

# Improving the Ability of Understanding Text Content in The Critical Reading Material of Degree Students Faculty of Educational of Medan State University Through Contextual Teaching and Learning Strategy

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## ABSTRACT

The research is based on the low understanding of the students on text in High Class Indonesian course especially on the subject matter of "Reading". This is caused by several factors: (1) the learning approach used by lecturers so far has been monotonous or less relevant to the conditions of the students, (2) the level of understanding in the reading material is low so that this affects the score of the students in the Higher Class Indonesian course, (3) students' interest in studying Indonesian language is very low, (4) student's lack of interest in the learning process, (5) opportunity to ask about the subject is not used (6) at the time of discussion most of the students are inactive, only one or two are active. This is a classroom action research that emphasizes on four research focuses: planning, action and implementation, observation, and also reflection. Subjects in this study are students of Regular Class a of PGSD Faculty of Education Unimed, amounting to 35 students; while the object of this research is improving the ability of understanding text content in the critical reading material of degree students faculty of educational of medan state university through contextual teaching and learning strategy. The result of data analysis on cycle I is that the average score of critical reading ability of High Class Indonesian language obtained by students of regular class A is 74.64, while the average grade score that has been completed in the learning process and based on test result only 45.7% or 16 participants of all study subjects. By this that learning needs to be continued to cycle II. While the results of data analysis in cycle II show a very significant improvement that is 89.39 while the average score of the class is 100%. The learning process is stated done individually and classically on cycle II.

**Keywords:** Contextual Teaching and Learning, Reading Ability, Text Content

## I. INTRODUCTION

The implementation of the *PGSD FIP Unimed* study program aims to produce qualified and capable graduates in the field of education and teaching at the Elementary School level. In the implementation of *PGSD* study program, there are many obstacles faced by the lecturer team, namely that the activity and motivation of the students are generally very low. This is seen in the learning process of the subject of reading where it is seen that the ability of *PGSD* students to understand and draw the conclusion of the text content is minimal.

The lecturers have tried to give a more detailed explanation of the material taught, but the students are still not able to provide the expected answers at the time

of the test. This is possibly caused by several factors such as:

1. lack of student interest in the learning process,
2. the opportunity to ask about the subject is not properly used
3. the ability to communicate the material that has been given both the content and the structure of the language is less
4. at the time of discussion most of the students are inactive only one or two are active,
5. learning outcomes (subject score) in the form of tasks, Formative I - Formative IV are generally low, and
6. learning approaches are lack of paying attention to the condition of the students.

In an effort to realize the educational goals, aspects of teaching and learning process is an absolute thing to be

explored. This is in accordance with the opinion of Wardani, (2004: 12) that there are still many teachers who lack the mastery of teaching and learning process. Attempts have been made to achieve teaching objectives that are appropriate to the curriculum. But the reality is still not in accordance with what is expected.

Reading course aims to :

1. make students master basic concepts of reading,
2. answer and make questions based on discourses that are read,
3. express critical responses on the content of fiction and non-fiction reading,
4. retell either oral or written content or the meaning of the discourse that is read, and
5. be able to design and apply learning skills to read according to skills.

The reading material is one of the competencies of Indonesian language which is expected to be the basic of the students in teaching reading skill at elementary school level and the main objective is that the students, at the time of becoming the teacher will be able to optimize their potency, by helping learners to learn how to read effectively by seeking the availability of school facilities. There are 4 (four) competencies that must be mastered by students in Indonesian Language and one of the difficult material is to master the competence of reading skill. Regardless of the regional diversity, the ability to understand reading often becomes a problem in the lecture, covering intonation, reading content, and the ability to criticize reading discourse.

In an effort to facilitate students to master the subject of reading ability, approaches have been pursued, among others are providing individual or group assignments, as well as providing homework exercises. Despite these efforts, many students have difficulty in mastering them. Thus, it is necessary to know the factors that cause the lack of mastery of *PGSD* study program students on the subject of reading ability.

The general purpose of the subject, cannot be manipulated by the teacher / lecturer because it is set in the curriculum; similarly with the characteristics of the course and the limitations of student learning resources. The most important component of all these variables is the characteristics of the student as a subject of learning.

Theoretically, the characteristics cannot be manipulated at all, because they must be accepted as they are.

One way that can be taken by lecturers in the effort towards the achievement or improvement of learning outcomes is to fix appropriate learning strategies and relevant for the achievement of learning objectives. By using appropriate learning strategies, student learning outcomes that follow the learning process of reading is expected to be improved. For that we need to obtain empirical data by applying the learning strategy that is by using Contextual Teaching Learning strategy in learning process to improve mastery of reading ability. Thus, this research essentially aims to improve reading ability through the application of contextual learning strategy (CTL).

Based on the above description, several problems in this study are found as follows: 1). Factors affecting students' reading ability are students themselves and lecturers, 2). Students are less active in the learning process on the subject of reading ability, 3). Less precise learning strategies with student circumstances, 4). Type of learning strategies to be used to improve reading ability, and 5). The low score of Indonesian Language courses in general.

Observing the various things that emerged above, the focus of the research is: the implementation of learning using Contextual Teaching Learning (CTL) strategies to improve students' critical reading skills of class A Reg. *PGSD S1 FIP Unimed*.

## II. RESEARCH METHOD

The method used in this research is action research method. Action research is one form of research which in its implementation does not abandon the scientific principles. All activities, recording, and reporting are done systematically. The principle of action research is a principle based on rational thinking.

Action research according to Kemmis in Hopkins (1993: 44) is undertaken to improve the results and processes of actions undertaken by the researcher in performing the task, deepening the understanding of the actions taken and improving the conditions in which the learning practices are carried out.

To support the implementation of the learning, the classroom is designed in accordance with the topic discussed and possibly there is a time when the learning process is implemented outside the classroom, so that students can play an active role in the learning process.

The researcher directly acts as the lecturer of the related course, in collaboration with the partner lecturer (observer) who is expected to be directly involved in the activities of this research activity process. At the end of each meeting, the researcher and the partner lecturer discuss and evaluate the learning process that takes place that day. All evaluations, suggestions, and criticisms are recorded as input for improvements to the next process.

The action plan of this cycle is based on pre-observation results, which indicate the need for active student participation in order to expand reading interest and improve reading ability. The atmosphere of participation should be developed to get a fun and exciting class that is through a flexible learning conditions and not rigid. Before conducting the first cycle first, pre-action is given to see the level of critical reading ability of *AI PGSD* students. This initial test will be carried out by researcher in collaboration with the observer.

For more details the action plan that will be implemented in the first cycle to improve students' critical reading skills are as follows:

### **1. Planning**

The activities undertaken in this planning stage are:

- a. Making scenarios of learning process in the classroom by using CTL strategy with topic / subject of critical reading of discourse.
- b. Making an observation sheet: to see how the learning process conditions in the classroom is conducted when the activity takes place.
- c. Making the teaching aids needed for the optimization of critical reading skills or students' reading comprehension.

### **2. Implementation of Action**

The study is planned to consist of two cycles of action and each cycle of action consists of four meetings, according to the reading ability material. At the end of the action tasks are given and tests are also given at the

end of the cycle. The technical implementations of classroom action activities are as follows:

- a. Implementing the planned scenario of activities. Submission of subject matter involve student activities. In the delivery of this material, the lecturer uses the learning steps in CTL.
- b. Giving group tasks and independent tasks (house duties) and evaluating at the end of the cycle.
- c. The observer is assigned to observe in the class on each action based on the observation sheet provided. Matters that the observer concerns in the classroom are assessing the activity of the lecturer and the student activity, and other things that arise in the classroom at the end of each cycle.
- d. The researcher notes in the research journal all the activities that emerge during the process of action taking place in each cycle.
- e. Conducting an analysis of observations to learn things that have gone on in the classroom. Determining activities that need to be maintained and revise unsuitable or inappropriate activities performed on each cycle.
- f. Conducting analysis of learning evaluation results to see the level of success that students have achieved in each cycle through the application of learning CTL.

### **3. Observation**

At this stage the process of observation is carried out on the implementation of the action by using the observation sheets that have been made and collecting the necessary data as input materials to assess student development.

### **4. Reflection**

The results obtained at the observation stage are collected and analyzed by the researcher in collaboration with the observer. The results of observations of the researcher assisted by both observers can be used as a reference for self-reflection by looking at the observation data whether the activities undertaken have been able to improve understanding of students in reading critical discourse texts and whether students do not feel burdened with the learning process undertaken, and whether the learning process implemented has been in accordance with the planned subject.

In this first cycle there may be new things that are not taken into account. These are used to improve the second cycle action plan.

This second cycle action plan is based on the reflection of action in the first cycle by correcting the improper implementation of the first cycle. In the second cycle the topic discussed is a critical response to the reading discourse. If there are still new problems that arise it will be used to improve the action in the next cycle. But if in this cycle 80% of students have mastered the goals that have been determined in accordance with success indicators, then this cycle is the last cycle.

After implementing the action applied to improve the critical reading skill of a discourse text, the researcher assisted by the two observers will discuss and evaluate the observation result that has been done during the learning process. The final decision will be determined by the researcher by considering the suggestions and assertions of the two observers on matters that need to be improved in order to be further strengthened in the implementation of the next cycle.

### III. LITERATURE REVIEWS

#### 1. Ability of Critical Thinking

Ability means being able to do something; ability is smartness; strength in doing something, Hardaniwati et al, (2005: 398): Reading is one of the four language skills as has been expressed in the *GBPP* of Indonesian language course. Reading is a process done and used by the reader to obtain the message, which would be conveyed by the author through the media of words / written language (Yarfriaty, 2016: 123). Furthermore, a process is added to demand that the group of words which constitute a unity will be seen in a glance, and that the meaning of words individually will be known. If this is not met, the implied messages will not be captured or understood, and the reading process does not work out well. While critical by Hardaniwati, (2005: 342) is not easily believing, meaning trying to find the truth, either denotatively or connotatively.

Thus it can be concluded that critical reading is a process of extracting the essence or understanding of the message conveyed by the author to the reader with the object of language. Students should therefore be helped

to respond to to visual symbols depicting the same auditory signs that have been addressed before that.

#### 2. Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) Learning Strategies

Hasibuan (2014: 1) states that contextual learning is a learning concept that helps teachers to relate teaching materials with students' real situations, which can encourage students to make connections between the knowledge learned and their application in student life as family and community members.

In this contextual learning, students are encouraged to understand the meaning of learning, the benefits, and how to achieve it. Students are expected to realize that what they learn is useful for life. Thus, the student will position himself as a party that requires provision for his life later.

In contextual classroom, the teacher or lecturer's job is to help the students to achieve their goals. Lecturers deal more with strategies than to give information. The task of a lecturer is to manage the class, so that the class becomes conducive to learning. So, the knowledge or skills will be determined by the students themselves, not what the teacher or lecturer says. In contextual learning "the best way of learning is students' self-construction to achieve meaning".

Contextual learning activities are natural, not knowledge transferred from teacher or lecturer to students. Slameto, (1995: 87). The task of teachers or lecturers in contextual class is to help students achieve learning objectives. Dinia, (2014: 32). In contextual learning strategy the components that must be applied are: constructivism, Questioning, Inquiry, Learning Community, Modeling, and Authentic Assessment.

According to Nurhadi (2004: 10) the steps of the application in the classroom are: (1) developing thinking that the student will learn more meaningfully by self-employment, self-discovering and constructing his own new knowledge and skill, (2) (4) studying in groups, (5) showing "model" as an example of learning, (6) doing reflection at the end of the meeting, and (7) doing the inquisition for all topics; assessment in many ways. Thus, students who have the ability to learn by following

the seven steps in contextual learning will get the nature, attitude, and ability that have been put forward.

## IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Description of Cycle Data I

#### 1. Action Planning

At this stage there are some things that must be prepared by researchers such as: 1). Examining the curriculum of Indonesian High Class as a reference for learning materials; 2). Preparing everything related to the lesson plan (*RPP*), observation sheets, interview guides, field notes, and student questionnaires; 3). Preparing a list of group names; 4). Making a final test; 5). Preparing student activity sheets (*MFI*s) and final action test sheets; 6). Preparing various tools in the form of OHP, blank transparency paper, markers and other accessories that support the process of learning implementation in this research; 7). Coordinating work program that will be implemented in this research with both observers. The formation of study groups done before the first cycle action is implemented taking into account the level of student achievement and it is aimed to create a balance of intellectual ability in each group. The formation of this group is carried out outside of action in order to make time efficient.

#### 2. Implementation of Cycle 1

The learning process at this first meeting consists of three stages, namely the preliminary stage, the core stage, and the closing stage. In the introductory stage, the lecturers begin the lesson by greeting and then convey the learning objectives, emphasizing the importance of the material, generating the student's initial knowledge, explaining the student tasks in the group and the task of the group itself. This preliminary stage takes about 15 minutes, as planned.

The core stage. In this phase, the contextual learning process begins with the lecturers to provide problems in accordance with the subject that will be discussed by students and provide concrete examples in real life. Students pay attention to the lecturer explaining the problem and see the example given by the lecturer. Lecturers give students the opportunity to understand the problem and if there is a problem that is not understood it can be asked directly to the lecturer. However, the

students still seem confused and cannot understand the problems posed by the lecturer. This is reinforced by the behavior of students who are still whispering with friends, so the class atmosphere becomes noisy. After the lecturer gives some explanation, then he instructs the students to carry out the discussion in their respective groups to find the "Basic Concepts of Critical Reading Skills" namely: 1) the concept of critical reading; 2) critical reading types; 2) critical reading skills, and 3) understanding the concepts, meanings, and core of the read.

Learning process with learning community method shows that each group tries to find the answer contained in the worksheet (inquiry) and if the answer has been found then the answer is first agreed to be answer group (questioning). During the group discussion, lecturers come to each group to monitor continuously the activities of the students. Aspects observed are aspects contained in the actual assessment of individual activities of students in group learning. In addition, the lecturer also records all information or events that have been observed during the lesson. These events include: a). There are some groups that have difficulty in understanding and solving problems during the discussion process so that students who have mastered the material do the modeling of the content of the reading and students who do not understand the material become easier to understand it (modeling), b). There are some less serious students working in groups, and c). When the group learning process takes place, there are students who talk-, walking to see the work of other groups. On the other hand there are students who just stay silent, looking at their friend's busy working, and there are also students doing work outside the context being discussed.

The unfavorable atmosphere of discussion should quickly be understood and responded by the lecturers, and the lecturers immediately reminded the students and motivated all the group members to be active and focused on the tasks of the *MFI*. (Student Task Sheet) Lecturers provide direction so that students "do not work alone, but must work together in their respective teams". After getting a reprimand from the lecturer, the students should be back to concentration to do their respective tasks. Each group member work together to discuss the activity sheet. After the time set for the group discussion

ends, the lecturer asks the students to discontinue the discussion, and then proceed with the results of the group discussion or make a sharing among the groups.

The learning process at the stage of delivering the results of this group discussion, is started with the lecturers giving the group a chance to feel ready to convey the results of their discussion. After a short wait, if there is no response from each group, the lecturer asks the group representative I to read out the outcome of the discussion and another group is asked to listen; after that continued with question and answer. The appointed one group is silent, looking confused, and afraid, and each individual waiting for anyone who dares to come forward. Seeing this situation lecturers should motivate students to dare to come forward. One of the students will stand up and said "Well sir, we will read the results of the discussions we have done", so one student comes forward to read out the results of his group discussion. The lecturer reminds the other groups not to be noisy, but to hear and pay attention to the results of group I discussions in front of the class.

After group I finishes reading the report, the lecturer will give motivation. This encourages students from other groups to read their group reports. The next step is a question and answer session about the group's findings. This is followed by another group until all the existing groups get their turn. The best presentation of the report receives awards from the lecturers and students. The lecturer feels quite satisfied with the way the other groups explaining their group's findings. Based on observations on the reports and activities undertaken by each group it can be concluded that the students are able to find out the subject discussed at the first meeting (authentic assessment). Nevertheless there are still some shortcomings both in the process and on the learning outcomes.

In the final stages of learning activities, the lecturer gives praise to the process of implementation of learning activities with contextual strategies undertaken by students. In addition, the lecturer also encourages students to make conclusions from the discussion activities by conducting question and answer. In relation to the meeting time I is over, the lecturer closes the lesson by giving comments on the report and the student's appearance. At the closing activities, the

lecturer asks the students to collect the results of the discussion report and give the opportunity to some students to reflect orally about the learning process that day and then close the session by saying greetings.

### **3. Reflection**

Reflection is done to determine whether the learning process and learning outcomes in cycle I is complete or not, so that the researcher together with the observers can decide whether cycle I should continue with the next cycle or not. This reflection is done collaboratively between lecturer (researcher) and observers. The results of the reflection of events occurring in the first cycle are as follows:

- a. The results of the evaluation in action cycle I shows that there are still may mistakes done by the students, and the results are not good. Errors made by students are at the time of answering questions and also in discussions. The result of the evaluation of the learning in the form of the test shows that the average score is 74.64 and the number of successful students is only 16 people (45.7%). Thus learning is said to have not succeeded, because it has not met the established success criteria.
- b. Observational data of two observers to the lecturers and students during the learning process, indicate that the indicator for the students to obtain an average score is 69. This states that the learning outcomes for students need to be improved, while the lecturer activity in learning reaches 96.

From the analysis of data described above, some conclusions are obtained such as, learning in cycle I has not achieved maximum results, especially in the field of learning outcomes. Thus it can be decided that learning in cycle I (first) should be continued with the second cycle with notes to revise only unfinished problems. The lesson will be continued to the second cycle of action (second).

## Data Description in Cycle II

### 1. Action Planning

At this stage of planning activities there are several things implemented by lecturers who act as researcher in this study such as:

- a. Preparing lesson plans, observation sheets, and field notes.
- b. Preparing a student worksheet and a final test sheet of action.
- c. Preparing tools in the form of OHP, blank transparency paper, Ruler, color markers and others.

Based on the results of evaluation and reflection conducted in the process of learning action cycle I, the lesson plan in the action of cycle II is focused on the material that has not been completed that is about "Critical Reading Skills in Understanding Meanings of the text".

### 2. Action Implementation

Preliminary stage activity begins with greetings from the lecturer, then answered by students. Furthermore, the lecturer mentions the learning objectives that day. The lecturer who simultaneously acts as a researcher tries to explore the initial knowledge of the students about the object to be completed by students through the questions that fit with the topic to be discussed. Some simple questions asked are "what meaning can you put forward from the following sentence?", 1). Cats, eat dead chickens. 2). Cats eat, chickens die. 3). Cats eat chickens, die. The questions are asked to students at random, and students are asked to explain their understanding of the sentence, and if the understanding is not accurate then the question is given to the other students until the correct answer is found.

Core activity. In this core activity section, learning begins with lecturers distributing worksheets of student activities to each group. Then, the lecturer gives the task to the students to understand the problems contained in the worksheet, and the lecturer also asks whether the students understand the purpose of the problem. Some of the students say they already understand and some others ask how to do it. Hearing this statement the lecturer gives an explanation of how to do the task. After

getting an explanation from the lecturer then the students start to read again and understand the each worksheet.

The lecturer asks the whole group to start discussions and work on activity sheets. Students first work individually and looks very diligent in doing their work. After each student has a strong understanding of the problem being done, then the student discusses his findings so that there is a very tough debate in the discussion. After students in each group agree or draw conclusions from the findings of their respective groups, one of the group members writes the group's conclusions for the group report.

Learning activities in cycle II (second) look more motivated, diligent, active, and discipline and the discussion also looks more alive than the previous learning. Each group takes good attention to their friends who are reading or presenting the work of the group in the form of sharing. Sometimes there are questions that require concrete examples from the preenter groups, so the role of the lecturer is needed to be directly involved in the sharing activities within the group. The lecturer then directs one of the students from the presenter group to serve as a model in reading the particular paragraph so that the questions from other groups are answered well.

In the discussion activities, the students seemed clearly trying to defend their own group's opinions so that the atmosphere of the discussion becomes more interesting and fun. Students are also diligent, active, disciplined, and enthusiastic in following the learning process. To neutralize the atmosphere, the lecturer tries to provide direction if there is an incorrect answer or a distorted answer. After all the group representatives have finished reading, the lecture again reinforce the group's explanation.

The closing stage lasts approximately fifteen minutes. This closing activity aims to check whether the students have really understood the problem. Then it is proceeded by assigning students to reflect on the day's learning in the journal notes. When the time is finished, the lecturer closes the meeting of the second cycle by greeting. During the learning process of the action of cycle II, the lecturer records the events considered necessary.

### 3. Reflection

Reflection is done to determine whether cycle II should be repeated or not. This reflection is done collaboratively between the lecturer (researcher) and observers. The results of the reflection of events occurring in the first cycle are as follows:

1. The result of evaluation in the second cycle action shows that the student's answer has not been entirely correct, but the result has shown the maximum result (good). The result of the evaluation of the learning in the form of the test shows the average score achieved by the students is 89.39% and the number of successful students is 35 (100%). Thus the learning process is said to have been successful, because it meets the established success criteria.
2. From the data observation of two observers to lecturers and students during the learning, it shows that the indicator for the students to get the average score is 83. It is stated that the learning outcomes for the students need to be improved, while the lecturer activity in learning reaches 96.
3. The lecturer has done his duty well, implementing the learning plan as it should be, starting from explaining the purpose, raising the problem, and guiding the students in doing their work. The lecturer gives attention and motivation especially to low-ability students. The lecturer observes all the learning activities and also performs the assessment from the learning process to the end of the lesson.
4. The use of OHP media and transparency paper is very helpful to students' understanding of the material taught and also facilitate the students in presenting the results of group work.

From the analysis of data described above, it is obtained that the results of data reflection of learning in the second cycle has achieved maximum results, especially in the domain of learning outcomes. Thus it can be concluded that the second cycle learning does not need to proceed with the next cycle. This is because the final test results of the second cycle action have already met the predefined learning completeness criteria.

At the time of the research process takes place there are two things that are interconnected and cannot be

separated from one another to form a unified whole, those are between the researcher and research subjects. The success of a research cannot be separated from the two factors mentioned above, especially the lecturer or researcher, because in this study the lecturer has a very important role. The lecturer will present and direct the research subject. In this research, the lecturer has dual roles, the first role as a teacher and the second role as a researcher. So the lecturer is fully responsible for the research process from the preparation stage, the implementation of the research to finally evaluate the research results.

Almost all students who become the subject of this research give the same statement: happy, active, and diligent in carrying out tasks given by the lecturer of contextual learning contextual lesson (CTL). Students also argue that it is easier to solve problems in a learning material with contextual strategy (CTL). Positive response from the students as the subject of this research is one way that can be used to create learning conditions in an effort to improve critical reading ability of *PGSD SI Class A Regular*.

The increasing ability of Regular class A students to master the material on "Critical Reading" in Higher Class of Indonesian Language course can be seen from several factors such as high motivation, student response to learning, and test results conducted at the end of the action. Especially in the final test of action cycle II, the average score of the class reaches the score of 89.39%, and students achieve the score of  $\geq 80\%$ , 100%. From the above data it can be concluded that there is a very satisfactory improvement in the ability of regular A-class students of *PGSD SI FIP Unimed* in mastering the material of critical reading. The results of the research presented in this study are of an excellent improvement. This is relevant to the findings of other researchers by using a contextual approach or strategy (CTL) on different subjects.

### V. CONCLUSION

The conclusions of this study are based on the results of data analysis of the learning process and the final test results of the action. The conclusion is that the ability obtained by students in cycle II on the subject of critical reading has been improved by using Contextual



Teaching Learning (CTL) learning strategy, strengthened by the test result.

Contextual Teaching Learning (CTL) learning strategy in " critical reading " learning of High Class Indonesian Language can improve reading ability and earn motivation. Contextual learning can make the learning atmosphere more interesting, fun, and increase the motivation that makes the subject of research more active, creative in the learning process.

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