

THE USE OF CONTEXT CLUES IN IMPROVING STUDENTS' READING ABILITY

Fariska Wulandari

Business English and Management
Polytechnic of Tonggak Equator, Jalan Fatimah No. 1-2
e-mail: RiskaDiandra0212@gmail.com

Abstract

This research was aimed to find out whether context clues can improve the students' reading ability and how significant's context clues in improving students' reading ability at third semester students of Agriculture Technology Polytechnic of Tonggak Equator Pontianak. This research was classroom action research which was set out in two cycles. The subjects involved included the third semester students of Agriculture Technology Department, Polytechnic of Tonggak Equator. In collecting the data, the researcher used field note and test. The data of the students' pre-test and progress test score were analyzed by using mean score and the data of observation was analyzed descriptively. The finding of this research was the students' reading ability was improved from pre-test and progress test from cycle to cycle. The mean score of the students' pre-test was 51.8. Then, the mean score of the students' progress test in the first cycle was 77.6. Finally, the mean score of the students' progress test in the second cycle was 88.8. Then, the records from the field note supported the finding from pre-test and post-test was the students' reading ability improved from the first cycle to the second cycle after implementation of the treatment by researcher.

Keywords: improving, reading ability, context clues.

Abstrak

Penelitian bertujuan untuk meningkatkan kemampuan membaca mahasiswa semester III Program Studi Teknologi Pangan Politeknik Tonggak Equator. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian tindakan kelas yang dilakukan dalam dua siklus. Subjek dalam penelitian ini adalah mahasiswa semester III Program Studi Teknologi Pangan Politeknik Tonggak Equator Pontianak. Dalam mengumpulkan data, peneliti menggunakan beberapa instrument, yaitu catatan lapangan dan tes. Data hasil pre-test dan tes kemajuan dianalisis menggunakan nilai rata-rata dan data dari hasil observasi dianalisis secara deskriptif. Temuan dari penelitian ini adalah kemampuan membaca mahasiswa meningkat dari mulai pre-test sampai tes kemajuan dari siklus pertama dan siklus kedua. Nilai rata-rata pre-test mahasiswa adalah 51,8. Kemudian, nilai tes kemajuan pada siklus pertama adalah 77,6 dan nilai tes kemajuan pada siklus kedua adalah 88,8. Selanjutnya, temuan penelitian berdasarkan catatan lapangan juga mendukung temuan dari pre-test dan tes kemajuan yakni kemampuan membaca mahasiswa meningkat dari siklus pertama ke siklus kedua setelah diterapkannya perlakuan oleh peneliti.

Kata Kunci: meningkatkan, kemampuan membaca, context clues.

INTRODUCTION

One of the goal must be achieved by all English teachers and lecturers is be success in teaching English. In fact, be success in teaching English is not easy.

Teachers and lecturers have to do some teaching approach, methods or technique to find out the appropriate technique to achieve their goal.

Reading is one of language skills that must be learnt by all students since it is a receptive skill that will effects the development of productive skills such as speaking and writing. For university students, reading is an activity that must be done since they have to read their compulsory books or others materials related to their lesson. Besides, reading can add students' knowledge, increase the number of vocabulary, improve analytical thinking, stimulate creativity, help to solve a problem, reduce stress, etc.

Unfortunately, the importance of reading has not realized by many students, yet. There are still many students who have difficulty in reading such as understanding the meaning of words, finding the main ideas, finding the general and specific information from the text and understanding reading passage/text.

Based on the problem explanation, the researcher thinks that she has to apply a strategy in order to help the students solve their reading problem. When the language learners are confronted with text, they may be stuck by shortage of vocabulary inventory and unable to understand the content of the text. The first thing that a learner does to understand difficult words is to check dictionary. However, there is a strategy that learners can use to get the meaning of such vocabulary items that is context clue. No matter what level the students are in, they will often come across difficult words in texts they are exposed to. Context clue is strategy which is worth developing. Therefore, the researcher was interested in conducting a research entitled the used of context clues in improving students' reading ability.

There were some problems found by the researcher in the classroom. First, students did not understand the meaning of words. Second, students were unable to find the main idea of the paragraphs. Third, students could not find the general and specific information from the text. The last, students did not understand the reading passage/text. Based on the background and identification of the problem, the researcher formulates the problems as follows: (1) Does the use of context clue improve the reading ability of the third semester students of Agriculture

Technology Department, Polytechnic of Tonggak Equator Pontianak in academic year 2016-2017?; and (2) How does the use of context clue improve the reading ability of the third semester students of Agriculture Technology Department, Polytechnic of Tonggak Equator Pontianak in academic year 2016-2017? Based on the problem formulated, the objective of this research is to find out whether the use of context clue can improve the reading ability and how significant context clue in improving the reading ability of the third semester students of Agriculture Technology Department Polytechnic of Tonggak Equator Pontianak in academic year 2016-2017.

There were two reading definitions found by the researcher, they were according to Silberstein and according to Patel and Jain. Silberstein (1994:120) states that “reading is an active process”. Describing reading as an active process means that when students contemplate the text, they preview the text by activating background knowledge, making predictions about the content, making connection to self, text, and world. Then, Patel dan Jain (2008:113) states that “reading is the most important activity in language class. Reading is a source of information and pleasurable. It also a means of consolidating and extending one’s knowledge.”

Besides, Brown (2004:186) states that there are three common genres of reading, they are: academic reading such as general interest articles (in magazines, newspapers, etc.), technical reports (e.g., lab reports), professional journal articles, reference materials (dictionaries, etc.), textbook, thesis, essays, papers, test directions, editorials and opinion writing. Second, job-related reading such as phone message, letters/emails, memos, job evaluations, project reports, schedules, labels, signs, announcements, forms, applications, questionnaires, financial documents (bills, invoices, etc.), manual, and directions. The last is personal reading such as newspapers, magazines, letters, emails, greeting cards, invitations, message, notes, lists, schedules (train, bus, plane, etc.), recipes, menus, map, calendar, advertisements (commercials, want ads), novels, short stories, jokes, drama, poetry, financial documents (e.g., checks. Tax forms, loan applications), forms, questionnaires, medical reports, immigration documents, comics, strips, and cartoons. According to Brown (2004:189), “for considering assessment

procedures, several type of reading performance are typically identified, they are perceptive reading, selective reading, interactive reading, and extensive reading.”

Linge (2000) states that reading comprehension is the ability to think words together into sentences and to understand the idea that the author is trying to convey in those sentences. Therefore, reading comprehension is an ongoing process of evolving thinking. When readers read, they carry on a conversation with the text. They respond with happiness, amazement, wonder, etc. they make connection, ask questions and draw inferences for better understanding and learning from what they read.

Mohamad (1999) states that there are actually three main levels or strands of comprehension-literal, interpretive and critical comprehension. The levels are: (1) Literal comprehension. Comprehension at this level involves surface meanings. At this level, teachers or lecturers can ask students to find information and ideas that are explicitly stated in the text. In addition, it is also appropriate to test vocabulary; (2) Interpretive or referential comprehension. At this level, students go beyond what is said and read for deeper meanings. They must be able to read critically and analyze carefully what they have read. Students need to be able to see relationship among ideas, for example how ideas go together and also see the implied meanings of these ideas. It is also obvious that before our students can do this, they have to first understand the ideas that are stated (literal comprehension). Interpretive or referential comprehension includes thinking processes such as drawing conclusions, making generalizations and predicting outcomes. At this level, teachers can ask more challenging questions such as asking students to do the following: (a) Re-arrange the ideas or topics discussed in the text; (b) Explain the author’s purpose of writing the text; (c) Summarize the main idea when this is not explicitly stated in the text; and (d) Select conclusions which can be deduced from the text they have read; and (3) Critical reading. The third level of comprehension is critical reading where by ideas and information are evaluated. Critical evaluation occurs only after our students have understood the ideas and information that the writer has presented. At this level, students can be tested on the following skills: (a) The ability to differentiate between facts and opinions; (b)

The ability to recognize persuasive statements; and (c) The ability to judge the accuracy of the information given in the text.

Teaching reading comprehension to English Foreign Language (EFL) students is not an easy way. According to Nuttal (1982: 21), “the aim of teaching reading comprehension are to develop the students’ ability to extract the message from the content. In teaching reading comprehension, the teachers are trying to put something in the students’ mind to take the information by them.” In teaching reading, the teacher or lecturer should make the students develop the ability to read by themselves. An independent reader must be able to overcome the text that he/she has never seen before. The reading teachers or lecturers have to facilitate the students to do so. The teachers’ role in reading is not to remain the students but to make the students have their own ability to read.

Bamberg (1975: 13) states that the goal of teaching reading is “encouragement of the full use of individual’s capacities in reading. In means that it will have maximum influence on his welfare and also lead to self-realization, efficient use of reading as a tool of learning and inquiry; and also for relaxation and escape, constant broadening of students’ reading interest. Encouragement of an attitude toward reading which will lead to lifetime interest in reading of many kinds and for many purposes.”

Context clue in the exam is important to do since it will improve the students’ reading skill. Obviously, students do not have dictionary in the exam so there are likely to be a lot of words from the reading text that they do not understand and they cannot check. If they come across a word they do not understand, then they cannot spend a lot of time working out its meaning because they have a very limited time for reading. Therefore, context clue is necessary.

Using context clues in word recognition means figuring out the meaning of a word based on clues in the surrounding context. These clues could be found in the sentence with the word, in the sentences before, or in the sentences following the word (Hancock, 1987: 2).

Hancock (1987: 2) states that context clues will be easier if the readers are familiar with some kinds of clues often found in sentences. There are some

common kinds of clues, they are: (1) Restatement, Hancock (1987: 2) states that “restatement is merely stating the word in another way, usually in simpler term. A restatement clue is usually set off by commas.” (2) Synonyms, Hancock (1987: 2) states that “a synonym is one of two or more words that have the same or similar meaning. When an author uses a difficult word, he often will also use a more familiar word to make it easy to understand.” (3) Antonyms, Hancock (1987: 2) states that “an antonym is a word of opposite meaning.” (4) Definitions. (5) Explanation. (6) Relationships.

The action hypothesis of this research is context clue will significantly improve the reading ability of the third semester students of Agriculture Technology Department Polytechnic of Tonggak Equator in Academic Year 2016-2017.

The result of this research will give many advantages, they are: (1) The finding of this research will give additional reference for another research related to improving reading ability; (2) The finding of this research will give more knowledge and insight for the reading teacher/lecturer in teaching reading. In other words, it may help them in improving their professionalism; and (3) For students of Polytechnic of Tonggak Equator, the researcher hope that the finding of this research will improve the students’ reading ability.

METHOD

This research is classroom action research. In doing this research, the researcher used action research design introduced by Kemmis and McTaggart (Burn, 2010: 9) which is set out in the figure below.

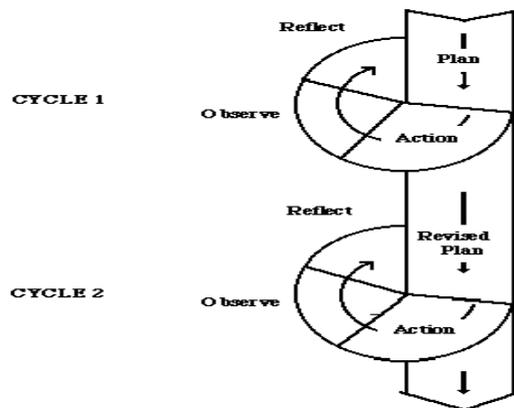


Figure1 Cyclical AR Model based on Kemmis and McTaggart

According to Kemmis and McTaggart (Burns, 1999: 32), “action research occurs through a dynamic and complementary process, which consists of four essential “moments”: of planning, action, observation and reflection.” These improvements are fundamental steps in spiraling process through which participants in an action research group undertake to: (1) Develop a plan of critically informed action to improve what is already happening; (2) Act to implement the plan; (3) Observe the effect of the critically informed action in the context in which it occurs; and (4) Reflect on these effects as the basis for the further planning, subsequent critically informed action and so on, through a succession of cycles (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988).

In the stage of planning, the researcher planned the teaching-learning activities to solve the problem in her previous teaching-learning process. The plan included the preparation before the teaching-learning activities, they were lesson plan, instrument to collect the data such as field notes and test (pre-test and progress test). Then, in the stage of acting, the researcher applied the plans she had. In the stage of observing, the researcher observed the learning process objectively. In the stage of reflecting, the researcher reflected the action that has been done and try to overcome the problem happened in order avoid the same problem happen in the next cycle.

This research was done with some procedures, they were the big cycle and small cycle. The big cycle in this research was 5 meetings in which the researcher applies context clue in teaching-learning process, those are cycle 1 which

consisted of three meetings and cycle 2 which consisted of two meetings. Then, the small cycle which consists of a meeting which lasts in about 100 minutes. This research was done in the researcher own class that was English subject class of the third semester students of Agriculture Technology Department, Polytechnic of Tonggak Equator in academic year 2016-2017.

In gathering the data, the researcher used field note and test. Field note was used to record what happen in the classroom and test that was consisted of pre-test and progress test. The pre-test was used to know the students' reading ability before the researcher gave the treatment while the progress tests were used to know the improvement of the students' reading ability each cycle. The result was categorized as follow:

Table 1 Categorize of Score

Numeric Scores	Relative Scores	Marking Quality
85 – 100	A	Very good
81 – 84	A-	Almost very good
77 – 80	B+	Better
73 – 76	B	Good
69 – 72	B-	Almost good
65 – 68	C+	More than fair
60 – 64	C	Fair
45 – 59	D	Less
0 – 44	E	Bad

Buku Pedoman Politeknik Tonggak Equator (2014)

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The researcher found the result of this research by using test (pre-test and progress test) and field note. Firstly, the researcher conducted a pre-test in order to know the reading ability of the students. Then, the mean score of the pre-test was only 51.8 that categorized as D. Therefore, based on the pre-test given by the researcher, it can be known that the students' reading ability is low.

In the first cycle, the researcher designed the plans that she wanted to apply. She planned the learning material, the learning activities and made a lesson plan. Then, she applied the plans that she has made. She delivered the learning objectives, she taught the learning materials to the students then gave reading

comprehension exercise. In doing reading comprehension exercise given by the researcher, the students were not allowed to check dictionary. Therefore, they have to apply context clues in order to understand the reading text and answer the questions. After applying and conducting the whole plans that she have made, she observed what happened in the classroom. She observed the students when they were doing the reading comprehension exercises and applying context clues.

At the third meeting of the first cycle, the researcher gave progress test to students in order to know the development of their reading ability. Here, the researcher also did observation while students were doing the progress test. Based on the researcher's observation, she found that some students still have difficulty in understanding the reading texts in the first cycle since they were confused about the type of context clues, how to distinguish it and how to apply it in order to help them understanding the texts. The result of the progress test in the first cycle showed improvement because the mean score of the students' reading ability was 77.6 that was categorized as B. Then, the researcher reflected the result of the first cycle based on the result of pre-test, progress test and observations.

Based on the reflection of the first cycle, the researcher found that the students reading ability has improved but there were still some students who have difficulty in understanding reading texts so she decided to continue the research to the next cycle. Then, she has to explain context clues again because there were many students were confused about the type of context clues, how to distinguish it and how to apply it in understanding reading texts.

In the second cycle, the researcher designed the plans such as the learning materials, the learning media, the reading comprehension exercises, the field note, and the progress test. After designing the plans, she applied the plans in teaching learning activities. The researcher delivered the learning objectives clearly, explained the learning materials, explained context clues again to students with more detail and more examples, and gave reading comprehension exercises. At the third meeting of the second cycle, the researcher gave progress test. The researcher did observation while the students were doing the progress test by

using field note. Based on the observation, the researcher found that the students have understood the type of context clues and could apply it in order to help them in understanding the reading texts.

The mean score of the progress test in the second cycle was 88.8 that was categorized as A. After the researcher has done the observations, she reflected the whole things happened in the second cycle. The result of reflection was the students showed a better understanding about the type of context clues and could apply it in understanding a reading text. Then, the students showed better improvement in understanding reading texts. Therefore, the researcher decided to finish collecting data in the second cycle since the research target was achieved.

Furthermore, the researcher also presented the result of the students' pre-test and progress test of last cycle that can be seen in the table below.

Table 2 Result of Pre-test and Progress Test of the Last Cycle

Students' code	Pre-test Score	Progress Test Score of The Last Cycle
<i>Student 1</i>	44	93
<i>Student 2</i>	56	90
<i>Student 3</i>	48	97
<i>Student 4</i>	44	67
<i>Student 5</i>	36	97
<i>Student 6</i>	68	80
<i>Student 7</i>	44	77
<i>Student 8</i>	56	80
<i>Student 9</i>	72	87
<i>Student 10</i>	56	97
<i>Student 11</i>	60	97
<i>Student 12</i>	72	93
<i>Student 13</i>	56	87
<i>Student 14</i>	64	97
<i>Student 15</i>	64	93
<i>Student 16</i>	64	87
<i>Student 17</i>	60	90
<i>Student 18</i>	-	90
Mean score	51.8	88.8
Category of score	D	A

Based on the table, it could be seen that the students' reading ability improve from cycle to cycle. In the first cycle, the mean score of the students' reading ability was 77.6. Then, in the second cycle, it improved become 88.8.

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion, the conclusion can be drawn as follows: (1) Context clues could improve reading ability of the third semester students of Agriculture Technology Department, Polytechnic of Tonggak Equator Pontianak in academic year 2016-2017; (2) Context clues significantly improved the reading ability of the third semester students of Agriculture Technology Department, Polytechnic of Tonggak Equator Pontianak in academic year 2016-2017 within two cycles.

Based on the research finding and discussion, the researcher offers some suggestions for further research, they are: (1) In order to make the students know and understand the purpose of the learning, the researcher suggests the next researcher/the teacher to tell the learning objective clearly; and (2) In order to make the students familiar with context clues, the researcher also suggests the next researcher/the teacher to explain the kinds of clues often found in the sentences clearly and detail.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bamberg, R. 1975. *Promoting the Reading Habit*. France: Enesco Press.
- Brown, D. H. 2004. *Language Assessment: Principles and Classroom Practices*. New York: Pearson Education.
- Brown, D. H. 1999. *Collaborative Action Research for English Language Teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hancock, O. 1987. *Reading Skills for College Students*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- Kemmis & McTaggart. 1988. *The Action Research Planner*. Deakin: Deakin University.

Linge, M. K. 2000. *Reading Tutor (How to Help Your First or Second Grader Become Great at Reading)*. New York: Learning Express.

Mohamad, A. 1999. What Do We Test When We Test Reading Comprehension? *The Internet TESL Journal*, V(12).

Nuttal, C. 1982. *Teaching Reading Skills in a Foreign Language*(12th Ed). Heinemann: Educational Books Press.

Patel, M.F. & Jain. 2008. *English Language Teaching (Methods, Tools and Techniques)*. Vaishali Nagar: Sunrise Publishers and Distributors.

Silberstein, S. 1994. *Technique and Resources in Teaching Reading*. New York: Oxford University Press.