

# The Effect of Applying the Talk-To-The-Text Strategy on Students' Reading Comprehension in Narrative Texts

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**Abstract** - This study investigates the effect of applying the talk-to-the-text strategy on students' reading comprehension of narrative text. By employing quasi-experimental research design, specifically pre- and post-tests design, talk-to-the-text reading strategy was implemented as a treatment in experimental class while the utilization of conventional strategy was taught in control class. The study was conducted by involving eighth grade students of a Junior Secondary School in Bintan, Indonesia. Cluster random sampling was employed in order to determine the samples. In order to gain the data, a reading comprehension test was used as the research instrument. Based on the data analysis using *t*-test, the result revealed that talk-to-the-text strategy gives better effect toward the comprehension of grade eight students in reading narrative texts.

**Keywords:** *talk-to-the-text, reading comprehension, narrative text*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Reading comprehension Strategies

Reading can be identified simply as making meaning from print (Anderson, 2008). In creating the meaning, there is a cognitive process by the readers involving recognizing the words and connecting information from text to their background knowledge before generating the meaning. Reading by getting meaning is also known as reading comprehension. The comprehension in reading occurs when the readers read information from the text and recall their knowledge or experience related with the text to construct meaning. Further, the use of comprehension strategy is crucial in reading comprehension since the strategy helps readers in comprehending the text. This opinion affirms the idea from Duke and Block (2012) which states that comprehension strategy is a strong predictor of reading comprehension. In short, reading comprehension strategy becomes important since it influences reader's comprehension about the text.

Teachers are important to provide students with some reading strategies in order to handle complex reading tasks. Reading comprehension strategies help students overcome problems encountered when they struggle to comprehend a text. Block in Li (2010) argues that "reading comprehension strategies indicate how readers conceive a task, what textual cues they attend to, how they make sense of what they read, and what they do when they do not understand". Further, Dole in Schumm (2006) defines

comprehension strategies as a set of routines or procedures that help readers become active processors to achieve the goal of comprehension. By practicing the strategies in some activities more, students are expected to achieve the goal of comprehension that is to comprehend the text.

The aforementioned comprehension strategies would help students access the texts before, during, and after reading. This idea is in the same vein with the one suggested by Vasquez, Hansen & Smith (2010) who classify reading strategies which engage students with the texts into three groups according to the phases in reading activities. The first group of strategies is found in pre-reading activities which includes the strategies for understanding the organizational structure of a text, using graphic organizers, text features, anticipation guides, concept maps, predicting and confirming activity. The second group of strategies used during reading activities includes double entry journals, literature circles, directed reading sequence, and Talk-To-The-Text. The last one is in post-reading activities, which encompasses the strategies such as story map, character maps and charts, and children's information picture books.

This research deals with reading comprehension of English Foreign Language (EFL) students in Junior Secondary School context. In Indonesian English teaching and learning context, students in this level are taught to comprehensively read two kinds of texts namely functional and monologue text. Functional text is a short text that helps readers to perform English in daily life. It is presented in the form of letter, invitation, advertisement, announcement, etc. On the other hand, monologue text is a piece of writing in which the writer presents information, explanation and point of view to the readers. For junior high school, monologue text consists of five genres namely procedure, descriptive, recount, report and narrative.

Unfortunately, based on observations in the school and interview with the teachers, it is found that students' score of reading comprehension was low. Many students perceived reading narrative texts as a difficult task since they hardly comprehended what the texts were about, although they were able to read them. Further, the researcher found there are some factors that affected students' reading comprehension scores especially in narrative text. The factors encompass students' lack of vocabularies, prior knowledge about topic of the text and alternative comprehension strategy

in reading the narrative text taught by the teacher in the classroom. These factors also conform to the argument from Duke and Block (2012) which states that vocabulary, conceptual and content knowledge, and use of comprehension strategies become obstacles in improving reading comprehension.

Some researchers have long been interested in various aspects related to reading comprehension. The main focus of these researchers are to determine how reading strategies contribute to help students read effectively and how teachers can incorporate these strategies into reading instruction. Yussof, et al. (2012) have implemented a graphic strategy and several cognitive strategies (story structure, questioning, synthesizing, visualizing and inferencing) to enhance secondary school students' reading comprehension of narrative text. The use of graphic organizer was embedded in story structure strategy placed in before-reading strategy. This would communicate the conceptual relation of the story and words' relative spatial locus (Katayama & Robinson as cited in Yussof et al. 2012). Through quasi-experimental research design, the result indicated that these strategies increase students' reading comprehension effectively compared to conventional method. Further, study which is related with the effect of prior knowledge on reading comprehension also has been studied by Vitale and Romance (as cited in Duke and Block, 2012). They applied science IDEAS model which applied reading of age-appropriate text along with hands-on activities to develop knowledge of specific science content. The result showed that the model had positive impact on science achievement.

Other researches who applied some reading strategies which focus on text structure to enhance students' reading comprehension are Zwica and Gomez (2008) who had done the research about applying annotating strategy to support learning in teaching and learning science. They used this strategy to make students' reading comprehension in science materials better. The previous researchers have studied that reading strategy fostered acquisition of new vocabulary, prior knowledge toward reading comprehension, and comprehension strategy that focuses more on text structure to improve reading comprehension. They found that some reading strategies might give solution in the way to improve vocabulary, to enrich prior knowledge, and also to improve reading comprehension.

Based on my experience as an English teacher in a Junior Secondary School, the current situation in Indonesia may emerge as if some teachers actually have applied some classroom strategies, such as discussing, retelling, reading aloud and so on and so forth. However, there is an urgency to implement supplemental strategies regarding specific language skills. In this case, the students need alternative reading comprehension strategies which enhance their knowledge about narrative-text structure to help them understand the texts. Furthermore, numerous possible strategies would prepare students to be skillful reader since they would be able to employ particular strategy effectively by adjusting it to the situation needed to handle the text.

## **1.2 Talk-to-the-text reading strategy**

Based on the previous studies, the researcher is interested in applying other reading strategies which require students to focus more on text structure. One of such reading strategies is talk-to-the-text strategy. This strategy requires students to stop and reflect what they have read. When they stop for a while, they write all the information related to the text based on some questions (prompts) given to them before reading the text; the answers are then written on sticky notes that they place on the margin of the paper; later, the sticky notes will be used to generate the discussion about the content of the text (Vasquez, Hansen & Smith, 2010). The interesting point in this strategy is the use of sticky notes. Though the students are assigned to write the response based on the reading, the use of this small notes may make them feel less intimidated to write. Furthermore, by combining reading and writing activity perhaps students would understand more what a text is about. As supported by Zsigmond (2015), writing instruction could help fostering students' reading comprehension as it deals with metacognitive dimension.

Moreover, talk-to-the-text strategy helps students read the text in the more detailed fashion because a text is divided into chunks (certain part or pieces of text) before being delivered. The whole part of a text is not given in the same time. The students are required to read a certain part in a text first, and then write their responses in sticky notes. Later, it helps them to remember important information from their reading accurately. To help students in creating responses, teachers can offer some prompts or guiding questions that guide them to start writing later.

## **1.3 Narrative text**

Narrative text in this study was used with the consideration that eight grade students study narrative text first before other monologue texts. The students also have been prepared for facing the challenge of national examination in the ninth grade. Further, narrative text is also close to students' life, especially in their daily interaction since narrative texts are mostly fiction such as fairy tales and folk tales. According to Anderson (as cited in Olfah, 2013), narrative text is a text that tells a story and, in doing so, entertains the audience. In other words, its purpose is to present a view of the world that entertains or informs the listener or reader.

The most common generic structure of narrative texts is an opening that establishes setting and introduces characters, a complication and resulting events, a resolution/ending. This statement is supported by Knapp and Watkins (2005) who inform that the generic structures of narrative text are orientation, complication, and resolution. Orientation is the structure in the beginning of the text which introduces the characters. Besides introducing the participants (characters), it also sets the scene of the story, the time, and place where the story happened (Who, what, when and where). Complication is the time when the problems of the characters emerge in a story. It contains a series of events in which the main character attempts to solve the problem. Resolution

contains the final events which solve the characters' problems.

Briefly, the researcher expected that talk-to-the-text strategy would give significant effects on students' reading comprehension. Particularly, it is expected that talk-to-the-text would help students understand each part of narrative text. Therefore, this research tested two hypotheses, namely the null hypothesis which states that "talk-to-the-text strategy does not give significant effects on students' reading comprehension in narrative texts", and the alternative hypothesis, which states that "talk-to-the-text strategy gives significant effects on students' reading comprehension in narrative texts".

## 2. METHODS

### 2.1 Participants

The study was conducted in Junior Secondary School level or also called as SMP in Indonesian context. The sample was taken from the eighth grade students registered in academic year 2014/2015 in SMP N 17 Bintan, Indonesia. The sample was chosen through cluster random sampling. There were five classes in grade eight and only two classes were chosen as samples. In order to determine which group belonged to experimental and control group, the researcher threw a lottery. Both number of students in experimental and control class were 25 students so that the total number of the samples was 50 students.

### 2.2 Design

The current study employed quasi-experimental design since it used intact classes rather than created a new group for experimental class (Creswell, 2012). This study occurred due to the availability of classes used to treat certain teaching and learning strategy. Specifically, it used Pre-test and Post-test Design. The study took 8 weeks consisting of 10 meetings, covering the administration of pre- and post-tests. In the first meeting, pre-test was administered to the students before the treatment was given. At the end of the treatment, post-test was administered to the students in both groups after the treatment was given. The post-test scores were then compared to determine the effect of the treatment. Overall, there were 8 meetings for teaching and learning processes in each class that each meeting ended up being conducted for 2 X 40 minutes. Furthermore, there were two groups as samples which were chosen randomly. One group was the experimental group which was taught by applying talk-to-the-text strategy during reading activities and another is the control group consisting of students who had been taught with conventional reading activities which in this case was retelling strategy.

### 2.3 Materials

The narrative passages used in the study were adopted and adapted from National Examination collection. By considering the target learners as Junior Secondary School students, several adjustments were made in order to achieve readability and comprehensibility of the passages. Overall,

there were three passages used in treatment phase and all of them may be categorized as short narrative texts as most of them only consisted of short paragraphs.

### 2.4 Instruments

The instrument in the post-test was multiple choice question type. Each question has four optional answers which require students to choose one of them as the correct answer. The students ought to answer 20 questions in 80 minutes. The content of questions in this instruments were based on the combination of characteristics of good reading comprehension test and the contents of narrative texts. A good reading comprehension questions should cover the features of comprehension, namely topic, main idea, expressions in context, grammatical features, specifically stated detail, excluding facts which are not written and vocabulary in context (Brown and Abeywickrama, 2010). Moreover, the contents of narrative text were also considered, namely generic structure and grammatical features. In generic structure, there are orientation, complication, and resolution. All parts contain characters, setting, problems, and solutions of the problems that sometimes have moral and cultural values and are temporally presented in chronological order. Knapp and Watkins (2005) state that grammatical features of narrative text are: (1) the use of past tense verb; (2) the use of temporal connectivity; and (3) the use of specific character. Briefly, the indicator of reading comprehension used in the study can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Indicator of reading comprehension of narrative text

<b>Indicators of reading comprehension of narrative texts</b>	<b>Explanation of the questions</b>
Stated details	Detail information of the story that is stated in the text
Implied details	Information from the story that is not stated in the text, the students should understand the story to get implied meaning.
Reference word	Reference word to refer some characters from the text
Vocabulary in context	Understanding the vocabulary from the context, it can be synonym or antonym of the word.
Language features	Understanding the correct language features that are used in narrative text, for example the using of simple past tense and past continuous tense.
Generic structure	Finding information from each generic structure of narrative text, including introduction, complication and resolution.

**2.5 Instructions**

To commence the hypothesis testing, the treatment ought to be made sure as to whether it had been completely and smoothly applied to the whole students’ learning in experimental class. Different from students in control class who was taught by the usual retelling strategy, students in the experimental class was introduced to and got the chance to practice talk-to-the-text strategy in the classroom. Students would be provided with the opportunity and guidance to learn the strategy for further application in reading certain textual type independently.

There are some steps of teaching reading through talk-to-the-text strategy based on Vasquez et.al (2010). The first step requires teachers to preview the text and determine effective stopping places for students to respond to the reading selection. Texts can be divided into chunks (certain parts or piece of text) based on length, transition points, difficult passages, important events, etc. Teachers also consider the time needed by the students to read. Teachers arrange how many times will be spent for reading every piece of text.

The second step is explaining to students that they are going to record their thoughts about what they are reading and have them write their thoughts on a sticky note and place it next to the corresponding section of the text. Using prompts will help students to start writing.

The third step, once students have completed the reading, have them work in pairs and groups to share their responses. Groups should come to a consensus of agreement and disagreement on the information. Teachers as facilitator bridge the discussion and then bring them to understand the meaning of the text.

The fourth step is reviewing the strategy. Asking them what kinds of questions this particular text created for them. What kinds of strategies/ prompts did they find themselves using. Later, teachers ask them whether the prompts are helpful or not in comprehending a text.

**3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

**3.3 Results**

After being taught by implementing the talk-to-the-text strategy in eight time meetings, the students were given a post-test to check their comprehension about reading narrative texts. The distribution of the post-test scores can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Score distribution from both samples

<b>8A</b>		<b>8B</b>	
Score range	Frequency	Score range	Frequency
30-39	1	30-39	0
40-49	5	40-49	3
50-59	9	50-59	3
60-69	6	60-69	5
<b>70-79</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>70-79</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>80-89</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>80-89</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>90-100</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>90-100</b>	<b>0</b>
Total	25	Total	25
Mean Score	<b>56.2</b>	Mean score	<b>66.6</b>
Total Scores	1405	Total scores	1665

The data show the scores from both the experimental and control classes. These scores imply that the students of experimental class have higher scores than the students of control class do. It can be seen from both mean scores, where the mean of experimental class is 66.6 and the mean of control class is 56.2. Thus, the difference of both means is 10.4 and in other words it shows that the experimental class performs better than the control class. Based on table 1, in 8A or control class, there are only 4 students who pass the standard score of 70, whereas in 8B or experimental class, 14 students pass the standard score.

The result of hypothesis testing showed that  $t_{observed} = 2.99$  and the critical value of  $t_{table}$  at  $\alpha = .05$  by  $df$  40 of 1.68. Since the calculated value of  $t$  is larger than the critical value,  $t_o > t_c$  or  $2.99 > 1.68$ , it can be concluded that experimental group performed better than control group in answering the comprehension test given. When  $t_o > t_c$ , it means the alternative hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) was accepted and the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) was rejected. Therefore, it can be said that talk-to-the-text strategy gives better effects on grade eight students’ reading comprehension of narrative texts.

**3.4 Discussions**

Based on the results, the two groups have different reading ability as reflected by the mean of scores. The experimental group taught by applying talk-to-the-text strategy has a higher mean score than the control group which was taught by applying retelling strategy. In other words, talk-to-the-text is a better strategy than the one used in the school which in this case, is the retelling strategy.

The difference is caused by the success of talk-to-the-text strategy gaining students’ interest in reading. In applying talk-to-the-text strategy, the teacher gave students sticky notes and asked them to write responses. Based on the researcher’s observation in the field, the students were attracted to write on sticky notes. The use of sticky notes increased students’ participation while reading. Although not

all of their writings were about the given prompts of talk-to-the-text strategy, at least they had written their own thoughts about what they read. Writing on sticky notes appears to be an activity that demands students not only to read a text fast, but also to find essential information from the text.

This opinion also confirms the result of Zwyca and Gomez's study (2008) about "Annotating to Support learning in the content areas: Teaching and learning science" that supported writing activity while reading. In annotating strategy, students are also demanded to find the essential information from the text by marking up or highlighting the text. The finding of this research showed that annotating was correlated with students' comprehension. In a nutshell, writing activity while reading is one of the factors explaining why talk-to-the-text strategy performed better than retelling strategy.

Likewise, the use of prompts helped students understand the narrative-text structure from the text. Narrative-text structure actually is a set of elements in the story. They are characters, setting, events, conflict and resolution. The prompts actually deal with cognitive strategy questions by applying question words (5W1H), making connection, summarizing, and visualizing the story in a text (O'Malley and Chamot, 1987). They guided students to know what they should find in the text and what kind of answers they should write in sticky notes as their responses. Although all of the prompts were written in the sticky notes, at least the students had been trained to be a strategic reader while they were given a reading test. They would focus on the elements of the text to find the essential information by using prompts.

On the other side, retelling strategy is a good reading strategy. This strategy requires the students to reconstruct or retell what they have read in order to comprehend it. Unfortunately, if the students are asked to retell a text in front of the class, not all of the students are able to speak English fluently and accurately. Even though they are helped by the questions from the teacher while they get stuck about the story, not all of students are good at speaking English. In some cases, a student understood what a text was about but he had difficulty in retelling to others. In another case, a student only focused on how to retell accurately without comprehending what the text is.

Based on the explanations and the result of hypothesis testing, it can be concluded that talk-to-the-text strategy can be an optional strategy applied by teachers and students in teaching and learning reading narrative text. Though there is no best strategy applied in the classroom, but at least variation of the strategy will be beneficial effect on students' reading skill development. They may experience with different reading strategies and be able to recall each of them anytime they need. Moreover, the data showed that students tended to be motivated in using sticky notes. Further, the statistical analysis indicated this strategy was effective. Briefly saying, this strategy has fulfilled the requirements of good strategies that they should meet the conditions that make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations (Oxford, 2003).

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The finding of the research by testing the hypothesis shows that the alternative hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) was accepted and the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) was rejected. Based on the data analysis in the previous chapter, it can be concluded that talk-to-the-text strategy gave better effects on comprehension of grade eight students at SMP N 17 Bintan in reading narrative texts.

The researcher also found that applying talk-to-the-text strategy in the classroom could gain students' interest. Further, the prompt that was used in talk-to-the-text strategy could help students to be more focused on the essential information from the text. The use of sticky notes in the application of talk-to-the-text strategy could be used as sources to begin a discussion about the text.

Furthermore, the result suggests English teachers to apply talk-to-the-text strategy as a reading strategy for students in reading, especially narrative text, to help them focus on essential information from the text. Furthermore, it is also expected that in applying talk-to-the-text strategy, students take more time to be familiar with the strategy. Thus, this is teachers' role to give students more practice time to make this strategy becomes an effective one. For other researchers, since talk-to-the-text strategy has been successful to give effects on students' reading comprehension and is reportedly applicable to different genres of text, it is suggested for other researchers to further research the use of talk-to-the-text strategy to help students in comprehending other texts with different genres.

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