

IMPROVING STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION THROUGH INTERACTIVE READ-ALOUD TECHNIQUE

By

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Abstract:

The present study, entitled *Improving Students' Reading Comprehension through Interactive Read-Aloud*, attempts to unlock problems found in teaching and reading comprehension through interactive read-aloud in a Senior High School of Sport (SMAN Olah Raga) Lampung, in Metro. The findings revealed that students' reading comprehension improved through interactive read-aloud. The improvement can be seen from the increase of test results, meaning construction, and motivation. The process of reading activities showed that the teacher's gesture and body language, 20 questions, explain and guess activities were proven to help the students construct meaning from the given texts. In addition, interactive read-aloud is effective to boost students' motivation to comprehend the texts.

Key words: Reading comprehension, interactive read-aloud.

Introduction

As one of the four skills, reading plays an important role in enhancing students' English ability. More importantly reading functions as a tool to accessing information to the worldwide web. Reading widely is a highly effective means of extending our command of language, so it has important place in classrooms where language learning is central purpose (Nutall, 2000).

In secondary school (SMA) reading skill is still given a priority. The objective of teaching is the development

of communicative ability in English embracing four language skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) with an emphasis on reading ability. The order of language skills to be taught has been changed from reading, listening, writing, and speaking to reading, listening, speaking, and writing. (Huda, 1999).

Wells (in Depdiknas, 2003) puts forward four literacy levels namely performative, functional, informational, and epistemic levels. At performative level, students are able to read and write, and speak with used symbols; at functional level, people are hoped to be able to use language for daily needs such

as reading newspaper; at informational level, people can access knowledge with their language; while at epistemic level, people can transform knowledge to a certain language.

For secondary school (SMA) graduates, its curriculum (Mendiknas, 2006) targets the students at the third level that is informational level. At this level, regarding reading skill students are demanded to understand various meanings (interpersonal, ideational, textual meanings) in various interactive written texts. In fact, students' reading skill still shows unsatisfactory yet. It can be seen from their final results of exam which are still far from the targeted passing grade. Yet the teaching of English in Indonesia in general and in secondary schools in particular is not successful (Huda, 1999). Moreover the government has issued the passing grade for students to be achieved. The passing grade covers some lessons including English with minimal score not lower than 4.26 for each lesson. This policy is of great concern not only for teachers and students but also parents.

The present study tries to investigate the improvement on teaching and learning reading comprehension

through interactive read-aloud. Reasons for choosing this kind of technique, among other things, are that this technique has been documented many times effective to boost students' reading comprehension (Krashen & Trelease in Herrel and Jordan, 2004:27) and it allows teachers to validate their teaching reading strategy in support of their students. Hopefully this study can contribute and support teachers in meeting some of the more daunting challenges of teaching reading.

Departing from the notions of reading comprehension eluded before, many people are on the way of seeking teaching model of reading in ways that facilitate students' reading comprehension. One of the models proposed in this study is teaching reading comprehension through interactive read-aloud.

The theory of reading comprehension here has been adopted from Ruddell et al. Ruddell (1994:415) defines comprehension as a process in which a reader constructs meaning while, or after, interacting with text through the combination of prior knowledge and previous experience, information in text, the stance she or he

takes in relationship to the text, and immediate, remembered, or anticipated social interactions and communication. Meanwhile, according to taxonomy of comprehension and levels of thinking (Ruddel, Draheim, & Barnes, 1990) there are four levels of comprehension:

The first is literal- recall of text-based information (e.g., “Do you remember the name of Sangkuriang’s dog?”). The second is interpretive-manipulation of text-based information to infer new meaning (e.g., “Why do you suppose Sangkuriang and Dayang Sumbi would live together happily?”). The third is applicative- transfer and use of text-based and personal knowledge to develop new meaning in a novel situation (e.g., “Well, suppose that at the end of the story you were feeling the way Sangkuriang were feeling, would you still try to marry Dayang Sumbi? Why?”). The last is transactive-emphathetic use of text based and personal knowledge and values to encourage the reader to identify with a character and to enter into and respond to the story more fully (e.g., “Have you ever wanted to be like Sangkuriang at the end of the story? Why?”).

Meanwhile, interactive read-aloud (Barrentine in Herrel and Michael, 2004) is the reading of books out loud with the use of expression, different voices for different characters, gestures, and the active participation of the listeners through predicting, discussion, and checking for understanding. It also involves the exploration of the structure of text and think-aloud strategies that demonstrate how the reader gains meaning from text.

The steps in implementing interactive read-aloud (Herrel and Jordan, 2004:28-29) are: The first is choosing an appropriate book—choose a book that is above the instructional reading level of the students that will give you an opportunity to provide a rich read-aloud experience through the use of different voices, excitement, and drama. Set aside a time each day when you will read aloud interactively with your students.

The second is prereading and planning interactions—before beginning the read-aloud sessions, read the book you have chosen thoroughly. Use sticky notes to mark places for discussion, predicting, and connections to other

books the students have read or personal experiences they can relate to the story.

The third is stopping for interactions—select a 10-15 minute section of the text to read each time, stopping at logical places between readings. Read with enthusiasm, using gestures and voices, and review the events of each day's reading at the end of the session. Discuss prediction for the next day's reading and involve the students in relating the events of the day to their own experiences or similar literary experiences. Use graphic devices like story mapping or daily illustrations of the events to keep the students interested.

The fourth is assessing student progress and understanding—students' abilities to paraphrase or retell events in a story are indicative of their understanding of the story. Meanwhile, English learners may understand the story and not have the vocabulary or confidence to retell or paraphrase. They can often draw illustrations or act out scenes to indicate their comprehension. To determine whether the strategy of interactive read-aloud is effective, pause
Cycle 1

occasionally to allow students to demonstrate their understanding by paraphrasing, illustrating, or acting scenes. Anecdotal records of these types of informal assessments can be kept in individual student portfolios.

Method of The Research

This study employed an action research as its basic design. This strategy basically is a way of reflecting on teaching. It is done by systematically collecting data on everyday practice and analyzing it in order to come to some decisions about what future practice should be (Wallace, 1998:4).

The main characteristic of action research is the spiral cycles consisting of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Suyanto, 2002). The spiral cycle consists of problem identification, systematic data collection, analysis, and finally, problem redefinition. In short, the cycle consists of diagnostic and therapeutic stages.

The cycles of action research could be illustrated as a set of activities as depicted in figure 1.

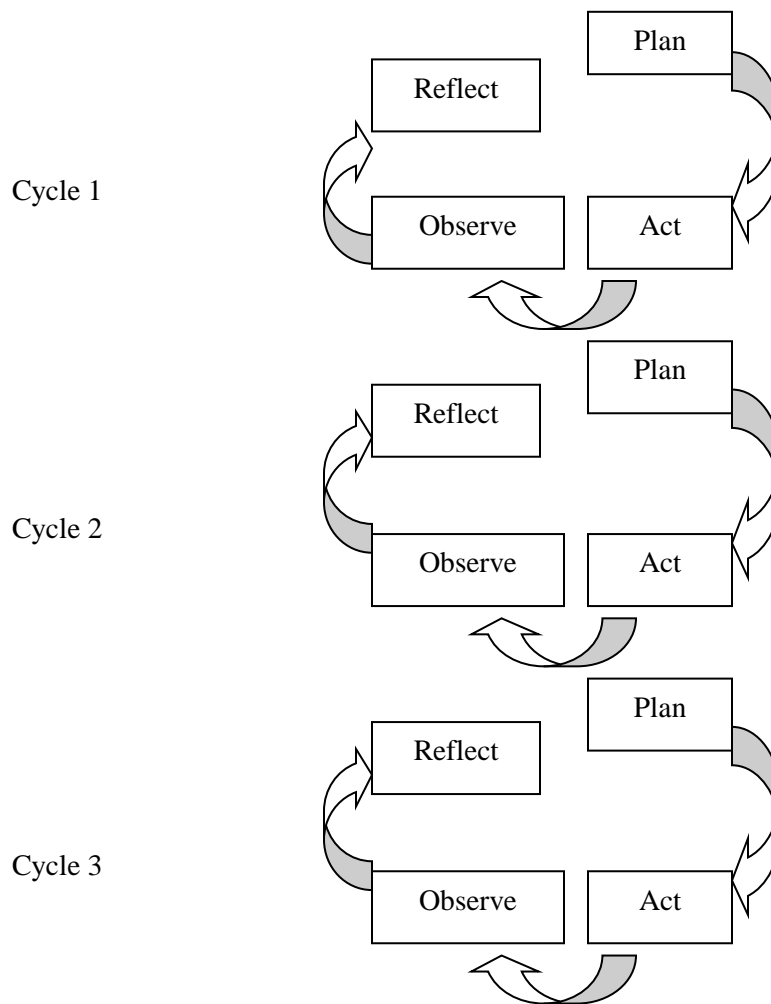


Figure 1. Cycles of Action Research

Each cycle consisted of four steps namely planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. The cycles illustrated above can be done repeatedly until the researcher gets the real picture of the study.

Before the cycle 1 was conducted, a pre test was administered to see students' reading proficiency. After the first cycle had been done, the

teacher, the researcher and the collaborators discussed what would be done for the next cycle. The last cycle would be decided if the solution had already been satisfactory. However, it is very possible for the researcher to add or change the treatment if the treatment is considered not effective. The researcher, therefore, administered a post-test to see, if any, improvement occurred in

students' reading proficiency. The results of pre test and post-test were compared to find out whether the chosen treatment was effective.

The research data collected were from three kinds of techniques namely observation, interview, and test.

Findings

The findings reveal the students' improvement in reading through interactive read-aloud from cycle 1 to cycle 3.

Cycle 1.

The improvements of reading comprehension the students gained in cycle 1 can be seen from the results of the test and reading process which covers meaning construction and motivation.

From the test administered at the end of cycle 1, the results show that the highest score is 100 and the lowest score is 50. The mean is 71.1. If it is compared with the score mean of pretest (68.1), the increase is 3.

Meaning construction in cycle 1 relates to the ability of the students to guess the meaning of difficult words (such as *inhabitant* and *veil*) explained by the teacher through words and

gesture. The improvement of meaning construction in this cycle can be seen from the interaction during classroom activities. This is evident in the students' responses to the interview, as exemplified in the excerpts below:

R#1, R#2, R#3, R#5, and R#6:
"Yeah, the teacher's description and gesture helped me

understand the meaning."

R#4: "the teacher's description and gesture were helpful although not much."

According to the excerpt above most respondents said that gesture and explanation were really helpful for them to understand the meaning of words. Although one respondent (R#4) said that gesture and explanation helped him comprehend a text but not much. Teacher's modeling in the form of reading aloud, gesture and explanation support students in their word construction.

Motivation in cycle 1 refers to proportional attention students pay to the activities given and willingness to be involved in those activities. The increased motivation in this cycle can be identified from some activities. First, the

students found the teacher's gesture and words during reading aloud attractive. Thus, it reduced boring situation. Second, the students found drawing pictures entertaining. It can be seen from their enthusiasm towards the activity. Through this activity they got motivated to be involved in the reading activity. Moreover, drawing activity could reduce anxiety, as illustrated in the following excerpts:

R#1: "I like drawing activity because my hobby is drawing."

R#2, R#3, R#4, R#5, R#6: "I like drawing activity, because I never did it before

and it was not boring."

Most respondents stated that they liked drawing pictures. By doing so, it could release boring situation (R#3). Meanwhile, one respondent said that drawing pictures was his hobby.

Cycle 2

The improvements of reading comprehension the students gained in cycle 2 can be seen from their results of the test and reading process which covers meaning construction and motivation.

From the test administered at the end of cycle 2, the results show that the highest score is 100 and the lowest score is 50. The mean is 72.9.

Meaning construction in cycle 2 refers to the students' ability to construct meaning from vocabulary checks activity. In session three at during reading stage when the teacher explained the word *gave birth* the students' response towards the use of words and gesture by the teacher was positive. The students found the teacher's words and gesture very helpful to comprehend a given text, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

R#1, R#2, R#3, R#4, R#5, R#6: "Yeah for me the teacher's words and gesture is very

helpful to comprehend a given text."

According to the excerpt, respondent 1 to 6, all admitted that the teacher's words and gesture help them comprehend the text.

Motivation in cycle 2 refers to proportional attention students pay to the activities given and willingness to be involved to those activities. The

increased motivation in this cycle derived from activities working in groups to predict what the end of the story of Sangkuriang would be. The students looked enthusiastic when they worked in groups. They admitted that they could share ideas freely through group working, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

R#1, R#2, R#3: “Working in group is fun. Even we could share ideas freely”.

R#4: “Yeah, in group difficulty can be handled together.”

R#5: “ In prediction there was no difficulty but working in group sometimes invited different ideas.”

Cycle 3

The test result administered at the end of cycle 3 shows that the highest score is 100 and the lowest score is 50.

The score mean is 75.7.

Meaning construction in cycle 3 refers to the students’ ability to understand the meaning of new words from twenty- questions activity. Through this activity students could learn more

R#6: “Although in group sometimes I still worked alone.”

According to three respondents (R#1, R#2, and R#3) working in group is fun. R#4 stated that difficulty can be overcome through group working. On the contrary, R#5 argued that working in group could invite different ideas. Moreover R#6 preferred to work alone.

The improvements of reading comprehension the students gained in cycle 3 can be seen from their results of the test and reading process which covers meaning construction and motivation.

words from given texts, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

R#1, R#2, R#3, R#4, R#5, and R#6:
“We could understand words taken from the texts better.”

Motivation in cycle 3 refers to proportional attention students pay to the activities given and willingness to be involved to those activities. The increased motivation in this cycle derived from a twenty-questions game.

The students looked enthusiastic when doing the game in groups. They admitted that they liked competition with other groups to win the game, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

R#1, R#2, R#3, R#4, R#5, and R#6:”In my opinion, a twenty-questions game was interesting and challenging. Through this game we could learn how to address questions and answers.”

According to most respondents a twenty-questions game was fun, interesting and challenging. Besides they could learn how to address questions and answers, guess in English, and understand more

Area of Improvement	Cycles		
	1	2	3
1. Test results	71.1	72.9	75.7
2. Meaning construction	64%	72%	80%
3. Motivation	72%	76%	84%

The improvements can be described in the following discussion. First, from the test administered at the end of cycle 1, the results show that the highest score is 100 and the lowest score

words in the text since words used in the game were taken from the text (Planning a career).

Discussion

This section discusses the students’ improvement in teaching and learning reading through interactive read-aloud strategy from cycle 1 to cycle 3. To help readers understand the discussion some tables are provided.

Table 1. The summary of students’ improvement in reading through interactive read-Aloud

is 50. The mean is 71.1. If it is compared with the mean of pretest (68.1), the increase is 3. In cycle 2, the results show that the highest score is 100 and the lowest score is 50. The mean is 72.9. Thus, the mean increases from 71.1 in cycle 1 to 72.9 in cycle 2. The increase is 1.8. In cycle 3 the results show that the highest score is 100 and the lowest score is 50. The mean is 75.7.

It is obvious that the average score increases significantly from 72.9 in cycle 2 to 75.7 in cycle 3. The increase is 2.8.

Second, meaning construction in cycle 1, observation result reveals that 64% (16 from 25 students) could guess the meaning of the given words. In cycle 2 the ability of the students to guess the meaning of the words given improved compared to cycle 1. 72 % (18 from 25 students) were able to guess the meaning of difficult words explained by the teacher through words and gesture. In cycle 3, 20 out of 25 students (80%) could guess the meaning of the given words. Thus, the improvement of meaning construction the students gained from cycle 1 to cycle 3 is 16% (64% to 80%).

Third, motivation in cycle 1 refers to proportional attention students paid to the activities given and willingness to be involved to those

activities. From the questionnaire reveals that 72% (18 out of 25 students) like the learning activity. In cycle 2, 76% (19 out of 25 students) like the reading activity given. In cycle 3, 84% (21 out of 25 students). Thus, the students' motivation improves 12% (72% to 84%) from cycle 1 through cycle 3.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusions

Considering that the present study has been completed, three major conclusions related to the research questions raised can be drawn. The first research question concerns the improvements of the students' reading comprehension using interactive read-aloud strategy. It was found that the students' reading comprehension activities improved in four areas, i.e. test

results, meaning construction, motivation, and word definition.

It can further be mentioned that interactive read-aloud is effective in supporting comprehension and vocabulary development. Besides, English learners are supported in refining their reading and speaking skills.

Suggestion

Based on the research findings, some suggestions will be directed toward the English teachers, headmasters, and other researchers.

First, English teachers must keep them abreast of teaching trends and issues. One of ways is by implementing interactive read-aloud to improve students' reading comprehension. With this strategy, English teacher can maintain learner interest and motivation. This is not to say that teacher should

stop using other strategies like bottom up and top down; clearly, such strategies still serve their purposes nicely. Rather, it is to suggest that judicious use of a combination of both such strategies and the strategy proposed in this study is desirable. Such a combination can help learners develop more efficient reading skills and ensure that any potential gains are not hampered by every teacher's enemy-monotony. The English teachers should always reflect and evaluate the teaching-learning process, and feel the changes happened both positively and negatively. Teachers should be more creative in making teaching process interesting and challenging for students.

Second, to headmasters, it is better if the headmaster always monitor the problems occurred in the classroom, or in general. The headmasters should give motivation and support to the teachers on effort, and creativity to solve

the problems. It is hoped that the headmasters' policy will best fit to the teacher's and students' needs.

Third, to other researchers who are intended to conduct research in teaching reading comprehension, this study hopefully can give contribution. The fact many senior high school students still have problems in their reading comprehension. Therefore, it is suggested that other research focus on teaching reading comprehension in ways that enhance students' reading comprehension. By doing so, it is hoped that the results of the study can enrich and update English teachers with varying teaching strategies.

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