

# THE USE OF SNOWBALLING STRATEGY IN TEACHING READING LITERARY TEXTS (SHORT STORIES)

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## ABSTRACT

Reading texts for literary experience is different from reading them for information. Actually, there are two general stances (efferent and aesthetic stances) readers may choose when constructing meaning and responding to literature. In the efferent stance the reader's purpose is primarily to gain information and analyze the author technique. The emphasis is on recalling, paraphrasing, and analyzing details. In the aesthetic stance the reader's purpose is primarily to "live through" the experience presented in the text and to associate the text with personal experience and feelings. The emphasis is on personally connecting with the text as one reads, developing deeper insights into the human experience and responding thoughtfully to the ideas and insights presented. Thus, it is necessary to apply a strategy in teaching reading literary texts. One of useful strategies for comprehending and discussing literary selections is a *snowballing strategy*. To apply the strategy in teaching reading literary texts, action research is used as a research methodology. This research is carried out in one of the 4<sup>th</sup> semester classes, literature study program, Semarang State University.

**Key words:** snowballing strategy, literary texts

## INTRODUCTION

Reading English literary text for Indonesian students is not an easy task. The students have to read English literary text as a foreign language text and understand different cultural background that is taken by the author of literary text. Based on the recent research results, there are ten principles in teaching reading; requiring purposeful and explicit teaching, classroom interaction that support the understanding of specific texts, starting before learners read conventionally, teaching learners the skills and strategies used by expert readers, requiring careful analysis of text to

determine its appropriateness for particular students and strategies, building on and resulting in knowledge, vocabulary, and advanced language development, pervading all genres, actively engaging learners in text and motivating them to use strategies and skills, requiring assessment that inform instruction and monitor learner progress, requiring continuous instructor learning about the processes and techniques in previous nine principles. Reading is a transaction between the text and the reader. As students read, they search for and construct meaning based on what they bring to the text and what the text brings to them.

Besides, literary texts typically involve the use of language and the imagination to represent, recreate, and explore human experiences. Literary texts celebrate the richness and power language; stimulate the imagination and esthetic awareness and shape thought and understanding.

According to Shulman (2000) in *Journey through American Literature*,

Reading literature is a joyful and enriching experience, full of excitement and pleasure. For most readers, literature offers a chance to enter a new world- a world of elegant or unusual language, beautiful imagery, and meaningful thought. Reading literature is different from reading other forms of writing such as articles in journals or newspapers. First of all, it involves reading for pure pleasure as well as reading for knowledge. Second, works of literature are open to interpretation; there is more than one way to understand a poem, essay, or short story. Finally, reading literature demands a special sensitivity to language since it is the beauty of an author's language that gives his or her emotional force and lasting meaning.

In teaching reading literary texts, the teacher should convince the students with some strategies in reading literary texts. Strategic readers understand that different texts require different approaches and strategies. Students need to develop effective strategies in order to read different texts in both the aesthetic and efferent stances. There some strategies that can be used in reading and comprehending literary texts. One of

strategies that can sufficiently be used is a *snowballing*. Rationale *snowballing* is a way of collecting information from a brainstorm, thought, experiment or round, ensuring full participation and more student discussion. It can be used in many situations including the presentation of new ideas, checking current understanding and the teaching of learning and thinking skills. Hattie *et al.* (1996) which suggest that the most effective teaching methods are those which set challenging goals and provide students with feedback relating to their progress towards those goals.

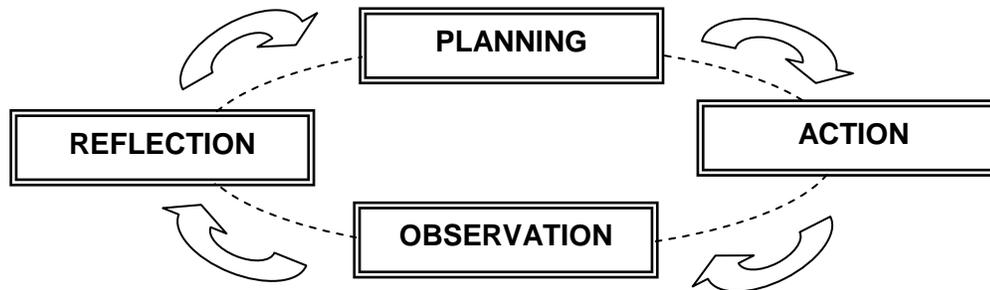
This study was intended to describe the use of *snowballing* strategy in teaching reading literary texts. The strategy is carried out in one of Prose classes of the 4<sup>th</sup> semester of the English Department of UNNES.

## **METHODS**

To know the use of *snowballing* strategy in teaching reading literary texts in the English language arts classroom could be tried out with action research. It is a method that formalizes reflection by engaging the practitioners in a critical and reflective attitude (Nunan, 1990). This methodology refers to classroom investigation initiated by researchers, perhaps teachers, who look critically at their own practice with the purpose of understanding and improving their teaching, and the quality of education. According to Arikunto (2000), the cycle of Action research includes the following

stages: *initial reflection to identify an issue or problem, planning an action (to solve the problem), implementation of the*

*actions, observation of the action, and reflection on the observation.* The cycle is shown below.



**Figure 1. Cycles of Action Research by Arikunto**

To observe the project work, I designed rating scale. A rating scale is a device that can be used by an observer to summarize judgment of the activity or behavior that has been observed. In this project, I developed a special rating scale by adapting from the different sources and adjusting them with the implementation of *snowball strategy* in reading literary text.

Because self-observation is limited, I also wanted to include perception from a colleague and from the students. Therefore, I asked another lecturer to complete two checklists as she was observing a lesson. One list was to record the frequency of certain behaviors by students; the other was to record characteristics of my behavior. Given that the presence of an observer might alter my students' behaviors, I also planned to employ a group interview to find out my students' feeling and opinions about their project work and our respective roles in the project. Besides, I recorded my students'

achievement that is obtained based on the students' answer toward questions for comprehension in each cycles.

#### **Initial Reflection: A Problem and a Possible Solution**

Action research is the name given to an increasingly popular movement in educational research. It encourages a teacher to be reflective of his own practice in order to enhance the quality of educational for himself or his pupils (Niff, 1988). When I reflected on my actions in prose classroom, I responded to a problem in one of my prose classes. The problem that I faced is related to strategy in teaching reading literary text. Previous strategy that was carried out in the prose class looked monotonous and ineffective. To solve the problem, I tried to find out about some strategies to teach reading literary text. One of strategies that could be applied is *snowballing* strategy. In the project, one of my goals was to increase

my own awareness of the way I teach as well as how my students learn with applying *snowballing* strategy in reading literary text. I applied the strategy in one of three prose classes that was taken randomly. A description of what occurred during the project follows.

## **Action**

### ***Classroom Planning***

Students need to develop thoughtful interpretations of what they read. They need to approach the task as active makers of meaning. I as the lecturer could encourage students to become active participants in the classroom community by tailoring their instructional strategies and methods to needs of their classes and individuals in those classes. Providing the necessary direction, support, and guidance for students before, during, and after reading helps them become strategic readers of literature. Instructional activities such as the following might be considered: (1) Help students prepare to read; (2) Help students employ effective reading strategies during reading; (3) Help students understand and respond after reading.

### ***Carrying out the Project***

In pre-reading, I helped students to active what they knew about a topic and anticipate what they would read or hear. A pre-reading activity with the focus on arousing interest in a text and getting students started reading will be different

from one with the focus on establishing a common understanding about the main idea or technique employed in a text. I needed to consider how to initiate the reading of any text.

During the pre-reading phase, I assistance the students to activate what they already knew regarding the ideas they are about to encounter. I had to do more than inform students of the topic of the literary selection. For example, in a selection dealing with the theme of “failure”, I and students brainstorm the images associated with the word “failure”. Then, I tried to build the students’ background knowledge by using the picture and map. For example, in a selection dealing with the setting of “Ohio (America)”, I showed to the students the map of America, exactly Ohio. I also encouraged the students to use predictions to set a purpose for reading. For example, titles help a reader predict what a particular work is about. Based on the title of the short story, the students jot down a brief prediction of what they think the selection will be about.

Before the students read a selection, I provide them with literary forms, techniques, and vocabulary in short mini-lessons. These mini-lessons should provide knowledge to help students experience, think about, and respond to what they are reading. They should not become disconnected terminology or treatises on literature. Prose fiction is

literature about imagined people, places, and events.

The purpose of prose fiction is to stimulate the readers' imagination and communicate the author's perception or view of the world. Short stories, legends, myths, and novels are usually made up of the same basic elements—events (plot), people (characters), places (setting), point of view, conflict, theme, and sometimes symbol. When reading stories, students must note whether the person telling the story is a character within the story or someone watching the action from the outside. As the story unfolds, they must note the central conflict or focus and decide why the characters behave as they do. Finally they must decide how they feel about the story's events, their reactions to the main characters, and the comments or questions about life that the story conveys.

When reading any particular text, I engaged students in the reading task and model appropriate strategies. These include:

- connecting (making connections with people, places, situations, and ideas they know)
- finding meaning (determining what the author is saying about people, places, situations, and ideas)
- questioning (paying attention to those words, ideas, and actions that are unclear, keeping in mind that they may become clear later)

- making and confirming predictions (trying to figure out what will happen and verifying it in the text)
- making inferences (determining the author's intent by reading between the lines and inferring what the author does not actually say)
- reflecting and evaluating (responding to what they have read and passing judgement).

During reading, I used the following activities to model and develop the strategies needed for effective reading: Encouraging the students to become involved with the text and Guided Reading Procedure.

After a purpose for reading has been set, students read as assigned selection to remember as much as possible. Next, they brainstorm everything they can remember, individually or with a partner. They check the text for additional information and correct any inaccuracies. Finally, they organize their recollections into an outline or semantic map.

After reading, I asked the students to respond in ways that bridge reader and text. Giving the students opportunities to respond to the text is an important way to encourage them to clarify and extend their thinking about what they read. Generally, after students have read a selection, it is important to: (1) Prompt an initial response; (2) Help students develop and extend their initial understanding and interpretations; (3) Ask students to make

connections to the broader issues and world around them; (4) Ask students to extend their understanding and appreciating of the writer's craft.

In responding the text, I applied *snowballing* strategy. *Snowballing* is a cooperative learning method which enables this to happen. Students are given appropriate resources or stimulus and relevant questions which they are seeking to answer. The steps of *snowballing* strategies are described following.

Stage 1: At first they worked on their own, made three questions based on the reading selection.

Stage 2: Next they work in pairs, sharing their answers. They discussed and agreed a common answer (which may be different from or based on the answers they have already). Then, the both students got together to make two questions.

Stage 3: Students then joined with another pair to form groups of four, for the same purpose, again agreeing on a common answer which was likely to include points from both of the previous 'best' answers. And so on if appropriate.

Each group made one question and asked the question to another group. If each group had one question, they discussed it with the member of the group. They provided 'best answer' with a semantic map.

In a group of four, I asked each member to have a role in their group. To

assist students, the roles are assigned to define student responsibilities, and to help students focus their reading and prepare for their discussions. A group of four included the following: a *collector*, a *facilitator*, a *scanner*, and a *presenter*.

After each group presented the 'best answer', I and the class analyzed and concluded the element of the reading selection. We tried to find the moral value that was found in it. Moreover, I and the students got together to make 'the complete semantic map' of the reading selection.

To know the students' comprehension toward the literary text, I gave them some comprehension questions. They answered them in the sheets individually. Furthermore, the answering sheets were collected to calculate the right answer of the student. These activities were applied in two meetings. Each meeting was regarded as one cycle. In the project, applying *snowballing* strategy was conducted in three cycles.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Observation: Analysis of Ratings**

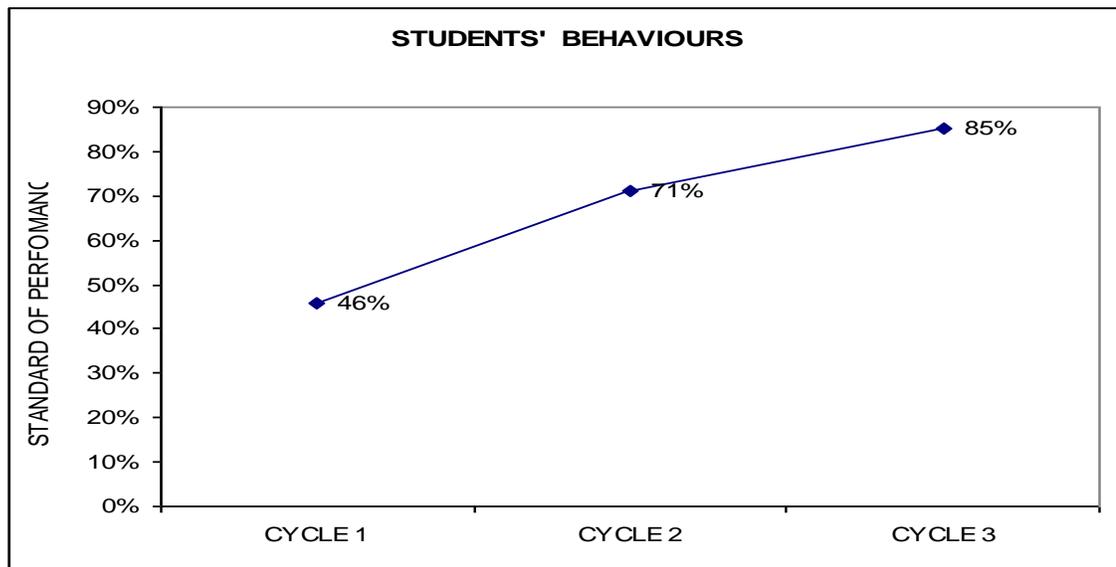
The aim of applying the student and teacher rating scales during observation was to collect data on what went in the class-room. The focus of the observations was on behavior: my students' behavior in pre-reading, during reading, and after reading by using *snowballing* strategy including evidence of independence and cooperation, and my behavior, specially

the role I played in classroom by applying *snowballing* strategy in pre-reading, during reading, and after reading.

To fulfill the need for a neutral observer, I asked a colleague to observe my interactions with the students in applying *snowballing* strategy in teaching reading literary text. After explaining what I

was trying to accomplish, I discussed with her how applying *snowballing* strategy that I and students had done in the project. Besides, I discussed with her how our collaboration would be structured and how she would use the rating scale during her observation.

### Students' Behaviour



Graphic 1

The improvement of my students' behavior in implementation of *snowballing* strategy in each cycles based on rating scale is shown in graphic 1. The first cycle shows 46 %. It means satisfactory. It showed the students were still confused about the action of *Snowballing* strategy in reading literary text. Some students remained silent and did not take part a lot in their group. Most students were still passive in responding my questions.

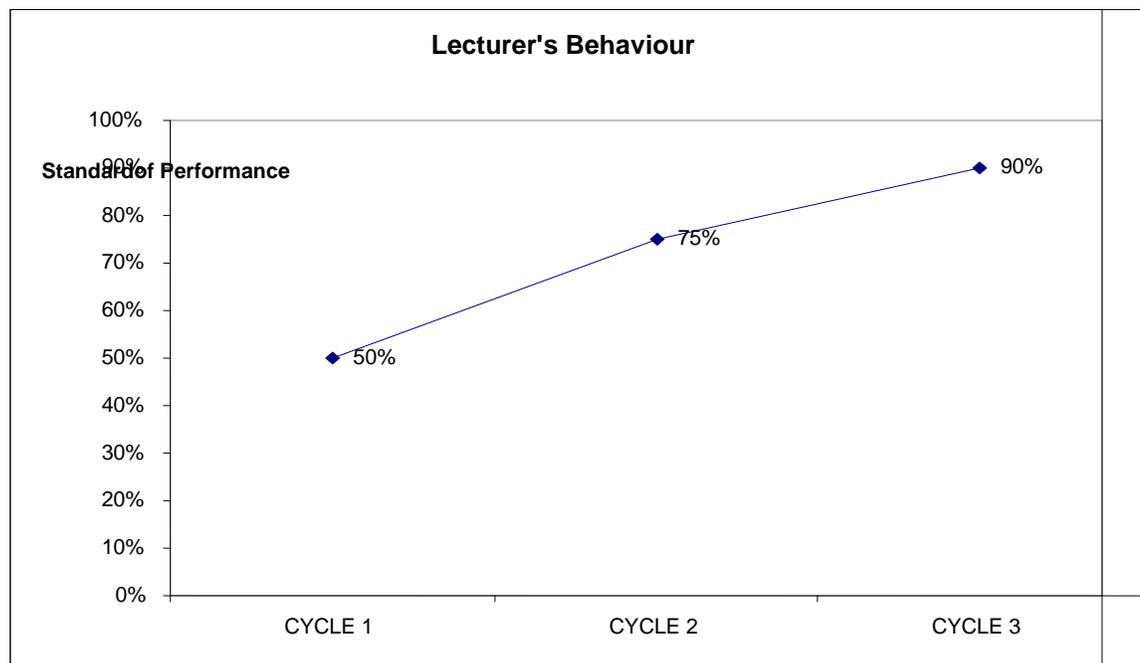
However, most of them enjoyed working in a group.

The graphic 1 shows that my students' behavior became progressive in following cycles. Result of the second cycle is 71 %. The students' behavior indicated that they could carry out the strategy in reading literary text. However, few of students were still confused about the action. They asked his/her partner about the strategy. And, a few students did not involve in discussion.

Based on graphic 1, result of the third cycle shown 85 %. It indicated that the students' behavior had carried out the strategy well. Most students had responded with my question about the elements of the selected reading. Most of them worked cooperatively and could managed dividing the work in the group

effectively. However, few of them were still passive in their group; I tried to encourage them and asked if they have some difficulties about material or strategy. Generally, the students seemed to enjoy working in their group. They could give good response about the literary text.

### Lecturer's Behaviour



Graphic 2

Graphic 2 shows the improvement the lecturer's behavior based on lecturer's ratings. According to my colleague, in the first cycle, I was still doubt in implementation of *snowballing* strategy. Result of first cycle shows 50 %. In the first cycle, I wasted the time too much in pre-reading. I was still hard to arrange the time

allotment and the steps of the strategy. Besides, I explained the strategy to my students unclearly. She suggested me to write the strategy in whiteboard or showed it in OHP. She also suggested me to arrange again the time allotment.

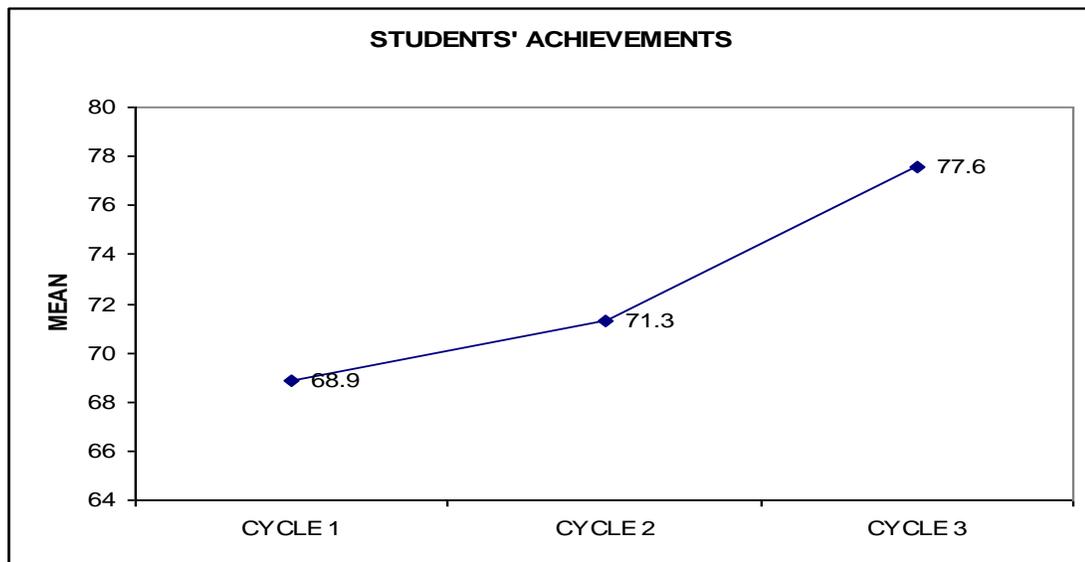
In the second cycle, the graphic 2 shows 75 %. I as a lecturer had improved

the implementation the strategy in the project than previous. I had modeled the strategies that effective readers use as they read. I had guided the reading process with questions and activities that help my students build their own understanding of what they are reading. However, I encourage less the students to participate working in their group.

In the third cycle, I had prepared the strategy well. Result of the cycle shows 90% I prepared the sheets that I had

designed in order to the students would be easy in applying the strategy. I had made time allotment that I had discussed with my colleague. Before making group, I had got the roles of member group discussion. So, the project could be done well. Even though, it was found some weakness of the project, it could be solved. To solve the problem, I discussed with my colleague about my and my students' behaviors in each cycles. It was reflections from the actions that were done the project.

**Analysis of students' achievements**



**Graphic 3**

The students' achievements were important to know their comprehension about the selected reading. The questions for comprehension were always given in each cycle. Graphic 3 describes the average of students' achievement from first

cycle to third cycle. It shows the improvement in each cycle; the first cycle is 68.9, the second cycles is 71.3, and the third cycle is 77.6. It indicated that the students were easier to understand the text by using the strata.

### **Analysis of the group interview**

I used interview sheets to know the students feelings about the implementation the strategy. I asked them to do not write their names in the sheet in order to them didn't feel guilty. Result of the interview sheets shown most of them were pleased to do it. They said that the strategy made them to be easier to understand the selected reading. They learned something new by using *snowballing* strategy.

### **CONCLUSION**

This case study prompted me to adopt reflective strategies and attitude toward my own beliefs about teaching and my behavior in the classroom. I learned that if we explore what occurs in our classroom, if we reflect critically on the theories and beliefs that underlie our practice, then fundamental changes in classroom practices can be accomplished. Without reflection, our teaching will be only be guided by impulse, routine, or intuition.

The project gets a lot of people talking to one another, while retaining much of the value of small group. It also contributes a festive quality to the class. People mill about excitedly and greet each other warmly as they meet in new configuration. On the other hand, snowballing can sometimes have a frenetic, disjointed feel.

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