



## THE USE OF STUDENT TEAM – ACHIEVEMENT DIVISION (STAD) TO IMPROVE THE STUDENTS’ READING COMPREHENSION PRACTICE

Yupik Puji Astuti ✉

Prodi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, Program Pascasarjana, Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia

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### Abstract

Located in junior high school (SMP) 35 Semarang, this study applied STAD in giving solution to students’ problems in reading comprehension. Those problems were written in three statements: first, what the problems in reading comprehension faced by the eighth graders of SMP 35 Semarang were; second, how to implement this strategy in the practice of reading comprehension; and third, how STAD could improve the practice of reading comprehension to the eighth graders of junior high school. The method used in this study was qualitative. The data was gained through observing, giving questionnaire, and interviewing students. The major problem was the students had low achievement and motivation which was stimulated by the lack of having effective practice. Therefore, improving their practice was the way to solve the problems. Using STAD in the practices were done in three cycles covering materials’ arrangement and behavior improvement which stimulated better condition for studying. This condition affected students’ extrinsic motivation and behavior for studying. After three cycles, this strategy helped the students have behavior improvement and higher achievement.

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✉ Alamat korespondensi:  
Kampus Unnes Bendan Ngisor, Semarang, 50233  
E-mail: [pps@unnes.ac.id](mailto:pps@unnes.ac.id)

## INTRODUCTION

Reading is one of the language skills which was listed as one of the standard competence together with writing, speaking, and listening in national curriculum for junior high school. In junior high school curriculum, reading is taught by giving five kinds of text types; i.e.: descriptive, recount, narrative, procedure and report to students. Eight graders have descriptive and recount as the main texts for reading comprehension in the odd semester and narrative for the even semester.

Even though reading is the basic skill to be taught to the students, many students still have problems in reading. The students of junior high school 35 of Semarang still had problems in reading comprehension, especially in reading descriptive texts. It is implied from their answers in a reading session in which only few students can answer correctly the questions about detail information from the text. They also find it difficult to find the word reference of some words in the text.

From a short interview, the students admitted that they liked learning with friends in a small group. Nevertheless, they never had an opportunity to study English in group. Therefore, implementing a strategy of cooperative learning, i.e.: STAD (Student Team – Achievement Division) in the classroom could give the students an opportunity to practice in group.

This study was attempted to describe three problems based on the students' difficulty in reading. The problems were what the problems were faced by the students in their reading comprehension on descriptive texts, how STAD could be implemented in the practice of reading comprehension on descriptive texts, and how STAD could improve the practice of reading comprehension on descriptive texts for the eighth graders of junior high school.

Four similar study on cooperative learning had been conducted which investigated different topics. First, Antil, Jenkins, and Wayne (1998) investigated prevalence,

conceptualizations, and the relation between research and practice on teachers of six elementary schools in two districts in the Pacific Northwest, The United States and found that 93 % out of 85 teachers preferred to use cooperative learning to other methods in teaching several subjects: social studies, math, science, and language lessons.

Second, Rahvard (2010) investigated the relationship between cooperative learning strategies and reading comprehension in ESL classrooms in some English Institutes in Iran. He found that the group taught using cooperative learning strategies achieved higher result than those who was taught with another strategy.

Third, Norman (2005) had investigated the effect of cooperative learning, i.e.: STAD, on students' achievement, motivation, and attitudes in an EFL Elementary Classroom in South Korea. The results of the study suggested that STAD had significantly positive effects on student achievement and students' attitudes towards learning English.

The last was Wichadee (2006) who investigated the effects of cooperative learning on English reading skills and attitudes of the first-year students at Bangkok University. She used STAD strategy in this research and found that students obtained higher reading comprehension scores and most of them rated positively in cooperative learning.

This study would be different from theirs in the side of subjects of the study, the research method, and the text types used for the study. The previous studies on cooperative learning were conducted to elementary school students (Norman in 2005 and Antil et al in 1998) and to university students (Wichadee in 2006 and Rahvard in 2010). In my research, the subject would be junior high school students in the eighth grade. I chose those students because they were in the class which I taught and I found problems in reading English text session.

Achieving comprehension in reading descriptive text was the goal of teaching in this study. To help the students arrive at reading

comprehension, I was interested in conducting the same strategy, i.e. STAD, to my students for two reasons. The first reason was from the students. First, it was the number of students whose number was 41 was a big number for individual monitoring and assisting in teaching. Second, they never had practice in group for English lesson. Third, they relied on the fast-learner friends to fulfil tasks or did exercises. The last one the students liked learning with friends better than alone. The second reason was what STAD offered as a strategy of cooperative learning. STAD offered two nice things in its procedures, which were positive. The first was teamwork studying and the second was team recognition. STAD seemed suitable to solve students' problems based on students' condition and what STAD had.

STAD is a strategy of cooperative learning. Before exploring further about STAD, the following part will be about cooperative learning, three theories which layered it, STAD, and reading comprehension.

Cooperative learning has some definitions according to several experts. Kronowitz (2008) defined cooperative learning as a technique of grouping students into four or five members who worked together to complete some tasks. Jacobsen, Eggen, and Kauchak (1989) considered cooperative learning as a teaching strategy to foster group cooperation and interaction among students which can encourage students to work together and help each other.

There were some theories behind cooperative learning which also influenced the basic concept of STAD. The theories were Behaviorism, Cognitive, and Social. The explanation of each theory are as follows.

Pavlov, a behaviorist, in Brown (2000:80) stated that the learning process consisted of the formation of associations between stimuli and reflexive responses which implied that an action was triggered by a stimulus. Social theory began its concept from the idea that people were interdependent from each other. Kurt Lewin (in Johnson, Johnson,

and Smith, 1998:29) stated that the essence of a group lied in the interdependence of its members (created by common goals); groups were "dynamic wholes" in which a change in the state of any member or subgroup changes the state of the other members or subgroups.

The cognitive theory focused on the way our brain took in, stored, and processed what we learn (Jacob, Lee, and Ball, 1997:33). Cognitivists considered how human memory worked to promote learning. Vygotsky and Piaget shared similar idea that cooperative efforts to learn, understand, and solve problems were essential for constructing knowledge and transforming the joint perspectives into internal mental functioning (in Johnson, Johnson, and Smith, 1998).

Those three theories contained the basic foundation of cooperative learning, as follows. First, actions which refer to students' response and behavior, can be formed or trained through a set of planned stimulus from the teacher. Second, group system encourage its members to be interdependence positively. Eventually, cooperative efforts affect the process of knowledge construction and mental functioning in the brain.

One strategy of cooperative learning is STAD or Student Team - Achievement which was initially designed by Robert Slavin and colleagues. Jacobs, Lee, and Ball (1999) explained the teaching process as follows. In step 1, teacher presented a lesson or topic. In step 2, teams or groups of students worked together to learn the material in the lesson. In step 3, students worked alone to take a quiz on the material. Their scores were graded individually but this would be contributed to group score.

The processes enables everyone to contribute the group score based on their own ability. It makes the low learners contribute equally with the high learner. Although the individual score is different from one to another, the calculation which is based on group score encourages the low-learner students to study harder. The calculation of the group score

is used to give the reward for the team such as in the form of presents or others.

The definition of reading comprehension are from several experts. Reading comprehension is the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language (Snow, 2002:11). Oakhill and Cain (in McNamara, 2007:63) notes that reading comprehension is a complex task that draws on a range of skills and processes. Magliano, also in McNamara (2007:111), admits that reading comprehension is a product of complex interactions between the properties of the text and what readers bring to the reading situation.

Dorn and Soffos (2005) explains more by saying that comprehension is a complex process regulated by cognitive, emotional, perceptual, and social experiences which falls into two categories, surface and deep levels. Surface level means reading to get the detail and factual information from the text, meanwhile deep reading refers to the activity of understanding what the purpose of the writer by writing the text.

Reading comprehension as a complex process needs strategies to be implemented in teaching students. Zimmermann and Hutchins in Moreillon (2007:11) identify seven reading comprehension strategies as follows: (1) activating or building background knowledge; (2) using sensory images; (3) questioning; (4) making predictions and inferences; (5) determining main ideas; (6) using fix-up options; and (7) synthesizing.

The first can be conducted through activating three types of connection: text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world. The second is using sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch or in shorter terms, all senses in reading. The third is asking questions which can be made by both teachers and students about a text which they are going to read. The fourth strategy involves story readers asking story listeners both closed- and open-ended questions about the text during the reading. Fix-up option is a way of regaining back losing comprehension by repeating the

first five reading strategies. The last strategy, synthesizing, is collecting altogether of the whole contents of what one has read.

To implement those strategies in teaching reading comprehension, some instructions for teachers are needed. Pressley (2000:546) writes that comprehension involves a number of lower order (i.e., word-level) and higher order processes (i.e., processes above the word level) specific to reading and explains some instructions to be implemented to arrive at comprehension. The instructions (Pressley, 2000) are as follows: 1) teach decoding skill, i.e., prefixes, suffixes, base words, blends, digraphs; 2) encourage the development of sight words; 3) teach students to use semantic context cues to evaluate whether decoding is accurate or not; 4) teach vocabulary meanings; 5) encourage extensive reading; 6) encourage students to ask themselves why the ideas related in a text make sense; and 7) teach self-regulated use of comprehension strategies, including prediction, questioning, seeking clarification when confused, and summarization.

Those instructions are started from decoding process in which teachers taught students from the low level of recognizing words to help them understand the change of the words and later on understand their meaning appropriately until teaching students to implement the strategies themselves or being independent readers. Comprehension takes a long process and practice and those instructions can be implemented as a start for teachers to help students learn to arrive there.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research was action research which applied qualitative approach. It was conducted in three cycles by using STAD to improve students' reading comprehension. It was influenced by the students' progress in every cycle to achieve desired goal of having better reading comprehension in descriptive texts.

Action research is based on the four steps in every cycle as the procedures, namely the

*planning, acting, observing, and evaluating.* However, before doing those steps in a cycle, preliminary research is conducted to define the problem in the English class.

The preliminary research was conducted by doing the following things. First, the teacher observed how students responded in English class. After that, the teacher checked their documentary record through scores, observing notes, and teaching journal. The teacher gave a list of questions on a piece of paper to the students to see their comment for English lesson, activity that comforted them in the classroom and their problems in learning English. Preparing syllabus and making the lesson plan were the next thing done by the teacher. The next thing to do was to find related references with English lesson.

In the planning phase, the teacher did these things: making the research schedule; writing a set of lesson plans for the teaching and learning process; preparing the sources materials for reading activities (reading texts and worksheets); multiplying the materials was the last step before teaching; making instruments for assessment; and preparing the way to do the procedures of STAD, including grouping students and deciding criteria for team recognition.

In the acting phase, activities covered the following activities: first, teaching's presentation; second, group assigned to learn materials; third, students work individually on a quiz on the material; and the last, team recognition based on their scores on quizzes and the average scores as a group work.

For observation phase, the process was conducted through self-observation and peer-observation. The teacher was assisted by a collaborator. She was the students' teacher in the last semester.

In the reflecting phase, the teacher noticed how the effects of the treatment given after several meetings taken from the data which gained through the result of reading activities, the result of indicators' achievement

on behaviour and reading competences, and student's answers in the interview.

The subjects of the study were the students of 8C class in the academic year of 2013/2014. This class was the teacher's own class where the teaching and learning activities were conducted regularly. There were 41 students in this class. They consisted of 22 boys and 19 girls whose age was around 13-15.

The instruments were important to get the information needed for solving the problems in this research. In this research, the instruments used were questionnaire, observation checklist on students' behavior and reading achievement, and teaching documents which consisted of lesson plans, reading texts, worksheets, and journal.

This study applied both ways of test and non-test. The teacher used test to find out the students' achievement in reading. The data for this was the students' score in post-test. The minimum score to be passed was 75. It was based on the school' regulation of the minimum passing score for English. The teacher also used non-test method. The data was taken from observation papers which monitored the students' behavior in the classroom.

As this research was a qualitative one, the data gained from the instruments were analysed descriptively. Most analyses were conducted through explanation in words. The data gained from the instruments were coded and interpreted based on the checklist. Numbers were also being explained to describe the progress made by the students.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings and discussion elaborated three things which happened in cycle one, cycle two, and cycle three, i.e.: the practices of reading descriptive texts using STAD, the students' learning behavior and the students' reading achievement.

The materials consisted of five domains: topics, gradation, text format, duration and frequency. Each of the domains influenced

others in the implementation of the strategy from the cycle one until the cycle three. In the cycle one, the materials was set up based on the lowest level. The topic was about animals. The gradation was low with only some texts consisted with 100 words or below. The text format was in a single paragraph. The duration was quite long with more than 20 minutes for reading each text and doing the exercises. The frequency of practice was low as there was one text for one meeting.

In the cycle two, the activities were a little bit raising up. The materials were still about the nature. But in this cycle, the topics of the descriptive texts were plants and an animal. They were "Parts of A Tree", "Coconut", and "Leopard". The gradation was somewhat low with only two texts consisted with 100 words or more. The text format was in paragraph. The duration was quite long with more than 20 minutes for reading each text and doing the exercises. The frequency of practice was low as there was only one text for one meeting.

In the cycle three, the activities showed a very positive turning. The topics was various from people to places. The students were exposed to read seven different texts: "Tropical Rainforest", "Yuda", "Dogs", "Cockroaches", "Borobudur", "Ambarawa Museum", and "Prambanan". This happened because the teacher wanted to withdraw herself and to push forward the rule of the students. The teacher facilitated the students to explore more their ability in completing the tasks. It was a surprise to see that the students were able to finish all texts in some meetings. The gradation of the texts was from easy to difficult with some moderate level in between. "Cockroaches" was on the difficult level as it had some technical words on biology.

The number of the texts showed that the students took shorter time to finish reading and do the exercises. The duration for each text and its activity was less than 10 minutes. It meant if each text had 5 questions; the students were able to answer every question less than 2 minutes. It was close to the real reading test in

the national exam in which each item must be answered in 2 minutes.

The frequency of practice was increasing as well. They had been increased the number of the texts from only three in cycle two into seven in cycle three. More texts meant more practice to do. The last domain of the practice was the format of the text. For this category, the teacher did not change the text and kept the format of paragraph style.

The students' behavior was improved in cycle three. Some changes arrived at the perfect score of 100 %, i.e.: indicators number three and number eight. Indicator number three showed that using STAD in the classroom made the students enthusiastic. Indicator number eight showed that the communication between the teacher and the students increased.

Students' achievement was the last effect of the implementation. Similar to a chain reaction, better achievement was an impact of having more practice of reading descriptive text. The teacher used post-test as a means of assessment. The students' score was increasing from cycle one to cycle three. It was seen from their minimum score, maximum score, and average or mean score. It was possible that the students' increasing score was because they kept doing the test many times. However, the teacher had tried to reduce that possibility by keeping some of the texts in the post-test hidden or not being discussed in the classroom.

Those three aspects affected one another. It was started from preparing the materials for students' practice in reading descriptive texts, forming students' behavior by enabling them study in the team work and ended in improving the students' achievement and behavior improvement.

## CONCLUSIONS

The problems faced by the students in reading comprehension especially descriptive text were complex. The problems were stimulated by their lack of practices for reading activities in the classroom which affected their

lack of vocabulary. The practice here refers to activities in reading texts. Two changes were done by the teacher regarding to student's progress in each cycle, i.e.: teacher presentation and group formation.

After three cycles, implementing STAD in the practice of students' reading comprehension classroom was seen to be helpful. There were three aspects which was affected by using STAD in reading. First, classroom condition became more comfortable for studying. Improving positive behavior was the second effect which was in line with the concept of *positive interdependence* inside STAD. The third effect was the continuation of *positive interdependence* condition.

Suggestions for further implementing STAD for teaching were as follows. First, before applying the strategy (STAD), teachers should aware their students' problems. Second, teachers could make change in adapting the procedures of STAD. Third, teachers should arrange indicators and assessment instruments to indicate whether the implementation of the strategy was successful or not. Finally, teamwork would be more productive if teachers withdrew their role from giving too much assistance by letting the students have more space to learn with their teammates. Nevertheless, teachers should still monitor students' behavior to see their change and gave assistance when necessary.

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