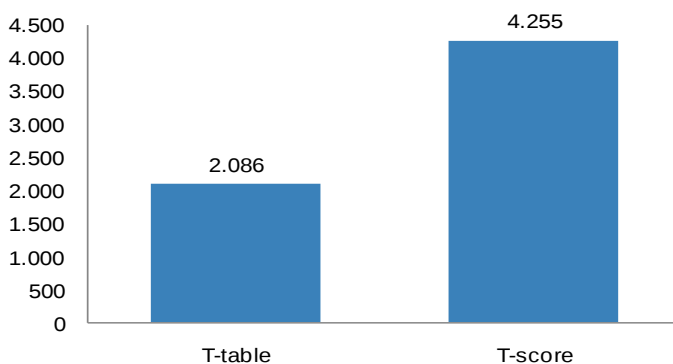


Figure 4. The comparison of t-table and t-score

The t-test with 95% confidence interval and α level (0.05) revealed a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test. Furthermore, it also revealed that the t-score=4.255, then the sig. (2 tailed) of t-table=2.086. Based on the explanation above, the t-score was higher than the t-table ($t_s=4.255 > t_t=2.086$). Therefore, the alternative hypothesis (H_a) was accepted and the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected. It can be concluded that there was a significant difference in the students' reading comprehension ability.

Discussions

The efficacy of the think aloud strategy in improving reading comprehension ability in second-grade senior high school students was investigated in this study. Based on the statistical analyses and observation, the mean score of the post-test (54.4) displayed a higher gain compared to that of the pre-test (31.65). Moreover, in order to accept the alternative hypothesis, the t-score must be higher than the t-table ($t_s > t_t$). As it was shown in the data analyses, the t-score (5.631) was higher than the t-table (2.086). Therefore, the researcher can

concluded that teaching reading comprehension using the think aloud strategy benefits students' reading comprehension abilities.

The primary goal of this research was to examine the aspects of reading comprehension, namely main idea, inference, vocabulary, and summary. The findings showed that using the think aloud strategy during the teaching and learning process improved students' reading comprehension in all aspects. As previously stated, the highest increase was in the main idea (from 9 to 12). Meanwhile, the aspect with the lowest increase was discovered to be inference (from 8 to 8.6).

Overall, this strategy has proven to be an effective strategy to improve students' reading comprehension skill. These findings are consistent with the previous research studies by Block and Israel (2004), McKeown and Gentilucci (2007), Ortlieb and Norris (2012), Jahandar et. al. (2012), Jackson (2016), and Sönmez and Sulak (2018), all of which discovered that this strategy is effective in improving students' reading comprehension ability.

During the instructional processes, students were taught how to make prediction during the reading process. Making predictions enabled the students to create mental images from the title or the given picture found in the text. Before reading the actual text, the researcher asked the students to predict the topic of the text. It was easier for the students to determine the main idea of the text once they had predicted the topic. Moreover, the think aloud strategy provided students opportunities to practice verbalizing their thoughts. To monitor their thinking process, students were required to read aloud about the text. During the reading process, the students were taught to stop periodically and reflect on their thinking process in order to ensure that they understood what they had read. Based on the observation, this activity assisted the students to find the detail information or inference which is not stated clearly in the text.

Besides, the students were also required to read the text aloud before they read the text silently. At the beginning, the students felt embarrassed to read the text in front of the others because they often misspelled some words while reading the text. However, the researchers facilitated the students to learn how to read the text correctly. Consequently, the students became more confident to practice their pronunciation in reading English text.

The think aloud strategy allows the students to overcome reading difficulties. This finding is also consistent with the findings of Baumann et al. (1993), who stated that this strategy enables the

students to activate self-regulation strategies when encountered with comprehension difficulties. Once they found a new vocabulary in the text, they were taught how to use fix-up strategy such as rereading the sentence or using context clues instead of looking at a dictionary. Besides that, the students also guessed the meaning of the unknown word or looking for its synonym.

Additionally, the researcher asked the students to activate their prior knowledge by connecting their experiences to the reading material. This activity helped them comprehend the text better. In this case, the students used their prior knowledge or what they had already known to summarize the new information in the reading material.

Furthermore, this research supports the finding made by Kucan and Beck (1997) that this strategy improves student social interaction. The results indicate that the think aloud strategy helped students in improving not only their reading comprehension skills but also their social interaction among themselves.

Taking into consideration the results discussed above, the students' reading comprehension scores increased over time when they were taught using the think aloud strategy. Besides, this strategy improved their social interaction in class. The students were more engaged during the teaching and learning process. They also understood analytical exposition text better when it was taught using the think aloud strategy. Eventually, the students will become expert readers who can comprehend a text independently when they are repeatedly exposed to the think aloud strategy.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The purpose of this study is to determine the improvement in reading comprehension of the 11th grade students at MAS Darul Ulum Banda Aceh following the use of the think aloud strategy. The results of the investigation indicated that the think aloud strategy improved students' reading comprehension ability significantly. It can be seen from the difference between the mean score of the post-test (54.4) which received a higher score compared to the pre-test (36.4). The results showed that the t-score (4.255) outperformed the t-table (2.086). Besides, Furthermore, after repeatedly exposing students to the think aloud strategy, there were improvements in the four aspects of reading comprehension, namely identifying a main idea, making inferences, summarizing, and interpreting.

The use of the think aloud strategy during the teaching and learning process helped students in developing positive social interactions. As instructed by the researchers to read the text with their friends, this strategy allowed the students to interact with one another and actively discuss the text.

Further research is recommended to use a larger number of participants in order to provide more valid findings. Since the sample of this research was male students, it is suggested that future research studies investigate students with different genders in order to find out whether gender is a factor that influences the effectiveness of the think aloud strategy. Besides, it is suggested that other researchers investigate the effects of this strategy on the other types of text with different levels of English skill.

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