READING INSTRUCTION
IN UNDER GRADUATE ENGLISH PROGRAM

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Abstract

Having lack of motivation and low intelligence have often been considered as sources of students' failures in Reading Subject. Such this unfair judgement on the parts of the lecturers remains in its existence in many colleges and universities although dozens of approaches and methodologies have long exalted through Communicative Language Teaching principles. The current study tries to elaborate some interrelated factors that influenced students' achievement in Reading Instruction at the English Tadris Department. Clear vision as reflected in the planning and instructional program is considered to be the primary importance to accomplish successful teaching.

Some basic theoretical frameworks as well as the most current trends in our educational practices are presented to picture students' progress. Finally, with a more interactive classes depicted to upgrade students' imaginations, the writer comes to the conclusion that students' success in reading depends largely on how the teacher/ instructor play his/her roles as a manager,a motivator, a supervisor, and as a teacher

Key words/phrases: Reading subject, intreractive reading process, Top-down and Bottom-up models, Instructional design, Fresh and Junior group

A. INTRODUCTION/PENDAHULUAN

Reading instructions in the English as a Second or Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) context has been a remarkable issues dealing with methodologies and learners' achievement. Both problems seem to be very common in Indonesian colleges and universities eventhough English is considered as the main subject of the department. In English Tadris (General Education) Department, Faculty of Tarbiyah (Religious Education) State Institute for Islamic Studies 'Imam Bonjol' of Padang, for example, since its early opening in 2003, students encountered

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many problems not only in the content of the 'Reading' subject, but also the vision of why and how they should go about the subject. It is evidence in this Undergraduate English Program that almost in every semester, around 30 or 40 percents of students were reported to take 'Reading' subject for the second or third times for improvement or as a 'must'. A number of unpermanent and under qualified lecturers who were incharged with the subject brought about the same dillema for the students' failures. Based on these phenomenon it safes to say that 'Reading Instruction' in this institution has not been planned and carried out as to accelerate students' macro and micro skills in foreign language learning.

As one of the macro skills in language learning, 'reading' should promote some other skills such as speaking and writing. In Indonesia, where English is taught as a foreign language, a large numbers of students acquire and master the vocabulary through reading. Therefore, the needs to interact and negotiate meanings should be in the first priority in the process of teaching and learning 'Reading'. But how can this principle be implemented? Where should 'Reading' lecturer start from?, and where should it be directed? These and many other questions can be addressed to the above phenomenon based on different perspectives. This paper, however, tries to look at the problems and reveal theoretical frameworks and present empirical data to indicate success or failure in this challenging enterprise. The real instructional design and materials development, as well as evaluation process are quoted for parts of validation and final discussion.

B. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

For many students, reading is by far the most important of the four skills in a second language, particularly in English as a second or foreign language learning. Carell (1988) is very certain that "… if we consider the study of English as a foreign language around the world – the situation in which most English learnres find temselves – reading is the main reason why students learn the language". In addition, at advanced proficiency levels in a second language, the ability to read the written language at a reasonable rate and with good comprehension has long been recognized to be as important as oral skills, if not more important (Eskey, 1970). Dealing with what and how to teach as to help students' comprehension in reading activities, it is worth to look at the previous advancements of several models which is so called 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' mpdels.

Up to 1970-es, reading was viewed primarily as decodingprocess of reconstructing the author's intended meaning via recognizing the printed letters and words, and building up a meaning for a text from the smallest textual units at the "bottom" (letters and words) to larger units at the "top" (phrases, clauses, intersentetial linkages). Problems of second language reading and reading comprehension were viewed as being essentially decoding problems, deriving meaning from print (Carrel, 1988). Even today, such a practice has been observable experience in many of the English teaching at our schools, beginning from Junior, Senior High School, up to the university levels.

The **'bottom-up'** models as pointed above, shares the following features. First, students are directed to recognize the language (letters or words) of the text and think of questions and or exercises which have been already depicted or explicit throughout the text. Second, students may work individually to finish the task and frequently, they don't have chance to interact with other members of the class, excep with the teacher. Third, there is almost nofurther activity related to the text and students leave the class with sacks of new words. Finally, the teacher's role may, frequently, be subsituted with authors of the text. In another words, 'bottom-up' is obviously very text-centered, it does not propose independent learning and therefore, 'reading' suffers many looses.

The practices of 'bottom-up' model in reading instruction was significantly influenced by the view that it was an adjunct to oral language skills (Fries 1945, 1963, 1972). The strong influence of the audiolingual method dictated the primacy of listening over reading and of speaking over writing (Carell, 1988). Besides, the

importance assigned to phoneme-grapheme relationships by structualists such as Fries and Lado (1964) was also responsible for the promulgation and implementation of the decoding perspective on second language reading.

The unsatisfactory comprehension resulted in by the 'bottom-up' model encouraged some psycholinguists to create a new model which is later known as **"top-down"** model. Goodman (1967, 1971, 1973) and others were noted to have contributions to this model when he described reading as a "psycholinguistic guessing game", in which the "reader reconstructs… a message which has been encoded by a writer as a graphic display" (Goodman, 1971:135). In this model, the reader need not use all of the textual cues. The better reader is able to make correct predictions, the less confirming via the text is necessary. According to this point of view, the reader reconstructs the meaning from written language by using the graphonic, syntactic,andsemantic system of the language, but she or he merely uses cues from these three levels of language to predict meaning, and, most important, confirms those predictions by relating them to his or her past experiences and knowledge of the language (Carelll, 1988).

Parry (1978) in Carell (1988) summarizes the differences of the two models as follows:

> Some argue that reading is a 'bootom up' process: graphemes are perceived as forming words, words as forming sentences, sentences as forming paragraphs, and so on (Gough 1972); others argue that the process is a 'top down' one: the reader starts with a general idea, or scheme, of what should in the text – this being derived from previously acquired knowledge – and uses this scheme in perceiving and in interpreting graphic cues (p. 223)

Further development of reading model was marked by the critical observations toward 'bottom up' and 'top down' models which later proposed a new 'interactive' model. Weber (1984) as cited in Carell (1988) states that:

> "… the top down perspective fails to accommodate important empirical eveidence adequately. The interactive models, attempting to be more comprehensive, rigorous and coherent, give emphasis to the interrelations between the graphic display in the text, various levels of linguistic knowledge and processes, and various cognitive activities" (p. 224)

Interaction is an important word for language teachers. In the era ofcommunicative language teaching, interaction is in fact, the heart of communication; it is what communication is all about. We send messages; we receive them; we interpret them in a context; we negotiate meanings; and we collaborate to accomplish certain purposes. Brown (1994) maintains the importance of interaction as he writes:

> Interaction is the collaborative exchange of thoughts, feelings, or ideas between two or more people resulting in a reciprocal effect on each other. Theories of communicative Competence emmphasize the importance of interaction as human beeings use language in various contexts to 'negotiate' meaning, or simply stated, to get one idea out of your head and into the head of another person and vice versa. (p. 159)

This model incorporates the implications of reading as an interactive process – that is, the use of background knowledge, expectations, context, and so on. At the same time it also incorporates notions of rapid and accurate feature recognition for letters and words, spreading activation of lexical forms, and the concept of

automaticity in processing such froms – that is, a processing that does not depend on context for primary recognition of languistic units.

There are many implications of this model to reading instruction commonly held in ESL/EFL contexts. First of all, contrextual interpretation of lexical items is aonly a part of the vocabulary skills needed for fluent reading, and many actually interfere if a student over-reies on this strategy. Similarly, certain kinds of 'phonic' exercises may be helpful to students. Finally, basic recognition exercises to improve speed and accuracy of perception may constitute an important component of an effective second language reading program.

C. CURRENT INTERACTIVE READING PROCESS

An interactive reading process which is dominated by sharing and transaction of ideas and meanings among students and lecturer is just like a "top of iceberg": a clear, white, lighting snow which in fact, deeply rooted at the foot of the mountain. Indeed, the instruction is mainly based on a well planning in which topic and indicators are specifically identified. A thorough planning elaborates a sketch of materials, students' learning experience, and several expected competences which will be gained by the students. There are a lot of skills that students may achieve. Harmer (2001) elaborates six skills when someone is reading such as: identifying the topoics, predicting and guessing, reading for general understanding, reading for specific information, reading for detailed infromation, and interpreting text. In addition to an appropriate planning, it must also be considered learning strategies comprising approach and steps. Presented below are quotations from the original planning of the Reading Instruction in English Tadris Department.

Reading I (2 Credits)

Standard of Competence	:	Students are able to undertsand and respond to various written texts in English
Basic Competence	:	1.2. understanding and responding to descriptive text orally and in writing
Indicators		
	:	1. Identifying the topics as described in several texts. 2. Recognizing word references. 3. Explaining the setting and objects that are described or presented. 4. Finding the sinonyms of the key words and phrases, and put them into ones' sentences.
Materials		
	:	1. A descriptive text taken from *Sunday Mercury*, Jan., 2005) 2. A descriptive text taken from *Tasmanian Homes Review*., Feb., 2005) 3. A descriptive text taken from *The Jakarta Post*. Dec. 2004)
		100 Minutes.
Time		
	:	

A well instructional design allows the lecturer to set up interactive teaching by applying principles of reading process, approach, strategies, and all activities devoted to comprehension. The class is started with the discussion of related issues *(activating students' background knowledge)* and questions leading to their specific needs and expectations based on the information given in the text *(clarifying and encouraging intention to read)*. Silent reading, then, is directed to skim and scan the content of the text such as: the main topics or ideas, factual information, and author's line of reasoning. Questions related to linguistic aspects should aid students to reconstruct the ideas or statements provided by the author, and that these activities would develop students' oral skills. A part from the previous activities, students are required to explain the meanings of some key words and use them in their own words, or to clarify some other words references as printed in the texts.

Consistent with the goals as stated in the syllabus and stated in instructional design, the test is designed to evaluate students' achievement and the quality of learning (such as materials and test itself). Instructor must be aware of threats toward test item validity and reliability. Therefore, instructor need to do the following tricks to anticipate them:

1. Prepare the number of item test up to the optimum coverage: the more, the better.
2. Present the text materials that are closed to or almost similar to those given through the learning sessions.
3. Construct 4 to 6 questions for each text.
4. Direct the questions to the achievement of the stated indicators.
5. Use equal length of sentences for each alternative answers.
6. Avoid using ambiguous words such as 'never', 'sometimes' or double negative words in the stems.

D. PROBLEMS AND SOLLUTIONS

Two groups of students taking 'Reading I' in the existing semester were the subject of this study. The first group comprises 45 students, are truly the first semester students and are still fresh. The second group, consisting of 52 persons comprising third, fifth, and seventh semester students (Note that the ofering of this 'Reading I subject in this academic year[2007-2008] is only a matter of Curriculum change in the previous year). For the simplicity of identifying the two groups, the first group is labelled as "Fresh", while the second is "Junior".

During the classes of approximately 9 weeks, the two groups shared different characteristics: the Fresh seemed to have well preparation (eg. They studied and analized the text at home, consulted the dictionary for difficult words, not only for the scheduled task, but also for the rest of the units. More than 75 percents of them participated in the learning process, and so, crowded and dynamic situation were the true words to charcterize this group. They had such big anthusiasm in proposing or negotiating their ideas either in explaining the key words or in restating the original ideas of the author.

The Junior, however, were reluctant and felt shy to participate. The majority of the students in this group did not have self confident. They had low motivation, and there was an indication that grammar block shut their mouth. Such a situation was better for them instead of being underestimated by the other members.

Finally, the results of test which was given as Mid Test shows the different achievement of the two groups (Mean Scores of Fresh and Junior are 64.72 and 60.70). The test was actually found 12% difficult, 56% fair, and 32% easy (based on

categorization suggested by Zainul, 1995). The fact that the Fresh had better achievement than the Junior while the latter group have had other related subjects such as English I, Structure I-II; raised some speculations that: (a) The Fresh is a much better input for English Tadris Department; (b) The average of over sixty indicates the successful teaching, regardless of the homogenity of the participants; (c) Such a good achievement made by both groups indicated the high validity of the test item.

E. CONCLUSION

In an attempt to increase the quality of Reading instruction at this faculty, I have put forward a rather wide and global vision as reflected in either instructional design, materials, techniques, or in the design of instrument for evaluation. All of these teaching and learning aspects, however, are not the 'end'; the recycling process of evaluation in each stages should be continuously improved, based on the needs of the students and the demand of our society.

The significant difference of average achievement between the two groups does not merely indicate different input on the part of the learners, but also less supports or contributions that the Junior had, either from the other related subjects or their lack of learning experiences. Nevertheless, the better achievement made by the Fresh was purely affected by serious efforts and innovations that have been   implemented through interactive process.

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