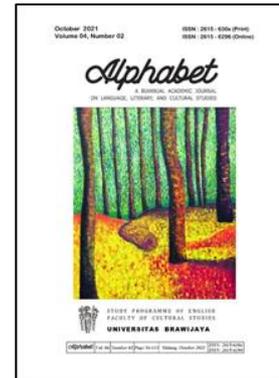


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## Higher Order Thinking Reading Strategies: An Alternative to Improve Students' Reading Comprehension in the Indonesian EFL Context

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# Higher Order Thinking Reading Strategies: An Alternative to Improve Students' Reading Comprehension in the Indonesian EFL Context

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## Abstract

Teaching reading in English as a foreign language in Indonesia is challenging since it is not only to enable the students to comprehend a reading text, but also to enable them to relate their understanding of the text to their real life. This paper proposes an alternative to English teachers in Indonesia on how to employ higher order thinking reading strategies to achieve the objective. To begin with, the writer discusses reading and reading interest in Indonesia. The writer then reviews higher order thinking reading strategies, teaching strategies related to higher order thinking skills, and graphic organizers. In the end, the writer expects that Indonesian teachers employ higher order thinking reading strategies to encourage their students to use their knowledge and life experience while reading a particular text so that they will be interested in reading and comprehend the text better.

**Keywords:** higher order thinking reading strategies, graphic organizers, reading in English as a foreign language

Reading plays a significant role in the development of English literacy, yet it remains difficult to teach since English is treated as a foreign language in Indonesia. The process of reading in English in the foreign language context involves complex variables (Grabe, 2009; Masduqi, 2014; Masduqi, Fatimah, & Subiyanto, 2021). Teele (2004) argues that reading a text in English involves syntax, lexical knowledge, and discourse that are interrelated to expand learners' thinking skills and widen their knowledge in the long run. Therefore, teaching reading does not only deal with how to teach students to understand a particular text, but also how to link the value of the text to their life experience and knowledge.

In relation to understanding a text, students need to use reading skills which involve lower-order and higher-order thinking reading

strategies. Lower order thinking reading strategies attempt to enable the students to recall information from a text. These strategies assist the students to understand a text more effectively. On the other hand, higher order thinking reading strategies facilitate the students to relate their reading comprehension to their life experience and knowledge. Higher order thinking skills are believed to develop students' critical thinking, problems solving, and creative thinking (Rahman & Manaf, 2017; Shaheen, 2010). These abilities are relevant with the 21st century skills and necessary to cope with various information both online and offline as well as develop lifelong learning (Yen & Halili, 2015; Rentawati et al, 2018).

In the context of English as a foreign language (EFL) in Indonesia, teaching reading is very challenging since most students find

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reading in English difficult and uninteresting. When teachers ask their students to read a particular text, the students tend to be lazy and ignore their teachers' tasks. Various reasons trigger this fact and one of them is the students' low reading habit. Indonesian students tend to have a low reading habit and therefore, prefer listening to their teachers' explanation to reading the materials independently. Consequently, Indonesian students in general have low reading ability (Masduqi, 2014; Masduqi, Fatimah, & Subiyanto, 2021). Furthermore, there are some causes of students' low reading ability, including lack of vocabulary, low reading motivation, limited prior knowledge, low reading interest, limited learning supports including limited libraries, and lack of parents' support (Cahyono and Widiati, 2006; Hamra and Syatriana, 2010). In addition, Indonesian people are generally in the process of transition from oral to written culture (Tampubolon, 1993). Therefore, the tendency of being informed through verbal information is still stronger than through independent reading. This naturally happens as Indonesian parents are accustomed to telling stories than reading stories to their children. As an implication to teaching reading at schools, teachers need to be creative to encourage their students to read.

One of the creative ways to encourage students to read is by employing higher order thinking reading strategies in classroom practices. In this paper, the writer proposes an alternative to English teachers in Indonesia on how to employ higher order thinking reading strategies to improve students' reading comprehension. To begin with, the writer discusses an important related issue, that is, reading and reading interest in Indonesia. Then, the writer reviews higher order thinking reading strategies, teaching strategies related to higher order thinking, and graphic organizers. The review serves as a catalyst for proposing higher order thinking reading strategies as an alternative to improve Indonesian students' reading comprehension.

## READING AND READING INTEREST IN INDONESIA

Reading plays an important role in the context of human life, especially in today's advanced information and communication era. Harras and Sulistianingsih (1997) state that reading is a bridge for people to progress and succeed in both education and professional fields. They agree that reading proficiency or reading literacy is a requirement for every person to advance in their lives. Urquhart and Weir (1998) assert that reading is basically getting and interpreting the information programmed in language form via the means of print. Furthermore, Grabe (2009) suggests that reading involves many complex processes. This is line with Grabe and Stoller's statement (2019) that reading involves linguistics processing abilities that are quite instinctive in their uses and combinations. In reading, readers use sense and imagination as well as observation and memory. Accordingly, readers will not read a certain text enthusiastically if the topic of the text is not interesting for them.

In terms of reading interest, Wahadaniah (1997) argues that people who are interested in reading have strong attention and enjoyment while reading a text and eventually, benefit from their reading activities. Reading interest means a high willingness or tendency towards reading activity or it can be associated with the love for reading (Dewi et al., 2020). Reading interest tends to provide a pleasant anticipation followed by actions, which in turn gives greater pleasure.

In the Indonesian context, people's reading interest is relatively low compared to other people in different nations. Based on the World's Most Literate Nations which was issued by Central Connecticut State University in 2016, Indonesia was in rank 60 out of 61 countries. Then, based on the result of PISA 2018, Indonesian students' reading comprehension reached average score 371, with the average score of OECD is 487 (OECD, 2019). In 2020 Indonesian Human Development Index (HDI) was in the position of 107

from a total of 187 countries (UNDP, 2020). This position indicates that literacy in Indonesia is low since one of the elements in HDI is literacy level and the quality of education among people in a certain country. Furthermore, a survey conducted by *Badan Pusat Statistik* (the Indonesian Statistics Bureau) in 2012 revealed that people tended to look for information from other sources than reading. They tended to watch television or listening to radio to obtain information. In addition, Herminingrum (2019) conducted a four-year study (2012-2016) involving primary school students in Malang and she found out that 30% of the first and second graders participated in her research could not read well and 50% of them had difficulty in writing. These facts indicate that reading is problematic and the ability to read still needs to be improved among Indonesian people.

### HIGHER ORDER THINKING READING STRATEGIES

Reading skills cover lower-order and higher-order thinking skills. Lower-order thinking skills contain remembering names, places, and time in a particular text, whereas higher-order thinking skills include comparing the content with real life, evaluating the arguments, and contrasting the writer's ideas with other writers. To understand the text comprehensively and coherently, however, readers mainly use higher order thinking skills. In this case, English teachers are required not only to ask their students to read the text, but also to teach reading strategies that can support the students' higher order thinking skills. Furthermore, the strategies for learning to read in English with higher order thinking skills include predicting skills (predicting), making connections from a text to the outside world (making the connection), visualizing the text content (visualizing), making conclusions (inferring), questioning the content of the text (questioning), and making a summary (summarizing). These strategies have been found to develop students' reading skills (Block & Isra-

el, 2005; Rentawati et al, 2018 Yen & Halili, 2015).

In terms of predicting, English teachers can ask their students to determine the purpose of reading and predicting issues in the text. The students need to interact their life experience related to the text and the actual contents of the text and even revise predictions they have made (Duke & Pearson, 2005). In making the connection, English teachers can ask the students to connect their prior experience and knowledge to the text content. By comparing their experience and knowledge with the text, the students are expected to understand the text effectively (Teele, 2004). In visualizing, English teachers can ask the students to draw an imaginative concept of the reading content or creating a graphic organizer (Adler & Doren, 2011). Then, in inferring, English teachers can ask the students to connect all elements of the content of the readings and make conclusions. In this case, the students can draw pictures, graphs, maps and other ideas to make inferences (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). In questioning, English teachers can ask the students to construct the content of the text by making questions before, while, and after reading. This activity can develop the students' problem-solving skills when reading the English text (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). At last, in summarising, English teachers can ask the students to find out main points of the reading text. This strategy can enhance skills in identifying main ideas, supporting ideas and other related ideas by using their own words (Adler & Doren, 2001).

### TEACHING STRATEGIES RELATED TO HIGHER ORDER THINKING SKILLS

In implementing higher order thinking reading strategies, English teachers need to implement several teaching strategies. The first teaching strategy is *Directed Reading and Thinking Activity* (DR-TA). In this strategy, a teacher walks his/her students through setting purpose, making predictions, asking questions, and clarifying points in the text. The approach

can be used in all content areas, from science, language, arts, and even mathematics. DR-TA begins with the students examining the title of the story or a section to be read. From this information, they make predictions and set expectations regarding what the text is about. Next, either the teacher reads the material out loud, or the students read sections, stopping at designated points. Logical stopping points include subheadings, ends of chapters, or high points of a story. At each stopping point, the teacher asks open ended questions that is designed to elicit predictions or opinions about the text.

The second teaching strategy is called *Letter to Heart*. Teachers ask the students to write a letter about some facets of a book. The letter can be addressed to the author, a historical figure, or a character in the book. It can be written either from the student's perspectives or from that of another character. Teachers should provide students with several articles on a specific topic that present two sides of an issue.

The third teaching strategy is *Position Paper*. In this case, students should read an article and take notes on points made by both sides of arguments in the article. With a partner, one student should then pick a side and write a position paper defending his/her position with factual evidence. Students can also participate in trials or debates on other related controversial issues.

The fourth teaching strategy is *Role, Audience, Format, and Topic* (RAFT). In this teaching strategy, students can use any format they want—diary, letter, editorial, and so forth—to answer the following questions from the perspective of a character they have read about R, that is, for role (Who are you?), A is for audience (Who will read your work?), F is for format (What type of writing will you do?), and T is for topic (What will you be writing about?). Take for example, there is a brochure about a 2021 Honda PCX which is given to a 17-year-old male by an automobile salesperson. The students can fill the RAFT model as follows:

- R: an automobile salesperson
- A: a 17-year-old male
- F: a brochure
- T: a 2021 Honda PCX

The last teaching strategy is *Collaborative Strategic Reading* (CSR). In this teaching strategy, students work together to accomplish four main tasks:

- preview (skim over the material, determine what they know and what they want to learn),
- identify clicks and clunks (clicks: we get it and clunks: we don't understand this concept, idea, or word),
- get the gist (main idea). and
- wrap up (summarize important ideas and generate questions)

Each student in the group is assigned a role such as the leader/involver/taskmaster, the clunk expert, the gist expert, and the time-keeper/pacer (positive interdependence). Then, each student should be prepared to report the on the group's conclusion (individual accountability).

By varying the teaching strategies (*DR-TA*, *Letter to Heart*, *Position Paper*, *RFAT*, and *CSR*), English teachers expect their students to have various experiences in relating the content of a text to their life experience and knowledge. In doing so, the teachers can carry out their reading lessons more interestingly and eventually, improve their students' reading interest.

In the next section, the writer describes the use of graphic organizers to complement the teaching strategies above. Graphic organizers are related to higher order thinking reading strategies as they are used to help students comprehend a text easier by connecting an idea with other ideas in the text. In this way, the students will be more able to relate the text content to their life experience and knowledge. Teachers can introduce graphic organisers and train the students to use graphic organisers in classroom activities that require higher order thinking skills such as

summarizing key concepts of a text. This will be elaborated further in the next section.

### GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS

Graphic organizers are visual representation of knowledge that structures information by arranging important aspects of a concept or topic into a pattern using labels. The main function of graphic organizers is to help present information in concise ways that highlight the organization and relationships of concepts (Bromley, DeVitis & Modlo, 1999). The organizers give the learners another way to see the information. Some of the organizers allow for the information to be written or drawn. Graphic organizers are a helpful way to organize information. In the book, *The Use of Graphic Organizers to Enhance Thinking Skills in the Learning of Economics*, the Hong Kong Curriculum Development Institute (2001) asserts that there are advantages of using graphic organizers for students. Some of the advantages for students are to understand the concept of part to whole, clarify and organize ideas, recognise and assimilate different points of view, comprehend texts, and improve memory. In addition, the use of graphic organizers is also useful for teachers to make the lessons interactive, to motivate students, and to assess what students know.

There are many kinds of graphic organizers. The Hong Kong Curriculum Development Institute (2001) states that there are four basic categories, namely cyclical organizers, conceptual organizers, sequential organisers, and hierarchical organizers. In this article, the writer only introduces to three examples of graphic organizers that can be used in reading classes.

The first graphic organizer is called KWL Chart. KWL stands for what I KNOW, Want I WANT to know, and Want I LEARNED. It is an example of conceptual organizers which can be used in teaching reading. Basically, teacher can use this organizer as pre-reading and post reading activities. Take for example a teacher brings a text about a famous singer. Before asking the students to read the text, the

teacher asks the students to fill the column K in this organizer. They have to write down the information that they know about the singer. In this case, the students are asked to link their prior knowledge to the text. This step is important since it can increase the students' interest in the topic. Then, the teacher assigns the students to complete the second column (W column). The students are asked to predict what the text is about and to think critically of what they might expect from the text. Afterwards, the teacher asks the students to read the text. Having read the text and perhaps done some reading comprehension exercises, the students then are asked to fill the last column in the KWL chart (L column) to check the points that meet their expectation and to check their understanding of the text. The model of KWL chart is as follows:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**KWL**

*Use the graphic organizer below to organize your information.*

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>K</b> <i>What I Know</i>	<b>W</b> <i>What I Want To Learn</i>	<b>L</b> <i>What I Learned</i>

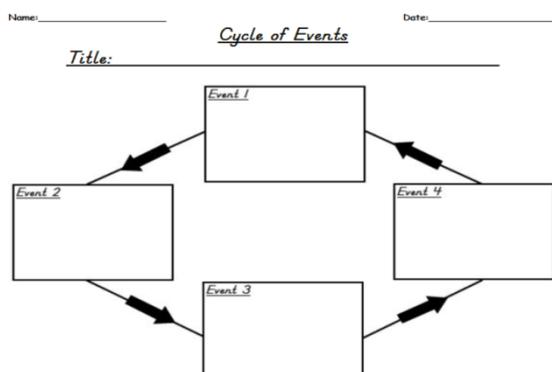
The second example is cause and effect graphic organizer. It is used to help students understand cause-effect texts. The cause-effect graphic organizer is as follows:

name \_\_\_\_\_

Cause	Effect

The last graphic organizer that can be implemented in reading classes is cycle of events graphic organizer. This organizer belongs to

cyclical organizers. It is used to train students to identify the key events in a text and how the events relate to each other. The sample of cycle of event graphic organizer is as follows:



There have been several studies investigating the importance of graphic organisers in reading comprehension (e.g., Chen, 2016; Ciascai, 2009; Simmons, 1988). In Chen's study (2016), reading comprehension and vocabulary hypertext glosses as graphic organisers played a vital role in improving reading comprehension and attaining vocabulary in the target language. Then, in the study of Ciascai (2009), graphic organizers scaffolded students' understanding of the content of certain text by classifying and modeling ideas in the text. Interestingly, in Simmons, Griffin, and Kameenui's study (1988), EFL students who were introduced and trained to use graphic organizers to comprehend certain texts outperformed the students who were not trained using graphic organizers. All things considered, graphic organizers that require higher order thinking skills are beneficial for students' reading comprehension.

### CONCLUSION

Teaching reading in English as a foreign language in Indonesia is challenging since reading involves complex variables and students' reading interest is generally low. Teachers are required to be creative to motivate students in reading as the main objective of teaching reading is not only to make the students able to comprehend a certain text but also to enable them to relate the text to their

knowledge and experience. Higher order thinking reading strategies is one way to improve students' reading comprehension. In doing so, English teachers need to implement various teaching strategies (*DR-TA*, *Letter to Heart*, *Position Paper*, *RFAT*, and *CSR*) to make their reading classes more enjoyable and comprehensible for their students. In addition, the use of graphic organizers is also a good alternative that English teachers can optimise to carry out interesting reading lessons, increase students' reading interest, and eventually, improve students' reading comprehension.

Several studies have proven the importance of the teaching strategies and graphic organisers for English students' reading comprehension. By recommending the use of various teaching strategies and graphic organizers, the writer expects English teachers to be able to make more effective reading lessons and make reading activities more meaningful for their students. In the end, English teachers in Indonesia can improve not only their students' reading comprehension but also their students' critical thinking skills.

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