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The Use Of Small Group Work Techniquesfor Improving Reading Comprehension

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ABSTRAK

The aims of this research were to find out (1) whether there was a significant difference in students' reading comprehension abilitiesin terms of main idea, vocabulary, detailed information, and inferencesforstudents who weretaught using the Small Group Work (SGW) technique compared to those taughtthrough a standard technique. And (2) to find out if the use of the SGW technique motivated students studying reading comprehension to read more compared to other students.The samplefor this research was class VIII(1)and VIII(2) from the secondyearat SMPN 1Baitussalam in Aceh Besar in the academicyear 2014/2015. This research used true experimental design. The result of this study using the SGW technique showed that there wasno significant difference in the students' reading comprehension in terms of the main idea.The use of the SGW technique did notmotivate and did not encouragethe experimental group students to develop their reading comprehension abilities.

Key Words: *Reading Comprehension, Small Group WorkTechnique,Narrative Text.*

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INTRODUCTION

English is learnt by students from junior high school to university level, but many of them still have difficulty trying to understand English from a book or from an article on the internet. One of the ways that students can get knowledge is by reading. Reading comprehension is the ability to understand a written passage of text. This means that the reader can interact with the text and can interpret it in a meaningful way. For many students, reading comprehension also unlocks the door to a lifetime of reading recreation and enjoyment. has said that reading comprehension is the process of extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language.

There are five aspects of reading which the students should master to comprehend a text well:they are determining the main idea, finding specific information, understanding references, ability to make inferences and understanding vocabulary. Readerscan also get pleasure from increasing their knowledge and getting information from texts. In language classes, reading can also consolidate and extend the reader's knowledge and skills in language.Based on the above, it can be inferred that when a reader is reading a text, she becomes the most important thing in the reading activity. A narrative text is a text, which relates a series of logically, and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by factors. She, furthermore, states that a key to comprehending a narrative is a sense of plot, of theme, of characters and of events and of how they relate one to another. Comprehension will make the reader able to determine the essence of the sentencesand/or the text and able to undestandthe main purpose of the narrative. By comprehending the text, the student will getthe gist of the text such as an important message or information from the text. Reading is the process by which the meaning of a written text is understood. It employs many different cognitive skills, including letter and word recognition, knowledge of syntax and recognition of text types and text structure.
When a student has difficulty in reading comprehension, her teacher should be able to solve her problems. Co-operative learning is an approach to organizing classroom activities into academic and

social learning experiences. It has been described as students working in groups to collectively complete tasks towards academic goals. While we are teaching in the class, it is important to make the class fun and active.By using the Small Group Work technique (SGWt) we can make all of the students in the class become more interactive and involved in the class activities. That the SGWtis the best way to ensure comparable effort among all the group members. Thus there is a need to design activities in which there is a clear division of work for each student in the group and each student must contribute if the group is to reach its goal. This is why the teacher should use the SGWtto make it easier for the students to comprehend the texts. Without comprehension, reading is empty and meaningless. Many students have difficulties in comprehending the meaning of the texts because of lack of vocabulary, uninteresting reading strategies, lack of background knowledge and ignoring or not knowing good reading techniques.

That the process of comprehension involves an understanding of words and how these words are used to create meaning. In order to help the readers comprehend the text, the SGWtcan be used. In accordance with the theories previously presented, the present study aims to investigate: (1) anysignificant differencesbetween the skills of students who are taught by using the SGWtfor studying reading comprehension in terms of (a) finding the main idea, (b) the meaning of vocabulary, (c) detailed information and (d) making inferences compared to students who are taught by using the standard teaching technique for reading compehension; and(2) Whetherthe use of the SGWtwill motivate studentsin a reading comprehension class to read more. The researcher used the SGWtto try to improve the reading comprehension of students from the second grade (year 8) at SMPN 1 Baitussalam, Aceh Besar.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This true experimental research was intended to find out whether there was a significant contribution to improving the students' reading compehension skills by using the SGWt. According to, Isaac and Michael (1987, p.52), the purpose of true experimental research is to investigate possible cause and effect relationships by exposing one or more experimental groups to one or more treatment conditions and comparing them to one or more control groups which do not receive the treatment. Borg and Gall(1987, p.8) have also stated that the experimental group (EG) consists of subjects who are given the treatment, which was the program or experience the researcher wants to study. The other group, called the control group (CG), consists of subjects who are not given the treatment usedwih the EG in that research but are given a standard treatment for comparison.(Rahmadianti & Munifatullah, 2025)

Population and Sample

This study was done at SMPN 1 Baitussalam, Aceh Besar which is located at Jln. LaksamanaMalahayati Km. 9, DesaKajhu, Aceh Besar District inAceh Province.There were107 students from all the gradesat SMPN 1 Baitussalam.The eighth grade had three classes:class VIII(1)with 16 students, class VIII(2)also with 16 students, and class VIII(3),with 15 students. The sample for this researchwas two classes selected at random from the three classesafter normality and homogeneity tests had been done. For theEG, the sample was class VIII(1), while the CG was class VIII(2). Consequently, the total number inthe sample was 32. Both classes were mixed wih both female and male students and in general all students had the same competency. After the pre-test, the EG were taught reading comprehension using theSGWtwhile the CG were taught using the traditional technique.

Research Instruments

Pretest

The pre-test was given in the first meeting to find out the reading comprehension ability of the students in both the EGand the CG before starting teaching using the treatment. The students were given some questions to answer based on thereading of a narrative text.

Post-test

The post-test was used to measure the students understanding of areading after the SGWtand individual activitieshad been implemented in the two classes. The students were again asked to answer questions based on areading of a narrative text. The researcher followed the curriculum outline for the second year students atSMPN 1 Baitussalam, Aceh Besar based on reading comprehension activities in terms of main idea, vocabulary, details and inferences.

Questionnaire

A questionnaire was disribued to the EG students about their attitudes to the treatment where the students could answer the questions by choosing between; strongly agree, agree, not sure, not agree, and strongly disagree.

Data Collection Procedure

In order to get the data needed, the writer used two classes in this study; one as the EG and the other as the CG. The EG was taught using the Small Group Work Technique (SGWt) and it was compared with theCG which wastaught using thetraditional teaching technique. The researcher prepared materials for teaching related to the syllabus for the second gradeat SMPN 1 Baitussalam, Aceh Besar. Before the researcher started the research, a pre-test was given to the EG and to the CG on different days.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, the researcher used quantitative data analysis methods with the data from the pre-tests and the post-tests. Theresults from the questionnaire were analyzed by using descriptive and inferential statistical methods involving one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) in order to answer the research questions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Reading as a skill

Reading is one of the four primary language skills besides listening, speaking and writing.People believe that reading plays an important role in studying English. It is one of the basic competencies that need tobe improved, since reading provides opportunities to study English language; vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, collocations and the waysto construct sentences, paragraphs, and texts. However, to understand a reading text, students need to be able to do a number of things. Richardson and Morgan (2003, p.238) have proposed several reading skills usefulto help understand the contents of a text**;** (1)skimming is fast reading to get the general meaning of a passage. This skill is needed to have an idea of the main points of a text without concentrating on the details.This is an activity which is appropriate to apply when there is no time to read something carefully. Therefore, in skimming the reader usually predicts what they are reading; predictingthe main topic or message while in the process of understanding the text. (2) Scanning is quickly searching for specific information in a text without reading the whole text. It is usually used in order to find information needed that is usually in a specific form such as a date, a name, a number or a place.

In addition, Nunan (2003) has stated that there are eight aspects to teaching reading: 1) exploit the reader's background knowledge, 2) build a strong vocabulary base, 3) teach for comprehension, 4) work on increasing reading rate, 5) teach reading strategies, 6) encourage readers to transform strategies into skills, 7) build assessment and evaluation into your teaching, and 8) strive for continuous improvement as a reading teacher.

Based on the above, there are many aspects that influence successful teaching of reading.Firstly, the teacher has to choose material appropriate to the background knowledge of the students and choose effective strategies forteaching reading to them. Next, she must explain the chosen strategy for reading efficiently and effectively to the studentsso that thereading comprehension of the students will get better with more effective and efficient strategies. Finally, the teacher also has to make appropriate assessments and evaluationsof the reading comprehension of the students.

2. Definition of Reading

Reading is about understanding written texts. It is a complex activity that involves both seeing and thinking. It plays an important role in life by enabling us to gain new knowledge, enjoy the day, and do everyday things that are part and parcel of modern life, such as, reading newspapers, books, and magazines.Snow (2002, p.11) has said that reading comprehension is the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language. It is aresult of interaction between the perception of graphic symbols that present language and the readers' language skills, cognitive skills, and knowledge of the world.

Meanwhile, Day and Bamford (1998, p.12) have defined reading as the construction of meaning from printed or written messages. This involves the connection of information from the written messagesto the readers' previous knowledge to obtain new meaning or understanding. In addition, Richardson and Schmidt (2010, p.483) have stated that reading is the process by which the meaning in a written text is understood. It employs many different cognitive skills, including letter and word recognition, knowledge of syntax and recognition of text types and text structure.

According toBarchers (1998, p.14), reading is a process that begins with the registration of the printed words in the brain by the visual and perceptual processes with the brain converting the written symbols to language and with cognitive and comprehension processes adding meaning by relating these symbols to the reader's prior knowledge.

3. Types of Reading Activities Intensive Reading

Intensive reading can be defined as reading texts in order to get specific information. Richardson and Schmidt (2010, p.212) have said thatintensive reading is "reading in quantity and in order to gain a general understanding of what is read. It is intended to develop good reading habits, to build up knowledge of vocabulary and structure, and to encourage a liking for reading".

Extensive Reading In this type of reading, the reader deals with longer texts as a whole which requires the ability to understand overall meaning. This activity requires fluency that mostly involves total understanding. has noted that "extensive reading is reading longer texts, usually for one's own pleasure". This activity depends on fluency, and also involve global understanding.

4. Teaching Reading by Using the Small Group Work Technique

In teaching reading comprehension, the teacher needs to design tasks that are suitable to the reading purpose. Group work is where groups of students working in the same room each work ona common problem. If the group is managed in a totally autocratic manner, there may be little opportunity for interaction relating to the work. If there is functioning within the group, the process should evolve. In the teaching-learning process for reading, the researcher, as the teacher in her class, did the following steps to organize the group work acttivities. First, the teacher grouped the students into several groups. Second, the teacher then asked the students to work and to answer the questions about the narrative text read by the teacher to them. Third, students representing each group gave answers orally and also wrote their answers on the white board. To encourage students to use effective strategies when reading in a second language, the teacher can develop simple exercises to elicit information via targeted strategies. There are three common stages in teaching reading comprehension; the pre-reading phase, the while-reading phase, and the post- reading phase Greenwood (1998). More explanations about these are as follows:

5. The pre-reading phase

In the pre-reading phase, Greenwood (ibid, p.15) states that it can provide a need to read to complete an activity or to confirm an idea; and it can persuade the students that as far as perception or hypothesis is concerned there are no right or wrong answers, only different ones. This means that, in this phase the activity used can be brainstorming. Here, the students are asked to tell about their knowledge and experience that is relevant to the text. (Language et al., 2025)

6. The while-reading phase

In the while-reading phase the teacher can generate appropriate activities to help students comprehend the text. In thisphase, Greenwood (ibid, p.59) has said that students should be involved in activities which enable them to respond cognitively, emotionally, and imaginatively to imaginative writing.

7. The post-reading phase

In the post-reading phase, the important activity is to evaluate the students' comprehension of what they have just been reading. That in this case, teachers can conduct such activities as justifying, scanning, questioning, reviewing, summarizing, finding the writer's purpose and following up. This phase is also designed to evaluate what the teacher has taught the students in the while-reading phase. For example, the teacher could ask the students about whether the students have enjoyed learning reading comprehension. Next, it is important for the teacher to evaluate the output from the students. The data wasanalysedusing ANOVA. The mean scores from both the EG and the CG and the difference between these mean scores was compared using an equivalence test. The mean of the pre-test scores of the EG was 37 while that for the CG was 34. This result indicated that there was no significant difference between both groups. In other words the EG and the CG were similar in term of their initial ability in reading comprehension in the pre-test. The first discussion is concerned with the first research question whether there would be any significant difference between students who were taught using the SGWtforreading comprehension in terms of (a) main idea, (b) vocabulary, (c) detailedinformation and (d)making inferencesas compared to students who were taught by using the standard teaching technique. For the mean change in scores for: (a) main idea, students in the EGhad anincrease of X = 1.75 with SD = 0.931 while those in the CG had anincrease of X = 1.44 with SD = 0.629 and the results of ANOVA gave F(4.17)= 1.238. Thus there was no significant difference in learning to find the main idea by the treatment technique. For the mean change for: (b) vocabulary, the EG was X = + 2.25 with SD = .1.125 while for the CGX was +0.69 with SD = 0.479 and F(4.17)= 26.114. Hence for vocabulary there was a significant difference in learning with the treatment technique. For (c) detailed information, for the EGX was+1.56 with SD = 1.153 while for the control group X was+0.81 with SD = 0.750 and F(4.17)= 4.758. So there was a significant difference in learning to find detailed information by the treatment technique. For(d)making inferences the EG result was$X$ = +1.0000 with SD = 0.89443 while for the CG, X *was* +0.6875 with SD = .70415 giving F(4.17)= 1.206. Thus there was no significant difference in learning about making inferences using the treatment technique. The analysis for the second research question about the use of the SGWtto motivate theEG studentsto read more.Most of the students said that the technique made the class feel crowded and it made them feel unhappy while learning reading comprehension.This showed in the responses of the EG students sincetheir mean score was$X$ = 56.38 with SD = 4.440andthe ANOVA test result gave F test (0.099) < F table (4.17) . Moreover, half of the students were not concerned or were uninterested in the processes for teaching-learning reading compehension. As a result, their grades in the reading classes were still not satisfactory. (Ulatifah & Nuardi, 2019)

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the theories, findings, and discussions in the previous sections, the conclusionsare that: the use of the small group work teaching techniquewith the second grade students of SMPN 1 Baitussalam,Aceh Besarmadeno significant difference between the results from the EG andthe CG. In fact, the first null hypothesis (Ho1)was acceptedand the second null hypothesis (Ho2) was also accepted.This means that there wereno significant differences in reading comprehension in terms of the main idea and inferences. However for vocabulary and detailled information there was a significant difference between the results fromthe EG and the CG. Meanwhile, the use of the Small Group Work teaching technique do not affect theresults from the students' reading comprehension. Thus, the SGWtdid notmotivate orencouragethe EG students toread more; in fact they regarded it as an unhelpfultechnique to improve their reading skills.

SUGGESTIONS

Referring to the conclusions above, some suggestions are made as follows: Based on these findings, it is recommended that English teachers try othertechniques, as alternative waysfor teaching readingcompehension of narrative texts. For other readers and researchers who want to do research about the small group work technique, it is suggested that they should carefully control class activities in order to make the students focus more. The narrative text learning material should refer to detailed information in the text and fulfill criteria that are clear and that refer to the whole of the text.

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