

# Utilizing Reciprocal Strategies to Improve Non-English Majored Students' Reading Comprehension

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## ABSTRACT

The research aims to make an overview introduction of reciprocal teaching and examine the effects of this teaching technique on improving non-English majored students' reading comprehension at UNETI. The research employed a quasi-experimental design with mixed methodology approach. SPSS 22 statistic technique of independent t-test and paired sample t-test was applied to process and analyze the quantitative data. The significance value was measured at 0,365 which is higher than the level of significance (0,05). This proved that there was a significant effect of using RT strategy on students' reading comprehension. Besides, qualitative methodology was applied in order for the researchers to get deeper understanding on participants' performance and attitudes towards reciprocal teaching in reading class. With data collection tools as journals and focus group interview, textual data was gathered, analyzed and crosschecked to evaluate the validity and reliability of the research. The findings demonstrated that participants are impacted positively with reciprocal teaching instruction. In the light of the present study, the students reported that they found the reading lessons more interesting and exciting. Besides, the students were motivated to interact in class to discuss the target passage. Hence, they felt more confident and responsible for their own study.

**KEYWORDS:** Reciprocal teaching, reading comprehension, reading strategies

## INTRODUCTION

Reading is regarded as a complicated process in which readers must decode text and make interpretations to get understanding. In order to do that, readers need to not only comprehend but also crosscheck their background knowledge with a variety of textual and situational clues. Specifically, it is necessary for readers to boost, monitor and sustain understanding with a range of process to construct the meaning. As an English language teacher at UNETI, the researchers have experienced the phenomenon that the students get troubles in getting the main ideas and maintaining inferences from their reading despite their ability to situate responses for some actual questions. The higher level the forms and comprehension passages are, the more acute their reading problem is getting. Consequently, they may become more frustrated whenever dealing with their reading. Obviously, it is essential for the teachers to supply learners with useful and effective techniques or strategies so as to clarify problematic texts and ideas they come across in the reading process. They need to be modeled and instructed directly to answer and ask comprehension questions. Also, they are in need of grasping the general ideas of the target passage. Due to that fact, the students' English reading scores at our university have been quite low for many years and teaching reading skill seems a challenging task for the lecturers at UNETI.

The concern of how to improve my teaching of reading skill has always been on our mind and motivated us to do a research on employing the technique called reciprocal

teaching (RT) to enhance my students' reading comprehension at UNETI.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### What is reading?

Choo et al. (2011) define reading as a procedure of transmitting, getting and interpreting data encoded in language form through the medium of print. The procedure involves either bottom-up and top-down processes. The first stage occurs when linguistic input from the passage is mapped against the readers' previous knowledge, meanwhile the later one takes place when prior knowledge is used to predict about the information they will find in the text. In short, reading is an interactive process in which readers interact with textual forms to derive the meaning from it, relying on various reading models. Hence, studying on these models will help understand how readers work out the meaning from a text.

### Models of reading process

#### The bottom-up model

It is said that in this model, all of the words are read in a phrase or a sentence before readers can understand (Palincsar and Brown, 1984). In particular, the bottom-up reading process starts with decoding the tiniest linguistic units, then construct ultimately meaning from the smallest to the largest ones. While doing this, the readers apply their background knowledge to the information found in the text. This is also called data-driven and text-based reading.

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### The top-down model

On the contrary to the first model, this process allows readers to concentrate on predicting the next group of words without a force of reading every word of a text. In other words, readers highlight linguistic guesswork rather than graphic textual information (Spörer et al., 2009).

### The interactive model

According to Spörer et al. (2009), this model is built on the interaction of the bottom-up and top-down models, which means that when reading word by word, readers who cannot comprehend the text are able to use their prior knowledge to assist unknown vocabulary. This process allows them to use textual clues and guess wildly at the meaning. However, they must be aware of the risk of weaknesses in word recognition and lack of effective bottom-up processing.

The RT approach is a type of reading instruction that is based on the interactive model, including four principle strategies. Hence, the aspects of language learning strategies and reading strategies will be discussed.

### Cognitive and metacognitive strategies and reading comprehension

Cognitive and metacognitive strategies are useful for readers while they construct to build their understanding of a text. Cognitive strategies cover different methods such as summarizing and deductive reasoning, predicting, organizing, taking notes, using prior knowledge and guessing the meaning from the context. Metacognitive strategies permit readers to know when and how to use these strategies and adapt them to suit their reading purposes. Planning, evaluating and regulating are included in metacognitive strategies. Palincsar and Brown (1984) indicate that the RT approach is one of the reading instruction methods which cover both cognitive and metacognitive strategies and enable them to improve their reading comprehension and thus become independent readers.

### Reciprocal teaching

#### What is reciprocal teaching?

According to Palincsar and Brown (1984), RT is a scaffolded discussion method that is based on reading comprehension strategies, scaffolding and modeling, and social interaction. This instruction allows a teacher to model and give the student enough practice on those four main strategies to construct the meaning of a text in a social setting. The students monitor their own thinking through the reading process to develop reading comprehension and promote themselves to be better in reading and achieve the most crucial goal of RT, becoming independent readers.

### Reciprocal teaching and reading comprehension

The process of reading comprehension is covered with four principles of predicting, questioning, clarifying and summarizing. And the level of reading successfully is measured on four criteria

- How successfully readers utilize these strategies;
- Readers implement those strategies to monitor and foster comprehension;
- Each strategy is employed when readers face a problem in the reading process;
- These strategies are regarded as metacognitive strategies.

### Features of reciprocal teaching

#### Scaffolding and explicit instruction

Scaffolding through explicit instruction is provided in RT, in which the framework and explanation of the four main schemes, guided practice, independent practice and the utilization of the strategies are involved by the learners. Palincsar and Brown (1984) claim that it is easy to memorize strategies but it is difficult to transfer or apply independent strategic thinking. The students need their teacher's explicit instruction with restrictive tasks to be motivated, indicated the significant features and provided solutions to problematic issues

### The four main strategies of reciprocal teaching

#### A. Predicting

This is the stage which readers use their background knowledge and personal experience to comprehend the target texts (Yang, 2010). To achieve this, readers need to illustrate clues to help predict the main content of the text. Prediction is vital strategy that helps students to set a goal before reading

#### B. Clarifying

Readers clarify whenever they face comprehension confusion and make effort to restore meaning. This process enables students to recognize and query any strange, unnecessary or ambiguous information in the text. The querying, discussing and reflecting that occur both during and after reading is an opportunity for clarifying.

#### C. Questioning

Questions are made to ask about the general content or essential gist information, serving the aim of testing whether readers understand the text and identify important clues. Moreover, readers are encouraged to produce questions related to the content of the passage, which has positive influence on the development of their reading comprehension. Some useful questions are "Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?"

#### D. Summarizing

Summarizing means the duty of identifying the main idea of the text, then predicting what might happen in further reading to check the accuracy of their prediction

#### E. Social interaction

It is very vital since group work provides opportunities for the students to improve their cognitive, metacognitive and affective strategies. Social interaction enhances the students' capacity to address comprehending challenges, promote their higher metacognition and raise their motivation and self-esteem.

### Previous studies related to reciprocal teaching

An experimental research carried out by Spörer et al. (2009) aimed to explore the impacts of reading strategies and RT on 210 elementary-school students' reading comprehension. Quantitative methodology was employed with the tools of post- and follow-up test. The results revealed that the intervention students attained higher scores on an experimenter-developed task of reading comprehension and strategy use than the control participants. In addition, students who practiced RT exceeded students in instructor-guided and customized instruction groups on a standardized reading comprehension test.

RT, also called face-to-face instruction was investigated in Yang (2010) with the population of 129 under-prepared college students. The study with RT was implemented online

with the purpose of recording students' reading processes and enhancing their comprehension. During the online class, students were boosted to utilize multiple strategies of predicting, clarifying, questioning and summarizing under the form of dialogue box, chat room, discussion forum and annotation tool in the system. Participants' reading progress in the remedial instruction integrating the RT system was identified by the pre- and post-tests. The results reported that teachers could benefit from promoting students to get engaged with others so as to clarify and discuss comprehension questions and incessantly supervise and determine their own reading.

Choo et al. (2011) conducted a study with mixed methodology to investigate the implementation of RT strategies in reading class in accordance with encourage teacher reflection on their practices on a group of sixth-grade student from an urban school. The data analysis showed a significant effect on the participants' reading comprehension. Besides, reciprocal program enabled the students' self-regulatory and monitoring skills; thus, produced an autonomous reader. From the positive findings, the author implied that the study would be worthwhile to expand onto different levels of schooling, across rural and urban areas.

Pham Le Hoa (2016) studied on 20 first-year students of Hanoi Architectural University in a five-week intervention to prove that RT bring much benefit to small group. Students were instructed with modelling strategies and participated in class discussion. The research proved that the students were motivated while their reading lesson is in progress.

Collaborative learning is a quite popular term in teaching and learning English as a second language. However, the specific teaching method of utilizing RT has not been studied on much. Based on its benefits discussed above, the researcher decided to conduct an action research so as to discover its influences on UNETI students.

### To what extent does reciprocal teaching help to improve the reading skills of students at UNETI?

The table 1 below indicated the summary of V-step reading pre-test and post-test scores for the experimental group

**Table 1 - Paired sample t-test experimental pre-test and post-test**

	Paired differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence interval of the difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pre-test	-20,876	7,596	1,544	-23,305	-16,315	-12,508	23	.000
Post-test								

The calculation pointed out that the t score was 12,508; the mean was 20,876 and the deviation was accounted for 7,596. Therefore, the result of t-test indicated that there is a significant change between students' scores before and after the treatment with RT. Compared with the qualitative from journals and interview, it is likely that students are put positive effects on their reading comprehension.

The results from the study pointed out that RT-based lessons helped the participants promote their reading competency such as asking and answering questions, clarifying and solving problems, getting summary and giving prediction. It is incontrovertible that from the beginning of the course, students followed the new instructional teaching techniques with reciprocal strategies. With the awareness of the steps in reading lesson, almost students needed far less input from the teacher who only took the position of facilitator in the classroom, the center was shifted to students' role in group and class discussion. It should be detected that students interacted responsibly in reading class, instead of doing the tasks individually before. The majority of students claimed in their journals that with the help of RT strategies, the reading tasks became easier for them, they knew how to apply the strategies in their reading process and appeared to enjoy doing it.

- The strategies support my reading the most, I can ask questions and solve my reading problems by discussing with my group mates.
- I found reading about different subjects easier with strategies.
- It is easier and faster for me to identify the main ideas or important concepts in a text now

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Research design

This study which was employed quasi-experimental design aims to study on the causes and effects of RT on the students' reading comprehension. Besides, the research also examines students' attitudes towards RT in reading classes.

### Research questions

Two research questions were employed to discover how RT strategies was utilized for students at UNETI

1. To what extent does reciprocal teaching help to improve the reading skills of students at UNETI?
2. How are the students' attitude influenced by reciprocal teaching in their reading classes?

### Participants

46 students who were chosen randomly from the class list are from Faculty of Accounting participated in this study. They are non-English majored and are considered to be at pre-intermediate level of English proficiency. They were divided into two groups: 23 for control group and the other 23 for experimental group. The control group was taught with traditional teaching method, whereas the experimental one were utilized with RT strategies

### Methodology and data collection instruments

We employed testing for both groups, meanwhile applied the instruments of journals and focus group interviews for experimental group. The tests were adapted from V-step reading test. The data collected aims to discover the students' performance with RT in classes as well as their perceptions labelled with their feedback and emotion towards the new teaching techniques.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The project performed a triangulation of the data obtained and analyzed from descriptive statistics from tests, analytical journals in accordance with focus group interviews.



- I am used to predicting the next part of the reading, I found it similar to what I had known
- I have read much faster.

The statistics analyzed from the independent sample t-test also proved the hypothesis of the effective impacts of RT. Table 2 below showed the calculation of independent sample t-test which described the score of posttest in experimental and control class.

**Table 2 - Independent sample t-test posttest in experimental and control class**

	Levene's test for equality of variances		T-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence interval of the difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	,860	,365	2,927	46	,006	13,192	4,534	4,062	22,323
Equal variances not assumed			2,927	38,645	,006	13,192	4,534	4,035	22,343

The data revealed the mean difference was 13,192 and the significance value was  $0,365 > 0,05$ . The calculation displayed that the t-score was 2,927. Concerning to the finding, a significant difference was discovered in mean of post-test values between the experimental and control group.

Crosschecked with the qualitative data, a comparison was made with other related studies. The findings suggested the similar results in a study conducted by Yang (2010) that RT strategies helped enhance students' reading proficiency. In addition, Spörer et al. (2009) also concluded that RT-based lessons effected positively on students' ability of analysing and solving problems in reading lessons. However, a closer look at the data indicated that while applying RT strategies, students got some problems.

Due to the lack of language knowledge, almost students found it difficult in clarifying. Even when students spent time rereading the text, they were not able to understand the meaning. As a consequence, they had to ask their group mates. Students were at different level of English, which turned out to have a mixed effect for students' attempts to better understand what they read. It meant that in the process of clarifying questions, students had to cooperate to solve the problems. This also supports the findings in Spörer et al. (2009) that the function of clarifying step appeared to be very useful to the RT discussion, especially in the social reading texts which are reckoned to expand knowledge with a great amount of information that many students have not possessed. In the questioning stage, the effectiveness of RT strategies could be seen clearly when students determined to make questions with "Who? What? Where? Why? How?". Apparently, they were promoted to focus on the main idea of the text they had read. The process of making questions and giving answers encouraged students to shorten time in order to reach the summary of the reading. In terms of questioning strategy, Spörer et al. (2009) also concluded that students discussed, sometimes even argued about the ideas of the passage, which put positive effects on their process of critical thinking.

#### **How are the students' attitude influenced by reciprocal teaching in their reading classes?**

The results of the study showed that almost students show positive attitude and behavior towards the use of RT strategies in reading lessons. Like what was investigated in Choo et al. (2011), most students claimed that collaborative work helped them to not only clarify their comprehension but receive feedback from their group mates immediately as

well. This benefit could absolutely not be gained while students read individually. Working in groups is such an efficient way in encouraging students during the

process of predicting, questioning and even summarizing. Listening and representing the ideas promoted students to review the information and then understand better on the target passage.

With the help of RT in reading class, students became more self-regulated and motivated in their process of reading. Students were the center in class, not the teacher. Taking the main role in class created for students' opportunity to practice and improve their reading comprehension. That working with friends created a friendly and comfortable atmosphere for students. They felt not under any pressure of the reading activity and then they could express their opinions and ideas comfortably. This finding was in the line with Pham Le Hoa (2016) that students were more active to participate in class activities. They found working in group enjoyable and interesting.

However, there are still some limitations during the process of conducting this innovation. First, students were reported to be so noisy when discussing. This situation might disturb other groups' concentration or other classes. Hence, how to manage the whole class with five group discussion at the same time is such a hard duty. Secondly, due to students' different background knowledge and English level, some students were complained to be passive during the process of learning. They even were not confident enough to give their answers. Some students did not hesitate to represent in front of class. This is a problem needed considering in future studies.

#### **CONCLUSION & IMPLICATIONS**

This study is considered the innovative project of utilizing RT strategies for students' English reading comprehension at UNETI. The results and findings showed that students found English reading classes more interesting and easier to achieve with the help of RT strategies. Moreover, they reported to be motivated and behave in a comfortable manner during the process of reading. Students became more responsible for their reading comprehension and more enthusiastic in taking part in reading activities. RT strategies were useful for students to comprehend the reading passage and shared their opinions confidently. It seemed that students got acquainted to reading strategies of predicting, clarifying, questioning and summarizing. They commented that they did not find reading comprehension difficult as

they had thought before. Another positive result showed that owing to RT strategies, students got involved in the reading process interactively. They exchanged information with not only their close friends but also any other ones in class.

It cannot be denied that the researchers gain a lot of benefits when conducting this innovation. First, in the position of a teacher, the researchers got experience of carrying out an action research. The researchers had to deal with real problems happening in class like managing the classroom or handling misbehavior students. The practical situations helped to develop teaching skill. Second, being a researcher, the researchers had chances to extend my knowledge with a new effective instructional teaching method with RT strategies. Furthermore, equipping with those literature is so important that it helped the authors to be able to explain and model it to the learners. Although there are still some limitations, this project is believed as an informative resource for practitioners who are keen on RT strategies to motivate students in their reading comprehension.

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