TEACHING THE LESS-SKILLED COMPREHENDERS BY USING "THE FAB FOUR"

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Abstract

This study investigates how the "Fab Four" strategy implemented to teach the less-skilled readers in State Institute of Islamic Studies of Ponorogo. The design of this study is qualitative. Twenty-seven English department students of the third semester are the subjects of the study. The Fab Four strategy is applied by having the lecturer model four comprehension strategies (summarizing, questioning, predicting, and clarifying) through guided group discussions. Using this strategy, improvements have been noted in students reading comprehension. The result of this study indicates that the "Fab Four" is a great strategy to teach the less-skilled comprehenders as they are trained to determine important ideas from a reading text while discussing vocabulary, developing ideas and questions, and summarizing information.

Key words: the Fab Four, Less-Skilled Comprehenders

INTRODUCTION

The teaching-learning process of reading has a particular importance as reading is a basic skill to learn something and very fundamental for students. Unfortunately, in fact, many students consider that reading is a tiring and difficult activity as they not only have to read the text but they also have to activate their prior knowledge and match them with the information they get in order to achieve comprehension. Without comprehension, reading is just an activity to decode printed materials with no understanding. However, in the case of comprehending texts, no matter how good ability they have, occasionally still face comprehension failure when reading text. Then, if the proficient readers still face comprehension failure how about the less-skilled comprehenders are.

In the case of comprehending text, it seems reasonable if most of the students have difficulty since they are only asked to read a certain text then answer the questions. In this case, actually, the process happening cannot be called as a strategy to teach reading, but it is appropriate to be called as a way to test students. As a matter of fact, asking students to answer such questions after they have finished reading is really a testing strategy rather than a teaching one. This is actually evidence that the teaching strategy of reading comprehension is not successful yet.

Based on the explanation above, therefore, the writer offers a teaching strategy that may be able to solve the problem in comprehending texts, especially for the less-skilled comprehenders. It is the the "Fab Four" strategy. This strategy, based on Palincsar and Brown (1984) identifies four basic strategies (predicting, clarifying, questioning, and summarizing) that help students recognize and react to sign of comprehension breakdown.

The objectives of this research are to give description and explanation about the implementation of the "Fab Four"strategy and the students' responses toward the implementation of this strategy.

METHOD

In conducting this study, the researcher used the descriptive qualitative as the research design. Descriptive research is a research to describe a situation which is conducted without manipulation or giving special attention to the subject as all of the activities run nature. Qualitative study is designed to describe the observed phenomena with words rather than with number. Twenty-seven English department students of the third semester in IAIN Ponorogo were the subjects of the study.

FINDINGS

The researcher described the implementation of the "Fab Four" strategy in teaching-learning process and the students' responses toward the implementation of this strategy below.

A. The Results of the First Observations

The researcher observed the process of how the "Fab Four" strategy implemented by the help of observation checklists and field note.

The lecturer started the lesson by greeting the students then checked the attendance list to make sure that all of the students were present. Before starting implementing the strategy, she reviewed little bit the previous lesson. Afterward, the lecturer made the students be more enthusiastic to learn since she told that they were going to learn a way to comprehend texts easily. This strategy was called the "Fab Four"strategy. The lecturer explained that there were four steps in the implementation of this stategy, namely predicting, generating questions, clarifying, and summarizing. She added that by conducting those four steps, the students could not only practice to speak English, but they could also learn how to overcome their comprehension failure, such as: new vocabulary, unclear reference words, and unfamiliar concepts.

Afterward, the lecturer distributed the texts and asked the students to read the title. Stimulating the students' background knowledge dealing with the title, which was going to discuss, was the next activity the lecturer did. She asked whether or not the students had known the text before. Some of the students said "yes", but most of them replied "no". The lecturer, then, modeled the four steps of the "Fab Four" strategy, namely predicting, generating questions, clarifying, and summarizing one by one. She started by giving instruction to the students as follows.

Lecturer: *Now, let's see if this is what really the author wrote. Read the first sentence of the story: Walter Crane was a rich merchant. What do you think the author is going to tell us?*

It showed that the lecturer dis not only started the class by building or stimulating the students' background knowledge but also conducting a predicting step. Then, the following utterance was the example for questioning step.

Lecturer: *Read the first sentence of the story: Walter Crane was a rich merchant. What do you think the author is going to tell us in the first paragraph?*

For the third step: clarifying, the lecturer used context clues to explain the meaning of a certain word. She did not directly tell the meaning instead gave a chance to the students to look at the context of the sentence.

After modelling the example of how to predict, generate questions, and also clarify difficult words, the lecturer explained that those were the examples of conducting the three

steps in Reciprocal teaching. Then, she continued discussing the next paragraph with the same strategy: asking questions related to the content of the paragraph and clarifying the difficult or new words. Besides, she also asked what the students have learnt from the first and second paragraph, which could be called as summarizing step. In the case of summarizing step, the lecturer stimulated the students to add comment or information by giving reward for the ones who could answer the question.

Next, the lecturer appointed one student to be "the lecturer" to practice leading the discussion of the second paragraph in front of the class. During the student "lecturer" performance, it was found that there were such difficulties faced in guiding the student "lecturer" to speak English. After doing the activity, the lecturer challenged the students to ask questions related to the activity had already been done.

After performing how to implement the strategy, the lecturer divided the class in a mix ability group of three to discuss the last paragraph by applying the strategy. As there were 27 students, 9 groups were formed. The lecturer told the student "lecturer" to write the word "lecturer" beside his name in his group task paper to indicate that the role of the lecturers would really change on the next meeting.

During the discussion, the lecturer monitored, kept on track, and helped the students overcome the obstacle. She moved around to check each group whether or not the students really could implement the strategy. The condition of the class was quite noisy. Most of the students had difficulty in speaking English and clarifying difficult words. Thus, they often asked for the lecturer and dictionary help.

After practicing the strategy, the lecturer had the students report the activities which had already been done in the group task sheet. In this case, they had to answer three instructions: generate questions, clarify difficult words, and also summary the text.

At the end of the lesson, the lecturer discussed the students' difficulties during the activities. Then, she asked the students to answer some questions. The lecturer gave final feedback and told her students to get ready for the next meeting as they were still going to learn by using the "Fab Four" strategy.

B. The Result of the Second Observation

Like the first meeting, the lecturer started handling the class by checking the attendance list. The lecturer reminded the students the four strategies of the "Fab Four" strategy. She continued distributing the texts and the students' tasks to each student in each group. Here, it should be noted that the group tasks were used to report the activities which already had been done. Different from the first meeting which asked the students to answer three instructions in the group task: generating questions, clarifying difficult words, and summarizing the text, the second meeting had the students answer four instructions: predicting, generating questions, clarifying difficult words, and summarizing the text.

The lecturer asked her students to directly discuss the text given by applying the four steps of the "Fab Four" strategy. She reminded that the role of "lecturer" should be rotated so that the one who had been the "lecturer" in the first meeting had to be the students in the second meeting. Since the order of the "lecturer" had been decided in the first meeting, the students "lecturer" could directly lead the discussion.

Unfortunately, when finally the lecturer asked the students who were going to be the students "lecturer", there were only some students who raised their hands. The others

were afraid of being the students "lecturer". Therefore, the lecturer supported them by helping them in leading the discussion. The students looked braver to lead the discussion.

Next, the lecturer distributed a piece of paper containing a conversation between students and lecturer which could be used by the students as a guideline in acting as a lecturer as many of them got some problems before.

Finally, the students started discussing the text. During the discussion, the students still got problems to speak English and clarify difficult words. However, the lecturer patiently explained again how to clarify difficult words that before looking at the dictionary, they could use the context clues to identify the meaning of new vocabularies as had been explained before. She explained that the students should guess the meaning by looking at the preceding and following of the difficult word. However, she did not ask any follow-up question to enrich the students' conversation.

The students, then, answered the group's task which consisted of four instructions. Individually, the second and third instruction had each student write down his own predictions about what the author might discuss, and also had them generate questions related to the text they had discussed. The third and fourth instruction had to be discussed together with their group. It was related with clarifying difficult words and what they had learned from the text. It was crucial that each student cited reference points in the texts that were the evidence to clarify or support questions and/or commentary.

At the end of the lesson, the lecturer gave feedback to the students' activity after implementing the "Fab Four" strategy. Different from the first meeting which spent much more time, the second meeting could be finished on time as the time well.

C. The Result of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire given to the students was meant to find out the students' responses toward the implementation of the "Fab Four" strategy. The researcher included four possible answers which indicated different agreement:

A= Very   B = Quite   C = Less   D = Not

Then, in order to gain reliable interpretation from the data got, the researcher classified the questions into three parts. They were as follows:

1. Questions 1-3 dealt with the material.
2. Questions 4-8 dealt with the teacher's role in the classroom.
3. Questions 9-17 dealt with the strategy.

Table 1. The Result of Questionnaire

No	ANSWERS			
	A	B	C	D
1	20	7	-	-
2	-	18	9	--
3	-	26	1	-
4	3	17	7	
5	3	22	2	
6	3	20	3	1
7	2	20	5	-
8	3	21	3	-

9	5	18	2	2
10	-	17	7	3
11	3	8	14	2
12	7	16	4	-
13	4	17	6	-
14	6	16	3	2
15	3	11	10	3
16	4	8	13	2
17	15	8	2	2

After classifying all of the data gained, the frequency of each number was counted to know the proportion of each part of questionnaire. It was calculated by using this formula:

The sum of students' responses of one question X 100 %

The number of the students

1. **The Students' Opinions about the Texts.**

No.	A	B	C	D
1	67,57 %	32,43 %	-	-
2	-	62,17 %	37,83 %	
3	-	83,78 %	16,22 %	-

From the students' responses, it was revealed that most of the students felt the texts were so interesting (67,57 %). Most of them comprehended the texts (62,17 %). Yet, some students thought that the texts were difficult. Meanwhile, more than 80% students agreed that the texts could motivate them to read (83,78 %).

2. **The Students' Opinions about the Lecturer's Role in the Classroom.**

No.	A	B	C	D
4	8,10 %	59,46 %	32,43 %	-
5	10,81 %	83,78 %	5,40 %	
6	8,10 %	75,67 %	13,51 %	2,70 %
7	5,40 %	75, 67 %	18,91 %	-
8	8,10 %	83, 78 %	8,10 %	-

From the table, it can be seen that the lecturer's role really affected the students' motivation and participation. The students admitted that the lecturer gave understandable explanation (59,46 %). Most of them also agreed that the lecturer supported them to participate actively in the class (83,78 %). The lecturer explained the strategies step by step clearly (75,67 %). Besides, it was clearly seen that the lecturer guided both the students "lecturer" (75,67 %) and the other students (83,78 %).

3. **The Students' Opinions about the Strategy.**

No	A	B	C	D
9	13,51 %	75,67 %	5,40 %	5,40 %
10	-	72,97 %	18,91 %	8,10 %
11	8,10 %	35,13 %	51,35 %	5,40 %
12	32,43 %	56,76 %	10,81 %	-
13	10,81 %	72,97 %	16,22 %	-

14	29,73 %	56,76 %	8,10 %	5,40 %
15	8,10 %	43,24 %	40,54 %	-
16	16,22 %	35,13 %	43,24 %	5,40 %
17	56,76 %	-	8,10 %	5,40 %

From the above result, it was known that more than 70 % students gave positive responses and high interest. They said that the strategy applied was interesting (75,67 %) and easy to be done (72,97 %). At first, before the strategy was implemented, the students had difficulty in comprehending texts (51,35 %), but after the lecturer implemented the "Fab Four" as a strategy, it was easier for them to understand the texts (56,76 %) and the others (32,45 %) stated that it was very easy to comprehend the texts. Besides, there were also some other positive effects gained after implementing the strategy, such as: it motivates the students to speak (72,97 %) and study English (56,76%). Besides, this strategy could also enrich their vocabulary items (43,24 %). However, sometimes they still found difficulty to do the strategy if the lecturer did not guide them (43,24 %). In short, most of the students really wanted to apply this strategy again (56,76 %).

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this part is to relate the results of the study and the theories. It was conducted to prove whether the results described above support, develop, or contrast with the theories. It was divided into two sections: the implementation of the strategy, and the students' responses toward the implementation of the strategy.

A. The Implementation of the "Fab Four" Strategy

In the first meeting, the top-down model of reading was performed since the lecturer started the class by stimulating the students' background knowledge, making predictions, and confirming to the text whether the predictions hypothesized were correct or not. In other words, the students started with a complex problem then worked down toward the smaller elements. As stated by Nunan (2003) that a top-down model begin with the largest elements and works down towards smaller elements to build comprehension of what is being read Thus, here, it proved that the Fab Four strategy uses top-down models of reading since the students begin with complex problems to solve and then work out or discover (with the teachers' guidance) the basic skills required (Slavin, 2000). Then, since in constructivist learning theory, the top-down model of reading is used, it means that the Fab Four strategy can be called as a well kind example of constructist learning theory (Palincsar & Brown in Slavin, 2000).

Moreover, in the first meeting, the lecturer also modelled how to implement the strategy with very short pieces of literatures. He started by discussing paragraph by paragraph. It means that a suggestion stated by Rosenshine and Meister (1994) in order to start this strategy with very short pieces of literature or short sections of a larger work (a chapter or section of a novel, biography, etc.) was well conducted. This activity allowed students to practice their skills before moving on to longer readings. After being showed how to implement the four comprehension strategies by the lecturer, the students were grouped into small groups of three to apply the strategy independently. Here, the lecturer assigned individual student to take turns "teaching" and "modelling" the strategies in their small group. This metacognitive exercise encouraged students to think about their own

thought processes when using reading strategies (Palincsar and Brown, 1984). It was a great way to make the students be more enthusiastic in following the conversation.

Based on the explanations above, it showed that in the first meeting, the lecturer followed both the stages of reading, namely pre-reading, whilst reading, and post-reading activity, and the procedures in implementing the Fab Four strategy. However, unfortunately, the teacher chose the student "lecturer" who modelled the four strategies in front of the class with the one whom she thought wanted to be a lecturer in the future, not the one whom she thought had less difficulty in conducting the activity. As suggested by Slavin (2000) that actually it is better if the lecturer starts with the student whom s/he thinks will have less difficulty with the activities. In this case, the researcher believes that there would be some expected effects, such as:

1) The time could be managed well since the lecturer did not have to spend much time to guide the student "lecturer" performed in front of the class.
2) The students could see a good example to apply the four strategies so that they might not ask so many questions how to implement the strategy.

The teaching-learning activities in the second meeting were the same with the first one. Here, the students discussed the texts with their group by implementing the four steps of the Fab Four, namely predicting, generating questions, clarifying, and summarizing, Besides, they also changed the role of the students "lecturer" orderly so that all of the students could be the leader of the group. This activity was an important part of the process (Rosenshine and Meister, 1994).

In short, both meetings, based on the result of observation checklists and the researcher's note, proved that the Fab Four strategy implemented by the lecturer was students-centered since the students actively learned by themselves. However, that the lecturer's role in the teaching- learning process could not be ignored was important to be underlined. Here, the teacher guided, kept on track, and monitored the students' activities. As stated by Rosenshine & Meister (1994) that the teacher should spend his/her time to move around the room to visit each group's discussion. S/he also might ask a follow-up question to enrich the conversation.

B. The Students' Responses toward the Implementation of the Fab Four Strategy

The students' responses which were obtained from the questionnaire showed that most of them gave positive responses toward the implementation of the Fab Four strategy. Here, they agreed that this strategy could motivate them to speak English (72,97 %) **w**ith their group since the Fab Four strategy was designed as a discussion technique. The dialogue itself, as written by Palincsar, Ransom, and Derber (1989), is used as the medium because of two reasons. Firstly, it is a language format with which children are familiar (as opposed to writing, which may be too difficult for some struggling readers). Secondly, dialogue provides a useful vehicle for alternating control between teacher and students in a systematic and purposeful manner.

In addition, most of the students stated that this strategy could also enrich their vocabulary items (43,24 %). Besides, most of them also agreed to apply this strategy in reading the other kinds of texts (56,76 %) **s**ince they felt that this strategy could help them in enhancing comprehension and obtaining the detailed information of texts (56,76 %). In this point**,** their statements strengthened Palincsar and Brown's statement in 1984 that the

Fab Four strategy was built on four strategies that good readers used to comprehend texts: predicting, generating questions, clarifying, and summarizing.

In short, implementing this strategy is very useful and helpful for the students not only to comprehend the texts but also to speak English.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The Fab Four is a students-centered strategy since the students actively learned by themselves by having the lecturer's guide. As stated by Rosenshine & Meister (1994) that the lecturer should spend his/her time to move around the room to visit each group's discussion. Asking a follow-up question to enrich the conversation is also needed. The lecturer follows the procedures in implementing the Fab Four strategy, namely predicting, clarifying, questioning, and summarizing. The teaching-learning activities

The result of questionnaire proved that this strategy is very useful for students especially for the less-skilled comprehenders to comprehend English texts.

However, it is suggested to choose the "lecturer" role with the one who has less difficulty with the activities. In this case, the researcher believes that there will be some expected effects. First, the time can be managed well since the lecturer does not have to spend much time to guide the student "lecturer" performed in front of the class. Second, the other students are able to see such a good example in applying the four strategies that they might not ask so many questions how to implement the strategy.

Overall, the Fab Four is a great way to teach students how to determine important ideas from a reading text while discussing vocabulary, developing ideas and questions, and summarizing information. Therefore, it is strongly suggested that other lecturers or teachers would apply this strategy to teach the less-skilled readers in order to boost their reading comprehension.

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