

# USING SITUATIONAL PICTURES TO ENHANCE SPEED READING FOR READING COMPREHENSION OF ENGLISH YOUNG LEARNERS

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**Abstract:** This article discusses how the situational pictures help the young learners to increase their reading speed in order to improve the reading comprehension. This research is a classroom action research conducted in two cycles. The data were collected through observation, field notes, interview, documents and tests of speed reading and reading comprehension (pre-test and post-test). The qualitative data were analysed through data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing and verification. The quantitative data were analysed through descriptive statistic, finding the mean score of the tests. The learners were able to achieve improvement from pretest to posttest. The learners' reading speed had increased from 58 to 168 words per minute and the mean of learners' scores at reading comprehension tests had improved from 36.92 (pretest) to 86.15 (posttest). The improvement has been found in the classroom situation as well. Learners boosted their motivation and willingness so they used their time productively to read the texts.

**Keywords:** *situational pictures, speed reading, reading comprehension, classroom action research*

## INTRODUCTION

There are abundant languages in the world. They display certain properties which enable people to express far more than any piece of nonverbal communication could ever do (Crystal, 2005: 4). One that is widely studied is English. English has become a lingua franca which is most widely studied by people around the world. Lingua franca, according to Harmer (2001: 1), means that the language is widely adopted as a means of communication between speakers whose different native languages from each other, and they use it as a second language. There are skills that must be mastered well so that the communication can run smoothly. They are

listening skill, speaking skill, writing skill, and reading skill.

Reading, which aims to comprehension (Linse, 2005: 69), is one of the language skills in form of an activity of thinking and understanding the meaning of a printed word or symbol (Spodek and Saracho (1994) in MacNaughton and Williams (2004: 162). Possessing background knowledge, vocabulary, experience, and other strategies will enable readers to understand a text (Pang, 2003: 6). It is crucial to develop in order to decode information from what is printed. When this skill is well-mastered, readers will be able to deal with more sophisticated texts efficiently: quickly, appropriately, and

skillfully (Ur, 1991: 147). There are several reasons why people read. Sometimes people read for survival, like when they read a warning sign on the road. People also read for learning, especially those who go to school. Reading, on the other hand, is also done for pleasure to get happiness (Wallace, 1998: 6-7). When reading a text, readers are asked to meet the reading skills required, some of them are: (1) to find out the main idea; (2) to identify communicative purpose of the text, and (3) to state implicit and explicit information (Brown, 2004: 188).

Meanwhile, speed reading is a technique of reading that allows readers to visualize the message behind the printed words that can be mastered through a lot of practices (Soedarso, 2005). Since speed reading is very closely related to reading comprehension, it can be said that the more words readers are able to comprehend at one time, the better their understanding and subsequent recall will be because comprehension will increase at the same time as the speed increases (Konstant, 2010). Based on the speed, which can be measured by dividing the numbers of words read in sixty seconds by the time allocated for reading in seconds, Beale and Mullan (2008: 7-10) categorize readers into four groups: (1) Slow readers, who read 100-200 words per minute; (2) Average readers, who read 200-300 words per minute, (3) Above-average readers, who read 300-700 words per minute, and (4) Excellent readers, who are able to read more than 700 words in a minute. For those who are not familiar to speed reading, on the other hand, bad habits often occur when they practise it. Soedarso (2005) argues that the interference factors include: (1) Vocalization or reading by pronouncing aloud each word as it is read; (2) Lip movement, saying each

word as it is read by moving the lips; (3) Head movement, which means reading by following each word with head movement instead of eye movement; (4) Pointing at each word using tools; (5) Moving back of eyes to reread a word or some before alias regressions, and (6) Sub-vocalization, happening when readers read aloud silently or pronounce each word in mind while reading.

Speed reading can be taught to every language learner even since the early ages. When it comes to young learners, children between five and eleven years old (Scott and Ytreberg, 1991), who learn naturally through interesting activities yet master very limited language (Moon, 2000), a light material is required because an effortlessly understood reading text is easy to comprehend (Shepherd and Unsworth-Mitchel, 1997). Moreover, young learners possess other unique characteristics as declared by Suryabrata (2008). There is a correlation between physical condition and achievement and young learners obey the traditional games' rules but they want something practical and concrete. Young learners are realistic and eager to learn, please teachers, and get good scores, but they still need compliment from themselves and need one from others as a motivation. Sometimes, they compare themselves to others, as long as it benefits them. Considering the unique characteristics of young learners, the ideal teachers who teach them must be able to: (1) help young learners' learning process by showing them how to accomplish the assignments effectively; (2) describe using clear verbal instructions to support the demonstration; (3) be encouraging, helping and praising and (4) give positive feedback (MacNaughton and Williams, 2004).

When teaching young learners, it must be noticed that they do need to be motivated. The teachers should raise their motivation up so that they are willing to join the activity enthusiastically (Ur, 1999). One of the ways is through situational pictures where people and objects are captured in a situation, so there is a correlation between them (Szyke, 1981). Any kinds of pictures, basically can bring images of reality into the class. They are good for learners to visualize or transform abstract ideas into a more concrete way as a background knowledge, get actual experience and motivation to learn (Anitah, 2008). Furthermore, pictures play other important roles in a teaching learning process. Wright (1989) suggests that pictures are not only able to motivate the students through the information contained, but they are also able to: (1) represent the speakers, their appearance, their behaviour, the setting, and the situation; (2) focus the learners' mind on the likely content and mood of the message, and (3) be a complement to the text so that neither is understandable without the other.

The research was conducted to children or young learners at the age of nine to eleven years old in an English course located in Surakarta. It provides a lot of classes for very young learners to adults. Those classes are divided into three sections: English for Children, which is separated into some levels: (1) Kindergarten; (2) Elementary Class (Star Class and EC 1-6), and (3) Kids Class (KS and KMC 1-4); (4) English for Teen, aimed to junior high school students (SL 1-6, SMC 1-3, UNP) and senior high school students (Elementary; Pre-intermediate; Intermediate; Higher-intermediate, and Advance 1-3, UNA) and (5) English for Adults (English for Active Communication

1-8 and TOEFL Preparation Course 1-2). The participants of the research were the students at level KS 2 period 14 August – 13 November, 2012.

The results of the pretest, observation, interview and field notes showed that the students did not meet the reading skills mentioned above, and the average reading speed they achieved was only as much as 58 words per minute and students' average score of reading comprehension was 36.92. Even in the teaching learning process, the students were not highly motivated to accomplish reading activities. They did not find that reading is an exciting activity to face. This study will find out whether and to what extent the use of situational pictures enhance speed reading to support reading comprehension and what happens when situational pictures are applied in reading class.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The method used in this research is classroom action research, a sistematical data collection on a teacher's everyday practice and analysing it in order to come to some decisions about what the teacher's future practice should be (Wallace, 1998: 4). It is characterized by spiraling cycles of problem identification, systematic data collection, reflection, analysis, data-driven action-taken, and, finally, problem identification (Kemmis & McTaggart (1988) in Ferrance, 2000: 26). Cycles which consist of four procedures in each are applied based on Kemmis & McTaggart (2005: 563) in Denos, et. al. (2009: 18), they are: (1) planning a change; (2) acting and observing the process and consequences of the change; (3) reflecting on these processes and consequences and (4) replanning; acting, observing, and reflecting again.

The qualitative data were collected through documents, observation, interview, and field notes in order to get the valid data. Document includes students' profile, portfolios of written work and lesson plans. This can benefit to analyse to what extent the changes implemented are worth (Burns, 1999: 140), while observation benefits researcher to document and reflect the classroom interactions that actually occur (Burns, 1999: 80). Another way of collecting data is through interview. The interview method of collecting data involves presentation of oral-verbal stimuli and in reply in terms of oral-verbal responses (Konstant, 2004: 97). On the other hand, field notes are used to describe what has happened during the lesson, and may be written up during the lesson or shortly after. By making the record, researchers can provide themselves with the data for the research (Wallace, 1998: 66). Meanwhile, the quantitative data were collected using tests (pretest and posttest). The speed reading test is used to measure the students' reading speed. The reading comprehension test chosen is the objective test where students have multiple choice items to be chosen as the answer. It is used to measure the students' skills in reading and comprehending the texts quickly.

The qualitative data were analyzed using interactive model of analysis: (1) data reduction, the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming the data that appear in the written up field notes; (2) data display, making organized information into an immediately available, accessible, compact form so that I can see what is happening and either draw conclusions or move on to the next step of analysis which the display suggests to be useful and (3) conclusion drawing and verification, the last stage of

qualitative data analysis after deciding what things mean and notes regularities, patterns, and explanations (Miles and Huberman (1994) in Koshy, 2005). The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to find and compare the mean of pretest and posttest.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The research was done in six meetings, twice a week. The subjects of the research were the students of Level Kids 2 Group 3. There were thirteen students in the class. Each cycle was conducted in three meetings with different topic in every meeting. There were elicitation, practice and presentation stages in an hour teaching learning process. On the speed reading class, students would be given the three pages worksheets containing the situational pictures, the reading text and speed reading and reading comprehension tests. Students had to read the reading text containing one hundred words in 30 seconds once before they worked at the speed reading and reading comprehension tests. Students had to underline the last word they read and write it down on the last page for the speed reading test. Soon after that, they would have to finish the reading comprehension test without reading the text again. When they had done, the worksheets would have had to be submitted. By the end of the Cycle I, there was Test I to find out the progress happened during the cycle, and posttest at the end of the Cycle II, which was aimed to figure out the whole progress of the research.

In Cycle I, teacher gave brief explanation about speed reading and bad habits on it before starting the speed reading class. After greetings and checking attendance, teacher presented the materials

and let the students practise on other language skills based on lesson plan arranged. For starting the speed reading class, teacher would distribute the worksheets to the students and ask them to take a look together. When the teacher was done with the distribution, students were allowed to take a look at the picture for a moment for figuring out independently what the pictures said and then open the next page. Students had to read the text in thirty seconds. Teacher focused on the stopwatch for measuring the allotted time while the students were reading the text. Students did not continue the reading activity by the time their teacher stopped them. They had to underline the last word they read and write it down on the next page where the speed reading test was located. Students continued the practice by doing the reading comprehension test. However, they could not open the previous page anymore. If there had been enough time, they could have discussed the work together before submitting the worksheets back to the teacher and continue the lesson apart from the speed reading class. Even though in every meeting students had the speed reading practice, only the result of it on the third meeting or the last meeting of Cycle I was used as the reflection called the Test I.

There were found some improvements both on the students' attitude toward the lesson and the class situation. At first, the students were in hurry when they knew that they only had thirty seconds to get along the text. Later on, they became more accustomed to the exercise although almost all of them were still confused and difficult to grasp the message in the pictures. A light increase also happened when students did the reading comprehension test. In the pre-test, the

average score was 36.92. By the end of this cycle, students' average score was 56.92. However, it was not a really good progress. Students still could not reach the minimum score to pass, which was 60.

In the next cycle, the plan was revised by adding some more activities. Basically there was nothing changed in every stage of teaching learning process. What needed to change was the way of teaching speed reading during the class. The revised plan was giving more explanation to students to predict what the situational pictures are about and teaching them how to find the information in the texts. The time management became another point to concern in this cycle as well. In the previous one, some students were still busy by themselves while others had already started working. As a result, those who lately worked could not do the assignment maximally. That was why in this cycle, the teachers would not have started the test if they had not been ready yet. Moreover, students would not be informed about the time allocated in this cycle. It would be done so in order to reduce stress that students faced. They were expected not to be under pressure when reading the text. In addition, in order that they could answer the reading comprehension tests better, teachers would have to review vocabulary which might be difficult for the students to understand in the elicitation stage.

Applying this revised plan brought positive progress to the classroom situation and the achievement of the students in the speed reading and reading comprehension tests. By discussing the situational pictures together, students were more enthusiastic joining the class after having a little understanding of the pictures. They were helped a lot to understand the message in

each. They could read more than they had done before although the time was reduced, from thirty on the first meeting of Cycle II to 25 seconds on the second and third ones, when the posttest or at the end of the Cycle II was held. It was aimed so that it could be found easier whether students could increase their reading speed.

The findings of the research show that the situational pictures are able to enhance the speed reading in order to improve the reading comprehension and they can improve the situation in a reading class as well. By comprehending the message of the pictures well, students do not have to waste the time by reading the whole text in order to find out what is written there since the focus of the text is

already visualised. The reading speed measured, furthermore, proves that it increases slowly from pretest to test I, which was from 58 to 86 words per minute. However, it goes up significantly to posttest and becomes 168 words per minute. The reading comprehension, meanwhile, also presents an upward trend. The mean score on the pretest is 36.92, and it climbs up to 56.92 on Test I. Even though there is an increase, it is not satisfying either since the minimum score to pass is 60. By the end of Cycle II, later, the mean score of reading comprehension test jumps passing the minimum score to pass and reaches 86.15. Table 1 shows how the progress achieved by the students of level Kids 2.

*Table 1. The Scores of Speed Reading and Reading Comprehension Tests*

	Pre-Test	Test I	Post Test
<b>Speed Reading (wpm)</b>	58	86	168
<b>Reading Comprehension</b>	36.92	56.92	86.15

Simply, this means that every participant passes the posttest. The students now have found it more easily to know the reason why the author created the texts and conclude what the texts were about. Furthermore, students were also able to answer the questions asking about the information in the texts and draw a conclusion of related yet unstated things in the text.

The situational pictures are also good at having the students' attention to the reading class. With their advantages in teaching learning process like concrete – representing the speakers, their appearance, their behaviour, the setting, and the situation (Wright, 1989), situational pictures add extra information which helps the students to infer what is intended yet unclearly stated in the text. This makes

reading seem more fun so they stimulate the students' interest to the reading class. Even to those who participate the class less actively, situational pictures are also able to make them take part more often. On the other words, pictures as interested tangible visual aids can create broader contexts in which to teach language and allow students to pay more attention to the content. Therefore, students are motivated to join the reading class.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that situational pictures are beneficial to enhance the speed reading for reading comprehension. The improvement in saving time to read, identifying the main idea and the purpose of the text, and stating the implicit and explicit information shows

that students increase the skills of reading, which lead them to a better reading comprehension. The upward trends from pretest to posttest are the evidence how the situational pictures affect the reading comprehension. The mean of reading comprehension test goes up significantly from 36.92 to 86.15, crossing over the minimum standard score to pass, which is 60, and the reading speed skyrockets from 58 to 168 words per minute. Even though they still belong to slow readers group, at least there was improvement that students could achieve. As long as they keep on practising, the reading speed will increase naturally. Situational pictures, meanwhile, are proven able to take students' interest. They are concrete, showing people and objects in one situation, so it is easier for them to figure out what the texts are about. By visualizing and focusing more on the content, students are well-prepared to get the point of the text, so they are ready to face the reading class.

As a suggestion, teachers have to provide attractive media and appropriate teaching method in the teaching learning process in order to attract the students' attention. Pictures, like situational pictures, are some examples of visual media which will be able to raise the students' interest. Moreover, clear instruction and explanation from the teachers will guide the students to a better accomplishment. On the other hand, students should realize that reading will give them abundant benefits to them and their future. By practising reading everyday, students will engage with this world where they live. Through speed reading, students will save energy and time they have for reading texts. However, the responsibility of achieving success in reading is not only the responsibility of the teachers and students themselves. It is

better for the institution to provide more facilities that enable access to new materials and media of teaching and learning reading. The institution can encourage and support the teachers as well to improve their quality by continuous upgrading, and so forth.

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