

Improving Students' Reading Comprehension by Using Peer Assisted Learning Strategies

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Abstract

This research aimed to determine whether peer-assisted learning strategies can improve students' reading comprehension, specifically focusing on seventh-grade students of SMP N 7 Siborongborong in the academic year 2023/2024. The study employed Classroom Action Research (CAR). The research subject are 27 students of grade VII at SMP Negeri 7 Siborongborong. Quantitative data were collected from pre-test and post-test scores, while qualitative data consisted of observations and interview transcripts. The analysis of scores revealed a significant improvement in students' reading skills. Initially, in the pre-test, only 6 students passed with scores of 58, 14, and 22.22% met the KKM (Minimum Completeness Criteria). By the first post-test cycle, 13 students passed with scores of 69.62, and 48.14% met the KKM. By the second post-test cycle, 22 students passed with scores of 79.44, and 81.48% met the KKM. From these findings, it can be concluded that peer-assisted learning strategies contributed to the improvement of students' reading comprehension."

Keywords : Peer assisted learning strategies, reading comprehension.

INTRODUCTION

In many aspects of life, students need to have a reading skill. They may have many purposes of reading. First, students need to read for academic purposes. Since there are many books written in English, it is important for them to have a good reading competence. Moreover, reading skill is required when they take an examination. Most of the questions are in the written form so students shall be able to read comprehensively.

Second, students also need a reading skill in daily life because there are so many products available such as foodstuff (e.g. snacks, noodles, etc.); cosmetics (e.g. powder, lipstick, perfume, etc.); medicine and many others, the instruction or the explanation of which is written in English. Moreover, students are also supposed to be able to read many signs, including traffic signs, the signs in the public places, and so on.

Third, students need to read English mass media, such as magazines, newspapers, tabloids, etc to gain more information and get the latest news in the world. It will broaden their horizons. Students can also improve their reading skills through reading novels, short stories, dramas, and so on, to get enjoyment or pleasure.

Reading is very important to the students in schools, from elementary schools to senior high schools and vocational high schools. As it is stated in *Permendiknas no.23 Tahun 2006*, the aim of reading in the curriculum is to make students able to comprehend the meaning of written

language, both interpersonal and transactional. Students are direct to understand many kinds of texts such as recount, descriptive, and narrative. They are also expected to get knowledge and information from the texts. In fact, research on reading comprehension in Indonesia has reveal that students' comprehension in reading is low. The teacher only teach the students to read the passages, finding the meaning of difficult words and answering exercises in teaching- learning process.

To improve the students' ability, the teacher should used to appropriate technique. The technique should be interesting to attract students' attention. One of the methods is Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) techniques. It is seen as an active learning process, because this technique will allow the students to become more active participants. PALS technique is believe as being able to give chances for students to be involve in discussion, to have courage and critical thinking and to make them willing to take responsibility of his/her own learning.

The Research Study

Based on the background of the study a research problem is formulated as follow; "Does Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) improve the students' reading comprehension of seventh grade at SMP Negeri 7 Siborongborong in academic year 2023/2024?"

The Objective of the Study

Based on the problem of the study, the objective of the study is to find out wether Peer

Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) improve student reading comprehension of the seventh grade at SMP Negeri 7 Siborongborong in academic year 2023/2024

The Scope of the Study

There are some several ways to improve student's English reading comprehension. In this study, the writer focuses on using peer assisted learning strategies and the type of genre or text is descriptive text, for seventh grade at SMP Negeri 7 Siborongborong in academic year 2023/2024.

The Significance of the Study

This research is expected to contribute to the following:

- a. Theoretical significance
The findings of the research will enrich the study in Foreign Language Learning (FLL) and become a reference for the next relevant type of research.
- b. Practical Significance of the Research
 1. For Teachers
This research can be use as a means to improve the students' reading skill in English teaching-learning process. Teachers will be more aware in creating suitable techniques for improving students' reading comprehension. Beside that teachers will get easy to motivate students to read English text since the teacher always monitor the students to complete their reading. Teacher can control their reading comprehension improvement continuously.
 2. For Grade VII Students of SMP NEGERI 7 Siborongborong
This research will be facilitated students for a better knowledge about reading .By using peer-assisted learning strategies, students can be more enthusiastic and interested in Learning reading skills.
 3. For English Department
This study is expect to be a reference for the readers who want to improve their reading comprehension skills.
 4. Other Researcher
This research finding is the material which can be developed further and deeper.
 5. Readers
This research can be read to enrich their knowledge about reading comprehension.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of Reading Comprehension

Reading is an activity in which readers respond to and make sense of a text being read connect to their prior knowledge (Spratt, Pulverness, and William; 2005: 21). The activity is do by the readers as they

want to get information and knowledge from the text. In the process of getting information and knowledge, the readers try to connect what they read in the form of written language to what they have already known about the text. Making sense of a text is done by understanding meaning of words, sentences, and even a text.

Reading can also be define as the process in which readers learn something from what they read and involve it in academic context as a part of education (Grabe, 2009: 5). Learning happens when there is a change in mind from an unknown thing to the known one. As reading is include in learning, the readers try to grasp the texts being read by interpreting, synthesizing, evaluating, and selecting the important information.

Comprehension can be define as the process of constructing meaning from a connect text involving the word knowledge (Pang, Muaka, Bernhardt, and Kamil, 2003: 14).By having such skill, the readers combine their background).

By having such skill, the readers combine their background knowledge with the additional information from a text, draw the meaning of words, and connect it to construct meaning.

Snow (2002: 11) defines reading comprehension as the process of extracting and constructing meaning involving the written language. In line with Snow, Johnson (2008: 110) states reading comprehension as the use of strategies in reading in retrieving information and constructing meaning of texts done by the readers. Strategies that are use by the readers may be different from one another. It depends on the readers' aim in reading comprehension.

Hence, reading comprehension can be define as the process in which the readers construct meaning from a text being read connect to the background knowledge they have. In addition, this reading comprehension existence has a very important role in the process of reading. It can show whether or not they monitor comprehension through the reading process.

Definition of Peer Assisted Learning Strategies

Peer-assisted Learning Strategies can be briefly define as "the of acquisition knowledge and skill through active helping and supporting among equal status or match companions. It involves people from similar social groupings who are not professional teachers helping each other to learn and learning them selves byso doing " (Topping, K.J., Ehly, S.W.2001,p: 114). Meanwhile, in an electric journal entitle The Reading Teacher Vol. 59, No. 8 May 2006, mention that PALS is a multiple strategy program develop to improve reading comprehension for elementary and middle school students. It focuses on teaching students a set of comprehension strategies that can be use

to help students understand any text they read.

Another definition of peer assessment state by Miranda (2009:1). She states that using peer teaching techniques helps utilize all the resources available to a teacher. Students understand how other students communicate. Additionally, how one student internally assimilates information can be express to help other students understand it better. Effective peer teaching techniques improve the overall learning environment and success of all students when implement properly.

Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) Application

As a technique, peer tutoring or PALS has an implementation guide. According to an educational electronic journal, “*The Reading Teacher vol. 59, no 8*” in May 2006, PALS consists of three basics activities with two students for each group. Conducting PALS in a classroom, the teacher should follow the steps describe below:

- a. Using a text at the instructional reading level of the lower reader, each partner reads the text aloud to the other for a period of 5 minutes. The higher reader always reads first, serving as the model for the lower reader. At the end of 5 minutes, the lower reader reads the same passage for the next 5 minutes. This stage is call tutor and tutee role play.
- b. After 10 minutes reading session, the lower reader “retells” the passage to the higher reader. The higher reader asks the lower reader by saying “What happen first?” and “What happen next?”. This retelling in sequence continues for 2 minutes.
- c. Next, partners take part in an activity call paragraph shrinking. Readers continue reading the same passage they began in the tutor and the tutee role play with no rereading. Each reader reads one paragraph, stopping after the paragraph and telling the main idea of the paragraph. Readers take turns reading the next consecutive paragraph and telling the main idea. Prompts for this activity include question and answer activity, for instance, by asking, “Who or what was the paragraph about?” and “Tell the most important thing about the who or what.” As in the tutor and the tutee role play, the stronger reader always begins reading first, serving as a model for the less strong reader.
- d. Finally, the last activity call prediction relay, the reading continues, only with larger units of text and a new activity. This activity has four steps: (1) reasonably predict about what will happen next, (2) accurately read half a page, (3) accurately check the prediction, (4) correctly summarize the most important information. This activity continues for five

minutes spreader again with the stronger reader going first.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study on improving the students’ reading comprehension by using *Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (PALST)* this study will be conducted with classroom action research. This was categorize as action research since there was a self-reflective, critical, and systematic approach that was do by the writer to identify a problematic situation as a way of improvement and changes in educational practice.

In doing this action research, the writer considered phases which were involved in each cycle. The research were planning, action, observation, and reflection. Every phase was done based on the ideas suggest by Kemmis and McTaggart (Burns,1999:33)

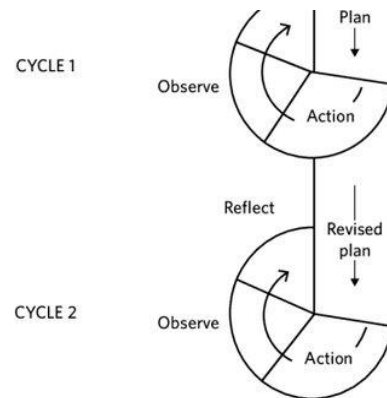


Figure 1: Scheme of Action Research by Kemmis and McTaggart (Burns, 1999:33)

The Subject of the Research

In Classroom Action Research (CAR), the choice of sampling technique in Classroom Action Research (CAR) depends on the specific goals, context, and nature of the research. Since CAR was often conducted within a single classroom or a small group of classrooms, the emphasis was on the practicality and feasibility of the sampling method.

The writer chose the students of grade VII B in SMP N 7 Siborongborong in the academic year of 2023/2024 as the source of collecting the data. It was because the students of grade VII B which was consisted of 27 students, has problems in reading comprehension. It was also based on the discussion with the English teacher and the agreement with the headmaster.

Technic of Data Collection

To gather the data, the writer used some instruments, i.e. an observation guideline and an interview guideline.

- a. Observation guideline

The observation guide used by the writer to gather the information about all the things happening in the process of teaching and learning by observing the whole section of the teaching and learning process in the classroom.

b. Interview guideline

The interview guide helped the writer to gather the data about the teaching and learning process occurred in the classroom by interviewing the teacher and the students.

c. Reading comprehension tests

Besides the instruments above, the writer also gave students reading comprehension tests. The reading comprehension tests were in the form of multiple choices and divided into two sections, i.e. pre-test and post-test. The pre-test was given to students before the treatment and the post-test was given after the treatment. The result of the pre-test and the post-test then were compared to know whether or not the treatment improved the students' reading comprehension ability.

Technique of Data Analysis

This research used quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. In order to attain the data, the writer used several data collection techniques, namely:

a. Observation

During the teaching and learning process in the classroom, the writer observed the teaching and learning activity. The writer observed several aspects in the teaching and learning process. The aspects included how the teacher teaches reading, the students' behaviors, and the learning materials. This technique was to get the information about teaching and learning activity in the classroom. The results were used to identify the problems in the reconnaissance step which determined the planning step, while in the acting and observing stage, the results were used to describe the students' and the teacher's behaviors and the problems that occurred during the implementation of the action. The results of the observation were in the form of field notes.

b. Interview

The writer developed some specific questions, but she allowed the flexibility according to the interviewee responded. The teacher and some students were interviewed before and after the teaching and learning process. The purpose of this technique was to know the opinion of the teacher and the students about the teaching and learning process.

c. Reading comprehension tests

There were two kinds of reading comprehension tests in this research, i.e. pre-test and post-test. A pre-test was administered in the reconnaissance step, while a post-test was administered upon the completion of the action. These tests helped the writer to find out the

students' reading comprehension ability before and after the writer implemented the activities of PALS. The writer compared the results of these two tests. The results of these two tests could show whether there was an improvement or not in the reading comprehension ability.

DATA AND DATA ANALYSIS

Data

This research involved quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data were obtained from reading comprehension test, and the qualitative data were obtained from interview sheet and observation sheets. The data were taken from the class consist of 27 students. The data were taken from the students who came from the first until the last meeting.

Quantitative Data

Field, A. (2013) states quantitative data involves numerical data that can be measured and quantified. It focuses on statistical analysis and objective measurement. The quantitative data were taken from the result of reading comprehension descriptive test during the research that was conducted in third meetings. The test was given three times; a test was pre-test, and two test in the last of cycle I and cycle II. The first test was given to the students without any treatment. At pre-test, the students ability in reading comprehension test was not so good. Because the KKM was 75. It could be seen from the tables list here in test reading comprehension evaluation.

Important note made by the writer, namely that out of 20 questions in descriptive text the author determines that each question is worth 5 so the total is 100. If each students answers ant get 75-100 would be declared passed. Based on the data above we can conclude that to get the result of pre-test, firstly the writer calculated the mean score by employing the formula by Arikunto (1993:230), that has already been previously pointed out.

$$X = \frac{\sum x}{N}$$

Where :

X : Mean

Σx : Individual Score

N : Number of Students

The researchers try to get the minimum proportion of classes that pass mastery level criteria (KKM).

Look for percentage value of student ability

$$P = \frac{f}{n} \times 100$$

Where:

P : The Class Percentage

f : Total Percentage Score

N : Number of students

To achieve good grade, students are required to be able to achieve KKM scores. The reason is, for

public school it is determined that the KKM must reach 75 as category good.

$$X = \frac{\sum X}{N}$$

$$X = \frac{1570}{27}$$

$$= 58,14$$

Next, to know the class percentage that passed the target score of minimal mastery level criterion – Kriteria Ketuntasan Minimal (KKM) the researcher used the following formula :

$$P = \frac{F}{N} \times 100\%$$

$$P = \frac{6}{27} \times 100\%$$

$$P = 22,22\%$$

Based on the result of pre-test, the data showed that the mean score of pre-test was 58,14. There was only six students or 22,22% of students who got score passed the minimal mastery level criterion (KKM).

First, calculating the mean of students in the first post test result :

$$X = \frac{1880}{27}$$

$$= 69,62$$

Second, the percentage of students who passed the minimum mastery level criterion (KKM) :

$$P = \frac{13}{27} \times 100\%$$

$$P = 48,14\%$$

From the calculation, the writer found that the students post test result is 69,62 it also showed that eleventh students (48,14%) who passed the minimal mastery level criterion (KKM). So the writer made a post-test cycle II.

First, this is the result the mean of students in this second post test result, and than the percentages the students' who passed the KKM:

$$X = \frac{2145}{27}$$

$$= 79,44$$

$$P = \frac{22}{27} \times 100\%$$

$$P = 81,48\%$$

Qualitative Data

Flick, U. (2018) defines Qualitative data involves descriptions and characteristics that cannot be easily quantified. It often focuses on understanding the qualities and attributes of a phenomenon. The qualitative data were taken from observation sheet and interviews. Observation sheet were used to identify all the condition teaching learning process, interview were used to know the feeling, problem and other condition of the students. By using observation sheet, interviews sheet it could be seen whether there were significant improvement both on teacher improvement in teaching reading comprehension and student's achievement in reading comprehension.

Analisis of Quantitative Data

Table 4.4
The Improvement of Student's Reading Comprehension through Peer Assisted Learning Strategies

Name of Test	Total Score	Percentage
Pretest	1570	22,22%
Posttest Cycle I	1880	48,14%
Posttest Cycle II	2245	81,48%

Before implementing peer-assisted learning strategies to improve student's reading comprehension, the writer gathered the data from the pre-test. The pre-test yielded an average score of 58,14. Additionally, the writer calculate the percentage of students who met the KKM (Minimum Completeness Criteria) based on their scores. It was found that approximately 22,22% of the students passed the KKM, totaling 6 students.

After calculating the results of the pre-test, the researcher implemented an action research phase involving peer-assisted learning strategies to improve students' reading comprehension. Subsequently, the researcher identified and analyzed the results of the first post-test cycle. The average score for students in the first post-test cycle was 69.62. Furthermore, 48.14% of the students achieved the KKM score, totaling 13 students who successfully met this criterion.

In the post test cycle II, the result is 79,44. Next, the writer calculates the percentage of students who pass the KKM. In the post test cycle II, it can be seen that the percentage of students who passed the KKM was 81,48%, this means that there was 22 students who passed the KKM. from these data we can conclude that using peer assisted learning strategies can increase students' vocabulary, because out of 27 students, 22 students have received the results of the KKM and only 5 students were unable to pass the KKM, so the writer can say that class research this action research was successful.

Analisis of Qualitative Data

In qualitative data there are some instruction used: observation sheet and interview sheet

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Conclusion

To improve students' reading skill, the writer used PALS technique in this research. It was done in two cycles consisting of two meetings. From the first cycle I found that PALS technique could improve the students' reading skill. The use of PALS technique could also improve the students' motivation. Furthermore, it could improve the students' interaction between the teacher and the students. However, PALS technique could not really improve the students'

confidence. That was why the writer felt that he had to add some accompanying actions in Cycle II. Shortly, the use of PALS technique is believed to improve the students' reading skill.

From the second cycle the writer also found that PALS technique was still effective in improving the students' reading skill. In terms of quantitative data, there was an improvement on the students' reading skill. It could be seen from the result of pretest and post test. The mean of the students' scores improved from 58,14 on pretest to 69,62 on post test cycle I and 81,48 in cycle II. It showed that PALS technique was successful in improving the students' reading skill.

Suggestion

Based on the conclusion and the implication above, some suggestions can be directed toward the students, the English teachers, and other writers.

a. To the students

The students should increase their reading skill through practicing very often using various kinds of texts. If they find the difficulty in learning English especially in reading skill, they can ask their friend and work collaboratively with them. PALS can be used for attracting students' interest to get involved in the learning process. Before using the technique, they have to understand what they should do in every step.

b. To the English teacher

For the English teacher, it is important for them to be more creative in choosing the techniques that will be conducted in the teaching and learning process of reading. When they use PALS technique, they have to consider the situation of the class by creating a good atmosphere in the class during the teaching and learning process of reading so that the students feel comfortable and enthusiastic during the teaching learning process. They also have to consider the time. The English teachers have to be creative in choosing the topics of the texts for the students.

c. To other researchers

This research was focused on improving the students' reading skill of the seventh grade of SMP N 7 Siborongborong through PALS technique. For other writers who want to conduct research using the same technique, they have to prepare the texts well. They have to know exactly how the technique is conducted to teach reading and allocate sufficient time for the students to do every step in PALS. They also have to explain every step clearly to avoid students' misunderstanding of the use of the technique.

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