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ABSTRACT

Arabic is the main medium of acquisition and mastery of various fields of knowledge written in Arabic. Thus, students need to be more skilful to understand the Arabic text so that the acquisition of knowledge in their field of study can be improved. However, the practice of teacher-centred teaching and the use of "grammar translation" at the school level has caused many students in the field of Islamic studies in Institutions of Higher Learning in particular, to face difficulties in understanding Arabic reading materials accurately and quickly. This factor has constrained their reading extensively due to the fading of motivation to comprehend the reading texts in Arabic. Studies have proven that the use of effective reading strategies is one of the methods that can help readers understand reading material more accurately and quickly. However, the use of effective reading strategies among Arabic language students and teachers is at a disappointing level. This preliminary study aims to implement the instruction of Arabic text reading skills based on the use of effective reading strategies. This study was conducted through classroom observations, analysis of teaching evaluation reports, and documentary evidence. The effectiveness of the teaching model was obtained from quantitative data through student assessment measurement reports involving 105 students of the Bachelor of Usuluddin, UniSZA. The qualitative data obtained were analyzed descriptively based on selected themes, while quantitative data were analyzed using Excel software. The findings of this study are expected to promote a new model of teaching Arabic, which can produce students who are proficient in Arabic effectively. These findings are also expected to confirm that learning Arabic strategically can improve reading skills which is a pillar of knowledge acquisition as the Malaysia National Education Policy states: "ensure that every Muslim student has the opportunity to learn the field of Islamic studies and Arabic in a quality manner".

Keywords: Reading Strategies, Arabic Reading Skills, Teaching Arabic as a foreign language

INTRODUCTION

The teaching and learning of Arabic and Islamic studies are inseparable. Arabic language is the main medium or tool for the acquisition and mastery of knowledge in the field. Therefore, students of Islamic studies need to be more skilled to understand and comprehend reading in Arabic so that the acquisition of knowledge in their field of study can be improved.

Many students of Islamic Studies face difficulties and problems to master their studies due to not being proficient in reading Arabic materials (Suhaila Zailani et.al, 2012; Ab. Halim, 2007). They are not able and do not know how to apply reading skills and use basic knowledge of Arabic to comprehend Arabic reading material. These factors have caused them to be less interested in reading Arabic materials, whereas, reading skills are important to help them master their field of study (Nooraihan, 2020; Nurazan, 2015; Che Radiah, 2009; Mat Taib, 2006).

In addition, the use of Grammar Translation method in the process of teaching and learning to read Arabic texts does not help students mastering reading skills. These factors have a negative impact on students of Islamic studies to master their field of study in Institutions of Higher Learning (Siti Salwa, 2009; Nasimah, 2006; Ab. Halim & Wan Mohamad, 2006). Training in the use of effective reading strategies should be applied in active, collaborative and cooperative learning strategies (student-centered methods) such as the involvement of students

in reading and discussion in small groups to understand Arabic reading material. This approach makes students more motivated and willing to understand the content of the text more effectively (Mohamad Syukri et al., 2015). Teaching reading skills without the use of specific strategies is like a fisherman who goes to catch fish in the middle of the ocean without using any tools such as fishing rods, hooks or nets. This phenomenon will not bring good results. The process of group discussion is more effective if combined with the use of metacognitive strategies of reading skills. The use of metacognitive strategies when reading becomes a tool to help students understand the text more accurately and quickly. If the use of these strategies is combined with active, collaborative and cooperative learning strategies, students will be able to improve their reading comprehension skills in Arabic.

Considering some of the problems related to the teaching and learning of Arabic, especially reading skills are among the factors that motivate researchers to produce models of teaching strategies for effective reading Arabic texts. This preliminary study is a pilot study to evaluate the effectiveness of the use of effective reading strategies. This study tries to suggest solutions to problems related to Arabic reading skills through the teaching of effective reading methods or strategies.

Reading Strategies

Reading strategy is a branch of Language Learning Strategy (LLS). LLS is one of the topics of discussion among second or foreign language researchers and educators currently. This is because LLS is one of the tools that is considered effective to overcome the problem of weaknesses in teaching and learning languages for non-speakers such as Arabic learned by the Muslim community in Malaysia. LLS is a series of actions performed by students to help them understand, remember and produce activities to manage language learning that cover all types of language skills (Chamot, 1998). The use of LLS that is effective and appropriate to student learning will make learning easier, faster, fun, self-contained, effective and can be modified according to the student's learning situation (Oxford, 1990).

A reading skills strategy is defined as a mental process chosen by the reader to accomplish a reading task in the form of an action, or a series of actions used by the reader to construct meaning during the reading process (Cohen, 1990, Garner 1987). It is a series of actions or activities identified by the reader to help the process of comprehending the text accurately and quickly. Or in other words, it is an action to help the reader's brain build meaning from the reading material. The action or activity is a combination of several forms of action that need to be done by the reader and can be varied and adapted to the content, level of readability and quality of reading material, so that comprehension of the text can be optimized (Macaro & Erler, 2008).

Modern scholars in the field of language teaching and learning for foreign speakers argue that reading activities involve a relatively complex skill process. It involves cognitive aspects that emphasize aspects of recognition, interpretation and perception of printed or written materials (Leslie, 2001). According to Goodman (1971), reading is a psycholinguistic process that starts from the reader observing the words in the text until the formation of meaning based on the observations made.

According to Crawley and Mountain (1995), reading involves metacognitive aspects that lead to thinking, understanding, research, and evaluation. Reading activity is a process performed by the reader to obtain each information to be conveyed by the writer through the medium of words or written language (Tarigan, 2008). Thus, reading is a dynamic and complex process that includes the ability to read quickly, understand, and remember each fact presented as well as make interpretations wisely and critically (Nik Farhan et al, 2010).

The Importance of Arabic Reading Skills

Arabic is the main intermediate language of the Muslim community around the world for the purpose of learning, acquiring and developing various fields of knowledge, especially the field of Islamic studies. Arabic is the language of the Quran and Hadith which is the main source of Islamic studies since the time of the Prophet (S.A.W). The main skill in comprehending the reading material of Islamic studies is the reading skill that is in accordance with the first revelation, which is the reading instruction. Therefore, students and educators of Islamic studies need to equip themselves with effective reading skills to master the field of Islamic studies.

Based on the objectives of learning and teaching Arabic, the application of reading skills is a key language skill that needs to be mastered by students and teachers of Arabic as a foreign language. This is because the skill of reading Arabic texts can make students know, understand, apply, analyze, synthesize and evaluate Islamic studies texts written in Arabic. According to Tu'aymah (1989), reading skills can provide a solid foundation for the construction of language skills that include aspects of spelling, vocabulary acquisition, writing style and grammar mastery. Therefore, reading skills can be considered as a major source of Arabic language acquisition for foreign speakers. Therefore, these skills need to be mastered first compared to other language skills such as listening, speaking and writing. This is because other sources of skills are less available and less widely practiced due to foreign environmental factors. Environmental factors of learning Arabic as a foreign language are less helpful in the acquisition of Arabic language skills (Nik Rahimi, 1998).

Reading activities involve three important elements: reading material, reading process and thinking skills. The process of reading involves comprehension, response and criticism that requires a reader to think actively to enable him to interact with the text. Thus, reading skills are essential to help readers understand the literal and implicit meanings found in the text (Nik Farhan et al., 2010). In certain situations, students who master reading skills can make learning more dynamic and motivated. Mastery of reading skills can produce a practice and habit when reading. On the other hand, poor mastery of such skills can weaken the reader's motivation to read. In institutions of higher learning, reading skills are the most dominant skills in the learning process. Reading skills help students learn independently to achieve success and excellence in their studies. This is because learning in institutions of higher learning requires students' own efforts to master their field of study. Lecturers, on the other hand, need to act as facilitators to help students master their field of study. Therefore, student-centred learning needs to be implemented more optimally in the teaching and learning process, to make students more autonomous in their studies. The use of such teaching and learning approaches can give students the freedom to explore useful knowledge based on their own desires and interests through reading skills (Huba & Freed, 2000).

METHODOLOGY

This action research is qualitatively conducted through classroom observations and Student Assessment Measurement Reports. The effectiveness of the teaching model was obtained from quantitative data from student assessment measurement reports involving 105 students from the Bachelor of Usuluddin, UniSZA. Qualitative data obtained were analyzed descriptively based on themes, while quantitative data were analyzed using Excel software.

Background and Context

This study was conducted at Sultan Zainal Abidin University (UniSZA), a higher education institution in Malaysia. It is a pilot study of the implementation of an Arabic text reading teaching model based on the use of effective reading strategies. This Action Study was carried out during the teaching session of the maharah al-Qiraah wa al-kitabah (Arabic reading and writing skills) course for 14 weeks (two hours per week) in the second session of 2020/21.

The participants

The respondents consisted of 105 undergraduate students from Islamic studies. They are divided into 4 classes. All students have followed the listening and speaking skills course and the Arabic grammar course in the first study session of 2020/2021. Therefore, basically, students have met the requirements to follow and learn Arabic reading and writing courses.

Study Design and Data Collection

This study uses an action research design. Action research is a study in the form of self-reflective inquiry carried out by educational practitioners, teachers or educators as researchers in a social situation (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). This research aims to improve the quality of teaching practice (Darling-Hammond, 2006). It involves the process of reflecting, planning, implementing and observing. In the context of this research, the researcher acted to implement an Arabic reading teaching model based on the use of effective Arabic reading strategies. The model is adapted from the SQR Arabic reading model (Nooraihan, 2020) as shown in Figure 1. In the context of this research, the researcher acted to implement an Arabic reading teaching model based on the use of effective Arabic reading strategies. There are three main strategies in this model namely; survey, question, and read. Each main strategy has several supporting strategies. The survey strategy is supported by skimming and scanning techniques to identify the general discussion topics of the reading text. The schema retrieval technique (schema activation) is used to support the question strategy which aims to facilitate the construction of questions related to the topic of the text. While "Read" is supported by chunking, scanning and writing techniques as shown in Table 1 and Figure 1.

Table 1: Sqr Reading Comprehension Strategy Procedure

Name of strategies	Purpose	Time Estimation
Survey i. Skimming ii. Scanning	make a quick preview of the topic in general to understand the general topic of the text • quick preview of the title and first sentence • Scan for keywords related to the title	• 5 minutes
Question • Shcema retrieval	• Activate past knowledge related to the general topic of the text.	• 5 minutes

<p>Read</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chunk • Language Shcema retrieval • Scanning 	<p>Read in detail to identify the main content and supporting content of each paragraph of the text.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Divide the sentences in the reading text into specific phrases to be easy to understand and remember. • Retrieve background knowledge about the formal, rhetorical, organizational structures of different kinds of texts to guess meaning. • Scan the nouns, verbs and answers to the questions built in the Question step. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20 minutes
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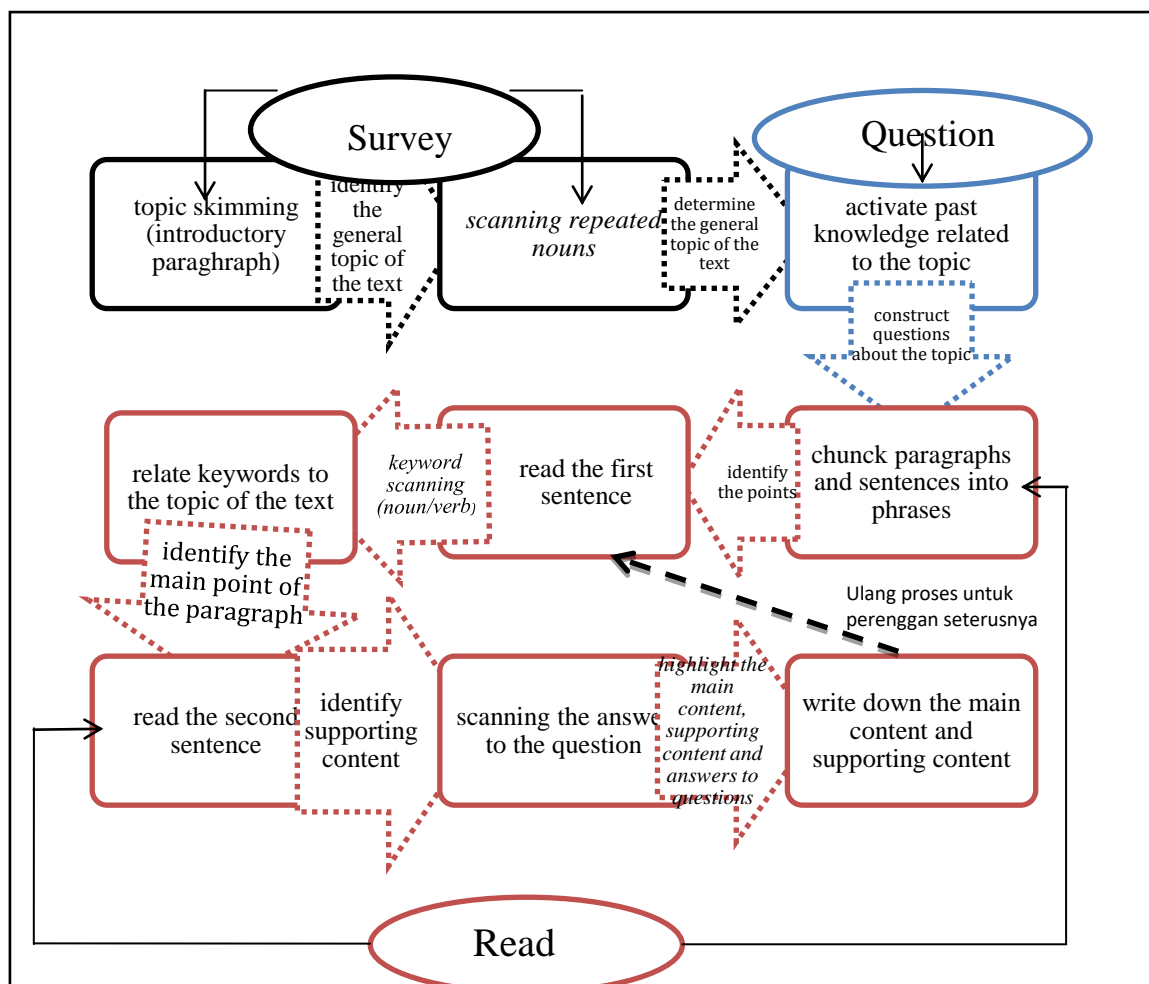


Fig.1: The Sqr Model Of Reading Comprehension Strategies

The model is adapted from the SQR Arabic reading model (Nooraihan, 2020) as shown in Figure 1. This model is used to instruct Arabic reading skills for foreign speakers. In other words, the instructors need to teach how to acquire knowledge or skills first before exploring knowledge in more depth. This new reading model aims to provide guidelines on the steps for understanding short reading texts accurately and quickly. The teaching and learning process of the course is as follows:

- Demonstrate how to use SQR reading comprehension strategies and how to use each strategy and substrategy for each step. This process is carried out for 2 hours during the first week of teaching this course.
- Training in the use of SQR through independent and collaborative reading. This step is followed by a group discussion in class about the main and supportive ideas of the text. The instructor acts as a facilitator to help students formulate the important content for each paragraph. Next, students answer comprehension questions related to the text orally and in writing. The process is implemented throughout the study period of this course so that each student is skilled in using the SQR strategy when reading Arabic texts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Instructor's observation

The summary of the instructor's observations shows that the students are able to understand the text (which contains five or six short paragraphs) as a whole and identify the important content in a short time, which is not more than 30 minutes. If it is done in a group, the understanding time can be shortened even more. In a session of teaching and learning reading skills in class, the instructor distributed different reading texts to each group. For example, four reading texts with different titles are divided into four groups of students to be understood independently and discussed in each group. The instructor asks each group of students to present the findings of the important content of the text to be shared with other groups. The instructor acts as a facilitator who provides comments and corrects understanding during the presentation session. A teaching and learning session that takes place like this makes students seem to have read four texts in two hours. This process also makes students read extensively and makes learning be active. Two-way communication can also be applied indirectly between teachers and students. Repetition of reading text comprehension activities in a strategic way makes students more motivated to understand reading material independently and in groups.

The knowledge and skills of using effective reading strategies have changed the teaching and learning situation of reading skills in the classroom. The one-way teaching and learning atmosphere changes when the instructor focuses on understanding the text independently based on the SPB that has been learned. The instructor asks students to read silently first for five minutes to understand the general topic of the text. During that period of time, students will use a survey strategy. After the time period is over, the instructor will ask students to present their views on the general topic of the survey results. From the understanding of the general topic of the text, the instructor will ask the students to ask any questions they want to know or even what they want to find in the text. The skill of using schema retrieval strategies or schema activation (previous knowledge) will make it easier for students to master this stage which may only take 5-10 minutes. Again, two-way communication takes place between instructor and student. Students give their views, while the instructor evaluates the views presented. Such activities continuously for 14 weeks have trained students to understand and identify the important content of the text independently. Collaborative teaching and learning makes students interact and exchange views between themselves and also between instructors. Therefore, the teaching and learning class of reading skills becomes active.

Student Assessment Measurement Reports

After going through the course teaching process throughout the teaching and learning period, the course evaluation results show that most students have achieved excellent grades. Student Achievement by Grade from the Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) reported that 64% students got A and A-, 15% got B+, 7.6% got B and only 1.6% got B (refer Table 2)-. There is no student got lower than B-. Thus, the result shows that more than half of the students have been able to master reading skills with excellence. Only about 30% of students can master reading skills at a good level. (refer Table 2 (A))

Moreover, students also understand the content of the text more accurately. The percentage of students achieving marks of 50% and above of all course learning outcomes reaching 100% except for the first course learning outcomes (CLO1) as shown in Table 2(B). Only 8% of students did not achieve a score of 50% or above. The factor of not being trained with newly learned reading strategies makes it possible for students not to reach the 50% mark. This is because the assessment for CLO 1 is carried out after five teaching and learning sessions. But for CLO 2, all students can respond to the skill of summarizing the content of the reading text through guided reading and writing activities. While for CLO3, all students can also describe the content and summary of the Arabic reading text through the intensive use of reading skills strategies. Both CLO2 and CLO3 assessed in the last week have been achieved by all students with excellence. This shows that teaching skills through repeated practice has improved students' practical skills. This finding coincides with the malakah theory by Ibnu Khaldun that students should repeat (al-tikrār) and familiarize themselves (al-'ādah) with the content of the lesson as often as possible to master the skills learned.

Table 2 : Continuous Quality Improvement Report For Dwi22902 Maharah Al-Qiraah Wa Al-Kitabah

A) Student Achievement By Grade									
GRADE	NUMBER								
A	34								
A-	33								
B+	16								
B	8								
B-	2								
C+	0								
C	0								
C-	0								
D+	0								
D	0								
F	0								
B) Student Achievement According to Course Learning Outcomes									
						CLO1	CLO2	CLO3	
Number of students (50% and above)		86	93	93					
All students		93	93	93					
Percentage of Number of Students Achieving Marks of 50% and above		92.47312	100	100					
C) Course Learning Outcomes (CLO) description									
CLO1	Demonstrate the ability to apply the strategy of reading comprehension skills in Arabic reading materials								
CLO2	Respond to the skill of summarizing the content of the reading text through guided and intensive reading and writing activities.								
CLO3	Elaborating the content of Arabic reading materials through the use of intensive reading skills strategies.								

CONCLUSION

Teaching, learning and the use of Arabic text reading comprehension strategies is an important aspect that needs to be emphasized by educators, curriculum developers and students of Islamic studies in order to rationalize the knowledge of the field. This preliminary study is one of the efforts to improve the potential of Arabic language reading comprehension skills among Islamic studies students at IPT. Thus, teaching and learning reading skills, especially language learning strategies, is very important for the higher learning students so that they can understand, acquire, master and evaluate the knowledge learned and disseminated for the benefit of mankind and the whole world.

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