TEACHING ENGLISH READING AT SENIOR SECONDARY LEVEL IN SAMARINDA

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Abstract

Reading instruction literature in a first language context identifies a range of reading comprehension strategies that can be taught to students to enhance comprehension and these have been applied to teaching English passages in EFL contexts such as in Indonesia. These strategies are previewing, predicting, questioning, visualising, and summarising. This study was conducted in Samarinda, the capital city of Kalimantan Timur (East Borneo). Three secondary state schools, School-1, 2, and School-3, participated in this study. These schools had similar teachers’ qualifications, and teaching and learning facilities.

Keywords: Teaching, Reading strategies, English Foreign Language

BACKGROUND

The use of the strategies is applied in procedures for teaching reading in English senior secondary school in Indonesia. The procedures comprise of three steps: pre-reading, during-reading and post-reading.

In the pre-reading phase, for example, teachers can teach previewing strategies by examining passage headings, pictures, or a title. By activating background knowledge, predicting strategies are applied to anticipate a story event or what might happen in a passage. Predicting main ideas in each paragraph of the passage can be practised in the during-reading phase. Questioning strategies can also be used to guide reading and to monitor understanding in the during-reading as well as post-reading phase. In the post-reading phase, summarising is used to synthesise key ideas about the content of the passage.

Villaume and Brabham (2002) claim that better reading strategies provide students with an authority to become more involved in reading experiences and encourage them to be more engaged in their reading. They also argue that instruction used to teach reading strategies should be explicit and systematic. The instruction should be clear and comprehensive. Teachers should model the use of the strategies and provide opportunities for students to practice the strategies under their guidance.

METHODS

This study was conducted in Samarinda, the capital city of Kalimantan Timur (East Borneo). Three secondary state schools, School-1, 2, and School-3, participated in this study. These schools had similar teachers’ qualifications, and teaching and learning facilities.

The data were mainly gathered from observations of three English teachers from three different senior secondary schools. The three participants are named Issy, Ati, and Anna, and their classes of Grade 11 (all names are pseudonyms). Each class had about 37 students. The observations were conducted eight times; Issy’s class at School-1 was observed twice, while Ati’s class at School-2 and Anna’s class at School-3 were each observed three times. The observations
focused on the presentation of the reading lessons. The data for the observations comprised transcriptions from an audio-recorder of what the teachers and students had said.

The teachers’ talk from the audio recorder from each observation was transcribed and translated, in instances when Bahasa Indonesia (national language) was used. Next, the transcriptions were read to gain better understanding of the data. The transcriptions were then coded to identify which data were relevant to the focus of the study. Following this, the data were selected that were relevant to the phases of teaching reading and teachers’ questions, and initial analysis and conclusions were drawn. Verification of the data was completed by comparing the data with other sources of information such as field-notes and video recordings.

Observations of Issy’s Class at School-1

Observations of Issy’s class at School-1 were conducted twice and used the reading passages taken from the student textbook. The topics were about a cave which served as a tourist attraction and two funny stories, one about snoring, and one about an atheist.

Observation 1

The first lesson observed used the passage “Gua Tabuhan is a Lively Cave”. At the beginning of the lesson Issy asked her students to open their textbooks to the passage and to look at the picture of the cave. In this phase, she asked some questions taken from the textbook to determine students’ background knowledge about the cave.

The subsequent phase involved learning vocabulary and synonyms related to the passage taken from the textbook, the students working in pairs to match words with their meanings. After the students completed this task, the teacher modelled the pronunciation of those words and they were repeated by the students. Then, the teacher and students discussed the meaning of the matching words. Issy asked students for the synonym of each word and then confirmed the student’s answer.

Next, Issy asked students to skim the passage. She asked three students to read aloud individually. Each student read three paragraphs of the passage. During the reading aloud, she corrected the pronunciation of some words. As soon as the students had completed reading aloud and they seemed interested in the topic, Issy asked her students to begin the next activity. The students were asked to discuss the answers to the questions in the textbook and they were given approximately 15 minutes to complete the task. Discussion of the answers to these questions was the next phase. She asked one student to answer each question and then wrote the answer on the whiteboard.

Observation 2

The second lesson observed used two anecdotes of “Snoring”, and “An Atheist and Newton” from the textbook. As soon as the lesson began, Issy asked her students not to open their books to the passage. She asked the same questions as those provided in the textbook in order to try to develop students’ curiosity about the topic. Similar to the first observation, eight similar questions related to the passage about sleep were asked in this phase. Having asked these questions, Issy requested that her students open their textbooks and look at the task about synonyms. The students were individually required to match words with their meanings for vocabulary from the passages before discussion of these synonyms. Following this, she modelled the pronunciation of those words and the students repeated them after the discussion of the task.

Next, Issy modelled reading the passages. After she read each passage, one student was required to re-read the passage aloud. Then, as the students became interested in the topics, she asked them to answer the questions in the textbook, where English and Bahasa Indonesia were used interchangeably.

The next phase was similar to that in the first observation where students were asked to continue answering the questions from the textbooks. As there was not enough time available to do this in class, the task was then to be completed as homework.

In summary, the observations of Issy’s class at School-1 showed that Issy relied completely on the textbook as her methods for teaching English reading. She used repetitive questions which were taken from those presented in the textbook. In addition, Issy put a lot of emphasis on pronunciation and vocabulary development, not comprehension, when teaching reading.

Observations of Ati’s Class at School-2

Three observations of Ati’s class at School-2 were conducted. The passages used “Thanksgiving,” “Hummingbird” and “Ministers Endorse Plans on Trade, Bird Flu” respectively. The first and second passages were found in the
students’ textbook and the third passage was devised by the teacher.

**Observation 1**

The first lesson observed was about celebrations, specifically “Thanksgiving”. Ati began with some questions about holidays which were celebrated in Indonesia, but which could have meaning for a holiday in the U.S., e.g. what people usually did, and what typical activities occurred on each kind of holiday. This phase was intended to have the students think about a particular celebration, “Thanksgiving”, which is not celebrated in Indonesia. Ati asked her students whether they had ever heard the word “Thanksgiving” and what it was associated with, such as meals and costumes. Next, as the students did not know about “Thanksgiving”, six students were each required to read a paragraph aloud. Each time one student had read a paragraph, some important points from the paragraph were emphasised by the teacher.

In the following phase, the students were asked to read the whole passage silently for a few minutes. The next activity involved completing the tasks in groups on the basis of the seating row arrangement. Each group was asked to complete two questions from each of three different tasks from the textbook. These tasks were to find evidence for “True/False” questions, answer the questions based on the passage, and search for pronouns found in the passage.

After completing the tasks, the students were asked to report their answers and to discuss them with the class. Ati asked the same question of different students to obtain the “right” answer before discussing the next question. Local context was also applied help students to answer the questions and the discussion was extended to include comparisons such as typical food for “Thanksgiving” or for Moslems at “Idul Adha”. Finally, a grammar activity was conducted examining tenses, such as reviewing the simple present and past tense. The students were also asked about unfamiliar words.

**Observation 2**

“Hummingbird” was the passage used in the second observation at SMU3. Ati began the lesson by asking some questions about what the students had learnt when they were in primary school. Students’ answers were the alphabet, numbers, colours, and animals. Since the relevant answer was animals, the teacher continued to ask about what kinds of animals, followed by what kinds of birds. As the students enjoyed talking about different kinds of birds, Ati mentioned the word “Hummingbirds”. She asked whether the students knew about this kind of bird. Students responded that it was called “a hallibri” in Bahasa Indonesia. As it was also an unfamiliar word in Bahasa Indonesia for many students, she then asked the students to read the passage silently.

Next, Ati asked the students to form groups of five. They read the passage together and answered the questions provided in the textbook. Two students from each group presented the group answers in front of the class, while other students were expected to respond by showing their agreement or disagreement with the answers. In each presentation the teacher rechecked and explained the answers. This activity continued until the end of the lesson.

**Observation 3**

The third observation involved a current issue, bird flu. The passage entitled “Ministers Endorse Plans on Trade, Bird Flu” was taken from an English national newspaper. As the lesson began, Ati introduced about the topic of bird flu obtained from an article of English national newspaper. The students then were divided into eight groups consisting of four to five students in each group. Each group was assigned one paragraph of the passage where they were required to find the main idea of the paragraph, the pronouns, prepositions of time, as well as three difficult words and their meanings. After completing the task, each group was given the complete passage before presenting the results of their task in front of the class, where the answers were written on the whiteboard. Discussion of the group’s answers was carried out after each presentation. After the group presentations were completed, Ati discussed the passage.

The three observations from Ati’s class at School-2 showed that Ati asked her students questions in the pre-reading session. These questions were not directly related to the passage, but rather were aimed to make students think about the topic. She asked similar questions to those provided in the textbook about the content of the passage and when writing her own questions predominantly asked knowledge questions.

**Observations of Anna’s class at School-3**

Observations in Anna’s class at School-3 were conducted on three occasions and three passages were examined. These passages “Farming”, “Agriculture” and “Welfare”, were taken from student textbooks.

**Observation 1**
The first lesson observed used the passage “Farming”. Anna began the class by asking some questions which were the same as those in the textbook such as “Where do most Indonesian people live?”,”Village or country?” , and “What’s the difference between country and village?”. This activity continued until the students were able to answer questions about where modern farming could be found. As the students were curious about the areas of modern farming, Anna asked one of them to read the passage aloud. After the extensive discussion, she then asked her students to read the passage. She asked each of the students to read a paragraph of the passage one after the other. This activity was carried out twice.

The phase that followed was translation, where the students were required to translate the passage into Bahasa Indonesia. Next, the students were required to answer the questions provided by the textbook. After the students completed this task, Anna questioned the students about their answers. Finally, the students were asked to complete a task for homework about vocabulary presented in the textbook.

**Observation 2**

The passage used in the second lesson observed was “Horticulture” which was similar to the passage used in the first observation. As the lesson began, Anna immediately asked four different students a question about the meaning of horticulture. Only one student was able to answer the question, so she then asked individual students one after the other to read part of the passage aloud. This occurred perhaps because the students had no idea about the meaning of horticulture. She immediately asked her students to read aloud.

After the students finished reading aloud, Anna asked some questions related to the passage.

Next, the students were required to answer the questions from the textbook. Discussion of the answers to those questions was also conducted. Finally, the last task – sentence completion with the appropriate words provided in the textbook – was carried out for homework.

**Observation 3**

Anna and her students used the passage “Welfare” in the third observation at School-3. She introduced the topic by asking a question about the meaning of wealth. Some students responded that wealth was better than health, while others had the opposite view. The students had a discussion about this to see whether they could develop a better understanding of the term welfare. Then, she asked her students to read the passage silently while one student read the entire passage aloud. She continued by asking two other students to read the passage again. Next, the students translated the passage into Bahasa Indonesia. Finally, at the end of the lesson, their answers to the questions from the textbook were discussed.

It is evident that the textbook provided the template for the teaching activities. Translation into Bahasa Indonesia was emphasised in the reading lessons that implies that literal translation skill is of greater importance than reading for meaning in English in this classroom.

**FINDINGS**

The findings from the observations revealed that the teachers from the three schools taught their reading lessons in a relatively similar fashion. The way they taught English reading was similar to the traditional approach used by the majority of teachers in Indonesian classrooms. Teaching reading activities in the classroom began with some questions from the teachers. Then, the teachers asked students to skim a passage. Next, the students read the passage silently and the teacher offered some assistance if they needed some clarification. On completion of this task, two or three students were asked to read aloud. Translating the passage was sometimes conducted during this phase. Next, the students were required to answer the questions provided in the textbook and to complete the tasks presented there. This was carried out in the classroom if time was available or taken home for homework. These findings indicate that all three teachers were heavily dependent on the textbooks as a syllabus and for their teaching methodology. As a consequence, they often just followed or imitated the material presented in the textbooks.

The findings also revealed that comprehension of the passages was not the primary target of reading. For example, Issy (School-1) taught her students about pronunciation and synonyms prior to reading lessons. The students in Ati’s class at School-2 completed the reading tasks from the textbooks mostly as group work; while the School-3 teacher, Anna, asked her students to translate the passage before they were asked to complete the task. This indicates that each teacher had their own style of teaching reading with a different emphasis on the basic classroom strategies to achieve the aims of the reading syllabus. The teacher who highlighted pronunciation in reading probably also used this language focus as an important feature in teaching other skills such as speaking and listening. The teacher who emphasised translation from English
to Bahasa Indonesia possibly hypothesised that by including translation, better mastery of English could be achieved. The use of group work may have required more students’ involvement and participation in class activities, but the aim was not understanding of the reading passages.

The findings from the observations imply that the teachers need to focus on comprehension when teaching reading. This suggests that future research may explore strategies to improve reading comprehension particularly teaching and learning process in the EFL context.

REFERENCES


