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**Research Article**

# The Effectiveness of Pre-Reading Activities on Gifted Students: A Case on Low Achievement Students

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**Abstract**

The main purpose of this study was to find out the effectiveness of using Pre-reading activities on students' reading comprehension and their preference of Pre-reading activities. There were 55 first year college-aged students participating this study. The first experimental group was treated using Pre-reading Questioning, while the second experimental group using Pre-reading Vocabulary List. The primary data were collected from the students' post-test, while the supporting data were gained through questionnaire. The primary data were collected, then analyzed by using independent $t$-test formula. The result of the $t$-test analysis was 0.041 (0.041<0.05), which means students who were taught using Pre-reading Questioning outperformed those who were taught using Pre-reading Vocabulary List in reading comprehension. From the questionnaire, Pre-reading Questioning gained higher preference from Pre-reading Vocabulary List. Pre-reading Questioning makes the students understand the text better and gives them opportunity to practice thinking and analyzing than Pre-reading Vocabulary List. It means that applying Pre-reading Questioning is an effective way to teach reading comprehension.

**Key words:**
pre-reading activities, questioning, vocabulary list, low achievement students

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# Introduction

As some novice EFL readers might struggle themselves between lines in a text due to several reasons, such as vocabulary unfamiliarity (Yorio in Madaoui, 2013), unfamiliar concepts and cultural boundary (Bernhardt: 2004), pre-reading activity serves as a way to clear the path to grasp the gist of a text. Pre-reading activities are used before teaching the actual reading materials. Pre-reading activities prepare students for better comprehension by making them familiar with the topic, structures, or vocabulary in the text (Bilokcuoğlu, 2011). Langer (1981) and Johnson (1982) in Yusuf: 2011) have demonstrated the facilitative effects of activating reader's prior knowledge to understand new text. Pre-reading activities do not only prepare readers for the concepts but also makes the reading task easier and connecting the new concept more meaningful. Pre-reading activities are intended to activate appropriate knowledge structures or provide knowledge that the students lack. By doing this, therefore, teachers believed that they would motivate students and provide an aim for reading the text (Cabaroglu and Yurdaisik, 2008).

There have been several studies investigating the effectiveness of pre-reading activities with various findings. Yusuf (2011) investigated the effect of Pre-reading Activities in senior secondary school. The sample of the study comprises twenty-five students were from Government Secondary School Ungwar Sarki as the experimental group and twenty-five students were from Government Secondary School Nassawara as the control group. The result of the study indicated that providing pre-reading activities such as pre-reading discussion, pre-viewing, and brainstorming might serve as useful tools for language teachers and reading teachers in facilitating learners' reading comprehension ability.

Madaoui (2013) also investigated the effects of Pre-reading Activities on EFL Moccoran College Students. He found that students who got vocabulary definitions and class discussion as their Pre-reading Activities produced high score than those who did not get. Further, he found that class discussion is more effective in increasing students' reading comprehension ability than vocabulary definitions activity. In contrast, a research that was conducted by Branch (2016) found that vocabulary definition activity as Pre-reading Activities is better than Pre-reading summarization activity on students' reading comprehension, although more fluent native speakers encounter a new vocabulary item in a passage, they skip over it, figuring out what it means from the context. In this case, however, they understood the passage, but arguably they did not actually learn the new words or phrases (Mihara, 2011).

Although Branch (2016) found that vocabulary list is better than summarization as Pre-Reading Activities, Azizifar et al., (2015) research result said the other way around. Sixty qualified students were selected to be classified randomly into two experimental groups; one for the pre-reading questioning group and the other for

vocabulary group. The result showed that using pre-reading activities while teaching students reading comprehension texts lead to higher rate of comprehension. It was found that guessing reading content from questioning pre-reading activity was more effective in increasing learners' reading comprehension ability than vocabulary activity.

Hashemi (2016) also studies about Pre-Reading activities towards Iranian students. The entire number of the students participating in the study was divided into four groups, one control group and three experimental groups intended to test the impact of the three pre-reading activities, namely the KWL technique, the Brainstorming technique, and the Pre-questioning technique. The results of data analysis indicated that all the experimental groups that used the pre-reading techniques did significantly better in their comprehension than the control group which received no technique. Meanwhile, the KWL group exceeded the other two groups in their performance.

A number of researchers claimed that Pre-reading Activity is an effective strategy to improve students' reading comprehension. In pre-reading activities there are several techniques namely; questioning, previewing, class discussion, group discussion, KWL, movie watching, vocabulary definition, summarization, brainstorming, and scaffolding. The researchers recommend that teachers could use those kinds of pre-reading activities as a useful tool to facilitate students' for better reading. On the contrary, not all the technique of pre-reading activities can help the students on reading comprehension. For example in class discussion and group discussion, it negatively affected the students at times because they were distracted and could not express their knowledge (Marinaccio, 2012).

Therefore, it is urgent to investigate further type of pre-reading activities that is appropriate for students' reading comprehension goal. In this study, the researchers investigate two types of Pre-reading activity, namely pre-reading questioning and pre-reading vocabulary towards students' reading comprehension and decide which type is more effective by conducting an experimental research.

**Research Problems**

After deliberating the importance of conducting this study, the research questions can be formulated as:

- Which type of Pre-reading Activities is more effective to facilitate students' reading comprehension?
- What are the students' preference for Pre-reading Activity?

**Research Hypothesis**

Based on the results of studies suggested by Azizifar, et. al. (2015) and Hashemi (2016), the researchers formulate the alternative hypothesis as students who are

taught using Pre-Reading Questioning perform better in reading comprehension compared to those who are taught using Pre-Reading Vocabulary.

## Method

### Research Model

The researchers chose quasi-experimental because it was appropriate to assess different treatment for both experimental groups. There were 75 students in the first year of English Education Department as the population of this study which were distributed into three parallel classes. However, only 55 of them joint this research, in which later they were assigned with different treatment. The researchers did not have any background knowledge about the students, so the researchers conducted the pre-test as a homogeneity test, in order to know the equivalent between both classes. The researchers applied Pre-reading Questioning for the first experimental group. Meanwhile, the second experimental group was treated by using Pre-reading Vocabulary. They were taught using the same texts. This study employed two variable consecutively; students' reading comprehension as the dependent variable and Pre-Reading Activities as the independent variable.

The research design of this study can be described in Table 1.

### Table 1.

*The Design of Quasi-Experimental Research*

| Group | Pre-test | Treatment | Post-test |
|---|---|---|---|
| Class 2019A | Y | $X_1$ | $Y_1$ |
| Class 2019B | Y | $X_2$ | $Y_2$ |

Where, Y    : Administering a Pre-Test

$X_1$    : Teaching reading using Pre-reading Questioning

$X_2$    : Teaching reading using Pre-reading Vocabulary List

$Y_1$    : Administering a Post-test

$Y_2$    : Administering a Post-test

### Participants

To collect the sample, the researcher used purposive sampling technique where the subjects were selected because of their convenient accessibility and proximity to the researcher. Here, the sample of this study was determined by the Head of the department. Before assigning the freshmen into classes, the department conducted an English proficiency test in order to map them. The test also supplied information for the lecturers before designing teaching materials. The university, where this study was conducted, did not conducted a screening test for freshmen students as they still struggle to get as many students as possible. As Poedjiastutie and Oliver (2017) asserts that students' economic background seems to have an impact on the

selection process, and in turn, the English level of the students. The university accepted students across nation, but majority were from East part of Indonesia. Based on the proficiency test, it was found that most of the freshmen had various low proficiencies. 10 percent were categorized as pre-intermediate level, 5 percent were intermediate, and the rest were elementary level. After knowing the freshmen's proficiency, the department distributed them randomly into three classes.

Class 2019A and Class 2019B were chosen to be the sample of this study. Class 2019A consisted of 28 students and Class 2019B consisted of 27 students so, there were 55 students who participated in this study. Although the subjects could not be randomly assigned, the researcher used a coin to determine the first experimental and second experimental group. The first experimental group was represented by numeral side and the other side represented was for the second experimental group.

**Instruments and Procedures**

This study employed two instruments to answer the research questions: a reading test and a questionnaire.

The reading test functions as the main instrument in this study. In developing the test, the researchers, first developed a blueprint to assure that the questions asked the intended learning objectives. There were 20 multiple-choice questions with five reading texts. The researcher, further, piloted test the reading test to find out the reliability of the test. After counting the reliability value using Cronbach Alpha coefficient, the researchers distributed a Pre-Test to both experimental groups. The result of this pre-test was used to measure the homogeneity of the groups.

The second step after administering the pre-test, the researchers implemented the strategies to both groups. The texts and teaching materials used were the same. However, the researchers used pre-reading questioning in the first experimental group and pre-reading vocabulary activity in the second experimental group. The researchers trained the students to be able to do the pre-reading activities independently. After delivering the treatments, the researchers conducted a post-test to both groups. The results were used for normality test and hypothesis testing. Right after conducting the post-test, the researchers distributed a questionnaire.

A questionnaire was used in this study to answer the second research question. The questionnaire functioned as a supporting instrument in quantitative research. The questionnaire asked the students' preference for pre-reading activities.

**Data Analysis**

The data were presented descriptively (average score and standard deviation) with the quantitative approach (Zakaria, et.al. (2019). The result of post-test from both groups was first analyzed for normality test using *Kolmogorov-Smirnov* test and homogeneity test using *Levene* test. Data analysis to test the hypothesis used

independent sample *t*-test to find out the *t*-value. Meanwhile, the result of the questionnaire was presented descriptively.

## Results

The researchers decided to extend the research by identifying the effectiveness of Pre-reading Activities on students' reading comprehension. 55 freshmen of a private university became the focus of the study and quasi-experimental research designed was used. The purpose of this research was to assess the effect of Pre-reading Activities among first-year college students by determining of the differences of the mean score from both groups. The result of Cronbach Alpha showed .450 out of 1.00, which indicated that the reading test had an enough consistency. Furthermore, the homogeneity test indicated that the significant value of *Levene* test was 0.830 which was greater than 0.05 as the significant level. It showed that both groups had similar sample characterization. It was also shown by the result of the mean score from both groups in the pre-test (Table 2).

**Table 2.**

*Pre-Test Mean Score of Both Groups*

|       | Class | N  | Mean  | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|-------|-------|----|-------|----------------|-----------------|
| Score | 2019A | 28 | 75.00 | 12.910         | 2.440           |
|       | 2019B | 27 | 74.81 | 13.191         | 2.539           |

Table 2 showed that both groups has equal initial reading proficiency. Although Class 2019A exceeded the mean score, the difference was not much.

Further, the normality test showed that the significant value was 0.200 which was greater than 0.05 as the significant level. This indicated that the data gained from the post-test was in normal distribution. There was no skewed data found.

From the result of these homogeneity test and normality test, the researchers proceeded with hypothesis testing using independent sample t-test (Table 3). The significant difference showed 0.041 which indicated that it was smaller than 0.05 as the significant level.

**Table 3.**

*Independent Sample t-Test*

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | Lower | Upper |
| Posttest | Equal variances assumed | 3.123 | .083 | 2.097 | 54 | .041 | 5.536 | 2.640 | .242 | 10.829 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | 2.097 | 48.554 | .041 | 5.536 | 2.640 | .228 | 10.843 |

Hence, the researchers concluded that students who were taught using Pre-reading Questioning significantly performed better in reading comprehension compared to those who were taught by Pre-reading Vocabulary. In other words, the researchers had enough evidence to accept the alternative hypothesis.

In order to understand better sample's preference on Pre-reading activities, the researchers present the result of questionnaire in Table 4. There were three categories of statements which students gave responds toward them.

**Table 4.**

*The Result of Questionnaire*

| No. | Categories | Pre-reading Questioning | Pre-reading Vocabulary |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | It helps me understand the text better | 89% | 84% |
| 2. | It makes reading a text interesting | 84% | 82% |
| 3. | It gives me more opportunity to practice thinking and analyzing | 95% | 92% |

Table 4 describes students' perception towards the strategy from both groups. Both Pre-reading activities received a positive perception which was shown by the high percentage. However, Pre-reading questioning was more favorable than Pre-reading vocabulary.

Most of the students (89%) confessed that Pre-reading questioning helped them understand the text better, while 84% of the students who were taught using pre-reading vocabulary agreed with this statement. Next, 84% of the students who were taught using Pre-reading questioning agreed that the strategy made reading a text becomes an interesting activity. Surprisingly, 95% of students believed that by doing

Pre-reading questioning activity as a pre-reading activity gave them more opportunity to practice thinking and analyzing. On the other hand, 92% students who were taught using pre-reading vocabulary also agreed with this statement. Descriptively, doing Pre-reading activities benefit students in reading comprehension, both using questioning and vocabulary.

## Discussion

In teaching reading there are many techniques or strategies that teachers can use. However, this research focuses on technique or strategy of teaching reading comprehension by using two different types of Pre-reading Activities. The first is Pre-reading Questioning Strategy that includes some questions related to the text before they read the whole text. The questions provided will help students to build a knowledge and a view of what the text is going to discuss about. The second is Pre-reading Vocabulary List Strategy which includes some key words and phrases that listed with their definitions or synonyms. By looking at the vocabulary lists it would be helpful for the students to comprehend the text.

From the activities of the treatments in both experimental groups, the researchers conclude that Pre-reading activities give positive effects. Here, the students were more active in learning process when Pre-reading activities had been applied in the classroom. They practiced the instruction that have been given by the researchers. They paid attention to the researchers' explanation about a text and short introduction about the topic. This happens because of several reasons. First, Pre-reading Questioning that provides questions helps students to build knowledge and point of view of what the text is going to be discussed. This activity accommodates students to learn how to construct a 'good' question which lead to comprehension. Ekaningrum and Prabandari (2015) said that teaching students to generate their own questions about material to be read is one of the major instructional goals of pre-reading preparation. The students were very enthusiastic and almost all of them raised their hand to read the questions that they were curious about. The second is Pre-reading Vocabulary List provides some key words and phrases listed with their definitions or synonyms, and sometimes with its translation in their L1 which help the students understand the text better. Al Rasheed (2014) warns us that the students' inability to guess the meaning of new words or recognize the concepts and cultural allusions may result in serious comprehension impairment.

From the research findings, the students in the Pre-reading Questioning group had better score than the Pre-reading Vocabulary List group. As the result study from Azizifar et al., (2015) showed that using pre-reading activities while teaching students reading comprehension texts lead to higher rate of comprehension. It was found that guessing reading content from questioning pre-reading activity was more effective in increasing learners' reading comprehension ability than mentioning some

vocabulary listed in the text. It is apparent that activating students' prior knowledge is more than telling students what the story is about, because students require questioning to stimulate what is already known. Comprehension is more successful and deeper if the reader activated relevant knowledge with information that is in the text (Marinaccio, 2012).

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that Pre-reading Questioning which had been given over to the experimental students was more effective if the teacher could manage the time and class well. The students agreed that Pre-reading Questioning help them to make predictions and imagine the content of the text. Mostly, students got difficulties to comprehend the text. Applying Pre-reading activities on students' reading comprehension should also consider the topic. Since this research was about narrative text, the researcher considered on background knowledge of the students, generic structure and language features of the text.

Questioning is a common strategy that used by teachers which leads the students into comprehension. Giving questioning prompts in the beginning of reading activity often used to bridge the students' prior knowledge and the topic will be discussed. Usually teachers pose intriguing questions which functions to raise students' curiosity. Also, teachers sometimes pose question while reading activity to underline important concepts that students must find through the text. Posing question in the whilst-activity also aims at evaluating whether the questions posed in pre-reading has already been noticed or not. However, the most commonly questioning activity done by many teachers are posing them after reading activity. The questions are formulated to check students' comprehension of the text.

Although the mean score of pre-test from both groups were not significantly different, the post test showed that first experimental group which was treated using Pre-reading Questioning had a good improvement in their achievement than the second experimental group. It was because constructing questions made them curious about the content of the story and helped them dig up their prior knowledge to connect with the text. Contradictory with the second experimental group who was treated by using Pre-reading Vocabulary List, some students felt bored because they just checked their dictionary and translated the vocabulary into their L1. The result of the questionnaire confirms that Pre-reading questioning helps the students comprehend the text better as it scaffolds students' thinking ability. Ponce, et.al. (2019) claims that study activities that are highly scaffolded and trained (i.e., questioning and graphic organizers) are effective for fourth graders but study activities that are not scaffolded or trained (i.e., notetaking) are not effective for fourth graders. Put on the highlight that the participant of their study were not native speakers of English, either ESL or EFL learners, the result of the study might support this finding. Anderson (1984) and Langer (1984) in Reynolds and Goodwin (2016) underline that students' background knowledge about a text is an important

factor in their comprehension. Pre-reading questioning functions as a scaffold comprehension as it leads the students to build a reading with purpose activity. Deeneey (2016) in her study informs that approximately a half of pre-service teachers' initial questions focused on the text and the other half focused on prior knowledge and experience. She further asserts that these initial questions play an important role in scaffolding knowledge activation.

The result of students' attitude during teaching and learning process was good. In the first meeting they seem confused with the implementation of Pre-reading Activities because they rarely had or not being aware of Pre-reading Activities as the learning strategy before. In the second meeting, they started to show their enthusiasm by making more than one questions in Pre-reading Questioning group and adding more synonyms for the Pre-reading Vocabulary List group.

The students highly agreed that Pre-reading activities made them curious about the content of the text, challenged them to ask questions to themselves to help them dig up their prior knowledge to connect with the text, familiarized them with it, made them read with the specific goal, and gave them opportunity to practice thinking and analyzing. The students admit that the activities made them more enthusiastic to read and made them enjoy with reading activity. In particular, Pre-reading activities made them feel less worried and give positive attitude towards English. This study strengthens Taboada and Guthrie's (2006) explanation that questions activate prior knowledge, which, in turn, aids in reading comprehension.

However, Pre-reading Questioning had weaknesses when it is applied in the classroom. Not all the students can answer the questions that they construct because of the time limitation or beyond the topic discussed. Further, they are not accustomed to formulate questions that require the next level of critical thinking process. Most of the questions were low order of thinking skills (LOTS). Giving a fact that the participants regard English as a foreign language, the incapability of constructing higher level of questions might be caused by the lack of English proficiency. Suggesting what Hall (2012) investigated that low-performing readers tended to have one or two favorite strategies that they repeatedly used regardless of their success. The participants were feeling secure to formulate low level of thinking questions as they may easily spot the answers explicitly in the text. Even though Pre-reading Questioning is more preferable than Pre-reading Vocabulary List, Pre-reading activities is an effective way to be used in reading activity. It can be seen from the result of both experimental groups that these activities had increased the score in students' reading comprehension ability. Besides, the students were very enthusiastic to follow teaching learning process using Pre-reading activities, and in turn, it helps them academically.

## Conclusion

Teachers might start the teaching-learning activities using various strategies or techniques; however, they must select the most appropriate one for the students. Among many of them, this study reveals that Pre-Reading Questioning is more effective compared to Pre-Reading Vocabulary List in improving students' reading comprehension. However, it is important to be highlighted that both Pre-reading activities got positive perceptions from the participants. This indicates that administering Pre-reading activities is beneficial for low level students in mastering reading comprehension. Despite its strengths, teachers should be aware that training the students in formulating a 'good and meaningful' questions takes time and it is not an easy task. Next researchers might continue the study by investigating types of questions made by the students which lead to better comprehension.

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