Skimming and Scanning Techniques to Assist EFL Students in Understanding English Reading Texts

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Abstract

This research aimed to find out whether the skimming and scanning techniques (SST) can improve EFL students' English reading comprehension in recount texts, especially on identifying the main ideas and detail information, in a senior high school in Meulaboh, Aceh, Indonesia. A number of 32 eleventh grade students participated in this study, and the one group pre-test and post-test design were used. Data collection was from a pre-test and a post-test. In analyzing the data, statistics was used. The results showed that the mean score of the pre-test was 45 and the post-test was 65, with 20 points of improvement. Furthermore, the result of t-test was 4.7, while the critical value of 0.05 significant level was 2.4, with the degree of freedom at 23. Since t-test>t-score, thus SST improved the students' reading comprehension in this study. Nevertheless, the paper further discusses some setbacks while implementing SST in the classroom.

Keywords

Skimming, scanning techniques, EFL students, English reading texts

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Introduction

English reading comprehension is among the skills that students in Indonesia must be skilled at since the recent tests in the Indonesia's national examination more emphasized much on reading (Yusuf & Fauzan, 2016). This examination is held for students for every transition of schools levels, from elementary to enter junior high, from junior high to enter senior high, and from senior high to enter university. Particularly for the senior high school students, the expectation of their reading skill becomes higher so that they can obtain good scores in English to enter the university.

Various types of texts are presented in the English subject in the national examination. Recount texts are among them. Since this text type is taught in the senior high school level, their good understanding in this text type is essential because it is always presented in the national examination. Nevertheless, not all expectations are always in line with the facts. Many studies have revealed that a lot of students in Indonesia still face difficulties in understanding English reading texts, particularly in Aceh, one of the provinces in Indonesia (Gani, Yusuf, & Susiani, 2016; Komariah, Ramadhona, & Silviyanti, 2015; Natsir & Anisati, 2016). Accordingly, the fourth author of this paper, Afla Nadya, who conducted her internship in one of the senior high schools in Meulaboh, Aceh found quite an alarming situation to the students in the English subject. She discovered that the average score of reading comprehension test of the student is 50 for all eleventh grade students. From this average, only four students were found to achieve the score of 65 as the highest, and ten students were found to achieve the score of 30 as the lowest. She collected the test results of the English subject conducted by the school prior to the official national examination as practice for the students. She discovered that they were sufficient in questions related to reference, inference, and detail information, but they obtained very low scores on questions related to the identification of main ideas and detail information.

This is not a surprise, especially since English is treated as a foreign language in Indonesia's educational policy (Sari & Yusuf, 2009); it is likely that these EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students encounter problems in learning the language. Torgesen (2002) says that the inability to identify the main ideas is among the problems encountered by students in reading comprehension. This is supported by Gunning (2002) who further added that all aspects of reading of comprehension (i.e. identifying main idea, detail information, inference, reference, and vocabulary) are were a struggle for students to grasp. These problems can be caused by the teachers from ineffective of techniques in teaching reading (Torgesen, 2002), or from the students themselves when they have insufficient knowledge and sentences structure in the language being learnt (Gunning, 2002), and lack of motivation to learn English in general (Achmad & Yusuf, 2016).

Nevertheless, it is quite alarming that by the eleventh grade, the students in the school under study are still facing trouble in reading comprehension, especially in identifying the main ideas and detail information of the reading texts. This is because by the end of the twelfth grade, they are going to face the national examination, in which much of the questions in the English subject are related to reading comprehension. A need to overcome these students problem is urgent, and thus, the researchers must take steps to assist them in improving their reading comprehension.

Hence, based on the literature, some of the techniques to do so and can be applied by the teachers to facilitate their students are the skimming and scanning techniques (Diaz &

Laguado, 2013; Sasmita, 2013; Ulmi, Sundari, & Sukmaantara, 2015), hereafter is referred as SST throughout the paper.

Accordingly, the researchers would also like to implement the SST to the students for this research. Seeing its successful results in previous studies, we would further like to inquire whether these techniques also apply to these students. Consequently, the question posed for this research is: Do the SST improve students reading skill, especially in identifying main idea and finding detail information in recount texts? The result of this research is anticipated to benefit both teachers and students in teaching reading for the English subject. Should the experiment succeed; the teachers can use it as a reference in using effective the SST in improving their students' reading comprehension. Based on the research question established above, the following hypotheses are formulated:

1. Alternate Hypothesis (H_a): The SST will improve students' reading comprehension.
2. Null Hypothesis (H_o): The SST will not improve students' reading comprehension.

Literature Review

Reading comprehension

Sheng (2000) defines reading as the process of communication between the reader and the writer to make sense of written or printed symbols, which involves the recognition of letters, words, phrases and clauses, and comprehension. Hengari (2007) further adds that interpretation, appreciation and application are much related to the process of reading. And thus, reading comprehension is the process of getting the meaning from texts. The aim is to gain an overall understanding about what is described in the text (Woolley, 2011). Without the skills of reading comprehension and the motivation to read, students' academic progress can be limited (Alvermann & Earle, 2003). Henceforth, reading comprehension is a complex process in which the readers identify basic information and are able to predict, to infer, to argue and to recognize the writer's points of view.

Reading comprehension is divided into various skills. A well-known statement related to reading proficiency from Mikulecky and Jeffries (2007) is a reader who wants to have a higher proficiency in reading should be able to define main idea, find detail information, make inference, and have sufficient vocabulary while reading. Similarly, Harmer (2001) also confirms that to identify the topic, predict and guess detail information, specific information, and general understanding are five purposes of reading comprehension.

According to Hare and Milligan (1984), the ability to identify main ideas in a text is an important key to reading comprehension. Furthermore, the recognition of the main idea is important because it does not only help readers to understand the paragraph being read, but also to help them remember the content later. The main idea is not stated in any particular sentence in the paragraph, but each sentence typically contains details that lead to a common idea.

Information offered in a text can occasionally be too general or too specific. Therefore, readers have to indicate information being informed in the text based on their needs or intentions for reading. Finding this detailed information further aids readers to be better in understanding the text. This is among the aspects that enhance reading comprehension (Mikulecky & Jeffries, 1996). In a set of statements, some of the words in one sentence are often repeated in other sentences (King & Stanley, 2009).

In passages, writers try not to repeat words very often because it would be clumsy and redundant, and thus, for readers, to make inference or to recognize reference words and be able to identify the words to which they refer to can help them better understand the reading passage.

Vocabulary is greatly related to the reading ability because it is a major part in reading comprehension. By knowing the meanings of the words, readers can decrease their difficulty in processing information provided in the text. According to Brown (2010), the more vocabulary a reader has, the easier him or her in understanding the text, in other words, an increase in vocabulary size has noticeable effects on reading comprehension.

Clearly, comprehension is more than a matter of reading the words. Readers need to involve themselves in actively making decisions, solving problems, and using background knowledge in an attempt to make sense of the texts that they read. In consequence, the comprehension skill to find main ideas, details information, references, and guessing word meaning play a great role in determining the readers' overall understanding of the text being read.

Skimming and scanning techniques

Among the techniques that can be applied by English teachers to improve student's reading comprehension are the skimming and scanning techniques (Diaz & Laguado, 2013; Sasmita, 2013; Ulmi, Sundari, & Sukmaantara, 2015;). Previous studies have shown that the implementation of the SST can increase students' ability in reading comprehension. A study done by Ulmi, Sundari, and Sukmaantara (2015) looked at the effect of using the SST on eighth grade students' reading comprehension achievement of recount texts at a junior high school in Silo, Jember by using an experimental design. The data were obtained by interviews, documentation and administering reading tests. The results showed that the use SST improved the students' reading comprehension and they enjoyed its implementation in the classroom.

Another study carried out by Sasmita (2013) investigated the use of skimming and scanning in comprehending English texts to 42 university students in Malang. Two classes were used as sample of the second semester students; the first class was taught with the skimming and scanning technique, meanwhile the second class was taught using the conventional method. The results showed that the first class achieved better scores in reading comprehension after the skimming and scanning techniques were implemented in the teaching and learning process. Another research by Diaz and Laguado (2013) also affirms that the use of skimming and scanning techniques can enhance reading comprehension and improve students' reading skills. Further data form observations and semi-structured interviews revealed that these techniques also changed their students' perceptions towards reading to positive point of views, motivated the students to read better.

In a nutshell, previous studies have showed that by using both skimming and scanning techniques, EFL students' motivation and achievement in reading comprehension can be improved. Ngoc (2015) encourages teachers to inspire their students to practice skimming and scanning reading texts. This practice is believed to commendably "prevent the students from inefficient reading habits such as reading word by word, reading aloud, moving lips, translating, reading for form and details" (Ngoc, 2015, p. 197).   When they can

read efficiently, students can make predictions on the purpose of the texts, the main topic and conceivably some supporting ideas.

Skimming technique

According to Liao (2011), skimming is done at a speed three to four times faster than normal reading. Readers often skim when they have masses of materials to read in a limited amount of time. In skimming, readers only have to take the most important information and the main idea rather than read all of the words (Sutz & Weverka, 2009). As skimming is related to speed, Abdelrahman and Bsharah (2014) propose that to improve reading speed, readers also need to increase concentration, improve memory and recall, and reduce sub vocalization, interruptions, procrastination and stress. They also provide the procedure of the skimming technique into three steps as follows (Abdelrahman & Bsharah, 2014):

- read first sentence of paragraph
- read last sentence of paragraph
- read key words in between

They further added two skimming patterns in the process (Abdelrahman & Bsharah, 2014):

1. For formal style, and this is typical of most text books (with long involved sentences and long paragraphs), therefore readers should read using the three steps outlined above.
2. For informal style (shorter sentences and paragraphs), the readers should read using first two steps only.

In teaching, the students are taught to skip words and learn to select key words or phrases to captivate important information with concentration and practice. To conclude, because skimming technique deals with the process of rapid coverage of reading a text to determine its gist or main idea (Brown, 2003), therefore, students are likely to depend more on top-down processing (Ueta, 2005). This is done so that they do not have to translate detailed information in the text. And so, it is typically recommended to read the first and the last sentence of the paragraph, because the main idea of the text is usually stated in those parts.

Scanning Technique

Scanning is unlike skimming, because readers are not concerned with the broader meaning of the text, but the detail (Sutz & Weverka, 2009). In this technique, the readers look for specific information within a text such as dates, names, and places, among others. Moreover, Brown (2003) explains that scanning is the process of quickly searching for particular piece or pieces of information in a text. The purpose of scanning is to extract specific information without reading the whole text. It is basically fast reading (Mikulecky & Jeffries, 2007). To do so, it involves moving your eyes quickly down the page seeking specific words or phrases (Sutz & Weverka, 2009).

Scanning is important to improve reading skill. The procedures of scanning technique are (Olson & Ames, 1972; Thamrin, 2014):

- Keep in mind only the particular information to be found out.
- Make a choice, which clues would support the finding of the required information.

- Have a rush view and sweeps down the page quickly to find out the clues. If the clues are found out, read that section to get the information needed.

While conducting the procedures above, readers should have full concentration while reading, be able to scan for the two or three search terms that describe the information needed and look for italicized, bolded or underlined words which may carry specific information in the text (Sutz & Weverka, 2009). Table and index within the text can also lead the reader into the information needed.

Method

This research used a quantitative approach with the experimental design. Creswell (2003) concisely defines quantitative research as a type of research that explains phenomena by collecting numerical data and analyze them using mathematically based methods. The results are typically presented using statistics, tables and graphs. The design of the experiment is the "one group pretest-posttest design" (Setiyadi, 2008, p. 118). It involves pre-test (O_1), a treatment (X), and post-test (O_2). The treatment was to teach the students reading comprehension of recount texts by using the SST. The selection of recount text refers to the national curriculum, syllabus, and lesson plans because this type of text is taught in the English subject for eleventh grade students in high schools (Dewi, 2013).

The population of this research was all of the eleventh grade students who were majoring in Science at the high school, SMAN 1, Meulaboh. As for the samples of this study, students were then purposely selected as the respondents of this study based on the results of reading test as mentioned earlier in the Introduction of the paper. The students with the lowest scores were grouped and a number of 30 students became the samples of this experiment.

Data were collected from a pre-test and a post-test. The tests consisted of a set of multiple choice questions. Since the difficulties faced most by the students were in identifying the main idea and finding the detail information, therefore, the treatment and tests also focused on improving the students' comprehension on these aspects. There were 20 questions for each test; ten questions inquired about the main idea and another ten questions inquired about detail information. At the end of the day, the standard for senior high school students' English competence is measured by the National Examination (UN). For that reason, the researchers selected and adapted the questions for the tests from the National Examination (UN) questions year 2012 until 2015, and were related to the topic learned by the students, which was report text. Since the questions were deemed standard from the Indonesia's Ministry of Education, validity and reliability tests on the test instruments were not conducted.

Technique of data collection

The pre-test was given to collect students' reading scores prior to treatment. It was given in order to know their achievement of reading comprehension before the experiment, especially on identifying main idea and finding the detail information. The third researcher conducted the experiment in the classroom, and thus, was the teacher in this case. After a brief introduction in the first meeting of teaching experiment, she distributed the pre-test to

the students. It took about 90 minutes for the students to complete the test. The treatment took place in three class meetings. It started after the pre-test in the first meeting.

The learning process began with a discussion about report text (function, general structure, main idea and detail information). Then, the teacher presented the material about report text directly and asked the students to underline the main idea and to find the detail information needed in text. She further explained about speed reading techniques that can help students understand the text better and faster; they were skimming and scanning techniques. A short practice was done by using the skimming and scanning procedures as discussed in the previous section. This practice was done with the whole class. Next, the students were divided into several groups in which each group consisted of 6 students. Each group was given the same reading text on recount with ten questions to be answered. The students were given ten minutes to work on the answers by implementing the skimming and scanning techniques. They also had to make sure that all members knew and understood about the answers within the time given. Afterwards, the teacher appointed one member from each group randomly to present the answers to the questions from the task in class. Just before the class ends, the teacher concluded on what has been learnt in class during the meeting. Moreover, the second and third meeting was also conducted similarly, but with different titles of reading texts given.

Finally, the post-test was given to measure the students' reading comprehension after the treatment of SST was given in class. The teacher distributed the post-test to the students individually. These post-test questions were different with pre-test questions, but the difficulty level was similar. The students had to finish the test in 60 minutes.

Technique of data analysis

In scoring the pre-test and post-test, the researchers used the following scoring system:

- One correct answer : 5
- The sum of the questions : 20
- Total score : 5 x 20 = 100
- The sum of the students' score : the correct answer x 5

$$\text{Students' score} = \frac{obtained\ score}{maximum\ score} \times 100$$

The category for each range of scores is as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. *Category for each score range*

Range of score	Category
100 – 90	Excellent
89 – 80	Very Good
79 – 70	Good
69 – 60	Bad
59 – 0	Very Bad

After the scoring was done, further statistics were conducted (i.e. mean, standard deviation, and t-test) to study the improvement of the students' reading comprehension in identifying the main idea and finding detail information, before and after the treatment of SST were given to the students (Hadi, 2004). The mean was calculated by using the following formula (Sudjana, 2002):

$$M = \frac{\sum X}{n}$$

Where:
M : mean
$\sum X$: the sum of the scores
n : the number of sample

Next, standard deviation was calculated with the formula (Sudjana, 2002) below:

$$SD^2 = \frac{\Sigma(x_1 - x)^2}{n - 1}$$

Where:
SD^2 : standard deviation
$\sum x_1$: the sum of score
$\sum x$: the sum of the scores
n : the number of sample

T-tests was also conducted to find out whether both of the pre-test and post-test showed any significant difference in improvement. The kind of t-test used was paired sample t-test, because two data (i.e. pre-test and post-test) were compared (Sudjana, 2002). The formula is as the following:

$$t = \frac{Md}{\sqrt{\frac{\Sigma d^2}{N(N-1)}}}$$

Where:
T   : the significant of score
Md   : $\dfrac{Sum\,score\,of\,posttest - sum\,score\,of\,pretest}{number\,of\,sample}$
$\sum d^2$: the average value between pre-test and post-test
N   : Number of Student

Finally, to prove the hypothesis, the result of the limit score from pre-test and post-test was in the measurement table of t-score with a significant value of 5% ($\alpha = 0.05$).

Results

This research aimed to find out whether the skimming and scanning techniques (SST) can improve EFL students' English reading comprehension in recount texts, especially on identifying the main ideas and detail information, in a senior high school in Meulaboh,

Aceh, Indonesia. Figure 1 illustrates the scores of the experimental group in the pre-test. The Y axis represents the total of students while the X axis represents the score of students.

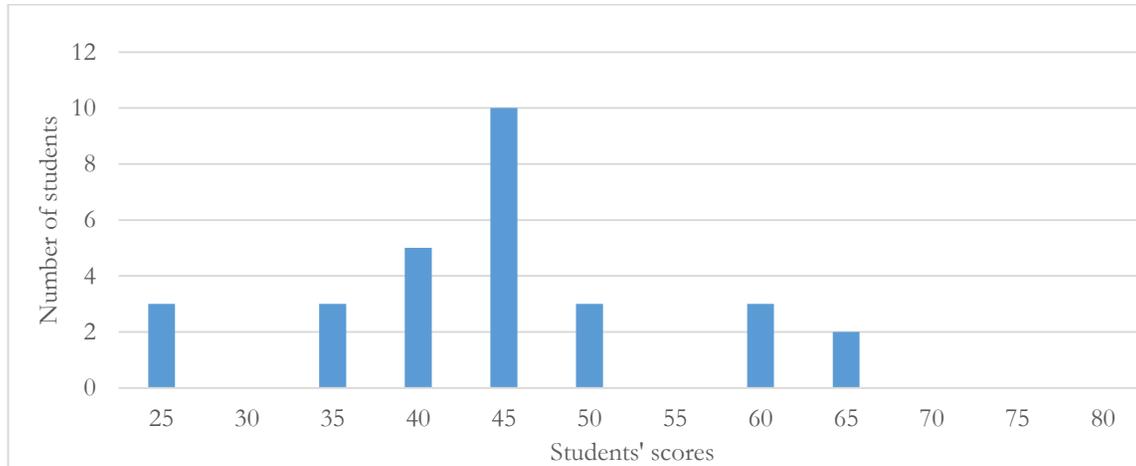**Figure 1.** *The pre-test scores of the students*

Figure 1 shows that the pre-test scores from 32 students which asked about identifying main idea and finding the detail information from the reading text given by the teacher. It can be seen that the highest score was 65 which was achieved by only three students, whilst the lowest score was 25 which was achieved by two students, and ten students achieved the score of 45. Thus, none of the students reached the passing grade determined by the school, which was 70. It can be said that the students' reading comprehension on these aspects were still low and needed improvement. The next figure, Figure 2, illustrates the scores of the students from the post-test. The Y axis represents the total of students while the X axis represents the score of students.

**Figure 2.** *The post-test scores of the students*
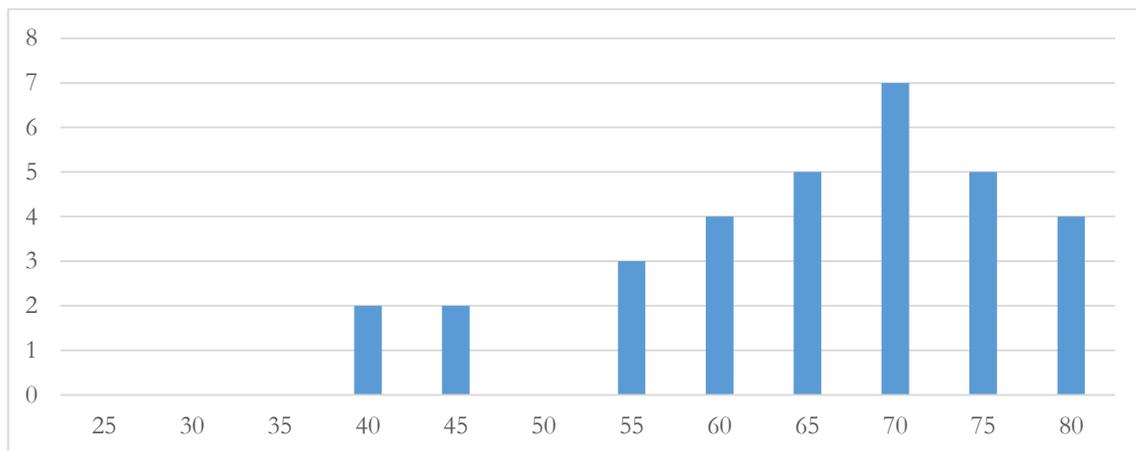
From Figure 2, it can be seen that the highest score was 80 which was achieved by four students, meanwhile the lowest score was 40 which was achieved by two students, and a number of seven students achieved 70. The post-test also revealed that most of the students achieved better and higher scores in the post-test, in which 16 students have passed the passing grade determined by the school, compared to the pre-test, in which none of the students passed the passing grade. Moreover, after the scores of the pre-test and post-test were obtained, the scores were compared to see the differences between both tests. Figure 3 further illustrates the comparison of scores merely from ten identifying the main idea questions from the reading test.

Figure 3. *Comparison of scores in identifying the main idea questions between the pre-test and the post-test*

Pretest (795)   Posttest (1055)
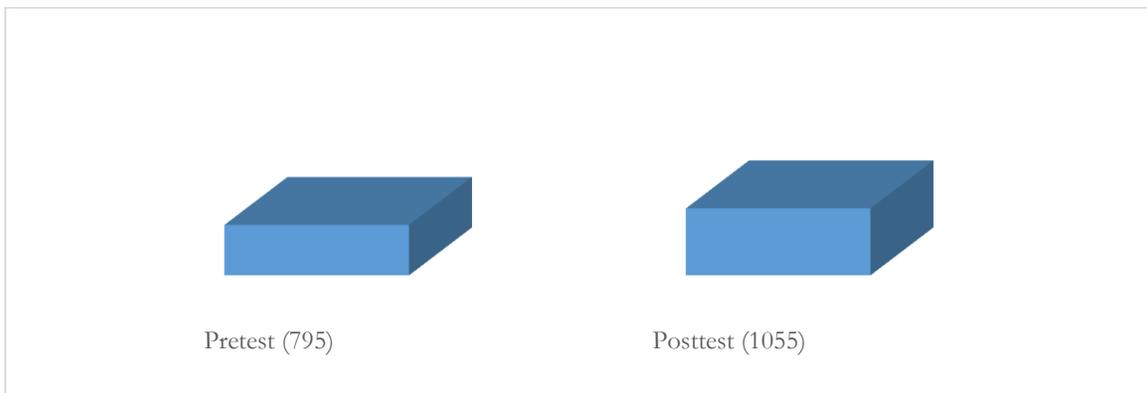
The total score for the main idea questions were seen to improve, from the score of 795 in the pre-test and improved to 1055 in the post-test. Meanwhile, the next Figure 4 displays the comparison of scores from ten finding the detail information questions from the reading test. The total score for the detail information questions were also seen to improve, in which the scores of 650 from the pre-test and was increased to 1030 in the post-test.

Figure 4. *Comparison of scores in finding the detail information questions between the pre-test and the post-test*

Pretest (650)   Posttest (1030)
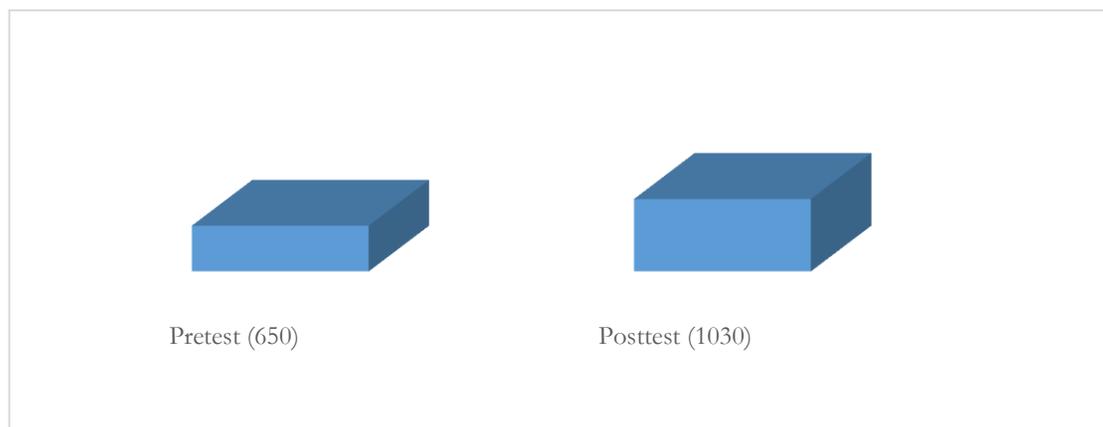
Afterwards, calculating the mean scores from both tests were conducted to further know the exact increase of scores between the pre-test and the post-test. The results show that the mean score of the pre-test is 45, and the mean score of the post-test is 65. Moreover, the calculation of the average value between pre-test and post-test is 20. From these results, the t-test is counted and the results is t = 4.7. Furthermore, the t-score is 4.47 and the critical value of t-score for 31 degree of freedom on the level significant of 0.05 is 2.04. From these statistical analyses, the t-score value of this study is higher than the critical value of t-table (t > t_t). It means that the difference is significant; the alternative hypothesis (H_a) is accepted and the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected (t = 4.7 > t_t = 2.04).

Discussion

While doing the research, it was primarily observed that students initially preferred to read the whole texts before answering the questions. This caused them to be slower in answering the questions and needed longer time to complete the task. When the SST was implemented, the teacher had to convince them that skipping some words would not harm their understanding of the texts. After a few practice on how to determined key words and phrases that could help them comprehend the text efficiently, they became more aware of the tips and tricks in answering the reading comprehension test by using skimming and scanning techniques.

The results of the tests have shown that the SST succeeded in assisting the students to improve their reading comprehension on English recount texts. Improvement was evidence after the students were taught reading comprehension on recount text by using the SST. These techniques are expected to support students while facing their examinations, especially, the National Examination at the end of the school year, within a limited time that is given to them. Sutz and Weverka (2009) has in the same way claim that these techniques are useful when students do not have enough time to read the texts, particularly during examinations. The success of this experimental study is similar to the previous studies conducted by Diaz and Laguado (2015), Sasmita (2013), and Ulmi, Sundari and Sukmaantara (2015). The SST has also improved their students' ability in reading comprehension.

Nevertheless, some setbacks in the implementation of the SST were also found during this study. Despite these techniques can save time in answering questions from reading texts (Sutz & Weverka, 2009), students need to be in the state of high concentration in using these techniques. If they are distracted, they end up in not understanding the passage at all. This was found in this current research; when students were distracted, even just a little bit, they ended up re-reading the entire passage to understand it. To overcome this problem, the teacher had to control the classroom situation with great deal; students who were noisy or were distracting their friends had to be swiftly stopped and handled to get them back on tract.

Moreover, during classroom discussion, students were not able to tell all the details about the passage; their knowledge about the text can be said to be superficial. The information extracted from the process SST was just enough to provide a simple and accurate answer to the questions from the reading texts, but they were not able to explain the answer in more detail if the teacher asked them to do so. This is as what Ngoc (2015, p. 197) says skimming is "a superficial reading, not an in-depth reading". This problem was dealt by the teacher by discussing the text together with the class after every group task; students are expected to learn from each other on grasping all details of the text. All the same, more

practice at home on implementing the SST in their reading is needed continuously to better improve their reading comprehension because during tests or exams, they would depend entirely on their own reading skills to answer the questions correctly.

As for the case of the teacher, she needed to be careful in allocating the time for the group practice and tests appropriately. This disadvantage was also mentioned by Sasmita (2013). Should a teacher give a time that is too limited based on their level of ability, the students struggled in answering the questions from the reading text by using the SST. This case was faced in the first meeting, in which she gave only seven minutes to answer the reading questions during group work and they students did not finish answering all ten questions within the allotted time. She had to add extra three minutes to get all the groups to finish the task. On the other hand, giving extra lingering time can also cause the students to get off track if they finish the task and much time is still left. Therefore, efficient time allocation should be mastered by teachers if they want to implement the SST in class.

Conclusion

After conducting the experiment, it was found that the mean score between the pre-test (45) and post-test (65) was significantly different. All of the students did not reach the minimum passing grade/KKM in the pre-test. Thus, out of 32 students who participated in this study, 16 students reached over the passing grade after the treatments of SST were given, and another 16 students improved their scores even though not reading the passing grade. Overall, the alternative hypothesis (H_a) which said the SST can improve the students' reading comprehension of the eleventh grade students was accepted.

Along the treatment in the teaching process, some setbacks was faced by the teacher in the classroom, they were such as to get the students have high concentration in the process of skimming and scanning while reading, not having the students know all the details in the texts after reading, and providing enough time for the task. Nevertheless they were resolved by the teacher in the next meetings by learning from experiences in the previous meetings.

However, this research was conducted not without any weaknesses. This study only focused on one class, and thus, the results cannot be generalized to all eleventh grade students in Indonesia. Future research are recommended to use more samples, provide and prepare more treatments, and give more tests to gain better understanding on the use of the SST in the classroom. The samples should also be conducted on other grades or levels of students; since every grade, school, and different environments have and provide different ways of learning, and thus, it may offer different results from this current study. Inquiring for responses from the students on the use of SST in the classroom, and how it benefits or even weaken them in learning reading comprehension should also be explored in future related research.

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