

**THE IMPROVEMENT OF STUDENTS' HIGHER ORDER THINKING IN  
READING CLASS USING STUDENTS' RESPONSES TEXTS IN THE THIRD  
SEMESTER OF ENGLISH EDUCATION PROGRAM  
PGRI UNIVERSITY OF YOGYAKARTA**

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**Abstract**

The research aims to improve the level thinking qualities toward students in Reading III using students' responses text. The research applied descriptive qualitative method. It described about the students' responses text that produced by students in reading novel to improve students' higher order based on their own perspective. The participants of this research were nine students of the semester III, A3 class, English Education Program of PGRI University of Yogyakarta. Data were got through observation, interview, document analysis and questionnaire. Qualitative data were analyzed through coding data, explanation, or data presenting and conclusion. The findings showed that using students' responses text in Reading III learning process that focus on novel significantly improve the students' higher order thinking level. The first activities, students' order thinking level still in the lower category i.e., remember and understand. The percentage is only 25%. The second activities, students' order thinking level improved up to 45%. The improvement of students' order thinking in reading comprehension using students' responses also influenced students' motivation and feeling when they were learning. The response text helped students in improving their reading skill.

**Key words:** higher order thinking, reading, students' responses texts

## **1. Background**

Teaching of language skill must take something from the language function as a means of communication both spoken and written. Communication consists of four skills i.e. listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Improving a language skill will have the impact on the improving of the other language skill competences. For example, if someone improves his listening ability, he will improve his reading ability along with vocabulary development and language schemata.

Reading is one of skill that is learned by English Education Program student at University level. Reading is a complex activity which involves decoding symbols quoted from Eyres. Reading is a complex process where the reader constructs meaning actively from the text, or not only passively process in receiving information (Eyres, 2007). This statement shows that basically, reading means that when someone looks at written language, he will try to understand the meaning of the word or the sentence. Reading is defined as a

thinking process that involves *word recognition, literal comprehension, interpretation and critical/creative thinking skills*.

Reading has become a part of our life; we read magazine, menu, newspaper, novel, books, etc.. Generally, we have our own purpose in reading like just a hobby or for academic purposes such as getting certain information. In university level, reading becomes one of the activities that is often done by students in almost all subjects. Therefore, students should comprehend effective reading skill to read effectively. Effectively reading skill in Huda (1999: 94), is a spesific language skill that should be mastered by students besides speaking, listening and writing skills. Generally, teacher asks student to understand a certain element and information in a text.

In reading non literary work, teacher usually emphasizes students' ability in understanding content to answer some questions in a text. So, students just focus on the fiction elements such as characters and characteristics of the actor, plot describing, and moral value that are addressed from the story. Generally, students feel difficult to comprehend a text, especially long text. Based on survey that is done by Alwasilah toward 100 students who live in 50 cities in Amerika, shows that reading comprehension average and vocabulary mastery of them are very low (in Alwasilah, 2001: 49). That survey gives information that there is a factual prove that shows understanding on reading is difficult.

A new paradigm appears recently that is a theory of reading teaching by using a reader's responses. The focus of teaching undergoes changing from text-oriented becomes reader-oriented. This new paradigm starts from transactional theory, or reader's responses theory which is developed by Rosenblatt. The focus on teaching reading using the reader's responses does not concentrate to the elements of story but more, that it focus on the reponses that are given by the readers toward what they have read (Cassanave (in Richard R. Day, 1993: 149-156). Explicitly, it states that reader's responses give more advantage to the students. He said that students will loose the strong advantages and keep in long time from reading activities if they do not reflect on what they read is more meaningful than they read using comprehending and also fluency. He also emphasizes that *responding – through thought, talk, and writing* – are able to improve the intelectual development and education.

There are some endoser from reader (for example, Purves et al, 1990; Calkins, 2004; and Donelson, 1990) who emphasizes that readers' responses result some strength and advantages. Purves et al. (1990:47) states that applying reader' responses in a class will make students have thier self confident. Because there is no right and wrong answer,

students will feel safe in giving responses to the text. Thereby, students are able to understand about themselves. Therefore, students can recognize their different and similarity with another students.

The theory of reader response adapted in this study has been drawn from the work of Louis Rosenblatt (1975). There are works of some proponents of readers response theory (Bleich, 1975, 1978; Purves et al, 1990; Farell and Squire, 1990; Probst, 1990; Calkins, 2001) which are cited as they give elaboration of reader response theory put forward by Rosenblatt. Reader response or a transactional theory which was put forward by Louis Rosenblatt, emerged as one of the many criticisms to formalist principles in the 1970s (Abcanan and Klotz, 1998: 1376). The focus of this transactional theory is “on the interaction between the work and the reader, holding that, in a sense, a work exists only when it is experienced by the reader.” The reader is not a passive participant; s/he becomes an active participant since the work exists only in the mind of the reader. Rosenblatt (1978: 22) notes that all readers of any text should be active readers. From that perspective, in becoming an active participant, the reader makes meaning of what they read. The making meaning is shown by the readers by producing response to the text they read.

Responses are of importance in the classroom. It should be the center of a curriculum in literature (Purves et al., 1990: 15). In this response-centered curriculum, teachers give students opportunities to give responses based on what they understand from the piece of the given literary work, on what they feel, on what they reflect the literature and their experience. In other words, the students learn to interpret the reading of literary works. Bleich (1975: 17) states that since human experience is subjective, teachers should acknowledge the personal significance of literary experience by inviting the readers to response to literature with their emotions, personal associations, memories, judgements, and intertextual relation.

In relation to reader response to texts, there are many types of responses that readers can give to texts they read. They are through written responses, through visual symbols, dramatic response and oral presentation (Purves et al., 1990: 73-119). Responses in a form of written ones can be in a form of, for instances, responses in journals, logs, letters, diaries, poem, episodes, scenarios, critical arguments. Responses in a form of visual symbols can be expressed through photographs, map, film, or video for example. Finally, dramatic response and oral presentation can be expressed through making drama and oral discussion of response respectively. This study, though, just focused on a form of written response.

Bleich (1975) as cited by Noorman (2003:263-275) classifies responses into five categories. The categorizations are:

- a. restatement. This is a text-based response. The text or discourse here refers to the text that the reader read. The reader has not analyzed the text in depth. It is like a retelling of the content.
- b. affective response. This is a response showing the students' involvement with the text or discourse. The responses, for instances, are like: I love it, or I do not love it.
- c. associative response. This response indicates readers' effort to relate the text meaning with for example the real life or experience. In other words, in the response, we can find intertextual relation.
- d. interpretative response. This is a response which is a beginning of critically evaluating the text.
- e. extension of response. This response indicates the effort to broaden the horizon by considering other alternative meanings.

The ultimate goal of literacy instruction is for students to be able to process text at the level of evaluation, synthesis, analysis, and interpretation. This level is the final thread in the reading tapestry. Once students have learned to read, we spend most of our time from 3rd grade on trying to help them develop their thinking skills and use them as tools to process their thoughts. As Alvermann and Phelps (1998:69) tell us, "The curriculum must expand to include information and activities that explicitly support students in learning to think well. The emphasis is less on the mastery of information measured by a recall-based assessment and more on learning how to use one's mind well, to synthesize and analyze skillfully". Put plainly, students will need these higher-order skills to succeed in their lives and careers.

Readers who engage in higher-order thinking go beyond the basic levels of comprehension. They can analyze, synthesize, evaluate, and interpret the text they are reading at complex levels. They can process text at deep levels, make judgments, and detect shades of meaning. They can make critical interpretations and demonstrate high levels of insight and sophistication in their thinking. They are able to make inferences, draw relevant and insightful conclusions, use their knowledge in new situations, and relate their thinking to other situations and to their own background knowledge. These students fare well on standardized tests and are considered to be advanced. They will indeed be prepared to function as outstanding workers and contributors in a fast-paced workplace where the emphasis is on using information rather than just knowing facts.

Since in readers' response the writers have to reveal some quality of knowledge as mentioned earlier, there is a need to observe higher order thinking levels. This study only employed higher order thinking classification which is rooted on Bloom's taxonomy. Bloom's taxonomy is used to classify level of abstraction of questions that commonly occur in educational settings. This includes knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Below is a brief description of Bloom's taxonomy taken from the Internet.

- a. Knowledge; If students have this skill, they can observe and recall information, have knowledge of dates, events, places, of major ideas, and mastery of subject matter.
- b. Comprehension; Students can understand information, grasp the meaning, translate knowledge into new context, interpret facts, compare, contrast, order, group, infer causes, and predict consequences.
- c. Application; Students can use information, methods, concept, theories in new situations, solve problems using required skills or knowledge.
- d. Analysis; Students can see patterns, organize parts, recognize of hidden meaning, and identify components.
- e. Synthesis; Students can use old ideas to create new ones, generalize from given facts, relate knowledge from several areas, predict, and draw conclusions.
- f. Evaluation; Students can compare and discriminate between ideas, assess value of theories, presentations, make choices based on reasoned arguments. They can also give evidences and recognize subjectivity.

When a discussion from the students' responses usually done by a group, they will share responses about text or passage that they have read. A student will appreciate responses that are written or expressed one to another. Therefore, they admit that they have different argument. Moreover, they also admit that they have similarity in each response that they share and what their response.

While they are reading, they always think what they have read. Scriver and Paul state that thinking is a natural thing that is done by human, but most of them are thinking by means of different assesment and prejudice (<http://www.criticalthinking.org/aboutCT/definingCT.shtml>, accessed on November 8, 2013). Therefore, reading quality and reader responses toward a text must represent thinking quality. Thereby, it is important to build a custom in reading and motivate thinking quality toward a response.

The research is finding about the responses that have been written from the students in reading novel. The result of responses are described to know the students' level thinking quality in responding a novel. Reading novel is a means that is used in the research to give feedback for the student in order to motivate themselves for building a quality thinking process not only from the point of view of "text oriented" but also from the point of view 'student oriented'. There are two problems that will be answered in this research, i.e.: (1) What kind of responses produced by students in reading a novel? and, (2) What kind of students thinking quality level produced by students in reading a novel?

The research is conducted based on two major reasons. The first reason is to show that reader responses are strong alternative that can be applied in teaching reading skill. The second reason is based on a fact that subjective responses will not create a trivial or unimportant opinion to be applied in reading class. Firstly, qualified responses must be in line on understanding. Therefore, students should not make something that refers to the unimportant responses (Noorman in Alwasilah and Abdullah, 2003: 267).

The research is conducted in order to give a picture for the teacher about students' general response toward what they have read. In addition, the research can give description about further action that should be given to help students to give responses that are not qualified or unimportant.. Then, generally, reader responses bring to individual opinion. In responses clarification, students need to analyze or give responses to their opinion. Therefore, this action can improve the way of reading that includes qualified higher order thinking. By using reader responses, teacher are able to improve the students' qualified higher order thinking. In other way, the research is advantageous for the teaching learning process in teaching reading skill especially that is connected to a text or novel. Using the responses text also will make students freely in expressing their feeling or idea based on the novel they have read. They are free to state everything about it without being afraid of making mistake.

## **2. Methodology**

This research method used a descriptive qualitative method. Hancock and Algozzine (2006:16) state that this method attempts to present a complete description performance of a phenomenon within its context. In other words, it was applied because a case study research was richly descriptive and it was grounded in deep and varied sources of information. Hancock and Algozzine (2006:8) state that a qualitative research goal is to understand the situation under investigation primarily from the participant's and not the researcher's

perspective that is called the emic or insider's perspective as opposed to etic, or outsider's perspective.

Since the data were about students who learn reading, the observations included all the description of students in learning especially explored in what they did, what they said about their learning, how they learnt, how they felt, and what they obtained as a result of learning. The current issue was in the same track with the current perspective of education which raised the issues of individual and social construction. It was important in this research to help and guide the learner as an individual to become more autonomous, independent and empowered through his own social and individual reconstruction of their knowledge, skills and attitude.

The participants were students in the third semester of English Education of PGRI University of Yogyakarta. There are thirty-two students in a class. However, researcher just limit the time and take nine students the researcher chose samples to represent the students in a class. Respondent were chosen by the lecturer applying the students' performace during in the class interaction. Moreover, the students' active response in every teaching learning process and also the result of a test and quiz were applied. The nine participants were given code such as: A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, A6, A7, A8 and A9. The Highest accomplishment (A1, A2, A3), the middle accomplishment (A5, A6, A7), and the lowest accomplishment from the whole population (A7, A8 and A9).

This study attempted to reveal meaning based on the students' reponses or jurnal written by students based on their perspectives. This descriptive research allowed the researcher to go beyond what were said and done by the participants, but also what was meant by their responses and actions. This study worked on interpreted description of leraning by students which helped the researcher to arrive at a thick description.

### **3. Discussion**

All the findings were discussed in depth. Those were related to the theories that were provided to get the new meaning. This last section of the chapter discusses the research result in interpreted narratives. As the previous section had revealed the result of the research, the discussions of the result accordingly cover the discussion of what kinds of students' respon produced by them after reading the novel and the description of order thinking level resulted by them.

This section discusses the data gathered from the classroom observation that is focused on the findings about higher level thinking of students toward responses text in



learning reading comprehension. The section also discuss about students' responses toward their lecturer strategies in teaching reading comprehension to improve their order thinking level from lower to higher based on Taxonomy Bloom theory of higher order thinking level.

### **Students' Responses Text**

Students wrote some sentences that in the area of the two first lower levels, ie. remember and understand categories. Category #1: Knowledge → Remember. This category refers to shallow processing: the drawing out of factual answers, recall, and recognition. In reading, this is simply recalling the facts in a text or recalling the sequence of a story. In this category, student simply wrote the fact or sequence of the story. She did not try to write something that analyze and evaluate about the hotel described in the novel. She retrieved information from memory, and did not change it any way.

Category #2: Comprehension → Understand. The second category of Bloom's original taxonomy was "Comprehension." In the revised model, it is renamed "Understand." This category reflects the acts of translating, interpreting, and extrapolating. Examples in reading include summarizing text and identifying in-text relationships. Understand means students are building new connections in their minds. The student's responses showed that the statement demonstrated students' understanding about the novel by summarizing and illustrating about a description of the hotel and also the customer.

Revised Category #3: Application → Apply. The third category, "Application," was changed to "Apply" in the revised taxonomy and is defined as knowing when or why to apply certain skills automatically, as well as having the ability to recognize patterns that can transfer to new or unfamiliar situations. Teachers prompt students to think at the "Apply" level by using the following constructions: "Predict what would happen if . . .," "Judge the effects of . . .," and "What would happen if . . .?" Verbs that teachers might use to determine whether students are working at this level include the following: *apply, choose, dramatize, explain, generalize, judge, organize, paint, prepare, produce, select, show, sketch, solve, and use.*

When students have not processed information at the application level, they cannot take information learned in one context and translate it to another. Apply means certain procedure or steps are expected to be followed in order to answer new problems. Students learn novel and another problem. Students are asked to examine the information another problem that can be applied to solve the problem in the novel. After students got some instructions in concepts about how to stimulate and reach the thinking level by giving them



some questions and activities how to write students' responses text that improve their thinking level in understanding a novel to improve their ability in reading skill, they intended to write more critical about what they have read in the novel.

Revised Category #4: Analysis → Analyzing. The “Analysis” category in Bloom's taxonomy was renamed “Analyzing” in the revised version. This level involves breaking information down into parts and different forms, and drawing comparisons between a text and background knowledge data.

Classroom questions that address this category include the following: “What is the function of..?” “What conclusions can we draw from..?” and “What inference can you make about..?” The following verbs apply to analyzing activities: *analyze, categorize, classify, differentiate, distinguish, identify, infer, point out, select, subdivide, and survey*. To use the thinking process of analyzing, students must be able to see connections and draw conclusions. We often see questions on state reading proficiency tests that expect students to display thinking at this level. Analyze means students utilize lower-level thinking skills to identify key elements and examine each part. Students read a student report and identify the evidence to support the finding. Students read the results of the scientific study and find supporting statements for each conclusion or finding.

Revised Category #5: Evaluation → Design. Though Bloom placed “Evaluation” at the highest level of his taxonomy, Anderson and colleagues rank it fifth to reflect their idea that creative thinking (design) is more complex than critical thinking (evaluation). For the Anderson theorists, critical thinking is necessary for the creative process to occur, because it involves accepting or rejecting ideas—a precursor to creating a new design (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). For this reason, evaluation precedes creation in the revised model.

To evaluate information, students need to be able to distinguish essential data from information that is simply interesting. They must be able to identify core themes, form and support opinions, and identify inconsistencies, bias, or lack of coherence or accuracy in a text. They must also be able to use background information, prior knowledge, and other textual sources to assess the validity of the text. For example, when reading a novel, students with strong evaluation skills might compare the works of two authors and offer evidence to support opinions on the author's writing style.

Revised Category #6: Synthesis → Create. The fifth level of the original Bloom's Taxonomy was called “Synthesis.” In Anderson's revised version, this level is renamed “Create” and is upgraded to level six. Synthesizing text involves linking new information

with prior knowledge or with multiple texts to develop a new idea, establish a new way of thinking, or create a new product of some type. Some constructions that assess the process of analysis or creating include the following: “Develop a new way to .,” “Suggest another way to . . .,” “How might you adapt . . .?” and “Can you predict the outcome if . . .?” The following verbs signal the “Create” level of thinking: *choose, combine, compose, construct, create, design, develop, formulate, hypothesize, invent, make, make up, originate, organize, plan, produce, and role play*. To succeed at this level, students must be able to synthesize their thinking and make predictions based on knowledge.

### The Students’ Level Thinking Based on Students’ Responses Text

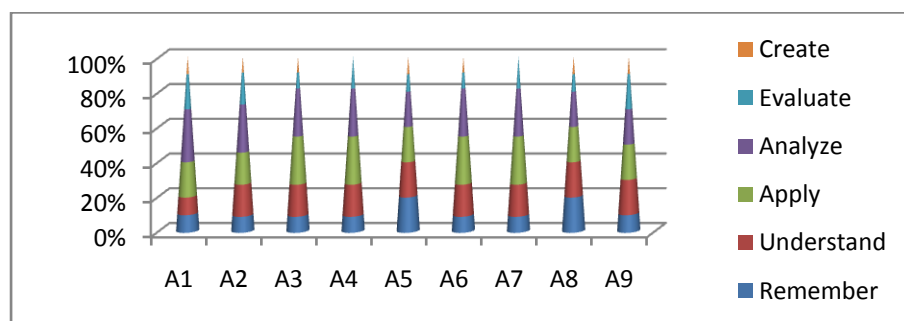


Chart 1. The thinking level based on students's responses

From the chart above, it can be seen that the students' thinking level produced by students in writing a students' responses text undergoes changing in the percentage of the higher level thinking. It means that there is an improvement made by students in their reading activities based on the students' responses that they produced after they read the novel. The students reached about 45% in the higher level thinking.

Based on the interview conducted by the researcher, the findings showed that all students feel enjoy and fun did some activities in using the students' respomses text toward learning reading, especially reading a novel about Bertram's Hotel. They said that the activities and discussion are very helpful in improving their reading skill, moreover, to know and stimulate their higher order thinking that stated by Bloom. They can share anything about the novel without feeling afraid of makaing misstake toward their opinion about the novel. They freely express any kind of things that they feel after they read a novel, such as, like and dislike, feeling easy or difficult in understanding the novel, they are familiar and aware with some difficult words that they find in the novel, etc.

#### 4. Conclusion

From all the findings and discussion above, it can be concluded that applying students' responses text is absolutely improving the students reading comprehension. It showed that before and after they are introduced to some activities and questions that can stimulate them in increasing their level of thinking based on Taxonomy Bloom, they just gave responses in the first and second category, remember and understand. But after they know about the strategies and activities, students were able to produce some responses that in the category analyze, evaluate, apply, and create.

There was significant changing of the percentage level of thinking. From the chart showed the first stage, the students produced responses text in a various way of expressing and level of thinking. Most of the student's responses in the first stage still have meaning in the category of remember and understand, furthermore, it included in lower thinking level. It is about 25% from all the thinking level. The percentage showed that students still have low level of thinking in learning reading comprehension.

After some treatments such as, activities, stimulating questions, students' responses and discussion applied in the students' learning process in reading novel, students' thinking level have improved from lower thinking level to higher level thinking. The percentage of the thinking level increased up to 45%. From the fact, it can be concluded that the thinking level of students based on students' responses text improved from 25% to 45%. The students wrote richer and valuable responses toward the novel they had read. They did not just write about the description one thing about the novel and recall the information stated in the novel. Generally, the students just wrote what they had read.

The students said they feel free when they were asked to make responses text toward the novel. They did not feel burden when they are asked to do so. The activities were very helpful for them in order to improve their reading comprehension skill and also their thinking level of students' responses text produced based on the novel that they read. It proved that applying students' responses text in learning reading improved the students' thinking level from the lower up to the higher order thinking level. Here the students' quality thinking had been improved, there is not a burden for students in learning reading because in writing responses text they are not afraid of making mistakes. Students freely expresses anything based on their own perspective. The better activities in learning in discussing about their responses text and gives comments each other will make the learning richer and also influence the students attitude in learning and their feeling in learning to be open minded in

every difficulties and problems that they faced. The considerations above, both directly and indirectly shown that applying the students' responses significantly improved the students' quality thinking level that influence the result of learning in cognitive, psychomotor, and affective aspects. Therefore, it is recommended to apply the strategies of using students responses text in learning reading in all level based on the students level.

Teacher, students and researcher can use the strategies to conduct teaching learning process to get improvement in students' thinking quality, quality of teaching and learning and to conduct a research about higher order thinking that connect to students' characters building.

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