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THE IMPORTANCE OF S I L L IN READING COMPREHENSION

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ABSTRACT: Teachers' success in teaching and learning process depends on how she/he propel his/her students to learn. There are two contradictory points of view. On one hand, teachers want their students to become active and self-confident in learning, while on the other hand, students consider that the process of teaching and learning activities is the teachers' responsibility. This often makes students passive, and they just sit and wait for whatever the teachers are going to give them. The teacher has responsibilities not only for giving the input of transferring knowledge or competence, but also teaching them how to study. The purpose of writing this paper is to provide an alternative to improving the process of teaching and learning activities. It is based on the observation that reading comprehension is still at a low level, and it should be improved. The improvement can be done through more exposure to learning strategies. Students' self-consciousness on how important learning strategies are makes students to autonomous. It is suggested to do more seminars and research on language learning strategies for making the improve of teaching and learning quality and to gain more knowledge and experience.
Keywords: *Contradictive Point, Self-confidence, Responsibility, Exposure, Self-conscious.*

The students really need suitable ways in learning to improve their learning outcomes. Therefore, proper methods are so crucial for Learning a language as the instrument and standard in making communication ability better. Furthermore, the last targets of proper methods taken by the students are able to improve their language proficiency and give better self-progress.

Students are generally not aware of their potential. They have been obsessed with the view that the learning process is a teacher's job. They tend to put learning responsibility on teachers' shoulders, and they just sit and wait for what will be presented by the teachers. They have no attention to be active in the activities of learning by being active to strive and search the knowledge

in the effort to enhance their comprehension. Thus, there is a gap between teachers' and students' concern for learning.

The fact is that one of the language skills, reading ability, needs improvement. There are four reasons increasingly underlining this improvement (C.E. Snow, 2002: p 4 – 8). First, literacy skills are becoming the main priority in reading. Economic development emphasizes a higher level of literacy achievement, and it seems to increase in the future. The job markets that relate to service and information-based jobs are growing: even using computers and accessing the Internet obviously require literacy skills. Second, there is no significant progress in reading skills. One of the indicators is that the students who visit libraries is still low. Third, reading comprehension instruction still needs to be improved; teachers sometimes assume that reading is the only way to understand. In several cases, some students do some, but some do not. The last, preparation of teachers, does not cater to students' need for comprehension instruction. Sometimes, reading comprehension is not given at the beginning of the reading stage. There is an inadequacy of time for the teacher to make significant progress in developing professional programs for understanding reading. This is strengthened by S Silvhianty (2002) that direct reading strategies instruction has a positive effect on students' reading comprehension. In conclusion, reading is not a luxury, but it is a need. Therefore, teachers and students are to make great efforts in meeting this challenge.

Ideally, tertiary school students are proficient adult readers. They have the courage to activate their capacities to read with comprehension in order to learn. Reading ability for adults means one way to many forms of employment, optimal participation in education, and access to the cultural capital. University faculties, of course, have the view that a high level of reading

comprehension is a prerequisite to a student's success. In short, a high level of reading comprehension is needed for tertiary school students.

Therefore, the existence of the gap between the requirement of a high level of reading comprehension and the fact that reading ability needs to be increased leads the teachers to the conclusion that reading ability needs to be improved. For that reason, the mission of the teachers is to develop their students' learning skills in order to be able to learn successfully both inside and outside the class. Although it is difficult to reconcile teachers' enthusiasm for independent learning with the opposite opinion from students, teachers need to gear their teaching to the ways in which students learn. Consequently, teachers need to find an effective instruction because it is assumed to be a key component of the successful acquisition of reading competency. In doing so, teachers call for their position both as input providers and learning strategy trainers. (D.J. Mendelsohn and J. Rubin. 1995)

Each learner applies his/her own strategy that is most suitable and comfortable to him/her. This means that each learner applies language-learning strategies differently. Strategies are tools for active and self-directed involvement needed for developing target language communicative ability. However, it can be perceived that language learners should be active agents in the acquisition process.

It has been mentioned about effective teaching, effective instruction, and the function of language learning strategies. The definition of language learning strategies stated by R Oxford (1990:8) is "learning strategies are specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations."

Given the above definition, it is obvious that language-learning strategies are important. When language learners apply their language learning strategy, it means that they are taking part in the language acquisition process. Learning strategies might be one of the factors that enable students to reach an answer to language learning success.

People, actually, have been applying learning strategies for thousands of years. Now, learning strategy is known under various names, such as learning skills, learning to learn skills, thinking skills, and problem-solving skills. Andrew Cohen (1996: 5) explained that the term strategy is the same as technique (Stern, 1983), tactic (Seliger, 1984), move (Sarig, 1987), and macro- and micro-strategies (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991). The word *strategy* comes from the ancient Greek word (strategi) that means generalship or the skill of war. This means the ability to use battles to win wars. Furthermore, in the education context, it means language learning strategies are used by learners in solving their problems in learning to achieve the target. Learning strategies are steps taken by students to enhance their own learning. '(R L Oxford. 1990:1) Meanwhile, Andrew Cohen. 1996 suggests that

> 'The methods of learning a language have real purposes in helping students to improve their skills for the language being learnt.'

DISCUSSION

Many people have investigated language-learning strategies. This area is interesting since this subject is perceived to be able to make language learning more efficient and enhance language learners' ability to communicate, in a target language, meaningfully. As a result, to be competent in conducting communication meaningfully, learners should be

> 'willing and accurate guessers; have a strong drive to communicate; are often uninhibited; are willing to make mistakes; focus on form by looking for patterns and analyzing; take advantage of all practice opportunities; monitor their speech as well as that of others; and pay attention to meaning. '(Rubin:1975)

In conclusion, language-learning strategy is crucial since language acquisition associated with questions about our understanding of the human mind and its subject matter. It means there is a seen and unseen process.

Furthermore, the meanings of methods for learning language have been stated by a lot of experts, and for a more detailed explanation, R Oxford (1990), cited in Oxford (1994), gives details on language learning strategies.

> "Foreign or second language (L2) learning strategies are specific actions, behavior, steps, or techniques students use-often consciously improve their process in apprehending, internalizing, and using the L2."

Each learner will apply his/her own strategy that is most suitable and comfortable to him/her. We might say that each learner applies a language-learning strategy differently. "Strategies are the tools for active, self-directed involvement needed for developing L2 communicative ability" (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). The language learning strategies might be described as all efforts and capabilities to develop language ability and capability. Brown has done a good job of explaining what language-learning strategies are. He stated that strategies are 'those specific attacks" that we make on a given problem. They are moment-by-moment techniques that we employ to solve "problems" posed by second language input and output.' (Brown: 1994, p 114)

The Benefit of Language Learning Strategies

The success of the EFL learners depends on both external and internal factors. The internal factors are what is stated by (Ihsan, 1997: p 320) that "Two relatively newly exposed personal factors, general learning styles and language learning strategies, need to be considered when analyzing why English seems difficult to learn." Language learning strategies have a close relation with the features of control, goal directness, autonomy, and self-efficacy. Goal is the power that encourages us to make any efforts, and that power leads us to a certain destination where we are going to go (Dorney and Otto, 1998), cited in R.L. Oxford 2001:166). This goal, then, is broken up into smaller short-term language goals in the form of learning strategies. These learning strategies are interconnected and mutually supportive to get effective result that is expected product end result.

Moreover, language-learning strategies help learners become more autonomous. Autonomous learners have eight characteristics (Tricia Hedge, 2000) they know their needs and work productively, learn both inside and outside the class, use classroom based materials as starting point to get more knowledge, work independently by making use of resources, utilize active thinking for learning, select and apply most effective learning strategies, have good time-management skills for learning, and consider teacher as facilitator and counselor. These characteristics can to be gained instantly, but learners will get them gradually. Learners apply metacognitive strategies to set their goal and make a plan, then work on it. During the process of learning, they are active in solving the problems they meet by utilizing their schemata, resources, peers, and even the teachers or experts for discussion. This activity largely depends on the learning skills awareness to form confidence, involvement, and proficiency.

Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is described as the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language. (C Snow. 2002) In extracting and constructing meaning, we need to consider three fundamental factors, namely:

1. Readers are people who employ all their capacities, abilities, knowledge, and experiences to comprehend texts.
2. Text means any printed or electronic text.
3. Activity means purposes, processes, and consequences connected with the act of reading.

The first factor is the reader. To comprehend the text, readers need to activate numerous capacities and abilities. Capacities in this context mean the capacities to activate metacognitive, affective, social, memory, and compensation strategies. Abilities, in this context, mean activating the capabilities of the person in the form of linguistic and technical schemata. Both capacities and capabilities, however, interact and are active in extracting and formulating the meaning conveyed by the reading text.

These two elements, however, are factors that influence comprehension, but this can be accelerated by instruction. The function of instruction in comprehending text is to give guidance to the students in order to keep them 'on the right track' to obtain comprehension. So, the goal of instruction is not only helping students understand the material, but also helping students learn how to become self-regulated, active readers who have a variety of strategies to help students comprehend. The mastery of the awareness of how to utilize students' capacities will be beneficial for them to do their lifetime learning.

The second factor is the text. This factor is crucial because, in understanding the text, the readers do not simply extract the text. During their effort to comprehend the reading text, readers also need to construct representations that are scattered in the text to form meaning. The reason is that the meaning can be exactly 'on the line', 'between the line', and 'beyond the line'. (See De Lopez. 1997)

So, texts can be either difficult or easy. The degree of difficulty of the text basically depends, in this context, on the activities in which the readers engage. Various activities will be suitable for various texts because different genres will call for specific reading activities to comprehend. The roles of the teachers are to facilitate the students ' awareness of their capacities and select and then activate them when necessary. In the current educational era, all students are expected to read more texts to catch up with technological development.

Therefore, the activity is the purposes, processes, and consequences connected with the act of reading. Reading is an integrated activity that involves and compromises the internal and, perhaps, external purpose during the reading process to achieve comprehension. Before we read, we set the purpose (internal purpose) of what we are going to know from reading, or maybe we read because the teacher assigns certain task (external purpose) to fulfill. During reading activity, the purpose might change or be modified since readers find new information that might be able to alter the original purpose. If this occurrence happens, comprehension will be complete. The consequences of reading lead to an increase in the knowledge a reader has.' (Snow.2002:15) The knowledge is both theoretical and technical information.

These three dimensions are of interest in dynamic ways during pre-reading, reading, and post-reading. This division is useful to distinguish between what the readers already have before

reading activities with what the outcome of reading activities is. Pre-reading periods activate all the readers' capabilities, including cognitive, motivational, language, and technical schemata, and non-linguistic capabilities. During reading and post-reading, other capabilities will be activated.

The process of comprehension is also influenced by some external factors, namely: cognitive development, maturity, and reading instructions. (Snow. Ibid). Reading instruction in the classroom will be the primary focus in this discussion because this research will try to answer the question of the effectiveness of reading instruction through language learning-based teaching.

Reading is not done in a vacuum because meaning does not exist in text. Students, as mentioned before, get meaning when students succeed in constructing the meaning from the text. By doing so, students actively apply their learning strategies and keep on monitoring their comprehension. Therefore, teachers need to find effective instruction that is able to employs necessary strategies to improve comprehension.

Language Learning Strategy on Reading

Language learning strategies can be applied in reading through both direct and indirect strategies. For direct strategies, readers generally apply the memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies. Memory strategies facilitate students to remember well through creating mental linkage, applying images and sounds, representing sounds in memory, and employing action strategies. In creating mental linkages, readers do grouping, associating/elaborating, and placing new words into context.

Applying images and sounds, readers use imagery, semantic mapping, keywords, and represent sounds in memory. In reading, readers sometimes remember certain information place.

They spot and scan the text to find where the needed information is. On the other hand, readers can also draw they're understanding to make it concrete using symbols, or/ semantic mapping.

Reviewing is one of the strategies to internalize the new concepts until the stage of automatic use is reached. The goal is to retrieve the new concept easily when required.

Employing action is acting out the content of the passage. This is one effective way to remember the content of the text. This technique utilizes the psychometric domain. For example, the teacher asks the students to act out the content of the passage distributed by the teacher. Generally, this activity is a group activity. The teacher gives guidance and stimulates students to act out what is written in the passage.

After understanding memory strategies for reading, the discussion moves on to the next strategies that are called *Cognitive strategies*. These strategies have four sets of strategies, namely: practicing, receiving and sending messages, analyzing and reasoning, and creating a structure for input and output. These strategies are useful for learning a new language because they are used for getting information before this information is stored in memory. There are several ways of applying cognitive, practicing is one of them.

Practicing, however, is perceived as the most important cognitive strategy. This is the way in which human beings acquire knowledge. Practicing includes repeating and practicing the way how a certain formula works. Repeating in reading means reading the passage more than once in order to make the reader understand the reading text thoroughly. During repetition activities, readers do various activities such as getting the main ideas, reading for detail, to getting specific information, etc. Next, practicing the way of how a certain formula works. It can be done by

reconstructing information and following the instructions to create the concrete object, and/or internalize formula that can be used automatically when it is needed.

Next, receiving and sending messages the strategies for getting ideas quickly and using resources for receiving and sending messages. It helps readers to focus on what they need and want to understand and disregard others or make them as background information only. This strategy is generally done by using resources to find the answer to the inquiry. Furthermore, analyzing and reasoning strategies are useful for understanding new concepts by breaking them down into parts that make the problem easier to understand. Finally, creating a structure for input and output. This strategy is very important, but the learners are sometimes a little bit reluctant to use this strategy. The real activity is in the form of note-taking taking and this activity can be done through all levels of proficiency. At the very early start of proficiency, teachers can allow students to write notes in their L1. Along with their interlanguage moves along the middle to the end continuum, teachers can ask their students to write it in the target language. Teachers need to introduce note-taking from the simplest one to the most sophisticated one, from a shopping list, to a form, semantic mapping, until catching the main idea and describing the details in their own words.

At last, the last categories of direct learning strategies are compensation strategies that have two sets of strategies, namely: guessing intelligently and overcoming limitations. Overcoming limitations is more frequently used in speaking and writing, but for reading, guessing intelligently is preferred. Prediction is important for reading. Learners will find it easier and more effective to comprehend the text generally if they use this reading skill, namely, guessing the meaning from the context. Since they do not focus on every difficult word in the text so they do not need to open a dictionary to comprehend every single word in the text.

CONCLUSION

SILL (Strategy Inventory for learning a Language) is a special activity done by the learner to gain the objectives of learning simply, quicker, more interestingly, more self-directed, more efficiently, and clearly in new conditions. It helps students to manage their comprehension and to pay more attention to improving their communicative competence. Oxford (1994) stated that the result of her research on language learning strategies has shown positive trend as a whole, dealing with the right language learning strategies applied. Furthermore, she also said that the appropriateness of language learning strategies will influence positive results in the progress of language proficiency.

Language learning strategies can be applied in reading comprehension through both direct and indirect strategies. For direct strategies, readers generally apply the memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies. In indirect strategies, readers use metacognitive, affective, and social strategies.

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