

# IMPROVING THE TENTH GRADE STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION ACHIEVEMENT THROUGH SMALL GROUP WORKING TECHNIQUE AT SMAN 1 SRONO

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***Abstract.** This article is intended to describe the research result on the use of implementing Small Group Working Technique in improving tenth grade students' reading comprehension achievement. The research problem was the students' difficulties in comprehending English text and poor of vocabularies. To solve this problem, implementing Small Group Working Technique was used to improve students' active participation and their reading comprehension achievement. The research design was classroom action research and the primary data were collected by using reading comprehension test and observation. The result of the research showed that Small Group Working Technique could improve the students' active participation and their reading comprehension.*

***Key Words :** Small Group Working Technique, Reading Comprehension, Active Participation*

## INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, English is formally taught as a foreign language. English has been widely taught in Indonesia as a local content at elementary schools and has become the compulsory subject at junior and senior high schools. Reading is the most emphasized in English teaching and learning process. Newnue (2010:3) states that reading is an activity to get information, increasing perception through written text and also interpreting and analyzing text. Without solid reading second language readers cannot perform at levels they must succeed in reading first.

The objective of teaching reading skill in the classroom is to enable the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students to be interested in reading texts. It is very important to teach the students of EFL to read in order to understand and comprehend the reading material.

Through reading, students are expected to be able to comprehend the materials given. Further, Nuwnue (2010:3) argues that reading comprehension is not only transferring the symbol printed from page to the brain but the readers have to comprehend the content of the text. Comprehension in reading becomes important

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because it makes the students have meaningful information in their reading. In other words, their reading is not useless. It is a process of using one's existing knowledge to interpret text in order to construct meaning.

The result of the preliminary study indicated that the students had problems in comprehending the text because they are poor in their vocabulary, they feel bored while reading text, and they do not get the information from the reading text. Moreover, monotonous classroom organization that focused on assigning the students to do individual work all the time might also contribute a breakdown in achieving the objective of teaching reading. The students often did not listen to the teacher's explanation about the lesson, but they just look at the reading text without doing anything. The way to solve the problems above is the teacher should have efficient techniques of teaching reading. In this research, Small Group Working Technique aimed to increase the teaching learning process quality and the students' reading comprehension achievement. The research proved that Small Group Working Technique is effective in facilitating students' comprehension skill in reading (Mikulecky, 2008 : 4). Small Group Working Technique has become increasingly applied in language teaching since it is seen to have many advantages. In groups, students tend to participate more equally and they are also able to experiment and use the language than they are in whole-class arrangement. Jones (2011:4) states that Small Group Working Technique can be helpful for the students in teaching learning process because it can provide some benefits. In additions, Bukart (2004 : 3) claims that the major benefit of Small Group Working Technique is to improve students' knowledge by sharing with other group member and make the students' learning process more fun. Small Group Working transforms the class into supportive learning teams; the group keeps students energized, motivated and provides support to complete complex tasks. Atherton (2010:4) says that Small Group Working also helps students practice essential social, problem solving and communication skills needed for success in the workplace. In addition, groups serve as forums where students can personalize their learning experiences and identify and correct misconceptions and gaps in understanding. Planning and organization are necessary for groups to be productive learning mechanisms.

According to Snow (2002:21), Small Group Working Technique is one of the techniques in teaching learning process in which students are divided into several groups. Each group consists of four or five students, and they work together to solve a problem or a certain assignment. In brief, it can be inferred that the activity done in Small Group Working Technique is either to discuss ideas, to solve problems, or to complete the assignment collaboratively or cooperatively either in the laboratory or in the classroom.

According to Paris (2005:194), there are several advantages of Small Group Working Technique. First the result of the discussion is better than the individual work because in small group working, the students can share each other. Second, the student will be more motivated because they get new materials that they have never seen before. Third, the students are free to express their opinion and ideas as the leader or the member of a group. Fourth, all the members in a group will be involved in making a final result of the discussion. In addition, Dillon (1994:105-9) affirms that there are some reasons of using discussion. The reasons are: one, the individual and the group's experience are enhanced. Two, the discussion process is satisfying. Further, Paris (2005:184) points out that Small Group Working Technique is beneficial, because it will increase the motivation and responsibility of the group's members, all members on each group will be able to find the job's weaknesses and try to make problem solving, and the activity involves all students in the classroom.

Knowing Small Group Working Technique has positive advantages, however, there are some disadvantages of Small Group Working Technique. Horowitz (2009:5) points out that Small Group Working Technique is time consuming, Small Group Working Technique is involving few clever students only, and success depends on the leader. In additions, Dillon (1994:105-9) also argues that the disadvantages of Small Group Working Technique are time consuming, unpredictable in process, and uncertain of outcome as much as unsure of success. To minimize the disadvantages of the method the good classroom management is needed.

In practice, there are some bases of Small Group Working Technique that have to be considered, such as: certain purposes, capability of the students, and the school facilities. According to Horowitz (2009:5-6), there are nine principles that Small Group Working Technique can be placed in the level of good. The first consideration is that the

students see the goal, plan, and problems clearly. The second is all the members of group give their contribution. It means that all members has to be active participate in the group's activities. The third is that each individual is responsible to the group. This statement closely refers to the word "tolerance" among the group members. The fourth is that students participate effectively and cooperatively with others. The fifth is that democratic procedures in used in planning, finishing, and making decision. In this step, all members in group must be equal in giving or sharing opinions or ideas in the group activities. The sixth is that the leader can make a good atmosphere in the process of discussion. The seventh is that the result can be used to evaluate the progress of each group, in the aspect of social, leadership, and activities. The eighth is that the constructive changing of students' behavior. The last is that every member should feel satisfied and safe in class. The final decision is made from the members' agreement. So every member will take part in the activities.

Selection of the groups' members is one important step in doing Small Group Working technique. The consideration that must be followed is that each group should consist of the highest, average, and the lower students' level of English achievement. Horowitz (2009:4) states that the members of the group will be better if they are composed by gender, age, and ability, so as to be cohesive and successful. This research applies Small Group Working Technique. It means that the students will be grouped in four to five in each group. Further, Horowitz (2009:4) says that the reason of composing Small Group Working Technique is that small group's members are usually more effective than a group of large members.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This research was intended to give actions to improve the tenth grade students' reading comprehension achievement by Small Group Working Technique. That is why the research design chosen is Classroom Action Research. According to McNiff, Whitehead, Lomax, (2003 : 4) Classroom Action Research is the process through which teachers collaborate in evaluating their practice jointly; raise awareness of their personal theory; articulate a shared conception of values; try out new strategies to render the values expressed in their practice more consistent with the educational values they espouse; record their work in a form which is readily available to and

understandable by other teachers; and thus develop a shared theory of teaching by researching practice. This research was conducted collaboratively between the researcher and the English teacher of the tenth grade students. The collaboration was focused on identifying problem, implementing the action, and doing the reflection and evaluation on the implementation of the action. In this research, the researcher acted as the practitioner who implemented the proposed strategy by referring to the activities done in class. The action was conducted in two meetings in which each meeting had different focus. The first meeting was focused on the discussion of the reading text. The teacher explained kind of text, the word meanings, pronoun referents and supporting details discussion of reading texts and asked the students to answer the questions on worksheet given. Then the researcher asked every group to present their results. The second meeting was focused on assessment of reading comprehension and doing the task in group. In general, the research was done in six stages, they were: explaining the assignment to the students by finding and analyzing the problems, explaining the goal of group working, dividing the students into some groups, asking the members of each group to choose their leader, helping the students explaining the instruction, receiving the result of the students' work. In this stage, the researcher observed the teaching and learning and the assessment process was focused on the activities done by the teacher and the students.

Kinds of the data collected in this research were both qualitative and quantitative. Reading comprehension test and observation were used to get the quantitative data, where as the qualitative data were collected by using interview and documentation. The test was done in each cycle after giving the action to the students. It was used to measure the students' reading comprehension achievement by Small Group Working Technique.

The observation was done by the researcher using checklist form as the observation guide. Here were the following indicators that were applied to observe the students active participation. They were: the students answer the teacher's oral questions, the students have discussion to share the ideas about the task given and the students work in group cooperatively to do the reading task given. The students was categorized as active students if they fulfill three of the indicators.

Meanwhile, to get the qualitative data of the research, the researcher used interview and documentation. In this classroom action research, interview itself had been conducted with the English teacher to collect the qualitative data covering the curriculum used in the tenth grade, the materials that were used by the teacher to teach reading, and students' problem in reading activity. In this research, the documentations were the names of the students and the students' previous reading comprehension score.

After conducting the observation and getting the data, the researcher analyzed the data to know the improvement of students' participation and reading comprehension achievement. This classroom action research was considered successful if the average of reading test was 75 and at least 75% of the students are active in groups during the teaching and learning process.

The last activity in this classroom action research was reflection, the reflection was done in order to know whether or not the actions had weaknesses or problems, and found the strength of the action. In this stage, the researcher collaborated with the English teacher to do the reflection to reflect the results of observation and reading comprehension test in each meeting of the cycle. The results of reflection in the previous meeting were used as a guide to revise the action for the next meeting.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The researcher implemented the action research in two cycles, each cycle consist of two meetings. The researcher collaboratively worked with the English teacher as the collaborator. While the class session was in progress, the researcher intensively observed the students and their activities. Observation was done during the class session from the beginning to the end. The test was done in the end of the cycles. Test I was done in the end Cycle I, and Test II was done in the end of Cycle II. The research focused on implementation of Small Group Working Technique in improving students' reading comprehension achievement. The discussion held in both cycles specifically concerned with students' activities in finding words meaning, pronoun referent, and states details in the text.

According to the observation result, the students who were active in group only 67.64%, it meant it did not achieve the target of the research. The target was 75% of students active in taking part as group members. It could be concluded that there were

some problems which were faced while implementing the action. The problem appeared were the students were noisy when they were asked to sit with their own groups and after sitting with their own groups some students just kept silent. And the results of the formative test achieved by the students were good. The score was higher than the previous achievement before the action was conducted. The mean score increased from 69.3 to 74.38. But it did not obtain the standard score. The standard score was 75.

After analyzing the data in the evaluation of the results, the researcher together with the English teacher as the collaborator carried the reflection of the results both of the test and the observation. The researcher found that the students' reading achievement was improved. But there was certain weaknesses during implementing the action, there were 13 out of 34 students who could not understand the instruction of the test items and some students did not active while the teaching and learning process. It means there are 38,2% who did not achieve the standard score. In other words, it was necessary to conduct the second cycle because both the learning process and learning achievement had not fulfilled the teaching objective yet.

The results of observation in the second cycle, the students were more cooperative, enjoy the lesson, and they were more active sharing each other in groups. The class ran more effectively and the condition more conducive. More students' could respond the teacher's question and they were already accustomed to the presence of the observer. They also accustomed for doing task in groups. There were 82.35% students were active in groups. And based on the reading test results conducted in Cycle I, the scores of the students' reading comprehension test had increase. The students' mean score was 74.38. It was higher than the mean score according to the teacher explanation in the preliminary study; the score increased 5.08 point, from 69.3 to 74.38. But the average score did not reach the minimum standard of score. For that reason, Cycle II was held and the students achieved 81.08. It meant that the result has already fulfilled the standard score.

Having known about the results of the observation and the reading test in Cycle II, the research found good results. It was found that the students were more actively involved in the teaching and learning process especially in English class. It also could be stated that the students had better improvement in their reading comprehension achievement. Only 4 students who did not achieve the standard score 75. It means only

11.7% of students who were categorized as fair in the test of second cycle. Because the students' scores had achieved the research target, so the action was stopped.

Based on the result of reading test and checklist; it was indicated the first cycle implementation was not applied optimally. It was indicated by students' negative response when the discussion session was held. Most of the students did not participate actively. They kept silent because they felt shy and afraid to make mistakes in the discussion session when the teacher and their group gave some questions related to the text. Besides, the discussion was definitely dominated by some students. As a result, they did not give any positive response in their group and it made the first cycle was not applied optimally.

For that reason, the students' reading comprehension achievement after being given the action by applying small group work was still unsatisfactory yet. It was found that the mean score of the students' reading comprehension mean score was 74.38 or it did not achieve the standard of score 75 set in the school. Since the result in the first cycle was still unsatisfactory yet, the action was continued to the second cycle by revising the teaching technique, the materials, classroom management and strategy teaching reading by applying Small Group Working Technique. It was more applicable and effective to improve the students' reading comprehension achievement. By this way, they gave positive response in discussing the reading text given with their group members. The students asked about the new vocabularies that definitely strange for them to their group members and asked some information stated in the text which was not understood. They did the task given by sharing with their group members.

Moreover, the students' reading comprehension achievement mean score had increased from 74.68 in the first cycle to 81.03 in the second cycle. Here, it had that the average of score already achieved the expected the standard score 75. It meant that the use of small group working in teaching reading could improve the students' reading achievement.

Besides, the second cycle implementation showed different result from the first cycle implementation. In this cycle most of the students gave a positive response in discussing the reading text with their groups and the researcher in the class. All the students in the class asked about the new vocabularies that definitely strange for them



and asked some information stated in the text which was not understood. They could ask, share, and express their ideas freely without feeling under pressure anymore.

From the application of Small Group Working technique in the teaching reading comprehension, it can be concluded that Small Group Working technique could improve the students' reading comprehension achievement and their participation in teaching learning process. This is because the use of Small Group Working technique had contributed to improve the students' interest and motivation to pay attention and to take a part in the teaching learning process, they also could share with their partner in group. It means that Small Group Working is appropriate technique that can be used to improve the students' reading comprehension achievement and their participation in teaching learning process.

In short, based on the result of Cycle I and Cycle II, it could be concluded that the results answered the action hypothesis of this CAR. It showed that Small group Working Technique could improve the tenth grade students' reading comprehension achievement and improve the tenth grade students' active participation in the teaching and learning process of reading.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

Based on the results of the data analysis that has been discussed, it can be concluded that Small Group Working Technique could improve the reading comprehension achievement of the tenth grade students. In the first cycle, there were 21 students who passed the reading test the average score was 74.38. There were 61.76% students who achieve score  $\geq 75$ . However it did not achieve the percentage of success. In the second cycle, the researcher found another increasing amount of the students who passed the reading test. There were 30 students who passed the reading test.

This technique also could improve the students' participation in reading by applying Small Group Working Technique. In the first cycle there were 67.64% students were active in taking part in groups, and in the second cycle there were 82.35% students were active in taking part. Thus, it was clearly seen that Small Group Working Technique could help students improving their reading comprehension achievement.

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