STRATEGIES IN TEACHING ENGLISH READING TO VISUALLY-IMPAIRED STUDENT

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ABSTRACT

Reading is really challenging for visually-impaired students, compared to other skills. The visually-impaired students learn reading skill in a different manner from the majority of students, such as they use Braille book and auditory media due to their inabilities to accommodate the visual teaching media. The visually-impaired students are required to be taught by means of specific strategies. Accordingly, it is of urgency to study further deeper how reading skill is taught in SMA-LB Negeri Pembina Lawang. The specific purposes of this study were describing the strategies used by English teacher, describing the problem faced by English teacher, and explaining how the English teacher solved the problem in teaching reading to the visually impaired student. The qualitative research design was employed in this study. The instruments used were observation checklist, field notes, and interview guide. It is found that there were six strategies used by English teacher in teaching reading to the visually impaired student, namely: (1) identifying the purpose of a text, (2) skimming the text for main ideas, (3) scanning the text for specific information, (4) analyzing the vocabulary, and two other strategies shown by the use of media suchlike (5) e-text strategy and (6) auditory strategy. There were five problems along with the ways to overcome the problems: (1) English teacher could not use game-based strategy; (2) the English teacher had difficulty to introduce new vocabulary, but then the English teacher explained it clearly in other ways; (3) the English teacher could not use interactive teaching strategy because the visually impaired student was only one; (4) the English teacher had problem in time management, but then the English teacher gave additional time to teach visually impaired student; and (5) the English teacher had problems in implementing e-text strategy to the visually impaired student because the student had difficulty in understanding the dialect of native speaker (the voice of computer), but the English teacher let the visually impaired student get accustomed to that native like voice.

Key Words: Teaching Reading, Teaching Reading Strategies, Visually-Impaired Student

INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, English learning is intended to be one of the compulsory subjects from junior high school, heading to senior high school and lastly be up to the universities. In learning English, there are four main skills, namely speaking, writing, listening and reading. In this sense, the writers principally discussed reading skill since it can essentially cover the three other skills due to its continual existence when students are learning writing, speaking, and listening.

English is not only taught for the majority of normal students, but also for students with any physical disorder. Article
5 of Regulations no. 20 of 2003 on National Education System, verse 1 enlightens that every citizen of this Country has equal right to access and obtain a good education. The aforementioned statement indicates that every citizen deserves to be treated equally to acquire the reasonable education quality for both, those who have physical disorder and those who do not. Blindness or visual impairment constitutes an inability to read even the largest letter on a vision chart from at least a distance of 3 meters (converted to 10 feet) [1].

Visually-impaired students commonly have faced difficulties in learning English. Students attached by special needs need greater help from their teacher and the surrounding environment to improve their English skills, principally reading skill. Visually-impaired students learn reading skill in a different manner from the majority of students, such as they use Braille book due to their inabilities to accommodate some visual teaching media. English teachers are required to know how to use the appropriate strategies in teaching reading to visually-impaired students. Hence, they are required to be creative and to have a good preparation in teaching reading to visually-impaired students in the classroom.

It is of urgency to explain that visually-impaired students are required to be taught by means of different strategies which are totally different from the strategies in teaching reading the majority of students. Furthermore, in real life, the different strategies in teaching the autistic students are regularly implemented in SLB. Meanwhile, SLB itself is a special school which is recommended and intended to students with various kinds of physical disorders, and one of which is visual impairment. In addition, SLB is often pointed out for several academic observations which are particularly conducted by National Government of Indonesia and other countries. Moreover, in accordance with the aforementioned explanation, the writers were interested in investigating teaching and learning in SMA-LB Negeri Pembina Lawang due to the lack of strategies accommodated by the English teacher in teaching reading to the students with physical disorders, especially those who are visually-impaired. Reading is indeed challenging for visually-impaired students, compared to other skills.

This current study was purposed to describe the strategies used by the English teacher in teaching reading to the visually-impaired student at SMA-LB Lawang, to describe the problems faced by the English teacher, and to explain how the English teacher solved the problems in teaching reading to the visually-impaired student.

Teaching reading is departing from a concept of reading as the implementation of a series of isolated skills, namely:
identifying words, finding main ideas, identifying cause and effect relationships, comparing and contrasting, as well as sequencing. Reading English text is an important part for many students who want to be able to read English texts either for their careers, for study purposes, or simply for pleasure. Reading has contributed positive effects on students’ vocabulary mastery, on both their spelling and writing [2] and has been offered in several strategies of teaching [3] [4].

There are to be specific three teaching reading strategies for visually impaired student which are adopted from Special Education Technology British Columbia; each of it can be implemented in teaching reading to the visually impaired students; those are: 1) Paper Strategies (by means of regular print; using handheld magnification with regular text; amplification of small amounts of text, pictures, diagrams, charts on photocopier; making use of large print version of the text, by the use of stand-alone video magnification; by the use of video magnification with computer integration; and by means of paper copies in braille); 2) E-text Strategies (making use of e-text with no enhancements; modifying appearance of text and/or background; magnifying text and/or computer screen; making use of e-text with tracking support; using e-text with auditory support; and designing e-text with refreshable braille); and 3) Auditory Strategies (by means of a live reader; using auditory books on cd; and making books in digital audio format) [5].

Visually-Impaired Students

Visually-impaired students are the persons who suffer from vision to properly function in education without the use of aiding materials, particular training or other assistances in particular. They could see with the acuity of 20/70 (they see from 20 feet whereas normal people from 70 feet). Visual Impairment, especially covering blindness or visual impairment, is an inability to read even the largest letter on a vision chart at a distance of 3 meters (converted 10 feet) [6]. It may be said that visual impairment is the functional restriction of the eye or eyes or the vision system [7]. Visually impaired students have shown that their eyes cannot be used at normal level; they suffer from reduction of vision due to age, contact lenses, medicine, or surgery. The World Health Organization (WHO) in 2013 has issued the following classification of visual impairment: 1) Mild Vision Loss or Near – Normal Vision: 20/30 to 20/60; 2) Moderate Visual Impairment: 20/70 to 20/160; 3) Severe Visual Impairment: 20/200 to 20/400; 4) Profound Visual Impairment: 20/500 to 20/1000; 5) Near-Total Visual Impairment: less than
20/1000; and 6) Total Visual Impairment: no light perception at all.

In this case, the student under investigation is a totally blind person. The visually impaired student cannot see at all. Hence, the English teacher should use appropriate strategies in teaching reading to the student. She was born normally and because of something she suffers from visual impairment.

**METHODOLOGY**

The current status of phenomena in this study was teaching strategies used in teaching reading to visually-impaired student. The writers described the strategies used by the English teacher, problems faced by the English teacher along with the solutions. Therefore, the writers used descriptive research design since it dealt with the data in the form of words. The research subject in this current study was the one and only English teacher of SMALB Negeri Pembina Lawang.

In collecting the data, the instruments that were used were observation checklist, field-notes, and interview guide. The writers observed the natural setting of teaching strategies used by the English teacher in teaching reading without interacting directly in the teaching and learning process. At this point, the writers sat at the back seat while taking some field notes and recording the activities in order to gain the necessary data.

The writer conducted three-time observations, covering the true-life situation of the school and the true-life situations of the teaching and learning process (the material used, and the teaching strategies used in classroom activity).

The interview was conducted after three-time observations with the aim of collecting and verifying the data collected from the observation. The writers analyzed the data based on the research subject’s answers. The data that had been collected were analyzed to know the strategies used by the English teacher in SMALB Negeri Pembina Lawang. The data were then classified in the form of words based on the purposes of the study.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

**Strategies in Teaching Reading to the Visually-Impaired Student**

The data were collected from the English teacher which contained the strategies in teaching reading to visually-impaired student. Based on the data analysis, there were in total six strategies in teaching reading to visually-impaired student from several different kinds of strategies of teaching reading. The findings are presented as follows.
A. Identifying the Purpose of Reading

One of the strategies in teaching reading used by the English teacher is identifying the purpose of reading. Identifying the purpose of reading facilitates the student’s understanding regarding the kind of text, the objective of reading, what the student read. This strategy provides huge assistance to both the English teacher and the visually impaired student. The purpose of this strategy is to get an overall idea of the text, to dig up the information of the text, and to become familiar with the style of a new article.

The English teacher used this strategy in the beginning of the teaching and learning process in order to give brief explanation about the purpose of reading. The English teacher opened the lesson and introduced the biography of KH Dewantara text. In this observation, the English teacher introduced KH Dewantara biography text to the visually impaired student. The English teacher assigned the student to make predictions of the content of the whole text from the title.

The writers gave the research subject a question to confirm the data from the observation, as follows:

“Teaching strategy depends on what the skills that are taught .. ya ya ya ... I usually use previewing or identifying the text, the student will identify the kinds of the text from the title at the first. Yes then, the reading skill in the class is always intensive reading.” (Q3, L29)

B. Skimming the Text for Main Ideas

In this strategy, the English teacher directed the visually impaired student to skim the text by asking the student for about more or less thirty seconds to look at a few pages. The English teacher directed by asking the student to read quickly by setting the application in the computer to skim the text. The English teacher asked the visually impaired student to find out the main idea of biography text, find out supporting ideas, and deliver the message of the text.

In the interview section, the English teacher also used skimming in teaching reading to the visually impaired student, such as:

“Skimming and scanning are also applied in teaching reading. Skimming is used to find out the main idea in the text and may be message of the text.” (Q3, L32)

C. Scanning the Text for Specific Information

Scanning or quickly searching the several parts in the text is one of the strategies that the English teacher used in the teaching reading to the visually impaired student. The English teacher asked the student to search uncommon vocabulary or
any specific information in the text. The writer asked the English teacher related to the use of the scanning strategy. The English teacher said,

“Scanning is for searching specific information or the uncommon vocabulary to be analyzed.” (Q3, L34)

D. Analyzing Vocabulary

The English teacher used the analyzing vocabulary strategy by analyzing the prefixes, suffixes, grammatical context, and semantic context of the text. After scanning the information to search for the specific information, the English teacher analyzed them with this strategy. The English teacher said that the reading strategies were related one and another.

E. E-Text Strategies

The English teacher used the e-text strategies in teaching reading to the visually impaired student because the student could not read by using braille because the visually impaired student has suffered from visual impairment since she was in high school, hence she did not learn braille. In the globalization era, both the student and the English teacher have to be aware of technology, so that is why the electronic text gives greater helps to the visually impaired teacher and student. The used e-text is e-text with auditory support; the computer voice will read e-text to the visually impaired student. This requires a special program with text to speech features. The English teacher confirmed the data from the observation, as follows:

“The implementation of teaching strategies in teaching reading to the visually impaired student is by using the auditory application in computers. The application to help the visually impaired student uses computer voice program to read a text. So, the visually impaired student listens to electronic text in reading a text. The strategies are called as e-text strategy and auditory strategy. E-text strategy is by accommodating the application inside the computer and the same as auditory strategy. The visually impaired student was not blind since she was born, she was blind since graduating from junior high school. Thus, she cannot read by using Braille because the sense of touch of hers is less sensitive and it will take more time to teach reading by using braille for her from the beginning. So, the solution is applying text in the digital form, the student used application to read a text; e-text and auditory-based.” (Q4, L40)

F. Auditory Strategies

In this strategy, the English teacher provided books in digital audio formats. They were recordings of human voices, reading books or computer voices; both
voices are spoken by native speakers. It is played in the computer and sometimes in digital audio player such as DVD.

To sum up, during the observation and interview, there were six strategies in teaching reading to the visually impaired student. The English teacher used four strategies in teaching reading to the visually impaired student such as: identifying the purpose of reading, skimming the text for main ideas, scanning the text for specific information, and analyzing vocabulary. The English teacher used two other strategies shown by the used media: e-text and auditory strategies.

**The English Teacher’s Problems and Solutions**

The English teacher faced several problems in teaching reading to the visually impaired student. In the teaching reading to the visually impaired student, it is different from the majority student because teaching reading is related to the visual ability of the student. The English teacher had difficulty to introduce the new vocabularies to the visually impaired student. The English teacher had to spell the uncommon vocabulary, pronounced it well in order to make the visually impaired student understand the uncommon vocabulary. Understanding the right word by looking at the word would be so much easier, but the student could not see, it took time. The English teacher stated the problem related to the difficulties in introducing the uncommon vocabulary:

“The problems totally come from the inability of the visual sense of the student; she has limitations in physical disabilities particularly in visual disabilities. While she was reading, she would take a long time. For the cognitive aspects, she has no problem at all. The second is a text with the difficult or uncommon vocabulary. To know the right word, looking at the word will be so much easier, but the student cannot see, it takes time. For instance, she did not know the word “Garden” g.a.r.d.e.n, if she looked at the text she automatically imagines the word. For the use of these applications, the student only listened to "garden" and the spelling could not be understood, I had to help her to spell it and make her understand what the word is about, operating the application to spell that word, and moving the cursor ahead to the word "garden" before then it was pronounced and it required more times. Her ability in operating the technology for basic user has been good enough, so I taught her using an integrated approach. I taught her the way how to use Microsoft Word, the way was originally reading how to move the cursor to spell per-word, copy and paste a word, a character, a paragraph, it all went along. The point is learning by doing.” (Q5, L51)
Another problem was the English teacher could not use several strategies, such as interactive teaching reading strategy because the student of that class was only one. The English teacher could not use game-based reading strategy in teaching reading to the visually-impaired student either. Hence, the English teacher only used six strategies which were appropriate to the visually impaired student. The English teacher also had problem in the time management. Time management was solved by having extra time to the visually impaired student since the student of that class was only one.

In the auditory and e-text strategy, the computer would read the text by producing voice that was spoken by a native speaker. The visually impaired student had difficulty in understanding the dialect of native speaker at the first time. Dialect of the native speaker which was spoken by the human voice reading of the computer was solved by letting the visually impaired student get accustomed to the voice of native speaker, so that the progress of the visually impaired student would increase automatically.

Based on the teaching strategies in teaching reading, the writers have found out that there were four strategies in teaching reading, as stated in [3] [4]; (1) identifying the purpose of the text, (2) skimming the text for main ideas, (3) scanning the text for main specific information, (4) analyzing vocabulary, and two other strategies according to [5]: (5) using E-text strategy, and (6) auditory strategy. Not all strategies proposed by theories are appropriate to teach reading to the visually impaired student due to some critical challenges mentioned above.

The writers found a unique finding while analyzing the data. The research subject of this study was the English teacher with visual impairment. Hence, it was not only dealing with the student with visual impairment, but also the English teacher with visual impairment. The English teacher was partially blind; but the student was totally blind. The English teacher graduated from State University in Surabaya and attended the English language education department. The English teacher was holding a master degree in the field of educational technology. In this case, the writers found that the English teacher acted normally and experienced the equal learning process as the normal people, eventhough the English teacher had visual impairment. To close, the English teacher could use six teaching strategies and media as properly as the normal teacher.

**CONCLUSION**

Based on the result of analysis the data, the writers found that the English teacher used six strategies. One of which
was identifying the purpose of reading. The English teacher asked the visually impaired student to predict the content of the biography text from the title. Second, in the skimming the text for main ideas, the English teacher asked the student to skim the text to find out the main ideas, supporting details, and the message of the biography text. In scanning the text for specific information, as the third strategy, the English teacher asked the student to scan the specific information like the name of the character in a text and so forth. Analyzing the vocabulary was also useful for the English teacher; the English teacher asked the student to pay closer attention to some uncommon vocabularies of the text. In teaching reading to the visually impaired student, the English teacher used e-text strategy and auditory strategy in helping the visually impaired student read the text. It was in form of audio-book, mp3, live reader, or human voices reading books or computer voice; those voices are spoken by native speakers.

There are five problems along with the ways to overcome the problems: the English teacher could not use game-based strategy; the English teacher had difficulty to introduce new vocabulary but then the English teacher explained it clearly in other ways; the English teacher could not use interactive teaching strategy because the visually impaired student was only one; the English teacher had problem in time management, but then the English teacher gave additional time to teach the visually impaired student; the English teacher got problem in implementing e-text strategy to the visually impaired student because she had difficulty in understanding the dialect of native speaker (the voice of computer), but the English teacher let the visually impaired student to get accustomed to that voice. Finally, not all strategies proposed by theories are suitable to teach reading to the visually impaired student; some critical challenges seek for teachers’ creativity and determination.

REFERENCES


