IMPROVING THE READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS OF PAI STUDENTS THROUGH QUESTION-ANSWER RELATIONSHIP (QAR) STRATEGY

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Abstract:
This paper discusses the use of Question-Answer Relationship to improve the first semester of PAI students of IAIH NW Pancor. This study was conducted to overcome the students' difficulties in reading comprehension and encourage the students to actively participate in the teaching-learning process through Question-Answer Relationship. The study was designed for collaborative classroom action research. The finding of the research that were conducted in two cycles showed that QAR strategy was worthy to improve the students' reading skills and activate the students to participate in the teaching-learning process of reading. The students' average score developed significantly from 59.00 in the pretest to 71.33(equal to 20.89%) in the first cycle. It developed to 74.33 (equal to 25.98%) in the second cycle in the scale of 0 – 100. Moreover, the findings of the study also described that this strategy improved the students' participation. The students' participation was 88.10% (equal to very good) in the first cycle and 88.39% (equal to very good) in the second cycle.

Keywords: *Reading comprehension, Taxonomy of Reading, and QAR strategy*

A. Introduction

The teaching and learning English is expected to enable the students to use English as a means of communication both in written and spoken forms. Accordingly, students should master the four skills of English; reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

In the meantime, for students of universities or colleges, proficiency in English particularly in reading skill is generally assumed to be essential for a successful study due to the reason that most of textbooks for a variety of subjects as well as reading materials available in universities or colleges are mostly written in English language.

The common habits of the lecturers of reading classes in the teaching and learning process are the facts that the lecturers read the texts first once or twice, and then they ask a student to read the text aloud. Then the lecturers tend to explain some clues or difficult words found in the texts and prepare some questions relate to the contents of the texts in order to increase the students' comprehension. The strategy applied in the reading class does not encourage the students to participate actively in the teaching and learning process. As a result, the students usually do not response well to the lecturers' questions since they get difficulties to comprehend the texts and the essences of the questions.

Due to the importance of reading skill and lack of reading comprehension of the students, teachers need to apply some different methods in teaching reading that bring the students to the amazing atmosphere of teaching learning process. Furthermore, Burns *et al.* (1995:6) remind teachers to motivate the students that reading is a means of enjoyment, to fulfill daily task and reading may also become the media to obtain information.

To overcome the problems above, it is important to apply some strategies in the teaching-learning process to help the students comprehend the texts better. The strategy proposed in this article is Question-Answer Relationship (QAR) Strategy. This strategy refers to a series of instructional activities to help students understand different levels of questioning and the relationship between questions and answers.

B. Reading Comprehension
1. The Nature of Reading Comprehension

Reading is one of the language skills that plays an important role in the society. Roe *et al.* (1995:3) state that reading is the reconstruction and interpretation of meaning behinds printed symbols. Reading, as stated by Pang et al. (on line), consists of two related processes: word recognition and comprehension. Word recognition refers to the process of perceiving how written symbols correspond to one's spoken language. Comprehension is the process of making sense of words, sentences and connected text.

On the other hands, Burn *et al.* (1996:5) define reading as a highly complex act that consists of two major components: a process and a product. In this case, reading does not only involve the skills in understanding the written texts but also the relationship between the scripts.

From the definitions above, reading may be described in many ways by different experts yet there are points of general agreement among reading experts. One such point is that comprehension is the purpose of reading. Thus, reading can be concluded as an activity that aims primarily at understanding or constructing meaning from the written texts.

Students will get many benefits by reading written materials due to the importance of reading that has three aspects as follows (Burn *et al.*,1996:6):
  a. Every aspect of live involves reading,
  b. Reading is enjoyment,
  c. Reading means an activity to obtain information.

Realizing the importance of reading ability in the present time, it is a must that students should have avid reading as reading will lead them to get so many kinds of information and knowledge. Somehow, the students should also be motivated to understand that in the process of reading, there is a communication between a writer and reader. In this activity, reading deals with decoding and the comprehension process in which a reader tries to understand what a writer has put

in a text. In the activity, the reader actively has to relate his or her prior knowledge or schemata to comprehend the text better.

2. The Taxonomy of Reading

Interest in formulating taxonomy of educational objectives has been followed by the formulation of taxonomies of comprehension skills (Cahyono, 1992:74). That is why; different experts try to formulate the levels of comprehension in different terms. The taxonomy of comprehension skills can be beneficial for teachers to formulate different questions. Cahyono (1992:74) adds that among the proposed taxonomies, Barrett's (Anderson and Pearson, 1984) is considered the best. The taxonomy divides the questions into three main level of complexity: literal comprehension, inferential comprehension, and evaluational comprehension.

a. Literal Comprehension

The most basic type of comprehension is called literal comprehension or reading on the lines. This kind of comprehension is act of acquiring information that is directly stated in a selection (Burns *et al.*, 1996:255). Meanwhile Roe *et al.* (1995:98) state that literal comprehension is concerned with facts and ideas that are directly stated in the reading content. The literal comprehension is needed by students in comprehending some facts or contents taken literally from the texts. In this case, readers obtain information that is explicitly stated in the texts or reading the lines level. At this level, reading comprehension aims at obtaining objects or information of a text effectively, especially in comprehending the text as stated by the words, sentences, or a paragraph in the texts.

Bloom's Taxonomy of this level is called knowledge. At the knowledge level students recognize the facts and details using the author's own words. On the other hands, QAR strategy also needs this kind of comprehension to answer questions on Right There and Think and Search questions phases. See Table 2.1 Taxonomy of Reading Proposed by Different Experts.

This level of comprehension is usually a prerequisite for higher level comprehension. Furthermore, this level consists of the following written directions, recognizing details, and sequences. Literal comprehension also deals with identification and recall of stated ideas and details. Most of the experts such as Barrett and Stevick agree to use the term 'literal comprehension' to show the basic comprehension.

b. Inferential Comprehension

Inferential (interpretative) reading is reading between the lines or making inferences that requires students to derive ideas that are implied rather than directly stated (Burns *et al.*, 1996:263). Besides, Roe *et al.* (1995:100) mention that interpretative reading is concerned with deeper meanings and readers must relate facts, generalizations, definitions, ideas, cause-effect relationships that are not

directly stated. The readers need to comprehend the texts better in order to be able to reach interpretative reading comprehension.

Furthermore, Bloom calls this level the comprehension level. Meanwhile, QAR strategy at level III or the Author and Me needs this level. This level requires the readers' abilities to relate their schemata and the contents of a text in order to guess the implicit ideas in the text. Roe *et al.,* (1995:75) implies that effective readers are active readers who use a variety of strategies and processes to construct meaning. Thus, good readers, with appropriate strategies of reading, will be able to get the implied ideas by relating their schemata to the texts they are reading. In addition, most experts call this level interpretative or inferential comprehension.

c. Evaluational Comprehension

Third level of comprehension is evaluational comprehension that is proposed by Barrett. This level of comprehension requires the students to compare information and ideas in the text with material presented by the instructor or other authorities, and with the students' own knowledge and experience, in order to form judgments of various kinds (Cahyono, 1992:75). Meanwhile, Bloom identifies the level of analysis in this category.

Evaluational comprehension meets the level of On My Own questions in QAR strategy as this level needs the students' comprehension and prior knowledge to promote new ideas or opinions. So, the students should read beyond the lines to answer the questions of this level.

Meanwhile, another term that is similar to evaluational comprehension is called environmental comprehension that is proposed by Stevick (Fachrurrazy, 2008:55). This level also requires the students to apply interactive model of reading process to cope with this category of comprehension. Meanwhile, Bloom identifies the level of application in this category.

On the other hand, Burn *et al*. propose the third level of comprehension that is called critical reading and creative reading for the fourth (highest) level.

Critical reading is evaluating written material-comparing the ideas discovered in the material with known standards and drawing conclusions about their accuracy, appropriateness, and timeliness (Burns *et al.*, 1996:278). This step is higher than interpretative comprehension due to the level of difficulty. Readers must read a text carefully and critically in order to get some considerations before they make decisions based on the materials they read.

Critical reading refers to synthesis level of Blooms taxonomy. Meanwhile, according to Barrett's taxonomy of reading, this level refers to evaluational comprehension (Fachrurrazy, 2008:55). Thus, the critical reader must be an active reader, questioning, searching for facts, appropriateness, and timeless (Burns *et al.*, 1996:278). Meanwhile, Roe et al. (1995:102) add that critical reading also depends on a person's ability to engage in literal and interpretative reading. It is really important for the reader to comprehend the text implicitly and explicitly before mastering critical reading.

Meanwhile, creative reading requires the readers to read beyond the lines. This level meets evaluation level of Bloom's taxonomy. Evaluation is making judgment about the value of ideas or materials. Furthermore, according to Stevick, this level is called environmental comprehension (Fachrurrazy, 2008:55). That is why, this level requires readers to think as they read and requires them to use their imagination (Burns *et al.*, 1996:293). Creative readers are able to view their experiences in different ways. The readers need to maximize their schemata by combining their prior knowledge with some ideas taken from the text to produce a new concept or idea. This skill deals with predicting outcomes, making visualization, and solving problems.

Among the proposed taxonomies of reading above, this study applies QAR taxonomy based on some reasons: QAR strategy tries to help the readers to identify different levels of questions and how the questions and answers relate to each other. See Table 2.1 to figure out the reading taxonomies and how each QAR level of questions needs different levels of comprehension.

3. Question-Answer Relationship (QAR)

"No comprehension activity has a longer or more pervasive tradition than asking students questions about their reading, whether this occurs before, during, or after reading" (Duke and Pearson in Coe and Glass, 2005)**.** In line with this activity, students are required to comprehend different levels of questions based on the texts they read and they occasionally find difficulties in comprehending them. Often students respond to questions with either a literal answer or by stating that "it" is not in the texts. Consequently, the teacher should facilitate them with an appropriate strategy. The strategy proposed to overcome the problems of students in reading comprehension subject is QAR. It stands for Question-Answer Relationship.

a. The Essence of Question-Answer Relationship (QAR) Strategy

QAR, according to Crawley and Mountain (1995:111), is a strategy for teaching students how to locate and answer comprehension questions. In QAR, students are taught to identify four types of question-answer relationship. Meanwhile, Vacca and Vacca (1996:59) state that "the type of question asked to guide comprehension should be based on the information readers need to answer the question. Therefore, teachers must help students become aware of likely sources of information as they respond to questions".

The Question-Answer Relationship (QAR) strategy helps students understand four different levels of questioning and the relationships between questions and answers. This strategy allows students to understand their thinking processes and develop their metacognitive abilities based on four levels of questions – **Right There, Think and Search, The Author and Me,** and **On My Own** – to indicate how the question is related to the text.

Meanwhile, the following steps are suggested by Vacca and Vacca (1996:60) and Coe and Glass (2005) for teaching reading using QAR strategy:

1). Introduce the **QAR** using a visual aid and a short selection to demonstrate the relationships by pointing two broad categories of information sources: In the Book and In MY Head.

2). Model identifying and answering questions at each level of **QAR** using a visual aid. Explain each type of categories and processes used to answer these questions. In the Book consists of Right There and Think and Search, meanwhile In My Head consists of Author and Me and On My Own. They are as follows:

a). **Right There!** (The answer is found in the text. The words in the questions can usually be found in the same sentence with the answer). It requires students to go back to the passage and find the correct information to answer the questions as the answers are stated on the text. "These are sometimes called literal questions because the correct answer can be found somewhere in the text" (Ladewig, online). Some questions of this level include these words, "According to the passage…", "How many…", "Who is…", "What is …"

b). **Think and Search!** (The answer is in the text, but the words are probably not in the same sentence. Read the text; look for ideas that can be put together and think about what the author is saying). "Think and Search" questions require students to think how ideas or information in the passage relate to each other. Students need to look back at the passage, find the information that the questions refer to, and then think about how the information or ideas fit together (Ladewig, online). So, this level needs literal comprehension but it is higher than Right There. Some questions of "Think and Search" include these words, "The main idea of the passage…","What caused…", "Compare/contrast…".

c). **The *Author* and Me!** (The author provides ideas and makes students think, but connections to students' knowledge are needed to answer the question). "The Author and Me" questions require students to use ideas and information that is not stated directly in the passage to answer the questions. These questions require the students to think about what they have read and formulate their own ideas or opinions. This level needs interpretative (inferential) and critical comprehension or they should apply reading between the lines level. Such questions include in this type are "How can you conclude…?", "The passage suggests…", "How do you know…"?

d). **On My Own!** (Students must apply their own knowledge and what has been learned to answer the question). The students should master creative or evaluational comprehension to answer questions of this level. Thus, they will apply reading beyond the lines level. "On My Own" questions can be answered using students' background knowledge on a topic (Ladewig, online). Such questions of this type are: "In your opinion…", "Based on your experience…", "Have you ever…?"

3). Practice individually or in small groups by dividing into groups of three and have them practice using QAR strategy.

4). Guide students to apply the strategy by deciding the QAR for each question and explain their reasoning.

5). Discuss the strategy and how it helps students to better understand the text.

Figure: 1 gives a better description on the four levels of questions, meanwhile, Figure 2 presents bright examples related to the question stems in each level.
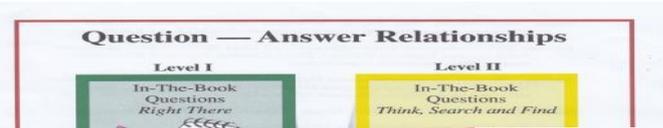
b. The Procedure of QAR Strategy

QAR strategy focuses on helping the students comprehend four different levels of questions and how to dig up the answers of the questions. This strategy is then applied into pre, during, and postreading activities.

The prereading activities cover (1) greeting and checking the students' attendance, (2) asking the students to sit in groups of three, (3) introducing the concept and purposes of QAR strategy (4) providing a short paragraph to determine two broad categories of information sources, (5) Modeling and explaining each type of questions using a visual aid, (6) activating the students' schemata related to the text, and (7) distributing the students' worksheet.

The next step applied is during-reading activities. The activities are as follows: (1) asking the students to read the text silently, (2) asking the students to answer the questions based on each level of information sources (Right There, Think and Search, Author and Me, and On My Own), (3) giving a hand to the students if needed, (4) asking the groups to show the answers, and (5) determining the correct answers with the whole class.
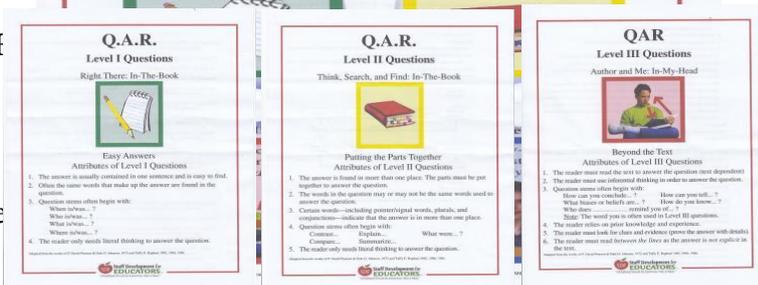
Finally, the post reading activities cover such activities as (1) giving feedback, (2) giving a conclusion of the benefits of QAR strategy and (3) closing the meeting.

Figure 1. Qu...**opted from English Jou**...

Figure 2. F...**n English Journal**

C. Results

The ...with four meetings for cycle ...each cycle was conducted to ...dents. The research findings presented in this s...n conducting English 1 subject of PAI Program using QAR s...ive participation during the class.

1. The Findings of Cycle

Based on the resu...n cycle 1, it was found that the average score of the students' reading comprehension test was 71.33 in the scale varying from 0 to 100. The average score indicated a significant improvement of the students' reading comprehension compared to the mean score of 59.00 on the pretest. It

meant that the average score of the students increased 20.89%. In addition, it was also found that out of 30 students, 17 (56.67%) of them got scores ≥ 70, and 13 (43.33%) of them got scores < 70.

The scores obtained by the students in quiz 1, it was found that the average score of the students' reading comprehension test was 71.3. Even though there was a significance improvement in the mean score and it met the first criterion of success (the students' average score of reading was 70.00), yet it failed to meet the second criterion as only 56.67% of the students got ≥ 70.00 since the second criterion, as decided in Table 2, determined that at least 75.00% of the students got scores ≥ 70.00.

On the other hand, the students' participation had met the third criterion of success as they could get average score of 88.10% (equal to very good and above the minimum score of 75.00%).

All in all, some evidence in the findings of cycle 1 proved that QAR strategy could improve not only the students' average score but also active participation in teaching-learning process. Somehow, the findings also showed that the first and third points had met the criteria of success, but the second one failed to meet the criteria of success (see Table 1). Consequently, the next cycle was still needed to be conducted and some revisions of cycle 1 should also be made to improve the students' reading comprehension skills.

Table 1. The Improvement of the Students' Reading Comprehension Skills in the Implementation of QAR Strategy and the Students' Participation

No.	Criteria of Success	Pretest	Cycle 1	Cycle 2
1.	The students' average score of reading comprehension test is ≥70	59.00	71.33	74.33
2.	75 % of the students gain score ≥ 70	23.33%	56.67%	80.00%
3.	75 % of the numbers of the students are actively involved during the teaching learning process of Reading Comprehension	-	88.10%	88.39%

2. The Findings of Cycle 2

The scores obtained from the quiz proved that there was a small improvement in the students' average score. But it was successful to increase the numbers of the students who got scores ≥ 70. 00. The average score of the students' reading

comprehension test was 74.33 in the scale varying from 0 to 100. The average score indicated a small improvement of the students' reading comprehension compared to the mean score of 71.33 on Quiz 1. It meant that the average score of the students increased 4.21%. In addition, it was also found that out of 30 students, 24 (80.00%) of them got scores $\geq$ 70, and 6 (20.00%) of them got scores < 70.00.

Prior to the analysis of the implementation on teaching-learning activities and students' score taken from Quiz 2, it could be concluded that the implementation of Question – Answer Relationship strategy was successful to improve the students' reading skills and active participation.

The indicators of successful implementation that the researcher had determined in advance stated that (a) the students' average score was 74.33, (b) 80.00% of the students got scores $\geq$ 70. 00., and (c) the students' active participation reached 88.39%. In addition, the indicators were also employed to judge whether the cycle proceeded to the next cycle or needed to be stopped.

Based on the reflection above, it could be generalized that the indicators had met the criteria of success. As a result, the next cycle did not need to be continued and the researcher stopped the research, drew a conclusion, and reported the research.

D. Conclusions

Based on the findings and discussions of the research, it can be concluded that the implementation of QAR strategy in reading comprehension was effective to solve the problems of the students in reading comprehension. The research was conducted in terms of two main aspects: finding out the effective strategy to improve the students' reading skills and improving the students' reading comprehension skills.

The first aspect relates to finding the effective strategy to improve the students' reading comprehension skills at PAI Department of IAI Hamzanwadi NW Pancor. The second one, the Question-Answer Relationship strategy that consists of four levels of questions namely Right There, Think and Search, Author and Me, and On My Own had effectively helped the students comprehend the texts they read and had effectively improved the students' reading comprehension skills.

The implementation of the QAR strategy consists of the following steps: (1) dividing the class in groups of three (the class works in cooperative learning to help each other), (2) introducing the concept of QAR strategy using a short paragraph to determine two broad categories of information (In the Text and In My Head), (3) modeling and explaining each type of questions using a visual aid, (4) activating the students' schemata related to the text (using pictures and some questions), (5) asking the students to read the text silently, (6) asking each group to answer the questions based on the levels of questions (Right There, Think and Search, Author and Me, and On My Own), (7) asking the groups to show the answers, (8) determining the correct answers with the whole class, (9) Giving feedback (the teacher should pay attention not only on the correct answers and levels of questions but also the students mistakes on grammar, pronunciation, and diction), (10) giving conclusion of the benefits of QAR strategy (discussing the QAR technique and how it helps the students to better

understand the text), and (11) implementing a test to have the students practice using QAR individually and independently.

Based on the results of the data analysis, it was shown that QAR strategy was successful to improve the reading comprehension skills of the students of PAI Department of IAI Hamzanwadi NW Pancor. The implementation of the strategy helped the students to identify different levels of questions and relationship between questions and answers. In addition, the implementation of QAR strategy in reading comprehension was beneficial to improve the students' reading skills. The improvement was proven by the increase on the scores that the students could obtain. First, relating to the students' scores in the preliminary study, the average score of the students was 59.00. In the first cycle the students' average sore developed to 71.33 (equal to 20.89%). It developed to 74.33 (equal to 25.98%) in the second cycle or at the end of the research.

Meanwhile, related to the students scores, in the preliminary study, only 7 (23.33%) of the students who got scores $\geq$ 70 which was the minimum standard criterion of the research. In the first cycle, there were 17 (56.67%) out of 30 students who got scores $\geq$ 70. Furthermore, in the second cycle, there were 24 (80.00%) of the students who got scores $\geq$ 70 which was the minimum standard criterion of the research.

Finally, the implementation of QAR strategy also revealed that this strategy was also effective to encourage the students to actively participate in the teaching-learning process of reading comprehension class at this institution. Most of the students (88.10% in the first cycle and 88.39 % in the second cycle) took a part in the teaching-learning process actively.

All in all, the strategy was efficient to improve both the students' reading comprehension skills and active participation in the teaching-learning process of reading. The specific strengths of QAR strategy were helping the students to identify different levels of questions and the relationship between questions and answers that made the students able to determine the sources of information to answer the questions and activating the students to participate in the teaching-learning process of reading.

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