Enhancing EFL students' reading learning process in COVID-19 pandemic through Nearpod

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to enhance students' reading learning process using a genre-based approach during the COVID-19 pandemic through Nearpod. Action research with four stages was applied as a research design. The qualitative data were collected through interviews and teacher's field notes, while the quantitative data were obtained by students' reading pre-test and post-test. The qualitative data were analyzed by assembling the data, coding the data, building interpretations, and reporting the outcomes. Meanwhile, the quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive quantitative analysis. Findings demonstrated that students learned how to determine the main idea, make an inference, and distinguish detailed information from the texts. They also considered Nearpod as an accommodating and encouraging tool in learning. The teacher addressed how to reinforce the students' reading learning process by deep consideration, preparation, and reflection to ensure that Nearpod worked properly. The statistical report of students' scores for the pre-test and post-test showed improvement from 64.7 to 84.8. The average students' post-test score was greater than the pre-test. This study revealed that the Nearpod program successfully supported the reading learning process for students because of its user-friendliness and it enabled teachers to monitor students' progress during the teaching process.

Keywords: *COVID-19; Genre-based approach; Nearpod; Reading learning process*

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1. Introduction

The deadly and infectious virus in 2019, namely COVID-19, has affected all aspects around the world. This pandemic has also shaken up the education sector and this distress increases across education globally (Dhawan, 2020). The COVID-19 outbreak enforced schools and colleges to close temporarily. Educational units are struggling to face solutions in challenging situations. Shifting from offline education to online is an alternative way to run the teaching and learning process. The concept of online learning as an alternative was conceived as more innovative and flexible it makes the students learn autonomously (Dhawan, 2020; Putrawangsa & Hasanah, 2018).

In online teaching and learning English, teachers are encouraged to teach reading comprehension skills. Reading comprehension is an active process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language (Samad, Jannah, & Fitriani, 2017). Varita (2017) pinpoints that the purpose of teaching reading is to develop students' ability to be effective and efficient in reading. Therefore, students should have a good understanding of all aspects of reading. In reality, many difficulties appear in the online teaching and learning process. From the preliminary observation and a test at the beginning of the semester, the third grade junior high school students of this action research had difficulties determining the main idea, choosing the supporting details in each paragraph, getting implicit conclusions, and comprehending the whole text due to limited vocabulary.

During the online learning, the teacher used WhatsApp, Google Form, and YouTube. However, on the preliminary interview with the teacher, she considered another platform to improve students' reading learning process. Teachers should select an appropriate platform to meet students' needs, situations, and conditions. The researchers and teacher chose Nearpod as a learning tool for teaching reading since it serves numerous engaging features and activities. Nearpod not only presents slides but also changes the way lessons are delivered (Delacruz, 2014). Consequently, the research question of this study was "How can the implementation of Nearpod enhance the students' reading learning process?". This research is expected to become a reference for the English teacher to improve teaching reading quality and help the students in the learning process.

2. Literature review

2.1. Reading comprehension skills

Reading activity involves the cognitive and linguistics processes in recognizing the words (Habók, Magyar, & Hui, 2019), comprehending the meaning, and engaging the readers with the text (Aprizani, 2016). These processes are divided into lower-level and higher-level abilities (Grabe, 2009). Lower-level ability includes specific syntactic and morphological processes, phonological awareness, word recognition, and semantic process. Higher-ability is a process by which the readers consciously get the meaning from the passage, such as finding the main idea, integrating meanings across sentences,

inferencing, comprehending, and achieving the goal of reading. Furthermore, in the higher-level ability, metacognitive competencies such as readers' thought, control, and reflection on the text are used to accomplish their particular aims (Habók et al., 2019). The object of the reading activity for junior high school students in Indonesia is reading for comprehension. Reading comprehension focuses on understanding the content of the text. This active thinking process depends on readers' level of knowledge and comprehension skills (Sahardin, Mukarramah, & Hanafiah, 2015). Reading comprehension skills include determining the main idea, distinguishing details information, making inferences, and mastering vocabulary (Komariah, Ramadhona, & Silviyanti, 2015; Mikulecky & Jeffries, 2007; Nasir, Sofyan, & Haqqini, 2019; Sahardin et al., 2015; Sari, Fitriani, & Emafetery, 2019).

2.2. Nearpod in teaching

Nearpod is an education web browser that provides features to deliver learning materials and operate and evaluate the learning process. Teachers can share their materials by sharing a unique code or link to start the session. Nearpod is used either for synchronous or asynchronous teaching. The learning materials are delivered to ZOOM, so the teacher and students are engaged in a live interaction. During the learning process, the teacher can see the number of active students making the learning session and students' engagement monitored (Sanmugam, Selvarajoo, Ramayah, & Lee, 2019).

Měkota and Marada (2020) state four fundamental steps of teaching by using Nearpod. First, downloading and creating an interactive multimedia presentation. The teachers can make a standard presentation slide and enter interactive tasks such as polls, quizzes, drawing, filling the gap, or open-ended questions. Second, sharing the presentation with the learners and controlling during the lesson. By using live participation, the students can only see the slide that the teacher shows. It makes students work systematically during learning. Third, presenting to the class and providing engaging interaction. At last, monitoring and checking students' works which are not time-consuming because they will appear automatically to the teachers. These steps are created to design interactive educational presentations and involve the learners in the lesson.

2.3. Genre based to teach reading comprehension

Hammond (1992) based on Sritrakarn (2020) developed the cycle of Genre-Based Approach into four parts: building the knowledge of the field (BKOF), modeling of the text (MOT), joint construction of text (JCOT), and independent construction of text (ICOT). Those four cycles are still used in recent teaching. All English skills such as listening, speaking, writing and reading can be taught by a Genre-Based Approach (Angraini & Rozimela, 2020; Ningsih, 2015). To succeed in teaching reading, the teachers need to keep attention to the nature of the reading process, the relevant reading activities, and suitable classroom management. Over the past years, many researchers

have suggested this approach to support students' needs in different educational contexts to meet the expectations of the potential readers (Derewianka, 2003; Huang & Zhang, 2019).

In teaching reading comprehension using the Genre-Based Approach, the first stage is BKOF. In this stage, the teacher provides students with building the cultural context, sharing the experiences, discussing vocabulary, and presenting grammatical patterns about the text. The primary aim of this stage is to gather information concerning the topic's content (Enli, 2015). The second step is MOT, the teacher begins to introduce a text model to the students and discuss the purpose or social function of the text. In this stage, students are shown the model of text and read the model of text as well as input texts to learn social function, the structure of a text, and the language feature. The third stage is JCOT. It allows students to (1) explore the link between the topic of the field to the purpose of the genre, (2) put up knowledge of the field in the development of the text, (3) deliberate with the teacher and other students related the most appropriate organization of knowledge about the topic into a written text, (4) reflect on knowledge of the schematic structure and linguistic features of the genre and (5) widen an understanding of some of the differences between spoken text and written text. However, the stage in this study will be modified to make the student understand more about the structure of the text, the language features, as well as practice more about reading comprehension. The last stage is ICOT. In this stage, students are engaged to comprehend the text and to answer the questions related to the text.

3. Method

3.1. Research context and design

This research was an action research; Kemmis and McTaggart's (2014) model was applied to find the problems during the online teaching and learning process of reading and to discover the solution for solving problems. There are four stages in conducting this study: preliminary study, planning, action and observation, and reflection. These steps answered whether or not the actions were successful in an attempt to enhance the students' reading learning process.

3.2. Setting and participants

There were 26 students in grade IX in one of Islamic Junior High School in Yogyakarta participating in the research. Among those students, there were 16 males and 10 females. Their ages were around 14-15 years old. Most of the students in the class are from Yogyakarta while some of them are from Central Java. All of them are native speakers of Indonesian language.

3.3. Data collection

The data of this research were both qualitative and quantitative. The researchers collected the data through the interview, observation, field notes, and reading test

performances. The teacher was interviewed before and after conducting the research and the students were interviewed as a reflection after the teaching and learning process. The questions were related to the classroom activities (Brown, 2007; Harmer, 2007), the teacher's teaching (Harmer, 2007; Nunan, 1989), students' attitudes and reading abilities (Graves, 1999; Nunan, 1989), materials and instructional media (Brown, 2007; Hashim, Md. Yunus, Amin Embi, & Mohamed Ozir, 2017), assessment to evaluate learning process (Brown, 2004), and the used of Nearpod in reading learning process (Delacruz, 2014; Sanmugam et al., 2019). The final data was students' scores on the pre and post-reading tests. The result of these tests was considered as starting data and supporting data in evaluating the teaching-learning process.

3.4. Data analysis

The qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed differently. The qualitative consisting of interviews transcript and field note data were analyzed by employing (Burns, 2010) frameworks that assemble the data, code the data, compare the data, build meanings, and report the outcomes. Meanwhile, the quantitative data were analyzed using the SPSS program to determine the progress of students' learning.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. Reading learning process using Nearpod application

4.1.1. Preliminary study

In this preliminary study, an interview with the teacher was conducted to identify problems during online learning. The teacher said that the students' reading score was still low at the beginning of the semester. It indicated that they had difficulties in understanding text. The students still found difficulties determining the main idea, finding the supporting details in each paragraph, getting implicit conclusions, discovering correct references, and comprehending the text due to limited vocabulary. Moreover, these problems are also reported in previous studies (Erdiana, Kasim, & Juwita, 2017; Gani, Yusuf, & Susiani, 2016; Komariah et al., 2015; Sahardin et al., 2015; Yusuf & Fauzan, 2016) that EFL learners in Indonesia are challenged with all reading problems. At the beginning of the semester, sometimes some students did not join the learning process. Their online learning presence was not quite good and made their achievement low. These problems made the teacher try harder to find the best solution to overcome them.

Furthermore, the teacher still found difficulties selecting appropriate media to teach reading. The media used during online learning was Google Form, WhatsApp group, and YouTube. Although the teacher taught reading by creating some videos and uploading them on YouTube, sharing the materials on WhatsApp group, and assessing their reading using Google Form, all proposed solutions were still far from expectation. Considering the problems identified, in this stage, the researchers had the intention to enhance the online reading learning process that would increase the students' reading

comprehension skills. Reading comprehension focuses on understanding the content of the text, and this active thinking process depends on readers' level of knowledge and comprehension skills (Sahardin et al., 2015).

4.1.2   Planning

In this stage, the researchers and the teacher discussed the solution to overcome the problem. Nearpod was agreed to be used to reach the goal due to a relevant study (Delacruz, 2014) conducted using Nearpod to teach reading. The teacher used a Genre-Based Approach with some modifications. The activities were, for instance, vocabulary activity, reading comprehension practice in a group, and oral discussion about procedure text. The materials were taught by giving text to the students and giving activities related to a social function, structure text, and language features.

The issues faced by the students in reading were difficulties to determine the main idea, find the supporting details in each paragraph, get implicit conclusions, discover correct references, and comprehend the text due to the limited vocabulary. To solve the issues and make the activities more engaging, the researchers and the teacher applied Nearpod. Reading activities can be designed in Nearpod in poll questions, videos, slides, and quizzes (Delacruz, 2014). The activities would be designed through all of those features mentioned, except the poll questions. Slides were used to provides all of the materials and activities during the reading learning process in Nearpod. In the BKOF and MOT stage, videos were applied to explain procedure text, the structure of a text, language features, and a sample of text. The students continued to do some quizzes related to the structure of a text. Since the quizzes offered various kinds of questions, in the JCOT stage, the researchers employed matching pictures to give exercises about vocabulary, action verbs, steps in cooking, and also memory games. Then, open-ended questions, true/false questions were presented in the ICOT stage.

4.1.3.   Action and observation

The action was applied based on a lesson plan. The teacher applied the Genre-Based Approach (GBA) to teach reading since GBA in ELT promises real benefits for learners pulling together language, content, and context (Kusumaningrum, 2015). Genre-Based Approach stages were implemented during three meetings. The first meeting was begun with the BKOF and continued to the MOT. In the BKOF stage, the students were prepared to get into the topic and share experiences. They were asked about their favorite food and how to cook them. This activity aimed to activate their schemata about the recipe which was one of the examples of procedure text. The materials were in a form of video in Nearpod. The video explained procedure text, its definition, where to find one in everyday life, the language features, the structure of the text, and the sample text. MOT stage familiarizes the students with the genre discussed (Kusumaningrum, 2015). In the MOT stage, students were given an example of the recipe "How to Make Pizza". The text is used as a model and input to teach social

function, language features, and structure of procedure text. To check whether the students understood, they had activities related to the structure of text and language features. All of the meetings began with sharing the Nearpod link to the WhatsApp group to let the students join the class and all activities.

In the second meeting, JCOT was implemented with some modifications. In the JCOT, the teacher guides the students into the joint construction with questions that focus on the stages of the genre (Istiqomah, Winimurti, & Prawestri, 2018). Activities in this meeting were guided by giving pictures in each task as support. This meeting was focused on their practice after they learned the genre. To start the second meeting, students were asked to reflect on what they have learned in the previous meeting by answering the open-ended question about what procedure text was. The second activity was a vocabulary game. The students were asked to match pictures with the right action verbs. The next activity was the memory test which was considered as a fun activity for students to find the same picture on the steps of "Making Bread". The fourth activity was matching the right steps of "Making Pan Cake" with the picture. To give various activities to students, while it was still arranging steps of procedure text, the students had to complete the task in a different way in which they had to draw a line from the pictures on the left side to the steps on the right side.

In each meeting, the teacher wrote field notes to reflect during the reading learning process to see the obstacles and what should be improved in the next meeting. From the field noted in a previous meeting, some of the students found difficulties in understanding the instruction. Therefore, a voice note in the Indonesian language was added to each activity. Afriyeni et al. (2013) state that teachers' roles in teaching reading are as an educator, motivator, and facilitator utilizing effective teaching so that the students are trained well. On the other hand, teachers are expected to be creative to motivate, stimulate, and facilitate them in teaching and learning. The chats of students and parents below are evidence that teacher is a facilitator for solving the students' problems:

> Some students and parents chat me on WA, "Assalamu'alaikum miss, I'm sorry, my son doesn't understand on how to do the task, I can't open the task on my smartphone, perhaps it's because the internet data runs out." (S1), "Ma'am, I don't get this (send a screenshot of an activity)." (S2), "how about this activity, miss?" (S3), "Miss, I get confused with this activity. Should I circle all of these three numbers?" (S4)

The statements above showed that the students and parents told the teacher about their learning obstacles. On the other hand, it was revealed that students put their effort into engaging in the learning process. Some students are highly engaged, they pay attention or do assignments seriously, while others do not engage in learning activities. It can be seen from Appendix 1 that they were eager to complete the activity although they found difficulties in understanding the instruction. Therefore, they consulted the

teacher to overcome the problem. This study supports evidence from previous observation (e.g. Biggs, 2012) that a variety of engagement in the classroom can be solved by the teachers. Take into consideration the importance of students engagement for their current future success, maintaining student engagement is essential (Quin, 2017) and how teachers communicate with students on a day-to-day basis could be influenced (Jang, Kim, & Reeve, 2016; Nguyen, Cannata, & Miller, 2018; Quin, 2017). It is a complex and challenging task for teachers to engage students while simultaneously teaching a subject and maintaining classroom management (Cents-Boonstra, Lichtwarck-Aschoff, Lara, & Denessen, 2021).

The last meeting was the stage of ICOT. The lesson began with giving a new text "Making a Grilled Cheese Sandwich". They were asked to read the text carefully and circle the correct answer to each question. The first activity was emphasized finding detailed information from text. Similar to the purpose of the previous activity, in the second activity, the students were given a new text "How to Make Photo Journal" then answered three True or False questions. Using the same text in the previous activity, students learned to find the main idea of the text, detailed information, and the purpose of the text in the last activity. The activities in the last meeting were considered formative assessments in reading comprehension since it is the goal of standard competence. In the ICOT stage, the students worked autonomously with the text and their performances were taken as achievement assessments.

The action stage was together with observation. The teacher was aware of her role as a guide and facilitator of the learning materials of reading. She also provided feedback to the students after class. The media used, Nearpod, was user-friendly, so the students were flexible to access the lesson and help them to improve their reading learning process. The students showed great attention to join the lesson, they tend to ask and discuss with the teacher if they had questions about the lesson. Sometimes, the students had difficulties handling Nearpod due to their less attention to the instruction of each task.

4.1.4. Reflection

Mostly, students were engaged in the reading learning process through Nearpod. Most of them participated and completed the task in Nearpod. They showed an interest during the class. Student engagement has been defined as how involved students are in the learning experience and how associated they feel with their classes (Axelson & Flick, 2011). Emotional engagement is explained as students' emotional response to classroom activities, such as the expression of positive influence (Van-Uden, Ritzen, & Pieters, 2014). Banna et al. (2015), Britt et al. (2015), and Meyer (2014) claim the importance of student engagement to online learning because they believe student engagement can be represented as a witness of students' considerable effort necessary for their cognitive improvement and their given ability to create their knowledge,

leading to a high level of student success. Those statements were also supported by the students' statements in the excerpts below:

Researcher	:	What do you think about the activities?
Student1	:	I enjoy the activity in class but sometimes I get the connection issue so that it's difficult for me to complete the activity.
Student2	:	It's an understandable miss. The tutorial helps me a lot.

Furthermore, to make the students enjoy the reading learning process, the activities in Nearpod are completed with matching pictures and memory games. Those activities were important to attract students' attention and proved that Nearpod provided some features to develop materials for teachers. Therefore, teachers should be creative in utilizing media to support the teaching and learning process. Online teachers should be critical in selecting material and content when they wish to engage students more in their courses (Martin & Bolliger, 2018). Using Nearpod also allowed instructors to deliver presentations, observe students' progress, and instantly share the results of submitted activities with students. The statements in the interview in the reflection stage are as follows:

Researcher	:	Do you think the students enjoy the activities?
Teacher	:	Yes, they enjoy the activities. They will consult the teacher if they have difficulties completing the activities.
Researcher	:	Concerning the reading practice, how do you feel about it?
Teacher	:	I feel good meeting by meeting, although there are many things to improve in the next cycle.
Researcher	:	Is there still any problem we should deal with?
Teacher	:	Sometimes the students found difficulties filling the Nearpod activity because of the unstable internet connection, and some of them found difficulties in understanding the instruction. Then, I found the idea to improve the next meeting.
Researcher	:	Which part indicates some failures and improvement?
Teacher	:	The part that indicates failures is when the students could not complete activities well because they didn't understand the instruction. On the other hand, the students showed improvement in the last meeting when they did the reading comprehension test, they showed good results.

From the result of the interview in the reflection stage, the teacher said that the students showed improvement when they did the reading comprehension test. It is implied that the students showed enthusiasm when they found it difficult, they consulted with the teacher. When the students had difficulties, the teacher took these in the field notes and she would modify the next lesson in Nearpod to overcome the problems. Teele (2004) emphasizes that the goal of all readers should be able to understand what they read. Küçükoğlu's (2013) research shows that good readers are actively involved

with the text and they are aware of the processes they use to understand what they read. Using Nearpod may seem challenging for teachers since they need to prepare a presentation, which is time-consuming, and they must create some activities for it. The scaffolding of the lesson must also be suitable for the application. It means that the teacher must restructure the curriculum (McClean & Crowe, 2017). If the teachers are aware of all these barriers and try to create a lesson in Nearpod and teach with it, they appreciate the dynamics Nearpod provides to the lesson. The teacher then can adjust the learning materials to students' needs (Audi & Gouia-Zarrad, 2013).

4.2. Result of pre-test and post-test from the meetings

Before starting the first meeting, the students were given a pre-test to determine their basic reading comprehension skills. In addition, at the end of the meeting after applying the Nearpod application for the teaching reading process by using a Genre-Based Approach, all students were given a post-test to know their reading skills progress. The test consisted of ten questions covering all reading comprehension skills. The quantitative data were analyzed with SPSS 25 (IBM Corp, 2017). The result of the students in the post-test was considered as the last result of the teacher's action in teaching reading using Nearpod. After the pre-test and post-test results were analyzed, the calculated result of the tests revealed positive improvements. The average pre-test score was 64.7, while the average score for reading text in the post-test was 84.8. Therefore, the reading learning process by using Nearpod for junior high school increased the students' scores on the reading test.

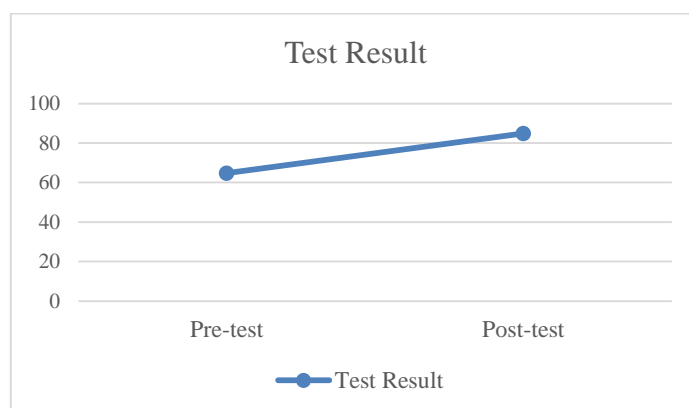**Figure 1.** The mean of pre-test and post test scores

Figure 1 shows the differences between students' result tests in reading pre-test and post-test. The result from the post-test was higher than the result of the pre-test. This means that the use of Nearpod in the reading learning process can enhance students' scores in the reading test. It was found from the test that the students were able to determine the main idea, select supporting details, understanding the implicit

meaning of a text, and comprehend the procedure text. The finding of this study is in-line with Delacruz's (2014) statement that the Nearpod framework is used for the reading learning process since it is user-friendly and can interact and manage students' improvement. It indicates a significant rise in students' learning experiences using the Nearpod application. The finding from this study is comparable to the result of Shehata et al. (2020) who reveals that the use of Nearpod increases students' involvement in the classroom and has a positive effect on academic achievement. Thus, the Nearpod's application features give a positive impact on students' reading comprehension skills.

5. Conclusion

This study improves the reading learning process by using the Nearpod application. The research did take place at one of the Islamic junior high schools in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, during the Covid-19 pandemic. To achieve the aim of this research, the plan, action, and reflection were designed and applied in the teaching and learning process. Current findings indicate that the characteristics of Nearpod features involve students in learning activities in the classroom. In addition, the way Nearpod manages materials allows teachers and students to more easily perform learning tasks during the teaching period. Furthermore, the Nearpod method of controlling the learning experiences to engage all students in the class and organize learning materials helped improve the students' reading comprehension skills.

The research findings show that the Nearpod encourages active learning and students can engage in the learning approach process during classes. It was identified that various activities in Nearpod made students enjoy the reading learning process. Moreover, the teacher confirmed that Nearpod supported her teaching and improved the students' reading test average score, 64.7 in the pre-test to 84.8 in post-test. The above results have practical implications for teachers to introduce successful teaching in learning environments. We believe that by knowing the capabilities of these dynamic learning tools, it may be easier to design classroom experiences that lead to improvement in the teaching and learning process. However, the teacher's role needs to be changed from being a distributor of information to being students' facilitator. This research is one of the initial attempts to thoroughly examine the implementation of Nearpod using a Genre-Based Approach in the reading learning process. However, the limited time to conduct the action is a weakness of this research. For further research, it is suggested to conduct action research on teaching reading using Nearpod in long-term action on a larger number of students.

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