IMPROVING THE STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION ABILITY THROUGH SQ3R STRATEGY

Sabarun

STAIN Palangka Raya

Sabarun_ws@yahoo.com

Abstract: The study is aimed at improving the students' reading comprehension ability in reading English class using SQ3R strategy, which refers to a reading technique covering a five step system developed by Francis P Robinson. Each of the steps stands for *Survey, Question, Read, Recite, and Review*. The study employed Classroom Action Research design. The subjects of the study were four of third semester students of the English Department of Palangka Raya State Islamic College of 2009/ 2010 academic year. The study was carried out in two cycles by following the four steps of action research: planning, implementing, observing, and reflecting. Each cycle consisted of one meeting focusing pre-reading, whilst reading and post reading. The data of the study are taken from the results of observation checklists, field notes, and the students' reading score. The result of the study showed that SQ3R strategy could improve the students' reading comprehension ability. It could be seen from the improvement of the students' reading scores. The students were actively involved in reading class and they were highly motivated to attend the SQ3R reading class.

Key Words: Improving, SQ3R Strategy, Reading Comprehension Ability.

The main aim of teaching English is to develop four language skills, i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing. Reading is one of the four language skills, which should be developed in teaching English. Reading, as well as other language skills, is placed as one of the important skills for students to be mastered. Here, the teaching of reading is essential for preparing students with the basic reading skill in order to be able to gain information and knowledge from any reading text. Rivers (1981: 259) states that reading is the most important activity in any language class, not only as a source of information and a pleasurable activity, but also as a means of consolidating and extending one's knowledge of the language.

To achieve this aim, the teachers need to devise learning and teaching ac-

tivities that are suitable with students' need and interest. Appropriate strategy which provides interesting activities will encourage students to be active and realize the demand that they are supposed to have. Based on the above explanation, the writer proposed the SQ3R strategy as a model of teaching reading. It is assumed that the strategy is the best method to solve the EFL classroom's problem on reading comprehension and give benefits to learning process such as in motivating the students, improving social interaction in the classroom, creating a positive learning environment, and improving reading skills. The study is aimed at improving the students' reading comprehension ability through SQ3R strategy. Therefore, the research problem is "How can the students' reading comprehension ability be improved through SQ3R strat-

egy?"

The study is restricted to the implementation of SQ3R strategy in teaching reading. In a more specific focus, the study is concentrated on how to improve the students' ability in reading comprehension through SQ3R strategy. It is aimed to develop the planning, the implementation, and the evaluation of the teaching reading using SQ3R strategy. The study belongs to action research and it is conducted at Palangka Raya State Islamic College of the third semester students of the students of the English Department of 2009/2010 academic years. The number of the students is 23 students.

The study has both practical and theoretical significance. Theoretically, the result of the study is expected to support the theory of schemata, in which the basis of SQ3R strategy in improving the students' ability in reading comprehension. The study is also expected to give a practical contribution to reading teachers with a model of SQ3R strategy in teaching reading comprehension at the college level. Later they can adopt it as one of the ways to solve the similar problems in reading classes. Practically, the study can also help the students to solve their problems in reading comprehension through SQ3R strategy. By having sufficient ability in reading English texts, they are expected to be more active, enjoyable and motivated in learning English.

Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is a process that involves actively constructing meaning among the parts of the text, and between the text and personal experience. It is the ability to understand the new information in light of what the reader already knows. As a complex process, reading is a recognition and comprehension of written symbols which are affected by reader's perceptual skills, decoding skills, experiences, language backgrounds, mind sets, and reasoning abilities as they anticipate meaning on the basis of what has been read

(Harris and Sipay, 1980). This opinion implies that reading activity as a complex process. It involves two main aspects: linguistic competence and background knowledge. The act of reading is triggered by the graph phonetic information such as letters, syllables, and word order to derive meaning from print.

Of the two primary aspects, there are three divergent models of reading process: bottom up, top down, and interactive models. In bottom up model, the reading is basically a translating, decoding, or encoding process. The bottom up models of reading is models of reading, which assume that the process of translating print to meaning begins with the print. The process is initiated by decoding graphic symbols into sounds. Moreover, Gebhard (2000) states that bottom up model refer to a process of decoding a message, which the readers read through the analysis of sounds, words, and grammar. To comprehend written language, the readers rely on their ability to recognize words, phrases, and sentences. In line with this, Nunan (1991) also states:

"Bottom up model focuses learners on the individual components of written messages: phonemes, graphemes, individual words, and grammatical elements which need to be comprehended in order to understand the messages."

Meanwhile, top down models view that information processing during reading is triggered by the reader's prior knowledge and experience in relation to the writer's message (Vacca, et. al., 1991:20). Here, meaning or comprehension is obtained by using only as much information as necessary from the graphic, syntactic, and semantic cue system. In line with this, Marzano, et. al. (1987) states:

"The top down model of reading deals with the emphasis on having the student (a) recognize that reading is a process of

obtaining meaning, and (b) utilize his or her knowledge of the world and of information in print to extract meaning."

In top down models, the reader's cognitive and language competence plays an important role in the construction of meaning from printed materials. It is based on psycholinguistic theorist's view that reading as "psycholinguistic guessing game" is an interaction between thought and language or a process which involves using available language cues selected from perceptual input on the basis of the reader's predictions. Top down theorists believe that skilled readers go directly from print to meaning without first decoding speech. To comprehend the text, students rely on their background knowledge connected to the content of what they are reading.

Another model of reading is interactive model. Interactive model is a combination between bottom up and top down models. This model tends to be more suitable for skilled readers. For them, both bottom up and top down models can occur simultaneously. It means when the readers are confronted with the reading texts, they must activate both their linguistic competences and their schemata related to comprehending the content of the texts. Furthermore, Vacca, et. al. (1991) claims that neither prior knowledge nor graph phonetic information is used exclusively by readers. They further state that interactive models suggest that the process of reading be initiated by formulating hypothesis about meaning and by decoding letters and words.

Teaching Reading in EFL Classes

The teaching of Reading in foreign language classes is to teach the language itself. It also functions to prepare students to read informational materials (Dawson, 1987). The focus is on helping students acquire the skills needed in attempt at constructing meaning. In this sense, the reading teachers have an important role in helping students acquire the

skills needed from bringing their experiences to bear upon written materials. They should assist students to use the skills of reading efficiently and effectively.

An effective reading teacher should have a great deal of knowledge about the reading process, the sequential development of reading skills, the materials for use, and the students being taught. Harmer (2000) explains some principles of the effective teaching of reading. First, reading is not passive skill. This principle implies that the students have to understand what is read before beginning to read. Second, the students need to be engaged into what they are reading. In this sense, the teacher needs to provide the reading text that interests them. Third, the students should be encouraged to respond to the content of a reading text. In this sense, the teacher should give chances to students to respond to that message in some ways. Fourth, prediction is a major factor in reading. Here, the students should have in mind the expectation of what they would find in reading and they should set up the purpose when the active process of reading is ready to begin. Fifth, the task should be matched with the topic. In this sense, the teacher needs to choose good reading tasks such as the appropriate forms of questions.

Techniques in Teaching Reading Skills

There are many skills used by students in gaining meaning and interpreting the texts. Related to this study, there are two common techniques of teaching reading skill that are relevant with the students in college level. These are skimming and scanning as elaborated below. In skimming, the students are required to find the general idea of the text. When skimming, one's eyes go quickly into sentences of the paragraph containing main ideas. Gebhard (2000) states that the activity for skimming is, for example, to determine the best title of a passage. In this sense, students have to read the passage quickly to get

its general information.

In scanning, the students are expected to locate facts or specific information. Scanning exercises may ask students to find a particular date, name, number, or definition of a key concept or to list a certain number of supporting details. The purpose of scanning is to extract specific information without reading the whole text.

The SQ3R Strategy

SQ3R strategy is a five step system developed by Francis P Robinson. Each of the steps stands for Survey, Question, Read, Recite, and Review. SQ3R strategy is developed on the basis of schemata theory. The basic assumption of schemata theory is that what a reader knows affects what he/she understands (Rumerhart, 1985). In this sense, a reader's own previously acquired knowledge or reader's background knowledge can influence his/her understanding of a text. The student's background knowledge and the previously knowledge structure is called schemata.

In terms of schemata, there are two kinds of schemata: content and formal (Carrel and Eisterhold, 1983). Content schemata refer to the reader's background knowledge of the content area of a text. Meanwhile, formal schemata refer to the reader's background knowledge of the rhetorical structures of different kind of text.

In terms of the teaching of reading, English teacher should provide students with these two kinds of schemata in order to obtain a better understanding of a text. In the view of schemata theory, understanding occurs because readers engage their background knowledge. Therefore, readers are required to be able to relate the text material to their own knowledge. Here, comprehending a text means to be an interactive process between the readers' background knowledge and the text. This view point becomes the basis of SQ3R strategy.

The Procedure of SQ3R Strategy

SQ3R stands for Survey, Question, Read, Recite, and Review. The procedure of SQ3R strategy involves: reading the heading of the chapter quickly to obtain its important points in the survey step; turning the heading into questions in the question step; reading to find the answers to the questions in the read step; recalling the important points by retelling or writing them in one's own words in the recite step; and checking the answers to reinforce one's memory of the important points in the review step. In more detail, there are five steps to apply SQ3R strategy.

Survey Step

The first step of SQ3R strategy is to survey the text. Surveying involves creating a mental map of the text. To begin with, students are assigned to read the text quickly in order to obtain some textual markers or clues about the text material organization.

Surveying helps readers find the general ideas of the text before beginning to read. In survey, readers are required to skim the parts of the text such as title, sub title, the graphs, illustrations, and the first sentence of the paragraph. The purpose is to help readers identify the whole picture of the text. In the context of the teaching reading, students are assigned to identify or list unfamiliar words from the text; find the meaning of those words through looking up the dictionary; reading the text quickly; and discuss what is found in the text with the group members.

Question Step

The second step of SQ3R strategy is predicting questions that may be answered in the text. The questions are elaborations of the mental map developed in the survey step. Question step is the students' questions based on what has been surveyed during the survey. In this sense, comprehension is aided by finding the answers to predicted questions. The purpose of questions is to facilitate students in adjusting their reading purposes.

With questions in mind, students are able to monitor the comprehension process. In the context of the teaching reading, students are assigned to read each of the questions so that they obtain the idea of such questions and discuss the predicted questions with their group members.

Read Step

The third step of SQ3R strategy is to read the text. It requires the students to carefully read the whole text to look for information in order to answer the predicted questions. With the knowledge structure in mind, students search for relationships between the main idea and the supporting ideas. In this sense, students may take notes while reading or underlining the points that refer to the answers of the predicted questions. In the context of the teaching reading, students are assigned to answer the predicted questions; get the main idea of the text and its supporting details; make notes of the important points from the text; and discuss with their group members on what has been during reading activity.

Recite Step

The fourth step of SQ3R strategy is to recite the text. After reading the text, reader should take a few minutes to recall some important points of the text. Recite step allows the monitor the information in long-term memory. In this sense, readers are required to recall some important points of the text such as the main idea and supporting details. They may retell and take notes the points in their own words.

In the context of the teaching reading, students are assigned to get involved in class

discussion about the text discussed; report of the discussion result; and give comments and responses on other group's report.

Review Step

The fifth step of SQ3R strategy is to review what one has read. In this sense, reader should review the entire text in order to see how the information fits together. In reviewing, the readers evaluate their understanding of the text; organize the main idea and its supporting detail; and reinforce them in memory.

To implement SQ3R strategy in the teaching of reading at the college level, there were three pedagogical activities to be done. They were pre-reading phase, whilst reading phase, and post reading phase.

In pre-reading phase, the class activity was focused on stimulating the students' background knowledge by asking some guiding questions, having the students brainstorming on the topic and explaining the objective of the task.

In whilst reading phase, the class activity was focused on guiding and assigning the students to survey the text, to obtain the answers of the predicted questions, to read the whole text and to recite what they had read.

In post reading phase, the class activity was focused on having students review the text. In this sense, the teacher guided and assigned students to read the text and write some important points of the text. In this phase, the students were asked to summarize the text with their own words. This table provides the application of the SQ3R strategy in Reading Class:

Based on these achievements, it was necessary to revise the planned strategy for the next cycle. The revision was on the time allotment for each stage of reading and the teaching strategy. Here, the teacher needed to explain more detail about the material and give wait time for students to ask questions. Moreover, the teacher needed to intensively guide students in every stage of reading, especially for poor ability students in reading comprehension.

Findings of Cycle 2

The data about the teaching and learning process was obtained from the result of observation checklists and the field notes. It was found that after being treated with the improved strategy, the teaching and learning process became much better. The improvement of some weaknesses of the teaching and learning process found in Cycle I could improve to the subjects' ability in every stage of reading activity.

In pre-reading activity, all subjects could pay attention to the teacher's explanation, set up the SQ3R class, read the text silently and complete the task given. They could answer the questions and brainstorm their ideas on the topic discussed. In the second cycle, all subjects were doing better than the first cycle, since they had experienced it in the first cycle. All in all, in pre-reading activity, the four subjects gained a lot of improvement in their reading comprehension ability. They were able to: (1) follow the SQ3R procedures; (2) brainstorm their ideas on the topic discussed; (3) pay attention to the teacher's explanation; and (4) find the main idea of the text and complete the task given.

In whilst reading activity, all subjects gained significant improvement. They were able to complete all the tasks in whilst reading activity. They were able to: (1) follow the SQ3R procedures; (2) find the unfamiliar words; (3) discuss the content of the passage with their groups; and (4) write notes or summary of the discussion result. In post reading

activity, all subjects also gained a lot of progress. They were able to: (1) follow the SQ3R procedures; (2) discuss their paragraphs in order to get the whole understanding of the passage; and (3) do the reading test individually.

Based on the result of analysis of students' reading comprehension ability in cycle 2, it was found that all subjects obtained significant improvement from cycle 1. It was indicated by the improvement of the students' reading achievement. All subjects' scores met the criteria of success, the minimum score of which was 7.0. The four subjects (KH, RR, SWA, and MA) got 7.0, 7.1, 7.0, and 7.2 respectively, which categorized as "good" level. In other words, all subjects were able to achieve the minimum criteria (good level) prescribed for successful reading comprehension.

Third, it was also found that students could enjoy learning writing using the SQ3R strategy. Based on the questionnaire checklists conducted on November 5th, 2009, about 20 out of 23 or about 80, 69% students strongly agreed and agreed that they enjoyed learning English in the classroom through SQ3R strategy. About 80.30% or 19 students strongly agreed and agreed that after attending the SQ3R classroom they could take benefits such as increasing motivation, self esteem, and achievement. For above reasons, the researcher thought that it was not necessary to continue this study in the next cycle, because the study was considered successful.

DISCUSSION

Before the implementation of the SQ3R strategy, there were several procedures to be done, such as grouping students, establishing seat arrangements, designing lesson plan, setting the learning objectives, designing appropriate media, and dividing the time allotment. Grouping students was the important step in the implementation of the SQ3R strategy in reading class. The aim was that they were expected to give and take each other. They

in many ways, such as it provided students some steps of reading technique, improved their reading skills, and gave motivation to students. In addition, the SQ3R strategy gave students some benefits related to the reading skills. It could improve students' reading skills such as finding the main ideas of each paragraph; finding the explicit information in the passage; finding the implicit information in the passage; getting the detailed information in the whole passage; and making a summary of the passage.

CONCLUSIONS

Referring to the objective of the research, the study was aimed at improving the students' reading comprehension ability using the SQ3R strategy. Based on the research findings and discussions of the study, it could be concluded that the SQ3R strategy could improve students' reading ability. It could be seen from the improvement of the average score in each cycle. In the pretest before the

implementation of the SQ3R strategy, the average score of the students' reading achievement was 6.08. Four students got 'poor' level. However, after the SQ3R strategy was implemented, the average score of the class in cycle 1 increased slightly to 7.02. Only two students did not achieve the criteria of success. Then, in cycle 2, the average score of the class increased dramatically to 7.50.

Therefore, it is recommended that the reading teachers who have the similar problems to apply the SQ3R strategy developed in this study as one of the strategies in teaching reading. In order to effectively improve the students' reading ability, before coming the class activity, it is advisable for the teachers to formulate the teaching strategy, make a well preparation in the lesson plan, determine instructional goal, select materials, prepare instructional media, design instructional procedures, and design the procedures of assessment.