

# MANAGING THE STUDENTS' INTERACTION IN TEACHING READING THROUGH TASK-BASED LEARNING

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## Abstract

*This paper discusses managing the senior high school students' interaction through task-based learning. The writer has collected some theories from some experts about interaction and task based learning. It is true that interaction in learning will be managed by the teacher, in this case, through task-based learning. Having analyzed and discussed the theories, the writer can draw conclusion that English competencies could be gained if the teacher can provide English environment for the students. The more the teacher can provide English environment in learning process, the better English competencies the students can master. Therefore, the teacher is suggested to expose English very frequently, so that the students can listen, speak, read, and write English. These activities can be done by involving the students in interaction through task-based learning by building control of the field task, modeling, having joint construction, and having independent construction.*

**Key words:** *managing interaction, reading, task-based learning*

## A. INTRODUCTION

In their lives people always interact to fulfill their needs. They can not stand alone. For example, in the situation of hunger, they will buy some food prepared by other people or anything to cook. In this case, they will inform their need so that other people will know and respond to it. It also happens in learning process in which the teacher and the students are present together. Teacher wants to share and transfer her or his knowledge to the students. On the other hand, the students will try to understand, analyze, and implement what they have got from the teacher. It is true that they can do it if they interact; the teacher says and the students listen or vice versa.

Furthermore, teaching and learning English as aimed at gaining communicative competence, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing is impossible to do without interaction or with insufficient interaction. The students might not be able to communicate in English if they are not involved in English communication. For example, they have

never listened, spoken, read, or written in English.

However, though some teachers had tried to involve students in learning, but in the writer's slight observation on the teachers' portfolios submitted for their certification, she found that most teachers at Junior or Senior High School did not integrate the interactive activities in teaching. For instance, in teaching reading, the class was just focused on the students' activities in reading. As the effect, the learning activities became monotonous and boring.

A professional teacher as said by Sudirman (2008:163-181) should have ten teaching competences. They are managing materials, managing teaching preparation, managing class, using media and source, managing interaction, evaluating, understanding guidance and counseling function, understanding and implementing administration, understanding and interpreting the research finding in teaching. But in this paper, the writer just focuses on the teacher's competence in managing interaction, especially increasing

the students' involvement in interaction. However, the useful approach will be focused on the task-based learning approach. Even-though, interaction in general was commonly discussed by some writers, but they had not yet discussed about the students' involvement in interaction which was applied through task-based learning. In short, the writer will discuss about the students' involvement to interact in learning English Reading through task-based learning at Senior High School.

## **B. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

### **1. Concept of Classroom Interaction**

Celce-Murcia in Forum Anthology (1984-1988) defines human interaction as the process whereby two or more people are engaged in reciprocal activities. This definition expresses that in interaction any participant will receive information each other; a speaker will send information to listener and the listener will receive the information. Then, the listener will give the feedback to the speaker's utterance, so that the speaker will receive the information.

Interaction in learning is called by Sudirman (2008:8) as educative interaction. It is the relationship between a teacher and the students when giving or sharing information to each other, proposed to gain the teaching and learning objectives. Different from interaction in general, this interaction is planned by the teacher on purpose to educate the students to be mature.

Furthermore, he mentions some characteristics of the interaction. The interaction is characterized by the existence of the objectives, the message, the active students, the teacher, the method to gain the objectives, the situation facilitating the teaching and learning process, and the evaluation to the result of interaction. All characteristics are similarly urgent

in the classroom interaction. If one of them does not exist, the interaction can not run, for example, when a teacher wants to teach a new material in a noisy place, the students will find difficulties in concentrating their mind. As the effect, they can not involve in the interaction.

Nowadays, teaching English at Junior or Senior High School is to make the students competent in using English. Then, interaction is focused on all competencies, as listening, speaking, reading, and writing although, the topic is reading. An English teacher can interact with the students or make the students interact each other by making them involved in all activities in learning.

Interaction is divided into three types by WPI Academic Technology Centre (2008). They are learner to content interaction, learner to learner interaction, and learner to instructor interaction. In the learner to learner interaction, the teacher will provide the situation that makes the learners interact with the content of teaching, in this case with reading text. In the learner to learner interaction, the teacher provides the situation that can make the learner interact among them. Finally, in the learner to teacher interaction, the teacher provides the situation to make the learner interact with the teacher. The three kinds of interaction can be applied in teaching to make students' involvement increased.

### **2. Role of Interaction**

As stated by Vygotsky in Richard-Amato (2003: 52) learning is a dynamic social process between teacher and the students in making dialog which focuses on emerging skills and abilities. Furthermore, Wells as quoted by Richard-Amato suggests that a teacher engages with learners in challenging, personally significant activities, observe what the students

can do independently, and help and guide them.

From the other point of view, he also quotes Freire (1970) who divides education into two types on the basis of the way the teacher and the students communicate in the classroom (in Richard-Amato, 2003). The first type is called banking education which involves the act of depositing. The students as the empty depositories, will receive, memorize, and repeat. While the teacher is the depositor, so there is no real communication. The second type is libertarian education, where a teacher and the students are partners. The students are involved in the acts of cognition and not with empty heads waiting to be filled with information. In addition, the process of teaching and learning is solving the problem by forming a type of cognitive apprenticeship. In this case, the students and the teacher together make the meaning on the basis of their experience added with the information from other sources in the classroom.

Richard-Amato then urges that such relationship can lead to meaningful interaction about relevant content. Without this relationship, meaningful communication can not take place. Thus, the students will find some problems if the teacher does not interact with them meaningfully or they do not interact each other and with the content of the text. Furthermore, to interact with the content, the students must have the background knowledge.

The interaction must therefore, includes the students in any activities in learning. The activities are called by Dulay et al (1986: 15) as the language environment. It is everything the students can see and hear in the new language. They add that it is very important for the success of learning a new language. Usman then (1999:22) categorizes them into five kinds. They are visual activities, oral, listening, moving, and writing activities. The five

activities are very important in learning English. Eventhough the focus is only learning reading, the students will not only be exposed with reading activities, but also with the other activities.

Moreover some studies have been done about the effect of social interaction on the students' language proficiency. The first study was done by Seliger as quoted by Richard-Amato (2003:53). He did an experiment on two different groups. The first group consisted of the students with high input generator, while the second group consisted of the low input generator. The finding showed that the high input generator interacted intensively, not only with the teacher, but also with each other. On the other hand, the low input generator either avoided interaction altogether or remained fairly passive in the situation in which they could have interacted. In his research then, he concluded that the high input generator could succeed in learning through interaction. But, the low input generator needed language environment to force interaction, because they did not tend to initiate to become involved on their own. In addition, Richard-Amato also quotes Carroll's conclusion on his study that social interaction had a substantial effect on proficiency.

The research findings have implication to the language teaching process, especially in interaction. The high competent students can interact intensively in learning. They do not need any stimulus from the teacher. On the other hand, the slow students need the teacher's encouragement to involve. If the teacher does not provide the situation that can make them interact, they may not interact. This way of interaction can influence their English skill or their English skill may not progress after learning.

English is learned by the students in Indonesia as foreign language, so

that they can not find English environment outside. In addition, the students can not interact with the surrounding people in English. Therefore, an English teacher must provide English environment in the class so that the students will be engaged in the classroom interaction. If the teacher does not provide this situation, she might not gain the English teaching objectives well.

### **3. Characteristics of Classroom**

#### **Interaction**

Dulay et al (1982: 13-44) divides language environment into two factors, macro and micro environmental factors. Macro environmental factors are the broad overall characteristics of the language environment. They include the naturalness the language heard, the learners' role in communication, the availability of concrete referents to clarify meaning, and who the target language models are. On the other hand, micro environmental factors are the characteristics of specific structures of the language the learners hear. They suggested three kinds of micro environmental factors have been investigated as salience (the ease with which a structure is seen or heard), feedback (the listener or the reader's response to the learner's speech or writing, and frequency (the number of times the learner hears and sees a given structure).

From the characteristics of the language environment described above, the conclusion can be drawn that if the students are exposed to the language environment, they can involve in the classroom interaction gradually. It can be done through the trial and error. First, they might have error and corrected by the teacher, or they themselves realize the error after listening to the teacher's utterances or reading the sentences repeatedly. Thus, interaction can be done by any student either they are rapid or slow students as

long as the teacher always provides the students with the environment. Therefore, an English teacher can easily gain the objectives of teaching by providing the English environment in the classroom.

Furthermore, the characteristics of interaction is detailed by Sudirman as, the purpose to help students developed, the planed procedures, the specific analysis of the materials, the students' activities, the teacher's role as supervisor, the discipline, and time allocation (2008: 15-18). If the teacher has them in the teaching and learning process, she might run the interaction well, so that classroom interaction becomes alive. On the other hand, if one of them does not occur, teaching and learning activities might not be optimal so that the purpose might not be achieved.

### **4. Nature of Reading Comprehension**

Reading comprehension is defined by some experts in different ways. Irwin (1980) describes it as the process of using reader's experience and the writer's cues to construct a set of meaning used to get specific information of the context. Reading activities therefore, may be done if there is the context in which the information is presented, which can help the reader understand the information.

Moreover, the context is anything in which some sentences occur and form a paragraph or a text. As clarified by Devine (1986), in reading comprehension reader will use syntactic, semantic, and rhetorical information of a text, so that the information is reconstructed in the reader's mind. Thus, syntactic, semantic, and rhetorical information become the context of information. They should be recognized while understanding a text. The context of a text is only linguistic context which

includes word, sentence, and the message.

In addition, Kustaryo (1988:2) defines reading comprehension as the combination of word recognition, intellect, and emotion with prior knowledge to understand the message communicated. Both experts emphasize that in reading comprehension, a reader needs to recognize any symbols in a text to understand the ideas communicated. Instead of trying to recognize the symbols, Kustaryo adds that to understand a reading text, the reader will use his or her intellect and emotion with prior knowledge. The prior knowledge, or also called the reader's experience is useful to facilitate the reader to understand a text. If one reads a text related to his or her previous knowledge, he/she will understand it easily, or vice versa. Moreover, the role of intellect and emotion are also important. Reader who has problem with his or her intellect and emotion may have trouble in reading comprehension.

At Senior High School, a terminology used for reading comprehension is a little bit different from what is commonly used. It is popularized with reading a text, for example, narrative text. This term is used for either short text which is commonly called paragraph or long text containing some paragraphs. This term is also used for writing. Thus, the term of text can be used for both reading and writing; in reading, the text has been written, while in writing the text will be written by the students.

The activities in learning reading at Senior High School may run well if the students understand the word, grammar, and the meaning of the text presented. In addition, they are also required to have background knowledge about the information or the message informed in the text. If a teacher wants to succeed in teaching

reading, she or he should select the text which may be appropriate to the students by considering the word, grammar, and the message that may make them understand easily and completely. In this case, the teacher may relate the vocabulary and the grammar in the new text with what they have known. Moreover, the message presented in the text must be related to the students' experience, so they will be motivated in learning because they can understand such material successfully.

##### **5. Kinds of Reading Tasks**

Willis (2004:5-10) categorizes the task in task-based learning as listing, arranging, comparing, problem solving, and creativity. They will be explained in the following paragraphs.

To understand the whole text, the students need to understand the words, grammar, and the idea of the text. In listing task, they are asked to list the words, grammar, and the idea that they can identify in the text. The list will help them in understanding the text. After listing them, the students will arrange them to make interpretation of the text. McWhorter (1986:4-7) suggests that the words listed are accompanied by the contexts, so that the meaning can be identified easily. Moreover, they can be arranged correctly, to find the idea, either the main or supporting ideas. This task can be done through outlining.

The next task is finding the similarities and differences of the language aspects found in the text to understand it. For example, understanding a word is by finding the synonym and antonym in the text, interpreting a sentence by finding the identical or contrast sentence within the text, and understanding idea by comparing the main idea and supporting ideas.

Problem solving task can be done by asking the students to find their problems themselves in doing the

immediate task. Then, they will try to solve them with the teacher's help. After finding and solving the problems in their group, they tell their experience in solving the problems to the other groups. At the end of the discussion, every group will try to understand the text and can make conclusion.

The last task is to understand the text individually. In the final period of the task, the students may work in group if they still find difficulties or they can share their experience each other. The task may be followed by the other creative tasks, which are important in understanding the text. The students in this period may move to the other groups to get information.

Richard and Theodere (2001) quote Nunan's suggestion that syllabus in TBL should involve two kinds of tasks, real world tasks and pedagogic tasks. The real world tasks are designed to develop the tasks important for a need analysis. So doing the tasks will be beneficial for the students' lives, for example the need in using the telephone. The pedagogic tasks were the tasks which are given based on the Psycholinguistic research on language acquisition, for example, a gap information task.

They also quote Pica and Falodun (1993) who divided the tasks into jigsaw, information gap, problem solving, decision making, and opinion exchange. In jigsaw task the students in group are given some parts of information written in some paragraphs. Each group has different parts of information. After understanding the information in each group, they will find the continuation from the other groups. Finally the class can arrange the paragraphs correctly by arranging the information. Different from that, in information gap, a group of students has important information, while the others have supported information. They will negotiate to find information in completing the

task. In problem solving task a group is given a paragraph containing problem and the others are given the paragraphs containing the solution. The class will find the problems and the solution through group discussion and classroom discussion. In decision making, the task given to each group is followed by some possible answers. The students in each group will find the correct answer after understanding the text. Finally, the opinion exchange task is the task to understand about one idea of the text. Each group will share their idea of the text. In this case they may agree or disagree about the idea. It is also stated by Richards and Theodere (2001) that the task also include restating, paraphrasing, and understanding paralinguistic features, guessing linguistic features and the context.

As described above, English teaching can be done attractively. The students can apply various kinds of tasks to make them active in learning. All of the tasks described above can be applied to the Junior or Senior High School students. The task can be given alternately to avoid boring. The students who always do the same task repeatedly may be bored, so the lesson may become uninteresting. The level of the task should be considered by the teacher by using curriculum as the guide.

## **6. Task-Based Learning (TBL)**

TBL is a task-based learning approach in which the task functions as the center of learning. Longman in Longman *Teaching Tips*, (accessed on February 15, 2007) states that the task can include any language aspects (structure, function, vocabulary, and other communicative aspects). They suggest that the teacher's role in this approach is an informant during the task. If the lesson is focused on the language, the teacher will be the informant. Furthermore, the lesson is proposed to accomplish the task. Then,

the aspects of the language will be learned depend on the students' need when they are engaged in the task (Willis, 2004).

The task becomes the centre of learning because learning is done through the task. The students can get the language skills by doing the task themselves. If they are not involved in the activities, they will get nothing in learning. Furthermore, when they find difficulties in doing the task they can ask the teacher. Thus, the students will study from the teacher based on the difficulties they find during the lesson. On the other hand the teacher does not explain the lesson in general. She or he will explain to whom need the explanation or just answer whenever asked to answer.

#### **7. Advantages and Disadvantages of Task-Based Learning**

Since the task becomes the centre of learning, the students should be active in this class. They may obtain the objectives if they work, but if they are passive they may not gain them. Therefore, it will be advantageous to make the lesson more efficient and effective.

However, making the students active in English class is a hard work. The teacher must be creative to select appropriate tasks and the ways to make the students seriously engaged in the tasks.

Frost (2004) points out that TBL is advantageous to make the students confident, the classroom natural, and the student produce unlimited languages, to give the students occasion to communicate with friends in class and enjoy the class. On the contrary, Hatip (2005:8-9) lists some weaknesses of TBL; 1) the students may not know the teaching purposes, 2) the classroom activities need the students' individual involvement, 3) the students tend to translate when they do not understand English, 4) the students tend to use Indonesian or body

language, 5) the students tend to understand word to word and be unaware of the context, and 6) the students are unaware of language systems because of the limited time.

Considering the importance and weaknesses of TBL, an English teacher is recommended to be creative to apply the model of learning that may gain efficiency and effectiveness of teaching. The application should be adapted with the situation and condition that may contribute for obtaining teaching objectives.

#### **8. Phases of Task-Based Learning**

The idea of TBL was first popularized by Prabhu (1987) as expressed by Harmer (2001:86). He argued that the students would learn language if they were thinking about a nonlinguistic problem. They are given a task they have to perform or the problem they have to solve. Furthermore, Harmer (2001:86) stresses that after the students have completed the task, they together with the teacher discuss the language that was used, make correction, and adjustment.

Nunan and Lamb (1999) suggest teachers to apply 5 phases in carrying out the task. They are Building control of the field task, Modeling, Joint construction, and Independent construction. The teacher first provides the students with background content knowledge needed to carry out the tasks. The knowledge includes the key vocabulary and grammatical structure related to the topic. At the stage of modeling, the native speaker models of interaction are presented to the students. The third stage is Joint construction; The students learn language systems. Finally, Independent construction is the stage in which the students read individually the text and try to answer the questions.

Willis (2004) then divides the classroom activities into three phases, pre task, task, and the analysis of the

students' need. In the pre task phase, the teacher introduces the topic will be studied and the way the students do the task with their group. Then in the task period they will do the task as introduced by the teacher in group. In this period, they will read, plan, and report what they have discussed. In the last period, the students will analyze what they have got in group through class discussion and then each student individually will read the material and ask some questions when they find some problems. Finally, the teacher will ask the students individually in written form or orally.

Similar with the phases proposed by Willis, Astika (2007:51) has divided task activities into three phases. They are pre-task, task circle, and language focus. Here, he uses the term 'language focus' instead of the students' need. It is shown that need analysis has become clearer, in this case, the language focus in every meeting. All students will learn the same language systems at any time they learn.

From the three ideas above, Nunan's idea is quite clear and applicable for teaching reading at Senior High School. The teacher may adapt the phases by considering the students situation and condition.

### **C. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

As discussed in Chapter II, learning English at Senior High School is aimed at making students competent in English. To be competent in English the students need to be exposed to English very frequently, as called as English environment, for example they listen to English, speak English, read, and write English.

However involving the students in such activities is difficult to do if they are passive. The teacher will work hard in changing their habit, so that they will be accustomed to listening, speaking, reading, and writing English. The effort can be

done by involving the students in the classroom interaction.

The students' involvement in learning English includes their visual involvement, for example when they watch media used by teacher or when they read. When the teacher asks the students a question and responds to it, or when they discuss the material and are asked to present it, in this case they have been involved in speaking; The movement of the students can be involved for example by asking them to point out a correct sentence in front of the classroom.

In the theory of task-based learning, the students are active in gaining the purpose of teaching reading. The teacher functions as a facilitator that can help the students whenever they needed. In other words, the teacher will provide the situation that facilitates the students to be involved in various activities as mentioned before, so that teaching reading will be effective.

Therefore, the teacher is suggested to apply this model as one alternative approach in teaching reading. The activities are modified from Nunan and Lamb (1999) see appendix 1.

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Appendix 1

**MANAGING THE STUDENTS' INTERACTION IN TEACHING READING  
THROUGH TASK-BASED LEARNING**

Theme	: Earthquake
Kind of Text	: Recount Text
Skill	: Reading

a. Preparation

In this preparation step, the teacher makes a course design of teaching reading by following the principle of task-based learning approach. Having finished it, she or he will prepare some media related to the topic, for example the picture of the situation during and after the earthquake.

b. Learning Procedures

The students will follow three stages of learning, pre, whilst, and post learning activities.

1) Pre-activities

some pictures are shown to all students followed by some questions as follows:

What picture is it?

Do you have an experience about earthquake?

Where were you at that time?

2) Whilst Activities

The activities include:

- a) The students are divided into small group of four, and given the following questions to practice in group:

Have you got unforgotten experience with the earthquake? When and where?

Can you tell what happened to you?

What did you do to save yourself and your family?

What did you feel at that time?

- b) Building control of the field task

Each group practice questioning and answering the above questions with all members of the group. Every student writes the answers. Then, the teacher provides them with background content knowledge needed to carry out the tasks. The knowledge includes the key vocabulary and grammatical structure related to earthquake, (noun, adjective, verb, and adverb). In this stage, the pictures are given to each group followed by the sentences explaining the pictures, so that the students can guess the meaning.

- c) Modeling

At this stage, the native speaker models of interaction are presented to the students; Teacher tells her experience about earthquake, first by showing how she opens the story, telling what happened to her and her family, and ending the story with the closing sentences. Then she or he introduces the opening story as orientation, what happened to her/him as events, and the closing story as reorientation. Finally, the students together with the teacher find orientation, events, and reorientation of the story.

- d) Joint construction

The students then practice finding (generic structure) which includes orientation, events, and reorientation of their experience. In this stage, every one in each group asks about their friends' experience and finds the generic structure

collaboratively with the teacher by following the examples. They also find the bad and funny experience about earthquake.

e) Independent construction

The students read individually the text about Mike's experience found in the text book, then answer some questions about the text.

3) Post Activities

This stage includes two processes, reflection and evaluation. In the reflection, the students will tell about what they like in the lesson or what they can get from the lesson. Then, they will answer some questions about vocabularies, language feature, and generic structure).