

INTEGRATED TEACHING OF READING: THE INDONESIAN CONTEXT

Bambang Suroso

Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto
bambangsuroso621@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

In Indonesia, English a foreign language because of students only have formal contact with English during lesson hours. Therefore exposure is very limited. This means that it is within these lesson hours that teachers should facilitate the learning of the four English skills, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. As the entry to the world of English printed materials are used and because of that reading becomes the main classroom activities. This poses a problem for English teachers, do they have to focus on the content or the language of the reading material. If we have to answer this question we have to know that the main objective of the learning process is to provide students with language knowledge and skill. So theoretically, priority should be on the students' language growth. This means the accumulation of of vocabulary mastery and grammar knowledge. But the two language components itself cannot be studied in isolation, they should be learned from the language in use. Because reading is the entry into the English world for students, it should facilitate the acquisition of elements which will later be used in listening, speaking, reading itself and writing. Therefore, the words in the reading material should be treated in terms of their meanings, sounds or pronunciation, spellings and uses. There should also be the systematic discussion or explanation of the grammar of the reading material. The combination of grammar and vocabulary is very useful for the extraction of meaning of something which is heard and written and also for the expression in the form of speech and writing. With this integrated approach students will acquire the basics for other skills than reading itself. Of course this does not mean that the content of the reading material should be addressed. The content can be regarded as the gimmicks. Just like when we eat. We eat because we have to absorb the nutritious value of the food, but if we just take that we may lose appetite, so it has to be accompanied with taste. Without taste eating will be dull, without nutrition eating will be useless. The taste is the content and the nutrition is the language elements of the reading material.

Key words: reading, entry, content, language element

LEARN TO READ OR READ TO LEARN

Teaching reading can be understood as making students learn to read and or read to learn. Teaching learning to read includes teaching how to recite words or sentences with the focus on stress, intonation and meaning. This of course takes place in the earliest stage of reading instruction. However, this does not mean the earliest stage of someone learning a language, let

alone the mother tongue nor the first language. Usually someone learns to read after they have the basic ability to speak. After being able to read words learners begin to make sense of what they read. At this stage they read to comprehend a piece of written text. Therefore reading is no longer the sounding of graphic or, to be precise, alphabetical symbol but the elicitation of information from a printed text. With this activity learner gain

entertainment, knowledge, new horizon, and opportunities (Pang, et al, 2003). With this also, learners have move from learning to read to reading to learn.

However, reading to learn has another dimension which is a little bit contrary to the notion of reading to learn as stated at the end of the above paragraph, namely reading to gain knowledge of something. While it may mean reading to learn or get information about a country's current affair, to enjoy literary works or to find job opportunity, it can also mean reading to learn a language. Although it sounds strange but it happens that a printed text is given to the students with the purpose of learning the language in which the text is written. And this is what usually happens at beginner level. Therefore the reading material and the session itself serve to *enrich* and *reinforce* the language being studied at the same time.

THE INDONESIAN CONTEXT

Like in any other country, in Indonesia the main source of English learning is printed written material. Therefore the learning activity centers upon and around that of reading. It can be reading comprehension, rewriting or retelling of what is read or language analysis of the printed text being taught. However it is not exactly the same as what happens in the context where English is taught as the first or second language. Pang (2003) says that reading is about understanding written text and involves two related process, the first being the word recognition and the second comprehension. This being said, it is assumed that one reads because they want to know the content of a text. Of course this is the ideal purpose of reading. However, if we ask question for example why a first year students of junior high school should read a text about their school, we know that they do not read the text to get information about their school, because they know very well about their school. So why do they read English text? The answer is that they read

because they study English. They read English to know English and knowing English means being able to speak it, listen to it, read it and write it. Those abilities are expected to emerge from reading-centered activities.

In Indonesia English is neither the first nor the second language but a foreign language. This condition makes exposure to the target language very little, only that within the classroom hours, meaning about less than two hours a week. With this condition, deliberate efforts to make students listen, speak, read and write English centers on the classroom activities. Therefore, teachers are challenged with providing students with meaningful and integrated classroom activities. They should use all resources at their disposal to engage students in English activities. With this in mind, reading should be understood as an entry to the learning of English which covers all its skills, reading itself, speaking, listening. In other words, reading actually carries a heavy "burden". In order for reading to deliver that "mission" there is no other way but to teach reading integratedly.

WHY READING

Actually there many gates through which English can be brought to students. It can be either listening, speaking or writing. The problem with listening as an entry for English learning is in providing the standard English sound, that is that students should be exposed to. Before the internet era teachers use pre-recoderded tape and tape player to bring English sound to class, or in their absence teacher use their own voice and read English dialog or stories. There are several reasons about why reading should be used as the gate to English skills? First as learning material, reading text or printed is easy to get both by students and teachers. Almost all stuffs have English words on or in them, that make written English part of students world. Everywhere students look they read English. Therefore written English is something they

are most familiar with. Second, reading materials are easy to use in the classroom. Teacher just makes copy of a text and distribute it to the class. Compared to listening material, reading material is much simpler to use in class. Listening material needs a certain equipment make students hear, such laptop or computer, speaker, and the electricity itself. The third reason is that reading material is more visual and psychologically more realistic to the students and more easy to grasp, although naturally language is spoken and consisting of sounds and therefore auditory in character.

INTEGRATED TEACHING OF READING

Despite the fact that the Indonesian English curriculum provides room for all English skills to be taught, it is a fact that English printed material is used as the main source of learning. This should not be a problem as long as the treatment of the printed material covers the whole range of the language elements. This holistic treatment is expected to provide students with things that are required for them to be able to speak, listen, write as well as to read. Of course, reading ability itself should be given top priority, for example by facilitating reading skills such as skimming – a quick reading to find the general idea of a paragraph or the whole text- and scanning- the quick reading to locate specific information (Gebhard, 2009). The teacher who facilitate the activities in the classroom should also pay attention to the other three skills which students may find it important for their development in the future. In order to make reading session holistic or integrated it is necessary to note that there are two focuses in facilitating reading activities, *meaning* and *language focus*.

Therefore, what is basically meant by integrated teaching of reading here is how the elements of text are treated to provide students with elements of the other English

skills. For example, the elements of listening ability is sound recognition. With this in mind, the reading or printed text –based learning process should enable students to accumulate as many English aural vocabulary as possible, as it is with reading where students have to accumulate visual vocabulary in order to make sense of what written and read.

MEANING FOCUSED

Focus on meaning means that students are facilitated to make sense of the text and be given comprehension assignments. One element that is necessary for the students' involvement in the discussion of the text content is the topic. This is in line with the principle of ESA (Hammer, 2003) which states that unless students are emotionally engaged with what is going in the class any learning activities will be less effective. A topic of their interest will be a good start. Therefore the selection of topic will be very crucial. Topic around the students' world, such music, sport, will attract them better than that about philosophy, history or politics. However, topic should vary in order to widen the scope the students' language knowledge. With "less interesting" topic it is the teacher's skill in introducing it that determines whether or not students will be engaged in the learning activities. For this purpose teachers can make the use of video, game, brain storming questions etc. Teacher can also use song as introduction to a certain topic, or the song itself can be the learning source, of which the choice is because of the theme, the clarity of the singer's pronunciation, the popularity or the simplicity of the language which is within the students' linguistic reach. Then as the lesson goes and through vocabulary and grammar discussion or explanation, it is expected that student can construct the meaning of the text. After that teacher may give some comprehension exercises. There are various ways and forms of

comprehension exercise which can be given to the students. Comprehension task can also be given at the beginning of the lesson. Here teacher should have a consideration so as not only to give “fact finding” activities such as asking the who, what and where but also the why and how of the stories. In other words teachers should be familiar with the Bloom taxonomy in designing exercises. However it is important to note that focus should not be only on the high order thinking skills by skipping simple tasks. Simple tasks are likely to fulfilled most students in the class, and if this happens rewards should be given as an appreciation. This type of ‘low’ order thinking task can create a collective feeling of success which in turn improve motivation. The opposite will happen if this simple task is skipped and instead only high order thinking is given. Of course the teacher should observe his class whether the majority of the students in a certain class belong to those low, middle or high “thinkers” to whom he or she should adjust the level of complexity of the exercises or tasks. Failure in this sector can either create boredom, when the task is too simple, or frustration, when too complicated.

In general the ultimate goal of teaching is to make students like English and if possible master English. Therefore a feeling of success should always appear among students. This can only happen if the input stage of the lesson can help students in the exercise stage.

FORM FOCUSED

By form focused, it means the language aspect of the text. This covers the vocabularies and the grammar of the text. In this two aspects the principle that applies here is *reinforcement* and *enrichment*. Therefore in order for the students’ English to develop, a text should be selected on the basis of the students’ previous knowledge so that it can be *strengthened* or *reinforced* and *novelty* so that students’ language develop and progress. The treatment of this two

language aspects should be as intense as the meaning aspect of the text. This has direct relationship with the selection of the text. Text should be based, among others, on the vocabulary richness but we have to understand that text with too many new vocabulary can create frustration and may not be thoroughly finished in one meeting. On the other hand with too few new words a text will not create a feeling of progress on the part of the students. Therefore the number of news should be at the maximum of 25% of all the words in the text.

The treatment of vocabulary should cover the four aspects, namely the spelling, meaning, pronunciation and use. In order for the discussion of the vocabulary aspect of the text to be *integrated* teacher should consider how the session of the vocabulary treatment can prepare students for non-reading task. For example we know that to be able to *listen* to English students should be able to recognize sound. Therefore pronunciation should given sufficient time in the treatment with intensive exercises. To be successful in *conversation* students should be able produce as well as recognize standard English sound. For *reading*, students need large vocabulary, therefore vocabulary treatment should be filled with interesting task which enable students to expand their vocabulary through *synonym* and *antonym* task.

The treatment of grammar of the text is supposed to give students the ability to express and understand meaning. This is useful for both receptive, reading and listening as well as productive, speaking and writing skills. Explanation should be clear so that students understand what meaning can be conveyed through the structure or grammar being studied. Exercise in this treatment should serve as automatization process so that students can think in the new structure, which in turn can be a device in expressing themselves and understand others in terms of language. The accumulation of vast grammar item which

gradually forms in the students memory will play crucial role in carrying out other language tasks, be it reading, writing, listening, speaking, translating, interpreting, etc.

CLOSING

As the conclusion, because the gate to the world of English is reading teacher has to make the maximum use of what is there in the text. But text should also be selected on the basis of ideas which enables the students English could develop. Exercise should also be intensive but but graded so that all students regardless of their intelligence have the chance to participate get successful which then will arouse stronger motivation to learn more. Exercises which can only be done successfully by the clever students will create injustice, as if the lesson was only for those “bright” students.

REFERENCE

- Gebhard, Jerry G, (2009), *Teaching English as a Foreign or Second Language, A Self-Development Methodology Guide*, The University of Michigan Press, USA
- Hammer, Jeremy (2003), *How to Teach English*, Pearson Education, Ltd, Essex, UK
- Pang, Elizabeth S, et al, 2003, *Teaching Reading*, International Bureau of Education, Geneva, Switzerland