Assesing an Autistic Student’s Reading Comprehension Through Task-Based Activities: Self-Study Through Narrative inquiry

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Abstract. The understanding reading text is essential for every student. Without knowing the reading content, students will not get information or lessons from the text they read, so it is necessary to assess their reading ability TBLT in the reading learning process. For this reason, researchers conducted research using a qualitative approach by applying the self-study method on narrative inquiry. For this reason, researchers exported their experiences when implementing TBLT to assess an autistic student named Dimas. The learning implementation is divided into three stages. It is reading tasks, drawing tasks, and retelling tasks. All of the tasks are interrelated. The researchers hoped that this research could become a reference for teachers to apply assessment with TBLT and contribute to the development of education globally and comprehensively, especially in Indonesia. The data used in this study are documentation, journal diary, field notes. The validity is done by linking the data from the documentation, journal diary, field notes, and for data analysis, the researcher connects the data with previous theories.

Keyword: Assessment, Reading comprehension, Task-based, Self-study

INTRODUCTION

The Nowadays, many information in various fields such as social, political economy, health education technology, and so on are presented in English. It's become the driving factor for each individual to learn English as an international language. So the English language skill that students have will also affect their academic abilities in the future. In learning English, reading skills are very important for students to achieve maximum learning outcomes. By reading students can add and expand their capabilities in several other aspects such as speaking, writing, and listening.

Students' ability to understand the reading content is also very important in the reading process. Without understanding the reading content, students will not get information and knowledge from the text they read. The research shows that many students are not used to reading text and are still not yet fluent in understanding the text contents when they are reading reading (Sari et al., 2020). The ability to understand reading content needs to be possessed by every student, including students with autism. Some children with autism can understand the content very well, like children in general, but some of them need help from teachers, friends, or people around them, and some are unable to read and understand the content (Ehri et al., 2001). To teach children with autism to read, the teacher must adjust to the abilities and deficiencies. Teachers also have to choose the right method according to their needs and make the reading learning process fun. So students will be more motivated to learn to read English texts.

For the students' ability in reading comprehension, it is necessary to do an assessment. There are several levels of understanding in reading, among others, namely. 1. Understanding Literacy (LC), knowing and understanding the information contained in the text. 2. Inferential Understanding (IC), can conclude from the information that can be in the text. 3. Reorganization (R), creating a scheme and synthesizing the existing content in the text. 4. Critical Comprehension (CC), can provide opinions and assessments of the
content of the text (Dewitz et al., 2003). Physiological, intellectual, psychological, environmental, and socio-economic factors influence a person's reading comprehension ability (Thama, 2014).

To assess the reading comprehension of the student, the teacher can do many ways. Unfortunately, many teachers in Indonesia have low level of assessment literacy especially those who teach English for young learners (Umam & Indah, 2020). Some actions have been done to increase the assessment literacy, such as a study by (Jaelani & Umam, 2021) that integrate authentic assessment in EFL classroom. In this study, the assessments that teachers can do to find out reading comprehension is implementing task-based language teaching (TBLT). It is done because TBLT is believed as an effective approach to be used in English classroom. It can be modified according to the classroom’s needs (Farhatunnisa & Umam, 2020).

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is an activity in the learning process by giving students task to use their literacy skills to interact and be useful in their real-life (Long, 2015). In TBLT, the teacher has a very important task where the teacher must create a learning atmosphere that allows students to discuss and provide support for students to convey their opinions, ideas, and information that they have and get. A good task-based language learning activity must have the following features. 1. Provide learning materials from the teacher. 2. Intrinstic interests (discussing to solve existing problems). 3. The existence of a product resulting from learning. 4. There are opportunities given to students to think, speak, and prepare for presentations (Shehadeh, 2005). Task-based activity can also help evaluate and assess students in the learning process. One of which is assessing students’ understanding in reading by making observations, as stated by Ellis, (2013). Direct task evaluation outcomes can be carried out by the assessor by observing student’s performance.

This research explored my experience when I was assessing reading comprehension through task-based language learning by doing self-study. As previously mentioned, there are four levels of understanding. In this study, the researcher will only evaluate the first reading comprehension, namely Literacy Comprehension (LC), carried out through reading, drawing, and retelling activities. This activity is carried out because it is considered fun learning and following the abilities of children with autism to foster motivation to learn from themselves. It is hoped that the study can be a reference for teachers to conduct assessments through task-based language learning in schools in Indonesia and contribute to Indonesia's development of education.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach by applying self-study method on narrative inquiry. Self-study is a methodology that is used to learn, practice in a professional manner. In self-study, practitioners are also researchers, so it needs adjustment of the type of data and data collection. Simultaneously, narrative inquiry is a research design that investigates human life experiences described through a story (Webster & Mertova, 2007). In narrative inquiry, researchers understand a critical part of the teacher experience continuum (Dewey, 1983). Thus, in this research, as a shadow teacher for a student with autism. The researcher explores her experience in assessing the reading comprehension of an autistic student by applying task-based language learning.

This narrative inquiry research contains a single story from the researcher as a shadow teacher for a student with autism named Dimas (a pseudonym). Dimas is nine years old and he is a 3rd-grade student at a private school in Bogor. The main teacher has been assisting Dimas for three years. To collect the data, documentation, journal diary, field notes are used. The documentation includes studying the lesson plan, video and materials used during learning processes. Journal diary is done as a form of reflection after the teaching is completed. Field notes are used to support the documentation and journal diary data that are collected during the learning processes. This task-based learning has been carried out for three months to support English learning at school, one of the schools of inclusion in Bogor. The lesson runs
for 45 minutes and three meetings a week. The task given is divided into three stages. They are reading task, drawing task, and retelling task. All of the tasks are inter-related.

The data that has been obtained is compiled based on the main findings and linked to the theory of reading comprehension and task-based activities in language teaching. Information is verified by adjusting data from reflection and documentation to ensure its validity. Moleong (1990) explains that all documents that have been obtained relating to the topic in research can be used for data validity and to analyze data. Data that have been received relating to the case are then connected to the previous theory (Moleong, 1990). So, the researchers did the analysis method in this research.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This research is in the form of a series of teacher’s stories on the stages of task-based learning activities that have been applied in assessing reading comprehension and describing the reading comprehension ability of an autistic child. This stage is in the form of reading text, drawing, and retelling.

**Reading text stage**

In every task-based learning activity, the teacher prepares the materials to use in learning process. The materials must be adjusted to Dimas' reading ability so that the teaching can run well and so that Dimas does not find it difficult to read the text. The reading text given to Dimas consists of 6-10 sentences and is pictorial, so that Dimas is interested in reading it (Adipta, 2016). According to Shahadeh (2005), an excellent task-based learning activity must provide the learning process materials. From the activities the teacher does, the pictorial text is a learning materials (Tomlinson, 2008).

![Figure 1](image1.jpg)

**Figure 1** The example of pictorial text that the teacher uses when doing learning activities.

When Dimas started reading the text aloud, the teacher began to notice how Dimas reads the text. The teacher pay attention to the speed in reading words, process phrases, and sentences as syntactic units and the suitability of expressions with the text being read. These three things are a unity of reading fluency (Klauda & Guthrie, 2008). In this activity, Dimas can read words fluently and process phrases and sentences as syntactic units. Still, he has not been able to adjust expressions to the text he is reading. When Dimas is reading the text given, he has no expression. The teacher did it because reading fluency influences reading comprehension. So, the teacher wants to know Dimas's reading fluency ability, such as the results of research from Klauda et al. (2008), wherein he researched 5th-grade elementary school students. He found that there is a significant effect of students' reading fluency on reading comprehension. This study is also supported by Kim, et al, (2012) which examined grade 1 and 2 elementary school students and found that students’ reading fluency affected reading comprehension. So that by looking at the reading fluency skills from Dimas, the teacher can understand and predict the reading comprehension (Valencia et al., 2010)

**Drawing stage**
The next activity is the drawing stage. In this process, the teacher asked Dimas to draw according to the story or discussion in the text. It is done because visuals in the form of images can help autistic children express emotions, convey communicative messages and interact with others (Kelly et al., 2009). Dimas reads the sentence and then draws it in the box that the teacher provides. There are numbers and different colored lines in each box to make it easier for Dimas to know the division. The activity of visualizing this information is carried out to achieve the learning and participatory goals of Dimas, who is one of the students with autism (Kelly et al., 2009). When he is drawing, Dimas looks like he can do it well and enjoys the activity. When he is drawing, the teacher occasionally asks Dimas what he has marked, such as "What is that?" and "Who is that?" to determine whether the image Dimas made was by the context in the reading text.

![Image](image.png)

Figure 2: The following is an image that Dimas has made.

From that picture, the picture shows that it is in accordance with the text that was read before, at the reading stage. Dimas still has control in writing sentences. So, the teacher asked Dimas to draw as a form of summarizing the text. One of the activities that can be a reading assessment is summarizing the text information (Grabe, 2009). Assessment using pictures on reading comprehension has also been carried out in research Keenan, (2008) where this assessment is done by asking children to choose images that match the text that has been read. In this research, the teacher did not tell Dimas to select a picture but to draw pictures. Dimas's picture in this section is a form of product that results from applying this task-based learning activity.

**Retelling stage**

This retelling stage is the last. At this stage, the teacher asked Dimas to retell what he had read. This stage is done because monitoring reading comprehension can be done by asking students to retell their information from the reading text (Klingner, 2004). When Dimas retells the story from the text that he has read, the teacher evaluates what he is telling with the story in the text that he has read. In this stage, Dimas tells the story in English and by the context contained in the text. By retelling a story, a student must be able to sequence and reconstruct the events presented in the text (Hansen, 1978). Retelling activities also benefit teachers in assessing students. The teacher can determine what students understand, and it can be used to learn what lessons can be taught next (Klingner, 2004). However, he seems to have difficulty telling it in complete sentences. So, the teacher helped him by giving questions to guide him in retelling.

The following excerpt is taken from Dimas when he is telling and the teacher’s conversation with Dimas when he had difficulty expressing his information. In the discussion, Dimas takes 1-2 minutes to tell sentence by sentence.

Dimas: “Mark is at the park.”

Teacher: “who is Max?”
Dimas: “Dog.”

Teacher: “Do you mean max is mark’s dog?”

Dimas: “Yes.”

Teacher: “So, tell me in a complete sentence then!”

Dimas: “Max is mark’s dog.”

Teacher: “Ok, you can continue!”

Dimas: “Mark flies a kite and plays Max.”

Teacher: “Do you mean “plays with max”?”

Dimas: “Yes.”

Teacher: “So?”

Dimas: “Mark flies a kite and plays with max.”

Teacher: “Ok, continue!”

Dimas: “Mark and Max play run and jump.”

Dimas: “Mark and Max go to the pond.”

Teacher: “What are they doing in the pond?”

Dimas: “See duck.”

Teacher: “Do you mean “to see the duck”?”

Dimas: “Yes.”

Teacher: “So?”

Dimas: “Mark and Max go to the pond to see the duck.”

Dimas: “The duck cute, funny.”

Teacher: “Do you mean “looks so cute and funny”? ”

Dimas: “The duck looks so cute and funny.”

The results of the conversations that have been conveyed above show that if Dimas can understand the content of the reading text that has been given, it is only constrained by his ability to use verbal language to convey the information he gets. It is in line to the study to the statement obtained by (Tager-Flusberg, 2004), which states that autistic children who can communicate verbally have difficulty using language functionally. In this stage, the teacher allowed Dimas to think and convey the information he got, and Dimas and the teacher had a discussion together.
CONCLUSION

By conducting a self-study through narrative inquiry, this study describes my experience when driving a reading assessment of an autistic child named Dimas. From the results of the discussion above, by carrying out three stages of task-based learning activities, it is known that Dimas can understand the text he reads. Klingner (2004) states that the best way to assess reading comprehension in students is to use various measurements. In this assessing reading comprehension through task-based activity, it is found that there is a provision of learning materials from the teacher in the form of reading text, the existence of a product as the final result of learning in the form of images made in mass. There are discussions and opportunities to think and presentations while at the retelling stage where according to Shahadeh (2005), these points must be presented in task-based language teaching. The researchers hopes this research can encourage teachers to share their experiences to become other researchers because by retelling the instructors' experiences, other teachers can get lessons from the failures and successes of the learning they apply to improve the quality of education globally broadly.

References


