

The Use of Close Reading to Pinpoint Student' Skills in Reading Comprehension: An Indonesian Case

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Abstract: There are many researches about reading comprehension over the years. However, the tendency of those researches is to find out the relationship and the effectiveness of a method or technique used to foster students' reading comprehension with quantitative approach. Moreover, in line with the reading comprehension researches, the student's meaning-making process is also still rare. Therefore, this case study is attempted to investigate the meaning-making process of students with close reading to pinpoint students' reading comprehension skill in one of Islamic senior high school and qualitative methodology is employed in this study. An after-school-session is held to earn the data for document analysis with eleven students from tenth grade as the participants. After analysing the data, it indicates that 73% of participants belong to literal level of comprehension and 27% participants are identified to be in inferential level. Furthermore, the study on close reading might be conducted quantitatively. In addition, the text complexity used for close reading might also be considered to be studied as a matter of fact that Indonesia's curriculum does not have measurement for text complexity assigned to certain grade.

1 INTRODUCTION

What has gone wrong in Indonesia educational system? Is it the curriculum, the teachers or the students?. As an evidence, Indonesia has been in the same place for fifteen years in the term of reading proficiency top 10 from the last, based on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) has shown once every three years, among many countries that participated *e.g. Vietnam, Malaysia, Korea, etc.* After years, being schooled how to read and read to learn by teachers, the result still was not pleasant for everyone. Climbing the PISA rank is not an easy task for Indonesia. However, if there is no better improvement, reading proficiency in Indonesia might get worst.

Low reading performance on PISA should have gather attention from all aspects that relevant to this matter. Roberts & Roberts (2008) showed that poor

reading performance of students is due to students' reading purpose that often read for information just to fulfil an assignment rather than to understand the text deeply. As for Lee & Spratley (2010) suggested that it might be due to students have problems with the text *e.g. unknown vocabularies, lack knowledge of text topic and generic structure of the text.* It caused them nonchalant on what to do to understand the text so that they could not monitor their understanding. The unpleasant result from PISA test meant that Indonesia has a low reading habit. Fixing this problem by revising our reading routine was probably the solution to this matter.

The revising tool of this issue is close reading. It is likely to be the wind of change for Indonesia reading world. Close reading is a reading approach that insists students generate meaning from text by examining carefully how language is used in the text itself (Snow and O'Connor, 2013). Fisher & Frey

(2012) explained that close reading has text-dependent questions (TDQ) that used as a tool to promote the habit of re-reading text to build schema. TDQ was a trigger for student to start the habit of re-reading text since it could only be answered by stating the evidence provided from the text not from other sources. Using close reading in classroom would help teacher to change student's reading habit and pinpoint students reading comprehension skills as well. Therefore, an urgent research needs to be done to eradicate the problem.

Over the years, there have been several researches conducted on close reading. (FISHER AND FREY, 2014) did an experimental research on struggling middle school readers (7 & 8 graders) with low achievement in reading. They held an after-school reading intervention with an intention to foster the academic reading achievement. The result showed, there were 75 participants who completed the study, 48 (64%) made at least one level increase, 26 (35%) also made the same result on the more difficult test, and 1 (1%) performed worse than the previous year. Blouin (2014) also did the pre-experimental study to the fifth grade students with specific learning disabilities and the result showed that there is no evidence as to whether or not close reading strategies are more effective than explicit reading strategies. Another researcher also has devoted an effort to compare close reading with another reading technique called shared reading (WATERS, 2014).

In line with these researches, most of my fellow researchers conducted a reading research to seek the relationship between something, the effect of a method or technique to foster students reading comprehension. Strangely, there is less research about student's meaning-making process (how student understood a text). Therefore, this research study will identify the meaning-making process of students with close reading to pinpoint students reading comprehension skills.

2 READING COMPREHENSION

Reading is different from reading comprehension. Reading needs decoding skills or reading fluency but reading comprehension needs the reader to understand what they are reading and make relation with experiences etc. For instance, reader with bahasa as a native language, surely, could read the English text due to it had the same alphabetic with English but reader rarely understood the meaning of the text itself. Therefore, when reader read an English text and it was simply just word calling a language that had same

alphabetic, in contrast, reading comprehension assures the reader to read and re-read to comprehend the text. In conclusion, reading comprehension is the process to reveal what is behind the text that involves the reader mental skills.

Inferential level of comprehension is reading between the lines, the opposite of the literal level (reading on the line). Lah & Hashim (2014) listed the demand skills in inferential level: summarize, compare and contrast, make conclusion and prediction. They both continued that reader's intuition, prior knowledge and understanding of the text a.k.a literal level was also needed. This level demands a high level of thinking from the reader since it also involves reasoning beyond the text.

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2.1 Skills in Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is the technique or strategy that helps reader engage with the text. Teacher has to notice that certain skills belong to certain level of comprehension. There are some sub-skills from reading comprehension skill that consider to be used in this research seeing from comprehension levels above (Day and Jeong-suk, 2005; Hussein, 2012; Lah and Hashim, 2014). Above all, it has to be known that each reading comprehension skill is overlapping one another.

2.1.1 Vocabulary

Primary skill in learning English in foreign language (EFL) is knowledge of word meaning or vocabulary. Moore (1996) argued to relieve word-meaning readers need to have semantic sense to construct meaning simply before they could understand the whole passage or text they need to know the word meaning first. Semantic senses are root words, prefixes, and suffixes (Pacheco and Goodwin, 2013), if readers have semantic sense they probably will be able to guess the word in certain context. When reader has an idea or concept that wish to be expressed, they need to be rich in vocabulary that exist in the working memory from here they can select the word that express the idea or concept (Alqahtani, 2015).

2.1.2 Main Idea

Determining the main idea is needed. Knowing about the main idea placement helps the reader in performing other skills *e.g.* summarizing, describing

events, ideas, and the overall structure of the text. So they can combine ideas across texts (Lord, 2015). Knowing how to locate the main idea defines whether you are good or poor reader (Wang, 2009). Main idea is reader's statement about the main point of certain text/passage that included in topic sentences (author's statement). If they could comprehend this skill, they will have insight about generic structure and type of the text that they were reading.

2.1.3 Supporting Details

Every paragraph has a main idea. When readers have their main idea, they also need a reason why it is what it is. This reason called as supporting detail, it gives the reader clues about the general idea of text (main idea). Supporting detail can come up as fact, quote, example etc. It will lead your way to make sense of the text. According to McWhorter & Sember (2012) supporting details are facts and ideas that help to located or explain the gist of a passage. There are two type of supporting details *e.g. major and minor*. Major detail is crucial fact that support the main idea and minor was the additional information to major. During reading text, usually you will find the signal words that mark the supporting details, it is also known as outlining.

2.1.4 Sequences

Spivey (2010) defines sequencing as putting events, ideas, and objects in a correct order. In narrative story the sequences commonly starts in the beginning, the middle and the end. Likewise, when someone asked, "Can you tell me what you did yesterday?" the answer probably will be things that have been done in the morning until night. That is a sequences and it is something that was built in mental representation. Briner et al. (2012) and Gouldthorp et al., (2017) classified the events/sequences into causal or temporal. The casual network in narrative identifies cause-effect and effect-cause process specifically. In contrast, the temporal system is a chronological event that exists in model representation. The temporal system will be needed to work on casual network.

2.1.5 Compare and Contrast

Compare and contrast are searching for a likeness and differences to form a conclusion or new sight. In the narrative text, teacher can tell students to compare and contrast two similar stories as they explained how these two stories are alike and different in the certain aspect. Silver (2010) argued that compare and contrast have five goals (an effective way to build

students memory, develop level of thinking, student comprehension development, improve students' writing in the content areas and develop students' habits of thinking). This skill basically demands reader to be detail-oriented.

2.1.6 Summarizing

Summarizing is an effective learning strategy that constructs and retains a succinct summary of important propositions from text (Pakzadian and Eslami Rasekh, 2013). They continued that copying part of the text in the summary and paraphrasing summary without abolish the original meaning/idea were also type of summary. Teaching summarizing is beneficial for the students as well as the teacher. Westby et al. (2010) stated that students can point important things and reassuring their understanding about the text. Besides, summarizing is an exercise for improving decision making and sequencing. It also said that teacher might use the summary as prove of student's comprehension, decision making and sequencing skills. Ability to summarize is an aid for students when they are stepping into higher level of education.

2.1.7 Making Prediction

Extrapolating or known as making prediction is a capacity to guess what will happen next in the text without ending or else. Good reader makes a prediction about the text during their reading. Here, readers need to support they prediction with the clues from the text and knowledgeable about the topic itself (background knowledge or prior knowledge). According to Robb (2003) making prediction is an activity that required a high-level of thinking because reader will be playing role as a detective who search for evidence in the text and use what they have known about the text's topic to create the reasoning in extrapolating. When student provides a prediction with a complete and logic evidence from the text then they have a chance of understanding the text deeply. However, if they are not so, they are not reading the text deeply or we can say they are not engage with the reading.

2.1.8 Inference

Making inferences based on text information (text-based inferences) and world knowledge (schema-based inferences) is a reading comprehension that needed when reader want to related clues or evidence. Kispal et al. (2008) wrote down the kind

of inferences that cited most in reading activity. Below:

- a. Inter-sentence inferences
- b. Gap-filling inferences
- b. Local inferences or coherent representation at the local level of sentences and paragraphs
- c. Global inferences or a coherent representation covering the whole text
- d. On-line inferences or inferences drawn automatically during reading
- e. Inferences drawn strategically after reading

2.2 Close Reading

Close reading can be said as the new way of teaching thinking of thinking or metacognition that is needed in 21st century. Metacognition involves the comprehension monitoring and metacognition control as Cromley (2005) claimed. Close reading is a technique that directed reader's attention merely to the text and it was different with other traditional reading instruction *e.g. shared or guided reading* (Burke, 2013). It is one of instructional routine that promote metacognition thinking (Houck, (2017). Close reading is better compare to the early model of reading *e.g. bottom-up and top-down* (Nunan, 1991) or interactive model (Rumelhart and McClelland, 1982) tend to make reader became a passive.

Now, we need to emphasize on how to make student became self-aware, continuous the cognitive behaviour during the reading or active reader. In close reading, there are phases in teaching students based on the comprehension level that demand them to coming back to the text for evidence and thinking differently whenever a new question is given.

Fisher & Frey (Fisher and Frey, 2015) listed the phases of close reading through questions such as "*what does the text say? How does the text work? and How does the text mean?*". These questions also show the intense phases in close reading. The first phase, it starts with the "*what does the text says?*" where literal level of comprehension are demanded and students capable of finding the text's general understanding and key details. The second phase, it works on "*How does the text work?*" where the vocabulary, text structure and author's craft of the text are discussed, this phase still belong to literal level. As for the next phase, "*How does the text mean?*" focuses on the inferential level of comprehension where inferences, opinions and argument, and inter-textual connection take place.

There are common elements that close reading has and it helps teacher to make students getting intense with the text. According to (Fisher and Frey, 2013)

there are four things to be considered in close reading. Below:

a. Short worthy/complex passages

In close reading using short passage is useful rather than long text type since reading closely needs quite some time to be closed to. The passage was selected by current complexity Fisher, Frey, & Lapp (2012) made three dimensions of complexity, in order to get the right text to be read closely. First, qualitative dimensions of text complexity are where teacher analysing the text's content or the readability of the text etc. Second, quantitative dimensions of text complexity is done by measuring the lexical density of the text by using the Fry (Fry, 2002) etc. Last, reader and task consideration are where teacher should consider the reader's experience, language proficiency, background knowledge, and motivation of their students. Teacher should consider the given questions to influence students to return to the text for an answers (text-based questions) and teacher also need to be an expert as she/he decided to use a text for the student to read closely based on experience, professional judgment, and the subject and knowledge of their students.

b. The practice of rereading/ Repeated reading

Repeated reading is an act of coming back to the text for evidences. According to Fisher & Frey (Fisher and Frey, 2013), repeated reading was one the reason students engage in close reading. They both continued that repeated reading could be done alone, with group, with read-aloud by teacher, or any combination of those. Repeated reading is an effective way to improve students reading fluency, accuracy, and comprehension (Han and Cheng-ling, 2010). Teacher could do the close reading with some help from other teaching technique likewise read-aloud. Read-aloud can enhance students' fluency, vocabulary development, oral language, developed critical thinking and problem solving skills. Especially when teacher read-aloud with narrative text (Johnston, 2015).

c. Annotation

Annotation is traces made by the reader. Annotation helps teacher to know what is important to students during and after reading. Fisher & Frey (2013) listed the type of annotating in close reading: Highlight the main points of the passages, circle unknown/new words, use a question mark for something you are going to ask late, write an exclamation mark for things that unusual or

unexpected, and briefly note what it was that caught your attention, draw an arrow when you find ideas that connected to something inside the text or to an idea or experience outside the text and note your connections, write *EX* when the author provides an example to support your claim.

d. Text-dependent questions (TDQ)

TDQ includes questions about the phrases that have mentioned and its function to make student coming back to the text for evidence to support their claim or answer so it's not bias. To be clear below the type of TDQs as Santori & Belfatti (2016) display below.

Table 1: Text-Dependent Question Types

Question type	Question purpose
General understanding	a. Draw on the overall view of the piece, especially main ideas or arguments.
Key detail	a. Who/what/where/when/why/how questions that is essential to understanding the meaning of the passage.
Vocabulary And text structure	a. Bridge explicit with implicit meanings, especially in focusing on words and phrases as well as the way the author has organized the information.
	b. May include text features and discourse structures.
Author's purpose	a. Draw the reader's attention to genre, point of view, multiple perspectives, and critical literacies, such as speculating on alternative accounts of the same event.
Inferences	a. Challenge students to examine the implicitly stated ideas, arguments, or key details in the text.
Opinions, arguments, Inter-textual connections	a. Allow students to use their foundational knowledge of one text to assert their opinion or make connections to other texts, using the target text to support their claim..

Text-dependant question plays important role in close reading that stimulus students' thinking during close reading. This question assign to level of comprehension or it can be interpreted close reading start with the easiest to the hardest question.

TDQ is proposed to know why and how they are answering like this, think, or conclude different from each other. Since, there are no way two students whose reading the same text would give the exact same answer, unless she/he cheated, comment etc.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The research methodology was the logical blueprint of the research (Yin, 2011). As this research questions started with *how* then qualitative research was being used, Patton & Cochran (2002) said qualitative method was needed when the research questions used what, how, and why. Qualitative research was useful in producing culturally specific information about the opinions, behaviours and etc. of particular populations (Mack et al., (2005). Case study is one the most useful method in qualitative research (Cadena, (2006) and this study were using the case study as the research method. This research would only cover the investigation of using close reading on the first grade students in one of Islamic senior high school in Sukabumi merely to update student's reading comprehension skills and students respond toward close reading technique.

3.2 Research Site

The research conducted in one of Islamic senior high school in Sukabumi. This school has an A score from the National accreditation corporation (BAN-SM). This school was chosen due to the low reading interest shown by the students judging from the purpose of their library visit. According to the librarian mostly students came to the library in order to borrow a book that teacher needed during the class, due to a homework of making summary, review or etc. It is not because students were interesting to read, it was simply because teacher told them to do so. Despite all that, the library has an ample space for student to read and sometime it was being used for teaching and learning activities.

3.3 After-School Sessions

The after-school-session was held with purpose to filter the students who originally wanted to learn English after school. The first and second session were done by close reading the incomplete story of Cinderella skeleton. On the first session student were

given the literal questions and the next session, student was given mix question of literal and inferential question in order to see if they could move to higher level or not. Students were given half story so it could be observed their inferences and prediction skill etc. The last session, they read the end of the story. Therefore; they can make summary, compare, and contrast the text with other text.

3.4 Participant

This research used purposive sampling, According to McMillan (2004) purposive sampling was a selection of particularly informative or useful subject. The first-grade students of Islamic senior high school were selected, the students with three years experiences in learning English and students' who were willing to volunteer and devote themselves to spare their time to have another additional hour to learn English (they were not being forced). The English teacher of first grader announced about the after-school-session and student who were willing to join, they were told to gather in particular classroom to start the session. They were eleven students who completed the session.

3.5 Data Collection Technique

The data came from the after-school-session that consisted of three sessions. Each session student was reading one text but met different question level in each session. the students' comprehension skills profile was assessed by using the text-dependent questions rubric that have adopted from (Evers, 2016) see table 2.

a. Document

Document analysis of students work from the after- school-session would be used as evidence that reflected student's reading comprehension skill. The finding would be shown by analysing participant's answer per-question. Due to Indonesia's curriculum does not have the lexical measurement so that the mini research was held in order to find the appropriate text for the 10th graders. The textbook called "*Bahasa Inggris: first and second semester edition*" were selected as the government provided this book for guidance to English teacher. After analysing the lexical measure of all the texts that could be found in the textbook, two narrative texts were found and the scale of the reading ease was 80.8 and 80.5. According to the Flesch formula, text that scored 70 to 80 had characteristic easy to read. After that, narrative text with similar readability level was being

searched and Cinderella Skeleton by Robert D. San Souci was picked with 76.3 readability level.

In conclusion, the text could be used for the 10th graders due to the level of readability that existed in same scale with the narrative text from the government textbook. Meanwhile, the qualitative dimension of the text was measure by the teacher *a.k.a.* the observer and the task was made with indication, it would make the students return to the text for evidence. Students work were evaluated by three experts to make the data valid.

4 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

After conducting the after-school-session, teacher should alarm on how to engage the student in their reading process. If student do not want to pursue their reading due to the complexity or the many unknown words in the text, they will not engage in the reading. In close reading, the teacher can use the same text for few meeting, and each session students meet the multi-level of questions *e.g.* TDQ. The beneficial part of close reading is repeated reading that allowed the teacher to assign each reading to the current level of question. It can lead teacher to see what students capable in reading comprehension. In second language acquisition, it is proved that repeated reading is highly converging evidence of its potency for reading fluency, accuracy, and comprehension. Rereading activities are designed to increase students' interaction and understanding with the text during the close reading aside from TDQ and annotation (Houck, 2017). Therefore, it is okay to use complex text for English class with an intention that the chosen text utilized for few meeting instead of one meeting.

On the last session of the after-school-session, 80% of the participants showed improvement than previous sessions because they have read the text multiple times and comprehend the text better than the first reading by themselves. The first session, participants read the text by themselves and it can be observed during the reading that they are struggling to understand the text and tend to translate the text word by word. Translating word by word by circling the new or unknown words are the form of annotation as Fisher & Frey (2013) explained. The second and the third session the teacher used read-aloud to help participants understood the story even better. (Johnston, 2015) suggested that read-aloud with narrative text enhanced fluency, vocabulary development, oral language, developed critical thinking and problem solving skills. To conclude,

using text or passage that consider as a complex text is acceptable if the teacher uses the text for few meetings instead of one meeting which is impossible for students to understand the complex text in one-hour session (duration for English class in Indonesia).

Based on the first session result, all participants earned average 50 to 90 expect for P2 and then the 2nd sessions, expect for P1, all participant's score were lower than the previous day especially P2 who got 8 from scale 100. The last day, P1, P3 and P8 got their score lower than the 2nd sessions, the rest were showing improvement. After analyzing participant's work the next step is classified the participant based on their level of comprehension

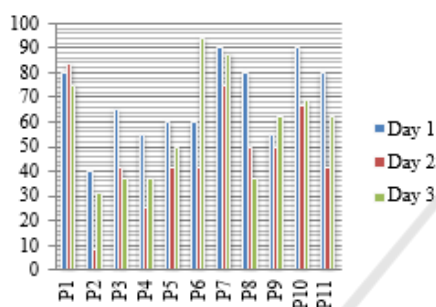


Figure 1: Participants' Score Day 1-3.

Based on the pictures above, there are eight participants with literal level of comprehension. They are P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P8, P9 and P11. They were being classified as readers with literal comprehension due to their answer toward text-dependent question only using something stated from the text or lack of inferencing skills. At the first session, the TDQ demanded the literal level of comprehension and they scored 40 to 80.

However, in the next meeting where the TDQ was about "how does the text work?" and "what does the text mean?" they could not afford to give sufficient evidence (explicit or implicit) to support their answer e.g. while reading prediction (question number 3 2nd session). Expect for P9, the rest were incapable to use the stated evidence (Cinderella Skeleton's half foot) to make a prediction. Event when P9 succeed with the prediction still s/he failed with the other questions. The last session, the TDQ was still about "what does the text mean?" they were answering using the fact stated in the text e.g. compare and contrast question number 4. Even if there was participant that support h/his claimed with implicit evidence, it was insufficient.

Participant with inferential level of comprehension went smoothly in the literal level questions. They gave sufficient evidence to support

their claim in the session as it was shown at participant's figure that P1, P7 and P10 got the score higher compare to other participants. Same thing happened to the second session and the last meeting. Indeed, if the whole score from three sessions were measure in percentage. Participant with inferential level earned more than 70% compare to the participant with literal level comprehension less than 70%.

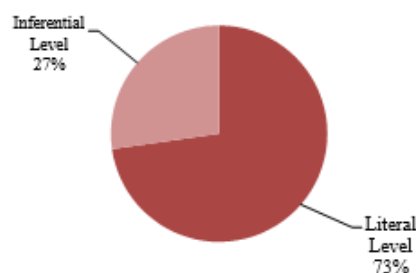


Figure 2: Participants' Comprehension level.

5 CONCLUSIONS

Based on the data earned from the research, 73% of participant belong to literal level of comprehension which according to Day & Jeong-suk (200) and Lah & Hashim (2014) mean they were able to get the meaning of words or phrase, fact (date, time, location etc.), sequence (logical order of events) and context (main idea and supporting detail). The kinds of answer that they wrote also tend to be copying what was written in the text rather than inferring from the text. In contrast, inferential level participants tend to answer with their own words and quote something from the text for the validity of their claim and 27% participants were identified to be in inferential level.

They passed the literal level smoothly and were able to summarize, compare and contrast, make conclusion and prediction as well as other skills that exist in literal level as Lah & Hashim (2014) described. After all, participants have read the text multiple times as it could be observed during the after-school-sessions for understanding or as an evidence to support their claim.

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