

USING “GRASP” STRATEGY TO INCREASE STUDENT’S READING COMPREHENSION ABILITY

Agus Setiawan

English Teacher of SMAN 1 Driyorejo, Gresik
Agus_smandry@yahoo.co.id

Abstract

Reading is one of the language skills which must be taught in English classes of Senior High School students. Through the teaching and learning of reading, the students are expected to be able to comprehend the reading passages they read. However, it was found that even senior high school students still get some difficulties in finding general information in the passage, finding specific information, identifying main ideas, identifying explicit and implicit information. This condition is caused by several factors such as; students’ low motivation in learning English, students’ lack of vocabulary, students’ low ability in mastering the reading skills, the materials of the reading text, and the monotonous teaching technique. The writer proposes the implementation of an appropriate method or strategy in teaching reading is urgently needed. Guided Reading and Summarizing Procedure or GRASP strategy to increase student’s reading comprehension ability.

Keywords : GRASP Strategy, Increase, Reading Comprehension

Introduction

There are four skills that must be mastered by the students learning a language such as English namely; listening, speaking, reading and writing. Among the four language skills, reading is very important since generally everyone can get knowledge through reading. The ability to read is vital to functioning effectively in a literate society.

Every aspect of life involves reading. Road signs direct travelers to particular destination and remind people about traffic regulations. There are menus in restaurants, labels on cans, printed advertisements, newspapers, magazines, textbooks in libraries and bookstores. These reading situations are inescapable for the literate society, particularly in educational institutions such as in schools or universities.

However most of Senior High School students consider reading as a difficult skill. When the students read a reading text, they often find difficulties in comprehending the text especially related to vocabulary items, complex sentences or even the text as a whole. It means that they need to understand not only the meaning of the text but also the function of the language. In reading, the students are expected to be able to identify printed or written words, to understand the way the information are organized in the text and to get various information in diverse text.

Reading also provides the opportunities to the readers to learn the units of language such as vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, and the way a writer constructs a sentence, a paragraph and a text

(Harmer, 2002: 57). In short, by understanding the reading skills the students will be able to comprehend the text easily and finally will be effective readers.

In relation to the significance of reading, according to School-Based Curriculum 2006, it is stated that the standard of Senior High School students competence in learning English which also become the main purpose is that the students can communicate in English fluently and accurately either in the written or spoken form.

Up to now, the students’ achievement in learning English is still measured by their ability in doing the final examination popularly called *Ujian Nasional (UN)*. The students’ success in learning English are determined by their ability in answering questions which recently consist of two parts namely listening part of about 30 % and reading comprehension part of about 70 %.

It is clear that reading constitutes larger part than other skills. Consequently the English teachers should pay more attention to the reading comprehension so that the students can pass their final examinations. The students’ ability to comprehend a text can be seen from their ability to answer the reading comprehension questions correctly both orally and in written form.

Literature Review

The Nature of Reading

Reading is described in many ways by different people. Some describe reading as a thinking process. Others say that it is the

construction and interpretation of meaning behind printed symbols or that it is the process of understanding written language. Still others say that it is a transaction between the reader and the text. All of these explanations are accurate (Roe et al, 1995).

During the reading process, there is interplay between the reader's preexisting knowledge and the written content. Competent reading is an active process in which the reader calls on experience, language, and schemata (theoretical constructs of knowledge related to experiences) to anticipate and understand the author's written language.

Reading can be viewed from various aspects. According to Harris (in Olson & Dillner, 1982:6) "Reading is a process of meaning elaboration or thinking in relation to written symbols." This definition presupposes that there are two essential aspects of reading process, word recognition and comprehension. Word recognition is the ability to pronounce and give meaning to the printed symbols, while comprehension is the ability to understand the text. He further elaborates that during the process of reading, both word recognition and comprehension must be present.

In this case, reading involves interaction between a reader and written language through which the reader tries to reconstruct the writer's message (Burns, et al, 1996:27; Vacca, et al, 1991). It is a process of combining textual information with the information a reader brings to the text. This means that the reader is not simply extracting information from the text, but also activating a range of knowledge in his/her mind. Thus reading can be viewed as a kind of dialogue between the reader and the text.

According to Smith (in Olson & Dillner, 1982:6), in the process of comprehending the meaning of a text, a reader needs two kinds of information, namely; visual and non-visual information. He further clarifies that visual information is the written information which must be caught by eyes, while non-visual information is the information involving the relevance of language competence, knowledge about the topic being read, and knowledge of the world. Both visual and non-visual information have reciprocal relationships. The more non-visual information a reader has in reading, the less he needs visual information and vice versa.

From the above points of view, Reading can be defined as the ability to recognize written symbols in which the reader activates his/her schemata (prior knowledge stored in his/her mind) to comprehend the meaning and the message of the writer.

The Importance of Reading

The ability to read is vital to functioning effectively in a literate society. However, children who do not understand the importance of learning to read will not be motivated to learn (Burns et al,

1996). Learning to read takes effort, and children who see the value of reading in their personal activities will be more likely to work hard than those who fail to see the benefits.

Anderson (1988) points out middle-grade students who have achieved basic literacy may become complacent and ease to see reading improvement as a priority. However, reading tasks become increasingly complex as students advance through the grades and require continuing improvement. Anderson suggests sparking the interest of these older children through career education activities, helping them in this way to see that reading is a life skill that is relevant to their future success. The children can choose occupations that interest them and list the reading skills each occupation requires.

As important as functional reading is to everyday living, another important goal of reading is enjoyment (Burns et al, 1996). Teachers must attempt to show the students that reading can be interesting to them for reasons other than strictly utilitarian ones. Students may read for relaxation, vicarious adventure, or aesthetic pleasure as they immerse themselves in tales of other times and places of those of the here and now. They may also read to obtain information about areas of interest or hobbies to fill their leisure time. To help students see reading as a pleasurable activity, teachers should read to them each day on a variety of themes and topics, from a variety of genres, and from the works of many authors.

Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is an interactive process of meaning construction (Roe et al, 1995). The reader's background knowledge structures (schemata), the information in the text, and the context in which the reading takes place all interact to produce comprehension. Schemata related to the reading material must be activated if students are to comprehend material as fully as possible.

Word identification skills and strategies help students pronounce words, but word meanings must be understood before reading comprehension can occur. Many of the words that content readers encounter represent labels for key concept in the content areas. A reader learns word meanings through experience, word association, discussion, concept development, contextual analysis, structural analysis, and use of a dictionary. Content area teachers can help students comprehend content materials by teaching them the meaning of key vocabulary terms. Structural analysis plays an important part in the determination of word meaning in content area classes. Morphemes, the smallest meaningful units of a language, include prefixes, suffixes and root words. When reading, students must comprehend material literally, interpretively, critically, and creatively, as each type of comprehension is appropriate. Modeling, discussion, a problem solving approach to reading, visualization

strategies, and judicious use of questioning techniques serve as five vehicles for developing these types of understanding.

Reading comprehension deals with higher level of reading activities in which reading covers not merely recognizing and translating written text into spoken words but it stresses more on the message acquired by the reader in relation to the reader's existing knowledge. Simply they can define comprehension as understanding new information in light of what they already know. They understand new things and events they encounter by matching them with their store of mental frameworks that he calls schemata. It is a sophisticated activity which involves a complex intellectual process; therefore many experts have different explanation related to the concept of reading comprehension.

Cooper (2000:11) defines comprehension as a strategic process by which readers construct or assign meaning to a text using the clues in the text and their own prior knowledge. He further clarifies that this definition requires two major perspectives that help us understand the process of comprehension, namely comprehension as constructing meaning and comprehension as a strategic process. Comprehension as constructing meaning is a process by which the reader constructs or assigns meaning by interacting with the text, while comprehension as a strategic process is a process by which the reader adjusts his/her reading to suit his/her purpose and the type of text he/she is reading. Both processes of constructing meaning and strategic adjustment work simultaneously.

Similarly, other experts view comprehension as a special kind of thinking process. They confirm that the reader comprehends the text by actively constructing the meaning internally from interacting with the material that is read (Mc Nail, 1984; Nunan, 1991; Hood, et al, 1996; Turner in Alexander, 1988). Successful comprehension involves the reader's discovering the meaning needed to achieve the particular purposes set for or by him.

Furthermore, Johnston (in Mason & Au 1990) clarifies readers comprehended a text only when they have established logical connections among ideas in the text and can express these in an alternate form. In this way, inferences are critical acts of comprehension, since they allow us to make various words meaningful, join together prepositions and sentences, and fill in the missing of information.

In addition, Langer as quoted by Mason and Au (1990) states that comprehension is not a simple text-based process in which readers piece together what the words, sentences or paragraphs say as if words themselves have some inherent meanings. Nor is it simply a concept driven process in which readers begin with the global notion of what the text will be about. Further, comprehension is a process, which requires readers with ideas and attitudes of their own to interpret what the author is

conveying. Apparently Langer's view is affected by Psycholinguistic view that involves interactive process in which the readers use a number of cognitive decoding and predicting strategies altogether in order to arrive at meaning.

McNiff (1992:55), briefly confirms that reading comprehension is the product of three main factors: (1) Coherent text, (2) compatibility of the readers' knowledge and text content, and (3) the active strategies the readers employ to enhance understanding and retention.

In spite of the fact that reading is an important skill, we cannot deny that reading is assumed as the most difficult skill to be mastered by the students. Based on the writer's experience, most of Senior High School students can hardly comprehend the reading text even it is a simple one.

It is because in comprehending a text students must focus their attention in some aspects such as recognizing words and phrases of similar and opposing meaning, identifying or locating information, distinguishing elements or features within context the analysis of elements within a structure and of the relationship among them, interpreting complex ideas, actions, events, and relationship, inferring the deriving and predicting the continuation, synthesizing and evaluating. (Anderson & Lukmani 1989 in Gebhard, 2000:121).

These aspects can influence the students' mastery in comprehending a reading text. Very often the students get difficulties in understanding the text mainly in answering the literal and inferential questions given although the text provided is simple. Sometimes in doing their task, they just answer the questions using incomplete sentences or just guess the answers.

The Main Factors of Unsatisfied Reading Comprehension

Based on the writer's experience as an English teacher, he considers that the result of the students reading comprehension is not satisfactory yet due the following factors.

a. Students' low motivation in learning English

Generally most of students are not motivated to learn English because for them English is a very difficult subject to learn. They are not motivated to read a reading text. They seem lazy when their teacher asks them to read. As a result they lose their attention and they are not interested in doing their task. They tend to be passive during the reading class activities.

b. Students' lack of vocabulary

Vocabulary plays an important role in the reading comprehension. Students having more vocabulary mastery usually will comprehend better and faster than those having less vocabulary (Bond, 2007:16). In this case, students' vocabulary is still limited so they often find difficulties in comprehending a text. Sometimes the students do not know the meanings of most words in the text.

They need long time to understand the text because they tend to ask the meaning of the difficult words to other students or to the teacher. Unfortunately not all students have their own dictionary with them and make the classroom atmosphere become worse since the students depend much on their teacher.

c. Students' low ability in mastering the reading skills

There are still many students who could not master the reading skills. For example they could not find the main ideas and supporting ideas, understand reference, and deduce meaning from context. There were only few of the second grade students who could read and comprehend the text effectively and efficiently. The English teacher's endeavor in increasing his students' reading comprehension skills had not got satisfactory result.

d. The material of the reading text

According to 2004 Curriculum or Competency Based Curriculum which is then changed or perfected into Content Standard based on which School-Based Curriculum or *KTSP* is developed, there is a great change in English lesson for Senior High School students. The materials for the English lesson in the 1994 curriculum were designed according to thematic such as family, sport, culture, economy, and so on. Meanwhile the materials for the English lesson in 2006 curriculum are designed based on genres or text types.

In this case, the students should learn many kinds of text types consisting of recount, narrative, descriptive, procedure, discussion, explanation, exposition, report, review and so on. Each type of genre has its own language features, its generic structures, and its social functions or purposes. These characteristics often cause the students get confused, even the teacher himself/herself did not understand deeply about them yet. They need long time to master the characteristics of the genres because text types seem to be something new both the teachers and the students. As a result this change affects the comprehension process.

e. Monotonous teaching technique

Most of English teachers applied monotonous teaching technique. The teaching of reading was mainly done by question and answer approach and sometimes translation method. The monotonous question-answer and translation method tended to be ineffective since they made the students got bored. The teacher just asked the students to read aloud the text, found the difficult words, translated word by word or sentence by sentence then answered the questions following the text.

Research on effective teaching describes teachers as mediators or helpers with active and interactive role in instruction (Richardson, 2007). Teachers should be a good model and a skillful demonstrator. They provide guided practice and in-depth explanation, thus supporting learning in a variety of ways. Skillful teachers facilitate the

students' development of appropriate comprehension strategies by coaching and making invisible cognitive skill through such activities as "think aloud" which demonstrate the comprehension process.

In this way the teachers offer the students assistance and encouragement during the reading process. Under the teacher's guide students consciously connect previous learning with present learning because the teacher encourages them to think about the knowledge and how they acquire the knowledge. Skillful teachers gradually release the responsibility of learning to the students and help them become independent smart readers.

In addition to these, a teacher as a facilitator in the class should not merely ask the students to read and understand the reading text by themselves without monitoring, directing and guiding them (Vacca, 2001:56). This usually happens because the teacher did not want to make himself or herself to be in difficulty, and he/she was not creative to find out various kinds of methods in teaching reading.

Considering the condition of the students who still have low competence chiefly in reading comprehension ability, the writer realizes that it is necessary to implement certain strategy that could improve the teaching of reading. Since strategy played an important role in the process of teaching and learning to achieve the goals intended.

By implementing certain strategy, hopefully we, as English teachers are able to overcome problem number 3 that was the students' low ability in reading skills and problem number 5 that was monotonous teachers' teaching style which became the main problems to solve. On the other hand it was expected that the English teachers are able to create interesting teaching-learning atmosphere so that the students could learn English especially reading attentively and interestingly.

GRASP Strategy

One of the strategies that could be applied to improve the students' reading comprehension was Guided Reading and Summarizing Procedure (GRASP) strategy. GRASP was based on the Guided Reading procedure (Manzo, 1975 in Anderson, 2009:45). GRASP shows the students how to deal with explicit context of reading selection. Specifically, it helps students recall the information given in a selection, formulate questions about it, correct misinterpretations, and organize recollection of the materials.

The premise of GRASP is that acquiring information and comprehending information accurately must precede higher order of comprehension and discussion. GRASP is particularly useful in content areas that require careful reading and detailed recollection of factual information. The strategy is well suited to small-group instruction as well as the teaching entire classes. It may be used with students in the

intermediate grade levels through college level (Harris, 1980: 25). The goals of this procedure are development of skills.

Students are expected to be able to apply independently in sharpening their abilities to recall materials they read, writing reports, encouragement of self correction and improvement in their organizational skills. The steps in the procedure are: (1) prepare students for lesson to get as much information as possible from the reading passages, (2) have the students face their reading passages down, (3) get main information by discussing prepared guided questions, and (4) lead the students to summarize the reading passages (Grellet, 2002:96).

GRASP strategy is chosen as the strategy implemented to improve students' reading comprehension ability because it is an applicable strategy. The steps in performing GRASP strategy are well-arranged and they were suitable and beneficial to be applied for the senior high school students who still need much guidance from the teachers in learning process. Most of them are dependent students who still need the teacher's help very much.

The Origin of GRASP

GRASP is based on the Guided Reading Procedure (GRP). GRASP shows the students how to deal with the explicit content of a reading selection. Specifically, it helps students recall the information given in a selection on, formulate questions about it, correct misinterpretations and organize their recollections of material.

The premise of GRP is that acquiring information and comprehending the information accurately must precede higher-order comprehension and discussion (Anderson, 2009: 24). This is better achieved through students' own concentration than through responses to questions posed by the teacher. With the GRP, expectancies are brought into sharp focus through students' efforts to reach agreement about the information they remember.

GRP is particularly useful in the content areas that require careful reading and detailed recollection of factual information. The method is well suited to small group instruction as well as to teaching entire classes of 20 to 30 students. It may be used with students in the intermediate grade levels through college level. The length of the text varies with the maturity and reading proficiency of students. Materials that take about 10 minutes to read work best.

The goals of GRASP are development of a skill students can apply independently in writing reports, sharpening of their abilities to recall material they read, encouragement of self-correction, and improvement in their organizational skills. The steps in the procedure are as follows: prepare students for lesson to get as much information as possible from the reading passages, have the

students face their reading passages down, get main information by discussing prepared guided questions, and lead the students to summarize the reading passages (Anderson, 2009: 43).

The Steps of GRASP

In the preparation phase, the teacher explains the purpose of the procedure. Having introduced the subject matter, the teacher assigns students to read a selection for the purpose of remembering as much of its content as they can. Basically the selection that is given to the students to read should be 500 to 1500 words long. But the teacher should consider the students' maturity and reading proficiency. For Indonesian students, the materials that take 10 minutes long will be better so the teacher should be careful in selecting the materials presented to the students.

Once students have completed the reading, the teacher has them turn their text face down and volunteer any information they can remember of the selection. The teacher records all responses on the board exactly as they are given. Initially, students may offer few recollections, but the responses will likely increase a few minutes of reflecting on, associating with, and correcting one another's recollections.

Whenever there is a lull in the response, the teacher patiently waits while students think about the information already recalled. When it becomes that students have given as much information as they can for one reading, the teacher asks students to read the selection again for purposes of correcting errors in their initial recollection and adding any significant information that may have been left out.

In other words, rereading takes place in order to complete the information needed and make correction in the original listing. Following this rereading, the teacher calls on students to complete and correct their recollection of the selection. During this phase of activity, the teacher may have the students refer to the selection in order to resolve differences that might exist among individuals' recollections.

The teacher then leads students to organize the recorded information into an outline, sequence pattern or concept map. To facilitate this process, the teacher asks nonspecific, guiding questions such as, "What is this section mainly about?", "How does the information support this purpose?" and so on. During the discussion, the teacher solicits students' advice about which of the remembered information can serve as main headings or central notes, which would best serve as supporting details and so on.

With the information pulled together in structured form, the teacher has students synthesize it and connect it with information they have previously learned. The teacher may wish to have students deepen their understanding of the material through further reading, writing assignment, or additional discussion. During a subsequent class meeting, the teacher may administer a test to check

students' memory of the material. Finally, a summary is formed by including only important information, compressing and combining information, and adding any information needed for a coherent account (Grellet, 2002).

Conclusion

By utilizing GRASP strategy, the writer expects that the students' comprehension can be improved. Meanwhile, the students' writing ability may be improved too, since GRASP strategy also focuses on the process of writing a summary. In other words both the students' reading comprehension and writing ability can be improved altogether.

GRASP will be effective to improve the students' reading comprehension ability when the English teachers master the steps of the strategy. There are four steps in GRASP strategy namely: prepare students for lesson to get as much information as possible from the reading passages, have the students face their reading passages down, get main information by discussing prepared guided questions, and lead the students to summarize the reading passages.

The lesson plan is better designed to last in two meetings; one meeting for reading activities and one meeting for summary writing ones. Moreover, it will work well when the teachers guide the students to find main information from the text using guided questions for improving the students' reading comprehension ability, write the important information in the form of outlining or concept mapping, provide a model or an example of how to summarize a text and train the students to arrange coherence paragraph using appropriate sentence connectors.

Reference

- Anderson, N.J. (2009). *Exploring Second Language Reading: Issues and Strategies*. Boston, MA: Heinle&Heinle.
- Bond, G.L., Tinker, M.A. & Wasson, B.W. (2007). *Reading Difficulties: Their Diagnosis and Correction (4th Ed.)*. London: Prentice Hall, Inc.
- Brown, H.D. (2001). *Teaching by Principles: An interactive approach to Language Pedagogy. (2nd ed.)* San Francisco: Addison Wesley.
- Burn, P.C., Betty, and Elinor, (1996). *Teaching Reading in Today's Elementary School* Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Cooper, J.D. (2000). *Literacy: Helping Children Construct Meaning. (4th ed.)*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Depdiknas. (2004). *Kurikulum 2004. Kurikulum Berbasis Kompetensi Mata Pelajaran Bahasa Inggris Sekolah Menengah Atas dan Madrasah Aliyah*. Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan Nasional
- Depdiknas. (2006). *Kurikulum 2006. Standar Kompetensi Mata Pelajaran Bahasa Inggris Sekolah Menengah Atas dan Madrasah Aliyah*. Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan Nasional.
- Gebhard, J.G. (2000). *Teaching English as a Foreign or Second Language: A Teacher self-development and Methodology Guide*. Michigan, New York: The University of Michigan Press.
- Grellet, F. (2002). *Developing Reading Skills: A Practical Guide to Reading Comprehension Exercise*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Harmer, J. (2002). *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. New York: Longman Inc.
- Harris, A. J. and Sipay, A.R. (1980). *How to Increase Reading Ability*. New York: Longman Inc.
- Mason, J.M.&Au, K.H. (1990). *Reading Instruction for Today (2nd ed.)*. New York: Harper Collins
- McNiff, J. (1992). *Action Research Principle and Practice*. New York: Chapman and Hall.
- Richardson, J.S.&Morgan, R.F. (2007). *Reading to learn in the Content Areas*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Roe, Betty D., Barbara D. Stoodt and Paul C. Burns. (1995). *Secondary School Reading Instruction: The Content Areas*. USA: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Vacca, J.A.L., Vacca, R.T., and Gove, M.K. (2001). *Reading and Learning to Read (2nd ed.)* New York: Harper Collins.

Keterangan Penulis

Agus Setiawan, terlahir di Surabaya, 30 Oktober 1975. Menyelesaikan S-1 Pendidikan bahasa Inggris di IKIP Surabaya (sekarang UNESA) pada 1999. Saat ini menempuh studi di Prodi Bahasa dan Sastra Pascasarjana UNESA. Menjadi guru Bahasa Inggris di SMAN 1 Sangkapura, Pulau Bawean, Gresik pada 2000-2003. Setelahnya hingga saat ini mengajar di SMAN 1 Driyorejo, Gresik. Beberapa kali menulis artikel ilmiah yang dimuat di Namira, jurnal pendidikan Kabupaten Gresik. Sementara karya ilmiah populernya yang berkaitan dengan seni dan budaya menghiasi halaman majalah dan koran, antara lain Majalah Bende, Majalah Prestasi dan lain-lain. Pria yang pada 2011 tercatat sebagai guru Berprestasi Kabupaten Gresik ini juga mendapat beberapa predikat sebagai penulis terbaik dari Majalah Media dan pernah tercatat sebagai "The Best Ten" pada event *Teacher Writing Competition*. Kini, dia berkiprah sebagai editor Majalah Media dan Penyunting Jurnal Pendidikan Kabupaten Gresik, Namira.