



Teaching Reading Comprehension of Javanese Texts Using Graded Readers in Elementary Schools

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Abstract

This study aims to measure students' reading comprehension skills of Javanese texts in elementary schools by utilizing specifically-developed graded reading materials of Javanese language. This research was experimental with a pre-test post-test control group design. The participants in this research were 56 students of two grade 5 classes. The data were collected by conducting observations of the learning process and tests. The data were then analyzed using t-test to find out the effectiveness of the books in improving reading comprehension of Javanese texts. The result shows that the t-test renders sig value of 0.00, which is less than the t-table 0.05. This means that there is a positive and significant influence of the use of the graded readers on the comprehension levels of Javanese texts among the elementary school students. The level of comprehension is shown by their ability to interpret difficult vocabularies, determine the intrinsic elements, identify the events, retell the contents, express explicit and implicit meanings, and infer the meanings of the stories.

Keywords: Reading Comprehension, Javanese Language, Graded readers, Elementary school

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is rich with local vernaculars. There are 706 regional languages still used and spread in various ethnic groups in Indonesia [1]. The Javanese language, one of them, is spoken mainly in three provinces: the Special Region of Yogyakarta, Central Java, and East Java.

The Javanese language has enriched the vocabularies of Indonesian as the national language of Indonesia. It is also a language of high culture. It is rich with honorific subtlety rarely found in other honorific systems of other languages. For this and other reasons, this language needs to be preserved from extinction. In this regard, various studies have been conducted to contribute to the efforts to maintain the

language [2][3]. The integration of the language and culture, local wisdom, local government policies, and education have been taken to help this language used in different communication texts [4].

Education is also responsible for this matter. Hornberger, King, Reyhner, and Wyman (in Smith-Christmas [5]) suggested that schools are a vehicle for language reclamation. The use of regional languages in schools is considered important because students spend most of their time in schools. In line with this opinion, McCarty & Nicholas [6] said that the reasonable place to preserve regional languages is schools. The government has determined that Javanese language is a compulsory subject in the formal education curriculum from primary education to secondary education in three provinces in Indonesia.

The subject of Javanese in schools is composed of Javanese culture, art, and literature. Students are to be provided with the adequate ability to comprehend reading materials. Nevertheless, the existing challenge ever is that a large number of the elementary school students have experienced serious literacy problems in the local language. Factually, this issue is commonly found in other countries as well as in the United Arab Emirates that experiences the obstacles in school reading materials due to the lack of phonological awareness or ability to detect the sounds forming a word [7].

A preliminary study shows that most students need serious guidance in the language especially in comprehending texts. Forty-seven percent (47%) of the respondents show that need guidance, 33% are in the developing category, and 20% are in the independent category. When specifically tested on their reading ability, thirty-five percent (35%) of the students are in the poor category, 37% are in the moderate category, and 28% are in the good category.

In some cases in the world, the problem with reading comprehension can be solved by providing students with graded readers that suit students' abilities and needs. Nation & Ming-Tzu [8] explained that graded readers are books specifically written or adapted for students who are learning a second language by paying attention to vocabulary, grammatical structure, and length of texts. Graded readers include such issues as vocabulary, organization of text, language style, number of words per page, and estimated text content, text format covering the aspects of print layout rules, size, and illustrations, and content and concepts covering the familiarity of the contents and genre of the text. These criteria reflect the level of difficulty of a book [9][10].

Reading is facilitated by right schemata. Reading comprehension is performed by connecting the initial knowledge possessed by students and the knowledge gained while reading so that the comprehension can be obtained optimally. This is consistent with the view of the schemata theory claiming that in reading comprehension, the readers depend on not only the information read but also the relevant mental structures (cognition) that have existed previously [11]. Thus, active readers actually construct meaning. In Javanese learning, it is possible that elementary school students have not had an adequate schemata of the language and culture to assimilate a text, so it is very likely that they will have difficulty in understanding texts. Therefore, it is important to provide contexts that can raise students' schemata. Class contexts can help build comprehension. Teachers can create various reading objective by linking their real life with interesting texts [12].

Research related to the use of graded readers has been reported. The findings indicate that teaching reading using graded readers is more effective than using short texts [13]. Students with a low ability are introduced to low graded readers. After the students have been comfortable, they can move to the next level so that there is an increase in reading skills, pleasure reading, reading comprehension, use of vocabulary, grammatical structure, and length of text. Graded readers have also been used by students in high schools to increase comprehension, attitudes, and motivation in reading [14]. In the same way, the results of a study show that students learning foreign languages feel the benefits of using graded readers [15].

Abidin, Mulyati, & Yunansah [16] said that learning is believed to be successful if the learning materials have been packaged and arranged according to students' learning abilities. Therefore, Javanese reading materials are to facilitate the diverse abilities and needs of students.

These grades readers are novel and intended to slot in the needs of new Javanese reading materials. Dewayani [17] stated that in fact, reading books in schools are not suitable texts for children. The books are mostly in the form of various types of texts that cannot foster the learning curiosity of students. The ability and response of teachers in reading activities using graded readers should develop interests in reading.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Is it the fact that when the level of difficulty of a textbook is carefully suited to the level of language competence of the elementary school student readers, their comprehension skills will improve?

2. METHODS

Research Design

This research was to reveal the effectiveness of the graded readers to improve learners' reading comprehension skills. This research was conducted in the grade 5 of an elementary school. This experimental study employed the Pre-test Post-test Group Design (Nunan, [18]) with an overview of the research design in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Pretest-Posttest Group Design

Experimental Group	O1	X	O2
Control Group	O3	X	O4

Participants

The participants were all of the students of two classes. This study employed 28 students of class 5A as the experimental group and 28 students of class 5B as the control group. The experimental group was the group using the medium level of Javanese graded readers, while the control group was the group using textbooks or Javanese language books provided by the school.

Instruments

The data were collected with observation sheets about the learning process and tests. The test was used to obtain data about students' reading comprehension levels. The sheets carry such element indicators as 1) ability to give meaning to the vocabulary in the reading texts, 2) ability to determine the intrinsic elements of the reading texts, 3) ability to identify events in the texts, 4) ability to retell the message in then texts, 5) ability to reveal implied and explicit meanings, 6) ability to conclude the information in the texts. This instrument had been validated by material and learning experts. The observation sheet was used to obtain data about the Javanese language learning process.

Data and Analysis

The data were analyzed using t-test. This study was to test the effectiveness of the Javanese graded readers to amplify reading comprehension levels among the elementary school students. The t-test compared data collected through pre-test and post-test. This was to ensure that the Javanese graded readers had been utilized optimally in the learning process. The data used to find out the effectiveness of the Javanese graded readers in the advanced grade of the elementary school were analyzed using the descriptive statistical analysis. Further interpretation was conducted to reveal more findings.

FINDINGS

The effectiveness of the Javanese graded readers can be seen from the differences from the students' post-test scores between the experimental group and the control group through the t-test. The following is the data of the assumptions for statistical tests that has been conducted.

Table 2. Results of Data Normality Test

		Experimental Group	Control Group
N		27	27
Normal Parameters a,b	Mean	3.6667	4.6667
	Std. Deviation	1.14354	1.14354
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.207	.174
	Positive	.200	.164
	Negative	-.207	-.174
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		1.077	.907
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.196	.384

The univariate normality test was used in this study to show a near-normal population distribution. In this study, the normality test used the Kolmogrov-Smirnov test in the SPSS version 21. The hypothesis proposed to measure the normality of data in this test would be H0 accepted (the data were normally distributed) if the significance value was more than the alpha level which was set at 5%. H0 would be

rejected (the data were not normally distributed) if the significance value was less than 5%. Based on the data above, the significance values of the pre-test variable of the experimental group and control group are $0.196 > 0.05$ and $0.384 > 0.05$ respectively. The data are normally distributed. Since the assumptions for statistical tests were met, the difference test could be performed with the results shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Results of Paired Difference Test

Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference			
				Lower Upper			
Post-test	1.0000 0	.83205	.16013	.67085 1.32915	6.245	26	.000

The results of the t-test show that the significance value of the post-test is $t_{count} 0.00 < t_{table} 0.05$. Based on the data, the sig value is < 0.05 so that H_a is accepted and H_0 is rejected. This means that there is a positive and significant influence of the use of the Javanese graded readers on students' reading comprehension in the advanced graders.

The observation of the learning process when using the Javanese graded readers shows the following results.

Table 4. Results of Observing Student Activities

No.	Indicators	Observation Results			
		Seen		Not seen	
		Number of students	Percentage (%)	Number of students	Percentage (%)
1.	Enthusiastic about reading the graded readers	26	93%	2	7%
2.	Actively answering teachers' questions	23	82%	5	18%
3.	Actively asking questions	18	64%	10	36%
4.	Enthusiastic about doing worksheets	25	89%	3	11%
5.	Actively involved in discussions	21	75%	7	25%
6.	Cooperative in groups	25	89%	3	11%
7.	Listening to teachers' explanation	26	93%	2	7%
8.	Actively expressing opinions	19	68%	9	32%

Students are enthusiastic in the class activity, especially with the activities of reading the Javanese graded readers, answering questions from the teachers related to pictures, vocabulary, and reading contents, doing worksheets, discussion activities, collaborative activities in groups, and listening to the teachers' explanation. Less optimal student learning activities are attested in the activities of asking. Students are still not confident in asking questions. Based on the interviews with several students, they are afraid to ask questions because they think they are not able to form Javanese sentences properly. Likewise, in the activities of expressing opinions, the students are still not confident to convey their opinions in proper Javanese sentences.

Guidance from the teachers was provided equally during the individual, pairs, or group activities. The following image is one example of the results of a group discussion in working on a worksheet showing the comprehension of the contents of the reading material in one of the Javanese graded readers.

Ayo Gladhen !

Kelompok :

Nama : 1. Retta
2. April

Kapan wae prastawa Gunung Merapi njeblug? Kepiye kedadeyane? Tulisen ing kothak ngisor iki!

Tahun 1954	Tahun 2010	Tahun 1930
andadekake 60 uwong mati. Jebugar kasebut uga nyebabake omah-omah rusak,	nyebabake 1,700 uwong mati. panjebuge ing taun ika uga nyebabake omah rusak, tetandu.	panjebuge merapi kang paling gedhe badadean ing taun 1930. Ana 1369 uwong
tetanduran lan kewan uga padha mati.	ran lan kewan padha mati kalebu omah-omah ing pinggir kali Cade Yogyakarta sing rusak cacahé nganti 182	wong mati amarga panjebuge merapi semené uga kewan lan tetanduran mati

Figure 1. Example of Student Worksheet Results

This research was carried out three times with consistent processes and results. The learning aims to help students accurately identify and interpret difficult words. They are also expected to be able to appropriately write and retell the contents of the reading materials in the form of graphic organizers.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Javanese has different characteristics from other languages, one of which is the sounds inventory. The phonemes vary extremely in the language. For example, the sounds /d/ and /d̥/ in the words *wedi* and *wedhi* cause the two words to have different forms and meanings. The word *wedi* means 'afraid', while the word *wedhi* means 'sand'. Another example is the words *lara* 'hurts' and *loro* 'two'. There is also the use of sounds /ɛ/, /ə/, /e/, /d/, /d̥/, /t/, /t̥/, /ɔ/, /a/, and /o/ in various words. Another characteristic is the honorific system in the language, namely the high variety (Krama) and the low variety (Ngoko). The practice of the two is not easy for elementary school students. These phonetic characteristics can be well understood by students if a specific method is used. The method should get the students to read the Javanese texts with Javanese characteristics in the relevant context.

Reading comprehension in elementary schools is quite an advanced reading activity. At this level, students are required to be able to understand the contents of what they have read. The abilities have been tested through answering questions related to the contents of the texts or retelling the contents of the texts in their own sentences in both oral and written forms.

Reading comprehension can be improved by providing appropriate books for students. Preparing appropriate reading books for children is very important. If students received the right books, it can help improve their literacy skills.

Reading comprehension can be built by presenting good and proportional texts that suit the abilities and needs of students. Good texts for students are texts that are both motivating and challenging for students. Motivating texts are those whose contents are easy to understand so that students' confidence can be developed. As for challenging texts, they are texts whose contents are sufficiently difficult for students to understand so they need to do various reading activities in order to understand the texts.

Dalman [19] said that there are four levels in reading comprehension, namely literal comprehension, interpretive comprehension, critical comprehension, and creative comprehension. A reader is as a good reader if he/she can reach those four comprehension levels. Nurgiyantoro [20] stated that a good reading ability and willingness are necessary to achieve good reading competence. In other words, both the ability to read fluently and motivation to read are significant. Interesting reading books can increase motivation to read as well.

The ability to comprehend texts can be improved by providing illustrations [21]. Teachers need to guide students to explore illustrations and utilize them in comprehending texts [22] [23]. These graded readers use illustrations to help students comprehend the texts on each page. In addition to helping increase comprehension, illustrations can also encourage students' reading motivation. Reading motivation contributes to students' reading and learning achievement.

Similarly, Hadaway & Young [24] gave four criteria for graded readers or books that are suitable for children, namely the level of familiarity of the book's content with students' background and knowledge, the level of the book's language, the level of the textual support, and the level of the cultural suitability. Likewise, Dzaldov & Peterson [25] stated that graded readers have features such as the number of lines, the print size, the distance between words and lines, the text organization, the placement of sentences and phrases per page, the types of punctuation, the number of punctuation, the number of illustrations with the number of texts, the relevance of illustrations in supporting meaning, and the use of text structures.

Javanese graded readers for elementary school students have been developed by Supartinah, Kawuryan, & Hastuti [26], and this experimental study was conducted to measure their effectiveness in promoting reading comprehension of the Javanese texts among the advanced graders of an elementary school.

In every aspect of life, students are confronted with various types of information, oral texts, visual texts, or written texts. The ability to understand the message depends on their reading abilities. Snow, Burns, & Griffin [27] mentioned that reading is a transaction, a two-way process, which involves the reader and the text in a particular context. In other words, meaning is built based on the interaction between the reader and the text. For example, each student will have different responses even though they read the same text because each student brings their schemata.

Basic reading comprehension skills are essential to understand the subjects that will affect their academic performance. Reading comprehension is a complex cognitive process aiming to understand the meaning of texts [28]. Consonantly, Pardo [29] said that reading comprehension is the process of constructing the meaning of a text as a result of the process of integrating contents, messages in the texts, knowledge, and skills during a reading activity. The reading process only becomes part of the learning process if students are able to comprehend the texts. Reading comprehension is an activity carried out to comprehend the message. Comprehending the message is an active process of compiling information obtained from both the message in the text and the schemata. This is a process of obtaining the meaning and information based on the context [30] [31].

Reading in schools is usually associated with the activity of reading textbooks and answering questions from the books. It should be true that to be able to comprehend the content of the books requires effective reading strategies. A reading strategy is an act of thinking that students use to comprehend a text. Readers use the strategies to comprehend the text they have read and to solve the problems [32]. Each comprehension strategy must be taught to students explicitly so that the process of comprehension, which is actually an mental process, becomes livelier. The strategies include predicting contents, analyzing text structures, finding main ideas, and summarizing. Students can apply the reading comprehension strategies at a higher level if they reach the ability to find the main ideas and supporting ideas of a text [33].

Students' ability to comprehend is dictated by many things, including language skills, prior knowledge and experience, socio-cultural background, and reading materials. If students face a text with unfamiliar language, it will be difficult for them to understand the text.

Students' reading motivation is closely related to reading achievement on standardized tests and school grades [34] [35]. In these classes, reading motivation differs from motivation for subject learning and for school. Reading motivation contributes directly to students' reading comprehension [36]. Reading motivation correlates with the number of books students read from independent reading to the ability to predict their knowledge of reading topics including history, science, and literature.

written texts, readers must be able to recognize the relations between elements in the text. When readers are able to recognize the relations between sentences and the larger units of text, the readers can form a mental model of what they read.

The socio-cultural familiarity dictates learning success. Reading occurs in contexts that construct and that are constructed by the readers. This means that reading takes place in a socio-cultural context that shapes and is shaped by the readers [27]. In other words, reading activities are associated with social interactions, as in the interaction between teachers and students. This interaction is built on the previous experience, current situation, and its implications for the future.

Reading materials (texts) factors also determine reading success. Teachers must pay attention to the physical form, content, and level of difficulty in the reading material. Teachers are required to prepare reading materials from easy to complex levels according to the abilities and needs of the students.

The Javanese graded readers have considered various levels of ability of elementary school students [26]. Students' reading comprehension will develop if adequate reading materials suit the reading skills starting from simple to complex.

The first graded readers is *Bagas the Little Monkey*. Each page contains 8-10 sentences. The texts are more dominant than the pictures. The pictures are only to illustrate some of the settings, events, and characters. Because this book is presented for advanced grades, the ideas of the story are more complex on every page.



Figure 2. Example of a page in the Javanese Graded Reader entitled *Bagas the Little Monkey*

On each page, there are new vocabularies. Several compound and complex sentences have been introduced in this book. This book contains narrative stories with multiple topics that are composed of such issues as describing, comparing, showing cause and effect, and presenting problems and solutions. The Javanese language varieties used are *Ngoko* and *Krama*. The second book, *The Impact of Selfie*, which is still in the same level, can be seen below.



Figure 3. Example of a page in the Javanese Graded Reader entitled *The Impact of Selfie*

Each sentence in this third book consists of more than 15 words, and each page has 8-10 sentences. The font size is standard. On each page, the text is more dominant than the illustration. The content of this story is fantasies with a more complex story line and broader topics. The language varieties used are *Ngoko* and *Krama*. This graded reader entitled *A Rainbow in the Drizzle* is shown in the following figure.

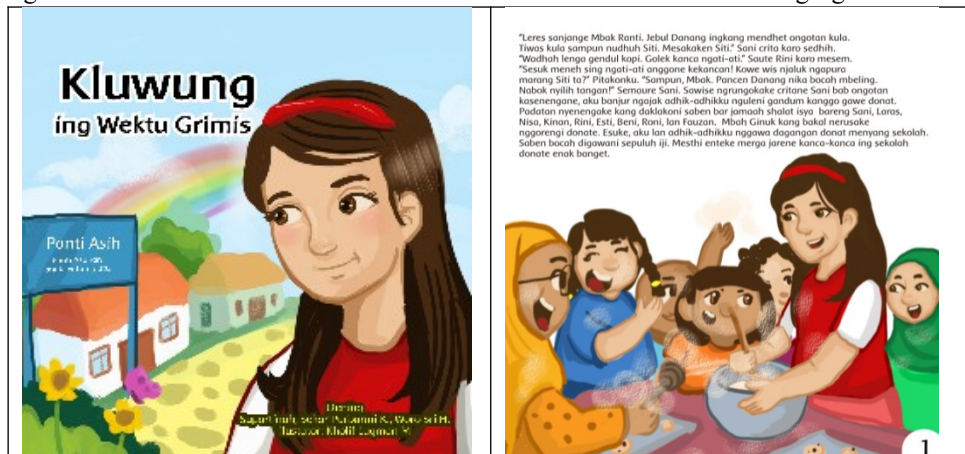


Figure 4. Example of a page in the Javanese Graded Reader entitled *A Rainbow in the Drizzle*

A good text is both motivating and challenging as stated by Rog& Burton [38]. A motivating text is a text whose contents are easy to understand, so it can develop students' confidence. On the other hand, a challenging text is a text whose contents are quite difficult for students to understand so that they need to do various reading activities in order to understand the text.

4. CONCLUSION

The Javanese graded readers have a positive and significant effect on the reading comprehension of the elementary school students. Students' reading comprehension in this study is attested by their ability to interpret difficult vocabularies, determine the intrinsic elements, identify the events, retell the contents, express explicit and implicit meanings, and infer the meanings of the stories. The results of this study can be useful for readers, especially elementary school teachers, to be able to utilize graded readers in supporting reading comprehension among elementary school students.

For future studies, fronting these students with much longer reading entries in terms of the length of sentences, paragraphs, and the whole text itself (more reading challenges) should give further information regarding the success of graded readers in promoting reading skills in the Javanese language. This is because these graded readers are guided reading practices and the effectiveness can be confronted with more natural thus more challenging reading texts.

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