

RECTIFYING THE TEACHING OF INTENSIVE READING THROUGH METACOGNITIVE STRATEGY: A CASE IN AN INDONESIAN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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Abstract: Since intensive reading has long been a part of curriculum core in Indonesia and is the main and only English skill tested in the National Examination, many teaching procedures usually focus on ways to assist students succeed in the examination. Therefore, there is a tendency for teachers to simply equip students with texts and help to make sense of the texts by translation so that enabling students to answer the given questions. While it may be helpful to some extent, there is a claim that this mode of teaching is (1) less accurate as it is deemed as *practising* reading, not teaching students *how* to read and (2) less effective for a mere texts' translation affords insufficient support for profound understanding and autonomy in learning to occur. This paper thus addresses this teaching issue happened specifically in a junior high school in Indonesia, where teachers still use translation, i.e. Grammar Translation Method, in teaching reading with a lot of practices and less strategy of how to read. Theoretical foundations of intensive reading and theories of language learning are critically discussed, which then lead to suggest the metacognitive strategy as a potential solution to resolve the issue. This paper hence could (a) enhance our understanding on intensive reading and its relation to language learning theories and (b) offer an insight of possible solution to cope other cases similar to the one presented in this paper.

Keywords: *intensive reading, reading comprehension, grammar translation method, language learning theories, metacognitive strategy*

INTRODUCTION

Intensive reading, a teacher-guided based reading to find out details to comprehend a text (Morris, 1972), or reading comprehension has long been a part of EFL reading programme in Indonesia (Cahyono and Widiati, 2006) taught to junior and senior secondary schools' students. This type of reading focus is justifiable as the demand of the curriculum and national examinations. Particularly in the examination, there are 50

multiple-choice questions with five genres of text -narrative, descriptive, procedure, report, and recount- tested (Aziez, 2011) along with several short functional texts. Any reading activity and other tests (mid-semester or final-semester examination) will be based on these emphases of texts.

Consequently, as encapsulated by Effendi and Suyudi (2017), students were considerably exposed to reading exercises similar to the exam. “Teaching to the test” approach, realised or not, in some way has been implemented in the teaching process. Therefore, teaching techniques and methods employed by teachers will be very likely to centre on ways of assisting students to answer questions of given texts. Sarjan and Mardiana (2017) for example, through their study in one of junior high schools in Indonesia, discover two strategies teachers use in teaching reading; *scaffolding* and *Question Answer Relationship (QARs)*. The *scaffolding* is done to help students uttering words of texts correctly, while the *QARs* is carried out to check whether the students have understood the text or not. Another instance of approach used is the Grammar Translation Method (GTM). Specifically, in the school I previously taught in West Sumatera-Indonesia, the teachers vary the reading activities and use the GTM where each sentence of a reading text was translated using L1, to accommodate students understanding the meaning of the text prior to answering the queries. The typical teaching reading procedure was as follows.

The pre-reading activity had already considered both *bottom-up* and *top-down* approaches whereby students’ interest and background knowledge were elicited by showing pictures, asking two or three questions related to a text, or introducing less-common vocabularies. The whilst reading activity involved asking a few students to read different parts of the text out loud and hereafter, the teacher and students together translated each sentence from the text. At times, the teacher initially provided jumbled paragraphs and asked students reading them to arrange a text and explaining particular verbs *aspect* and *tense* used. Henceforth, the students read the text by themselves and were assisted when they need a help with the sentence meaning. The post-reading comprised of answering diverse types of questions and finally the students exchange book and mark each other’s work while discussing the correct answers with the teacher.

By the approach above, approximately 60% of students could correctly answer most of the comprehension questions given from the worksheet while studying. Since the school I used to work is one of the middle-ranked; B-accredited schools in town (*Basic Data of Primary and Secondary Education 2018*), that proportion was regarded fairly as an accomplishment. Ironically, given the fact the students had been instilled with that seemingly effective method to have them grasped the meaning of the text and produced accurate answers, nearly two-thirds of the students were unexpectedly failed to reach the minimum standard score in the *final-semester* examination. In fact, the questions on the examination had been designed by contributors of the *English Teachers Discussion Forum* or also known as *MGMP*, where English teachers’ representatives from each school assemble to collaboratively improve professionalism and create questions for

particular exams (Farida, no date). Moreover, the test items were also written based on the national examination, which was proven by Sugianto (2016) to be valid and reliable. While were questioned concerning this matter, the students judged reading as a tough subject. This conviction probably appears as concluded by Hamra and Syatriana (2010) because Indonesian students' reading skill is still below average. Amongst many factors influencing the reading skill such as lack of vocabulary (Z.A, 2015), grammar difficulty, inability to use context clues, motivation and reading strategy (Suryanto, 2017), etc., they all seem to target the teacher as the salient facilitator responsible for the learning to take place. If the teachers have done their job, then what could be wrong with this occurrence? There are two primary concerns of this particular situation.

One problem I noticed during my tenure in the school was that the teacher-fronted grammar-translation method was mainly utilised as the single teaching approach. As a result, the teachers took too much control by translating and providing words meaning without sufficient scaffolding for the students. The teachers perceived it is obligatory to support the students thoroughly during the learning process, and a failure to do so engenders irresponsible sense. This viewpoint is conflicting to language learning theory as a socio-cultural process involving internalisation and 'transfer control' of knowledge from an advanced user; teacher, to novice users or learners (Vygotsky, 1986). This validates the reasons why the students only did well in the classroom but not in the test for their less independence and much reliance on the teachers, as well as an inaccurate perception of teachers' role.

Another constraint is perfectly pointed out by Macalister (2011) who also encountered teaching practice similar to the one conducted in the school I formerly worked. He affirms such teaching convention that excessively but solely concentrates on posing numerous types of question after reading texts was in reality *practising* reading, not teaching the students *how* to read. Teaching how to read necessitates "developing skills and strategies that will assist future reading" (Macalister, 2011, p.162). It is then no wonder that students often view reading as a challenging subject and were unsuccessful during the test; they have been stipulating to do something they are not told *how*. For this reason, rectifying the nature of intensive reading teaching and learning practices inside the classroom by providing suitable reading strategies and gradually shifting the control from teachers to the students is pertinent in this context. Therefore, this paper is aimed at exploring (1) what involves in reading a text intensively and (2) how its teaching could develop independence of students in reading comprehensively.

INTENSIVE READING

The Nature of Intensive Reading

Reading a text intensively is perhaps the most truistic but, as the name suggests, straightforwardly accurate definition of intensive reading. This type of reading to the text is central and typical in Indonesia (Z.A., 2015, and Cahyono and Widiati, 2006). In particular, Patel and Jain (2008) describe intensive reading as passage reading to gain

detailed information. Likewise, Morris (1972) calls it as in-depth reading, which is normally classroom-oriented (Morris, 1972; Macalister, 2014). Texts or passages in intensive reading activity are relatively short (Patel and Jain, 2008; Hafiz and Tudor, 1989), as opposed to extensive reading materials. The characteristics of intensive reading itself though prompt slower speed of reading, and thus according to Macalister (2014) and Richards and Schmidt (2002) require teachers' assistance.

Additionally, Paran (as cited in Erfanpour, 2013), in one hand, infers intensive reading as a valuable avenue to enhance reading comprehension. Hence, intensive reading is viewed as a *tool* to achieve comprehension. On the other hand, intensive reading is deemed by Morris (1972) as an *element* or a part of the reading comprehension lesson, not as an instrument to arrive at an understanding. Succinctly, these two slightly contradictory illustrations of intensive reading imply an intense association between intensive reading and reading comprehension.

In a different way, Nation (2009) and Hedge (1985) moreover regard comprehension as one of the two goals of intensive reading. The first goal is comprehension of a text and therefore necessitates a controlled and applicable reading strategy, and the second purpose is related to improving knowledge of language features such as lexical, syntactic or grammatical items through the studied text. The former is usually realised using comprehension questions while the latter realisation relies on the investigation of the language features contribution towards a communicative purpose of a text. In Indonesia context, the reading comprehension questions mostly inquire the content of a text and very few language features like vocabulary or grammar. It implies that the two goals are mutually underlined with greater emphasis on the first objective.

Due to differences in goal, intensive reading's focus is therefore divided into several aspects. Eight categories of focus in intensive reading are proposed by Nation (2009). They are (1) comprehension, (2) regular and irregular sound-spelling relation, (3) vocabulary, (4) grammar, (5) cohesion, (6) information structure, (7) genre features, and (8) strategies. Among these categories, all except (2), (5), and (8) are concentrated not only in the school I previously work, but mostly in public schools in the area. It is common to find teachers teaching a structure of a recount text for instance, its genre features as grammar and vocabulary, and comprehension questions at the end of the lesson. This is conducted normally within 2 meetings (and may vary among schools). The afterwards meeting will then centre on other texts. Hence, the reading lesson intensively studies how specific genre constructs meanings and consequently texts are seen as having a different focus.

At that last point of focus, Nation (2009) argues the stance and recommends an emphasis to teach items frequently emerge in a wide range of texts. Nation (2009) and Macalister (2011; 2014) accentuate that *today's teaching* should *make tomorrow's text easier*. There are four ways to put this into practice (Nation, 2009). Firstly, attention must be given to those high-frequency items frequently occur in many different texts, in terms of language in overall. This to some extent is challenging because, as stated

earlier, diverse genres of text are taught in junior secondary schools of Indonesia. Narrative, procedure or recount texts for example, indeed have unlike features. However, the second way where it is advocated to employ strategies that can be used with a majority of texts is feasible to achieve. Thirdly, Nation suggests to taking little attention to less-frequent items and lastly, any similar elements and strategies used in some different texts must be ensured.

When analysing the type of question appears in the national examination 2017 using reading comprehension question taxonomy developed by Day and Park (2005), I found four categories of comprehension measured in the test; they are *literal*, *reorganization*, *inference*, and *prediction* (see Appendix). The first three classifications were asked the most and while each text may have two to four questions, at least two different comprehensions are always assessed from a text. This is where the second and the fourth methods proposed by Nation above are very likely to apply. Teachers can introduce strategies on how to deal with those type of comprehension questions that appear in most texts; in different genre of texts. Furthermore, almost each text consists of identification of words synonym or antonym as well as pronoun reference. The four suggested tactics once again can be implemented in this case. Teachers could provide strategy on how to guess words' synonym or antonym from context and the technique ought to be repeated and instilled for every different text. By this method, Nation has to a certain extent transformed teachers' perspective to design intensive reading teaching activities not discretely on the basis of what a particular text has yet commonalities numerous texts bring.

Intensive Reading and Theory of Learning

As formerly stated, intensive reading and reading comprehension interrelate to each other. Given that reading comprehension is one of components of intensive reading, the teaching of intensive reading therefore takes into account the nature and process of comprehension. Comprehension entails not only using linguistics knowledge but the world knowledge at the same time. Scholars (Richards, 1997; Urquhart and Weir, 1998; Nuttal, 1996) called it *bottom-up* and *top-down* strategies or models or approach correspondingly. The earlier involves constructing meaning from the bottommost linguistics parts as words, phrases, or sentences, whereas the latter meaning building is started from our experience and knowledge of surroundings. Both are functioned interactively by readers either consciously or unconsciously.

Moreover, according to Orasanu (1986), there are three varieties of knowledge contributed to comprehension namely (1) concept formation and application, (2) background knowledge, and (3) text structure. The first and the second concept are similar to the complementary *bottom-up* and *top-down* models, and the third one is counted for its significance to retrieve information. In addition, Randi, Grigokenko, and Sternberg (2005) summarize a three-dimensional explanation of reading comprehension. The first dimension is labelled as *transactional* where readers compose meaning actively through a text as the medium to interact with the writer. The following

dimension concerns *social standpoint* involving a particular setting or background of where the lesson takes place, and *the purpose of reading* becomes the last functional dimension.

The concept of comprehension above suggests an interactive process within a student's mind to arrive at understanding. This theory of comprehension in intensive reading should be initially understood as a precursor for teaching and learning to happen. Just as learning other skills, the active process of comprehension involves cognitive processes. Essentially, cognitive perspective of learning encompasses different models and Lightbown and Spada (2013) have reviewed some models. One of them is an *information-processing* model which suggests that learning process begin with attending the language features students are learning. This involves capability of using cognitive or mental sources within themselves. This skill of being attentive towards ones' understanding is known as *declarative* knowledge, and to put it into practice is called *procedural* knowledge.

In reading, *declarative* knowledge can be exemplified by students' ability to understand meaning of individual words, grammar rules, etc. When the students are capable to create an inference or a conclusion from the words and rules to arrive at a general meaning, the *procedural* knowledge is constructed. The transfer from declarative to procedural knowledge could take times and need a systematic guide. With a lot of practices, then the procedural knowledge could be automatic (Lightbown and Spada, 2013) and constructing meaning in reading could be easier for students. This is perhaps what underlies teachers' inclined action to give many reading exercises, which is useful for students for automaticity, but a preceding controlled and systematic guide seems to be absent from the teachers. With the GTM approach mentioned earlier, teachers help the students in their process of moving from the descriptive to procedural knowledge that should have been done by the students themselves under teachers' support. This concern requires immediate solution.

Another example of cognitive model is called *usage-based learning* where learning is believed to occur through the frequency of exposure to similar inputs of language features (Ellis as cited in Lightbown and Spada, 2013). Once the learners notice specific feature, it will likely to activate other elements of language. Furthermore, the third model focus namely the *competition model* is not restricted to the input but meaning and practises too. Given the exposure to ample examples, learners will learn how to use hidden clues designating specific meaning. This is in some way associated with *inductive* learning. Aside from different models emerge on the ground of the cognitive perspective, some hypotheses and theories of second language learning uncovered by Lightbown and Spada (2013) point that learning will happen at first because of cognitive development process, or abstract processes inside learners' brain on the basis of experience.

A crucial point in cognitive perspective to note is though learning possibly occurs initially by processes of attending language aspects, being equipped with inputs and

exercises, the whole activity, such as that transfer from the declarative to procedural knowledge, requires a mediator, a role model or an interaction. Hence, not only is learning involving conceptual progress within oneself, but also social collaboration with others, or to be precise, with teachers or peers. Thus, there is an overlapping role of cognitive and social view in learning, including learning intensive reading. This view of regarding learning as a social interaction scheme escorts to another crucial perspective of learning; that is socio-cultural perspective.

Unlike the cognitive perspective, this theory, advocated by a Russian psychologist, named Vygotsky, views social interaction as the first and foremost step of learning (Lantolf et.al., 2000; Lightbown and Spada, 2013). Language learning, required higher cognitive functions, is believed to begin with a mediation process, which can be reached through a regulation (Lantolf et.al., 2000). Drawing on several research on sociocultural theory, Lantolf et.al. (2000) reveal three regulations namely *object*, *other*, and *self-regulation*. The *object* regulation is facilitated by tangible tools such as books, power-points, dictionary, etc., and as the name suggests, *other* regulation facilitation is helped by ‘others’, which in this case teachers, peers or even parents. Regarding this second regulation, Vygotsky (1986) argues that the ‘others’ must be more experienced others who are within the learners’ ZPD (*zone of proximal development*)—that is a gap between what learners can do by themselves and by the help of more capable others through scaffolding (Lightbown and Spada, 2013; Lantolf et.al., 2000; Jubran, 2016).

As for the *self-regulation*, what students have obtained from the two other regulations must be internalised to oneself so that creating autonomous learning. Apparently, teachers must transfer their control of knowledge to facilitate students’ independence in learning. At this last point, it is unfortunate that this social constructivist of language learning whose prominence in teaching reading comprehension is stressed (McLaughlin, 2012 and Cairney, 1990) is not in the right direction and implementation in school I formerly worked. The teachers primarily concentrate on the product of learning, not the learning process of how to read and accelerate the texts meaning formulation development by using grammar-translation approach. This sort of practice impedes the acquiring-knowledge process as well as self-regulation. Briefly, it can be concluded that the intensive reading teaching practice where I worked is not quite consistent with both cognitive and sociocultural viewpoint of learning. For this reason, a feasible and visible strategy for teachers to resolve the problem need to be addressed.

METACOGNITIVE STRATEGY

The necessity to move control of learning from teachers to students for self-directed learning to happen and to teach students *how* to read should begin with appropriate reading instruction. This proposition is supported by Urquhart and Weir (1998) stating that teaching reading comprehension requires instruction and mediation as the pedagogical input. Between many aspects underlying reading instruction such as *cognitive* and *metacognitive* strategy, (Urquhart and Weir, 1998; Grabe, 2009), *schema* and *text structure* theory (Meyer as cited in Cahyono and Widiati, 2006) and many

others, the first two are commonly reviewed and used by practitioners so they will also be discussed in this section.

The cognitive-based view of reading comprehension according to Urquhart and Weir (1998) may involve *skimming* and *scanning* to guessing word-meaning based on context. In addition, Dole et.al. (1991) conclude that this type of cognitive perception entails active interaction between readers and the texts. Metacognitive strategy, however, involves a process of thinking about reading itself (Urquhart and Weir, 1998). Particularly, this strategy concerns with awareness and judgement during the reading process (Griffith and Ruan, 2005). Dole et.al. (1991) claim that good readers usually use this metacognitive strategy.

Griffith and Ruan (2005) further describe how the metacognitive strategy could be applied to reading comprehension. The following description generated by Griffith and Ruan (2005, p.7) is based on a model of relationship between metacognition and reading.

Preparing to Read

1. Is clear about the goals for reading
2. Skims the text to get information about the length and structure of the text
3. Activates prior knowledge

Constructing Meaning While Reading

1. Reads selectively, reading quickly irrelevant information or re-reading important, difficult, or interesting text
2. Identifies main ideas
3. Predicts
4. Makes inferences
5. Interprets and evaluates
6. Integrates ideas into a coherent representation of the text
7. Monitors understanding

Reviewing and Reflecting on Reading

1. Self-questions for understanding
2. Invokes strategies to review the text and comprehension
3. Summarizes
4. Continues to process the text based on reading goals

Another model has also been proposed by Grabe (2009). Even though Grabe's model is not as specific as above, most of his eight strategies are associated with the aforementioned examples. For instance, Grabe (2009, p.209) advocates 'summarizing', 'forming question', 'activating prior knowledge', 'inferencing', 'using text-structure awareness', and 'monitoring comprehension' as steps to activate students' metacognition; that is "knowledge and cognition about cognitive phenomena" (Flavell, 1979, p. 906). The mere difference is that he includes 'answering question and

elaborative interrogation' and 'using visual graphics and graphic organizers' to aid students in visualising the studied texts. Another model is proposed by Chamot and O'Malley (in Cakici, 2017) involving *Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluating*. In reading context, a planning includes preparation of the reading process while monitoring "requires learner to check his production or comprehension, and evaluating strategies provide learners with evaluation and judgement of learning task" (p, 71).

Metacognitive strategy model is not restricted to those three revealed above. There are many other diverse models. However, the three models are sufficient to provide a prominent characteristic of metacognitive strategy; that is *evaluation* or *reflection* at the end of the reading. In addition, upon a closer scrutiny, it can be noticed that metacognitive reading strategy has in fact catered cognitive strategies like *skimming* and *scanning*. This implies that teachers only need to use the former mode in teaching. As inferred by Phakiti (2003), cognitive and metacognitive strategies are difficult to distinguish, and they should not be seen as two different mental facets.

With this step-by-step strategy, students will not only be encouraged to reading practices but strategy on *how* to read too. The reading process is started with activating background knowledge and making clear the reading purposes. This initial step can be understood as activating students' *declarative knowledge*. Afterwards, during the whilst-reading, students are directed to actively monitor their declarative knowledge and predict the information of a text. It is in this second step, the transfer from declarative to *procedural knowledge* happens. Thus, teachers are expected not only translate the studied texts to students but scaffold them in the reading process. Prior to answering questions from the texts, as exemplified in the Griffith and Ruan (2005) metacognitive model above, students are at first fostered to do a review or reflection on reading, which will very likely facilitate internalization or self-directed learning.

This metacognitive strategy should be used in any studied text so that teaching *today's text, make tomorrow ones' easier* can be realised. Teachers initially ought to demonstrate the strategies several times with necessary scaffolding prior to transferring the control and letting the students work by themselves. Teachers may at first face difficulty to implement the strategy for its complexity and possibly time-consuming quality. Moreover, Indonesia has an interpersonal relation culture where those with a high academic status, in this case the teachers, tend to dominate role in teaching and students as the subordinate group usually have little room for working together with teachers (Mbato, 2013). This is one of the critical issues in ELT in Indonesia. Nevertheless, it is truly a worth to apply the metacognitive strategy for its benefits.

Ahmadi, Ismail, and Abdullah (2013) for instance declare that metacognitive strategy role in reading comprehension is undoubtedly positive and similar cases are also reported by Urquhart and Weir (1998), even particularly this strategy could improve self-regulation (Nash-Ditzel, 2010; Mbato, 2013). Specifically, Cubukcu (2008) finds that metacognitive strategy instruction could enhance students' reading comprehension and vocabulary. In a similar vein, Channa et al. (2015), Fitriasia et al. (2015), and Kolic-

vehovec (2006), uncover the same finding that metacognitive strategy is fundamental for student to monitor and control their awareness of understanding a text. In a nutshell, it can be inferred that metacognitive reading strategy is proven to be beneficial for teachers to teaching students *how* to read and direct *autonomy* in reading.

CONCLUSION

The notion of “teaching to the test” in a reading lesson does not necessarily hold a negative connotation as long as the process is clear and structured. In a junior high school in Indonesia where I previously taught, “teaching to the test” usually occurs in an intensive reading programme in schools. The process of teaching intensive reading concentrates on ample exposure of practising reading with minimum guideline on *how* to read. Besides, the cognitive process of reading is frequently accelerated and unstructured. Teachers use the GTM approach to provide texts meaning so that it is easier for students to answer questions of the text. As a consequence, students only succeed in doing the reading test in the classroom but not in the actual test like final semester examination.

Discussing the underlying theory of intensive reading and theory of learning, those two practices mentioned above are found to be somewhat conflicting with the theories, where exposure should be given on the *ways* or *how* to read and sufficient scaffolding from teachers. It does not also necessarily mean that a lot of reading practices and the implemented GTM approach are completely improper yet teaching strategies of reading and technique that could elicit independence in learning ought to be primarily prioritized. Hence, in this paper, metacognitive strategy is suggested to rectify the two concerns. The choice of this strategy is grounded on the specific circumstance of issues above. Metacognitive strategy principally concerns with (a) reading preparation, (b) monitoring own understanding in reading by self-questioning, predicting, etc, and (c) finally evaluating the process and understanding one of which can be done by summarizing. This mode of teaching is expected to bridge the gap between the theory of intensive reading and language learning and its current practices.

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APPENDIX

The national examination questions 2017 for junior secondary or high school is available from: <https://www.m4th-lab.net/>.

The following analysis is based on the Day and Park (2005) reading comprehension question taxonomy.

No	Types of Comprehension	Question No.	Total
1	Literal	5, 7, 8, 11, 12, 14, 15, 19, 25, 26, 27, 37, 47.	13
2	Reorganization	17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 29, 31, 33, 34, 38, 41, 44, 45, 48.	16
3	Inference	2, 3, 4, 6, 9, 10, 28, 30, 32, 35, 36, 40, 42, 43, 46, 50	16
4	Prediction	1, 13, 16, 39, 49.	5
5	Evaluation	-	
6	Personal response	-	
			50