TEACHING READING COMPREHENSION (AN OVERVIEW OF THE CONTENT-BASED SUMMARIZING)

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Abstract

Reading is an important skill for students, in particular for Islamic studies students who often study rich textual texts. They are required to understand and grasp information quickly form the texts. This requires teachers and students to poses approriate reading technique in a classroom teaching. Researchers have proposed many reading teaching techniques from traditional and modern perspectives in many reading classroom studies, but limited researchers have proposed an appropriate reading technique for summarizing a reading text in particular for Islamic studies students context. This paper proposes a content-based summarizing techniques for reading calssroom to improve students skill to grasp information faster compared to traditional techniques. The discussion of this paper shows that the content-based summrizing technique is potential to be implemented in a reading classroom, in particularly for Islamic studies classroom.
Keywords: Reading comprehension, content-based summarizing

Introduction

Reading skill is one of important skill in learning English. A text can be comprehended properly when a reader has a good skill in reading.[1] However, in fact many readers do not have good skill in reading. They get difficulties to comprehend a reading text. Consequently, they cannot catch the information in a text. That is the reason why many students do not like to read English books, even though they have sufficient English vocabulary.

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[1]Abdul Gafur Marzuki, Developing Reading Skill of Islamic Education Department Students through Guided Reading, *Paedagogia*, Vol. 5 No. 2 (2016), p. 38-60.

The ability to read and to understand written document is critical to success in our educational system. Moreover, comprehension problems become most apparent when students are faced with textbook material.[2] Currently, more and more teaching and learning material are printed and circulated within our education institutions. This requires our students to poses better reading skill and ability other than vocabulary to grasp information from the written material.

Even though, the relationship between reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge is strong and unequivocal but understand reading techniques is critical important in understanding a reading text.[3] In other words, vocabulary knowledge does contribute to reading comprehension, but having good reading techniques will sharpening the reading skills and help students grasp information faster.[4] In addition, having a better reading technique also can help students to comprehend a text fluently. A better reading technique is usually applied be a teacher in a reading classroom to support this fluency.[5]

Cunningham and Stanovich[6] eloquently articulated the interrelationships between reading fluency and comprehension: They assert that slow capacity-draining word recognition processes require cognition resources that should be allocated to comprehension. Thus reading for meaning is hindered; unrewarding reading experiences multiply; and practice is avoided

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[2]McNamara, D. S. (2009). The Importance of Teaching Reading Strategies. *Perspectives on Language and Literacy*, 6.

[3]Darwis J. Bandu & Abdul Gafur Marzuki, A Correlational Study between Vocabulary Mastery and Reading Comprehension of PAI Students of Tarbiyah STAIN Datokarama Palu, *Istiqra*, Vol. 2 No. 1 (2014), p. 75-94.

[4]Ma, Y.-h., & Lin, W.-y., A Study on the Relationship between English Reading Comprehension and English Vocabulary Knowledge. *Education Research International, 2015*, 14. doi: 10.1155/2015/209154

[5]Nouri, N., & Zerhouni, B., The relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension among Moroccan EFL learners. *IOSR Journal of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS), 21*(10), 19-26.

[6]Cunningham, A. E., & Stanovich, K. E., What reading does for the mind. *American Educator, 22*(1) (1998), p. 8-15.

or merely tolerated without real cognitive involvement.[7]   Another study also argue that the results indicated that students who received strategic reading instruction in this environment received both statistically and practically significantly higher marks on three reading comprehension measures than did the students in the control group[8].

In other words, the success of teaching reading is depending very much on the technique used by the teacher. One of technique that can be used in teaching reading is summarizing technique. Actually, the summarizing technique has been taught in traditional approach. However, the use of traditional approach of teaching summarizing has been criticized and increasingly left behind. As a consequence, other approaches of teaching summarizing have been proposed.

In this article, the writer attempts to present a summarizing technique which is developed from traditional approach of teaching summarizing with some modifications. The technique of summary making is called "Content-Based Summarizing Technique (CBST)". However, in the discussion, the writer also discusses about traditional approach in reading teaching, current technique of summarizing, what is CBST, and the implementation of CBST in a reading classroom.

Reading Skill and Technique

The terms skill and technique have been used inconsistency, reflecting an underlying confusion about how these terms are conceptualized by both students and teachers. Such inconsistency have confused students and teachers which cause instruction less effective.

The techniques are usually defined by examples, such as rehearsal, chunking, and imagery, rather than by explicit definitions of the scope, conscious use, or deliberate goal orientation of the actions. Meanwhile, the term *skill is* often refered

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[7]*Ibid.*

[8]Dreyer, C., & Nel, C. (2003). Teaching reading strategies and reading comprehension within a technology-enhanced learning environment. *System,* *31*(3), 349-365. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0346-251X(03)00047-2

to *motor skills*, routine habits, and activities that are less mindful and more automatic[9].

Techniques usually requires some sort of planning. A plan of action designed to achieve an overall aim. Technique is also a procedure for completing a specific task[10]. In other words, technique is a particular stratagem or procedure used to accomplish a particular objective which is implementation and it actually takes place in a classroom. The techniques must be consistent with a method, and therefore in harmony with an approach as well.

For example, a teacher use time alocation technique in teaching reading. When a teacher use time alocation technique, he/she may breaks reading time into several parts to suit the reading objectives. The following table 1 shows lesson plan for a reading activities is broken down into several steps.

Table 1. Time Breakdown for Three Hours Reading Plam.

Typical Lesson Plan for a Three-Hour Class	
Component	**Time (min)**
Phonological Awareness	10
Word Analysis	20
Word Recognition "Sight Words"	10
Spelling	20
BREAK	10
Oral Reading (Accuracy)	20
Oral Reading (Fluency)	35
Comprehension	25

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[9]Afflerbach, P., Pearson, P. D., & Paris, S. G. (2008). Clarifying Differences Between Reading Skills and Reading Strategies. *The Reading Teacher, 61*(5), 364-373. doi: 10.1598/rt.61.5.1

[10]Ulya, R. (2011). What is the Difference Between Strategy, Technique, Method and Approach in Term of Teaching. Retrieved 25 July 2017 http://ulyarosyita.blogspot.co.id/2011/03/what-is-difference-between-strategy.html

Writing	30

Source: Hager[11]

The reading class is designed for three hours. A teacher organizes the class into blocks of time in which, with the help of two volunteers, the teacher directly teaches eight components of reading: phonological awareness, word analysis, sight word recognition, spelling, oral reading for accuracy, oral reading for fluency, listening comprehension, and writing. These components embody the skills and strategies that successful readers have mastered, either consciously or unconsciously. The curriculum also includes an intensive writing component.[12]

The reading activities can be designed according the need of the students and lesson objectives. A teacher may improvise in designing a teaching teachnique to produce better outcomes in the teaching process. Another technique in teaching reading can also be designed as follow:

- Defining new words
- Asking questions
- Coding recurring words and themes
- Making personal connections to the text
- Citing current events
- Highlighting heading and subheadings
- Summarizing paragraphs
- Chunking
- Categorizing information
- Numbering and ordering
- Drawing pictures[13]

Alternatively, a classroom teacher will carry out the following steps: (1) teach students to think aloud while reading; (2)

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[11]Hager, A. (2001). Techniques for Teaching Beginning-Level Reading to Adults. *World Education, 5*(A), p. 3.
[12]*Ibid.*
[13]Barber, S. (2016). 6 Techniques for Building Reading Skills—in Any Subject. Retrieved 24 Juli 2017, from Edutopia https://www.edutopia.org/article/6-techniques-building-reading-skills-susan-barber

identify students' reading strategies; (3) help students to understand the concept of "strategy" and to recognize that some strategies are successful, some unsuccessful, and others only "seemingly" successful; (4) help students to identify strategies that they use to decode native language texts containing unknown words; (5) help students to identify strategies that they can use to decode foreign language texts containing unknown words; (6) provide instruction/practice/integration for specific reading strategies; and (7) identify students' reading strategies and compare them to the strategies students used before instruction. Suggestions derived from the authors' experiences with the activities are provided[14].

One thing that should be considered by a reading teacher is that knowing students' level of instruction is important for choosing materials. Reading should be neither too hard and too easy but it should be designed at a point where students can understand it and therefore benefit from it. If students don't understand the majority of the words on a page, the text is too hard for them. On the other hand, if the student understands everything in the reading, there is no challenge and no learning. In this case, teachers assess their students' level by giving them short reading passages of varying degrees of difficulty[15].

Traditional Approach of Summarizing Technique

A summary is a shortened version of a text that highlights its key points[16]. Previous models of summarizing indicate that there are at least three stages of summarizing process. There are reading at the text, making an outline, and making a summary. It is also suggested that in writing summaries, the summary be written in note form or outline before writing summary. Notes for a

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[14]Hosenfeld, C., Arnold, V., Kirchofer, J., Laciura, J., & Wilson, L. (1981). Second Language Reading: A Curricular Sequence for Teaching Reading Strategies. *Foreign Language Annals, 14*(5), 415-422. doi: 10.1111/j.1944-9720.1981.tb01661.x

[15]Levy, S. (2016). How to Teach Reading Skills: 10 Best Practices. Retrieved 25 July 2017, from Busy Teacher http://busyteacher.org/14461-how-to-teach-reading-skills-10-best-practices.html

[16]Nordquist, R. (2017). Summary (Composition) : Glossary of Grammatical and Rhetorical Terms Retrieved 25 July 2017, from thoughtco.com

summary are derived from the text that the students read. The process of writing summary then may proceed as the following: text reading → note-making → summary making. This basic procedure of writing a summary is essentially a representation of the traditional approach of summarizing.

Another traditional approach of summary is *precis.* The approach used in *precis* is called 'text-reduction approach.[17] In *precis* students are required to reduce a text to about half its length. For example, they are assigned to shorten a 500-word text to 250 words. This form of summary is challenged by Cranmer.[18] He wonders how useful such an exercise is. In real life reading 250-word text (summarized version) is not too different from reading a 500-word text (original version). However, he states that if students could reduce a 10-page article to 200 words or 200-page book to 10 pages that really would be useful.

Today, however, summarizing has been regarded as a means of training organizational and study skill in a preparation for higher level of reading in which content element decoding is the ultimate goal. This is in line with the current trends to emphasize reading for content areas.[19] Consequently, the techniques of summarizing have been criticized. One of the criticisms is that it could not provide clear guidance as to what should be written (the content) and how it should be written (the form)[20]. Another criticism is that it gives all paragraph with many important points is treated in the same way as one that merely illustrates something trivial.[21]

Some Current Techniques of Summarizing

Skill in summarizing has been considered by experts in reading instruction as an important skill to be applied in reading

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https://www.thoughtco.com/summary-composition-1692160

[17]Cranmer, D. (1989). *Notes, Summaries and Composition*. London: Edward Arnold, p.87

[18]*Ibid.*

[19]Noorman, G. B., & W.E. Blanton. (1990). The Information Text Reading Activity (ITRA), Enganging Students in Meaningful Learning. *Forum Magazine, 24*(1), 9-15

[20] Chambers, F., & Brigham. (1989). Summary Writing, p. 67

[21] Cranmer, D. (1989). Notes, Summaries and Composition, p.89

instruction for more than a quarter of century,[22] for example, asserts that a reading teacher could help students develop skill they need in reading trough, among others, asking them to make summary of a paragraph. The summary should include important ideas in the sequence in which they appear in the paragraph. Chastain[23] argues that summarizing the content of a passage may facilitate students to read for meaning. Bowen[24] states that summarizing as a writing-related task may help continue to develop the standard comprehension and reading skill.

In response to the criticism directed to the traditional approach of summarizing, models of summarizing are proposed by some experts. This is important because research on the influence of teaching students to summarize informational text using a rule-governed approach has demonstrated that they could outperform control groups who were simple given advice about how to summarize[25].

Carnie, et al.[26] have developed a procedure to guide students in summarizing a text. The procedure involves the following steps: (1) skimming a passage, (2) listing the key points conveyed by the passage, (3) combining related points into single statements, (4) crossing out last important points, (5) rereading the list of the key points, (6) numbering remaining points in a logical order, and (7) writing the points into paragraph in numbered order.

Then, Hayes[27] develops a classroom procedure for teaching students how to compose summaries of their reading texts. The procedure is called *the Guided Reading and Summarizing Procedures* or GRASP. The procedure is done in four basic steps: (1) preparing students for the lesson, (2) having students read for

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[22]Finnochiaro, M. (1994). *English As a Second Language : From Theory to Practice*. New York: Regents Publishing Company, p.73

[23]Chastain, K., *Developing Second Language Skill*, (Chicago: Rand McWally College Publishing, 1976) p. 323.

[24]Bowen, J. D., *Tesol Technique and Procedures,* (Cambridge: Newbury House Publishing Company, 1985) p. 246.

[25]Carnie, D., Silber, J., & Kameenui, E. J. *Direct Instruction Reading,* (Ohio: Merril Publishing Company, 1990) p. 400

[26]*Ibid*., p. 389

remembering details, (3) helping students group remembered details, and (4) showing them how to convert grouped details into a prose summary.

Furthermore, Carnie, Sailbert, and Kameenui[28] propose what is called *one sentence summary*. The teaching procedure includes these steps: (1) the teacher tells the students a rule for writing a main idea, (2) the students read the passage, (3) the teacher asks the students to figure out a main idea sentence by naming the person and telling what the person did in all sentences, (4) the teacher calls out a student to say a sentence, (5) the teacher repeats the same procedure with the remaining passages, (6) the teacher has the students write the main idea sentence for each paragraph.

Another summarizing teachnique is proposed by Chambers and Brigham[29] the technique is called *the deletion approach to summarizing*. The approach revises the traditional one that emphasizes on the selection of the major ideas of the passage. The process of deletion approach consists of taking the original text and simply discarding any nonessential sentences, clauses,, phrases, or words until it is pared down to essentials. The process requires five steps; (1) after reading the passage, delete sentences that are merely elaboration of topic sentences; (2) from what remains delete all unnecessary clauses and phrases; (3) from what remains delete all extraneous lexis; (4) replace the remaining words with the students' own expressions; (5) rewrite a "fair copy".

What is Content-Based Summarizing Technique?

The summarizing technique discused in this article is one which is relevant with theories underlying reading instruction and those underlying summarizing process. If the two requirements are fulfilled in a summarizing technique for content element, it than could be confirmed as an activity applicable for helping students learn the contents of a reading passage. *Content Based Summarizing Technique* (CBST) itself is a technique of

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[27]Hayes, D. A. Helping Students to Grasp the Idea and Writing Summaries. *Journal of Reading, 35*(2) (1989), 96-109.

[28]Carnie, D., Silber, J., & Kameenui, E. J. (1990). Direct Instruction Reading. p. 389

summarizing a passage on the basis of the essential contents of the passage. This model is based on two propositions; the first is that a good model is one that could summarize the past, represent the present, and predict the future[30] and the second is that the summarizing activity that the students do should reflect their understanding of content of the reading passage[31].

In summarizing process some information should be included in the summary and some information should be excluded. The question is what information should be summarized. According to O'Dell[32], what is important in reading is to be able to understand the general meaning of what the readers read, and to be able to select the little bits of specific information that are important. Hennings argues that main idea invention is what reading is all about[33]. Furthermore, it is argued that helping readers invent significant ideas should be a major focus of reading instruction. On the basis of these arguments, content-based summarizing technique emphasizes the main ideas of the text as the information (the contents) that should be summarized. CBST is thus developed on the assumption that the understanding of the text can be gained from the understanding of the main ideas. In this case, the main idea refers to a statement which summarizes a paragraph[34]. The main idea is not simply the topic sentence but it includes the ideas in the topic sentence as well as the ideas in the supporting sentences.

The procedures of CBST are conducted in three steps. First, the reading text is read thoroughly. Second, notes which include the main idea (if necessary, main supporting ideas) are made.

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[29]Chambers, F., & Brigham. Summary Writing: A Short Cut to Success. *Forum Magazine, 27*(1) (1989), p. 45-50.

[30]River, W. M., & O'Dell, F. *Interactive Language Teaching.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

[31]O'Dell, F. (1987). *English as a Foreign Language Prelimnary Examination*. London and New York Longman.

[32]*Ibid*., p. 110

[33]Hennings. (1994). Essential Reading Targetting, Tracking and Thinking AboutMain Ideas. *Journal of Reading, 35*(5) (1994), p. 346-353.

[34]Raygon, A. L. *Reading for the Main Idea,* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1979)

Third, the summary is made on the basis of the notes. CBST which requires the students to read the text thoroughly could be a guarantee of the readers' understanding of the contents. The procedures conducted provide a chance to catch the main idea directly through thorough reading and the product is summary with unnumbered sentences[35].

Furthermore, CBST does not take into account the details of the text because the dependence on the details will reduce the ability to memorize the contents of the text because what could be memorized longer is the general element, not specific one. When the main ideas have been understood and memorized, the details could be remembered for they could be subsumed in the main ideas[36].

Moreover, CBST does not require the students to name the person and to tell what the person does in all of the sentences because it is an obstacle of catching the main idea of a passage in accordance with the text type. This is because many texts could not be summarized by mentioning the agent and the activity one does. CBST, then, does not require the students to work in group or pairs and the produced summary is more flexible in that it is not patterned by a frame such as suggested by the *frame summaries,* but it could be in any form as the contents require. Another specification of CBST is that it is simple as it does not require the students to proceed several step in details. Therefore, it leads to the determination of the main ideas immediately after thorough reading is conducted[37].

Applying CBST in Classroom

In this section, the author will illustrate how to apply CBST in a reading class. The author presents a reading text as the example for applying CBST in classroom teaching. The CBST summaries expected from the students are content-based summaries or summaries which are based on the main ideas of the text that they work on. In order that they could produce summaries

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[35]Carnie, D., Silber, J., & Kameenui, E. J. (1990). Direct Instruction Reading. p. 389

[36]Hayes, D. A. (1989). Helping Students, p. 96-109

[37]Chambers, F., & Brigham. (1989). Summary Writing, pp. 45-50

as expected, instruction may be given. A reading text is entitled *Dawn of Islam* taken from book *English For Islamic Students* by Djamaluddin Darwis[38] as follows :

DAWN OF ISLAM

In the beginning of Islam, Muhammad, the messenger, delivered his message to his family as well as to the Quraysh people. With much struggle and unmatched patience Muhammad managed to collect a few followers. Muhammad talked to people and advised them not to worship the idols which were made of stone and which could neither do them any goo not bring them any harm. He called them instead to follow the religion of Abraham: to believe in one God, Allah, and worship only him.

But non-believers went to believing in the idols and refused to accept Islam. They were afraid that Islam would bring them lots of enemies and make the rest of the Arabs hate them and boycott their trade. If that happened, they would be in great trouble. Therefore, they decided to do something to Muhammad and his followers. They agreed to send a delegation to Abu Thalig and asked him to settle this matter once and for all.

The spokesman said; "Look Abu Talib, you are one of our leader, we greatly honor you. Will you judge between us and your nephew? Tell him to stop insulting our Gods, the Idols, mocking our religions, criticizing our beliefs and slandering our father who taught us these beliefs. Either you stop him or let us deal with him."

Abu Talib gave them no answer, but instead sent someone to look for the prophet and tell him to go to his uncle's house. When the prophet arrived he saw all the important Quraysh men gathered in his uncle's house. As soon as he got there, his uncle, Abu Talib, said to him, "My dear nephew, these are the heads of your people and the rich Quraysh men wishing to make a deal with you. They want you stop attacking their gods, the idols and they will let you worship your God."

The prophet replied, "Can I call upon them to worship somebody else who is better than these idols?" "Who is that, son" "asked Abu Talib. " I would call upon them to say one little phrase. If they say it the rest of the Arabs will submit to them and they will

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[38]Darwis, J. (1999). *English for Islamic Studies*. Jakarta: Raja Grafindo Persada. p. 88

rule the people of the world. All want them to say is "There is no God but Allah."

The text above is used to teach the students to make a summary. The students are instructed to write a summary on the basis of the three parts of the text. The first part of the text (paragraph 1) is about Muhammad started spread his message to his family and began to collect a few followers. The second part (paragraph 2-4) is about non believers who were afraid of Islam; (paragraph 2), one of non believer asked Abu Talib to stop Muhammad's activities (paragraph 3), and Abu Talib tried to persuade Muhammad to stop his activities (paragraph 4). The last part (paragraph 5) is about the strength of Muhammad's belief.

From the above passage, notes are made. The notes are made in the form of outline as in the following:

Personality   : bright, patience, strength
Activity   : Delivered Islam massages to his family and Qurays people

Activities in spreading his massage:
     Activity   : Muhammad collects followers and talked and advised non believers.
     Reaction : Non believers refused Islam and tried to persuade Muhammad
     Effect   : Muhammad did not want to stop his activities to spread Islam massage.

The writer's judgment:
     There is a combination between patience and loyalty on Muhammad's character. He cannot be persuaded by non believers with riches to stop his activities.

From the above outline, a summary is written down. The result of the summary might be as follows:

DAWN OF ISLAM

According to the writer, Muhammad is a strong, patience, and loyal man. His activity in the beginning of Islam to deliver his massage to his family and Quraysh people and

collect the followers. Then, collected followers and advised non believers to accept Islam. The reaction of non believers is to refuse Islam and tried to persuade Muhammad but Muhammad did not want to stop his activities to spread Islam massage.

From the text above, we can see how the summarizing process was undertaken. The reading text was reduced to few core sentences which reflect the main content of the text. This is essential for students or other readers to grasp important information from a reading text. Without applying CBST, students might be difficult to catch core message of a text. This technique would be more benefits for students who study Islamic teaching which is considered rich textual material compared to natural sciences.

Conclusion

Appropriate reading techniques will determnine students ability to grasp information from areading text. In this article, the author has illustrated a reading teachnique which is considered appropriate to be applied in a classroom in particular for Islamic students who often studies rich textual documents such as history, eductaion, and other Islamic teachings. The content-based summarizing technique discussed in this paper is considered very appropriate to be applied for Islamic students classroom which requires high skill to grasp information from a rich tektual document.

The idea in this paper was written based on theoretical perpsective and yet to be implemented empirically. Future research, should apply this theoretical idea into an empirical classroom teaching to produce better results. The reading texts should also not limited to Islamic teaching text but also to another area of studies.

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