Shaping Research Ideas for Pre-service Teachers in an EFL Context

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ABSTRACT

The prerequisite for undergraduate studentsparticularly pre-service teachers in Indonesia to earn their degree is to conduct small research. Since they have topics and references that are similar to those provided by previous small research, thus research ideas are alike for years. This is repetition in research rather than contributing new knowledge. Therefore, this paper reports how the 22 students gathered research ideas. Each student should have at least 12 scholarly journal articles including four research-based ones. They need to search open access journals to download journal articles they are interested in. They read, find the main topic, highlight and note important points of each paragraph of the articles. Paraphrasing and summarizing are the steps to be completed. The students need to have mind-mapping for the research-based articles. The results show that the students have more competencies and skills in browsing and searching relevant journal articles; and the research ideas and methods to conduct research. Therefore, the students learn the ICT, how to read and write, and gather research ideas simultaneously. Further, they are expected to develop research proposals based on what they have found from the online journals.

1.0   INTRODUCTION

Generally, one of the graduation requirements for undergraduate students of pre-service teachers especially for those who study at university levels in Indonesia is completing a research report. They have to conduct small research related to their interest. In the context where English is a foreign language, the research interest mostly links to teaching and learning processes. In fact, due to limited sources of recent references such as journal articles in Mulawarman University in East Kalimantan (well known as Borneo)where this study conducted, topics of research are similar from years to years.

Meanwhile the Internet has played an increasingly important role in foreign language/second language readers since online reading serves as the source of input for them (Anderson, 2003). Leu (2002) underlines that Internet offers minimum time for information and communication comparing to other media such as books or computers. According to Coiro (2003), electronic texts introduce new supports as well as new challenges that can have a great impact on an individual's ability to comprehend what people read.

As the use of the Internet increases, e-journals have become a major resource in scholarly research. An electronic journal could be any journal available on the Internet that may or may not have a print version. Khan (2012) emphasizes that there is no standard

definition available for electronic journals. They are called by various names, such as e-journals, virtual journals, paperless journals, online journals, networked journals, and CD-ROM journals. Therefore, generally, a journal that is available in an electronic form through an online host is called an e-journal.

Research Information Network-RIN (2013) points out that e-journal assists researchers to seek for information they need immediately and efficiently. Remote access to online journals has been a major gain to academic and research libraries. Further, Research Information Network-RIN(2013) has recognized that most United Kingdom (UK) researchers and students seeking information through e-journal.

Meanwhile the condition of pre-service teachers in this study context, reading in for journal articles is uncommon for them.Literature of reading instruction in a first language context identifies a range of reading comprehension strategies that can be taught to students to enhance comprehension and these have been applied to teaching English passages in English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts(Hudson, 2007; Koda, 2005). These include strategies such as previewing, scanning, skimming, predicting, questioning, visualising, and summarising(Burke, Fiene, Young, & Meyer, 2008; McLaughlin & Allen, 2003; Taylor et al., 2006). For example, teachers can teach previewing strategies to activate background knowledge, predicting strategies are applied to anticipate a story event or what might happen in a passage. Questioning strategies can be employed to guide reading and to monitor understanding. Using visualising strategies, teachers can ask their students to use visual imagery in their reading to represent their understanding of the passage. This can be completed by drawing, providing pictures or mind maps. Summarising is used to synthesise key ideas about the content of the passage.

Related to strategies for reading, Villaume and Brabham(2002) underline that better reading strategies allow students to be more engaged in reading experiences and encourage them to be more involved in learning. Therefore, instruction used to teach reading strategies should be explicit, systematic, clear, and comprehensive. Demonstration how to employ the strategies including opportunities for students to practice the strategies under teacher's guidance is necessary.

Further, Duke and Pearson (2002) provided five progressive phases of reading strategies.The first is an explicit description of the comprehension strategy and when and how it should be used. Next, teachers provide modelling and demonstrate how to apply the strategy. The third phase involves collaborative use of the strategy in action. Guided practice using the strategy with gradual release of responsibility is the fourth stage. In the final stage, the students are able to use the strategy independently. Scaffolding and modelling allow students to develop as active readers (Garcia, 2003; Gibbons, 2002; Handsfield & Jiménez, 2008; Lantolf, 2007; Pressley, 2002). The notion of developing students as active readers links to more learner-centred approach in which readers construct an understanding from information in a passage and their experience in a meaningful way (Bransford, Brown, Cocking, Donovan, & Pellogrino, 2000; K. L. Brown, 2003; McCombs, 1997; Schuh, 2004; Seifert & Simmons, 1997).

2.0   METHODOLOGY

The methodology comprises three sections; participants, procedures, data and data analysis.

2.1   Participants

The participants of this study were 22 pre-service teachers in the fifth semester of Mulawarman University who learned advanced reading course and were expected to yield the research topic in the sixth semester. Therefore, at the end of the course, they needed to submit twelve online journal articles including four research-based articles while the rest could be literature-based studies. They obtained the articles from the open access journals.

2.2   Procedures

The students in the advanced reading course were taught in three different phases; browsing journals, highlighting and noting, and paraphrasing and summarizing. In browsing journal articles, they were explained about the journal articles and the benefits using them for research ideas. Next, I showed them the websites they could browse and download free access journals, and how to search articles they were interested in through reading theabstracts. I suggested them to read the abstract before downloading to ensure the article was the one they desired. I also provided links to open access anddemonstrated how to search an article using key words.

Next phase was highlighting and noting. The students had to apply skimming and scanning strategies in order to find important points in paragraphs.After completing this stage, they had to highlight sentences or phrases. Note taking wasapplied when they haddone with highlighting. What they noted was the summary of the highlighted sentences/phrases in their own words. The notes were written besides the paragraph. This wascarried out for each paragraph.

The third phase was paraphrasing and summarizing. In this phase, the students   took all the notes they had written in the articles and typed them. They needed to summarize, edit, and revise them to have better summary that reflected the content of the articles. Through the summary they did not necessitate to reread the articles in the process of research proposal.

Demonstrations and exercisesthe three major phases took four meetings. The students needed to do their own with guidance during the rest of the meetings. They had to gather 12 relevant articles based on their concern.

2.3   Data and Data Analysis

The data gathered in this study were from the questions given to pre-service teachers two months after the course has ended. They had one week to respond the questions focusing on what they had learnt, difficulties they encountered in each phase, and impact of this course for the research ideas. The responses were analyzed based on the themes emerged from the responses. The chucks of similar responses in each phase were merged to achieve one similar theme.

3.0   FINDINGS

This section consists of three parts; browsing, highlighting and noting, and paraphrasing and summarizing Each is presented as follows.

3.1   Browsing the Journal Articles

Most of the students' responses indicated that they knew the website for journal articlesexisted,and how to browse throughthem. One response, specifically, revealed that she just realized that there were many things sheshould be awareof, for example student-18 (S18) "I just realized that there are lots of things-more educational knowledge out there. For example in listening skill, it is not only the listening skills, but also strategies, anxiety, or think aloud related to listening."This statement shows that there are many topics in alisteningskill that is not only in the skill itself but also can be extended to issues related to the skill. Further,thestudents indicated that they previously did not know what journal articles, how to download, and howto browse through website for journal article, as statement given by student-13 (S13)"I think I learned lots in this stage. Now, I know how to download the journal article. I know better the website of the journal article. This is the first time I did it".The response shows that the kinds of activities especially browsing, searching and learning about journal articleswere the first time for this student.

Moreover, the students were also acquainted with approach to compromise with journal articles. Other also demonstrated that he was able to distinguish reliable articles and predatory one as reported by student-1 (S1) "I know about journal article, the function of article as a reference in research, the website that I could browse, how to search and download as well as the "predatory journals" should be avoided". Therefore, the students were able to choose reliable journal articles that they could use as references in their research reports. Although most students perceived that this phase was beneficial for them, they also indicated that it camewith difficulties. Three students informed that bad Internet connection was the problem that hindered them to browsethe topic they needed. Most of them had challenges to obtain 12 relevant articles as student-14 (S14) wrote

"In this browsing phase I faced some difficulties; I can't find the articles that I wanted since I wrote down a complete title of the article. So, I have to write down the general key words and then I have to select the articles. This takes time and I need to spend more time to select the ones I am interested in".

The response above shows that students had trouble to search and attain relevant articles with right key words. In addition to this, ten student responses indicatedthat searching relevant articles that met to their interest was challenging; for example student-2 (S2) reported "It is hard to decide one topic that I want to focus on because there are too many articles with too many topics". This statement confirms the students' confusion as the results of the amount of topics given in the websites gave these students difficulties to choose their research topics.

3.2   Highlighting and Noting

In highlighting and noting phase, the students had to find main ideas to enable them highlighting main points of the paragraphs. However, the students, in general, indicated that they necessitated to be careful as one reported (S14) "In order to search for main ideas, I have to be careful and should understand the texts". Although the students were familiar with finding main ideas like one reported, the activity was similar to what she did in senior high school. Student-12 (S12) wrote "I learn again what I have learned in senior high school, to find main ideas, but in this course is in English".

Although the students ought to redowhat they had practiced in senior high schools, finding main ideas was challenging for them. Most of them denoted that they were confused

to determine which ones would be the main ideas or important points of the paragraphs as reported by student-6 (S6) "It was quite hard to find main ideas in the paragraphs because I found many sentences in one paragraph and I must repeat reading to find them". In regards ofrepetition in reading, most students expressed that they hadpredicament in understanding the journal articles because of new vocabularies and language style; for example student-3 (S3) "I found that it is hard to determine important points of some articles because of the language used. In order to understand, I have to open dictionary and it takes time to understand them". This shows that new unfamiliar words and language used in the journal articles hindered the students to understand the articles.

The next stepis highlighting and noting. The students in this phase found that they had to highlight what they have thought as important points in the previous action; finding main points in each paragraph. Student-17 (S17) informed "This stage will ease me to know important parts and to understand the meaning of the paragraphs". Further, student-13 (S-13) explained "This phase allows me to learn when there are some notes besides the paragraphs; I do not need to read the whole paragraph. I can read the notes I have made, and I did flash back my memory to search important points". This information shows that the students could take the benefit from what they had done in highlighting and noting main points of the articles. Other thing that students have learned wasreflection.Forinstance, student-8 (S8)clarified "In highlighting is about behaviour/ attitude. I learned some good ones, to be more tidy, focused, carefully and patience. I learned how to note correctly the information I got, what the focus and main points from the information".

Similar to the previous stages that the students had to complete, in highlighting and noting, they confronted at least two challenges; long articles and timeconsuming. Thestudents found some articles had more than 15 pages with single space of 10 font, as student-8 (S8) confirmed "The difficulty I found if it is long article, more than 15 pages with small font". Moreover, in terms of timepreoccupation, students explained that reading article many times is time consuming as student-17 (S17) informed:

"Because making notes in each paragraph is not demanding, we have to have much time in this stage as I have to read the article again and again although it is just in the stage of finding main ideas or key words in each paragraph".

The statement above revealed an indicationthat finding important points in each paragraph were problematical for students; they had to read the article many times and then decide important points in each paragraph.

3.3   Paraphrasing and Summarizing

More than half of the responses revealed that the students acknowledged better how to paraphrase,which wasenabling them to summarize; for example student-16 (S16) "I know how to paraphrase and summarize with my own words and find synonyms. I got a lot of new knowledge of words from synonyms, how to construct sentences, etc." The rest claimed that they have enriched their vocabulary because they had to search for synonym in paraphrasing. Again, most students had obsctaclesinparaphrase,such as synonym and voice change; active into passive voice or vice versa as reported by student-17 (S17),
"I think I have problems in changing the sentences into the passive voice as I have to know the basic sentence of the active one, verb to be used and others. I have to learn more about passive voice and have dictionary with me".
Furthermore, most of them were confused to paraphrase using their own words which have similar meaningswith the original source. One example is given below (S18):

"I feel difficulty when I have to paraphrase because I am not too smart to do that. It happens maybe because I have fewer vocabularies. Additionally, when we are not careful, it will change the message from the author. When we can't arrange the word, it will make the paraphrasing is the same as the original. I think before we do paraphrasing or summarizing we have to know fully what the article is. Having more vocabularies is one of the important points in this case because we are pushed to convey the writer's message with own words"

The description above demonstrates the major obstacle student faced was their limitation invocabularies. Itwas hypothesized that if the students had adequate vocabulary, an ideal way of paraphrasing that conveys original meaning intheir own words would be less intricate.
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3.4   Impact on Research Ideas

Six students' responses revealed that they learned more about the articles, while ten students mentioned that they learnedmoreknowledge about research, for example

(S11) "From this course I learned many things that actually making research proposal is not as difficult as I thought as long as I have prepared from now. I think from this course I could start and figure out what I have to do and need when writing research proposal. I have some depiction the proposal I wanted to make even though this process is time consuming, however I am happy with it. I know what it is and how to do it".

(S19)"Yes, there are I know want should I do when I prepare my thesis later. I know the best source that contains many researchers' theories. I used to search the main idea of the journal articles. I know the way to search key point by highlighting the sentences".

The two previous statements indicate that the process in each stage had allowedthe students to gathersome ideas for their prospective research, even though they suffered from exhausting and demanding work. About 90% or 20 students got research ideas, or at least they obtained research topic as stated by student-1(S1) "I have got an idea for my research such as improving listening in English through songs, digital stories and multimedia". In addition to that, student-10 (S10) wrote "I have a research idea. I intend to plan research about speaking anxiety effect on speaking performance in the classroom" or "I am interested in mind maps for vocabulary achievement" as it waswritten by student-20. Meanwhile, the rest or 10% mentioned that they have not had research ideasorthey still considered the researchtopic they would take; as one student reported (S12): "After one semester I learned this course, I still don't know what topic I should have in my proposal. I am still confused and get lost. I wish I could find it soon".
Additionally, most of the students had not started making research proposalsby the end of the course; yet, one claimed that she presented her own proposal in other course.

(S4)"In this semester I took a course of academic presentation in which each student has to present research proposal either from the previous thesis or my own thesis, and I chose the second one. I used the journal articles that I have learned from this course as references with some additional articles which are more specific about my proposal".

The statement above showed that the student was confident enough to show her own research proposalthat wascomposed from journal articles she had taken in this course. In addition to ideas for conducting research, the students reflected what they had to do during the course. One student mentioned that he did not learn much from the course, five students did not provide any comments on this section, while the rest indicated that the course was fatiguing but beneficial, not only inacademic but also for personal reasons, for example

(S10)"Actually it is exhausting to work one journal per week. But then, I realized that in the future such routine will help me conducting research related to my interest. Whether I like it or not, I must force to drive myself out of the comfort zone".

(S1) I realized that when I did reflection to myself about what I have learned from this course is much more on the habit to be persistent in learning, work harder, to be more responsible to what I have done, independent, think critically, and not to give up easily in doing something. I believe that "short pain long gain"

(S16)"This course is "amazing" because I learned not only how to search main points, highlighting and noting, but also time appreciation to accomplish task on time and do not waste time. I experienced that I did not have enough sleep because I have to complete to summarize three articles for one night as I spent more time for play rather than for study. Therefore, I am very happy with this course as I learned many things".

The assertions from three students revealed that the learning experiences they had achieved in this course were useful for not only research knowledge but also for individual needs.

4.0   DISCUSSION

The discussion in this section is based on the key findings achieved from each phase. The students have become aware of the research topics beyond what they have studied. More issues on language skills could be assessed as a source of information for them in learning(Anderson, 2003). In browsing phase, the students know better about the website they can access and download journal articles they want although sometimes Internet connection deters them to do it. Thus, Internet and journal articles are accessible for students in this study, however Internet connection as a technical problem still occurs in which this fact is dissimilar to other context where Internet is faster as a source for learning (Leu, 2002). Consequently, they had to spend more time on this phase. Moreover, using the right key words bestows students' problem.

In highlighting and noting phase, the students had to find important points in each paragraph, they had to concentrate which words or sentences are necessary. The major challenges for students were unfamiliar vocabularies and language style used in the journal articles as well as their lengths. This is probably due to first time experiences for them reading and engaging with journal articles. In fact, lack of vocabularies influence students' ability to paraphrase since this caused difficulties to search synonyms, as well as changing the sentence voice. As a result, they were unsure using their own words with similar meaning to the novel source. The fact that students gained benefits as well as complexities to understand the journal articles is identicalwith Coiro's (2003); the introduction of electronic texts brings assistance and impediment while the impact allows students to gain more knowledge about research (Research Information Network-RIN, 2013). Moreover, students obtained some thoughtsand schemes for conducting research, more autonomous in their

learning,and self-regulated (Bransford, Brown, Cocking, Donovan, &Pellogrino, 2000; Brown, 2003; McCombs, 1997; Schuh, 2004; Seifert & Simmons, 1997).

5.0   CONCLUSION

The students indicated that they have encountered the phase of findings main points of each paragraph was the most challenging; comparing to other phases such as highlighting and noting, and paraphrasing and summarizing even though they studied those strategies in the previous courses. Therefore, the teaching and learning process, especially in reading, have to be well-designed in order to provide more opportunities for students to practice different kinds of reading comprehension strategies which should be taught to students since theywere in the first semester.

This study reveals that seeking research inspiration through the online journal articles has offered students some benefits such as more competencies and skills to browse and search relevant journal articles as they are familiarwith the Internet and ICT. They are able to broaden their research knowledge and method, and learn to read and write concurrently. Although they have uncompleted research proposals, they have developed themes and schemas for their research.

Since the data of this study have focused on the student' reports of what students have learned, it is suggested for future research that has similar interest to include interviews to gather more in depth data.

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