

THE USE OF QtA (QUESTIONING THE AUTHOR) IN TEACHING READING COMPREHENSION TO SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Lisa Rahayu¹, Ratmanida²
English Department
FBS, State University of Padang
State University of Padang
E-mail: stayaway.hevy0u@ymail.com

Abstrack

Pada saat ini sistem pengajaran sudah semakin berkembang. Begitu pula dalam pengajaran bahasa Inggris. Namun dari keempat keterampilan berbahasa yaitu mendengar (*listening*), berbicara (*speaking*), membaca (*reading*) dan menulis (*writing*), pengajaran *reading* terutama di SMP masih banyak memiliki kendala, terutama pada metode pembelajarannya. Siswa masih mengalami kesulitan dalam memahami materi berbahasa Inggris dalam bentuk tertulis secara maksimal. Oleh karena itu, makalah ini membahas penggunaan *QtA* (*Questioning the Author*) sebagai sebuah strategi yang dapat digunakan untuk mengembangkan kemampuan pemahaman membaca siswa. Dalam penggunaan strategi ini, guru memberikan sebuah teks yang akan dibaca siswa bersama-sama setelah sebelumnya membagi teks tersebut dalam beberapa bagian. Kemudian guru mengajukan *queries* (pertanyaan diskusi pada *QtA*) pada setiap bagian yang berfungsi membantu siswa memahami teks tersebut. Jawaban yang diberikan siswa akan direspon guru dalam bentuk diskusi. Manfaat dari penggunaan *QtA* ini adalah untuk membantu siswa membangun pemahaman makna teks yang sedang mereka baca melalui *queries* dengan mempertimbangkan sudut pandang dan tujuan penulis.

Kata Kunci: *reading, reading comprehension, questioning the author, queries*

A. Introduction

Listening, speaking, reading and writing are the four skills that are taught in English teaching. Reading, as one of those skills, is an important skill for student in learning English. Through reading, students can get information, knowledge and values. In addition, students can get the information in a text and makemeaning from it. A student who is a good reader is more likely to do well in school and pass exams than a student who is a weak reader. A good reader can understand the individual sentences and organizational structure of a piece of writing. They can comprehend ideas, follow arguments and detect implications. Good readers can extract from the writing what is important for the particular task they are employed in and they can do it quickly. With strengthened reading

¹Student of English Language Teaching Program of FBS UNP graduated on June 2014

²Advisor, Lecturer in Faculty of Languages and Arts, State University of Padang

skills, therefore, the students will make great progress and development in learning.

Teaching and learning process in school is based on curriculum. It is a set of plans and rules about goals, contents, learning materials, and the way of using it as guidance for implementation of learning activities that is aimed at a specific goal. In teaching English, teachers use Curriculum 2013 as reference.

Referring to the Curriculum 2013, there are twelve genres of text that need to be learned by the students of senior high school in Indonesia. They are procedure, descriptive, recount, narrative, report, news item, analytical exposition, hortatory exposition, spoof, explanation, discussion and review.

Unfortunately, many students encountered difficulties in understanding the text, as well as teachers encountered some difficulties in teaching the text. Based on the writer's experience in teaching field practice program, there were some problems that are faced by the students. The first problem is the students did not feel motivated to learn the text because the teacher couldn't find a suitable method to teach it that lead them to boredom. The teacher tended to use the conventional technique of teaching reading wheretheygave the students copies of a text and then asked them to read it for a few minutes without introducingany appropriate reading strategy, especially in reading monologue text. After that, the teacher asked them some questions related to the textwhen the students finished reading it.

This technique is considered difficult by the students. When they do not understand the text, they cannot answer the question. Moreover, the questions do not help students to comprehend the text; instead, they just assess comprehension with the aim of finding out whether the students understand what they have read. The students will only focus in getting information and read as if no one is talking to them. In fact, as Buehl (2009:137) states, "reading is an act of communication between an author and readers." It means that a text is a way an author tries to communicate with his/her readers. This makes readers should not ignore the author's intentions, viewpoints and perspectives of the text.

The second problem is when students read a text, as Graves et al. (2011:573) state, they tend to think that the text is absolutely correct and it has nothing to be questioned. That is why when they find something that they cannot understand, they blamethemselves for their incapability of understanding. This willlead them to boredom and frustration. They ignore a fact that the text itself might be less than perfect. They hardly realize that the text is just someone's ideas that are written down and sometimes they need to work hard to figure out what the author is trying to say.

In order to overcome the problems above, teacher can apply Questioning the Author as a strategy to improve senior high school students' reading comprehension.

Grabe and Stoller (2002:9) said "reading is the ability to draw meaning from the printed page and interpret this information appropriately." It means that in order to get meaning from words that they read, the readers recognize and use their knowledge of the structure of the language to begin forming a mental notion

of the topic. They can draw information from a text by using knowledge that they have and then form an interpretation of that information.

In addition, Anderson (2008:2) said “reading can be defined simply as making meaning from print.” He suggests four elements that are used in the process of reading. They are the reader, the text, reading strategies and fluency. It is clear that a reader gets meaning from a text by using appropriate strategies that lead him/her to be a fluent reader.

Moreover, Nunan (2003:68) defines reading as a process of making meaning by merging information from a text and the reader’s background knowledge. So, it can be said that the reading process is begun with the use of what exists on the reader’s mind. By activating and using the background knowledge, a reader can make the personal connection to the passage he/she reads. This combination then creates the meaning of what the reader has read so that he/she achieves the aim of reading.

Furthermore, Sheng (2000:1) said “reading is the process of recognition, interpretation, and perception of written or printed material.” By his explanation above, it is clear that the readers can get the meaning of what they read by recognizing the words, interpreting information and combining it with their own ideas.

Based on the definitions above, it can be concluded that reading is the combination of words recognition that is related to prior knowledge to understand the message delivered. A reader has to recognize the printed symbols that represent language and respond intellectually when being asked about the content of the text. If the reader has got the meaning of the text, it means that the goal of reading has been achieved by the reader.

According to Grabe and Stoller (2002:29), “reading comprehension is an extraordinary feat of balancing and coordinating many abilities in a very complex and rapid set of routines that makes comprehension a seemingly effortless and enjoyable activity for fluent reader.” It means that reading comprehension is a complex process. The readers cannot get the point of what they read right after seeing the text. They need to study the text first. Then, the readers can build the meaning from it by using their experience and their background knowledge. When the readers are able to create the right meaning sense, it means they have comprehended the text well.

Moreover, Sheng (2000:1) defines comprehension as getting ideas of the written material and using the strategies that help the readers to understand it. It can be said that comprehension happens when the readers get the message of a text by using appropriate strategies.

Furthermore, the RAND Reading Study Group in Reutzel and Cooter (2009:154) defines reading comprehension as “the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language.” He suggests four components in a comprehension process. They are (1) the reader, (2) the text, (3) the activity, and (4) the situational context. Thus it is an ability to interact with the text by understanding its complete meaning and the concept behind it. Reading will be useless if the reader does not comprehend what he/she reads.

Dealing with the experts' opinions above, it can be concluded that reading comprehension is a complex process to build the meaning from a text. The ability of a reader to comprehend a text is determined by the purpose for reading, the context, the nature of the text, and the readers' strategies and knowledge.

Beck et al. in Graves et al. (2011:573) said "questioning the author is an approach to text-based instruction that was designed to facilitate building understanding of text ideas." They developed this technique with two ideas: "(1) to encourage and assist young readers in getting under the surface of the material they were reading, dig into it, and engage with the ideas the text presented and (2) To assist students in realizing that textbooks are simply someone's ideas written down and that readers frequently need to work hard to figure out what the author is trying to say."

Moreover, Nunan (2003:75) stated "QtA is an excellent technique for engaging students in meaningful cognitive and metacognitive interactions with text and for assisting students in the process of constructing meaning from text." In this technique, students learn to engage with meaning and develop ideas rather than retrieve information from the text. He suggests this technique as an appropriate activity in a reading classroom, rather than having students read a text and giving some questions to test their reading comprehension.

Graves et al. (2011:573) point out that the aim of QtA is students learn to build meaning from a text as they read it, not after they finish their reading. They suggest the process of using this technique as follows:

"First, the teacher explains to children that texts are in fact written by ordinary people who are not perfect and who create texts that are not perfect. Consequently, readers need to continually work hard to figure out what the authors are trying to say. QtA proceeds by having the class read a text together, with the teacher stopping at critical points to pose queries that invite students to explore and grapple with the meaning of the text. The queries include initiating prompts such as "What's the author trying to say?" to get students started in grappling with the text, follow-ups such as "What does the author mean by that?" to encourage them to dig for deeper meaning, and follow-ups such as "How does that connect with what the author told you?" to encourage them to put ideas together."

Based on the explanation from experts above, it can be concluded that QtA is a technique in improving reading comprehension that asks the students to explore the meaning of the text by posing queries. In this technique, students are taught that the text is simply someone's written idea, which may or may not be clearly expressed. This knowledge gives them to question the authority of the text. It also frees them from the feeling of failure and frustration when they cannot understand the text as they read it. This technique involves students as they read the text for the first time rather than after they have read or during a second read. The queries are strategically used by the teacher to direct the discussion that

focuses on clarifying, collaboratively constructing meaning for, and understanding the ideas in the text they are reading.

Honig, Diamond, and Gutlohn (2008:733) said “QtA queries are teacher questions designed to assist students in dealing with, grasping text ideas as students encounter them. They are intended to support students in building an understanding of major text ideas, and to help them discover the difference between knowing what an author says and inferring what an author means.” The queries can be designed to help the students to draw information and to recognize the author’s intention from the text to build understanding.

Honig et al. (2008:733) said that there are two types of queries; they are Initiating Queries and Follow-Up Queries. An Initiating Query is an open-ended question to begin a discussion about a part of text, while Follow-Up Query is an intensive question to help students figure out more detailed information from the part of the text.

Based on the explanations above, it can be concluded that QtA queries assist students in grappling with text ideas, with the goal of helping them put ideas together to get a better understanding of the text. The queries help teachers in their role as facilitators by guiding the progress of group discussion and helping students to develop their ideas. The queries are not used to assess comprehension after reading, but to construct meaning during reading.

Beck and McKeown in Honig et al (2008:733) said “QtA lesson planning has three goals: (1) to identify the main ideas students should construct and anticipate potential problems in the text, (2) to segment the text to focus on information needed to build understanding, and (3) to develop queries that promote understanding

Graves et al. (2011:576) suggests three actions in planning QtA lesson. They are (1) reading and analyzing the text to figure out the major information and consider the difficulties that the students may have in getting the information, (2) dividing the text into some parts that students have to discuss before they come to the next part, and (3) writing some queries to get the important ideas of the text, considering the difficult points that students may have, and setting how the text will be discussed into parts.

Based on the explanation above, it can be clearly seen that planning QtA has three steps. The first step is reading the text to identify the major understanding and the problem that students may find as they read. The next step is segmenting the text into some parts. The last step is writing down the queries that will be proposed to the students.

According to Beck et al. in Honig et al. (2008:735), there are 6 types of QtA Discussion Moves. Marking, Turning-Back, and Revoicing are moves that used to respond students’ idea during a discussion. Recapping, Modeling, and Annotating are moves that involve the teacher stepping into the discussion in a more direct way.

There are some advantages of using questioning the author technique in teaching reading that Buehl (2009:139) suggests. They are (1) engaging students in more active questioning (2) helping students to be less frustrated when they read a difficult text by realizing that responsibility of making a text clear also

belongs to the author, (3) helping students to be metacognitive –readers who actively monitor their comprehension during reading, (4) engaging students with reading when they are learning rather than afterward, (5) helping students get used to a process of self-questioning that proficient readers use to monitor their comprehension, (6) helping students to choose selections that they will read independently, perhaps as homework, especially when they find difficult part of a text, (7) helping struggling readers using QtA as a comprehension-building strategy, and (8) QtA lessons can be developed in all content areas and adjustable for young students as well as adolescent learners.

Based on the explanations above, it can be said that using Questioning the Author in teaching reading can increase student motivation and engagement to the learning process. This technique can also develop critical thinking skill of the students. Moreover, students will have more frequent interaction by collaboratively construct meaning through the discussion.

B. Discussion

1.Preparation

There are some preparations need to prepare, such as teaching material, media, and lesson plan in implementing this strategy.

a. Teaching Materials

There are two kinds of materials that can be used in using the QtA technique. The first one is the text. In selecting text as the material, teacher should find a text that is expected can be understood by the students. It is important to select the text based on students' level ability. Teacher should consider the length and grammar difficulty level of the text.

The second material is a list of queries related to the text that will be given to the students. The teacher should prepare queries that the students will answer at each stopping point to help them focus on the important ideas of the text.

b. Media

In using QtA technique, laptop and projector can be used as media to help students get better understanding of the material given. They are used to show the power point of the material.

c. Lesson Plan

It contains of required material, objectives, and instructional components of teaching. A proper lesson plan will help the teacher to be more organized while teaching. It enables the teacher to preparing the teaching in a systematic way before entering the classroom.

2.Implementing Questioning the Author in Teaching Reading at Senior High School

a. Pre-Teaching Activity

In pre-teaching activity, the teacher can begin by checking the students' attendance and readiness before starting the learning process. After that, the teacher can review the previous lesson that the students have learned by asking

some questions related to it. After that, the teacher needs to explain the purpose of learning or basic competencies that will be achieved. Then, the teacher introduces the topic.

b. Whilst Teaching

The first process in this activity is exploration. The teacher can show the students a picture of one of the most famous fairy tales in the world and ask them some questions. It will attract the students and activate their prior knowledge. Next, the teacher asks the students about what they know about narrative text and the examples of the text. In this case, the students are going to read a narrative text entitled Hansel and Gretel. The teacher shows a picture related to the topic of the text that students will learn by using the power point and ask them about what they know about the picture.

The next process is elaboration. Students start the reading. The teacher shows the text model by using the power point media. This media can improve students' focus and help teacher to provide annotations and highlights.

After having the class read a text together, the teacher asks the students to stop reading at the orientation part. After that, the teacher poses some queries to invite students to explore the meaning of the text. The teacher uses initiating queries at the beginning to lead the students to get general ideas of the section. Then the teacher uses follow-up queries to assist students in elaborating and integrating the ideas. The teacher chooses one student to answer each query. After a student answers a query, the teacher gives response to it. The teacher rephrases and clarifies ideas and keeps the discussion focused. If the students seem unsure with their answers or have difficulties in understanding the information, the teacher will help them by providing information from the text. It is important to remember that the role of the teacher during this strategy is only to facilitate and to control the discussion.

After the students have built meaning from the orientation part by doing the discussion, the teacher asks the students to read the complication and do the discussion like they have done in first part. They do it until the last part, that is resolution.

After reading the whole text, the teacher needs to guide students to identify the generic structure of the text model. Then, he/she identifies the text model's language features with the students.

The next process is confirmation. In this section, the teacher gives the printed text of Hansel and Gretel to the students along with some comprehension questions. The students answer the questions on the paper given. The students do the exercise individually. After doing the exercise, the students collect the papers to the teacher.

c. Post Teaching Activity

In this stage, the teacher together with the students conclude the lesson that has been learned. Then, the teacher gives homework that will be collected on the next meeting.

C. Conclusion and Suggestions

Based on the previous discussion, it can be concluded that Questioning the Author (QtA) is a technique of teaching students to construct meaning during reading to improve their comprehension. It is a technique that asks students to pose discussion questions called *Querieswhile* reading a given text, helping to strengthen their knowledge and understanding, rather than *after* reading. The queries are used by the teacher to direct the discussion that focuses on clarifying and understanding the ideas in the text they are reading. This technique can develop the students' critical thinking and engage them in meaningful interaction with the text in order to make a better comprehension.

It is suggested for the teachers to use questioning the author as a technique in reading classroom to help students get better understanding. It will be an effective way of learning because questioning the author makes students go beyond the text and integrate ideas in building meaning collaboratively. It is also expected for the teacher to create interactive atmosphere in using this technique because it can increase the students' interest and motivation to be involved in the learning process.

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