

Using story grammar strategy to improve reading comprehension of narrative texts

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ABSTRACT

This research was designed to improve the eighth graders' reading comprehension of narrative texts through story grammar strategy. Collaborative Classroom Action Research was employed. The subjects of the research were the eighth grade students (VIII-C) of MTs TMI Pujon. This research was conducted in two cycles comprising four stages of action research, i.e. planning, implementing, observing, and reflecting. The students' reading comprehension achievement in the form of score and the information on students' interaction during the teaching and learning process were obtained by administering a reading comprehension test at the end of each cycle and by using observation checklists and field notes. The findings of this research indicated that the story grammar strategy was successful in improving the students' reading comprehension of narrative texts. The result of reading comprehension test in cycle 2 showed that 90% of students (19 students) passed the minimum passing score (75). Dealing with the teaching process, almost all of students were enthusiastic and actively involved in all activities, most students also gave positive responses toward the application of story grammar strategy. It can be concluded that story grammar strategy can improve the reading comprehension of narrative texts of the eighth grade students of MTs TMI Pujon.

Keywords: Story Grammar; Reading Comprehension; Narrative Texts

INTRODUCTION

Reading is an essential skill for English as second or foreign language (ESL/EFL) students, and reading is the most important skill to master. With strengthened reading skills, ESL/EFL readers will make greater progress and attain greater development in all academic areas (Anderson, 1999). Improving the students' reading comprehension is one of the ways to enhance their understanding of the text.

Nowadays, the most challenging thing for students, especially Junior High School students, is the National Examination, which consists of 4 subjects with English as one of the subjects. Most of question items in the test focus on reading comprehension which relates to some text types. Understanding the text given is the key to answer some related questions. Therefore, the researcher is interested in doing a research which focuses on reading comprehension in order to prepare the students for the upcoming National Examination. The students of VIII C MTs TMI Pujon were chosen as the subject of this research. Twenty students of this class were found have difficulties in reading comprehension of narrative text which was proven in the preliminary study.

In preliminary study, the teacher gave ten comprehension questions of narrative texts to the students in 60 minutes, then she also distributed the questionnaire and did the interview to some students to find out their opinion and difficulties of the test. The result showed that no student could reach the passing grade (75), and only one student got 70, while the other 19 were failed. 4 students

(20%) got score 51-70, 7 students (35%) got score 41-50, and 9 students (45%) got score below 41.

During preliminary study and teaching learning activities which focused on reading skill activity, teacher found some problems faced by many students. All of students did not have any strategy to understand and comprehend the text better, most of them also were not aware about the story structure resulting difficulties in finding the important elements of the story, unfamiliar words found in the text also part of their problems. Further, many students also did not have interest in reading, especially in English.

In this study, considering the aforementioned problems, the researcher as well as the English teacher decided to use the story grammar strategy to solve the students' problems in comprehending narrative texts in terms of recognizing specific information, detailed information, and inference of the texts, since this strategy is effective to improve the students' comprehension of narrative texts.

A story grammar is the system of rules used for describing the consistent features found in narrative texts (Mandler, 1984 cited in Amer, 1992). The students' knowledge of this narrative structure allows them to predict the flow of stories which, in turn, aids in the comprehension of narratives (Duchan, 2004 cited in Murza et al, 2010). According to McNeil (1992), story grammar strategy is effective to develop students' schemata. Schemata take a significant role in assisting students to comprehend texts, the more schemata students have, the better comprehension they will achieve from a text. Moreover, direct instruction of story grammar can enhance the students' comprehension of the story and helping them to learn to recognize the important elements of narrative texts.

Therefore, by using story grammar strategy, the researcher believes that she could improve the students' comprehension of narrative texts in terms of recognizing specific information, detailed information, and inference of the narrative texts. In short, this study focuses on improving the students' ability in identifying the rhetorical structure of narrative texts by using story grammar strategy.

METHODS

The design of this research is classroom action research (CAR). In this research, the researcher applies Collaborative Classroom Action Research which focused only on a particular classroom. Collaboration is carried out with another English teacher, the researcher herself acts as the practitioner who conducts the teaching and learning activities by using story grammar strategy, whereas the collaborator performs as the observer during the implementation of the action.

Classroom Action Research consists of cycle (s) in which each cycle consists of four stages namely planning, acting, observing and reflecting (Latief, 2012). However, in order to know what should be planned in the stage of planning, the researcher did a preliminary study to identify the students' problem. The preliminary study was in the form of pre-test, questionnaire and interview.

The study is conducted in MTs TMI Pujon which is located on Jl. Masjid No. 1 Pujon-Malang. The subjects are the eighth grade students of MTs TMI Pujon; there are 21 students which consist of 3 males and 18 females.

The procedures of the research consist of planning, implementation, observation and reflection. Before making plan, the researcher did a preliminary

study. The preliminary study was done to find the problems faced by students in comprehending narrative text. The data were taken by delivering questionnaire, doing interview, observing classroom activities, and students' score of comprehending narrative text. The reading test comprehension was consisted of 10 multiple choice questions with 60 minutes for time allocation. The result showed that no student could pass the minimum grade.

The cycle (s) consisted of four stages: planning an action, implementing the action, observing the action, and reflecting. In the planning stage, the researcher and the collaborator prepared the procedures in using story grammar strategy in solving the students' problem in reading comprehension. Then, they made the scenario or lesson plan in order to explain how the design of story grammar could be implemented in the reading class. Furthermore, they set the criteria of success as the guidance of the research's success. Finally, they prepared the instruments to collect the data of the research which consist of observation checklist, field notes, questionnaire, and reading comprehension test.

Story grammar strategy was employed by the researcher and the collaborator for the teaching of reading. In cycle 1, this strategy was implemented into 2 meetings. When applying the story grammar strategy to the students, the teacher employed the three phase stages: pre-reading, whilst-reading, and post-reading.

The lesson plans were designed with the purpose of providing the teacher with guidelines of teach and learning activities. The lesson plan included the following elements: the standard competence, the basic competence, the instructional objectives, the teaching and learning activities, the instructional material and teaching media, and the assessment.

For this research, the criteria of success are needed to determine whether the cycle is success or not. It will emphasize on the students' involvement in teaching-learning activities, the result of students' reading comprehension test, and also the students' responses (opinion) toward the implementation of story grammar strategy in the class.

The targets of the three criteria were at least 80% or 17 students reach the criteria of success. First, if at least 80% of the students achieve 75 in reading comprehension test is considered to be successful. Second, if at least 80% students involved actively during the action, it is considered to be successful. Third, if at least 80% students have positive responses toward the implementation of story grammar strategy in the class is considered to be successful.

The implementation of action was focused on the use of story grammar strategy. In implementing the action, the researcher as the practitioner teacher in that class, implemented story grammar strategy in teaching reading comprehension whereas her collaborator played a role as the observer. The collaborator noticed the students' reading activities in teaching-learning process, she observed the students' enthusiasm during the implementation of story grammar strategy in the class, classroom situation, and the strength and the weakness of story grammar strategy in teaching reading.

Observation is the process of observing the implementation of a Classroom Action Research in order to obtain the data as a result of implementation of the action stage. In this research, three kinds of data were collected, namely, the students' reading comprehension test achievement in the form of score, the recorded

information on students' interaction during the teaching and learning process, and the students' responses toward the application of story grammar strategy. The instruments used in this research were achievement tests, observation checklist, field notes, and questionnaire.

In the reflecting stage, all relevant data from implementation of the action were analyzed and reviewed to examine whether the action was successful or not by matching the result of the observation with the criteria of success. If the collected data indicated at least 80% of the students were actively involved during the teaching and learning process, the result of reading comprehension test showed at least 80% of the students passed the minimum passing grade (75), and at least 80% of the students gave positive responses toward the application of story grammar strategy in the class, it meant the action met the criteria of success. On the contrary, if the result of data analysis could not reach the criteria of success, the researcher had to revise the plan and redo the implementation of the plan in the classroom.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The result of cycle 1 showed that there were 10 students who scored <75 and 11 students who passed the minimum passing grade. The students' achievement improved compared to the result of preliminary study in which all students couldn't achieve the minimum passing score and only one student who got 70.

However, the result of reading comprehension test in cycle 1 indicated that only 52% of students who could pass the minimum score. It meant that the first cycle couldn't achieve the criteria of success. Therefore, the researcher must continue the following cycle with revising the plan.

The students' interaction happened in the 3 stages: pre-reading, whilst-reading, and post-reading activities, they were observed and noted by the observer using observation checklists and field notes.

In the first meeting, there were only 4 students who answered the teacher's questions and 7 students who responded the pictures in Bahasa Indonesia. In spite of using Bahasa Indonesia, they could guess the picture correctly. The students were stimulated during pre-reading activity and their responses in the description of the picture increased in the second meeting. In the second meeting, there were 12 students who responded to the scheme-related questions correctly. Yet, most of them tended to talk in Bahasa Indonesia.

The result of pair work observation indicated that 10 students told ideas about the meaning of difficult words and 12 students shared ideas about the structure. Yet, there were 3 pairs which kept silent and did the task individually. Moreover, there was one group which was busy doodling and talking to each other because there were 3 members in the group, so the interaction was less effective. After finishing the story grammar, the students were asked to answer the comprehension questions in pairs. But, some students faced difficulty to express their ideas in English, therefore they asked the teacher to translate their answers.

Some students were given a chance to present their work in front of class, and the teacher discussed the work with the whole class. Because of the limited time, there were only 2 groups which present their story grammar. In the first meeting, there were only 8 students who shared the answers of comprehension questions, and

it improved in the second meeting in which 12 students were willing to answer the questions orally. The teacher discussed the students' answers to find the best answer of all the comprehension questions.

In general, the implementation of story grammar strategy in cycle 1 ran well. At the first meeting, the students' interaction was less optimal especially in pre-reading activity (only 4 students answered scheme-related questions and 7 students responded to the pictures) and post-reading activity (only 8 students shared the answers of the comprehension questions), but in the following meeting, they appeared to be more enthusiastic and active.

From the data obtained, it is concluded that only 11 out of 21 students who have reached the target score in cycle 1. There were 10 students who failed to answer the questions related to recognizing specific information, detailed information and also finding the moral value of the story.

In short, the criteria of success have not been achieved yet. Therefore, the researcher decided to continue the research into the second cycle. In relation to the findings above, some revisions were made on the lesson plan of cycle 2. The researcher and collaborator selected the material based on the students' level and their interest, the material chosen was stories about Indonesian folktales. They also changed the teaching procedure used in whilst-reading and post-reading stage. In the whilst-reading stage, the teacher guided the students to find the important elements of the story by providing some examples, depth explanation on how to find the moral value of the text was planned to be given in the post-reading activity. Moreover, the questions given were different from story grammar form and focusing on the inference of the text to trigger the students' ability in identifying the implicit information of the text. Different from cycle 1, the teacher used LCD to attract the students' attention and gave comprehension questions as quiz to let the students be more active and enthusiastic in answering the questions.

The result of cycle 2 showed that 19 students got scores more than 75 which mean that 90% of students passed the minimum score, only 2 students who didn't achieve score >75. The result indicated that the students' achievement increased compared to the result of cycle 1 in which only 52% of students who could achieve the passing score.

The students' interaction happened in the 3 stages: pre-reading, whilst-reading, and post-reading activities, they were observed and noted by the observer using observation checklists and field notes.

In the first meeting of cycle 2, there were 12 students answered the teacher's questions and 16 students who shared their opinions about a series of pictures given by the teacher. In the pre-reading stage, the students seem enthusiastic to share their ideas about the pictures, since most of the students knew the story about them. While in the second meeting, the students' responses about the questions and pictures given improved. The observation checklist showed that almost all of students responded to the teacher's questions, although most of them still spoke in Bahasa Indonesia.

The result of pair work observation indicated that 16 students told ideas about the meaning of difficult words and 17 students shared ideas about the story structure. In short, almost all of students were actively participating in the reading activity.

The result showed that almost all of groups gave the right answers for the comprehension questions, only one group which failed to answer one of the questions.

The students' responses to the application of story grammar strategy were collected through the distribution of questionnaire on the third meeting after the reading comprehension test of cycle 2. The result showed that most of students gave positive responses to the application of the strategy. The result also proved that no student gave negative response, since no one chose disagree and strongly disagree for the option of the statement given.

The result of the study shows that the use of story grammar strategy increased the students' reading comprehension of narrative texts as indicated by the improvement of the students' scores from preliminary study to cycle 2.

At the first meeting, most of students were enthusiastic and actively involved in all activities of teaching reading, and this improved in the second meeting in which almost all of students participated actively in the pre-reading, whilst-reading, and post-reading activities.

From the data obtained, it is concluded that the criteria of success have been achieved, since more than 80% of students passed the minimum passing score, most of the students were actively involved in the teaching and learning process, and almost all of students gave positive responses toward the application of story grammar strategy in teaching reading. As the research has achieved the criteria of success, the researcher decided to end the research at cycle 2.

Discussion

The present study found that the students' ability to comprehend narrative texts increased. It was proven by the students' achievement on reading comprehension test on cycle 1 and cycle 2. In cycle 1, around 52% of students achieved the target score, and it improved in cycle 2 in which 90% of the students passed the minimum score.

The students' reading comprehension was closely related to their ability to recognize the elements of narrative texts as presented in the story grammar form. This finding was in line with Short and Ryan's statement (1984) that story grammar strategy is designed to provide students with a strategic plan for selecting important aspects of story information. Further, the story grammar form provides some important questions related to consistent features found in narrative texts, as research has shown that asking questions that focus on the story line leads to improve students' comprehension of the story (Beck, 1984 cited in Amer, 1992).

In short, the procedure of teaching reading using story grammar strategy improved the students' reading comprehension. The direct instruction and the schemata built about the narrative text structure helped the students to comprehend the text, as stated by McNeil (1992) that story grammar strategy is effective to develop students' schemata, which take a significant role in assisting students to comprehend texts.

The students' interaction in the class during the implementation of story grammar strategy was obtained through the observation done by the collaborator using observation checklist and field notes. The result showed that the students' participation in the first cycle was less optimal, however it improved in the second cycle in which almost all of students were enthusiastic and actively involved in all

activities. In order to attract the students' attention, some revisions were made on the lesson plan of cycle 2, for instance, selecting material based on the students' interest, providing a series of picture related to the text through LCD, and giving a comprehension questions as quiz.

The revisions made were successfully attracting the students' attention. In pre-reading stage, presenting some pictures on LCD triggered the students to activate their prior knowledge and arouse the students' interest of the text, as stated by Konza in Sulisty (2011) that the use of several tactics in pre-reading activities plays a role in several ways, namely to prepare the students for the text content, activate the students' prior knowledge (schemata), assist the students in making meaning of the information, arouse the students' interest in reading, and to focus and sustain their attention to the text.

Further, it was concluded that most of students participated actively in all activities during the teaching and learning process by using story grammar strategy.

The students' opinion about the application of story grammar strategy was collected through questionnaire. The result indicated that around 81% of students agreed that activities in the story grammar strategy helped them to activate their prior knowledge, resulting in a good comprehension of the text, as stated by McNeil (1992) that story grammar strategy is effective to develop students' schemata. Moreover, 71% of students had the same opinion that story grammar strategy helped them to seek and find the explicit and implicit information of narrative texts. This is in line with Short and Ryan's statements (1984) that story grammar strategy is designed to provide students with a strategic plan for selecting important aspects of story information. Further, 85% of the students thought that story grammar strategy could help them to improve the reading comprehension ability of narrative texts, as explained by Duchan (2004 in Murza et al, 2010) that the student's knowledge of this narrative structure allows him or her to predict the flow of stories which, in turn, aids in the comprehension of narratives.

In short, most of students gave positive responses toward the implementation of story grammar strategy in teaching reading, since most of them got the benefit of applying this strategy to comprehend the narrative texts better. It was proven by the improvement of the students' scores of reading comprehension test from preliminary study to cycle 2.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of story grammar strategy in the two cycles of reading instruction revealed that it was effective to improve the reading comprehension of the eighth grade students of MTs TMI Pujon. The story grammar strategy provides a clear picture about the story structure of narrative text. The story grammar form eases the students to focus on the main elements of the story as found consistently in narrative texts.

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