

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of Study

Language is a means of communication. Communication takes place not only with two or more speakers, but also between a speaker and a text. There should be a kind of interaction between the learners (reader) and the text which is being read in order to be good readers.

Reading is a necessary skill that any learner needs. Unfortunately, how to teach reading has not been given due care in some schools. In the past, according to the traditional view, reading begins with the child's mastering the names of the letters, mastering the letter-sound relationships, then, learning some easy words in isolation, and, finally, reading simple stories with highly controlled vocabularies (Harp and Brewer, 2004 :17). Researchers and teachers as well complain that most learners are not able to understand what they read.

Reading cannot be separated from comprehension. That is why there appear a lot of problems dealing with reading comprehension. Many English learners find it difficult to understand the English text. Very often, they get stuck because of some problems, such as unfamiliar words, their inability in understanding the context, being reluctant, and so forth.

Reading is not an easy skill to master. It is a complex process that requires specialized skill of the reader (Dechant, 2003: 21). Besides it is also

comprehension process as well as writing. According to Nunan (2001: 33), reading needs identification and also interpretation processes which require the reader's knowledge about the language structure used in the text and his knowledge about a given topic. It is the complexity that makes some students less interested in this kind of activity. They find it difficult to understand what is on the reading passage since they do not know the technique which can help them to read more effectively and efficiently. This phenomenon happens in almost every language class.

Reading comprehension skills separate the "passive" unskilled readers from the "active" readers. Skilled readers do not just read, they interact with the text. Skilled readers, for instance, predict what will happen next in a story using clues presented in text, create questions about the main idea, message, or plot of the text, and monitor understanding of the sequence, context, or characters (Sanders, 2001: 26).

To be able to achieve the purposes of reading comprehension, one should have some basic reading skills as follows; (1) literal skills (getting the central thought and main idea, recalling and recognizing of facts and information, finding answer to specific questions); (2) interpretive skills (drawing conclusion, generalizing, deriving meaning from context); (3) critical skill (determining the writer's purpose); and (4) creative skills (applying information into daily life).

Based on the preliminary observation on the teaching-learning process in MTS Asy'Syafiiyah Karangasem Margasari Tegal, the writer found that

there are some problems that arise in students' reading comprehension. The students still encounter some difficulties in comprehending English texts. In the interview with some students, they said that they got difficulties in identifying the implicit and explicit information of the text. Besides, many students have low motivation in reading class.

The students' lack of understanding on reading lesson is mainly caused by an inappropriate teaching technique used when the teachers attempted to explain reading materials. The teacher only uses one technique namely, conventional technique. In the reading class, the teacher presents a subject in the text book and asks students to read whether silently or loudly, and then students have to answer the questions that follow. Consequently, the reading lesson becomes monotonous and boring, students lack motivation to read, even if they read, they show negative attitudes. As a result, the students are not able to get good scores in their reading achievement.

Permendiknas no. 24, 2006 at seventh article in point b states that the teachers under Badan Penelitiandan Pengembangan Departemen Pendidikan Nasional can develop KTSP curriculum innovatively. It means that the teacher has the right in using method or technique in a teaching process as long as the technique can achieve instructional goals. The teacher has to be able to make an interesting material and to use an interesting technique. One of the ways that may have a significant impact on the teaching reading process is the semantic mapping strategy.

Semantic mapping strategy can be used for, at least, several different instructional purposes. This strategy can assist teachers in planning the instruction by helping them identify the patterns of organization of ideas and the concepts.

A semantic mapping strategy can be useful for introducing the important vocabulary in a selection to be read. It shows students how the terms are interrelated. Teachers can use a semantic mapping to activate and tap student's background knowledge. Also, it can be a helpful reference for students to use in clarifying confusing points as they are reading. Once students are familiar with the nature of the semantic mapping strategy, they can create their own mapping during-reading or post-reading activity.

Steps in the creation of semantic mapping strategy, particularly; the concept and word mapping strategies are: Analyze the concepts and vocabulary in the text. Arrange the words in a map that depicts the interrelationships between the concepts. Add to the diagram the words or concepts that are already understood by the students in order to depict the relationships between what they know and the information in the text.

The semantic mapping strategy or Structured Overview, as it is sometimes called, is a schematic diagram of the major concepts in a portion of text. The researcher of this study uses the semantic mapping strategy in teaching reading at MTS Asy-Syafi'iyah Karangasem Margasari Tegal because it can develop the students' thinking skills and reading comprehension. This strategy can easily be taught and implemented for the students. The

researcher believes that semantic mapping strategy can improve the students' reading comprehension.

B. Statement of the Problem

Based on the background of the study above, the research problems which arise are as follows:

1. Can semantic mapping strategy improve students' reading comprehension?

a) Limitation of the Problem

In this research, the researcher focuses on improving students' reading comprehension using semantic mapping strategy. The reading comprehension is limited only on the literal reading and interpretive reading.

b) The Aim of the Study

The aim of the study is to examine whether the use of semantic mapping strategy can improve the students' reading comprehension. Besides, the research is also designed to study what may happen when semantic mapping strategy is implemented in the classroom practice.

c) Clarification of Key Terms

In order to understand the title, below are the clarifications of terms used in this study:

a. Improve

Hornby (2005: 598) states that “improve” is an action to become or make something better.

b. Reading Comprehension

According to Tampubolon (2003: 6), reading is a manner to build reasoning power. While Hornby (2005: 235) states that comprehension is the power of understanding. Based on that definition, the writer concludes that in reading activity the readers or the students have to understand what the text or the author talks about, so that they can answer the exercise well.

c. Semantic Mapping

Attonanci (in Elivan, 2001: 2) states that semantic mapping is a visual representation of knowledge, a picture of conceptual relationship. According to Sinatra and David (2004: 22) semantic mapping is a graphic arrangement showing the major ideas and relationship in the text among the word meaning.

A semantic mapping is a diagram used to represent words, ideas, tasks, or other items linked to and arranged radially around a central key word or idea. It is used to generate, visualize, structure, and classify ideas, and as an aid in study, organization, problem solving, and decision

making (ConceptDraw.Com). Semantic mapping is a strategy for graphically representing concepts (Pearson, P.D& Johnson, D.D (1998)).

d) The Benefits of the Study

1. For students

- The students' English reading skill increases.
- The students are trained to be capable of reading texts using semantic mapping strategy.
- The students' vocabulary will increase automatically.
- It will give an enjoyable learning situation which can improve the students' learning motivation.

2. For teachers

- a) They can use semantic mapping strategy as an alternative technique in teaching reading.
- b) It stimulates the teacher to find a new approach which is appropriate for teaching reading.
- c) It improves the teachers' capability to conduct teaching learning activity appropriately.

3. For other researchers

Other researchers can use this research as a reference in improving reading comprehension.