

STUDENT ATTITUDE TOWARD ACTIVATING BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE IN READING

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Abstract

Reading is one of the skills that every student must have in order to comprehend what they are reading. Background knowledge is required for students to use in their reading strategy. Background knowledge is information that a person has about a topic that is based on his experience, for example. The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of reading strategies on background knowledge among English Education Departments at State Islamic University of North Sumatera. The researcher's sample consists of several in third semester students of English Education Departments at State Islamic University of North Sumatera. In this study, researchers used quantitative methods such as questionnaires and tests to conduct surveys. The questionnaire was an open questionnaire with two sessions. And the data found in this study revealed that the students attitude toward using the Activating background knowledge strategy in third semester students of English Education at State Islamic University of North Sumatera is still immature. They have not been able to successfully apply this strategy when reading a text. Students' attitudes toward using this strategy remain weak and negative. Students are still having difficulty activating their background knowledge.

Keyword: reading comprehension, reading strategies, background knowledge

I. Background of Study

When a student reads a text, reading comprehension strategies will be needed to help them understand the text. Students must have effective reading strategies in order to be involved in reading and understanding the text. Understanding the text is one of the most important aspects of learning, using background knowledge will help them to read more effectively. Students will read and understand the information needed to better understand the text, and it will be easier to activate background knowledge to overcome comprehension difficulties.

According to Goodman 1967 in reading students not only use short-term memory but also use long-term memory. Students must utilize and activate background knowledge stored in long-term memory. According to schema theory, providing schemas can help someone in thinking (Allington, 2010). This is related to reading comprehension, which is a two-way street between the reader's initial knowledge and the text being read. As a result, readers with more backgrounds will understand better than readers with fewer backgrounds (Abdul Mohsen, 2012). In this case shows that premises. Relying on experience and

background knowledge is very important in determining actions to help students understand what they are reading. It is on this basis that background knowledge is very important and should be utilized to help students understand the text better. The purpose of this mini research study is to see if the Activating background knowledge strategy can launch or facilitate students' reading comprehension skills.

Problem of Study

Low or lack of background knowledge is a major problem as well as an obstacle in reading comprehension. In reading, there are strategies that can be used to make it easier for readers to understand the texts they are reading, namely by using strategies to activate background knowledge to develop understanding in reading texts. The problem is that some students still don't realize whether having background knowledge is important or not. Because the lack of background knowledge makes it quite difficult for students to get an overview of the topic being read, if students have high background knowledge it will make them able to understand the text better. Not only that, the low motivation in the individual and the weak mastery of the language are also the main problems in this case. In reading literary texts, students must be able to understand language well, therefore they must have background knowledge.

Objective of Study

Activating background knowledge is one strategy in reading that can help students better understand the text. The researcher had a goal in mind when conducting this research. One of the objectives of this mini research study is to find out more about the impact of activating background knowledge in third semester students of English Education at State Islamic University of North Sumatera. The researcher tried to examine the students' ability to use active background knowledge in the process of reading and understanding the text. We want to use this pre-reading strategy to determine whether students have high or low reading skills, and whether students with low activating knowledge backgrounds can be helped by this strategy in the process of understanding the readings they read.

Significant of Study

This study shows that reading strategies can have a positive impact on students' reading comprehension, and can help students improve their reading comprehension. Therefore, this study intends to determine students' attitudes towards reading strategies, especially in activating background knowledge. With this, the researcher hopes that this research will help students in understanding reading by activating background reading strategies, especially for third semester students of English Education at State Islamic University of North Sumatera.

II. Review of Related Literature

What is Reading?

Reading is one of the skills that every student must have in order to understand the content of reading. Hittleman stated in his book, *Reading in a Changing World: "Reading is a verbal process interrelated with thinking and with all other communication abilities – listening, speaking, and writing. Specifically, reading is the process of reconstructing from the printed patterns on the page the ideas and information intended by the author."* Reading, as stated above, is a process of reconstructing ideas, opinions, or ideas in a text/reading as well as information written by the author. Reading, according to Goodman, is a cyclical process. A good reader takes advantage of the redundancy inherent in language, which aids in the reconstruction of the entire text. Following reconstruction, its accuracy is tested against previous information, which can be a combination of information extracted from a text as well as his/her own background knowledge on the topic of a text. Once the reader confirms the agreement between the reconstruction and previous knowledge, the cyclical process of sampling begins again. If any inconsistency or inaccuracy in the reconstruction of the text is discovered, the reader either rereads the text or does not believe the information (Goodman 1971 cited in Johnson, P., 1982). There are numerous reading strategies that can help students improve their reading comprehension. These strategies can assist and facilitate students' reading

activities. Activating background knowledge is one of the most effective reading strategies.

What is background knowledge?

According to Stahl, Hare, Sinatra, & Gregory, (1991) background knowledge is an ability that may directly influence the reader's understanding of what she/he reads. Because the higher our knowledge, the greater we can understand the contents of the text. Background knowledge is information that a person has about a topic, for example, based on their experience. According to Anderson (2009) the scope of background knowledge is all knowledge that readers have when reading texts such as life experiences, information related to the topic, educational knowledge, and language knowledge. In understanding a text, it's necessary to know what the reader knows about the text in particular and in general. Students activate background knowledge will determine whether the background they have is sufficient or lacking

The results of a research study conducted by Chai (1990) on the effect on reading comprehension of instruction was seen from the level of skills possessed. In this study, a group of ITM MARA students in intensive reading class were grouped into two groups, namely the good reader group and the bad reader group by providing pre-reading directions and the results turned out to be more effective with a good group of readers and have higher abilities for the group of good readers

than bad reader group. Then, research conducted by O'Brian which examines effective pre-reading activities to activate students' background knowledge so that students are helped in understanding a text namely KWL and Anticipation Guide conducted in middle schools in Mid-Western, USA. And the results show that this strategy is effective for activating students' background knowledge and can increase students' grades.

Activating background knowledge is information about what the reader already knows about the topic, title, or author. Activating background knowledge is common with mature readers. By intentionally linking what the reader knows with the text she/he is reading, the intent of activating here is trying to make a connection. The problem is that some students still don't realize whether having prior background knowledge is important or not. The aim is to activate background knowledge, make it easier for students to understand what is read, make students become active and play their roles before reading, while reading or after reading. Student can also ask the questions. Background knowledge is a strategy that students can employ when reading a text by relating it to what they have learned or known both inside and outside of the classroom, which can serve as the foundation for learning new information. Each student has a unique culture and education, as well as a diverse background knowledge that can be directly related to the

various topics they learn in class. It is critical for a teacher to activate students' prior knowledge in order to awaken their background knowledge. To enable background knowledge according to Ogle you can use the KWL Chart. Using a KWL chart to help students activate their background knowledge while reading a text is one method. K-W-L stands for K=Know, W=Want, and L=Learn. Students write and share what they already know about the topic from the text they read in section K (What I Know). Then, in section W(What I Want To Know), they write questions about the topic. In section L (What I Learn), they write down what they learn or new information they gain from the writings they read. KWL expands on the chart in the section on how students can answer or get answers to the questions they write, stating that they can conduct online searches or conduct personal interviews to find answers. Then, after learning and receiving new information, students write down what actions they take or how they react to them. Perhaps student' can put it to use, share it with others and teach it, or come up with a new idea and create something new. Also, make a list of any new questions they have about what they have learned. So can be concluded that in the KWL Chart there are 3 columns, there are:

- First column is what I know (K), before reading the text, students can state what they already know about the topic and then relate it to what is in the reading.

- Second column is What I Want To Know (W), when reading the text, students can make whatever things they want to know from the text.
- And the third column is What I Learned (L), after reading, students will get answers about what they have learned from the text.

III. Method of Research

In this study, researchers used quantitative methods. According to Sugiyono (2017:8) "Quantitative method is a research method based on the philosophy of positivism, used to examine certain populations or samples, collect data using research instruments, analyze quantitative data with the aim of testing predetermined hypotheses." The data collection technique that the researcher used was a survey by giving tests and questionnaires to obtain data from a predetermined group. In collecting data, the researchers spent 3 days using a questionnaire method and an open test. This test is used by the researchers to see the abilities and attitudes of students in activating background knowledge by using the KWL graph. Researchers chose several students majoring in English education at UINSU as samples in this study. This open questionnaire was conducted in 2 sessions. The first session was conducted before doing the test. The aim is to find out the initial information that respondents know about strategies to activating background knowledge. Then, the researcher presents the test by

providing text and the respondents will answer the questions contained in the KWL Chart (what I know, what I want to know, and what I learned). After testing the researchers conducted a second questionnaire given after the test to find out what information the respondents had obtained. According to Prof. Dr. Sugiyono, "Questionnaire research is a way of collecting data using a set of questionnaires consisting of questions or statements given to respondents." Questionnaire is a data collection technique that is carried out by providing a list of written questions to respondents to answer. This questionnaire is used by researchers to support data from testing to find out the advantages and disadvantages of using a strategy to activate background knowledge using the KWL Chart. The first and second questionnaires each consist of 3 questions. Questionnaires and tests were given through Google forms considering the current conditions do not allow researchers to go directly to the field.

IV. Data analysis and finding

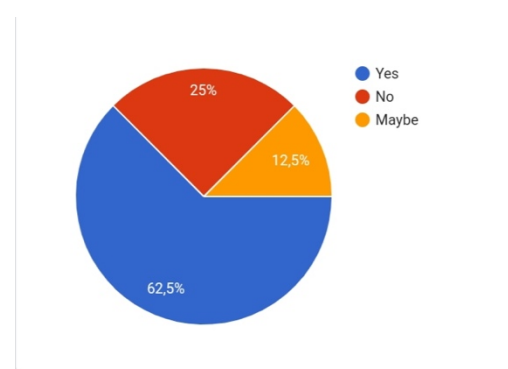


Diagram 1.1

According to the data in the diagram above (Diagram 1.1), not all of the eight correspondents understand what activating background knowledge is. It is known that 1 person is unsure whether they have heard of this strategy, 2 correspondents stated that they have never heard of and are unaware of this strategy, and the remaining 5 correspondents stated that they are aware of this strategy. When asked to explain what they know about this strategy, many correspondents answer incorrectly, with only a few able to answer concisely, clearly, and precisely.

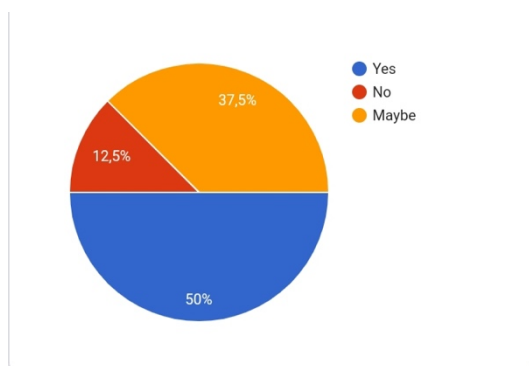


Diagram 1.2

We can use KWL charts to help students activate their background knowledge when using this background knowledge strategy. Of course, we asked if they knew about the KWL chart in the questionnaire, and the results, as shown in the second diagram, show that not all of them have heard of it. 1 correspondent chose no, indicating that he knows nothing about the KWL chart; 3 correspondents chose maybe, indicating that they may be familiar

with the word but are unsure whether they know anything about it; and 4 other correspondents chose yes, indicating that they have heard of or studied the KWL chart in activating background knowledge.

Following that, we began to administer a test to the correspondent in the form of a relatively short text. We asked them to read with this background knowledge strategy in mind. We employ the previously mentioned KWL chart. We asked three questions in section K (What I know); in the What you already know about this title on the text column, they answered about what they already knew by just reading the title of the text, and in the 'Have you ever read the same topic before' column, two of the correspondents answered that they had never read the same topic. The same as the text we provided, while the rest responded that they had previously read something on the same topic as the text, and the final question was 'Have you ever experienced before?' Six correspondents said no, while the rest said yes. Still on the test, in section W (What I want to know), we asked, 'What do you want to know more about during reading?' Some correspondents responded that they did not agree with the text's contents; perhaps they misunderstood it and did not fully comprehend the use of KWL charts in the strategy of activating background knowledge. And in the final test, part L (What I Learned), they all answered correctly.

After administering a brief test, we asked the correspondents to

describe the challenges they encountered while implementing the Activating background knowledge strategy. We can conclude from each of their responses that there are still many people who are unaware of how to use this reading strategy. They gave a variety of responses, but the main challenges they face when using this background knowledge strategy in reading are remembering what they have read and being confused because they do not know what to conclude.

Finally, they learned from this strategy that by using it, they could better understand the content of the text and remember the appropriate story and relate it to the text they read.

From the results of the questionnaire containing 8 correspondents, we found out that the attitudes of students at English Education Department at State Islamic University Of North Sumatera in using the Activating background knowledge strategy are still immature. They have not been able to apply this strategy well when reading a text. We can draw the line that their mastery of the background knowledge strategy is still weak and low. They still have difficulty in activating their background knowledge.

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study reveals that there are still students who do not know how to use reading strategies and are considered less effective. The attitude of students is considered less mastered this strategy

and still find a lot of difficulties in implementing it. Students during the test still feel unfamiliar with the strategy of Activating background knowledge and KWL Chart. This research is still in a small area and has not been carried out well enough. Therefore, it is possible to develop future research to get more valid and good results. The main challenge that respondents feel when using this strategy of activating background knowledge in reading is that sometimes they have difficulty remembering what they have read and are confused to conclude because they are not too focused. So they have to reread it. And the advantage of using this strategy is that students can better understand the content of the text and remember the appropriate story and relate it to the text they read. So, the researchers concluded that students' attitudes towards activating background knowledge strategies in 3rd semester of the English Education Department at State Islamic University of North Sumatra were still immature and had not been able to apply this strategy well when reading a text. The researcher suggests that teachers should provide training to students on strategies for in-depth reading comprehension.

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