

TEACHING READING BY USING COOPERATIVE LEARNING AT SMP ISLAM JEMBER IN THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2006/2007

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Abstract

Along with the teaching of four skills of English, reading is no less important than the other three skills; listening, speaking, and writing. The teaching of reading so far has shown unsatisfied results proved by low achievement of students' formative or summative test results. This research aims at describing the process of teaching reading by using cooperative approach. The design of the research is Classroom Action Research (CAR). By implementing Kemmis and Mc. Taggart's theory, this research applies one cycle of planning, implementing, observing, and reflecting. The research findings show that the approach is essential in preparing students with reading skill in order to gain information and knowledge through reading texts.

Kata Kunci: teaching reading, cooperative learning

At secondary school, English is taught as a compulsory subject in which four language skills, that is listening, reading, speaking, and writing are to be mastered by students. Reading, as well as other skills, is placed as one of the important skills for students to master. This implies that the teaching of reading is essential for it will be useful for preparing students with the reading skill in order to be able to gain information and knowledge from any reading text. Rivers (1981:259) states that reading is a most important activity in any language class, not only as source of information and a pleasurable activity, but also as a means of consolidating and extending one's knowledge of the language. With adequate reading proficiency, students are expected to develop their knowledge concerning with a specific context given to them to learn. They are also expected to be able to extract meaning from specific cues in the text, get the gist of it, and obtain specific information from the reading text.

Though several attempts have been done by English teachers to teach students reading to gain adequate reading comprehension, the results do not meet our expectation. The unsatisfactory outcomes of the teaching of reading

comprehension in junior high, which is frequently integrated with vocabulary in general is caused by many factors. One of them is the material given to students. Reading texts taken from the obliged textbooks and other commercial ones are sometimes not suitable with the local condition of students. It means that such reading texts are difficult for students to understand not only because of their insufficient knowledge about the content but also the use of vocabulary and grammar of the texts. Another factor is that the English teachers do not possess specific skills to make adjustment with their students' needs. Besides, the time allotment used in teaching reading comprehension is not sufficient. The most important of all is that the students as well are not accustomed to read even with the reading text in *Bahasa Indonesia*. Hence, the students' reading proficiency is much less adequate.

In teaching reading comprehension at junior high school, the English teachers are demanded to prepare their students with a good reading foundation at the very beginning in order to make them have adequate proficiency in reading English texts. To prepare the students to be able to read for comprehension, in particular to enable them to answer the comprehension questions based on the reading text efficiently and effectively, the English teachers need to devise learning and teaching activities that are suitable with their needs and interests. Besides, they themselves are also to be prepared with teaching reading strategies that will help their students improve their comprehension towards the reading texts. For comprehending the reading texts is difficult, it then requires a strategy and concentration. Therefore, the students are to be prepared with reading strategies that will enable them to comprehend reading texts. Hence, the objective of the present research is intended to see whether *the cooperative learning* used in teaching reading can increase students' reading comprehension achievement. Referring to the research problem, this research is directed to implement *Cooperative learning* to solve students' problem dealing with reading comprehension.

This research is restricted to the teaching of reading comprehension, which emphasizes on literal and low inferential comprehension aspects. In a more specific way, the research is concentrated on how to increase students' abilities of the third year (III) students of SMP Islam Jember in the academic year 2006/2007 to answer comprehension questions based on the reading text. The strategy used to teach reading comprehension in the classroom is *cooperative learning*.

Preliminary Preparation of the Action Research

This concentrates on the socialization of the cooperative learning strategies to students, the implementation of the pre-test, and the organizations of pair works and group works as well. A new strategy can effectively be applied in the classroom if it has been firstly introduced to the students. On the basis of the consideration, the researcher and his collaborator i.e. the English teacher of SMP Islam Jember agreed to introduce the cooperative learning strategy to the class being researched.

At this stage, the students were assigned into particular groups of four. Before working in groups, the students were given a demonstration about how they work and what they have to do in groups. After the demonstration, one of the groups was invited to demonstrate to their friends with guidance from the researcher and his collaborators. Then, the students were given the reading text and some comprehension questions related to the text. Subsequently, they were asked to do the task in groups. Here, each of the group members was assigned to answer different questions. At the time, they were guided to do their reading tasks. After completing the task, each of the group members was asked to discuss the answers in groups. The final work of the whole groups was sharing answers with other groups.

This program entails several aspects. Firstly, having introduced the strategy, the students were expected to be familiar with cooperative learning because they have already had prior knowledge concerning with such strategy. Secondly, they were expected to be able to socially interact with others from learning and practicing social skills, Finally, this was the most important objective of the program, with their adequate knowledge, they were required to be motivated to learn together to accomplish their reading comprehension tasks.

The Planning of the Action Research

Prior to the implementation of the action research, a pre-test was administered. The pre-test was done on September 3rd, 2006. The material of the test was taken from the second year textbook. The theme selected by the researcher and his collaborator was *Geography* where the topic "*Our country (Indonesia)*" and "*Natural resources*" are discussed. The selection was based on the consideration that it was the last material at the second year of junior high. Therefore, they relied on their belief that the students were still fresh with the test material being given. The material of the test covered two levels of reading comprehension, i.e.

literal and inferential comprehensions.

The test items were designed in the form of short answer questions. The aim of selecting the test format was to minimize the possibility of students to rely much on their guess when they answered the questions. The test consists of eight questions, which are divided into two parts. The first four was derived from the reading text entitled "*Indonesia*". The second part was taken from the text entitled "*Natural Resources in Indonesia*". The test items comprises the questions which require the students to find the specific information explicitly stated in the text and those which oblige them to first make inferences from the text based on the context to arrive at the right or appropriate answers.

The pre-test was aimed at finding the current students' reading comprehension achievement. The result of the test was made as a basic step to form appropriate pair-work and group work. The results of the pre-test showed that the students' current reading achievement was low.

Implementing and Observing the Action Research

Organizing pairs and work groups was begun with determining the rank of the students according to the results of the pre-test. When constructing the pair and the group work, the number of students, male and female students, and the students' semester achievement were also taken into accounts. This was considered as some students obtained the same scores. However, it was heavily relied on the current reading comprehension achievement of the subject being researched resulted in the pre-test.

Based on the rank of the base scores achieved by the students in the pre-test, the pairs and the groups' arrangement were organized. To create a good pair, one of the common ways of organizing such pair, i.e. pairing the highest scorer with the lowest one from the ranks of achievement was considered. It means that pairing was begun with placing the first high scorer to the first low scorer in a pair and then followed by the second scorer from the top and the other second from the bottom, and so on. Since the number of the students was 17, it was decided to make 1 out of 8 pairs into a group of three. Here the last pair had three members.

To structure the groups, on the other hand, the students were placed into quartiles in accordance with their achievements rank. Each quartile consists of four students excluding the second quartile, as the number of students was odd (17). The quartiles were arranged from the highest to the lowest scorer. The

first quartile consists of number 1, 2, 3, and 4; the second quartile is number 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9; the third is 10, 11, 12, and 13; and the last is number 14, 15, 16, and 17. The group members were derived from each of the quartiles. In order to organize the approximate equal ability of each group, the first scorer of the first and the second quartile each combined with the lowest scorer from the third and the fourth quartiles were firstly derived. For example, group one consists of the students with number 1, 4, 11, and 16.

The students' worksheet on the first meeting of the cycle contained the reading text entitled "*Planting*". Preceding the text delivered to students, several oral questions dealing with the pictures concerning with *farming tools* on their hands were discussed as pre-reading activity. The questions were directed to lead the students to the topic. The following tasks were those which required students to identify specific information both explicitly and implicitly stated in the text. While the worksheet, which is given at the second meeting contains reading text entitled '*Modern ways of growing rice*'. The worksheet consists of three tasks. The first task contains several questions, which were presented orally in pre-reading stage. The next tasks comprise literal and inferential questions, which call for students to answer based on the text.

Related to cooperative learning model applied at the first cycle, it was agreed to apply two different models in one meeting. First, pair-work model selected was side-by-side pair. This was selected by considering that the students did not need to rearrange their seats. Second, the group-work model, *Learning together* was selected. The strategy requires students in groups of four to five to work for and share ideas to complete their assignment. During the activity, members of group were encouraged to help each other to ensure that everyone learned the lesson equally and therefore they achieved the same goal. In this *learning together* activity, no competition among groups was allowed.

Pre – Reading

At the first meeting, pre – reading activity was begun with distributing students some pictures of the tools commonly used by farmers in Indonesia. Then, they were asked to pay attention to the pictures. After a few moments, the students were invited to respond the oral questions dealing with the pictures given by the teacher. Since the low able students got difficulties in understanding the instruction though in a very simple English, some ideas were described in Bahasa Indonesia. The following was the conversation conducted by the teacher in pre-

reading stage.

At the second meeting, the pre-reading activity was begun with showing the students the pictures of *a Traditional farming tool and a Modern farming tool*. Then, the students individually were invited to observe the pictures in their hands. Having observed the pictures, the students were asked questions dealing with the name of those pictures. Since they were familiar with the pictures, most of them gave responses in chorus. However, they mostly expressed their ideas in Bahasa Indonesia. To help them expressed in English, they were told to take a glance at the previous text in the first meeting.

The following questions dealt with the distinctions of the tools discussed. Here, most of the students were able to differentiate those tools in nearly details but they could not express it in English. Therefore, with the help of his collaborator, they were aided to find the English words of the phrases they expressed in Indonesia. For example, "*traktor menggunakan mesin, pak*". They were helped to construct the sentence using the words they found in the dictionary. Afterwards, some could say "*tractor use machine*".

The conversation conducted between the practitioner and the students at this stage was aimed at calling students' prior knowledge dealing with the topic discussed, *farming tools*. Having the oral questions with the available pictures, it could be easier for teacher to prompt and to probe the students' schemata associated with the topic discussed. It could also help to promote specific skills in students such as defining the purpose of reading, asking questions, making predictions, figuring out the meaning of unfamiliar words, and relating new material to what is already known.

Whilst – Reading

Before starting the main activity of reading comprehension at the first cycle, both the first meeting and the second one, the time frame in each task was firstly determined. It was decided to provide 15 minutes for the first task and 15 minutes on the second one. Afterwards, the students were asked to pair themselves as the pairs formed at the beginning of the action research. The activity of posing them in their pairs at the first time spent approximately five minutes. Some of them were still ashamed to sit next to his female friend or vice versa. Few others did not remember their partners. And the rest were on purpose to let the time running out. The class was so crowded. To have them been ready for pair activities, they were helped to have seats in proper pairs.

Having the students paired with *side-by-side* seat formation, the activity of while – reading was begun. At the activity, the students in pairs were firstly invited to read the questions delivered to them thoroughly. The following activity was asking them to skim or to scan the reading text. Then, they were directed to answer the questions, which required the literal response based on the reading text entitled “*Farming tools*”. Before starting to do the task, each of the pairs were requested to listen the instruction given by the teacher. In order to make the instruction more clearly caught by the students, especially the low achievers, the practitioner asked them for further clarification. The questions usually used to check the students’ understanding about the instruction during the class are such as “*Do you understand?*”, “*Are you with us, Iwan?*”, “*Is it clear?*”; “*Is it O.K?*”; etc.

During the pair-work activity, the students were monitored to do the task in pairs. At first they were not allowed to open dictionary when they were confronted with some difficulties on the task given. Instead, they were given list of words altogether with the reading text. They were encouraged to share ideas, problems with their partners before the teacher.

In order to save the limited time provided to answer the questions at the task, key words in particular questions were also elaborated. For example, “*How many steps do farmers have to follow to plant rice?*” To arrive at appropriate response of the question, they were told not necessarily to catch all the meaning of the single words in it instead of understanding profoundly particular words like *how many*, *step(s)*, *farmer(s)*, and *plant*.

Besides, when necessary it was also depicted that without understanding all the meaning of the words of the question except the question word; one could arrive at the right answer provided that he could find the suitability of the question and the information explicitly stated in the text.

After ten minutes, the students were asked to stop doing the task. Then, they were invited to check their answers by comparing their answers with the other pairs’. In the end of the activity, the students were given the answer key of the task. They were expected to easily self-correct their answers. The students were again getting busy. They moved and talked to each other to compare their answers. To avoid the atmosphere of the class being so, the teacher and his collaborator came to approach them nearer.

The following activity was the group-work activity. This activity was preceded by the act of grouping the students into group of four. As in pair activity, it took several minutes to arrange them into group-works for the activity

was a transition after another activity taken by the students. Therefore, the class again became busy and the activity of group – work was slightly late to start.

To begin the group activity (*Learning together activity*), for a second time the students were called for to read the instruction how to do task two. Afterwards, they were assigned to do different tasks. Each of the group members had a different question to answer in order to fasten the accomplishment of the task. At this time, they were also asked to discuss the individual answers in-group. Subsequently, they were asked to understand the questions in groups. The following activity of the students was to answer the questions based on the reading text delivered to them. Since the time was simply 15 minutes minus few minutes spent at assigning the groups, the students were reminded to make use of it wisely. To have them making use of the time well, the practitioner wrote on the board the time they started doing the task and finished it. They were again not allowed to open dictionary when they got problems in completing the task except none of the team members could explain the words. Instead, they were given a list of words that might appear problems during the work. In addition, they were exposed to share ideas with other groups, not only their group members.

Throughout the group-work, the practitioner and his collaborators devoted to monitoring the group activity. They immediately approached the students in groups when the students got difficulties in finding the answers. It was also clarified what the particular questions required the students to respond. As the students got confused for they did not find the answer explicitly stated in the text, they were told way to arrive at the right answer. To motivate them to finish the task with the right answers/responses on time and to work together actively, the students were usually tapped on their shoulders when they wrote good responses. Or, they were also sometimes praised with utterances like *'good'*; *'very good answer'*; *'wow, brilliant'*; *'nice question'*, etc.

The final activity of the group-works was crosschecking their answers. To crosscheck whether the students' answers/responses were right or wrong, they were requested to compare theirs with other groups'. After comparing each other's answers, they were given answers key. With the answers key, the students were required to identify their mistakes. In the end, the groups, which obtained good scores, were given applause as the sign of success. The groups that got low scores instead were encouraged and motivated to do their best. They were told to be out of anxiety and reluctance to participate in working together when doing such the reading tasks. They were encouraged to socialize with others by

saying that everyone in groups or in teams was equal and therefore she or he was required to learn together to gain the same goal instead of learning individually.

Post – Reading

At this stage, the students were provided the time to reinforce what they already learned in the previous stages. For the time was much limited, the practitioner preferred to give them a home assignment dealing with the topic discussed on that day. During the first meeting of the cycle, the students were given a task, which required the students to make a short description about one of the farming tools usually used by farmers in our country. The description was done in a written form. Before taking it home, the way to do the task with the example was explained to students. After the instruction was given, they were invited to ask questions dealing with particular problems in answering questions.

For the second meeting, the students were given similar task as in the first meeting. The students were required to write differences of the farmer's tools in the United States and in Indonesia. The differences were there in the reading text delivered to them. Besides, the students were also provided with the opportunities to ask questions dealing with the topic already discussed.

Reflection of the Action

This part deals with the analysis of the implementation of the actions during the first cycle, which are obtained through the results of the observations, the results of the Quiz I, and the results of the interview. It also concerns with the reflection of the action in relation to the backwards.

This section focuses on identifying the effectiveness of the implementation of the first cycle. To clearly identify the process of the first cycle, three different kinds of data gathered were presented. Firstly, the data concerned with the teaching and learning process, which were taken from the observation sheets for both teacher's activities and students' activities during the first and the second meeting. Secondly, the data related to the students' learning results, i.e. students' learning process and their reading comprehension achievement on the quiz/test. Finally, the data dealing with the students' attitude towards the cooperative learning strategy applied were obtained from the interview conducted at the end of the first cycle.

Analysis of the Results of the Observations

The results of the observations on the teaching and learning process were presented into two different divisions. The first division deals with the teacher's (the practitioner's) performances during the first and the second meeting at the first cycle. The following division, on the other hand, concerns with the students' performance on task during the teaching and learning process.

From the observation results on teacher's performance at the first meeting, it was found that the implementation of the cooperative learning strategies, pair-work and group-work with *Learning Together* cooperative model, in reading comprehension did not yet fulfill the expected criteria. The incomplete steps done by the teacher during the first action indicated that the strategies still did not yet work well.

In the activity of connecting students' schemata with the topic to be discussed in pre - reading, for example, the teacher spent more minutes than he set up before. Essentially, it should be done in five minutes including opening the class. For the only high achievers were apparently able to give oral responses to the teacher's questions while the rests kept silent and seemed confused, the activity took longer time than it should be. Consequently, the teacher should clarify all the oral questions in Bahasa Indonesia.

During monitoring students' pair or group reading activities, it was identified that the practitioner were frequently involved in helping students to solve their problems dealing with word recognition. In a sense, he immediately offered help to the students. His immediate involvement broke the sphere of pair or group activity. During the pair or group activity of reading, the students did not fully trust each other as a partner and as a team and therefore, the interdependence, self-accountability, and sharing in teams as the sign of cooperative learning did not fully appear. The consequence of such the case was the time consumed in the activity was longer than the time frame set up. Also in the end of reading activity, it was found that the practitioner did not provide the students opportunities to give their comments or to ask questions related to their answers.

At the second meeting, the teacher's performance basically undertook a progress for he learned from his weaknesses during the first meeting. Based on the observation results, the time allotted in each step of teaching was already managed. The students' activities in pairs and in groups were also monitored like in the first meeting. However, it was different from what he did in the first meeting. The teacher did not anymore immediately involve helping the students identify

their problems related to the word recognition. There was a slight progress in the attempts to maximize the involvement of all the low achievers and high achievers to work together as partners or as teams.

For students, being less able to respond the oral questions dealing with the pictures given during the pre – reading stage at the first meeting showed that the students' word recognition and prior knowledge was still seriously insufficient for comprehension to take place. Seemingly, they were not either accustomed to start learning particular topic with such prompting or probing questions instead of directly starting the lesson with the tasks from the textbook.

The incomplete discussion and accomplishment of the task was another sign of the less successful of cooperative activities. The students found serious problems during while-reading stage because they were not yet accustomed to work in pairs or in groups. Apparently, most of the students were reluctant to work both in pairs and in groups for they were embarrassed and regarded such the peer interaction disturbed their concentration on the task. This also happened since the teacher intervened the cooperative activity of students too immediately.

Research Findings

This was clearly shown by the results of the observation that the average of the students' performance on task in the first and the second meeting was consecutively estimated 60 % (fair) and 73 % (good). The percentage of the involvement of the students in cooperative activities in meeting one illustrated that they were still weak. Likewise, though some improvements were attempted, some parts of the activities needed intensive attention.

Apart from the observation sheets, field notes were also used to gather the data associated with the teaching and learning process, which were not covered in the observation sheets. The practitioner and the observers took the field notes during the teaching and learning process in the two meetings. Several points were noted at the first cycle as the factors affected the success and the less successfulness of the cooperative work towards the students in reading comprehension.

First, the group model, *learning together* was apparently weak in terms of achieving the goal of learning in groups. In this sense, since in *learning together* cooperative model, students in groups were not exposed to compete to gain particular scores, it sounds as if they were involved in accomplishing the task for the sake of learning instead of their own needs. Secondly, the unfamiliarity of the students in working in pairs or groups was estimated as another factor.

This was related to students' attitudes and social interactions among their peers or teammates. Some students seemed embarrassed to work in pairs particularly when they were paired with different genders.

The following factor noted was the familiarity of the students to look up on dictionary the unfamiliar words found during reading activity. This was one of the factors disrupting students to accomplish their tasks on time. The students thought that they simply were able to arrive at the right answer of the questions when they understood every single word in reading text. Therefore, they relied heavily on meaning taken from dictionary. Overall, the things noted caused the time usage inefficient.

Conclusion

Based on the fore-mentioned research findings, it was concluded that the implementation of cooperative learning in teaching reading comprehension improved students' reading comprehension. The conclusions drawn were specified into three subheadings: the major stages in effective cooperative learning; the strengths of cooperative learning; and the weaknesses of cooperative learning.

The findings of this classroom action research is expected to give a practical contribution to the learning and teaching English with the emphasis on teaching reading comprehension at SMP Islam Jember. To be more specific, it is directed to give a practical contribution to the English teachers who directly involve in the process of teaching and learning reading in the classroom. The cooperative learning is required to be efficient in increasing the students' reading comprehension proficiency. Therefore, English teachers, in particular those who teach English at SMP Islam Jember, get better understanding about the strategy which in turn enable them to develop students' ability in reading comprehension.

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