
USING CRITICAL READING STRATEGIES; ONE WAY FOR ASSESSING STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION

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Abstract

Assessment is the evaluation for the students' ability in one material or one subject of learning in order to know how far the students understand the material are, and it needs an authentic one to get the best result of the students' learning. Many assessment have been done in assessing students' reading comprehension, meanwhile not all assessment is appropriate to the students' need. Moreover, in assessing students' reading comprehension, an authentic assessment can be in the real world or the real context for their living and their environment. An Authentic Task is an assignment given to students designed to assess their ability to apply standard-driven knowledge and skills to real-world challenges. One way to assess students' reading comprehension can be done by using Critical Reading Strategies. It is known that the strategy help the students in comprehending the contents of the text well. By applying the strategies, the students will be more comprehend about the text. It is realized that it is difficult for the students to use it, meanwhile it is proved that it makes the students understand the text well. Thus, it can be concluded that the students' reading comprehension can be evaluated by using Critical Reading Strategies, and it is proved that it has good result.

Keywords: *Critical Reading Strategies, Evaluating, Authentic Assessment, and Reading Comprehension.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is a receptive skill in which the readers try to understand the written texts. In understanding the text, the readers try to take the information from the texts; they do communication and interpretation from what they have read. To interpret the texts, the readers need to comprehend the texts, and to comprehend the texts the readers or learners must know the suitable strategies or techniques that should be applied in their reading activities. Moreover, to help the students or learners in understanding texts, the lecturers must choose the suitable techniques, methods, or strategies in teaching reading comprehension; then, appropriate kinds of assessment must also be considered in order to evaluate students' reading comprehension well.

When the readers, in this case the students of English Department, try to get the messages written by the writers, they should be able to read and comprehend English text well, because they have learned English for more than nine years. In fact, the learners still got difficulties in understanding English texts. There are some reasons for the problems. The first is the difficulties to understand the words, it means that the students got problems in vocabularies. Bad habit in reading is also another problem of getting difficult to understand the texts. Another problem is inappropriate of reading strategies; using bad reading strategies will make the students are getting difficult to understand the texts and using various reading strategies will help them enriching their reading comprehension (Learning data base, 2010). The last problem is inappropriate assessment used to assess students' performance in reading comprehension, because appropriate reading assessment will make the teacher know whether the students understand or not to what they read (Kerlinger, et.al, 2007).

The last problem is interested to be solved by the teachers in order to evaluate what must be evaluated in reading comprehension. It is the reason for choosing reading assessment as the topic in this article. The writer realizes that assessment is one important aspect in learning process, and it needs the good assessment that can assess their reading comprehension appropriately.

Using or making appropriate reading assessments is needed. Assessment is done to collect the data about students' reading comprehension. Right assessment will help the students'

achievement evaluated well. Moreover, low ability of the students in reading comprehension also can be caused of inappropriate assessment used. The assessment can be formative and summative assessment. Formative assessment is done in evaluating all of learning process of reading comprehension, whereas summative assessment is usually done at the end of semester to evaluate students' achievement of the reading material in one semester. In doing reading assessment, it can be done by using performance test, reading tasks, and others.

The issue of reading assessment is interested to be known, whether the assessment of reading comprehension by using multiple choice and essay test correlated significances to students' reading comprehension. It will be usefull for determining the correct assessment given to the students in reading comprehension. Using reading strategies can be used for assessing students' reading comprehension.

Based on the reasons, the writer chose reading strategies to assess students' reading comprehension. As known that, reading strategies will help the readers in understanding well and be good understanding in reading texts (Celce-Murcia, 2001: 191 – 192); moreover in this case the writer used reading strategies to assess students' reading comprehension. The reading strategy used is Critical Reading Strategies. It is chosen because there are some findings show that the Critical Reading Strategies gives a significant effect to some learning activities (Meraj and Maryam Talebi, 2015; Hosseini, 2012; and Akin et al, 2015). As known that there are many reading strategies in Critical Reading Strategies that can be used to gain the information from the texts that have been read by the students. Because the effectiveness of Critical Reading Strategies, the writer is interested to use it as the way to assess students' reading comprehension. By using this strategy, the students' reading comprehension will be evaluated more, then they will get more comprehend about their texts.

2. REVIEWS OF RELATED THEORIES

Reading Comprehension

Reading considered of understanding or taking the ideas from what is being read; it is the process of readers' mind and thinking. On the other hand, comprehension is the understanding of the meaning for the written materials and covers the strategies that lead to understand. Reading comprehension is the ability to interpret the meaning from what it is being read. In understanding text, the readers communicate or interact with the writers through the writings. Taking ideas from what is written is really needed to comprehend English text.

Moreover, reading is the process of cognition, interpretation and perception of a written or printed material. As stated in Goodman cited from Carrell (1998: 12), reading is a receptive language process; it is a psycholinguistics process in which the readers reconstruct the meaning. It happens in human minds; people receive the text and then process with their minds. In processing in their minds, they make their own interpretations of the text they read.

In reading, an individual construct meaning through a transaction with written text; it involves the readers' acting on interpreting the text and the readers' experiences, language background, and their cultural framework influence interpretation. Related to this explanation, Irwin (1991: 8) states that reading is a transactional between the reader and the text in a specific context that results in the creation of a new text in the mind of the reader. The goal of reading is not inferring the intended message of the author but rather creating a message that is useful to the reader. The readers read the texts and do the new interpretation based on their knowledge; they try to make new text but not far from the original text based on their interpretation and their understanding.

Furthermore, comprehension itself is being able to find meaning in what is read. He Ji Sheng (2014) states that comprehension is a process of negotiating understanding between the reader and the writer. It is more complexes psychological process; it includes linguistics factors, such as phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic elements, in addition to cognitive and emotional factors. In addition, Nadrah (2004: 27) states that comprehension is an interpretation what the readers think when they are reading. By having reading comprehension from the text, the readers can get the information from the text. The important things also in reading comprehension the readers can express again the content of the text what they have read.

As further information, reading process deals with language form, then comprehension, the end product, deals with language content (Sheng, 2000). For the teachers, reading comprehension is

for what being talked when they talk about a person's reading ability. It is the end result of the reading process and is what happens when all of the components interact successfully.

In addition, Young in Nadrah (2004: 28) suggests that comprehension must be focused on reading instructions. They are understanding words and building vocabulary, understanding sentences, sentence structure, and syntax, and understanding paragraph, which include finding the main idea and topic sentences, finding detail, and drawing conclusion and interpretation what you read. Further, in comprehension at least needs three skills which should be possessed as a reader; knowledge of words forms and their meanings, the ability to understand the sentence in a paragraph, the ability to see the main thought of the writer and get the general ideas of a piece of reading material.

Based on explanations above, it can be concluded that reading comprehension is mental process in which the readers try to understand the meaning in the text by interpreting what have been read in order to find the idea given by the writers. In reading comprehension, the readers should pay attention for some aspects such as how they understand the words and the information from the text, understanding main ideas and details, and be able to make conclusion.

There are some level of understanding that should be tested in reading comprehension; it can be literal comprehension and applied comprehension. Literal comprehension is related to the symbols that have been stated in the text they read. The readers try to understand the symbols from the texts; they are sentences that connected one each other. They try to understand what they have been read by looking up to the symbols, sentences, or in paragraph. Then, applied comprehension related to the ability of the students to apply what they have been read. It can be stated that the readers after reading the text can improve their skills, their ability to socialize with others, the characters, and others.

Based on the explanation, the writer used some categories of ideas that would be tested by using essay test. The categories are to find the information in the text, to understand the main idea and details from the text, to know the information by identifying the facts or opinion, to know the author's purposes in writing the texts, to understand the tone and bias from the texts, and to summarize the text reads. They are based on the concept of ideas suggested in critical reading strategies.

Assessment

To know whether the students can comprehend the texts well, it needs assessment. It is the evaluation in order to know the students' learning result. As known that assessment is the process of recording and reporting to all areas of teaching, learning and development within higher education (Nicholls, 2002). Assessment deals with measuring the performance of the students and also with the progress that they make (Harris & McCann, 1994). Assessment as applied in education describes the measurement of what an individual knows and can do (Banta and Palomba, 2015). More over, it is the collection, review, and use information in the systematic ways for taking the information about educational programs undertaken for the purpose of improving students' learning and development (Palomba and Banta, 1999: 4, in Banta and Palomba, 2015: 1). Thus, it can be said that assessment is the process of gathering information for educational programs, in this case for taking the information about students' comprehension in reading texts.

In addition, Farbrain and Wich (2011) stated that assessment has several forms and is needed for a variety of purposes within teaching and learning; it provides information on individual student progress, helps academic tutors to address areas of weakness, and gives both tutor and student information about their academic progress. Assessing students' work is not a new venture, but within the past five years greater emphasis has been placed on alternative ways of assessing students in higher education, both formally through standardized university examinations and informally through tutor assessment.

Recording and reporting are related to record and giving the report of students' result after giving the assessment of the students' reading comprehension. Record keeping is a key feature of teaching and assessment, then reporting is to give information to students' themselves and others. So, it can be said that assessment, recording, and reporting are needed in English language teaching and learning to know the students' progress in teaching and learning process; the results of assessment may be used for judgmental and for developmental purposes.

Establishing reasons why students need to be assessed requires an understanding of the purposes of assessment. The purposes of giving assessment in relation to teaching and learning and student development are summarised in the following ways:

- 1) Provide feedback to improve learning.
- 2) Motivate individuals.
- 3) Diagnose strengths and weaknesses.
- 4) Help develop skills of self-assessment.
- 5) Provide a profile of what has been learned or developed.
- 6) Pass or fail individuals.
- 7) Licence to proceed.
- 8) Licence to practice.
- 9) Predict success in future employment.

(Franbrain & Wich, 2011):

From the lists of assessment purposes, it can be divided into two main purposes; one relates to feedback and the other relates to accreditation and accountability. The first is intended to improve the quality of teaching and learning through reflection and reflective practice. Moreover, students engage in the problems and discourses of their disciplines and are given encouragement, response and feedback on what they do, as appropriate, with a view to the becoming more independent, critical and reflective thinkers. With these purposes, the teachers will know what is needed to do to their students after each learning process.

Assessment may also be held for other purposes, some of which are listed below:

- 1) To illustrate the meaning of learning outcomes and aims.
- 2) To provide feedback to students.
- 3) To provide feedback to academics.
- 4) To compare one student's score with scores obtained by other students; this is often part of a selection process.
- 5) To compare one student's score in a test with his or her score in a different test.
- 6) To compare a student's score with a set of norms.
- 7) To compare a student's score with other aspects of assessment.

(Nicholls, 2002)

Moreover, in assessing reading comprehension the teachers measure students' understanding about the texts given. Harrison and Salinger (1998) said that reading assessment means how to knowing what happens when the students read. Further, reading comprehension measures help the teachers monitor the comprehension of the students over time and provide the information that is useful in designing reading comprehension intervention programs (Kerlinger, et al., 2007). In addition they also said that reading comprehension assessment has purposes, they are 1) to compare students' comprehension levels to those students in a norming sample, 2) to find out if the students have got the criteria of their level, and 3) to informal instruction by determining when the students understand what they read and how efficiently they use which comprehension strategies (Kerlinger, et al., 2007). So, it can be concluded that reading comprehension assessment is used for determining the students' understanding in reading texts.

To assess students' reading comprehension, the teachers needed to know what the information needed to the students when they are reading. Klingger, et al., (2007) stated that in reading, there are many things to be measured related to the text genre. For example in descriptive text measures the information about setting, characters, sequence, and plots of the study; in expository text asks about main idea and supporting details; the others are about finding the information given in the text, explore vocabularies, and others. Then, the teachers need to use authentic assessment in order to be able to assess reading comprehension based on the students' ability and the students' needs, it should be done through their reading activity.

Authentic assessment is done to know whether the students have gained the teaching and learning result, and experience. The assessment should based on the students' need and the students' knowledge. In order to get the correct information, the students should give the accurate instrument and assessment for it. Authentic assessment stresses on measurement practices which engage students' knowledge and skills in ways similar to those one can observe while performing some

real-life or ‘authentic’ task (O’Malley and Valdez-Pierce, 1996). It also encourages tasks that require students to perform some complex, extended production activity, and emphasizes the need for assessment to be strictly aligned with classroom goals, curricula and instruction. Selfassessment is considered a key component of this approach.

Furthermore, there are some purposes of doing assessment (Banta and Palembang, 2015). They are to understand how educational programs are working to determine whether they are contributing to students’ growth and development, to know what experience the students got after learning, to know whether the curriculum makes sense for the students, whether the students can integrate their learning with their life and ability or not.

There are four features to craft authentic assessment; the *first* is emphasize application, the *second* is focus on direct assessment, the *third* is use realistic problems, and the *last* is encourage open-ended thinking (Nitko, 2001: 244). For this case, the writer used assessment for encourage students’ open-ended thinking. It is done by applying reading strategies to evaluate students’ reading comprehension. The reason for doing this is because the information gotten by using the strategies can evaluate students’ comprehension about the text; then the reading strategies that is used is critical reading strategies.

Critical Reading Strategies

Reading critically is really needed to make the students understand and critic for the text they read. Critical reading strategies is the reading strategy used for activating students’ critical thinking; meanwhile it can assess some information needed in reading texts. Critical reading refers to the way or the process in which the students and teachers interact in the classroom to practice a comprehension.

Further, critical reading strategies refer to strategy that encourages learners to use each of the cognitive processes in the three upper levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy, which commonly associated with critical thinking skills (Nasrollahi, et al, 2015). It will help students to read the textbooks and various reading passages in the systematical and critical ways. Before students can think critically and use higher order thinking elements to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate a text, they need to understand it, which can become difficult when they are reading complicated material. Related to the information, McWhorter (1992) says that the process in critical reading can evaluate the idea and give the judgement about the students’ value. So, by giving Critical Reading Strategies hopefully can give the complete information for getting ideas in the texts of the students.

Critical reading demands the reader to make judgments about what they read; this kind of reading requires posing and answering questions about the text and the author (Kabiri, 2012). It means that when the readers do critical reading, they make a judgement not only for the texts they read, but also the author. Likewise, Richards and Schmidt (2002, p. 134) refer to critical reading as “Reading in which the reader reacts critically to what he or she is reading, through relating the content of reading material to personal standards, values, attitudes or beliefs, i.e. going beyond what is said in the text and critically evaluating the relevancy and value of what is read”. It is the reason to make critical reading strategies as one way to assess students’ reading comprehension.

There are many Critical Reading Strategies that is applicable to use in reading comprehension. As given by Nasrollahi, et al (2015), the critical reading strategies are Annotating, Previewing, Scan & Skimming, Facts vs. Opinions, Drawing Conclusions, Monitoring One’s Own Comprehension, Summary, Paraphrase, Synthesizing and Questioning that proposed by (Singhet *al.*, 1997; Tovani, 2000; Axelrod & Cooper, 2002). Moreover, LeMaster the critical reading strategies are Planning for the Reading, Prereading, Learning and Retaining Academic Vocabulary, Rereading the Text, Marking the Text, Pausing to Connect Ideas Within a Text, Writing in the Margins, Charting the Text, Responding to a Writing Task, Summarizing the Text, Utilizing Sentence Starters and Templates, and Investigating Writers’ Choices. Further, McWhorter (2012: 377) also gives critical reading strategies, they are make inferences, distinguish fact and opinion, recognize generalizations, identify tone, identify the author’s purpose, and recognize bias. In this study, the writer takes the critical reading strategies from McWhorter, because it is simpler than others. By using critical reading strategies, the teacher can evaluate whether the students can understand the texts they read or not. By training to use critical reading strategies will make the students more understandable about the texts they read.

3. METHOD OF THE RESEARCH

The purpose of this study is to know the effectiveness of Critical Reading Strategies to assess students' reading comprehension. The research has been done by experimental research to the fourth semester of English students in IAIN Padangsidempuan, they are 26 students from IV TBI – 1. The instrument used is test; it consists of some questions in essay form based on Critical Reading Strategies. Then, to prove the hypothesis whether "the critical reading strategies give significant result to assess students' reading comprehension" analyzed by using the statistical analysis through SPSS 22 (pair sample t-test).

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Data Analysis

After taking the data from the students it is known that the students' reading comprehension by using critical reading strategies is better than before. It is known from the result of their reading comprehension test. The result can be seen on the table below:

Report

	pretest	posttest
Mean	70,00	86,96
N	26	26
Std. Deviation	8,124	4,737

Based on table it can be seen the students' reading comprehension in pre-test when the writer used essay test without applying critical reading strategies is 70; then, the meanscore of the students' reading comprehension when the critical reading applied is in 86.96, and the standar deviation for the pre-tes is 8.124 and for the post-test is 4.737. It can be seen that the students' reading comprehension is better when the writer asked them to answer the questions given by using critical reading strategies. Then, to know the significances of the effectiveness of using critical reading strategies to assess students' reading comprehension analyzed by using pair sample t-test. The result can be seen as follow:

Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
pretest - posttest	-16,962	8,605	1,687	-20,437	-13,486	-10,051	25	,000

By looking up the result of the SPSS of the significance of the effectiness of using critical reading strategies in assessing students' reading comprehension, it is shown that the results of Paired Samples t-test for comparison of critical reading pre & post-tests displayed the mean of 16.98, standard deviation of 8.6, and t value of -10.051 with the significant level .00 and df of 25 which is statistically significant at the .00 level. Therefore, it could be concluded that using critical reading strategies did have statistically significant positive effect to assess students' reading comprehension, alternative hypotheiss is accepted, and the null hypothesis of the study is rejected.

5.DISCUSSION

By using critical reading strategies, the students can find the information in the text specifically. They can do what is the purpose of the writers in writing the texts, by knowing the writer's or author's purpose it is really needed to understand kinds of ideas given.

By using the critical reading strategies, the students' comprehension about the text has been known. They are better in comprehending the text after they used critical reading strategies in their

reading activities. As known that critical reading strategies can enhance students' learning results (Tallebi and Tallebi, 2015; Hosseini, et al, 2012; and Nasrollahi, et al, 2014). They have proved that by using critical reading strategies the students' learning not only in reading comprehension, but also in writing, vocabulary or others can be increased.

By using critical reading strategies, in which the students are asked to identify author's purposes, distinguish between facts and opinion, identify tone, bias, and other information needed, the teacher can assess the students' reading comprehension better than just by using multiple choice, match, fill in the gaps or another kinds of assessment.

Moreover, the result of this study is also supported what is being done by Eka (2015), in which the higher students are really better in reading comprehension than multiple choice test to assess their reading comprehension. Eka has been done a research on assessing students' reading comprehension by using multiple choice test and essay test, it is proved that the students' result in reading comprehension is better by using essay test even the difference is not significant.

The finding is also supported by Zabihi and Pordel (2011) who found that autonomy and engagement are prerequisites for improvement of critical reading and that they can be achieved through strategy instruction and task-based instruction, respectively. It is known that the critical reading strategies used by the teacher to teach the students are better in making the students become a critical readers.

By the findings above, it can be said that the teacher can use critical reading strategies to help them evaluate students' reading comprehension, because by using the strategies in it, the students can comprehend the text when they read.

6. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings above that is shown that the students' reading comprehension is better to assess by using critical reading strategies. It is known that critical reading strategies can be used to assess students' reading comprehension, because it has been proved when the students applied it in their reading comprehension problems they can get information from the text, and the hypothesis of this research is accepted. It means that the critical reading strategies has been better in assessing students' reading comprehension significantly, because by looking the result of the significance ($0.00 < 0.172$). thus, it can be said that the students' reading comprehension can be assessed by using critical reading strategies. The teachers can use reading strategies, one of them is critical reading strategies, to increase students' reading comprehension, then can also know the ability of the students in understanding the text by using the strategy.

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