

# DEVELOPING STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION THROUGH CONTEXTUAL GUESSING

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## **Abstract**

This research was aimed at developing students reading comprehension for D class first semester students at Polytechnic of Tonggak Equator Pontianak. This research was classroom action research which was set out in two cycles, they were the first and second cycle. The subject involved in this research included the students of D class, first semester students of Polytechnic of Tonggak Equator. In gathering the data, the researcher used some instruments, they were field note and test. The data of the students' pre-test and progress test score were analyzed by using mean score and the data of observation was analyzed descriptively. The finding of this research were the students' reading comprehension were developed from pre-test and progress test from cycle to cycle. The mean score of the students' pre-test was 72. Then, the mean score of the students' progress test in the 1<sup>st</sup> cycle was 84. Finally, the mean score of the students' progress test in the 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle was 91.

**Keywords:** developing, reading comprehension, contextual guessing.

## *Abstrak*

*Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengembangkan pemahaman membaca mahasiswa kelas D semester 1 Politeknik Tonggak Equator Pontianak. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian tindakan kelas yang dilakukan dalam dua siklus, yakni siklus pertama dan siklus kedua. Subjek dalam penelitian ini adalah mahasiswa kelas D semester 1 Politeknik Tonggak Equator. Dalam mengumpulkan data, peneliti menggunakan beberapa instrument, yaitu catatan lapangan dan tes. Data hasil pre-test dan tes kemajuan dianalisis menggunakan nilai rata-rata dan data dari hasil observasi dianalisis secara deskriptif. Temuan dari penelitian ini adalah kemampuan pemahaman membaca mahasiswa meningkat dari mulai pre-test sampai tes kemajuan dari siklus pertama dan kedua. Nilai rata-rata pre-test mahasiswa adalah 72. Kemudian nilai rata-rata tes kemajuan mahasiswa pada siklus pertama adalah 84. Serta nilai rata-rata tes kemajuan mahasiswa pada siklus kedua adalah 91.*

**Kata Kunci:** *mengembangkan, pemahaman membaca, menebak makna kata menurut konteks.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Being successful in teaching English must be the goal that would be achieved by all of English teachers and lecturers. In fact, being successful in teaching English is not as easy as the people thought. Teachers and lecturers have

to do some strategies in order to find out the best and appropriate strategy to achieve their goal for being successful in teaching English.

There are four language skills that must be taught to the students, they are reading, listening, speaking and writing. Reading is one of language skills that must be learnt by all students since it's a receptive skill that will effects the development of productive skills such as speaking and writing. For university students, reading is something that has to be done. They have to read their compulsory books or other materials related to their lesson. For students who are studying languages, reading is one of the skills which has to be learned and is considered as the most important one because it can influence other language skills (listening, speaking, and writing). Besides, reading can enhance students' knowledge, increase vocabulary, improve analytical thinking, stimulate creativity, help to solve a problem, reduce stress, etc.

The importance of reading has not been realized by a lot of students, yet. Many students are classified as poor readers. Many of them have difficulty in understanding the meaning of words, finding the main ideas, finding the general and specific information from the text and understanding reading passage/text.

Based on the problem explanation, the researcher thinks that students need strategy in order to help them solving their reading problem. Confronted with texts, language learners may be stuck by shortage of vocabulary inventory and thus be unable to understand what texts are about. The first thing that a learner does to understand a difficult word is to look it up using dictionary. However, there are techniques learners may use to get the meaning of such vocabulary items. One of these techniques is guessing meaning from context. No matter what level the students are in, they will often come across difficult words in texts they are exposed to. Inferring and guessing meanings of unfamiliar words is a strategy which is worth developing. Therefore, the researcher interesting to do a research entitled *Developing Students' Reading Comprehension through Contextual Guessing*.

There are some problems were found by the researcher in the classroom. Firstly, students do not understand the meaning of words. Second, students can't

find the main idea of some paragraphs. Then, students can't find the general and specific information from the text. The last is students do not understand the reading passage/text.

Based on the background and identification of problem, the researcher formulates the problems as follows: (1) Does the use of contextual guessing improve the reading comprehension of D class firstsemester students of Polytechnic of Tonggak Equator Pontianak in academic year 2015-2016?; and (2) How does the use of contextual guessing improve the reading comprehension of D class first semester students of Polytechnic of Tonggak Equator Pontianak in academic year 2015-2016? Based on the problem formulated, the objective of this research is to find out whether the use of contextual guessing in teaching reading can improve reading comprehension of D class firstsemester students of Polytechnic of Tonggak Equator Pontianak in academic year 2015-2016.

Silberstein (1994: 120) states that "reading is an active process". Describing reading as an active process means that when students contemplate the text, they preview the text by activating background knowledge, making predictions about the content, making connection to self, text, and world.

According to Patel and Jain (2008: 113) reading is the most important activity in language class. Reading is a source of information and pleasurable. It also a means of consolidating and extending one's knowledge.

Brown (2004: 186) states that there are three common genres of reading, they are: academic reading, for example technical reports (lab reports), reference materials (dictionaries, etc.), textbook, thesis, essays, papers, test directions, editorials and opinion writing. Second, job-related reading, for example phone message, letters/emails, memos, job evaluations, project reports, schedules, labels, signs, announcements, forms, applications, questionnaires, financial documents, etc. The last is personal reading, for example newspapers, magazines, greeting cards, invitations, novels, short stories, drama, poetry, comics, etc.

Brown (2004: 189) states that for considering assessment procedures, several type of reading performance are typically identified, they are perceptive reading, selective reading, interactive reading, and extensive reading.

Linge (2000) states that reading comprehension is the ability to think words together into sentences and to understand the idea that the author is trying to convey in those sentences. Therefore, reading comprehension is an ongoing process of evolving thinking. When readers read, they carry on a conversation with the text. They respond with happiness, amazement, wonder, etc. they make connection, ask questions and draw inferences for better understanding and learning from what they read.

Reading is a complex process such Schoenbach et al (1999:38) states that reading is not only about how to pronounce a word, and comprehend the meaning of words, reading is a complex process. It is a complex process of problem solving in which the readers work to make sense of a text, not only just from the words and sentences on the page but also from the ideas, memories, and knowledge appeared by those words and sentences. Therefore, the reader do not only learn about certain words, sentence, or phrase, but also they have to think about the idea from those words and obtain knowledge from those words and sentences. The readers have to be able to recognize the words used, grasp information, and infer the ideas of the text that is called reading comprehension.

According to Mohamad (1999) there are actually three main levels or strands of comprehension-literal, interpretive and critical comprehension. The levels are: (1) Literal comprehension. Comprehension at this level involves surface meanings. At this level, teachers can ask students to find information and ideas that are explicitly stated in the text. In addition, it is also appropriate to test vocabulary; (2) Interpretive or referential comprehension. At this level, students go beyond what is said and read for deeper meanings. They must be able to read critically and analyze carefully what they have read. Students need to be able to see relationships among ideas, for example how ideas go together and also see the implied meanings of these ideas. It is also obvious that before our students can do this, they have to first understand the ideas that are stated (literal comprehension). Interpretive or referential comprehension includes thinking processes such as drawing conclusions, making generalizations and predicting outcomes. At this level, teachers can ask more challenging questions such as asking students to do

the following: (a) Re-arrange the ideas or topics discussed in the text; (b) Explain the author's purpose of writing the text; (c) Summarize the main idea when this is not explicitly stated in the text; and (d) Select conclusions which can be deduced from the text they have read; and (3) Critical reading. The third level of comprehension is critical reading whereby ideas and information are evaluated. Critical evaluation occurs only after our students have understood the ideas and information that the writer has presented. At this level, students can be tested on the following skills: (a) The ability to differentiate between facts and opinions; (b) The ability to recognize persuasive statements; and (c) The ability to judge the accuracy of the information given in the text.

Teaching reading comprehension to English Foreign Language (EFL) learners is not an easy way. According to Nuttal (1982: 21), “the aim of teaching reading comprehension are to develop the students’ ability to extract the message from the content. In teaching reading comprehension, the teachers are trying to put something in the students’ mind to take the information by them.”

In teaching reading comprehension, the students have to develop the ability to read by themselves. An independent reader must be able to overcome the text that she/he has never seen before. The reading teachers/lecturers have to facilitate the students to do so. The teachers’ role in reading is not to remain the students but to make the students have their own ability to read.

The goal of teaching reading is Encouragement of the full use of individual’s capacities in reading. In means that it will have maximum influence on his welfare and also lead to self-realization. Efficient use of reading as a tool of learning and inquiry; and also for relaxation and escape. Constant broadening of students’ reading interest. Encouragement of an attitude toward reading which will lead to lifetime interest in reading of many kinds and for many purposes (Bamberg, 1975: 13).

Brown (2001: 306) states they are ten strategies that can be practically applied in reading classroom, they are: (1) Identify the purpose in reading. According to Brown (2001: 306), efficient reading consist of clearly identifying the purpose in reading something. By doing so, the readers know what they are

looking for and can weed out potential distracting information. Students have to know their purpose in reading something; (2) Use graphemic rules and patterns to aid in bottom-up decoding (especially for beginning level learners); (3) Students usually find difficulties in making correspondences between spoken and written English in learning to read. Therefore, the lecturer can use graphemic rules and patterns to aid in bottom-up decoding; (4) Use efficient silent reading technique. According to Brown (2001:307) in order to increase reading efficiency, intermediate to advanced level students can be helped by teaching them few silent reading rules, they are: (a) Students don't need to pronounce each word; (b) Try to visually perceive more than one word at a time; and (c) If a word is absolutely crucial to global understanding, skip over it and try to infer its meaning from its context; (5) Skim text for main ideas. Skimming consists of quickly running one's eyes across a whole text (such as essay, article or chapter) for its gist. Skimming gives readers advantage of being able to predict the purpose of the passage, the main topic or message, and possibly some of the developing or supporting ideas (Brown, 2001: 308); (6) Scan the text for specific information. Scanning is quickly searching for some particular piece or piece of information in a text. Scanning exercises may ask students to look for names or dates, to find a definition of a key concept, or to list a certain number of supporting details. The purpose of scanning is to extract specific information without reading through the whole text. For academic English, scanning is absolutely essential (Brown, 2001: 308); (7) Use semantic mapping or clustering. Reader can easily overwhelmed by a long string of ideas or events. The strategy of semantic mapping, or grouping ideas into meaningful clusters, help the reader to provide some order to the chaos (Brown, 2001: 308); (8) Guess when you are not certain. According to Brown (2001: 309), learners can use guessing to guess the meaning of a word, guess a grammatical relationship (e.g., a pronoun reference), guess a discourse relationship, infer implied meaning ("between the lines"), guess about cultural reference, guess content message; (9) Analyze vocabulary. One way for learners to make guessing pay off when they don't immediately recognize a word is to analyze it in terms of what they know about it. Several techniques are useful here:

(a) Look for prefixes (co-, inter-, un-, etc.) that may give clues; (b) Look for suffixes (-tion, -tive, ally, etc.) that may indicate what part of speech it is; (c) Look for roots that are familiar; (d) Look for grammatical contexts that may signal information; and (e) Look at the semantic context (topic) for clues (Brown, 2001: 310); (10) Distinguish between literal and implied meanings; and (11) Capitalize on discourse markers to process relationships. Many discourse markers in English signal relationships among ideas as expressed through phrases, clauses, and sentences. A clear comprehension of such markers can greatly enhance learners' reading efficiency.

Guessing meaning from context in the exam is an important technique that will **improve students reading skills** and the speed with which students can read. Obviously students do not have a dictionary in the exam so there are likely to be a lot of words from the reading text that they do not understand and they cannot check. If they come across a word they do not understand, then they cannot spend a lot of time working out its meaning because they have a very limited time for reading. Therefore, **guessing meaning from context** is necessary.

Confronted with texts, language learners may be stuck by shortage of vocabulary inventory and thus be unable to understand what texts are about. The first thing that a learner does to understand a difficult word is to look it up using the nearest dictionary. There are however techniques learners may use to get the meaning of such vocabulary items. One of these techniques is guessing meaning from context. No matter what level our students are in, they will often come across difficult words in texts they are exposed to. Inferring and guessing meanings of unfamiliar words is a strategy which is worth developing (Rhalmi, 2013).

Guessing from context refers to the ability to infer the meaning of an expression using contextual clues. These clues may be purely linguistic or situational: (1) Linguistic context: the linguistic environment in which a word is used within a text; and (2) Situational context: extra linguistic elements that contribute to the construction of meaning this may involve background knowledge of the subject" (Rhalmi, 2013).

Rhalmi (2013) states that learners should be able to infer the meaning of an unknown word using: (1) the meaning of vocabulary items that surrounds it; (2) the way the word is formed; and (3) the background knowledge of the subject and the situation.

Texts are often full of redundancy and consequently students can use the relation between different items within a text to get the meaning. Our prior knowledge of the world may also contribute to understand what an expression means. These techniques help students get the meaning of words or at least narrow the possibilities: (1) Synonyms and definitions; (2) Antonym and contrast; (3) Cause and effect; (4) Parts of speech; (5) Examples; (6) Word forms (the morphological properties of the word); and (7) General knowledge (Rhalmi, 2013) .

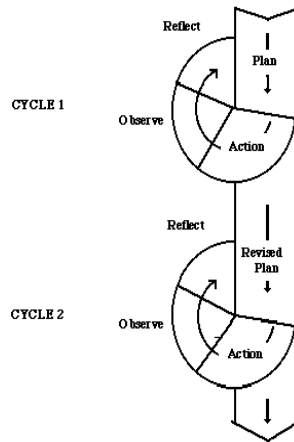
The action hypothesis of the research is contextual guessing will significantly develop the reading comprehension of D class first semester students of Polytechnic of Tonggak Equator in academic year 2015-2016.

The researcher wish that the result of this research will give many advantages, they are: (1) The researcher hope that the finding of this research will give additional reference for another research related to improving reading comprehension; (2) The researcher hope that the finding of this research will give more knowledge and insight for the reading teacher/lecturer in teaching reading. In other words, it may help them in improving their professionalism; and (3) For the students of Polytechnic of Tonggak Equator, the researcher hope that the finding of this research will improve the students' reading comprehension.

## **METHOD**

This research is classroom action research. In doing this research, the researcher used action research design introduced by Kemmis and McTaggart (Burn, 2010: 9) which is set out in the figure below.





**Figure 1. Cyclical AR Model based on Kemmis and McTaggart**

Kemmis and McTaggart (Burns, 1999: 32) stated that "action research occurs through a dynamic and complementary process, which consists of four essential "moments": of planning, action, observation and reflection." These improvements are fundamental steps in spiraling process through which participants in an action research group undertake to: (1) Develop a plan of critically informed action to improve what is already happening; (2) Act to implement the plan; (3) Observe the effect of the critically informed action in the context in which it occurs; and (4) Reflect on these effects as the basis for the further planning, subsequent critically informed action and so on, through a succession of cycles (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988).

There are four activities done by the researcher, they are planning, acting, observing and reflecting. In the stage of planning, the researcher planned the teaching learning activity to solve the problem in her previous teaching learning process. The plan include the preparation before the teaching learning activity, they are lesson plan, instrument to collect the data such as field notes and test (pre-test and progress test). Then, in the stage of acting, the researcher as the lecturer applied the plan she had. The next stage is observing. There were classroom observations done by the researcher herself. The researcher observes the learning process objectively. The last stage is reflecting. Reflection recalls action as it has been recorded in observation, but it is also active. Reflection seeks to make sense of processes, problems, issues, and constraints made manifest in

strategic action. It takes account of the variety of perspectives possible in the social situation and comprehends the issues and circumstances in which they arise (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988).

This research was done with some procedures, they are the big cycle and small cycle. The big cycle in this research is 4 meetings in which the researcher applies this technique in teaching learning process, those are cycle 1 which consists of two meetings and cycle 2 which consists of two meetings. Then, the small cycle which consists of a meeting which lasts in about 100 minutes.

This research was done in the researcher own class that is D class first semester students of Polytechnic of Tonggak Equator in academic year 2015-2016. This research was finished within a month. The subject of this research was the D class first semester students of Polytechnic of Tonggak Equator in academic year 2015-2016.

In gathering the data, the researcher used some instruments. First, field note that is used to record what happen in the classroom. Second, test that was consists of pre-test and progress test. Pre-test is used to know the students' reading comprehension ability before the researcher give the treatment while the progress test is used to know the development of the students' reading comprehension each cycle. The result will be categorized as follow:

**Table 1. Categorize of Score**

<b>Numeric Scores</b>	<b>Relative Scores</b>	<b>Marking Quality</b>
85 – 100	A	Very good
81 – 84	A-	Almost very good
77 – 80	B+	Better
73 – 76	B	Good
69 – 72	B-	Almost good
65 – 68	C+	More than fair
60 – 64	C	Fair
45 – 59	D	Less
0 – 44	E	Bad

*Buku Pedoman Politeknik Tonggak Equator (2014)*

## FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Based on the test and observation, the researcher presents the finding of this research as follows. The result of pre-test and progress test can be seen in the table below.

**Table 2. The Result of Pre-test and Progress Test of the Last Cycle**

<b>Students' Code</b>	<b>Pre-Test Score</b>	<b>Progress Test Score of The Last Cycle</b>
Student 1	71,4	96,6
Student 2	80,0	96,6
Student 3	74,2	86,6
Student 4	77,1	96,6
Student 5	82,8	93,3
Student 6	71,4	73,3
Student 7	74,2	100
Student 8	80,0	86,6
Student 9	42,8	90,0
Student 10	77,1	93,3
Student 11	80,0	90,0
Student 12	57,1	80,0
Student 13	74,2	90
Student 14	65,7	86,6
Student 15	68,5	93,3
Student 16	48,5	86,6
Student 17	82,8	96,6
Student 18	68,5	93,3
Student 19	74,2	93,3
Student 20	71,4	90,0
Student 21	71,4	96,6
Student 22	62,8	96,6
Student 23	82,8	83,3
Student 24	82,8	93,3
Student 25	94,2	96,6
Student 26	74,2	90,0
Student 27	71,4	86,6
Student 28	65,7	90,0
Student 29	77,1	90,0
Student 30	77,1	83,3

Mean score	72	91
Category of score	B-	A

Firstly, researcher did a pre-test in order to know the reading comprehension ability of the students. Then, the mean score of the pre-test was only 72 that categorized as B-. Therefore, based on the pre-test done by the researcher, it can be known that the students' reading comprehension is low.

In the first cycle, the students responded to the teacher's greeting. In pre-activity, when the teacher asked some questions related to the topic, most of the students answered that they seldom reading an English book, magazine or article, they could not read English fluently. In the while activity, many students confuse when they knew that they were going to study reading by using contextual guessing since they do not know the meaning of reading by using contextual guessing. In the first cycle, many students get bored in reading the text.

After giving the learning material and applying the technique (reading by contextual guessing), the researcher gave progress test to the students. The result of the progress test in the first cycle was 84 that was categorized A-.

In the second cycle, students showed that they began to improve their reading skill. There were only few students who wrong in reading some words in a reading text. The students began to understand the reading text. Then, researcher also did progress test in the second cycle. The progress test was given after giving the learning material and applying the technique (reading by contextual guessing). The result of the progress test in the second cycle was much better than the first cycle that was 91 that was categorized as A.

From the research finding, it could be seen that the students' reading comprehension developed from cycle to cycle. In the first cycle, the mean score of students' reading comprehension was 84. In the second cycle was 91. The development was considered as the result of treatment that is contextual guessing meaning in improving students' reading comprehension such Brown (2001: 309) states learners can use guessing to guess the meaning of a word, guess a grammatical relationship (e.g., a pronoun reference), guess a discourse

relationship, infer implied meaning (“between the lines”), guess about cultural reference, guess content message. The development of the students reading comprehension by using contextual guessing meaning also in line with Rhalmi says learners should be able to infer the meaning of an unknown word by using the meaning of vocabulary items that surrounds it, the way the word is formed and the background knowledge of the subject and the situation. Furthermore, the result of the treatment indicated the action hypothesis was accepted. Contextual guessing meaning improved the reading comprehension of D class first semester students of Polytechnic of Tonggak Equator in academic year 2015-2016.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the discussion on the previous chapter, the conclusion can be drawn as follows: (1) Contextual guessing meaning could develop reading comprehension of D class first semester students of Polytechnic of Tonggak Equator in academic year 2015-2016; (2) Contextual guessing meaning significantly developed the reading comprehension of D class first semester students of Polytechnic of Tonggak Equator in academic year 2015-2016 within two cycles; and (3) The action hypothesis of this research is proved that contextual guessing meaning developed reading comprehension of D class first semester students of Polytechnic of Tonggak Equator in academic year 2015-2016.

Based on the discussion on the previous chapter, the suggestion can be drawn as follows: (1) In order to make the students know and understand the purpose of the learning, the lecturer need to tell the learning objective clearly; and (2) The teacher should give clear explanation about the aspects of scores so that the students understood the aspects of scoring and they can prepare their reading performance well.

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