THE USE OF WEBQUEST TO IMPROVE STUDENTS’ READING COMPREHENSION

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Abstract

Having good reading comprehension plays an important role for students who want to continue their study to higher level or for those who want to gain success in their future. Reading is also one of the best ways to improve their English because by reading a lot the students may get knowledge and the latest issues. Good reading comprehension is not only useful for reading subject but also for other subjects that they learn. To help the students improve their achievement in reading comprehension the teacher should be able to create situations that may rise the students’ motivation. Integrating technology, pedagogy and human resources during the process of teaching and learning the language is one of the ways suggested by the experts. This article, however, will try to offer the solution, that is, by using web-based teaching instruction which is called WebQuest in teaching reading.

Keywords: WebQuest, Reading comprehension

INTRODUCTION

English is one of important subjects offered for Indonesian students. It’s status is as a foreign language. English has been introduced to kindergarten and elementary school students as an elective subject. For junior and senior high school students English belongs to a compulsory subject. Moreover, for junior and senior high school students English is also one of the subjects tested in the final national examination. According to the national curriculum as stipulated in Garis-Garis Besar Program Pengajaran or GBPP (Deparmenten Pendidikan & Kebudayaan 2006) all of senior high school students should be taught listening, speaking, reading and writing integrally. The goals of teaching English are: (1) the use of English in communication and (2) the score in the final national examination (Deparmenten Pendidikan & Kebudayaan, 2004). The two goals are relatively difficult to be achieved by most of the students. Fakhri Ras (2011) reported that most of the third year students of senior high school in Pekanbaru could not use English for communication even though they have learned the language for almost six years before finishing their study at senior high school. Among the four skills, however, reading skill tends to be the
priority in the teaching and learning activities. The students have to master the reading materials because together with listening, reading will be tested at final national examination (35 items for reading and 15 items for listening). The Six of this final national examination is to evaluate the students' achievement and proficiency. Both the teacher and the students then neglected the productive skills speaking and writing, because these skills are not covered in the final national examination.

Having good reading comprehension is very important for students or those who have desire for further study or for their future careers because by reading the students may improve their English as well as understand up-to-date information (Tran Trong Tuan 2011). According to senior high school curriculum 2006 the competency should gained by the students on aspects of reading are: the students should understand the meaning of written interpersonal and transactional discourse, formally or informally, in the form of recount, narrative, procedure, descriptive, news item, report, analytical exposition, hortatory exposition, spoof, explanation, discussion, and review, in everyday life context. Based on interviews with some English teachers of various senior high schools in Pekanbaru during September 2012, it was found that the achievement of students' reading comprehension was not yet satisfactory.

Unsatisfactory of students' reading comprehension caused by several factors, that can be summarized as: (1) cognitive factors, (2) affective factors, (3) factors from reading texts, and (4) factors of proficiency. The first factor is related to the knowledge, experience, and level of intelligence of students' ability to think. The second factor is related to emotional state, attitudes, and situations. The third factor is related to the level of difficulty and readability of a reading text that is influenced by the choice of words, structure, content of reading text, and language usage. The last factor is related to students' proficiency level associated with the mastery of vocabulary, structure, and elements of texts.

This view is in line with the findings of Rina Febritasari (2010) and (Simur Vera Afriana 2012). Their study found that students' inability to answer questions caused by their lack of vocabulary. Students' vocabulary was very minimal so they were not able to get the meaning of a reading text well. Another factor that caused unsatisfactory level of students' achievement on reading related to lack of interest and motivation to read (Susilowati 2012). The students say that they readjust because they have to read, not because they are interested to read. From the teachers' side, weaknesses in terms of teaching methods are still the main issues related to student achievement in examinations. Patterns of English language teaching in schools are still monotonous and boring. There is an inclining that most
of the teachers are still using conventional teaching methods. Teaching the same subject for years also cause teachers to think they do not need to make any preparation in teaching [Mahdum 2010]. Learning situations like this tend to make the students become passive.

A good teacher will always try to do his best to help students to learn. To assist students in improving their achievement on reading comprehension, a teacher must create a learning environment that is communicative and student-centered. Communicative and student-centered learning environment may encourage students’ participation and interaction.

There are many teaching methods of student-centered suggested by educational experts. One of the ways is by using information and communication technologies in education (Norazah Mohd Nordin & Ngau Chai Hong 2009). The existence of computers and internet indeed has brought new changes in the teaching and learning process. Besides, the use of computers and internet can make teachers become more creative and innovative. The use of computers and the internet can also facilitate the teaching and learning process in the classroom. Auzar (2009) argues that the use of computers can make learning program activities faster.

The use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in education creates a new teaching method which is called a web-based instruction. A Study conducted by Muhammad Anas, Mursidin T & Firdaus (2008); Mohd. Azif Ismail, Rosmaini Mahmud & Zainuddin Yazid (2007) proved that the use of the web in teaching and learning activities is able to provide support for interactive communication among teacher, students, and learning materials required in a learning activity. For teachers, the use of the web provides many resources in planning learning material. Meaning that, besides sourcing from textbooks, teachers can get books and additional references from internet.

One application model of the web-based instruction in the classroom is the use of WebQuest (Norazah Mohd Nordin & Ngau Chai Hong 2009). WebQuest model is designed by Bernie Dodge in 1995 and developed by his colleagues March in 1998. According to Dodge, WebQuest is an inquiry-oriented activity in which some or all of the information required by the students derived from the sources on the internet. WebQuest allows students to explore the virtual world of learning outside the classroom and access information from the web. By using a WebQuest as a learning tool, students will be able to understand the learning material more easily (Norazah Mohd Nordin & Ngau Norazah Chai Hong 2009).

Agus. D. Priyanto (2009) explains that WebQuest can be used in teaching and learning process because: (1) can develop a way of thinking critically: analyze, synthesize, and apply new information; (2) develop collaboration or mutual learning; (3) provide scaffolding materials and; (4) suitable for problem-
based learning, and (5) suitable for adult learners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading and Reading Comprehension

Experts are still disagreed in giving accurate definition of reading. Nevertheless, there is an agreement; one important element that must exist in any reading activity is understanding or comprehension. This opinion is supported by Zamri Mahazod, Mohamed Amin Embr and Nik Mohd Rahimi Nik Yusoff (2010) who say that after reading a text, the reader need to understand what the content to be conveyed by the writer. Reading is an active process, has a purpose, and it requires a certain strategy in accordance with the purpose of reading and the type of reading. Reading is also an activity that involves physical and psychological process. Physical process involves the activity of visually observing form of writing and is a mechanical process in reading. Mechanical process is continued in the form of the psychological process of thinking in processing the information. The process began when visual senses send their observations of the writings to the center of consciousness through the nervous system.

Pang et al. (2003) agree that reading is a complex activity that involves both perception and thought. It consists of two related processes: word recognition and comprehension. Word recognition refers to the process of perceiving how written symbols correspond to one's spoken language. Comprehension is the process of making sense of words, sentences and connected text. According to Lenz (2005), reading comprehension is the ability of getting an approximate understanding of the writer's idea in a text. By comprehend a text, reader could understand what the writer tries to tell about in the text. Since reading comprehension is the process of constructing meaning of the written text with readers’ background knowledge (Strothman 2006), the reader's prior knowledge directly impacts new learning situations. When readers get new knowledge from the text, they will relate it with their prior knowledge. While reading process, readers will create the visualization of the relation in their mind in order to get what the writers mean in the text (Williams 2008).

This idea is correspond to what Horowitz (2006) argues. Good readers must also be able to understand the words they read, and to relate what they read to their own lives and experiences. When readers get information of a written text, they will construct the new information with the knowledge that they already have in order to gain the writer's idea. So, everyone could have different interpretation of a text, since his/her background knowledge may be different with another. David Nunan (2003) also gives his idea about reading. According to him,
reading is a fluent process of readers combining information from a text and their own background knowledge to build meaning. The goal of reading itself is comprehension. The reader’s background knowledge integrates with the text to create the meaning. In short it can be said that reading comprehension is the process of constructing meaning of the written text with readers’ background knowledge, the reader’s prior knowledge directly impacts new learning situations. When readers get new knowledge from the text, they will relate it with their prior knowledge. While reading process, readers will create the visualization of the relation in their mind in order to get what the writers mean in the text.

Understanding the process of reading is also important. David Nunan (2003) divides the reading process into: (1) bottom-up model; (2) top-down model; and (3) interactive model. Bottom-up model is typically a lower-level reading process. Students start with the fundamental basics of letter and sound recognition, which in turn allows for morpheme recognition followed by word recognition, building up to the identification of grammatical structure, sentences, and longer text. Letters, letter clusters, words, phrases, sentences, longer text, and finally meaning is the order in achieving comprehension. Top-down models, on the other hand, begin with the idea that comprehension resides in the reader. The reader uses background knowledge, makes prediction, and searches the text to confirm or reject the predictions that are made. The interactive model is a model that is accepted as the most comprehensive descriptions of the reading process. This model combines elements of both bottom-up and top-down models assuming that a pattern is synthesized based on information provided simultaneously from several knowledge sources.

Nasamalar Chitravelu, Saratha Sithamparam & Teh Soo Choon. 2004. Mention about some important insight about reading: (1) reading involves knowledge of certain writing conventions; (2) real reading involves not merely sounding of the words in a text but understanding the meaning or message the words are intended to carry; (3) understanding a text involves understanding the language in which it is written; (4) reading involves utilizing previous knowledge; (5) reading is a thinking process; (6) reading is an interactive process; (7) reading is a life-support system; and (8) reading is not a single skill but is a multiple skill that is used differently with different kinds of text and in fulfilling different purpose.

Students’ comprehension of the text can be evaluated from different aspects. Nuttal (1982) mentions that there are five types of questions can be used to classify reading comprehension: (1) questions of literal comprehension; (2) questions involving reorganization or reimplementation; (3) questions involving reorganization or reinterpretation; (4) questions of evaluation;
and (5) question of personal response. Hughes (2002) states different opinion about types of reading comprehension questions. They are: (1) identifying order of events and topics; (2) identifying reference; (3) guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words in context. Moreover, King and Stanley (1989) state that reading comprehension is related to these five components. They are: (1) finding factual information; (2) finding main idea; (3) finding the meaning of vocabulary in context; (4) identifying reference; and (6) making inference.

Pardono (2005) adds two more types of questions that can be used in reading comprehension, that is: True-false question and Exception question. In a True-false question, the students are given set of sentences and then they are asked to decide whether the sentences are true or false according to the given text. In an Exception question, the students are given some sentences, then, they are asked to decide which sentence is not true according to the text.

It can be seen that to comprehend the text is not easy. In order to have good comprehension, the students need to have background knowledge, understand various kinds of reading skills, and have sufficient amount of vocabulary. Besides, the students have to know about lexical, grammatical, cultural meaning, text organization and connection between sentences. Many students fail to catch the writer’s idea because of the limitation of thinking and analyzing the meaning of words and sentences. Good reading comprehension is very tightly associated with the acquisition process of English as a foreign language. By having a good reading comprehension, students will be allowed to make progress not only on the reading subjects, but also in all areas of science.

Using WebQuest in Teaching Reading

The idea for WebQuest came from Bernie Dodge, a professor at San Diego State University in 1995 (Dodge 1997). The WebQuest is created as a strategy to introduce the World Wide Web into the classroom. Therefore, a WebQuest is an inquiry-oriented lesson format in which most or all the information that learners work with comes from the web (Dodge, 1997). The WebQuest design is based on a constructivist philosophy, and it promotes cooperative learning and scaffolding of instruction. WebQuest for language learning allows students to construct their knowledge of the language through exploring structured web resources on their own (Laborda 2009).

Chen Shan (2011) says that the use of WebQuest in foreign language learning is also supported by Krashen’s Input Hypothesis; a foreign language is better acquired when it is meaningful and acquired through experience. In addition, several studies (Bradshaw et al. 2002; Owens et al. 2002; Ridgeway et al. 2002; Zheng et al. 2005) have linked WebQuest to the
development of higher order thinking skills and problem solving skills (Zhou & Li 2010). More importantly, WebQuest learning helps students become better learners by increasing their autonomy and providing them a sense of fulfillment (Cai 2005; Liu Song & Kong 2007; Lou 2010). Isabel Perez Torres (2007) state several advantages of using WebQuest: (1) can be used to foster critical thinking; (2) provide a fast way for students to use the resources on the Internet without time-consuming searches; (3) clear structure and effective use of time; (4) improve motivation; and (5) improve collaboration and cooperation among students. The use of technology captures the attention of students. It increases students’ motivation to learn complex skills. When teachers use computers in constructivist ways, students may work together, help each other, and use a variety of resources to solve problems. Active engagement and engagement with real-world situations to foster higher-order thinking are key features of constructivist teaching (Roblyer, 2003).

A well-designed WebQuest typically consists of six components (Dodge 1998): (1) introduction; (2) task; (3) process; (4) resources; (5) evaluation; and (6) conclusion.

• The Introduction is normally used to introduce the overall theme of the WebQuest. It also provides background information of the topic as well as introduces key concepts which the students will need to understand in order to complete the tasks involved.
• The Task section of the WebQuest explains clearly and precisely what the learners will have to do through the WebQuest. The task should obviously be highly motivating and intrinsically interesting for the students.
• The Process section of a WebQuest provides step-by-step instructions for completing the task. The process should provide a clear description of what the students should do.
• The Evaluation section explains how assessment of the final product will take place. This is usually in the form of a rubric or checklist.
• The conclusion summarizes what the students have learned as a result of completing the activity.

There are two main types of WebQuest defined primarily by the scope of the tasks involved: short term or long term (Ayfer Şen & Steve Neufeld 2006). Both employ similar principles and methods but for different purposes. Short-term WebQuest is designed to be completed within less than two or three lessons with a limited amount of new information for students to comprehend and process. Long-term WebQuest is usually designed to span a week or a month’s period depending on the given tasks, which usually require the students to analyze new information
and show their understanding by elaborating or synthesizing their ideas.

Following Dodge’s five rules for writing a great WebQuest (Chen Shan 2011), the WebQuest is characterized by the following features: (1) Websites were carefully selected and screened to prevent students from information disorientation and overload. Resources were organized into categories with a short description for each category. (2) Students were divided into groups and required to work collaboratively to complete tasks. (3) Tasks were designed to challenge students to think and use the language in life-like situations. (4) Linguistic and cognitive scaffolding was provided for each section.

The application of teaching reading by using WebQuest can be presented as the following. The teaching and learning process should take place in the computer lab with internet access. At the first meeting, the teacher should introduce the WebQuest to the students and demonstrated the way how to study by using the WebQuest. The teacher should also give time to the students to navigate through the sites on their own to get familiar with each section of the WebQuest. The activity of teaching and learning itself can be divided into three phases: the pre-activity, during or while-activity, and post-activity phase. In the pre-activity phase, the topic and task(s) are introduced by the teacher, including the goal, procedure, and time needed. Warm-up activities are usually included, such as brainstorming or mind mapping used to activate their background knowledge. In the during-activity phase, the students work in group to complete tasks. They complete the task by using step-by-step guidelines given in the WebQuest. In other words, the students have to complete the task by reading the articles provided on the WebQuest. The role of the teacher, then, is as a facilitator, organizer, and guides the students. The students have responsibility for their learning and ask for help when they need it. Next, students worked with their group members to pool their research findings and develop PowerPoint presentation slides. Finally, the students present the results of their discussions to the class using PowerPoint slides. In the post-task phase, the teacher summarizes the teaching materials and led the students to review targeted knowledge or skills. The teacher also evaluates students’ work and provides opportunities for repeated performance, if necessary.

CONCLUSION

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that it needs hard effort from the students if they want to gain good reading comprehension. They need to have background knowledge. Indeed they have to understand well about reading skills and strategies. Moreover, they should have sufficient amount of vocabulary. Besides, the students have to know about lexical,
grammatical, cultural meaning, text organization and connection between sentences.

The use of technology in education, especially the use of WebQuest in language learning plays an important role to improve the students’ achievement. The use of WebQuest places the students in a well-structured learning activity. Guidance provided by the teacher will make the teaching and learning process more effective. WebQuest provides the students with necessary resources of information to discuss. The teacher’s advance planning and guidance during the activity also make the search for information more effective within the time available so that the students can spend the class time more on discussing the issue. WebQuest activity is, therefore, a well-structured activity appropriate for students to improve motivation and read extensively in a limited amount of time.

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