

# SMART STRATEGY TO BOOST STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION

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**Abstract:** Reading as one of language skills plays significant roles in the teaching English as a foreign language. Since the teacher still uses the conventional way to teach reading, students' ability in reading comprehension seems still unsatisfactory yet. So, teacher should explore and develop new strategies. One of strategies in reading comprehension that can trigger our students to attain that purpose is SMART (Self Monitoring Approach for Reading and Thinking) strategy. This study is developing SMART strategy to boost the reading comprehension achievement of the ninth grade students. The research applies a collaborative classroom action research design in which the researcher and the collaborative teacher work together in preparing a suitable procedure of SMART strategy, designing the lesson plan, determining the criteria of success, implementing the action, observing, and doing reflection. The finding indicated that SMART strategy was successful to enhance students' motivation to be actively involved in the instructional process. The improvement on the students' participation was 75% in Cycle 1 and 87% in Cycle 2.

**Keywords:** *Reading Comprehension, SMART strategy*

## INTRODUCTION

The goal of EFL instruction is how our students can master English material effectively. As Brown (2007) stated that the joy of teaching lies in witnessing our students' attainment of broader and broader vistas of linguistic proficiency and in experiencing the communal bond that we have been instrumental in creating in our classroom. In this case, English teacher has the great challenge to

develop his or her teaching strategies in encouraging our students to acquire English proficiency by focusing on how they construct the knowledge by themselves.

In the context of English Language Teaching in Indonesia, the teaching of reading comprehension plays significant roles in leading our students to the understanding of the written text. According to Hadi (2008) the teaching of reading comprehension should be based on the theories of reading. Chastain (1989) introduces that the ultimate objective of teaching reading comprehension is to enable the students to comprehend written text which is considered appropriate to their level. Principally, the reading skills required are understanding main ideas and supporting ideas intended by the author, relating prior knowledge with those ideas, evaluating, and making inferences and flexible adjustment of strategies used to comprehend the reading text (Long & Richards, 1987). Those understandings imply that the objective of teaching reading comprehension should be helping students to develop all of the reading comprehension skills. The teaching techniques and strategies should be directed to achieve those objectives.

One of teaching reading goals at the junior high schools as stated in the standard of content (Depdiknas, 2006) is to enable the students to understand the formal or informal written texts which are in the forms of recount, narrative, procedure, descriptive, and report in the context of daily life. To be more specific, the students are expected to be able to: (1) read aloud the written text in both good pronunciation and intonation, (2) identify the topic from the written text, (3) identify the general, specific information, and the main idea of the written text.

There are some problems why the students' ability in reading comprehension is still unsatisfactory. *Firstly*, the students' low motivation in learning to read. *Secondly*, in reading class management, the teachers unconsciously tend to test their students, not to teach them. *Thirdly*, the teachers only asked the students to read a text without leading to the topic of the text. Besides, the teachers do not initiate a certain strategy how to comprehend a text. This short coming certainly impedes them in comprehending English reading texts.

Considering the above cases, the main problem of why students' achievement in reading comprehension is still low is due to

the teacher's lack of strategy in teaching reading, it is necessary to implement a strategy that can help the teachers solve the students' problems in reading. One of the strategies that can help students understanding materials is SMART (Self Monitoring Approach for Reading and Thinking). According to Vaughn and Estes (in Buehl, 2001), SMART strategy is one strategy that triggers students to think about how their reading is proceeding. SMART is based on the premise that successful reading begins with recognizing what is understood and not understood in a passage (Buehl, 2001). So, the use of this strategy is hoped to able to provide great chance for our learners to find out how to comprehend reading passages by themselves without teacher's spoon feeding. In short, SMART can solve the students' problem in reading comprehension.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **The Theory of Text**

Reading comprehension consists of three elements: *the reader*, *the text*, and *the activity* or purpose for reading (Snow, 2002). It means the activity here may refer to the interaction of the reader and the text, which make up the three reading models, have provided perspectives in how reading should be taught. The importance of the text in facilitating reading signifies the important of the *text structure theory*. The role of the reader's prior knowledge in understanding message in a reading text is emphasis of the *scheme theory*. The interaction of the reader and the text has been the focus of the *metacognitive theory*. According to Mealey and Nist (1989), these theories constitute the most prevalent theories underlying reading instruction.

### ***Text Structure Theory***

The text structure theory tells that a text has a structure. Carrel (1992, as cited in Hudson, 2007) stated that the term text structure refers to how the ideas in a text are structured to convey a message to reader. Clearly, some of the ideas in a text are central to the message and others are less central. Supporting how the text structure theory works, Meyer (1999) cited in Hudson (2007) argues that, text structure designates how concepts are subordinated to others. Research over the past three decades has shown that knowledge of text structure interacts with comprehension.

Research has shown that reading instruction which is based on various aspects of text structure is effective in improving the students' reading comprehension in second language. Vacca (1999) argues that text structure is crucial variable in learning and memory. Likewise, for more than 50 years, reading educators have underscored the recognition and use of organization as essential processes underlying comprehension and retention. The primary purpose of many content area texts is to provide users with information. To make information readily accessible, authors use external and internal structural features. External text structure is characterized by text's overall instructional design—its formal features. Its internal text structure is reflected by the interrelationships among ideas in the text as well as by the subordination of some ideas to others.

### *Schema Theory*

The reader brings information, knowledge, emotion, experience, and culture—that is schemata (plural)—to the printed word (Brown, 2007). Schema means the reader's background knowledge on which the interpretation of a text depends (Hudson, 2007). The procedure for teaching receptive skills generally starts with a lead in. This is where we engage students with topic of the reading and we try to activate their schema, which means "pre-existent knowledge of the world" (Cook 1989 cited in Harmer, 2004). According to Rumelhart (1982) cited in Vacca (1999) defines schemata as the mechanism by which people access what they know and match it to the information in a text. In doing so, they build on the meaning they already bring to the reading situation. Indeed, schemata have been called "the building blocks of cognition" because they represent elaborate networks of information that people use to make sense of new stimuli, events, and situations.

In this theory, schemata greatly influence reading comprehension and learning. Vacca (1999) highlights that when a match occurs between students' prior knowledge and text material, schema functions in at least three ways; *first*, schema provides a framework for learning that allows reader to *seek and select* information that is relevant to their purposes for reading; *second*, schema helps readers *organize* text information; and *third*, schema helps readers *elaborate* information. Further, Anderson & Pearson (1984) cited in Klingner & et al. (2007) adds that schema theory

suggests that what we know about a topic or construct influences how much we can or will learn by reading a passage that addresses that topic. Thus our knowledge and experiences related to key ideas in the text we read influence what we learn and remember about what we read. World knowledge and word meanings influence our understanding. The more we read and learn about the topic, the easier the next page on that topic will be for us to understand.

### ***Metacognitive Theory***

The term *metacognitive* refers to 'thinking about thinking; the reader's conscious awareness or control of cognitive processes such as monitoring understanding while reading'. (Klingner, et al., 2007). Hudson (2007) explains that *metacognitive* skills play a strategic role in such problem-solving cognitive activities as reading comprehension. Metacognition refers to knowledge of our regulation of cognitive endeavors. It involves knowledge about one's cognitive system and conscious attempts in regulating cognition. Thus, metacognitive theory deals with activities in pre-reading, whilst reading, and post-reading stages which should undergo during independent reading or in reading instruction in order to facilitate comprehension and learning.

Further, Klingner (2007) elaborates the metacognitive processes the reader uses are those involved in monitoring understanding, selecting what to remember, and regulating the strategies used when reading. The metacognitive strategies the reader uses include rehearsing (i.e., repeating information to enhance recall), reviewing, underlining important words or sections of a passage, note taking, and checking understanding. Meanwhile, Alderson (2001) describes the metacognitive skills which comprise recognizing the more important information in text; adjusting reading rate; skimming; previewing; using context to resolve a misunderstanding; formulating questions about information; monitoring cognition, including recognizing problems with information presented in text or an inability to understand text.

Metacognition applied to reading instruction also enable to make the autonomous learner as Brown (1978) cited in Vacca (1999) expresses that to be independent learners, students need to know the whats, hows, and whens of strategic reading and thinking. They should know enough about knowing to recognize the importance of

(1) using a variety of strategies to facilitate comprehension and learning, (2) analyzing the reading task before them, (3) reflecting on what they know or don't know about the material to be read, and (4) devising plans for successfully completing the reading and for evaluating and checking their progress in accomplishing the task.

### **SMART Strategy in Reading Comprehension**

The most important thing in teaching reading is how to make our learners to be proficient and autonomous readers. By doing this, they will be used to fight with plenty of texts. Buehl (2001) explains that proficient readers carry on an internal monologue while they read, it is as though proficient readers operate with a split personality. One personality is hard at work with the task at hand, This is the personality concerned with cognitive activities such as selecting what's important in that chapter, organizing this information in conjunction with what is already known, and preparing to answer a series of questions on the material. But it is a second personality that separates effective from less effective readers. This second personality works in the background, directing and evaluating all those cognitive activities needed to successfully learn.

Researchers call this internal monologue metacognition--the ability to think about your thinking. Metacognition involves a self-awareness of what one is doing and how it is going. It also reflects an ability to switch gears and try something else when things break down, such as when a reading passage is proving particularly difficult. Ineffective readers approach print passively and continue to plow ahead, even if nothing is making sense. But effective readers can also be taught how to activate the control center in their minds that directs their learning (Buehl, 2001).

According to Vaughn and Estes in Buehl (2001) SMART strategy is one strategy that triggers students to think about how their reading is proceeding. SMART is based on the premise that successful reading begins with recognizing what is understood and not understood in a passage (Buehl, 2001). So, the use of this strategy is supposed to be able to make our learners comprehend reading passages better. SMART can solve the English and students' problem in reading comprehension.

### **Steps of SMART Strategy**

Buehl (2009) describes how to apply SMART strategy that involves the following steps: (1) select a passage of four or five paragraphs that you find personally challenging and ask students to follow along as you think aloud about your reading; (2) after reading the entire passage, model to students how to paraphrase material in words that make sense to them, (3) introduce the SMART protocol to students; and (4) have students read a passage on their own using the check mark and question mark system.

Practically, the above steps can be elaborated as follows:

- ***Step 1: Do I understand?***  
Place a check (√) in the margin of the text or on a sticky note when you understand and a question mark (?) when you have a question.
- ***Step 2: What have I just read?***  
At the end of each paragraph, stop and summarize in your own words what you just read (look back at text if necessary).
- ***Step 3: Does it make sense now?***  
After reading the whole text, return to each paragraph that has a question mark and reread. If it still doesn't make sense, move to step 4.
- ***Step 4: Why am I having trouble?***  
Try to pinpoint the problem. Is it unfamiliar words? Concepts? Is the sentence structure too complex? Do you have little background information about the topic? Figure out your particular problem before going to step 5.
- ***Step 5: Where can I get help?***  
Try a variety of aids: glossary, appendix, dictionary, chapter summary... If you are still confused, ask a classmate or teacher.

### **Model of Teaching Procedure**

Some stages of teaching procedure or SMART strategy implementation are described as follows.

Table 1 Model of SMART strategy implementation

<b>The Stage of Teaching</b>	<b>Teacher's Activities</b>	<b>Students' Activities</b>
Pre-Teaching	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Prepare the instruction of how to use SMART for students.</li> <li>2. Distribute the student worksheet.</li> <li>3. Ask students to read the introduction of SMART.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Listen to teacher's explanation.</li> <li>2. Take the worksheet.</li> <li>3. Read and comprehend the worksheet.</li> </ol>
Whilst-Teaching	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Give a model of report text by giving brief explanation then followed by suggestion and motivation</li> <li>2. Ask students to read the report text individually.</li> <li>3. Ask students to place a check mark (✓) next to each paragraph that they understand and place a question mark (?) next to each paragraph that contains something they do not understand individually.</li> <li>4. Ask students to explain with their own words what they read.</li> <li>5. Ask students to go back to each (?) and see if they can now make sense of paragraph by using SMART protocol. It includes: read, self-translate, and troubleshoot.</li> <li>6. Ask the students to form in group and appointing a student as leader</li> <li>7. Ask students discuss to do the tasks based on the passage that they have read.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Read and learn a model of report text by discussing with their groups.</li> <li>2. Read the report text individually and silently.</li> <li>3. Place a check mark (✓) next to each paragraph that they understand and place a question mark (?) next to each paragraph that contains something they do not understand individually.</li> <li>4. Explain what they have read with their own words.</li> <li>5. Go back to each (?) and see if they can now make sense of paragraph by using SMART protocol by reading, self-translating, and troubleshooting.</li> <li>6. Form groups discussion 4-5 students lead by the leader.</li> <li>7. Discuss the tasks based on the passage that they have read.</li> </ol>

	8. Monitor students and giving them assistance.	8. Work actively with their group members and asking teacher's help if necessary.
	9. Ask students to read the tasks individually.	9. Read the tasks based on teacher's instruction individually.
Post-Teaching	1. Guide students to take the conclusion of lessons that they have learned and do reflection of learning process.	1. Respond the teacher's questions.
	2. Give reinforcement for students by giving them home tasks.	2. Listen to teacher's direction to do the next task well.

### **Advantages and Disadvantages of SMART Strategy**

Buehl (2001) shows that SMART offers a number of advantages as a teaching strategy: *Firstly*, Students are provided with a system that helps them actively monitor their reading success. *Secondly*, students learn to verbalize what they do and do not understand in a reading. *Thirdly*, students are encouraged not to be satisfied until an entire reading makes sense, and they are given specific steps to try to clear up trouble spots. *Lastly*, students become involved in putting the material into their own words thus helping them to remember as well as understand it. This strategy is adaptable to most subject areas and is appropriate for elementary through high school age students. It is especially effective in cooperative group or tutorial settings.

However, some limitations can also be addressed to SMART strategy. *First*, SMART strategy represents only one strategy which covers several activities for reading comprehension. *Second*, it can be difficult for beginning teacher, take more time than other instructional model, and some students are not active and there are many activities, *Finally*, although SMART strategy is relatively simple, it takes much time for students especially those who are low achievers to be proficient in using their reading tasks.

### **METHOD**

The research applies a collaborative classroom action research design in which the researcher and the collaborative teacher work

together in preparing a suitable procedure of SMART strategy, designing the lesson plan, determining the criteria of success, implementing the action, observing, and doing reflection. The subjects of this research were 35 ninth year students of one Islamic Junior High School in Nganjuk, East Java - Indonesia in the academic year of 2014/ 2015. This research was conducted in 2 Cycles, each of which comprises four meetings.

The data of this research were obtained through (1) observation sheet, designed to obtain information about teacher's and students' activities and performance during the implementation of SMART strategy, (2) field notes, arranged to note the data beyond the coverage of the observation sheet, and (3) test, devised to identify whether the students make progress in reading comprehension.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The research shows that the implementation of SMART strategy in the teaching-learning of reading comprehension can improve the students' comprehension skill. It can be identified that after the implementation of the action, there was an improvement on the number of students who obtained the gain at least 10 in first Cycle was 30 students out of 35 students (85.71%). It had not fulfilled the criteria of success yet. In cycle 2, the students who got the gain at least 10 were all of 35 students (100%). It had fulfilled the criteria of success in term of the score improvement. Moreover, the finding indicated that SMART strategy was successful to enhance students' motivation to be actively involved in the instructional process. The improvement on the students' participation was 75% in Cycle 1 and 87% in Cycle 2.

Based on findings of the study, it indicates that the appropriate procedure of SMART strategy gives significant contribution both in improving the students' score in reading comprehension and improving students' participation during the instructional process. The implementation of the strategy for teaching reading comprehension consists of three phases namely pre-reading, whilst-reading and post-reading. Based on the findings presented above, it is recognized that in implementing SMART strategy for teaching reading, the teacher is required to apply the appropriate model to gain better result in the teaching and learning process. Particular strategies are needed in each stage of reading process including pre-reading stage, whilst-reading stage, and post-reading stage.

### ***Pre-reading Stage***

In Pre-reading activity could be categorized as activating the students' background knowledge. According to Grabe in Richards and Renandya (2002) activating schemata supports comprehension by calling up stable background knowledge representations that supports and interpret the text knowledge. Wainwright (2007) adds that by activating background knowledge and experience the students could easily understand the materials, because the broader this is, the more likely the students are to be able to tackle materials of greater difficulty drawn from a wider range of subject areas. Breadth of scope breeds more breadth as well as greater depth of understanding. In short, eliciting the students' prior knowledge in advance will help them to comprehend the text easily.

The researcher showed the students the topic to be discussed by using some pictures and real objects, as stated by Heaton (1990) picture provides students with ideas for such tasks, enabling them full attention to using the written language, Harmer (2004) enforces that pictures can enhance the text, giving readers (or students) an extra visual dimension to what they are reading, they have power to engage students. Then the researcher gave some questions about the topics and a model of SMART strategy to make them understand how to apply it.

At last, the researcher guides the students to form in group and pointing a student as a leader. These ways could facilitate the students to focus their attention on understanding the content of the text. In line with this, Brown (2007) group work has at least 4 advantages, namely (1) generates interactive language, (2) offers an embracing effective climate, (3) promotes learner responsibility and autonomy, and (4) it is a step toward individualizing instruction.

### ***Whilst-reading Stage***

In whilst-reading activity, the researcher did some steps, they are (1) Giving a text for each group (worksheet), (2) Guiding the students in reading fast and silently, according to Nation (2009) increasing silent expeditious reading speed can be done by skimming and scanning. In skimming the reader goes through a text quickly, not noting every word but trying to get the main idea of what the text is about. Whereas scanning involves searching for a particular piece of

information in a text, (3) leading them to place a check mark (✓) next to each paragraph, sentence, and word that they understand and place a question mark (?) next to each paragraph, sentence, and word that they do not understand, in line with this Alderson (2001) argues that readers were thinking when they used a particular symbol in the text. Such techniques would allow detailed exploration of processing problems associated with particular features of text and the strategies that readers use to overcome such problems, (4) leading the students to discuss how to paraphrase each paragraph what they read in group, in accordance with Gardner (2005) states that a paraphrase is a complete restatement, including all of the writer's main ideas and key supporting details that can help to understand the content of a source, demonstrate understanding and establish the ideas, (5) leading the students to go back to each question mark (?) and see if they can now make sense of paragraph by using SMART protocol, It includes: read, self-translate, and trouble-shoot, according Harmer (2004) troubleshooting is also needed by teacher when he or she monitors groups during a group work activity, sees how well they are doing and deciding whether or not to go over and intervene, but teacher is also keeping his or her eyes open for problems which he or she can resolve either on the spot or in future, (6) guiding students to discuss how to do the tasks based on the passage that they have read, (7) monitoring the students' activities and giving them assistance, (8) leading students to read the tasks individually. Lewis in Richard and Renandya (2002) emphasizes that the task is the most specific type of small group activity in the language class, it can have a variety of goals, which students select depending on their level and their interest.

To comprehend the reading materials, the teacher gave the students some questions dealing with the text in group. This activity aimed to measure the students' comprehension on the text they had read. The teacher monitored this activity by checking their works to ensure that they could follow the instruction. Then, the teacher asked the volunteers of the groups to answer the questions and give the responses. This condition was shown by the percentage of the students' involvement in third meeting of Cycle 1 as much as 75% students to 87% students in third meeting of Cycle 2 who were actively involved.

### ***Post-reading Stage***

Post-reading activity was the last phase of the procedure, this activity was aimed to guide students to take the conclusion of lessons that they have learned and do reflection of learning process. The teacher helped the students who got difficulty in applying SMART strategy by leading them with some questions. Thus, by conducting this activity the teacher could make an evaluation and a reinforcement of the learning process. This activity belongs to reflective teaching, according to Richards (2002) describes that reflective teaching is an approach to teaching which is based on a belief that teachers can improve their understanding of teaching and the quality of their own teaching by reflecting critically on their teaching experiences and develop the skills of considering the teaching process thoughtfully, analytically, and objectively as a way of improving classroom practices.

The use of SMART on reading comprehension has been observed by many researchers, some of them are the followings. Arends (2002) examined the effect of the Self-Monitoring Approach to Reading and Thinking technique for his peers. The analysis of the collected data revealed that the students' reading comprehension improved. The finding indicated that the techniques resulted in significant pre-post student gains on a cloze test. In sum, the SMART technique has proven to be effective not only in improving students' reading comprehension, but also in enhancing students' involvement in the teaching and learning process.

Another study by Susilawaty (2010) used SMART technique to improve the students' reading comprehension in expository text, the findings of this study indicated that the SMART technique was successful in improving both the students' involvement in reading activities and the reading comprehension ability of the students in comprehending English text.

In line with the previous study, this research showed the students' improvement on reading comprehension through SMART Strategy. But the improvement was in difference result and its way. This study used the criteria of success based the increasing of the students' gain score at least 10 points as much as 100% students. The percentage of students' gain score achieved 100% or all of students (35 people) got at least 10 points of gain score after implementing SMART Strategy. It means SMART Strategy can improve students' reading

comprehension. The students' mean score also showed a progress from 36.09 in preliminary and became 71.05 in Cycle 2.

The use of SMART Strategy in reading comprehension also is able to make the students active and motivated in the teaching and learning process. The data in Cycle 2 showed that as much as 65.38% students participated actively in meeting 1, 73.07% students got involved actively in meeting 2, and 88.46% students got involved actively in the activities in meeting 3.

In short, SMART Strategy of this study cannot only improve the students' reading comprehension achievement but also students' participation more active in the teaching and learning process.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

SMART strategy is a teaching strategy that can help our students to develop the tactical ways to comprehend reading texts with the use of the check mark and question mark system to recognize what is understood and not understood in a passage. Therefore, teachers should train the students to use this strategy before using it in their reading tasks. Besides, teachers should also provide the students with much guidance until they are proficient in using it independently.

Based on the findings above, some suggestions for English teachers and future researchers are made as follows: for the English teachers who have similar problem, it is suggested that they implement SMART strategy as one of the alternatives for improving students' reading comprehension. For the future researchers, it is suggested that they conduct the same research in other level of study with different subjects, setting, and other text types to see whether SMART strategy is also applicable and effective to improve the students' reading comprehension.

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