

## The Role of Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) in Enhancing Students' Reading Skills For Second Language Acquisition

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### ABSTRACT

Reading becomes greatly important issue since it is considered as the most frequent input to develop second language acquisition. In reality, learning strategies used in the classroom activity often left a gap between the high proficiency students and the lower one. Hence, peer-assisted learning strategy (PALS) comes to provide a way out towards the gap. The role of peer-assisted learning strategy is assumed to be one of effective learning strategies since it gives them a more chance to interact and cooperate closely while diminish the gap itself in reading skills. Therefore, this research aimed to know the role of PALS in order to help the students enhancing reading skills focusing on the fluency, pronunciation, and word recognition in comprehending the texts while eliciting social interaction between them. This belongs to a case study research. The data were collected through interviews with various grades of students in senior high school. In the end, the research provided the descriptions about the students' opinion towards the role of PALS in enhancing their reading skills.

*Keywords: PALS, Reading skills, SLA*

### ABSTRAK

*Kemampuan membaca menjadi isu yang sangat penting karena itu dianggap menjadi input utama dalam perkembangan pemerolehan bahasa kedua. Pada kenyataannya, strategi belajar yang digunakan dalam aktivitas dikelas sering meninggalkan celah antara murid yang mempunyai kemampuan bahasa yang tinggi dan yang rendah. Maka, peran PALS (strategi belajar dengan bantuan teman) menjadi jembatan dari gap (celah) tersebut. Peran dari PALS dianggap strategi pembelajaran yang efektif karena itu memberikan kesempatan lebih untuk berinteraksi dan bekerjasama secara lebih dekat sekaligus menghilangkan gap yang ada dalam kemampuan reading itu sendiri. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui peran PALS dalam rangka membantu siswa meningkatkan kemampuan reading yang berfokus pada kelancaran, pengucapan, dan pengenalan kata dalam memahami teks sekaligus menumbuhkan interaksi sosial antar siswa. Ini termasuk penelitian studi kasus. Data diperoleh melalui interview dengan berbagai siswa SMA di level kelas yang berbeda. Diakhir, penelitian ini menyediakan gambaran tentang opini siswa terhadap peran PALS untuk meningkatkan kemampuan membaca mereka.*

*Katakunci: Strategi belajar dengan bantuan teman, kemampuan membaca, pemerolehan bahasa kedua*

## INTRODUCTION

Various learning strategies emerges one after another to provide the best solution for the learners in second language acquisition. However, certain strategies sometimes show the deficiencies towards cooperative learning between the students. Most of the learning strategies focus only on how to maximize learner's skills individually. It implies that the students who already got sufficient capacity in English will grow more smoothly. Further, they incline to get more facile applying any learning strategies to which suit to them in developing their own proficiency in English. However, when it comes to the students who are still in low proficiency, not much of strategies can be applied for. In addition, the speed of grasping the conveyed materials would be slower than the preceded students. Consequently, it raises the vivid differences between the students who have high proficiency and the lower ones. It can't be denied in relation to the fact that the students happen to be put in the same classes frequently based on the age regardless of the proficiency especially in English skills. Hence, this condition elicits the differences in some aspect of the students in which eventually will effect on the outcomes of students' skills in English. The higher one would be more smooth and confident, whereas the lower one would be left behind more and more in the classroom, English learning in this case.

In reading skill, many students lack of ability in comprehending the texts. The most visible factor is they lack of mastering vocabularies of those texts. Besides, the common way of the teacher on giving new vocabularies is always same which is not very effective at all for the students to be intake. The reason is probably the students are not very engaged to the whole lesson which yields to forget what they have learned about those vocabularies. As a result, the word recognition by the students during reading the texts is very low because they cannot decode the ideas which are delivered in the texts. So then it affects on how the students having difficulties on comprehending the whole text messages. Besides, most of them are also deficient in terms of pronunciation where then it also influences the fluency of the students in reading the texts.

PALS is kind of appropriate since it allows the students work together as a pair in which each pair consisted of a high performing student and a low performing student. Vygotsky (crain 1992; Slavin, 1990) and Piaget in Ginsburg-Block, Rohrbeck, Lavigne, and Fantuzzo (2008: 249) state that peer-assisted learning activities promote cognitive development and increase educational values in social interaction in which it results in optimal learning because same-age children are better able to learn from another rather than independently or adults. The benefits of PALS are not only strengthening students' academic skills, it also gives many students opportunity to practice their social skills with peers in natural setting (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2001; & Rivera, 1996 cited in [www.readingrockets.org](http://www.readingrockets.org)). Topping (1998: 28) states that when the students work together and learn in pairs, their motivation and attention are greater and their capacity to contribute question and receive feedback is greater and their own learning achievements are more visible to them. Furthermore, Harmer (2001: 21) gives points that work cooperatively gives the students chance to be more confident because they can work without the pressure of the whole class. They also can discuss what they are thinking in pairs without having shame.

For solving those matters, *peer-assisted learning strategies* (PALS) become one of good solutions to be applied in the classroom activity. PALS is considered to be one which can cover those deficiencies happen in the classroom since this learning strategies emphasizes on how to lessen the gap between the high and low proficiency students. Furthermore, both can interact each other during the lesson without biasing them into different levels, instead they hand in hand cooperate one after another to complete the assigned tasks. This research hopefully will give the vivid big pictures about what peer- assisted learning strategies is and

how it is implemented in classroom activity. Furthermore, there will also be affirmed about what students' opinions towards PALS implemented in the classroom and how they give a response towards PALS.

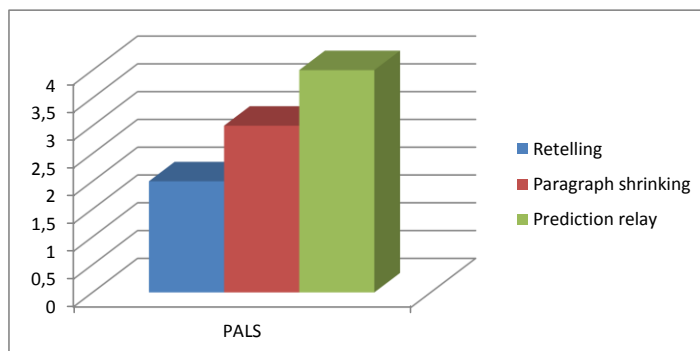
## METHODOLOGY

This belongs to a descriptive qualitative research in which the writer investigates students' opinion towards the role of Peer-assisted learning strategies in enhancing reading skills. The research procedure was adapted from a case study model proposed by Hancock and Algozzine (2006:15) which involved these six following steps. The first is setting the stage where it has been determined that the research is conducted on May until June and takes around 4 diverse students from various schools around Yogyakarta. Next is determining what to know which is to select appropriate relevant theories to the study. It also will clarify the main focus of the study itself. Third is selecting design, in this step the writer decides to choose a case study model by Hancock and Algozzine to conduct the study. After that, the next step is gathering information by using the research instrument. In this study, the main data is obtained through in-depth interview with some students. In other word, the data collection technique used is also in the form of interview. Then, come to the fifth step is summarizing and interpreting information based on the obtained data. The last step is reporting the findings; the writer reported the research findings systematically to support the discussion and draw the conclusion from it.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this sub topic, the researcher provided the data in which is used as the basic evidence to answer the research question. Therefore, it is provided some students' opinions towards the role of PALS in enhancing reading skills through conducting in-depth interview. The scheme of PALS according to Fuchs, Fuchs, Mathes & Simmons, (1997: 185-186) are used as the basis sessions of the discussion. Again, those three activities are: partner reading with retell, to increase oral fluency, paragraph summary, to increase skills in summarization and identification, and prediction relay, to make prediction of the text in reading comprehension. There are four various level students from grade 10, 11 and 12. They are also coming from different schools around Yogyakarta including SMAN 8 Yogyakarta with two students, MAN 2 Yogyakarta, and SMAN 7 Yogyakarta. All of them are taken as the respondents to be interviewed related to this topic. The opinions of those students are categorized into the following table:

Figure 1. The Categorization of Each Students Using



In paragraph shrinking activity, only one student from 11<sup>th</sup> Grade who has never practiced it in English reading activity since the teacher never tells to. Instead, the teacher only asked him and other classmate to do it alone or answering directly in front of the class. Whereas, the other three students have ever used this activity in improving reading skills and they said that it really helped them in grasping and understanding each paragraph of the text they read of.

In the last activity which is prediction relay, all of the students have ever used it in reading activity. It proved that this seems to be effective since their teacher regularly used it in their reading activity. Doing prediction relay did help them in grasping the particular information about the text either as a part or as a whole. In addition, the confirmation activity to check out the understanding towards the text showed interaction between them, high and lower level in a more comfort situation rather than doing alone or a head of the class.

To put it more specific, here is the summaries of each talk by the students. starting from the students from grade 10<sup>th</sup>, he said that learning with kind of pair tutoring is more convenient for him; no need to speak aloud like in front of the class, getting more confidence, no noisy or hectic, easy to share and if there is kind of problem (pronunciation, not knowing the meaning), he can go directly to discuss it with the pairs. Continuing to the students with grade 11<sup>th</sup>, he said that learning with pair tutoring is more comfort; more confidence, easy to check the mistakes with the pairs, can directly remind the other's errors and mistakes (pronunciation and not knowing the meaning). While with the students with highest level in senior high schools, the one who fully used this PALS said that it is more comfort and helpful for him; being able to interact more closely with the pairs, having more confidence, if there is something wrong, they can share the ideas, and if there are some mistakes they can correct it together since he is kind of clumsy being in front of the class. While the other one said that learning with pair tutoring is faster and effective; when the teacher asked them to do the tasks, he can divide the tasks for both, if there is something one doesn't understand, and they can discuss and share the ideas, and getting more confident is also one of its benefits.

It can be said that all of those three activities assisted them during enhancing reading skills in terms of improving the fluency and the pronunciation through retelling. Then through paragraph shrinking has improved their skills; the skills to recognize the words and deduce the meaning from the context, the skills to understand literal and inferential meaning, and the skills to indentify the main ideas. The last is prediction relay which became the most frequent activity among them did help in their reading comprehension to summarize the idea and make a prediction towards the texts. The role of PALS seemed to be very important to build their confidence and lead to a better interaction between tutor and tutee during the activities.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

To conclude, *peer-assisted learning strategies* (PALS) received a good responses and opinions by the students who have ever applied it in the classroom activity. The main point is that PALS do help the students with various levels work in the same activity; indeed, they hand in hand cooperate completing the tasks given by the teacher. Through the three activities, PALS has its own features to enhance certain skills of reading such as improving in fluency, pronunciation, word recognition in order to be able to inference the main ideas, summarize, and make prediction in comprehending the text. Another point is that building students' confidence using PALS is rather effective with tutor and tutee play a good role and switch one after another to get more exposure of each. In fact, peer-assisted learning activities promote cognitive development and increase educational values in social interaction in which it results in optimal learning because same-age children are better able to learn from another rather than independently or form adults. Hence, PALS seems to be one of good solution to

solve the gap between the students with high proficiency and the one are in lower level while cooperatively make use of affective and social strategies during this activities to enhance students' reading skills in their second language acquisition.

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