READING ABILITY OF EIGHTH GRADERS AND TEACHING READING STRATEGY IN SMPN 2 MALANG

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ABSTRACT: The study analyzes the reading ability of regular and bilingual eighth graders and the strategies used in teaching reading in both classes in SMPN 2 Malang. This study uses the descriptive-qualitative design. The result of the analysis shows that the reading ability of bilingual eighth graders is higher than that of the regular eighth graders. Moreover, the teaching reading strategies by the regular class teacher and bilingual class teacher are different in some ways.

Keywords: reading ability, regular, bilingual, teaching reading strategy

Nowadays, many students have learned English in their school since English is a global language. English has become one of the most important subjects that students must learn. The evidence is that English is one of three main subjects tested in the National Examination that determine whether a student can graduate from the junior high school level or not. Furthermore, many schools in Indonesia offer bilingual class to build students’ ability in English.

In English, there are four skills that learners have to master. Those skills are reading, writing, speaking and listening. Among all of those skills, reading is a skill which is crucial for academic domain. “Reading is a primarily a cognitive process, which means that the brain does most of the work” (Simanjuntak, 1988:5). People cannot ignore this skill. “Reading is sometimes referred to passive skill, but if we examine the abilities to develop fluent direct reading with comprehension of meaning we shall see that the reader is far from passive during this activity” (River, 1968:220). This skill is necessary for the success in all academic domains. Moreover, “Many specialists defined that reading is the process of putting the reader in contact and communication with ideas” (Simanjuntak, 1988:3).

In reading process there is comprehension. In comprehension, there is a part called knowledge. “Knowledge is the basic element for comprehension” (Simanjuntak, 1988:4). It means that, to achieve comprehension, a reader should relate new information to what they already know (knowledge). Moreover, according to Harris and Sipay (1980), reading comprehension is a result of interaction between the perception of graphic symbols that represent language and the reader’s language skills and knowledge of the world. In order to comprehend a text or passage, they suggest that a reader have to elaborate the ability to
understand the graphic symbols and relates that to the knowledge that s/he has already had.

“As a channel of language processing, reading is essentially a form of communication between writers and readers which is mediate through a writer text” (Sullistyo, 2011:20). It means that to get information from the writer, people should read texts. Since a lot of materials in schools are in written forms, students must learn to achieve a good reading ability. Reading ability is a very crucial factor which is responsible for increasing students’ ability to learn and master information. Nowadays, students are expected to be independent. Students use this skill often to learn. Students do not only listen to their teacher in the class, but students should also learn the material by reading them. Besides, in all entrance exams, such as elementary school, junior high school, senior high school and even college require, students are tested on their reading comprehension ability. In addition, “Reading ability is important to everyday functioning” (Harris & Sipay, 1980:1). Thus, students’ reading ability is essential to be learned by students of all levels.

Today, many schools offer bilingual classes. These classes are aimed to improve students’ ability in using English. Beside these bilingual classes, some of these schools still provide regular classes. Despite the class is regular or bilingual, teacher takes a major role in students’ achievement. The methods teacher apply in class also affects students’ learning achievement. The statement is supported by Smith (1985:2) in that “What the teacher need is an understanding of the particular possibilities and costs (to child) of different methods and materials, an understanding of the particular children and what they are finding easy and difficult, and an understanding of reading, and how children must learn to read.”

In this research, teacher’s teaching strategy is one of the researcher’s focuses. In reading, there are several texts which students should master such as, narrative, recount, descriptive, report and many more text types. Those texts are important to learn. Every text has characteristics and purposes which are essential in English. In the eighth grade, two types of texts taught to the students are recount and narrative texts. Here, the researcher chooses a text which is narrative. A narrative text is a text which presents a fictional story. Its purposes are to amuse or to entertain the reader.

In this study, the researcher concentrates on intensive reading. What the researcher means by intensive reading is a reading activity of short texts conducted during classroom lessons. “Intensive reading will be a great part of the classroom activity” (River, 1968:233). Here, what the researcher means by reading ability itself is the ability of the students in comprehending a text which is measured by students’ reading score.

The researcher focuses this research on eighth graders. Eighth grade is a grade before
the last grade of junior high school. In this grade teacher and students begin to prepare for the national exam. If the teacher and students know about students’ reading ability, they can do something to improve students’ motivation and reading ability later. There are both bilingual and regular classes in SMP N 2 Malang. Therefore, it is possible for the researcher to conduct a comparative study in this school. One bilingual and one regular eighth grade classes are involved in this study.

METHOD

The study is designed as a descriptive qualitative study. “Qualitative study is constructed in the form of deep and creative narration and shows its natural setting” (PPKI, 2010:28). “Qualitative study tries to figure out the whole situation based on the context (holistic-contextual) through collecting data by researcher as the key for the study” (PPKI, 2010:26). The researcher tries to identify, analyze and describe the reading ability of eighth graders from bilingual and regular programs and the teaching reading strategy that was used in these programs in SMPN 2 Malang.

In the beginning of the study, the researcher acts as a planner. In the process of the study, the researcher acts as an observer. The researcher collects, analyzes and reports the data. Besides the researcher’s attendance, the students’ and teacher’s attendances are also important. The sources of the data in this study are regular students, bilingual students, regular teacher, bilingual teacher, statements from the interview, description from the field notes and the test score. Regular students are students who are using Indonesian in all subjects except for the English subject. Bilingual students are those who use English in all subjects.

The researcher used some instruments to collect data. They are test, observation guide, interview guide and questionnaire. Test is used to measure students’ reading ability. Observation guide, interview guide and questionnaire are used to collect the data on the teaching reading strategy.

There are three steps in analyzing the data: reducing, serving, and concluding data. Reducing data is a process of simplifying the data obtained during the research. This step is done to get the meaning of the data. The next step is used to show the data clearly so that it can be understand by those reading them. The data can be in the forms of narration or in test forms. Next, conclusions are drawn from the data for the purpose of answering the research questions.
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Reading Ability of the Regular Eighth Graders

The test result shows that there is one student whose score is between 81-100. This means that the student has excellent comprehension ability. Fifteen students score between 61-80. This means that they have very good reading ability. They have very good understanding of the meaning of the task and the reading materials. Eighteen students score 41 – 60. This shows that the majority of students belonged to a group of those with good reading ability. In other words, 51.42% of the participants has good understanding of the meaning of the task and reading materials. There is no student who scores fair in their reading ability but there is a student who has poor reading ability. This student has poor reading comprehension skills and poor understanding in completing the task.

From the scores of the researcher calculates the mean, median, mode and range as presented in Table 1.

| Table 1 The Mean, Median, Mode, and Range of the Regular Students’ Test Scores |
|---------------------------------|----------|---------|---------|
| Mean                            | Median   | Modus   | Range   |
| 58.71                           | 57       | 57      | 74      |

The Reading Ability of the Bilingual Eighth Graders

There are 7 students who score between 81 and 100. This means 29.16% of the students in the class has excellent reading ability. Students in this group have accurate understanding in completing the task. Moreover, there are 17 students who score between 61 and 80. In another words, there are 70.83% students in the class who has very good comprehension of the reading materials and very good understanding in completing the task. There is no student who scores 60 and below. The mean, median, mode and range of this class is presented in Table 2. There is 29.1% students who score 68. The range in this class is 26, this is much lower than that of the regular class.

| Table 2 The Mean, Media, Mode and Range of the Bilingual Students’ Test Scores |
|---------------------------------|----------|---------|---------|
| Mean                            | Median   | Modus   | Range   |
| 65.5                            | 68       | 68      | 26      |

Teaching Reading Strategy of the Regular Class Teacher

There reading strategies applied by the regular teacher are the modeling and grouping strategies. These two strategies are applied for two meetings in which narrative texts are
taught. The modeling strategy is used in the first and second meeting. In using this strategy, the regular teacher reads the whole text while the students repeat after her. In applying the modeling strategy, the teacher plays a role of a model.

The regular class teacher uses teaching media in order to support the application of the modeling strategy. The media are in the form of handouts and LCD presentations. The regular teacher displays the reading materials on the LCD.

The regular teacher applies the grouping strategy together with the modeling strategy. The teacher asks the students to make groups of four or five students. In the first meeting, it seems that there is no specific reason for grouping the students because the discussion conducted in this meeting is done by the whole class. On the other hand, the grouping strategy is essential in the next meeting. There is an activity in which the students work together in groups. The students did the exercises together with the group members.

In order to check students comprehension of the text, the teacher uses additional strategies of retelling and giving additional questions. In the retelling strategy, the regular students retell stories in front of the class in Indonesian. If the students cannot finish the story, they receive help from their group members.

**Teaching Reading Strategy of the Bilingual Class Teacher**

There are some reading strategies that the bilingual class teacher applies. The strategies are the Think-Pair-Share, modeling, and grouping strategies. In the modeling strategy, The teacher reads the text. This is then repeated by the whole class. The teacher takes the role of a model in the teaching learning process. In using the modeling strategy, the teacher explains the content of the text, yet she does not use any media in addition to the students’ course book.

The think-pair-share strategy is a strategy applied by the bilingual teacher after the modeling strategy. In applying this strategy, the bilingual teacher asks the students to choose their own partner. Then, she assigns one part of a reading text to each pair so that students can work on different sections of the text. Then, they make a question based on the given text. Each pair makes one question together. After that, the pairs write their questions on the white board.

The next strategy is the grouping strategy. In applying the strategy, the bilingual students can choose their own group members. Each group consists of four students. The teacher chooses the story for each group. The bilingual students retell the story in group.

In order to check students comprehension of the text, the teacher gives additional
strategy for the students by giving them additional questions about the content of the text. By doing this, the bilingual teacher aims to make the students comprehend the text better.

**The Discussion of Reading Ability of the Eighth Graders**

The results of the tests show that the bilingual class students have better scores than those in the regular class. This is shown by the mean gained by both classes. The mean of the regular students’ test scores is 58.71. Meanwhile, the mean of the bilingual students’ test scores is 69.5. In addition, the mean calculated using a t-test also confirms that the bilingual students’ test scores are higher than those of the regular students. The bilingual students are expected to have better reading comprehension skills than the regular students because they use English in all of their subjects. Therefore, the test scores of the bilingual students are supposed to be higher than those of the regular students. Yet, the test results show that the differences are not significant. The highest score of the bilingual class is 89; this is gained by only two students. Meanwhile there is one student from the regular class who receives the same score. There are 13 students in both classes who gain the same scores: 6 students score 63 and 7 students score 68.

**The Discussion of Teaching Reading Strategy**

Overall, the teaching reading strategies in the eighth grade applies four strategies, yet these strategies are not applied in their entirety or only applied by one of the teachers in the study. Most of these strategies are only partly applied. The first strategy used in the teaching of reading comprehension skills is the Three-Phase-Techniques. Both the regular and bilingual class teachers apply this strategy. Yet, during the teaching and learning process, they do not use the same reading activities. The regular class teacher applies the modeling and grouping activities; while the bilingual teacher combines the modeling, Think-Pair-Share and grouping activities.

The second strategy is ETRM. ETRM stands for *Experience Text Relationship Method*. The first phase of this strategy is *Experience*. Applying the experience phase is beneficial in order to activate students’ background knowledge. This may increase their comprehensions of texts. The second phase is the *Text* phase. In this phase, the teacher asks the students to make predictions of the text. After that, the students check whether or not their predictions have covered the information provided in the text. Asking students to make predictions of the text may increase their curiosities. The last phase is the *Relationship* phase.
This phase requires students to draw on their background knowledge. The students have to connect the story that they have known to the story in the text. The results of the study show that both the regular and bilingual class teachers do not apply all phases of ETRM. The regular teacher does not apply the any of the phases of this strategy and the bilingual teacher only applies the *Experience* and *Relationship* phase.

The third strategy applied is the SQ3R. SQ3R stands for *Survey, Question, Read, Recite and Review*. The first phase of this teaching strategy is the *Survey*. In this phase, a teacher is supposed to ask students to skim the text for main ideas. The teacher should give time for the students to do silent reading. This phase is beneficial because it allows the students to understand the main idea of the text that will help them understand the more detail information. The second phase is the *Question* phase. In this phase, the teacher asks the students to make some questions. The questions are about the information that the students need to know from the text. The questions can guide the students in reading the text. The third phase is the *Read* phase. The read phase in the SQ3R is supposed to make use of the questions made by the students, not by the teacher. The fourth phase is the *Recite* phase. In this phase, the students are expected to be able to answer their own questions. They can do it by retelling the story in their own words. The story can be retold in the form of written or spoken language. The last phase is the *Review* phase. In this stage, the teacher checks whether or not the students understand the text thoroughly. In the use of the SQ3R strategy, the regular class teacher only applies the *Review* phase but the bilingual class teacher does not apply any of the phases of this strategy.

The fourth strategy is the PQRST which stands for *Preview, Question, Read, Summarize and Test*. The first phase is *Preview* phase. In this phase, the teacher asks the students to look at the text for a moment. Applying this phase is beneficial because it triggers students to employ their background knowledge. When the students understand the main idea, it will help them to process the more detail information. The second phase is the *Question* phase. This phase is almost identical to that of the SQ3R. The question phase is aimed to guide students in reading. In this phase, the teacher asks the students to make some questions that will guide them in reading the text. The third phase is *Read*. This phase is almost identical to that of the SQ3R. The students read the text while looking for the answers of the questions they have made. When reading the text, new questions may appear. In the read phase of the PQRST strategy, the reading activity is guided by the questions made by the students in the previous phase. The fourth phase is *Summarize*. In this phase, the students summarize the text in their own words. The summary can be in forms of written or oral
language. The last phase is the Test. This phase is aimed to check students comprehension of the text. The important thing of applying this phase is not the score that the students get but how the learning results can reflect the success of applying the teaching strategies. As the results of the study show that the regular class teacher does not apply the PQRST strategy in its complete form. The regular class teacher does not apply the Preview and Question phases, but she applies the

*Read, Summarize and Test* phases. Similarly, the bilingual class teacher also applies the strategy partially. She applies exactly the same phases applied by the regular class teacher which are the *Read, Summarize and Test* phase.

There are two other strategies that could have been used in both the regular and bilingual classes in this study. They are the jigsaw and autonomous strategies. In using the jigsaw strategy, the teacher asks the students to make groups which are their original group. Each member of these groups is responsible for a topic. The original groups are then separated into expert groups which consist of members who have the same topic. The members of the expert groups share the information from the original groups. Then, the members return to the original group to combine the information. During the observation, the regular class teacher asks the students to make groups of four or five. Yet, there are no expert groups. The students answer the questions in groups and then discussed them with the whole class. In other words, the regular class teacher does not apply the jigsaw strategy. The bilingual teacher also does not apply this strategy in the bilingual class. The bilingual teacher asked the students to work in pairs.

The other strategy is the autonomous strategy. During the observation in the regular and bilingual classes, both teachers do not apply this strategy. The students depend entirely on the teachers. Both teachers do not let their students to apply self-learning in class. The regular and bilingual class teachers control the whole teaching learning process. Applying this strategy may be beneficial to promote learning autonomy. Yet, if the students are not motivated in learning, this strategy will not work well.

**CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

**Conclusions**

The reading comprehension skills of the regular eighth graders and bilingual eighth graders are not the same. The bilingual eighth graders score higher than regular eighth graders in the reading comprehension test. But, the reading comprehension skill of the bilingual eighth graders is lower than the teachers' expectation. The condition has been addressed by
giving the bilingual class students additional programs called “program pendampingan” and the English Enrichment Course. These additional programs are not given to the regular eighth graders. These programs are hoped to be able to improve the bilingual students’ achievement to at least the same as that of the regular eighth graders.

Both the regular and bilingual class teachers use similar strategies in teaching reading. However, there are some strategies that the regular teacher uses but the regular teacher does not and vice versa. The teaching reading strategies applied by the regular teacher are the modeling and grouping strategies. The bilingual class teacher applies the modeling, Think-Pair-Share and grouping strategies. Some teaching strategies, such as the jigsaw and autonomous strategies are not used by both teachers.

**Suggestions**

In this section, some recommendations are addressed to some parties: regular and bilingual class teachers, principals, and future researchers. Teachers should not only use one or two strategies. They should be adept in teaching reading so that they can adapt their teaching strategies and learning materials to the condition of their students. Principals need to take actions for the purpose of improving all students’ reading ability, both regular and bilingual class students. Future researchers are encouraged to investigate other aspects of teaching reading for the purpose of improving the teaching of reading comprehension in all levels of language learning.

**REFERENCES**


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