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# FRONTLOADING STRATEGY TO IMPROVE EFL JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' DESCRIPTIVE TEXT READING SKILL

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## ABSTRACT

Reading is the receptive skill that should be mastered by the EFL learners in Indonesia, specifically by the junior high students. The curriculum mentions that the standard of reading competency in Junior high school is to understand and comprehend words and sentences from various texts (KTSP, 2007). This means, besides numerous advantages of reading the students are also demanded to be able to comprehend the text. Moreover, on the final test even National Exam of English subject, many texts correspondingly appear as the element of the questions. In fact, despite of the need and the advantages of reading comprehension, many junior high school students especially who live in the village still unable to understand the text easily. The condition of course will hamper their educational process. This research offers an alternative strategy in reading that is Frontloading Strategy. Kamil, Borman, Diolen, Kral, Salinger & Torgesen (2008) mention that frontloading is making a difficult text to be accessed by all children easier. Frontloading strategy is believed to be one of the powerful before-reading instructional strategies to facilitate comprehension of a passage. The strategy is expected can help the EFL junior high school students to comprehend the descriptive text easily.

**Keywords:** *Frontloading Strategy, Reading, Descriptive text, EFL, Junior High School*

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

General difficulties in comprehending English text that are faced by Junior High School students specifically who live in the village are varies, such as lack of English language proficiency, interpersonal conflicts, lack of interest and fear of expressing their thought in English, etc. The educational culture and their background characteristic influence this condition. While in the other hand, students need to be able to understand the content of the text not only read it aloud. Since the text form is emerge on their final test even national examination.

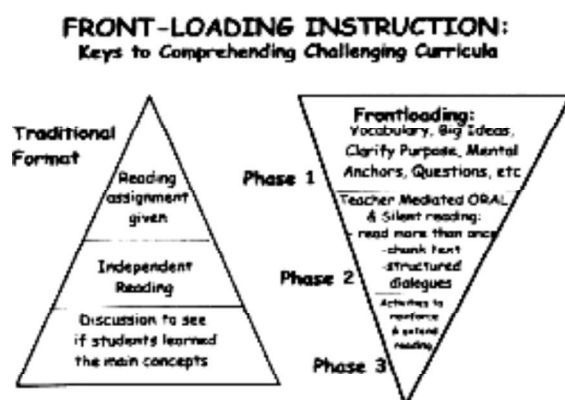
In handling this situation actually there are many variations on what strategies to use, but they all distill down to a similar pattern. This research offers one of the strategies that hopefully can help the students in comprehending English text easily. A number of obstructions to successful engagement with the text are expected to be overcome by Frontloading strategies, which generally is a practice of deliberately revealing the participants to vocabulary, concepts, and skills they will later learn. This process naturally brings prior knowledge to a level where it

is ready to apply, stimulates questions on the topic, builds interest, and most of all builds the content language that will support the reading (Hoyt, 2003). This alternative pre-reading teaching strategy hopefully can become a solution since “students construct meaning by attaching it, connecting it, and integrating it into their background knowledge.”<sup>1</sup>

## FRONTLOADING STRATEGY IN READING

Frontloading is one of the pre-reading strategies. Research shows the most successful learners have already been exposed to the academic content and skills before it is taught in school. (Marzano, 2004). Along this time, most English teacher at school give the text directly without thinking their students readiness in handling the information on the text. As the result, most students do not reach their maximum capacity in comprehending the text. Wilhelm, Baker, and Dube (2001) mentioned that “Frontloading is an assessment. Frontloading activities can be used before reading to assess student conceptual, procedural or genre knowledge that may be necessary for success on subsequent reading tasks”.

Below is the scheme of the comparison between frontloading strategy and traditional one.



Source: Kinsella and Feldman (2004:8)

The differences among both teaching formats are quite clear. The traditional one usually directly gives the text to the students for independent reading without teacher’s assistance and if it necessary there is a discussion just to see if the students learned the main concepts. While Frontloading strategy is the in contrary, the reading part becomes the last activity. There are several pre-reading stages for preparing the students to receive and understand the content of the text easily. It begins from the basic need of EFL students that is vocabulary. Bamford & Day (1997) state that “Pre-teaching vocabulary is a proven method of enhancing knowledge before reading a new text, as well as introducing cultural aspects of a text, using pictures, film, or a field trip. Previewing text in this way is sometimes called Frontloading”.

There are a variety of ways to frontload information to maximize success for students Echevarria (2004):

### 1. Introducing Cultural Aspect

This concept may help students more learn about the cultural aspect of the text, before

they read the whole text. The teacher tells the student about characteristics of the cultural aspect of the country related to the text.

**2. Realia**

Bring in the real thing. For example: when reading a text about the life cycles of fruits, bring in the fruits, seeds, branches and buds and allow students time to observe, touch and have oral language experiences prior to encountering the new vocabulary in the text.

**3. Video**

Provide rich visual imagery through video, with the sound on or off, to help students understand concepts from a text before they read. Establish a focus for viewing so students look for key points.

**4. Field Trip**

Frontload the key concepts and vocabulary by going on a field trip prior to embarking on the study. Take photographs, then discuss and write about the experience when return to the classroom. The information in a related text will be much more meaningful when it can be connected to share real-life experiences.

**5. Picture Observation Charts**

Collect a variety of pictures that connect to the text to be read. Post on chart paper around the classroom and have students move from poster to poster, observing and discussing the pictures with a partner. Encourage students to write their questions, connections and observations on the posters.

**6. Text Bits**

Using pictures from the text to be read, or related pictures, pass one to each student and ask them to face one other person. Students describe their picture, predict what the book may be about and listen to the same from their partner. They then move to another student and repeat the process. When pictures have been shared, students write a quick prediction of the book's content, based on the pictures. A whole class discussion follows.

**7. Read Aloud and Shared Reading Connections**

Prior to having students read a selection independently, read aloud a book with related content and use a think aloud strategy to discuss the concepts and vocabulary that are common to both texts.

**8. K-W-L Focus on Questions**

Use the familiar KWL format, but consider changing the K to "what I *think* I know" and W to "what I wonder." The last column could be L for "what I learn?" This keeps the learners focused on questions before, during and after reading which stimulates language and conversation.

**9. Word Sorts**

Identify key vocabulary from the text to be read. Provide a list of words to students to sort into categories determined by either the teacher or the students. Ask them to provide the rationale for placing words in certain categories.

**10. Cloze**

Select a paragraph from the text to be read. Delete some of the words that provide mul-

multiple possibilities for substitutions. Ask students to read through the passage and insert words that make sense. When finished, ask students to share with a partner and then with the whole group.

### 11. Expert/Guest Speaker

Invite an expert into the class to present information on the topic of study. Encourage the expert to bring the “tools of the trade.”

### 12. Partner Preview: I Notice

When introducing new nonfiction, ask students to turn to a partner with their text in hand and begin to preview the text by saying “I notice...” Have them take turns as they page through the book noticing text features, structures or key vocabulary. When they have finished, debrief with the whole class.

The importance of accessing and building background for all learners has been well documented. As mentioned by Echevarria, Vogt and Short (2004) “Taking a few minutes to jump-start students’ schema, finding out what they know or have experienced about a topic and linking their knowledge directly to the lesson’s objective will result in greater understanding for English learners”.

For this research, out of 12 strategy that has mention above, five are used as a pre-reading activities those are: introducing cultural aspect, bring the realia, watching the video, picture observation charts, and text bits.

## THE IMPLEMENTATION

A pre experimental study was conducted towards a second grade class of EFL Junior High School at Cicalengka, a district area in Kabupaten Bandung which consists of 34 students. The research itself was held on October 2016.

The research covers: two test (pre and post-test), five times treatment and questionnaire distribution in the end of the program. Pre-test aimed to identify the initial competence of the students specifically their reading comprehension skill, while post-test aimed to recognize their capacity in comprehending the text after being given the treatments. The final activity was questionnaire distribution which has purpose to find out students’ respond towards the teaching strategy.

A text entitled “Pyramid” with 10 essay questions, five true/false questions and five word matches was given for the pre-test. The similar text and instructions were given for the post-test. In this activity, the students far more relax and comfortable during answering the questions. The complete test result can be seen in the next section.

For the implementation of the strategy, the researcher conducted five meetings of treatment program. The program was held after the school hour; therefore it did not disturb the regular teaching learning process. Below is the description of main activity on each meeting.

#### • Meeting 1

In the first meeting the text that was explored entitled “South Korea”. The content is about definition of South Korea. Before reading the text, the students are asked to watch two

video about South Korea (9 minutes duration each). After the video finish, the researcher who was also act as teacher asked the students about the video, the language during discussion was mixed with bahasa Indonesia:

1. What was the video about?
2. What country was that?
3. What do you know about South Korea?
4. What are famous in South Korea?
5. Do you know any tourism places in South Korea?
6. Etc...

While discussion, teacher write the cue words relates with the text and then discuss the meaning. Students were encouraged to dig the meaning through discussion, not directly search from the dictionary. After that, the printed text was distributed to each student to be read and answer the questions.

- **Meeting 2**

The second meeting discussed a text entitled “Croissant”, the frontloading strategy that implemented before reading the text was picture observation charts. The students divided into groups contain four students. Before the meeting the teacher provided 15 pictures relates to French and Croissant. The pictures printed in small size, one paper contain five pictures. Those papers distributed to each group. They were instructed to write down five questions based on the pictures and write down their opinion towards five pictures that they like. The activity done in 45 minutes and then each group present their findings in front of the class. After that the teacher distributed the text to be read in pairs.

- **Meeting 3**

The third text entitled “Soedirman” and the Frontloading strategy that implemented was text bits. The students divided into three big groups. And then the teacher distribute a series of pictures relates to the text. The student observed the pictures in turn. They have to predict the main ideas that will emerge on the text. The teacher initiated the discussion and then they just continued by themselves for 20 minutes. After that they have to write down the discussion result (the prediction about the main ideas that will be discussed on the text). The teacher assisted the students fully during the writing process. Then the teacher distributed the text.

- **Meeting 4**

Meeting four explored a text entitled “TajMahal”. The pre-reading activity was introducing cultural aspect. The teacher wrote the key words from the video on the white board with its meaning. The teacher led the reading and asked the students repeated with proper pronunciation. And then a video was played about the history of TajMahal. After that the text was being distributed.

- Meeting 5

For the last meeting, a realia was brought to the class as a media to discuss the text entitled “Rod Puppets (WayangGolek)”. Besides the real *wayanggolek*, the teacher also displayed the picture of *dalang*, *sinden*, *nayaga*, and the stage. The key words related with *wayanggolek* was written in the white board, and the teacher asked several questions to explore students’ basic knowledge about *wayanggolek*. After that the text was being distributed to the students.

The last agenda was questionnaire distribution to find out students’ respond towards the strategy. It was held along with the last meeting of treatment. There were six question of simple questionnaire set. The complete description can be seen in the next section.

## THE RESULT

Below is the table of the tests result.

**Table D.1 Test Result**

Name	Pre-test Score	Post-test Score
Student 1	65	85
Student 2	55	80
Student 3	60	88
Student 4	55	70
Student 5	65	80
Student 6	50	70
Student 7	55	75
Student 8	60	80
Student 9	65	85
Student 10	70	85
Student 11	55	80
Student 12	70	90
Student 13	55	75
Student 14	60	80
Student 15	70	85
Student 16	55	85
Student 17	60	80
Student 18	45	65
Student 19	65	85
Student 20	50	70
Student 21	40	65
Student 22	65	80
Student 23	50	80
Student 24	65	85
Student 25	45	75
Student 26	60	80

Student 20	60	80
Student 27	45	75
Student 28	50	75
Student 29	50	70
Student 30	45	70
Student 31	45	75
Student 32	45	75
Student 33	50	70
Student 34	45	70

The table above shows the result of the tests, both pre and post-test of 34 students which taken as the sample. For pre-test the highest score is 70 which achieved by student 10 and 12 while the lowest score is 40 (student 21). The data indicates that most students have low score which reflect their weaknesses on comprehend the text. Thus, they need to be given a program (treatments) which can escalate their reading comprehension skill.

The next column is their post-test score. After the treatment, the highest score becomes 90 (student 12) and the lowest score is 65 (student 21). The improvement is the evident that frontloading strategies are effective to increase students' ability in comprehending English text which is one the important skill to master by the Junior High School students.

Another research instrument is questionnaire which intends to find out students' respond toward the strategy. The type of the questionnaire is closed, which means the respondents have limited option in answering the questions. Below is the table of questionnaire result.

**Table D.2 Questionnaire Result**

No	Question	Yes	%	No	%
1	Apakah kamu menyukai pelajaran Bahasa Inggris?	18	52%	16	48%
2	Apakah kamu menyukai kegiatan membaca teksber bahasa Inggris?	11	32%	23	68%
3	Apakah kamu merasa mampu dengan mudah memahami bacaan berbahasa Inggris sebelum mengikuti program ini?	6	17%	28	83%
4	Apakah kamu merasa front loading strategies ini menyenangkan?	34	100%	0	-
5	Apakah belajar dengan menggunakan Frontloading strategies kamu merasa lebih mudah memahami teks deskripsi berbahasa Inggris?	34	100%	0	-
6	Apakah kosa katamu bertambah setelah belaja rmembaca teks deskripsi berbahasa Inggris dengan menggunakan Frontloading strategies?	34	100%	0	-

The questionnaire reveals that from 34 students, 52% of them like to learn English subject. It is a good beginning because positive thoughts can help opening the mind and heart to receive new knowledge. While for the rest, they probably have certain difficulties relates with English language thus they feel dislike the subject.

Item no 2 mentions that from 34 students 68% of them dislike reading English text. From informal discussion with the students, they mention the reasons, such as: lack of vocabularies, hard to read because unfamiliar with the pronunciation, unfamiliar topic, etc. which hamper them to read and understand the reading. These problems make 83% students mention they hard to understand English text as reveal from questionnaire number 3.

Relates to students respond towards the implementation of Frontloading strategies as pre-reading activities, all students (100%) mentions that they feel Frontloading strategies is fun, since along this time their teacher seldom to explore varies learning media or teaching strategies during teaching learning process. The implementation of Frontloading strategies makes them enthusiastic in learning process. Item number 5 shows that all students feel much easier to comprehend English text when they learn by using Frontloading strategies. The last item mentions that reading English text by using Frontloading strategy can effectively improve their vocabulary mastery.

## CONCLUSION

From the result it can be concluded that Frontloading strategy can help the students to improve their reading capability. The post-test score shows the improvement of students capacity in answering the text, thus it reflects that this strategy is succeeded in to make EFL junior high school students become easier in comprehending descriptive text written in English.

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