

Reading: The Needed Skills to Catch the Meaning

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Abstrak

Membaca bukanlah sekedar ketrampilan memecah simbol-simbol. Membaca sesungguhnya merupakan upaya untuk memahami apa dan bagaimana pola pikir sang penulis. Bahkan, mengkritisinya atau berkreasi dengannya. Karena itu, membaca sesungguhnya merupakan komunikasi antara penulis dan pembacanya.

Membaca tentu membutuhkan kecerdasan dan ketrampilan tertentu secara memadai pada setiap tingkatannya. Topik ini membahas ketrampilan yang dibutuhkan pada setiap tingkatan membaca.

Tingkatan pertama adalah membaca literal. Disebut juga membaca ekstensif. Seorang pembaca pada tingkatan ini baru memiliki kemampuan menangkap makna secara eksplisit. Kedua adalah membaca kritis atau membaca intensif. Pada tingkatan ini seorang pembaca sudah mampu menangkap makna secara implisit. Dia telah memiliki satu set kemampuan intelektual untuk menganalisis bahan bacaan secara objektif, fair, dan bijak sesuai dengan sikap ilmiah. Tingkatan membaca tertinggi adalah membaca kreatif. Seorang pembaca dalam tingkatan ini memiliki ketrampilan untuk menghubungkan dan menerapkan hasil bacaan dalam konteks kehidupan yang lebih luas.

Keywords: *reading, skills, stages, mental process*

A. Introduction

Qura'!"¹ Read! Reading is the first command of God, the first His revelation to the Prophet Muhammad p.b.u.h. Abdullah Yusuf Ali commented that "iqra'" means read or recite or rehearse or proclaim aloud the object understood being God's message.² Therefore, reading—according to Islamic religion— is a compulsory upon all Muslims to be able to think and conduct based on Islamic teaching.

Reading—socially—is a need of modern society. The science and technology in this modern era are growing up. The demand of life is more complex. A man who doesn't read must be left behind. Everyone should be well-informed. Reading becomes the key of development. It really unlocks the knowledge and increases the human resource. William Francis Bacon—a philosopher of XVI century—said: "reading makes man full."³ Reading, , is a need of each individual to develop his community and nation.

Historically, no institution of education along the historical system of education in all over the world that did not pay attention to the importance of this intellectual skill: reading. The education of ancient Egypt,⁴ ancient India—except caste of Sudra,⁵ ancient China,⁶ ancient Arab—especially in *Kuttub*,⁷ ancient Greek—especially in Athena,⁸ and ancient Rome,⁹ had given the priority to develop the reading skill of their children.

Gontor—the famous Islamic Boarding School of Indonesia—also so emphasizes the importance of reading skill. Because, Gontor had placed the community or *ummah* dedication as a point of educational orientation. A student or graduate of Gontor, , should be a good reader. He should have an effective reading skill to be able to

¹ Qur'an. Shurah Al'alaq: 1.

² Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an, Text, Translation and commentary. Jami'at el-Imam Muhammad Ibn Su'ud el-Islamy. Riyad. 1938, p. 1761.*

³ Nurhadi, *Membaca Cepat dan Efektif*, (Bandung: CV. Sinar Baru, 1987), Third edition, p. 16.

⁴ I. Djumhur and Danasaputra, *Sejarah Pendidikan*, (Bandung: CV Ilmu, 1974), Second edition, p. 4.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 5.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 17.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 22.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 25.

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 31.

understand his community and nation development. Furthermore, he should have also a broad knowledge and independent mind—both are the mottoes of Gontor—because he should be able to develop his *ummah*. The headmaster of Gontor said: “Fi ayyi ardhin tatho’ fa anta mas’ulun ‘an Islamiha.” Wherever you stand on, you are responsible on Islamic values to be running in your environment. Reading is really a mean to develop individual logic and progress a civilization of nation.

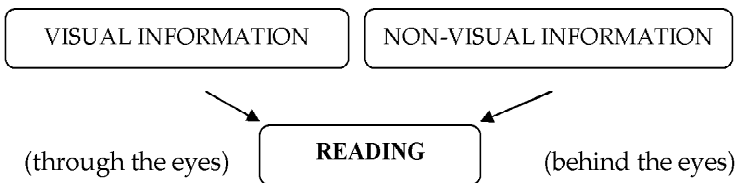
Reading, indeed, is not only decoding but more than it. Reading is really comprehending the meaning of message. It involves an effort to understand what and how is the framework of writer. Although, to criticize or to create-innovate. Those all are the reading stages. Actually, reading needs an intelligent and prior knowledge of the reader as well as the writer. Therefore, reading is a communication between the writer and reader. The writer is communicator and the reader is communicant.

This short paper will describe the needed skills in each stage of reading.

B. Concept of Reading

Reading is a concept rises in the linguistic studies, generally connecting with educational psychology, and other fields of study. According to Frank Smith, reading involves a number of more general skills that cannot be ignored in any serious analysis of the subject.¹⁰ He found that reading is possible to be analyzed from the two sides of reading : 1. Through the eyes; and 2. Behind the eyes. A reader will achieve visual information through the eyes and non-visual information from behind the eyes in his reading.

The following picture shows the concept of reading:



¹⁰ Frank Smith, *Understanding Reading: A Psycholinguistic Analysis of Reading and Learning to Read*, (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1978), Second Edition, p. 1.

Reading involves the role of eyes and what behind eyes (i.e. brain); visual information (i.e. symbols those are printed on the pages) and non-visual information (i.e. concept behind symbols). It involves a mental process.

D. Mental Process of Reading

The process of reading—in the psychology of reading—is closely related to an activity of eyes and mind. AS. Hornby, therefore, defined that reading is “to look at and understand something written or printed.”¹¹ And, Morgan L. Walters also defined that reading is “to look at and understand the meaning of written or printed words or symbols.”¹²

Both definitions above emphasize the term “to look at” as an activity of eyes. Because, the first of all in reading is an eyes’ activity called “looking at”; i. e. looking at printed material or written language. Furthermore, reading verily requires a special kind of visual discrimination completely among the written words.¹³ Those written words are recognized as symbols. And, the symbols must be clear to make understanding well.

The symbols are made up of letters, words, sentences, paragraphs, a wide variety of punctuation marks and many printer’s refinements. They represent concepts and take the place of spoken words which in turn stand for thoughts, feelings and emotions and things.¹⁴

The term “to understanding” in reading refers to an aspect of the mental process. Therefore, reading material needs such supplies of intellectual assets, for instance adequate knowledge and language. Frank Smith stated : “an understanding of reading cannot be achieved without some general insight into the nature of language and various operating characteristics of the human brain.”¹⁵

¹¹ AS Hornby, *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English*, (Oxford University Press, 1974), Third Edition, p. 699.

¹² Morgan L. Walters, *The Holt Intermediate Dictionary of American English*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc, 1966), p. 675.

¹³ Frank Smith, *Op.Cit.*, p. 2.

¹⁴ Robert H. Beck, Walter W. Cook, Noland C. Kearney, *Curriculum in The Modern Elementary School*, (Prentice-Hall Inc. USA, 1960), Second edition, p. 221.

¹⁵ Frank Smith, *Op.Cit.*, p. 2.

According to James Drever, understanding is “general term, covering functions which involve apprehension of meaning.”¹⁶ Here is the importance of language. Without apprehension of meaning the reading activity would be ineffective or useless.

The term “meaning” is very essential in understanding reading. In this case, reading is “bringing meaning to and getting meaning from the printed or written material.”¹⁷ Really there are two well-known kinds of meaning: Denotative and connotative. Denotative is the exact and literal meaning of a word or expression.¹⁸ And, connotative is meaning added to the literal or dictionary meaning of a word or phrase by frequent association with other ideas, the feeling of the user.¹⁹

According to Anderson, reading is a recording and decoding process. It is just on the contrary of speaking and writing as both require the encoding.²⁰ In the term of linguistic, language is a code that brings meaning. Reading—as an interpretation activity to a statement that still in written code—is decoding process. Decoding means deciphering the written code.²¹ It is just the opposite of encoding that means putting in a code.²²

Some experts said that to use the term recording for reading activity is more preferable than the term “reading” because the first of everything in reading is to change the written symbols to be the sound. Then, those codes are decoded (read). But, this is the view point of linguistic. Really, reading process cannot be reducible as decoding. Reading should involve an interpretation on the reading materials, as a mental process.

Morgan L. Walters described reading as an “interpretation or manner of interpretation.”²³ And, AS. Honby stated that reading is to reproduce mentally or vocally the words of an author, book. Etc.; or to interpret mentally.²⁴

¹⁶ James Drever, *A Dictionary of Psychology*, Revised by Harvey Wallerstein, p. 306.

¹⁷ Henry Guntur Tarigan, *Membaca Sebagai Suatu Ketrampilan Berbahasa*, (Bandung: Angkasa, 1986), p. 7.

¹⁸ James Drever, *Op.Cit.*, p. 207.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

²⁰ Henry Guntur Tarigan, *Op.Cit.*, p. 7.

²¹ AS Horby, *Op.Cit.*, p. 224.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 283.

²³ Morgan L. Walters, *Op.Cit.*, p. 675.

²⁴ AS Horby, *Op.Cit.*, p. 283.

The conclusion is, the essence of reading process is interpretation. By this activity the understanding is possible. Reading activity involves physical and mental process simultaneously, but mental process is more dominant.

E. Critical Thinking in the Proses of Reading

The main purpose of reading is "getting information or amusement from written or printed words."²⁵, the only translation data from a code to another one is not enough in the reading process.

There is a different purpose in reading between a child and adult. "The child is to practise reading itself, whereas the adult puts reading to use in getting information."²⁶ The former may not need more interpretation, while the latter, however, an interpretation is very essential. Therefore, reading does not merely need translation. Frank Smith stated that reading is "not reducible to simple matter of reader's decoding messages that are transmitted by a writer."²⁷

Actually, both readers (the child and the adult) are "translating written symbols into that form of language from which they already derive-meaning; but the adult may accomplish this translation with greater sophistication by using many more levels of information and swift practiced integration of that information."²⁸ He may understand the information better. Because, in accordance with the psychology of reading, a reader must bring together the principles of concepts and their association with printed symbols. And, the adult generally has more concepts and abilities to associate with those printed symbols, enable him to understand the printed symbols more than the child.

Printed symbols here must be the language symbols because the most commonly used symbols in thinking are language symbols. Words play an important role in thinking.²⁹

A reader within his reading is thinking. Reading must be by a thinking process. Thinking means the process of using the mind

²⁵ Morgan L. Walters, *Op.Cit.*, p. 675.

²⁶ Robert S. Ellis, *Op.Cit.*, p. 1.

²⁷ Frank Smith, *Op.Cit.*, p. 2.

²⁸ Robert S. Ellis, *Op.Cit.*, p. 2.

²⁹ Norman L. Munn, L. Dodge Fernald JR, and Peters Fernald, *Introduction to Psychology*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company), Second Edition, p. 325.

(with cognate) to come into conclusion or to form conceptions of opinions.³⁰ A reader should be able to make conclusion from his reading, or perform a conception or opinion by his reading.

Thinking is manipulating the word internally, using modification of the organism (engrain) which represent previous experiences.³¹ Thinking is also the manipulation or reorganization of concepts, motives, habits and rules.³² , a reader should be able to analyze the element or to reorganize what involved in reading materials. Those kinds of intellectual abilities are critical thinking.

Taba out-lined three sets of thinking operation in defining:

1. Concept formation—discriminating, grouping, and labeling things and events;
2. Interpreting of data and inference—identifying elements, and inferring conclusions;
3. Application of principles—hypothesizing solution and deducing relationship or solutions.³³

What is critical thinking? In general, it could be described as good, unemotional judgment that result from analysis of the material or a situation.³⁴ It is also involved a more personal analysis of a situation or of written or oral presentation.³⁵ Critical thinking actually involves :

1. Collecting data and interpreting the data collected;
2. Reaching conclusions or solution based only on those particular dato and not someting aside from the data;
3. Applying the conclusions, principles, or arganizations to new situation;
4. Evaluating the persuasions, discuccions, principlles, ideas, and program of other.³⁶

The important one, critical thinking in the proses of reading means a set of intellectual abilities to read and analyze the reading

³⁰ AS Horby, *Op.Cit.*, p. 898.

³¹ Norman L. Munn, L. Dodge Fernald JR, and Peters Fernald, *Op.Cit.*, p. 324.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 325.

³³ Herbert J Klausmeier & Richard E. Ripple, *Learning and Human Abilities: Educational Psychology*, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1971), Third Edition, p. 438.

³⁴Edward W. Smith, Stanley W. Krouse, JR Mark M Atkinson, *The Educator's Encyclopedia*, (New York: Prentice Hall Inc., 1966), Fifth Edition, p. 613.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 618.

materials objectively, fairly, and wisdom that suits the scientific attitudes.

F. Stage of Reading

Reading is an activity that closely relating with thinking process or cognitive abilities. Therefore stage of reading ability are according to those cognitive abilities—that according to Guilford—involves cognition, memory, convergent production, divergent production and evaluation. In the version of Bloom (Bloom’s taxonomy of cognitive operation) they are parallel with comprehension, application, analysis, synthesys, and evaluation.³⁷ Cognitive ability can be defined as a mediator, a kind of trace or machanism, that enable the individual to interact with or to interpret rather descrete enviromental experiences. Reading abilities are devided into stages based on those cognitive levels. The stage of reading are :

1. Literal reading,
2. Critical reading,
3. Creative reading.³⁸

1. Literal reading

Literal reading is “reading the line.” It is skill to remember and recall the explisit facts in the reading.³⁹ It means that type of reading is not so requiring such critical thinking. So, Broughthon named such this type of reading as superficial reading. i. e. reading by an aim to get superficial comphrehension; and its catagory is extensive reading.

This type of readers read word by word, line by line, etc. The reader memorizes what written on the pages. He records them in the mind, then he recalls them again when he needs them axactly as what said by the writer. In other word, after reading. “he is just able to answer such as the question : what, who, when and how exactly as written in the text. According to Guilford type of this reading just involves cognition and memory level. Bloom termed it comprehension. The terminology ‘comprehension’ and ‘cognition’ have the same meaning—becoming aware of and understand information.

³⁷ Herbert J Klausmeier & Richard E. Ripple, *Op.Cit.*, p. 99.

³⁸ Nurhadi, *Membaca Cepat dan Efektif*, p. 145.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

Comprehension is “understanding of communicated material without relating it to other materials” and “cognition is discovery, rediscovery or recognition.”⁴⁰

Reading activity, according to this type of readers (literal readers) is identical with the remembering activity, reading process is considered as an effort to bring the explicit information that founded from reading into the memory.

This type of readers would be satisfied when he is able to remember the printed information as much possible. Therefore, he just makes effort to remember what is read, which in its process does not involve the aspect of critical thinking.⁴¹ He does not search the meaning of words expect what are written explicitly. This is lower stage of reading.

2. Critical reading

Critical reading is “reading between the lines” or “reading beyond the lines”. It is the skill of reader to process the reading critically.⁴² It means that critical reading is reading skill by using by the critical thinking. The critical reading—according to Prof. Dr. Guntur Tarigan—is a type of content study reading. , its category is the intensive reading. For this, the best method for critical reading is silent reading.⁴³ Therefore it is an activity using visual memory that involves eyes activity and mind, to get information.

Different form the former stage, the type of critical reader would not be satisfied with the activity of remembering and recalling the explicit facts only. He realizes that the text is not containing the explicit information only, but also the implicit one that needs processing and understanding. The reader considers that the text of reading as someting written that requires interpretation. Interpretation is an explanation or exposition of meaning from a given point of view or school of thought.⁴⁴ There are three broad aspects of interpretation in reading.

⁴⁰ Herbert J Klausmeier & Richard E. Ripple, *Op.Cit.*, p. 99.

⁴¹ Nurhadi, *Op.Cit.*, p. 142.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 145.

⁴³ Henry Guntur Tarigan, *Op.Cit.*, p. 13.

⁴⁴ Carter V. Good, *Dictionary of Education*, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company Inc., 1965), Second Edition, p. 297.

In general, a good reader grasps the literal meaning of a passage he usually engages in a number of supplementary steps or process, such as drawing inferences, seeing implications, judging the validity, quality, affectiveness or appropriateness of the ideas presented. Comparing the views of different authors on the same issue, applying the ideas acquired to new situations, solving problems and intergreting the ideas as read with previous experiences therefore new insights, rasional attitudes, and improved patterns of thinking and acting are acquired. Many of this type of reading are often referred to as critical reading.⁴⁵, the criticcal attitude is very essential in reading. The critical attitude would be shown in the way of reading.

Ruth M. Strang stated that critical reading requires scientific thingking which includes elements of observation, analysis, Synthesis, selective recall, and imagination as well as ability to recognize the problem, judge the adequacy of data, discover essential relationships and suspend judgment untill enough reliable evidence is available on which to draw conclusion.⁴⁶

A reader should master those all types or elements of critical thinking. In this case, Drs. Nurhadi proposed many types of critical reading; such as:

1. Interpretative reading,
2. Analysis reading,
3. Reading for organization,
4. Reading for consclusion,
5. Reading for evaluation.

The Analysis reading as a variant of critical reading would be discussed as the following:

3. Analysis Reading

Analysis is one of the thinking abilities that should be exist in critical reading.⁴⁷ It is a type of the productive thinking. Bloom— as mentioned before, termed Guilford's convergent thinking as application and analysis.

⁴⁵ Chester W. Harris, *Encyclopedia of Educational Research*, (New York: The McMillan Company, 1960), Third Edition, p. 1102.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Chester W. Harris, *Op.Cit.*, p. 1102.

Analysis here is breaking down a communication into its constituent elements. Analysis can be a skill to examine separation of reading with comment and judgment in order its organization structure could be understood well.⁴⁸ So, the analysis reading can be as reading by rationing and analytics thinking.

In the critical reading, a reader must analyzes the elements of information. Information is beside the point whether the decision concerns the identification of particular objects or events or the selection among various choices of action. In this case Drs. Nurhadi proposed that analysis reading would involve many abilities, include ability to identify main ideas, details or facts; to classify the facts; to compare the whole ideas; and to compare the outstanding figures. While Davis, through factor analysis he attempted to include "ability to identify an author's intent, purpose or point of view" and "ability to select the main thought of passage" beside the others, into the basic factors in comprehension. And included also in analysis reading an ability of comparing the views of different authors on the same issue.

The reader, therefore, he should be able to look at the components or elements that forming the unity of reading. It involves facts, details, or other elements that not mentined explicitly. In other word, he should make identification, selection, classification and comparing among the elements of reading.

The following description is concerning many abilities included in analysis reading :

1. Ability to identify main ideas.

To identify means to discover or state the identity of something; e.g. information. Idea means thought⁴⁹, conception, opinion, picture in the mind, etc.⁵⁰

In reading, the reader should be able to discover from the text the essential thought, conception, opinion, etc. of the author. For instance, to know what learned or experienced by an outstanding figure is. This sort of reading is "reading for main ideas."⁵¹ The reader could; look at those elements or main ideas in each paragraph in the whole text.

⁴⁸ M. Noor Syam, dkk (Tim Dosen FIP-IKIP Malang), *Pengantar Dasar-dasar Kependidikan*, (Surabaya: Usaha Nasional, 1988), Third Edition, p. 145.

⁴⁹ Morgan L. Walters, *Op.Cit.*, p. 384.

⁵⁰ AS Horby, *Op.Cit.*, p. 149.

⁵¹ Henry Guntur Tarigan, *Op.Cit.*, p. 9.

2. Ability to identify details or facts.

'Detail' (noun) means collection of particular facts or items;⁵² 'facts' (noun) means events, things, etc.⁵³

In reading, a reader should be able to discover or to get the collection of particular facts or items. He reader should search those particular facts completely. Reading to discover, for instance, what inventions that discovered by an outstanding figure; what happened with him; what to solve many problems had been done by an outstanding figure; is called by reading for details or facts. The reader should identify those details of reading.

3. Ability to classify the facts.

'To classify' (verb) means to arrange into groups or classes according to a system.⁵⁴

In reading, a reader should be able to arrange the facts or other elements of reading in classes or groups. Those classification must be clear. Reading to find, for example, what the unusual or unnatural things for a figure are; or whether the story true or fictional, and so on; is "reading to classify." The reader should classify those facts of reading.

4. Ability to compare the whole ideas.

'To compare' (verb) means to examine in order to find out, or show likeness and difference.⁵⁵ It is an ability to examine or judge to what extent ideas, statements, etc. in reading, are similar or not similar, to distinguish each other therefore differences are made clear.

In reading, a reader should effort to examine, judge to what ideas are similar or not similar. The reader should compare whole ideas in reading; therefore differences between them are made clear.

5. Ability to compare the outstanding figures.

'Figure' (noun) is person as he appears to other.⁵⁶ In reading, a reader should examine or judge to what extent outstanding

⁵² AS Horby, *Op.Cit.*, p. 235.

⁵³ Morgan L. Walters, *Op.Cit.*, p. 276.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 287.

figures in reading are similar or not similar; therefore differences between them are made clear. For instance, how do the two stories have similar; it is called by reading to compare or contrast. The reader should compare those outstanding figures.

4. Creative reading

Creative reading is a skill of the reader to apply and relates his results of reading creatively with the larger context of life. It is, really, a stage above the critical reading. It means that the type of this reader is not only satisfied with what he achieved by critical reading, but he should follow it up by applying the result of reading in the larger context of life. So, he will apply his reading for the importance of daily life, or at least to use or relate it with his importance as a part of his real life.

In other words, such this kind of reading involves both two kinds of productive thinking—divergent and convergent; or as proposed by Bloom—application, analysis and synthesis. Bloom's synthesis of information may lead to different and novel responses of the same type that result from Guilford's divergent production. Similarly, the application and analysis of information leads the production of responses that may be judged as correct or incorrect; thus these operations are similar to Guilford's convergent production.⁵⁷ So, a creative reader, not only requires convergent thinking but also divergent one in his reading. Such this type of reading is considered as the best stage of reading.

G. Conclusion

Reading activity verily involves physical and mental process simultaneously, but mental process is more dominant. Reading abilities are divided into stages based on those cognitive levels. The stage of reading are literal reading, critical reading, and creative reading.

The lowest stage is literal reading or extensive one. The reader in this stage has just a skill to understand the meaning explicitly. The middle stage is critical reading. It is intensive reading. The reader of this stage is able to catch the meaning implicitly. He has a set of

⁵⁷ Herbert J Klausmeier & Richard E. Ripple, *Op.Cit.*, p. 99.

intellectual abilities to analysis the material reading objectively, fairly, and wisdom suits with the scientific attitude.

The critical reader has had a critical thinking within his reading process. He is able to master a concept formation (such as discriminating, grouping, and labeling things significant); interpreting of data and inference (identifying, and inferring conclusions); and application of principles (hypothesizing solution and deducting relationship or solutions).

Analysis reading is a variant of the critical reading. There are many skills in this stage reader; such as ability to identify main ideas, identify details or facts, classify the facts, compare the whole ideas and compare the outstanding figures.

The highest is creative reading. The reader of this stage has a skill to relate and apply his result of reading in the large context of life.

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