

PROVIDING EXPLICIT STRATEGY INSTRUCTION TO ENHANCE STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION AT ENGLISH FOR ISLAMIC STUDIES CLASS

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Abstract

The aim of research is to identify the effects and advantages of providing explicit strategy instruction to enhance students' reading comprehension at English for Islamic Studies class of IAIN Pontianak. This was a classroom action research, and its data were collected through reading comprehension test, observation, interview, and document review. Then, the data were analysed through interactive model data analysis. The results showed that, after providing explicit instruction of comprehension strategy, students' reading comprehension improved for they became more strategic and more metacognitive when reading after being introduced with reading comprehension strategy explicitly. .

Key words: *Explicit Strategy Instruction, Students Reading Comprehension.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The main goal of reading is to comprehend reading material, and to be good reader one should have good comprehension of what being read. According to Snow (2002) comprehension is process of constructing and extracting meaning simultaneously through engagement and interaction with written language. Meanwhile, in academic context, the role of reading is very essential for most of learning activities involve it, and lecturer or teacher has responsibility to help students comprehend texts or passages they read.

To check students' comprehension, lecturer or teacher may purpose questions. If students can answer the questions, it implies that they have already understood what they read, but if they cannot answer them, it means that they have difficulty in comprehending reading material. Such problem may be caused by their unfamiliarity

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with reading strategy. This can happens since lecturer does not introduce the strategy when teaching reading. He/she only tell students to read and then ask them to answer questions. Whereas, teaching reading is intended to enable students comprehend reading texts by telling and showing them how to utilize reading strategy as what Nunan (2003), says “monitoring comprehension is essential in to successful reading, since in many reading instruction programs, more emphasize and time may be placed on testing reading comprehension than on teaching readers how to comprehend reading materials and make use of their cognitive and metacognitive skills”.

Similar problem also occurs in English for Islamic studies class in which most of its activity is reading text discussing Islamic topics such as ‘Marriage in Islam’, ‘Five Ways to Deal with the Dilemma of Riba’, ‘The Face of Islam Nusantara’, and so forth. According to some students, during classroom reading activity they were told to read a passage and then answer questions without knowing what strategy to do so. The following table shows that students have some difficulties to deal with reading comprehension questions:

Table I. The percentage of Students’ Correct Answer in Preliminary Research

Element	The percentage of students’ correct answer
	Preliminary research
Finding Explicit Information	18 students (50 %)
Making Inference	12 students (35 %)
Finding Main Idea	16 students (45 %)
Understanding Communicative Function	14 students (40 %)
Making Prediction	11 students (30 %)

To overcome the problems, the lecturer needs to introduce reading comprehension strategy such as strategy to find main idea, understand explicit message, and make inference to acknowledge implicit information. In other words, students require explicit strategy instruction to comprehend reading passage (Gough & Hillinger, 1980; Wren, 2002). Besides, according to Raphael (2014) “when students have difficulty answering questions, we often assume it is because they have not read carefully. However, it may actually be that they need to be taught how to analyze a question in order to find the correct answers”. In addition, findings of several researches show that explicit strategy

instruction brings about positive effect on students' reading comprehension (Romansyah, 2013; Hirade, 2016; Iwai, 2016; Al Khaiyali, 2017).

Next, related to reading comprehension, Deboer and Dallman (1966), state that reading is an activity that involves comprehension and interpretation of idea shown by written or printed language. Simanjuntak (1988) affirms that reading is cognitive process in which brain does most of works when reading, and this incredible human's device almost simultaneously takes information provided by eyes and then connects it with already known information related to subject in order to construct complete meaning of a text.

Further, according to Haris and Sipay (1980), reading is complex process in which acknowledgement and comprehension of written symbols are influenced by reader's perceptual and decoding ability, experience, language background, way of thinking, reasoning skill to anticipate meaning based on what he/she has read. Hence, it can be assumed that reading is perceptual process in which reader sees and interacts with text to understand, interpret, and decode written symbols in the text. To do so reader should have good comprehension.

Meanwhile, Hornby (1995) defines comprehension as strong activity of mind to understand, while reading comprehension is ability to comprehend what is read by involving reader's experiences and knowledge. Comprehension is the ultimate purpose of reading, and variation in comprehension is most probably originated from various background knowledge brought when reading (Urgurhart & Weir, 1998).

Nunan (1992) considers comprehension as active process to construct meaning of mental representation. It suggests that comprehension skill of students is different according to their knowledge, information, and experience. Deboer and Dallmann (1966) affirm that background experience, interest, and authentic intelligence play important role in determining high comprehension, and how much can be understood and missed by reader. It suggests that reading comprehension is ability to understand reading material by involving reader's experience brought to texts that causes variation in comprehension, and it can be assumed that, based on the theories above, reading comprehension is complex process of interaction with texts to construct interpretation using prior knowledge. Comprehension can be improved if prior knowledge is activated

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through formulating purpose, questioning, making prediction, introducing structure of texts, and so on. Then, to support comprehension, reading should have good reading comprehension skill such as ability to find main topic and idea, understand explicit meaning, interpret implicit information, and make prediction.

Strategic Reading

English in Indonesia is the first foreign language. So, mastering English as a foreign language is not as simple as learning English as a national language. The teachers and the students must understand the strategy that will be used in English teaching and learning process since this can aid students understand English material well (Sari & Suhono, 2017). For instance strategy on reading comprehension. Grabe and Stoller (2001) mention the ultimate goal of teaching academic reading is development of strategic reading, and is not disconnected instruction of reading strategies. Strategic reader knows the purpose of reading activity, possesses set of good practical reading strategies and implements them in efficient combination, monitors exact comprehension, and recognizes miscomprehension along with its effective solution. Strategic reading uses wide strategic repertoire in combination instead of in isolated application. The following strategies are often used by strategic reader:

- a) Previewing a passage
- b) Making prediction/probability of next event will happen in the passage
- c) Making summary or conclusion
- d) Learning new vocabularies through analysis of affixes and word stems
- e) Utilizing context to retain comprehension
- f) Recognizing organization of the passage
- g) Proposing questions about the passage
- h) Clarifying meaning of the passage
- i) Fixing miscommunication

The development of strategic reading requires commitment of strategic instruction. Introduction of reading strategy, its practice and usage must become part of every learning activity. It is easy to say about reading strategy if every class involves reading activity, focuses on text comprehension, and includes discussion about text and how it is comprehended. Eventually, the goal of strategic reading is to develop a) routine

strategy which automatically works to solve general problems of reading comprehension and b) set of problem solver strategy that can be utilized when routine strategy does not work properly.

General frame of reading strategy instruction mentioned by Duke and Pearson (2002) is as follows:

- a) Choosing text that meets students' reading task
- b) Choosing or determining strategy that is relevant to comprehension of the text
- c) Giving explicit instruction by telling students the strategy being used and its function
- d) Modelling the strategy so that students can learn how, when, and where to make use of the strategy to comprehend the text.
- e) Supporting students by cooperating with them in order that they can understand how to apply the strategy by themselves; involving them in discussion about how they implement the strategy; and providing feedback to them.
- f) Asking students to implement strategy in next lesson or in next passage. (Be ready to provide guided practice and extra modelling).

The aim of reading strategy instruction is to make students become strategic readers according to their development. The strategy should be introduced gradually, and should be discussed, explained and modelled. As retention, it can be reintroduced regularly through discussion, wall chart, students' explanation and students' modelling. In other words the strategy must be taught explicitly in order that students are able to become independent skilful reader as Irvin's opinion in Flood, et al. (2006), "the purpose of explicit strategy instruction is to facilitate independent learning. In order to become active, self-directed readers, students must have knowledge of themselves as readers, be cognizant of the strategies they use when deciphering texts, and select appropriate reading strategies and monitor the effectiveness of those strategies."

Moreover, according to the research finding of Taylor, Stevens & Asher (2006), students who followed explicit reading strategy training (ERST) comprehended second language texts better than those who did not. Likewise, Aghaie & Zhang (2012)

conducted a research which proved that students' reading comprehension and reading strategy transfer who were taught using explicit instruction were better than those of control class who did not get the same treatment. Moreover, other researches also showed that explicit reading strategy instruction has positive effect on students' reading comprehension and metacognitive awareness (Ahmadi, Ismail & Abdullah, 2013; Brevik, 2014; Tavakoli, 2014; Meniado, 2016)

Therefore, the aim of this research was to identify the effects and advantages of providing explicit strategy instruction to enhance students' reading comprehension at English for Islamic Studies class since the students often have difficulties when answering reading comprehension questions which may happen because they did not know what to do when dealing with reading comprehension questions, so that they needed to be taught strategies to answer the questions. In other word, lecturer should explicitly expose them to comprehension strategy such as identifying main idea, understanding explicit meaning, drawing conclusion, making prediction, and forming judgment.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

In order to assist students solve their reading comprehension problems, the lecturer conducted a classroom action research on teaching reading strategy explicitly to enhance students' reading comprehension score at Department of Akhwal Syakhsiyyah, IAIN Pontianak. This classroom action research involved two sorts of data: quantitative data and qualitative data. The quantitative data were gained from test: pre- and post-test, while qualitative data were collected from observation and interview which are explained as follows: The test was conducted to acknowledge the improvement of students' reading comprehension. The test was administered before implementing the research (pre-test), and was also done after the treatment in cycle 1 and 2 (post-test); observation was carried out to monitor and observe students activities and the effect of the action by means of observation sheet; and interview aimed to gain information about students' activities, teaching method and problem faced by both students and lecture during instructional process especially related to reading comprehension activity. The form of the interview was open ended interview. Meanwhile the qualitative data were

analysed through interactive model data analysis proposed by Miles & Huberman (1984), consisting of “data reduction, data display, and data verification”.

3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This classroom action research on teaching reading strategy explicitly to enhance students' reading comprehension involves two cycles. Each cycle consisted of five meetings, while the teaching reading covered: 1) lecturer's modeling the strategy, 2) students' working in group, and 3) lecturer's supporting student practice.

Lecturer's modeling the strategy was aimed to help students learn how, when, and where to use the reading strategy. Next, grouping the students was done considering the reading comprehension involves higher-level questions. According to Aebersold & Field (1997) “Higher-level questions can be frustrating for some students. Lecturers should plan their use carefully. Students benefit greatly from the thoughts, experience, and knowledge of their classmates, and small group discussions of higher-level questions may be the most threatening and most helpful way to introduce this level of work”. Meanwhile, supporting student practice was through lecturer's cooperating with students and helping them figure out when and how to use the strategy by themselves. Engaging them in discussion about how they should apply the reading strategy and if necessary, lecturer should provide corrective feedback.

Further, the lecturer observes students' activity during reading instructional process in order to know the effects of teaching reading strategy explicitly to enhance students' reading comprehension and find out its strong and weak points. He also interviewed several students in the end of each meeting. Then, to evaluate students' comprehension and to find out the effect of the treatment, he proposed some questions.

Table 2. The Improvement Percentage of Students' Correct Answer of Reading Comprehension Questions in Cycle 1

Element	The Percentage of Students' Correct Answer	
	Preliminary research	Cycle 1
Finding Explicit Information	18 students (50 %)	25 students (72 %)
Making Inference	12 students (35 %)	18 students (50 %)

Finding Main Idea	16 students (45 %)	23 students (70 %)
Understanding Communicative Function	14 students (40 %)	19 students (55 %)
Making Prediction	11 students (30 %)	18 students (50 %)

According to the findings in the first cycle, the lecturer examined the strong and weak points as reflection of the treatment. The weak points were useful to make recommendation to plan next cycle. The strong points of the treatment in the first cycle were the students felt that the lecturer’s providing the steps, such as key words when identifying explicit information was helpful. Besides, they were more interested and motivated to read especially when the lecturer, in pre-reading, proposed a question e.g. “What you do already know according to the title?” This question was intended to activate students’ schemata. And the following question: “What might the text be about?” also encouraged the students to read the passage as they were curious whether or not their prediction of the next event or information was correct. Then, when students had difficulty in answering such questions, the lecturer told them that the answer was in their minds and it might be different from one student to another.

Meanwhile, the weak points of the reading comprehension instruction in cycle one was 50 % of students had difficulty when dealing with question of making inference/implicit information. It might be because they had difficulty to make simple summary, so they required more training and explanation. Hence, they needed more explaining and guiding to prosper when dealing with such questions. The condition got worse, especially when, in the instructional process, the students worked in group of 6-7. This made some students did not participate actively.

Referring to the weak points found in the first cycle, the lecturer considered that the students need reintroducing the strategy of making inference to deal with questions of implicit information. Then, to make the students more participate actively and more easily to control, the number of students in group needed to be reduced into 3 to 4 students. Vermette (1998) affirms that “a group larger than four is problematic because members tend to play a reduced role and it is difficult to account for everyone’s opinion during discussion”. He further suggests that “an ideal team size should be in the range of three to four as each group can have a balance of interests, personalities, strengths

and talents for sparking creativity". Moreover, Abrami, et al. (1995) asserted that "the larger the group, the more complex communication becomes, and the more difficult it is to promote equal participation, interpersonal skill development, and, possibly, learning".

Besides, in cycle 2, for example, in one of classroom reading activities, the lecturer remodelled reading strategies before classroom reading activity, and he told students to notice his explanation. Then, in pre-reading, lecturer questioned students about topic or title of reading passage that students would read that day. Then, lecturer told students to read the passage silently and afterward he randomly pointed some students and told them to generate questions pertaining to the passage that they read. According to some reseaches students' generating question is beneficial for their reading comprehension (Alfassi, 2004; Mostow& Chen, 2009; Spörer, Brunstein, &Kieschke, 2009; Weinstein, McDermott, & Roediger III, 2010). The questions were, for example, "What is the main idea of the passage?" "What is meant by *mahr*?" "Who are the guards of Muslim virgin girl?" and "Why is proposing widow easier than virgin girl?" The lecturer then asked other students to answer to questions and mention the strategy to answer the questions. Some students were able to answer the questions and mention the strategy they use to answer the questions: S12: "the main idea of the passage is Marriage in Islam, to find the main idea, we need to read every fist sentence of every paragraph and also the last sentence of the last paragraph and those sentences will tell us what mainly discussed by the passage"; S1: "mahr is a gift from groom to his bride, it is literal question and I can easily find the answer by using keyword in this case the key word is *mahr* so I scan the passage in order to find the keyword for the answer in line 15"; S10: "the guards of Muslim virgin girl are her father,brother, and uncle or father's brothers. It is also literal question and to answer it we need to find the keyword and then check it in reading passage"; and S21: "the answer of the question can be found in line 20 and line 25 and we should make conclusion based on information we get in line 20 and line 25, and the answer is that the widow is easier to be purposed than Muslim virgin girl since the suitor need not the approval of guard but her only consent, while the suitor of Muslim girl must get both her consent and approval from her guard". Such effort to tell students to generate questions and mention reading strategy was

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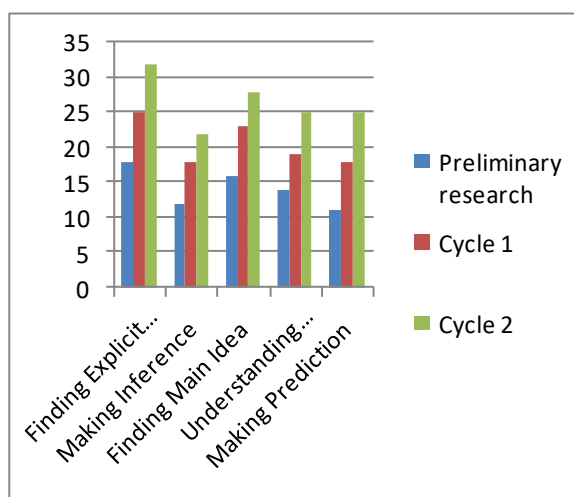
aimed to retain the strategy in their mind so that they can automatically use the strategy when having reading activity.

After some revisions based on the weak and strong points, the lecturer conducted the next cycle. And according to post-test in cycle two, the percentage of students' correct answer increased as shown by following table:

Table 3. The Improvement of Percentage of Students' Correct Answer after Treatment in Cycle 2

Element	The percentage of students' correct answer		
	Preliminary research	Cycle 1	Cycle 2
Finding Explicit Information	18 students (50 %)	25 students (72 %)	32 students (90 %)
Making Inference	12 students (35 %)	18 students (50 %)	22 students (63 %)
Finding Main Idea	16 students (45 %)	23 students (70 %)	28 students (80 %)
Understanding Communicative Function	14 students (40 %)	19 students (55 %)	25 students (70 %)
Making Prediction	11 students (30 %)	18 students (50 %)	25 Students (70 %)

Chart 1. The Improvement in Students' Score from Preliminary Research to Cycle 2



The above chart displays the increasing score of students' reading comprehension; and it suggests that explicit instruction of reading strategy is beneficial to improve

students' reading performance. Moreover, according to interview with some students, they think that lecturer's teaching reading strategy explicitly is helpful for students to answer questions of reading comprehension: S12 "after paying attention to the explanation and example of finding mind idea of a passage, now I know that I must read every first sentence of every paragraph and last sentence of the last paragraph. Then, based on those sentences I can conclude what is mainly discussed by the passage"; S3 "Now I have understood how to answer question by using scanning strategy. I only need to find the key word in the passage and then I can get the answer"; S25 "*Alhamdulillah*, I know how to use skimming strategy even sometimes I still have difficulty to make conclusion when answering question, for example 'It can be inferred from the passage that blah blahblah'."

4. CONCLUSION

Referring to students' reading comprehension score, it indicates that teaching reading strategy explicitly is helpful and beneficial. After the treatment, students are more familiar with the strategy to find explicit information, make inference, find mind idea, understand communicative function, and make prediction when reading. In other words, the improvement of students' reading comprehension might be because the students became more strategic or more metacognitive in their reading after being introduced reading strategy, and assisting them to become metacognitive when reading can promote their academic performance.

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