

**Improving the Reading Comprehension of Grade VIII Students of SMP
Negeri 2 Tempel Yogyakarta in the Academic Year of 2016/2017 through
Semantic Mapping Strategy
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Abstract: The objective of this research is to improve the reading comprehension of eighth grade students at SMPN 2 Tempel, Yogyakarta through Semantic Mapping Strategy. The type of this study is action research. The research subjects were 33 students of grade VIII E at SMPN 2 Tempel, Yogyakarta. The research procedure is adapted from Burns (2010) with four steps; planning, action, observation, and reflection. The data of this research are quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative data were obtained from the pre test and post test scores. While the qualitative data were obtained by doing observation, interview, and discussion. There are five steps of Semantic Mapping Strategy used in this research; introducing topic, brainstorming, organizing, personalizing, and post-assignment synthesis. Based on the results, the use of Semantic Mapping Strategy can improve students' reading comprehension based on the result of the study.

Keywords: reading, comprehension, Semantic Mapping Strategy, students

Introduction

English is defined as a lingua franca that makes it widely used in the world of communication. It gives chance for people from different backgrounds and mother tongues to communicate each other. Not only English speaking countries, non-English speaking countries, such as Indonesia, also start to use English to communicate especially in the field of business, economy, and education.

In the education field, schools in Indonesia teach English as a foreign language. There are four basic skills of English (reading, listening, speaking, and writing) that needed to be learned by the students to make them have good English skills. All are important, including the reading skill. Reading is important for a variety of reasons. For example, it is a vital skill in finding a good job, enriching thoughts, widening visions, and enhancing knowledge.

Clarke (1980: 35) calls reading 'the most thoroughly studied and least understood process in education today'. Reading can be seen as an interactive process between a reader and a text. In this process the reader interacts with the text as he/she tries to elicit the meaning. It has also been described as a process of translating alphabetical symbols into a form of language from which the native speaker has already derived the meaning. Any exposure in reading English texts such as the material or the media is surely a good thing for students.

It cannot be denied that good cooperation between the teacher and the learner will make the learning successful. To achieve it, the teachers should act as both facilitator and instructor so the learners could engage well in the active interactive learning processes in developing comprehension (Cassidy et al., 2010). Moreover, Anderson and Pearson (1984) argue that the reader can comprehend a text by actively building meaning from interacting with the materials. They need to use strategies which can enhance their abilities in comprehending the text.

Based on the observation, many students in the class VIII E SMP Negeri 2 Tempel had problems in their reading comprehension because they were unable to accurately understand written materials, that is, they could not interpret what they read and make the connection between what they read and what they have already known. Meanwhile limited sources of materials and media also became one of the problems because they were not interesting enough for students to gain motivation in reading English texts. Students also had bad attitude to English. They easily got bored in the class and did not give attention to the teacher. They were busy chit-chatting with their friends or doing other activities.

Regardless to any problems occur in the class, reading is an important skill to be implemented in real life. Harmer (2007) states that there are some reasons why reading is important and needs to be learned. First, reading is needed to be acquired for the careers of the students, for study purposes, or simply for pleasure. Moreover, reading texts also lead the students to study about language, vocabulary, and the construction of sentences, paragraphs, and texts.

There are also many references that show semantic mapping as an interesting strategy for learning English. For the first time, semantic mapping was presented by Johnson and Pearson (1978). It expects that students come to the class with various knowledge about the materials or topics given by the teacher and use their various or previous knowledge as basic knowledge for the topic they will learn in the class.

Jones (2006) states that semantic mapping is a visual strategy which shows the main ideas of a certain topic and how they are related. There are five steps of semantic mapping as stated Zaid (1995): 1) introducing the topic; 2) brainstorming; 3) categorizing; 4) personalizing the map; 5) post-assignment synthesis. In teaching reading, semantic mapping can be useful to the teacher to get students focus on the details, structure of the text, and helps students in brainstorming the paragraph or short essay. In short, semantic mapping displays correlation among ideas, and the components of the story. Based on those facts, applying Semantic Mapping Strategy in language teaching and learning can be one of good ways to improve students' reading comprehension skills. Thus, the research was conducted to improve the reading comprehension skills of grade VIII students of SMP Negeri 2 Tempel, Yogyakarta through Semantic Mapping Strategy.

Research Method

This action research used Burns' model consisting of two cycles. Each cycle consisted of planning, action, observation, and reflection. This research was conducted in the first semester of the 2016/2017 academic year. The subjects were grade VIII E students of SMP Negeri 2 Tempel, Yogyakarta. The data were qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data were obtained through observations and interviews. Meanwhile the quantitative data were gained through tests. In analyzing the qualitative data, the researcher transcribed the interview and read it to make a conclusion on the important points in each teaching and learning process. The quantitative data were analyzed using Paired Sample T-Test in SPSS version 22 to see if the semantic mapping strategy influenced students' reading comprehension. To ensure the validity and the realibility of this research, the researcher used to democratic, outcome, process, catalytic, and dialogic validity. Meanwhile for realibility, the researcher used time and investigator triangulation.

Findings and Discussion

The first step of this research was reconnaissance. In this step, the researcher were identifying some problems and selecting probelms to solve. After that, the researcher started to plan some actions to overcome the problems. The researcher used semantic mapping as the strategy to help students in comprehending the text in the classroom. The students were asked to draw a semantic map based on the text given. Before drawing the semantic map, students were asked to do the steps of semantic mapping in the form of brainstorming, categorizing, personalizing, and post-assignment synthesis. The Brainstorming activity improved students' participation in giving opinion and ideas in the class. This activity also helped them in mastering the new vocabulary. Meanwhile the Personalizing activity led them in finding the detailed information of the text and understanding relationship among information. Thus, comprehending the text became easier than before.

However, some students still had difficulties in mastering vocabulary; many of them also did not want to write the new vocabulary they got in the notebook. To overcome these problems, the researcher provided a handout with some activities included in Cycle 2. The implementation of this activity helped the students to improve their vocabulary and increase their interest in participating in the teaching and learning process. This research was closed by the reflection at the end of each cycle.

The research resulted in the changes of behavior regarding to the students' participation in the class. The analysis from the quantitative data showed that the students' reading skills improved after the use of semantic mapping. The mean of the pre-test is 6.7 and the mean of the post-test is 7.9. It can be concluded that the mean of the post-test increases 1.2 from the mean of the pre-test. These showed that there was an improvement of students' reading skills after using semantic mapping strategy in the classroom. To support the descriptive analysis data, the researcher also analyzed the data by looking at the T-Test. The data indicate that

the probability value is 0.00. This means the result is significant because the p-value is lower than the significance level ($0.00 < 0.05$). It means that there is a significant difference in the reading ability of the students after being taught using Semantic Mapping Strategy.

Conclusions

The result of the qualitative and quantitative data revealed the improvement of the students' writing skills by using Semantic Mapping (SM) Strategy. Semantic Mapping helped them to be familiar with the content and organization of the text. The use of SM also helped them to improve their vocabulary mastery since it leads students to think about the ideas especially in the brainstorming activity. The use of semantic mapping also increased students' interest in learning since they are provided with an interesting activity. In conclusion, the result of this research shows that the use of semantic mapping improves the reading comprehension skills of grade VIII E students of SMP Negeri 2 Tempel, Yogyakarta.

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