

QAR : A Strategy for Teaching Reading Comprehension at Senior High Schools

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Teaching students strategies for answering questions is an important part of comprehension instruction. The failure of students in comprehending the text was caused of misunderstanding the questions and how it relates to the answer. QAR is a reading comprehension strategy applicable to use with both fiction and nonfiction texts. It is a valuable skill for all students to obtain, especially struggling readers. QAR assists students in relating prior knowledge to text information. It becomes a conscious process students actively engage in when reading texts, especially difficult reading selections. With this strategy, students become aware of the relationships between questions and answers. Students will begin to understand where the answers come from and thus are better able to answer the questions correctly. This paper reveals an alternative model for teaching reading comprehension using QAR strategy. Hopefully, it will be useful for English teachers who are training students to read and face the implementation of Curriculum 2013 at senior high schools.

Keywords: *Question and answer relationship, reading comprehension, strategy*

Introduction

Questioning is one of the most important dimensions of teaching learning process because it gives teachers a chance to find out whether students understand the content the text and it allows students to monitor their comprehension (Gatlis, 2002).

In teaching reading, there are several types of questions that teachers should focus on reading cycles (before, during and after reading a text). Lower order questions only test the students knowledge from the text. They just find the answers from the text easily. Meanwhile, higher order questions tend to encourage students to think more deeply and beyond about a concept or give reasons for the answers. Therefore, reading instruction should include both types of questions with an emphasis on higher order questions.

One of the problems found the reading class was low level of students' reading proficiency. There are many reasons for this; lacks of vocabularies, a large class size, limited reading strategies and monotonous reading teaching methods. The English teachers generally have their students read a passage and translate word for word into Indonesian language, ask them to comprehension exercises, and ask them to identify responses as "True or False" or multiple choice without explicitly teaching them what strategies should be used. In short, teaching reading in schools seemed to fail to provide students with the skills that they actually need.

The implementation of Curriculum 2013 with the scientific approach, consisted of *observing, questioning, experimenting, associating, and communicating*, challenge the English teachers to provide the students with critical thinking and high order thinking skills (HOTS). One way to train students to comprehend the text is by implementing question-answer relationship.

Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is a process in which the reader constructs meaning using as the building materials the information on the printed page and the knowledge stored in the reader's head. To teach comprehension effectively, we need to understand what the process involves. Reading is no longer seen as a static process and reader is not merely a passive one. Reading is seen as a process of constructing meaning through a dynamic interaction among the reader, the text and the context of reading situation (Wixon, 1987). Meaning is actively created in the readers' mind as a result of his/her prior knowledge and information given in the text. Based on the ideas above, it is clear that reading involves comprehension, and successful comprehension depends on the reader, the text and the reading context.

Research has shown that the prior knowledge that a reader has about the topic helps him to understand a text better. What does this mean for the teacher in the class? Wong (2004) clarifies that there are three factors that must be considered in teaching reading comprehension. First, building prior knowledge is an important aspect of teaching comprehension. Students may have knowledge, but they may not know how to link it to the topic. The teacher has to think of ways to provide the background knowledge so that students can make the necessary links. Then, the teacher can help students by providing for successful reading lesson. The text is another factor to consider. The teacher needs to consider types of text she has chosen for reading. Comprehension can be affected by the writer and the way she writes. The last factor to consider is the reading context, involving the setting, the task set and the purpose of reading. For the teacher, then, developing

conducive setting for reading lessons can aid students' understanding. Setting questions for written work. During instruction, setting the purpose of reading at the beginning the lesson is a good way focusing students' reading and encouraging them to develop skills like predicting, skimming, scanning, locating the main idea, and details within the reading lesson.

Moreover, The RAND Reading Study Group (2002) noted that reading comprehension involves four components: the reader, the text, the activity, and the situational context. The first three essential components—the reader, the text, and the task—occur within the fourth component of reading comprehension—the situational context. The *reader* is the one doing the comprehending, and the *text* is the reading material (e.g., stories, nonfiction selections, etc.). The *activity* refers to what kind of comprehension task, skill, strategy, or concept the reader is attempting to perform (e.g., discovering the author's main idea, understanding a sequence of events, thinking about a character's intent in a story, etc.).

In implicating the factors above, teachers must include explicit reading strategies as an integral element of their instructional plans. They should integrate effective comprehension strategies before, during and after reading.

Pre-reading prepares students for learning by activating their prior knowledge. Pre-reading activities can benefit those whose background knowledge, command of key concepts and vocabulary may be insufficient. In addition, pre-reading activities help students focus attention on what is most important... Pre-reading strategies often used by proficient-level readers involve making connections, generating questions and determining important concepts...

During-reading activities prompt students to visualize, make inferences and monitor their comprehension. . . Using during-reading activities, the teacher can help students prioritize what is most essential and connect this information in a meaningful and organized way.

After-reading activities deepen understanding, helping students summarize and understand what they read. . . [these activities] go beyond merely identifying what was read and assist students with integrating new learning with previous knowledge"

Question-Answer Relationship

QAR is a research-based method and language framework developed by Taffy Raphael (1986) for enhancing students' ability to talk about and answer comprehension questions. Then, Raphael & Au (2004) clarified question-answer relationships as a taxonomy that categories comprehension questions based on where their answers can be found. According to the taxonomy there are four categories: "*Right There*," "*Think and Search*," "*Author and Me*," and "*On My Own*." "Right There" and "Think and Search" questions can be found directly in the text, in one location or in multiple places across the text, respectively. "Author and Me" and "On My Own" questions require more thinking, as readers must use the text to make inferences or use the information from their heads entirely.

Moreover, Conner (2006) highlights question-answer relationship (QAR) as a reading strategy in which students categorize comprehension question according to where they get information they need to answer each question. The students are asked to identify whether the information they use to answer the questions about the text is textually explicit or implicit information.

QAR helps students understand that answers come from one of two main sources; in the text and in my head. These sources are further divided into four *QAR categories*; *Right There*, *Think and Search*, *On My Own*, and *Author and Me*. This language of QAR is introduced through analyzing the differences between questions with answers sources in the text, and those with answer sources coming from students own background knowledge or experiences (Raphael & Au, 2005). The four categories of questions are examined as follows:

Right There Questions (in the book): Literal questions whose answers can be found in the text. Often the words used in the question are the same words found in the text e.g. characters names, setting etc. The answer is in one sentence of the text: the question and answer usually have the same wording. Answers usually are one-word or short-phrase responses. There is usually only one right answer to Right There questions. Some examples of phrases used for Right There questions: Who is...? e.g. *Who is the main character?* Where is...? What is...? When is...? How many...? When did...?

Think and Search Questions (in the book): Answers are gathered from several parts of the text and put together to make meaning. The question and answer have different wordings. Answers are usually short answers. Some examples of phrases used for Think and Search questions: For what reason...? How did...? e.g. *How did the character return home?* Why was...? What caused...?

Author and Me (in my head): These questions are based on information provided in the text but the student is required to relate it to their own experience. Although the answer does not lie directly in the text, the student must have read it in order to answer the question.

They must use their prior knowledge to answer these types of questions. They must synthesize the text to fully understand the question. Some examples of phrases used for Author and Me questions: "Would you...?" e.g. *Would you have made the same choice the character made? Which character...? Did you agree with...? What did you think of...?*

On My Own (in my head): These questions do not require the student to have read the passage but he/she must use their background or prior knowledge to answer the question.

They require inferential and evaluative thinking. Answers do not require information from the text but do require that students make some type of judgment about or relate to the topic of the text. Some examples of phrases used for On My Own questions: "Do you know...?" e.g. *Do you know what it's like to feel jealousy? Have you ever...? Would you ever...? What would you do if.....*

From above information, it could said that question and answer relationship is a reading strategy utilizing the relationship between questions and answers to those questions are found, text explicit (answer stated in a single sentence), text explicit (answers implied by information in two or more sentences and scriptal (answers not found in the text at all, but part of readers, background knowledge, answers also referred to as right there, think and search, author and me, and on my own.

The Benefits of Question-Answer Relationship

The experts and researchers in teaching reading such as Raphael (1986), Sorrell (1996), Raphael & Au (2005) and Rothong (2013), gave some reasons why the reading instruction based on QAR and reading strategies are effective in developing comprehension. QAR strategy helps students make connections between information in the selection and their prior knowledge. Reading comprehension increases with the use of this strategy because readers are asked to think at various levels of cognitive processing. The strategy encourages the reader to think about the selection from four perspectives: entering the text, moving through the text, moving beyond the text, and carrying on a mental dialogue with the author. Students who use this strategy learn to recognize the different types of thinking needed when answering questions. Another benefit of the QAR strategy is that students can learn to ask the four different types of questions, and the questioning process can be transferred from teacher to learner. This allows students to become independent strategic readers by formulating their own questions while reading. (Raphael, 1986)

QAR has been successful in improving readers' comprehension skills and performance with answering questions based on a text. The strategy assists students with reading comprehension difficulties since it engages the student in reading and examining the material as well as questioning and integrating information (Sorrell, 1996).

Raphael & Au (2005) clarifies the benefits of implementation of QAR strategy in teaching reading. They stated that QAR:

- explicitly shows the relationship between questions and answers
- categorizes different levels and types of questions.
- helps students to analyze, comprehend, and respond to the text concept
- helps refute the common misconception held by the students that texts contain all of the answers

Furthermore, Rothong (2013) discussed more deeply. She stated that implementing the QAR strategy was very effective because:

Students set purposes before, during and after reading and this make the task meaningful for them.

QAR helped students become active readers since they interacted with the text all the time. For example, before-reading questions or on my own activated specific and general knowledge. During reading questions or right there, think & search and author & me facilitated students to monitor level of comprehension and apply reading strategies to answer questions. After reading questions or think & search and on my own encouraged students to respond, make connection, analyze ideas, assess literal and inpreive comprehension or extend comprehension.

Students developed higher level of comprehension as QAR provided students with different level of thinking.

A Suggested Model of Teaching Reading using QAR

English Teachers are challenged with implementing effective comprehension strategy instruction including question-answering strategies. Teachers who frame comprehension instruction around the QAR taxonomy also provide students with skills that include scanning, using context clues, text organization, summarization, synthesis, visualization, and making predictions, inferences, and connections during the reading process.

QAR is also most effective when initially applied in a group setting allowing students to practice and work collaboratively with peers in order to gain a better understanding of the category of questions and

answers in relation to the sample read. The teacher provides students with immediate feedback. Having completed the task in groups, students proceed to completing the assigned task independently.

Taffy Raphael, who developed QAR, suggested the following lesson progression for teaching the strategy (2004).

Phase I: Setting the Purpose

(Learning QAR Basic Categories)

When introducing QAR, start with short, narrative reading texts. Ensure that students are able to identify and write questions. Introduce the two levels of questions, In the Text and In My Head, and explain that they tell where students can find the answers to questions. Next, introduce the two types of questions at each level. Model an example of each type of question, thinking out loud so students can "see" your thought process as you determine the relationships.

Phase II: Modeling/Thinking Aloud

(Teacher does, Students observe)

When students have a clear picture of the differences between two main QAR categories ; *in the text and in my head*. Then, generate one of each of the four types of questions and provide the answer to the questions. Have students categorize the question-answer relationships and explain their thought processes. This part of the process can be easier for students if they begin by working in cooperative groups and then transition to working independently after they show a thorough understanding of this strategy. In cooperative groups, have students read a short passage (50-75 words) and give them one of each type of question. Have each group answer the questions and categorize the question-answer relationships, explaining their thought processes. Provide each group with immediate feedback.

Phase III: Scaffolding

(Teacher does, students help)

After students have been introduced to the QAR concepts, provide them with several 75-100 word reading passages and a question and answer for each passage. Have students, individually or in cooperative groups, read each passage, identify the question-answer relationships, and explain their thinking. Ask, "Why do the questions represent one question-answer relationship and not another?" Continue to give students immediate feedback.

Phase IV: Coaching/collaborative Practice

(Students do, teacher helps)

As students become proficient with this strategy, use more expository and functional texts. Provide them with a 150-600 word reading passage divided into four sections. Give students one of each type of question for each section. Have students answer each question, identify the question-answer relationship, and justify their thinking. After they have mastered this, present a longer reading passage and in small cooperative groups have students write one of each of the four types of questions. Have each group share its questions. Ask the other groups to answer the questions, categorize each question-answer relationship, and explain their thinking.

Phase V : Independent Practice

(Opportunity for self-assessment)

Finally, assign a reading passage and have students independently write four questions, one of each type. Direct students to exchange questions with a partner, answer each question, and categorize the question-answer relationships.

Conclusion

The question-answer relationship (QAR) is a reading comprehension strategy developed to clarify how students approach the task of reading text and answering questions. It also helps students understand the different types of questions. By learning that the answers to some questions are "Right There" in the text, that some answers require a reader to "Think and Search," and that some answers can only be answered "On My Own," students recognize that they must first consider the question before developing an answer. By following the framework of QAR in reading instruction, students will have critical thinking and high order thinking skills.

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