

Defining Reading Skills and Strategies in Formulating a Model for Teaching Reading in Indonesian Context

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Abstract

In order to formulate a suitable and effective model for teaching reading in Indonesian context there are two important things that need to be considered, they are; a clear definition of what reading is which leads to the differences between reading skills and strategies and also a discussion on the differences between reading in first language, second language and foreign language. A comprehensive definition of reading will be able to answer questions on what fluent readers do when they read, what process are used by fluent readers and how do these process work together to build meaning. The answer to the questions above will also lead to the identification of reading skills. Reading strategies on the other hand, is another different concept that should be clarified when someone intended to make scientific consideration in making decision on what reading skills and strategies are needed by their students. After deciding what reading skills and strategies are important, the way how to teach them is also an important issue that should be addressed. The position of English as a foreign language in Indonesia is seen as obstacle for students and it needs special attention. As compared to reading in foreign language, there has been a wide range of literature on the comparison between reading in first and second language. It would be beneficial to discuss reading in foreign language since it will shed ideas on how to teach reading in Indonesian context. Therefore, this article will try to discuss a comprehensive definition of reading, reading skills and strategies and also discuss important point on reading in first, second and foreign language. Finally, the writer will purpose a model for teaching reading which is expected to be suitable for Indonesian students.

Introduction

The rapid development of technology and communication and the advent of internet which result in a sheer volume of information available make reading become more important than ever before. In order to be successful in life, modern society must be good readers. It is possible to say that reading skills are not a guarantee for someone's success but success will be harder to achieve without becoming a skilled readers. The beginning of this century was marked as a globalization era where people were no longer concerned with boundaries of countries. People from all parts of the world come into contacts to do business, to exchange information, to find better education, to visit other places for recreational reasons and many people also move to other countries for many reasons. The rise of English as a global language makes this process a lot easier. People use English to interact in globalization era and it had a major impact on school systems around the world and the demand of reading in second or foreign language.

The notion of "reading" seems very easy to understand and some people never realize the complex process that happens when they read. At certain situation, people unconsciously read things. They read instruction in an airport or on the street or they read information about a product they plan to buy in a supermarket. Other people, on the other hand, consciously read thing like when they read a chapter of a book instructed by teacher or an employee reading a document for job presentation. What most people are not aware of is what happen when they read and what do skilled readers do when they read. When those questions are answered, it is possible to describe the general notion of reading and identify skills used in reading.

Most research conducted to investigate "reading" is actually related in reading in first language. Research findings in first language can somehow be related to second and foreign

language reading and it can also be used as a consideration in teaching reading in second and foreign language context. However, the limitation of opportunities to use English or to read outside the classroom in foreign setting as compared to second language setting is a factor to be taken into consideration in teaching reading in foreign context like in Indonesia. Classroom as the only opportunity for students to actually “read” should be used optimally by teachers to teach reading skills and strategies explicitly. Providing sufficient practices to use reading strategies is also imperative since it will help students to eventually transform strategies to skills. In order to do that a model for teaching reading is needed as a guideline for instructors and teachers to teach reading effectively in foreign context, in this case Indonesian context. Therefore this article will describe a model for teaching reading after defining the concept of reading, reading skills and strategies and reading in first, second and foreign language.

Discussion

Defining Reading

Uncovering the nature of reading is important but it is quite difficult. It is important in a sense that it will contribute to the process of making decision about what to teach, how to teach, how to assess and other important things related to the teaching of reading itself. It is difficult due the fact that there is a complex process happen when someone read and the fact that people actually read for many different purposes. Different kinds of text available around peoples’ life make them read in different ways and have different purposes.

There are six major purposes of reading in academic settings as explained by Grabe (2010: 8). These different purposes of reading create a different process that people undergo when they read and it should be examined prior to defining what reading is. People read to search for information. When this happens, the process that people are involved in is called scanning and skimming and this is carried out in high speed. People also read to learn which mostly happen in academic and professional setting. When people read to learn, the process is emphasized on the reader since they are expected to remember main ideas and supporting ideas. They organized that information in a frame and they have to connect the new information from the text with the already existed information in the readers’ long term memory in order to be able to recall the information. Reading to learn happens in slower speed with shorter text segment. People also read to integrate information from multiple texts. This purpose of reading involves a more complex process since the readers are expected to organize similar and different ideas from each text and create their own organizing frame that best describe all texts. An increased complexity or process happens when people read to evaluate critique and use information. They are asked to make decision on what aspects of the text are important, persuasive or controversial then relate it to not only their prior knowledge but also other related text and finally give respond to the text that shows readers’ attitude, emotional responses, interests and preferences. Finally, people read for comprehension and it is the most common purpose of reading. General comprehension process provides a foundation for other reading purpose and it is a type of reading that happens automatically as a result of constant practices.

The description on purposes of reading above and the process, in which reading happens, lead to the definition of reading itself. It makes sense that reading is understood as a complex combination of processes as explained above and as described by Grabe (2010: 140). These processes include, first, a rapid and efficient process. Reading is an efficient process because of the various processing skills that work together smoothly and also because of the reading rate which is approximately that people read for about 250-300 words per minute. It is also a rapid process due to the rapid and automatic process of word recognition, meaning formation, comprehension, critical evaluation and linkages to prior knowledge that happen when people read. Reading is also a comprehension process when people try to understand the messages that the writer convey in the text. Comprehension is the central goal of reading and all cognitive processing involved in reading is related to this fundamental goal. Reading is an interactive process since the text provides information that the writer wants the reader to know

and the reader in the process of constructing meaning related the text to their prior knowledge. Reading is also a strategic process in a way that readers use different strategies to anticipate the text. Reading is flexible, purposeful, evaluative and learning process. Finally, reading is a linguistic process where it linguistic knowledge (morphology, syntax and semantic) is required.

Defining Reading Skills and Strategies

The description of process that happens when people read give information on what fluent readers do when they read and it also state implicitly what skills are needed to be able to become fluent readers and what strategies are used by fluent readers when they encounter problems. The context where reading happens in first language, second language or foreign language is another important discussion to be addressed when someone plans to teach reading.

What is reading skill and what is reading strategy?

Sometimes the term skill and strategies are used synonymous and sometimes they are used to describe complementary relation. Both assumptions about skill and strategies show that the two terms are related. Afflerbach (2008: 366) clarified that skill is associates with proficiency of a complex act and strategy is associated with a conscious and systematic plan. Nunan (2003: 77) also make distinction between strategy and skill when he stated that strategies are conscious actions that learners take to achieve a desired goals or objectives, while a skill is a strategy that has become automatic. Therefore, it is possible to say that strategies are actions that readers do consciously to solve problems when they read and it becomes skill when they do it automatically. For example, using context clues to guess the meaning of an unknown word can be both recognized as skills and strategies. The first time readers use context to guess the meaning of difficult word, they are using reading strategies since they plan the action consciously to figure out a meaning of a word by doing something. After sufficient practices on using context clues the student can finally use context clues automatically in guessing the meaning of a word without any systematic planning of how to use context clues. Transforming strategies into skill is possible when teacher teach reading strategies explicitly and provide sufficient practice in using reading strategies outside and inside classroom.

After clarifying the differences between strategies and skills, it is also important to examine what reading skills should the student have in order to become fluent reader. There are several terms used to classify reading skills. Van Dijk in Alderson (2000: 9) classify reading skills into micro processes which deals with local, phrase by phrase understanding and macro processes which deals with global understanding. Grabe (2010: 21) identify reading skills into lower level processes which include word recognition, syntactic parsing and meaning encoding and higher level processing which includes text model formation, situation model building, inferencing, executive control processing and strategic processing. Van Dijk and Grabe were referring to skill when they explain the process of reading as they call it micro-macro processes and lower- higher level processes. Nuttall (1982: 65&80) stated explicitly that reading skills are classified into word attack skills as skills to understand word and phrases and text attack skills as skills used to understand text for global understanding.

Other experts have also attempted to examine reading skills and proposed taxonomy to explain it. There are also several taxonomies that had been proposed by different expert. Munby's taxonomy has been one of the most influential one as explained by Alderson (2000: 10) This taxonomy includes: recognizing the script of a language; understanding explicitly and implicitly stated information; understanding conceptual meaning; understanding relation within sentence; understanding lexical and grammatical cohesion devise; distinguishing main ideas and details; using basic reference skills; skimming and scanning.

Teaching Reading Skills and Strategies in Foreign Language Setting

What have been discussed in a lot of research findings about reading were related to reading in first language. Reading in second and foreign language are not as much based on research finding as it is in reading in first language. There are many differences between L2, L2

and FL reading, however, it is still possible to relate each items in terms of global understanding. As explained by Grabe (2010: 1) one of the most generalizable aspects between L1, L2 is the basic comprehension process and what most likely differentiated them is the local processing details. Pointing out important differences which have direct implication to teaching will also be beneficial.

One obvious difference between L1, L2 and FL is the amount of time devoted to reading in each setting. L1 readers read many different texts with different purposes in a very natural ways. Reading will eventually become an automatic process as the result of a lot of time devoted to unlimited amount of reading. L2 readers, as compared to FL have more opportunity to read since they will be able to find reasons to read outside the classroom as a means to develop automaticity in reading. FL readers have a limited opportunity to develop automaticity since classroom the only meaningful opportunity where they are exposed to reading. Grabe (2010: 28) stated that automatic process in reading is the outcome of thousands of hours of meaningful input. It is something natural that most of FL readers are struggling and consider reading is difficult and frustrating to most of them considering the amount of time they spend reading. One direct implication for teaching is that it is of an utmost important that students are provided with opportunity to read not only in the classroom but also outside the classroom. It is also necessary that students are provided with activities or tasks to read outside classroom as a means of practice to develop reading abilities. When it comes to the teaching of skills and strategies, what is important is to design task and activities to transform strategies into skills.

Teaching reading skills and strategies in foreign setting is also challenging. One of the most important issues to be taken into account is the explicit teaching of reading skills and strategies. A number of researches have proven that explicit teaching of reading skills and strategies improved comprehension, Alexander in Aebersold (1990; 90). The writer herself had conducted an experimental research that also resulted in an improved comprehension when reading skills and strategies are taught explicitly especially when a suitable instructional framework is used, Melani (2008; 70). The use of suitable instructional framework is highly recommended when instructors wish to teach reading skill and strategies explicitly. This framework should be able to allow instructor to introduce skill and strategies explicitly by naming certain skill and strategies, modelling the use of skills and strategies and providing activities to help students experiencing the use of the skills and strategies Chamot (1993:43). The need to teach reading skills and strategies effectively and the need to provide activities for students to read outside the classroom inspired the writer to formulate a model for teaching reading in Indonesian context (foreign setting).

A Model for Teaching Reading in Indonesian Context

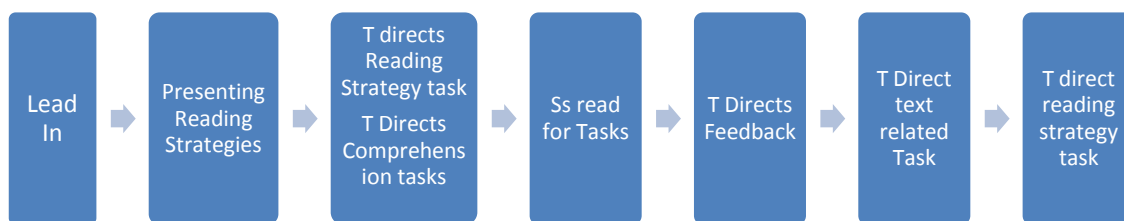
A basic methodological model for teaching receptive skills proposed by Harmer (2010: 271) is a suitable model to be used in teaching reading skills since it integrated skill and language work or tasks. In this model, teaching reading starts with the first procedure that is lead in. This is the stage where students' background knowledge is activated as an attempt to engage students with the topic. It is the responsibility of the teacher to provoke their students to relate information they already have with the new information they about to read. When this is done, students can make prediction of what the text will be about and will be able to challenge them to find out whether their prediction is correct or not while they read and they will finally be able to be fully engaged with the text. This can be done by using pictures, giving some questions or even interesting activities. This stage is followed with a stage where the teacher set some comprehension task. Then it is followed with the stage where students read for the task that had been designed previously. Teacher direct feedback is the next stage that should be done. Here the teacher may suggest students to discuss the answer in pairs or small group. This stage may be directly followed with teacher text related task as follow up activities or repeat the comprehension task again for a more detailed comprehension.

This model is not specifically designed to teach reading skill and strategies explicitly. A modification of this model to better suit the explicit teaching of reading skills and strategies is

required. Chamot (1993:43) stressed that the important component to teach skill and strategies are introducing, modelling and practising the strategies. The modification of model proposed by Harmer will be an insertion of component by Chamot in teaching skills and strategies explicitly. Therefore, there are some modifications.

First, in the lead in stage, reading strategies should be introduced by identifying how students solve problems related to certain strategies. After lead in, the next stage should be the presentation stage where the teacher explicitly teaches strategies. In this phase, reading strategies are explicitly modeled, named and explained. Presentation of reading strategies is most effective when it is explicit, that is when the strategies taught are given names and the students are told the reasons for using the strategies. Explicit instruction should also include suggestion about the tasks that the strategy help to accomplish and the mental processes associated with the use of the strategies. The last modification component is practicing. It is also important to add task of using strategies inside and outside classroom. In designing task for outside classroom, it is important that teacher encourage students to use strategies.

The model for teaching reading skill and strategies is explained in the figure bellow:



Conclusion

Defining “reading” gives some insight on what happen when people read and on the process that people involved in when they read. It also leads to what skills are needed to be able to be fluent readers. Clarification on the differences between reading skills and strategies and the discussion on reading in first, second and foreign language provide important information on what to teach and how to teach reading in foreign language. The accumulated information on the these discussion is the bases on formulating a model for teaching reading in Indonesian context and hopefully this model will be beneficial and applicable.

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