



## **STRATEGIES ON TEACHING READING COMPREHENSION FOR THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

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### **Abstract**

English teacher applies certain strategies in teaching reading comprehension to achieve the objective of learning. Covid-19 pandemic has changed the ways of teaching from face to face to online learning. This study is intended to investigate strategies the teacher used, to know the problems faced by the teacher in implementing strategies, and to know how the teacher solves the problems in implementing strategies on teaching reading comprehension during the covid-19 pandemic at junior high school. This descriptive qualitative research was conducted at SMP 2 Manyaran, Central Java. The subject is an English teacher. Observation and interview were applied to collect the data. Miles and Huberman's interactive model is used to analyze the data. The results of this research show that the teacher applies five strategies to teach reading comprehension during the pandemic covid-19 namely, strategy of identifying the purpose in reading, skimming the text for main ideas, scanning the text for specific information, analyzing vocabulary, and implementing L-R-D (Listen-Read-Discuss) strategy. The teacher encounters several problems in implementing the strategies because the students fail to identify the purpose of the text, face difficulty to skim the text and analyzing vocabulary. To overcome the problems, the teacher makes several efforts such as giving more exercises and texts and conducting discussions. The online learning during the covid-19 pandemic challenges the English teacher to navigate the students to find the sources of learning using the technologies.

Keywords: Strategies, reading comprehension, covid-19 pandemic

### **INTRODUCTION**

During the covid-19 pandemic activities in face-to-face learning process in the class was changed to learning from home. According to World Health Organization (WHO) on 8 May 2020, that corona virus can easily be transmitted from human to human, so it is very dangerous if gather many people in one room. The learning flow in the classroom has the highest risk of spreading the virus because teacher-student or students-students touch each other. Duration of the learning in class can also increase the risk of passing the virus. The students who come from various regions do not have the guarantee of being protected from the corona virus both from their home, their environment, even on the way to their school. The pandemic makes Indonesian governments issue many policies. The Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia has begun to limit the learning process at schools and universities. The Minister of Education and Culture issued Circular Number 4 of 2020 concerning the Implementation of Education in a Coronavirus (Covid-19) Emergency, one of which emphasizes that online/distance learning is carried out to provide a learning experience without burdening the students.

The learning process from home may vary and take into the students learning facilities. The facilities include the use of technologies for learning because some learning platforms should be installed in electronic devices such as mobile phones, computers, and tablets. Both teachers and students should be familiar with the changes of the ways of learning from face to face to online learning.

Students who are good at language learning can be able to understand English learning easily from those who are less intelligent so that the strategy that teacher used must be efficient. A study of strategies to teach reading comprehension has been conducted by Anjulo (2017) which focuses on the use an extensive reading strategy. The result is that intensive reading strategy is a strategy that is often used by students, but extensive reading strategy has a great positive effect on students reading comprehension. Furthermore, Kung and Aziz (2020) conducted research using metacognitive reading strategies. The result is that metacognitive reading strategies can improve reading comprehension and give students many opportunities to read independently. This study focuses on strategies to teach reading comprehension during the covid-19 pandemic.

This study is started from the preliminary research that results the data of the students' difficulties in understanding reading comprehension. The teacher also faces a challenge during the learning process in the classroom that many students encounter more difficulty in understanding the material of reading comprehension in online learning. The students' interest in reading texts also decrease. This is a challenge for English teacher to use strategies on teaching reading comprehension that are creative and innovative so that students can enjoy learning well.

## Reading

Reading is the most essential skill for success in all educational contexts (Brown, 2004, p.185). Reading is a process to know, to comprehend, and to feel the content of the text. Reading is an activity where we can explore a lot of information contained in the reading content. According to Bamford & Day (1998, p.6) reading is a process related to recognition and comprehension of the word. Word recognition in here it means a process of perceiving symbols written of the text that match a person's spoken language. Smith (2004, p.3) defines reading as an activity to have four characteristics, namely the purposeful, selective, anticipatory, and based on comprehension.

Nunan (2003, p.68) explains that reading is a fluent process for readers to combine a lot of information from the reading text and background knowledge they know before reading to construct meaning. The purpose of reading is understanding. It can be summed up that reading is a process to find out, to understand, and to feel the content of text. Reading is an activity where we can explore a lot of information contained in the reading content.

## Reading Comprehension

Almutairi (2018:1) explains that one way to achieve the goals and expectations of education, students must master reading comprehension skills so that they can organize the class well. McNamara (2007, p.11) defines comprehension is an ability where someone can go beyond the words, understand some ideas of a paragraph and know the relationship in each idea in a text. Comprehension refers to the process of understanding a word, sentence, and connected text. McKee (2012, p.46) defines comprehension as the ability to find out and grasp a text, identify implicit and explicit information in a text, and connect the interpretation of what the writer says and what the reader thinks. For the example, when students can understand textual information, finding information related to the text, and identify important information that was available in text.

According to Snow (2002, p.9) reading comprehension is a process where meanings are explored and constructed together with written language interaction. Woolley (2011, p.15) states that reading comprehension is one of the most important components of reading that must be mastered. In each of the activities, students are required to be able in construct a strong comprehension of the meaning in the text that students read. Klingner, Vaughn and Boardman (2007:8) state that reading comprehension is a process of complex collaboration between readers, their interest in reading the text, what they think about the text, the knowledge they get from previous texts and understanding the type of text. Furthermore, reading comprehension can be explained as the student's capability to comprehend a whole of the text, including understanding

implied and implied meanings, types of reading text, the information or knowledge contained in the text, the aims of reading and the student's capability to use strategies on reading comprehension. Oakhill, Chain and Elbro (2015, p.1) defines that reading comprehension as a complex task combines cognitive skills and abilities such as identifying words, decode and mastery of language in the text. In a text the author usually uses certain codes such as the use of synonyms, antonyms, and idioms so the reader needs to decode this code. It means that to be able to identify words and decode the text, readers need to mastering language so that they can easily understand the reading.

### ***Components of Reading Comprehension***

There are many skills that can contribute to overall comprehension performance. McNamara (2007, pp.48- 50) writes three components of skills related to the meaning.

1. Inference-making  
Making inference is very important to ensure a good understanding of the text. The author doesn't have to write every little detail in the text so that the text becomes long and it makes the reader bored. However, the readers are left to fill in details in the text that are not stated explicitly. The readers can fill in details by integrating the attached statement or inserting general knowledge with information in the text.
2. Comprehension monitoring  
Comprehension monitoring is essential to construct meaning. When students realize that they are lacking in comprehending, they can take several steps or ways to solve the problem. Comprehension monitoring can be seen by asking the students to analyze the consistency of a reading text. These can be found in random sentences, contradictions, or information that contradicts the content of the texts.
3. Understanding text structure  
Instructions in the text structure can help someone reading comprehension. An explicit awareness of the structure of the text and the expectations it generates from it can be a useful tool for readers. This means that readers can use the background information and schemas in the text to construct meaning-based representations.

Meanwhile, Pang, *at. al* (2003) state that there are five components of reading.

1. Phonological and phonemic awareness  
Phonological awareness is an ability where the students are able to find language sounds that are different from their meaning. Phonological awareness has a strong correlation with a person's reading ability when viewed from the study of the language (alphabet and non-alphabet). In the study of the language of the alphabet, phonemic awareness is very influential because it can map each letter of the alphabet into phonemes.
2. Fluency  
Fluency is one of the most component in reading. Someone that is include category fluent in reading is they are that able to read quickly, accurately and with full expression. A person who is fluent in reading has no problem with vocabulary recognition so they can focus on the meaning of words in the text.
3. Vocabulary Good readers are readers who are able to master vocabulary knowledge well. When understanding a reading, readers must understand the meaning of each word they read by building text understanding through the ability to understand words according to the context in the sentence. Actually, getting knowledge of vocabulary is very difficult but this is really needed when someone is learning to read and wants to develop their reading skills.
4. Prior knowledge  
Reading comprehension can be developed from the students' prior knowledge. This prior knowledge can be in the form of knowledge about culture, learning materials, the outside

world and even linguistic knowledge obtained from various sources. The students can comprehend the text when they already have the knowledge about the topic.

#### 5. Comprehension

Comprehension is the activities by which someone gets or knows the meaning of the text they is reading. A person's comprehending in reading can be seen from the knowledge of vocabulary, thinking and reasoning they are involved in the reading process.

### ***Strategies of Reading Comprehension***

McNamara (2007, p.6) states that strategies for reading comprehension are cognitive actions or behaviors that aim to improve several aspects of reading comprehension in certain contextual conditions. The strategy used by the students is depend on which strategy that suits with them. Brown (2001, pp. 306-310) provides several strategies for reading comprehension.

#### 1. Identify the purpose in reading

Effective reading consists of identify the purpose of reading clearly. In here students shall know and be able to identify the purpose of their reading. This strategy is important because by find out the purpose of reading allows students to easily get the information that they are searching and looking for in the text and also get rid of potentially distracting information in the text. The easiest way to find the purpose of reading is the teacher explains to the student about the purpose of reading according the type of reading text and look for main ideas in each paragraph.

#### 2. Use grapheme rules and pattern to aid in bottom-up decoding (beginning level)

In many cases, students are familiar with the spoken language. They also have difficulty in English spelling terms. Students may need an explanation of certain English orthographic rules and their characteristics. This is because not all grapheme-phoneme correspondences can be obtained easily. In addition, they have to use the rules and patterns of graphemes that are made to fit between spoken and written English.

#### 3. Use efficient silent reading strategy for relatively rapid comprehension (for intermediate to advanced levels)

This strategy is not suitable for the first level because the learners at this level still have limited vocabulary and grammar pattern mastery. In the reading process, intermediate to advanced students do not need to read fast because the teacher can aid them to increase their efficiency by teaching silent reading. Focus on words that are important for global understanding, skip unnecessary words and try to deduce the meaning of the context.

#### 4. Skim the text for main ideas

Quick skimming directs the student's gaze across the text to find the gist of the reading text. Skimming aids students to predict the goal of, the main topic, the message in the reading, and maybe some ideas that develop or support the text. The teacher provides several questions related to the reading content and asks students to read the text to answer the question.

#### 5. Scan the text for specific information

The aims of this strategy are to find specific information without reading the entire text. Scanning reading focuses students on phrases that contain important information and leaves phrases that are deemed unimportant to make it easier to find detailed information. The teacher can instruct students to do the scanning exercise related to search the name of the characters, setting of place, setting of time or to list some sentence/word supporting details.

#### 6. Use semantic mapping or clustering

Semantic mapping strategies or grouping ideas into meaningful clustering, can help students organize and minimize reading clutter. Semantic map making can be done independently, but with productive group work techniques make the students pushed

collectively and can make mapping into sections so the student easier in reading comprehension.

7. Guess when you are not certain

In this strategy the teacher can help students become accurate guessing. The teacher can use this strategy by liken reading as a guessing game. When students are able to understand the guesses in the reading, the students' reading comprehension ability is very good.

8. Analyze vocabulary

The teacher can use this strategy when the student cannot analyze of the vocabulary. The students who have difficulty understanding the meaning of vocabulary need an easy way to analyze vocabulary. To analyze vocabulary the student can search prefixes (like inter-, and un) to give clues of words, search suffixes (like -tion and -ally) to find the type of part of speech, search roots that are familiar with the student, search grammatical contexts that might key information, and search the semantic context for clues in analyzing vocabulary.

9. Distinguish between literal and implied meaning

This needs the application of top down skills. Not all languages can be interpreted with regard to literals and syntax. The implied meaning should usually be derived from pragmatic information processing. Many students find it difficult to distinguish between literal and implied meanings because the student lack of vocabulary, pragmatic and syntactic mastery. This strategy can help students to have the ability to understand literal meanings but also to understand discourse analysis.

10. Capitalized on discourse makers to process relationship

Many discourse makers in English hint at the relationship between ideas expressed through phrases, clauses, and sentences in the reading text. Understanding that is so clear can improve reading efficiency for readers. Such clear understanding can improve reading efficiency for readers.

The teacher can choose the strategy that is most likely to help students understand the text well. Teacher must pay attention to student abilities, student reading difficulties, reading levels, and student assessments. In teaching reading, teacher have responsibility to help students achieve reading goals. The teacher can provide, select or create texts that are appropriate with the lesson plans and students' abilities, design of reading assignments that are useful for students to understand reading texts, organize effective learning activities, and create a supportive environment for practicing reading.

## Strategies on Teaching Reading Comprehension

Strategy in teaching plays an important role to achieve the goal of learning. Brown (2004, p.229) mentions several strategies on teaching reading comprehension.

1. The teacher needs to identify the purpose of the reading

This is very important to help teacher choose the right reading books for learning. Having a clear purpose of the reading can also help students find a reading text that suits their requirement. They will sort out the reading texts that are useful to them and ignore reading that is not important. Efficient reading that consists of identifying the purpose of reading can help them to get accurate information and ignore information that has the potential to damage the purpose of reading.

2. Ensure that there are graphics and pictures in the reading to help young learners in decoding and capturing the meaning of the reading easily. Graphics and pictures can also attract young learners to read. In addition, can use efficient silent reading techniques to read and understand the reading quickly. This applies to intermediate to advanced readers who are already accustomed to reading.

The use of creative strategies makes students more active and interested in learning reading comprehension. There are many strategies on offer to help teacher teach reading comprehension. Strategies on teaching reading comprehension can be used according to teaching needs. It is adapted to the student's background, the genre of text and the problems that appear in teaching reading comprehension.

In this research, researcher chooses an English teacher of 7<sup>th</sup> grade of junior high school class as research subject. Based on the interview with the English teacher, it is known that the teacher used several strategies in teaching reading comprehension. One of the strategies used is L-R-D (Listen, Read, and Discuss) strategy. In listen step, the students listen to the materials explanation and instructions from the teacher that will be learned via WhatsApp Group application. In read step, the students read the text after receiving explanation and instructions from the teacher. In discuss step, the teacher and students do discussions together when students do not understand the material and after the students did exercises. The teacher also said that

## METHOD

This descriptive qualitative research intended to describe the teaching strategies used by the English teacher, the problems faced and the solutions in teaching reading comprehension during the covid-19 pandemic at SMP N 2 Manyaran, Central Java. The English teacher was the subject of the research. Observation and interview were applied to collect the data. Miles and Huberman's interactive model is used to analyze the obtained data.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Teacher's Strategies to Teach Reading Comprehension during the Covid-19 Pandemic

From classroom observation and interview with the English teacher to apply certain strategies to teach reading comprehension, the data are obtained. The observations are conducted four times to figure out the strategies of the English teacher's strategies to teach reading comprehension as the covid-19 pandemic forces the teacher to adjust the way of teaching from face to face into online learning.

Teaching reading comprehension in online class was shorter than in normal class. The teacher focuses on exercises and tasks to explore the students' reading comprehension. The activities during learning in the classroom consist of opening, main activity, and closing. The results of observation and interview with English teacher, there are five strategies used the teacher to teach reading comprehension during the covid-19 pandemic at SMP N 2 Manyaran, Central Java. The strategies are identifying the purpose in reading, skimming the text for main ideas, scanning the text for specific information, analyzing vocabulary and applying L-R-D strategy.

#### *Strategy to identify the purpose of reading*

The teacher conveys the purpose of reading according to the material being studied through PowerPoint with audio. The selected text is recount text which is about telling an experience. To find the purpose of reading on text being studied, she asks students to read the text and looks for keywords related to the title of the text. The aim is to encourage the students to identify the genre of the text and to know the purpose of the text.

#### *Skimming Strategy*

The teacher explains how to skim a text to find a main idea. The teacher directs students to skim a text by giving question about the main idea. The teacher invites the students to discuss the answers in whatsapp group.

### ***Scanning Strategy***

Firstly, the teacher explains how to scan or locate specific information intended to find. He directs the students to scan the text by giving question about setting of time and place and detailed information. The platform used is whatsapp group. The teacher invites the students to discuss their answers.

### ***Strategy of analyzing vocabulary***

This strategy is applied by asking the students to find 10 words that they are not familiar. The unfamiliar words lead to the students' difficulty to know the meanings. They are asked to use dictionaries to find the meanings of the words. But before they use a dictionary to look for the meanings, they are asked to deduce the meaning of a word from context.

### ***L-R-D (Listen-Read-Discuss) Strategy***

Using slides of Power Point, the teacher explains the genre of a text he will discuss. Recount text is the genre. Firstly, in Listen step, the students listen to the audio on Power Point about recount text (definition, the purpose of the text, general structure, language features and examples of text). Secondly, in Read step, the teacher asks the students to read a text of recount on the worksheet pay attention to the text related to the material on Power Point. Thirdly, in Discuss step, the teacher invites the students to discuss their answers of the questions given to them. The teacher gives feedback to the answers and together with the students comes to the conclusion to the correct answers.

The student's level of reading comprehension becomes a reference in choosing suitable strategies to teach reading comprehension. The level of comprehension of the 7<sup>th</sup> grade of junior high school is considered as literal comprehension level. Literal comprehension is a basic level of reading comprehension. At the level of literal comprehension, the information and fact contained in the text include main ideas, causal relationships, sentence patterns, etc (Kennedy, 1981). Based on this level, the teacher applies strategies to help students finding ways to analyze the information available in the text quickly such as the purpose of reading, main ideas and specific information. The teacher applies several strategies based on Brown (2001, pp.306-310) that strategies for reading comprehension for beginning and intermediate level of learners in reading comprehension are identifying the purpose in reading, skimming the text for main ideas, scanning the text for specific information, guessing word meaning, analyzing vocabulary.

## **Problems in implementing strategies on teaching reading comprehension during the Covid-19 Pandemic**

Teaching English as a foreign language in Indonesia is a challenge as English is not used in daily life. Every teacher in different environment supposes to adjust his or her teaching based on the conditions. In this case, teacher encounters problems in implementing the strategies in teaching reading comprehension.

### ***Problem in identifying the purpose in reading***

The students are reluctant to read and understand the text that has been given from the teacher. They do not understand the material well because they are not familiar with some words in the text.

*"The problem is that the students are reluctant to read comprehensively. To know the purpose of the text, the message of the text should be conveyed. However, in covid-19 pandemic, the interest of reading is decreased because when they get problem in understanding the text, they also reluctant to ask. Probably it is because online learning that they could not directly ask the teacher face to face"* (Interview on Monday, 12 April 2021)

The teacher also faces another problem in teaching reading comprehension. The students fail to distinguish the purpose and characteristics of the several genres of reading being studied.

*“Besides, the students confuse about the purpose of their reading. They do not understand the purpose of the texts when it has different genre. Actually, every genre has its own purpose. The root of the problem is because they are reluctant to read”* (Interview on Monday, 12 April 2021)

### **Problems in Skimming Strategy**

The students are not successful to determine the main ideas and the topic in reading. There were two reasons students fail to determine the main ideas and the topic, namely students do not understand the instructions or questions from the teacher and students do not know how to formulate main ideas and the topic.

*“Some students do not understand the instruction or the questions. They also still do not know how to find the main idea and the topic although I have explained to them. They forget how to distinguish the main idea and the topic. In online learning, sometimes they do not have spirit to read seriously”* (Interview on Monday, 12 April 2021)

### **Problems in Strategy of Analyzing Vocabulary**

The problem in analyzing vocabulary was that students do not master vocabulary. In addition, the teacher encounters a difficulty to control whether students really know, understand and memorize the vocabulary that they analyze. The online learning reduces the way the teacher reinforces the students in analyzing vocabulary.

*“Students’ vocabulary mastery is still limited. I really do not know whether they really know the meaning of the words and analyze the words to know the meaning or not”* (Interview on Monday, 12 April 2021)

*“Yesterday I asked the students to make a list of words which are considered as unfamiliar or they do not know the meaning. After that, they should find the meanings of them. They write many words. It means that they do not understand the message of the text because they do not know most of the words. I want them to memorize the meaning of the words but they do not try to do that”* (Interview on Monday, 12 April 2021)

The students’ failure to understand the material because they are reluctant to read means a problem for the teacher. Jennings, Caldwell, and Lerner (2014, p.95-96) state that problems in teaching reading comprehension are emergent literacy, word recognition accuracy, reading fluency, comprehension, and language meaning vocabulary. The teacher encourages the students’ seriousness by controlling them to do more exercises. The teacher is also modelling how to skim a text to find the gist. Analyzing vocabulary is another challenge for teacher as the students sometimes are not familiar with the words. Teaching reading at the covid-19 pandemic condition changes the ways to teach and the teacher feels that online learning sometimes lessen the students’ seriousness in learning.

### **Teacher’s Problem Solving in Implementing Strategies on Teaching Reading Comprehension during the Covid-19 Pandemic**

In order to achieve the goal of the learning, the teacher solves the problems in implementing the strategies to teach reading comprehension. More efforts are made because the covid-19 pandemic makes the learning conducted online. The new way of learning surely influences the way of teaching.



### ***Giving more exercises***

When the students are reluctant to read the text, the teacher sends texts and exercises continuously. Giving more practices is as a stimulus so that students should read the text to find the purpose of reading. The teacher also gives students different titles of the texts at each meeting. This is to avoid the feeling of getting bored. The teacher also selects short texts so that students will understand the purpose of reading easier before they are given the longer selection of texts. The teacher conducts a review at the end of the lesson together with the students.

*"I give exercises and send texts to the students. The title of the text is different for each meeting. It is a short text. It aims at encouraging students to read because they are sometimes reluctant to read. They are given exercises continuously. I review the answers of the exercises in order to make them remember the answers"* (Interview on Monday, 12 April 2021)

*"I navigate the students how to find the exercises in internet and ask them to read English book in the library. The school has good facilities for the library, there are many kinds of books there. They are able to borrow the book and return it in a week. They can practice how to read longer selection of texts"* (Interview on Monday, 12 April 2021)

*"At the initial semester I remind the students to make use of their smartphones. For example, I ask them to listen to the English songs and watch English movies"* (Interview on Monday, 12 April 2021)

### ***Conducting Discussion***

Because students fail to determine the main ideas and topic in reading the teacher holds discussions. The students are given time to discuss the answers with their friends in small groups. The teacher divides the groups. Because the answers of the questions based on the results of the discussion, the students have confidence to answer the questions.

*"Discussion is a good way to help students to have courage to answer questions. Although the discussion is held via whatsapp, it runs well. Giving tips to them to answer the questions is successful. If they still confuse, I will explain one by one. It helps them a lot"* (Interview on Monday, 12 April 2021)

Implementing strategies to teach reading comprehension during covid-19 pandemic needs more efforts from the English teacher. Giving more practices for the students is an appropriate solution to enhance students' ability to identify the purpose of reading. Sending more texts and exercises continuously to the students should be accompanied by the feedback from the teacher. Reviewing materials and giving feedback will make students aware that they are given attention by the teacher. The varieties of topic selection are also an important point to attract students' attention and familiarity to the texts.

Having discussion with the students is another way to solve the problem in implementing the strategies of teaching reading comprehension. When the teacher and the students share their opinions about main ideas and topics, it means that the students are involved in the process of getting the conclusion to the answers of the questions.

Vocabulary mastery as a common problem for foreign language students is paid more attention by the teacher because to understand the text the students should know the meaning of the words. The English teacher navigates the students how to find exercises concerning to analyze vocabulary from internet. The teacher also asks students to use their smartphones to learn English such as listen to music and films to improve vocabulary mastery. Moreover, the school also gives facilities of English reading books so that students can borrow and study at home.

## CONCLUSION

The choices of strategies in teaching reading comprehension are the efforts the teacher made to achieve the objective of the learning. The strategies which are implemented is based on the condition of the students and the environment. The covid-19 pandemic has changed the ways of teaching and learning therefore the English teacher should be able to select the appropriate strategies for the students during classroom practices.

The English teacher of the 7<sup>th</sup> grade of junior high school students of SMPN 2 Manyaran, Central Java encounters problems in teaching reading comprehension. The problems occurs because of the students failure in understanding the texts, limited vocabulary mastery, and the change of ways of teaching during covid-19 pandemic where the teacher has limited opportunities to help the students improving their reading comprehension.

To overcome the problems, the English teacher should analyze the factors which cause the problems. Reinforcing the students through giving more practices and navigating them to find exercises from internet using the technologies can help them to become independent students to study at home. Selecting topics which are interesting in the students' ages is another important way to overcome the problem. Their familiarity to the topics will help the students to understand text better.

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