

## Improving Students' Reading Comprehension by Using Problem-based Learning Strategy

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### Abstrak

*This study explores an improving students' reading comprehension by using problem-based learning strategy by formulating quasi-experimental design of Darma Yudha Junior High School. Reading is one of subject that some of Indonesia students faced many difficulties to understand for some reasons. The strategy selection has an important role to create the expectation of the teachers that can be answered by the implementation of creative method, interested materials or enjoyable learning process. Problem-based learning (PBL) is one of strategy of expressing ideas to experience real life context to build critical thinking and problem solving skill. In problem-based learning, students work in collaborative groups to identify what they need to learn in order to solve a problem. The goals of problem-based learning include helping students develop; 1) flexible knowledge, 2) effective problem-solving skills, 3) effective collaboration skills, 4) life-wide learning and 5) intrinsic motivation. In other hand; PBL is well suited to helping students become active learners because it situates learning in real-world problems and makes students responsible for their learning. Based on the result of research, it is found that PBL is one of instructional strategy that offers potentials help to improve students' reading comprehension and motivation.*

**Keywords:** reading comprehension, problem-based learning, and motivation.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Reading is one of the most important language skills that should be developed inside and outside the classroom. It is also one of the most common ways to get information. Generally, there are two skills in Language learning, namely the receptive skill and productive skill. Receptive skill is the ability to listen and read, while productive skill is the ability to speak and write. Reading is a receptive skill in which the students are introduced and exposed to the written text.

Based on the definition above, it can be inferred that reading is a skill that presents the writer's idea related to the management reading text content itself. Besides, readers must have good interaction with the passage and also the method to understand the text. The aim of teaching reading is to make the students able to read the English texts effectively and efficiently. They do not only have to understand the structure of the texts explicitly but also comprehend the meaning of text implicitly.

Since English is not our first language, many students still face difficulties in gathering and comprehending the ideas of reading passages. They do not understand how to obtain the specific and general information of reading texts. In fact, one of the aims of reading is to get the factual information from the served reading texts.

Good reading comprehension is the ultimate goal of reading instruction. At the seventh grade of Junior High School, reading comprehension is the primary focus of reading instruction.

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Accurate assessment of reading comprehension is necessary if this goal is to be met. Reading comprehension plays an important role so as to gain the knowledge of the text. It is also known that in the learning process, there is a high correlation between reading comprehension and academic achievement.

Reading motivation is one of the most important factors. It receives the special focus in foreign language teaching especially on the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. It is regarded as the most vital and necessary for learners in both a classroom context and an extracurricular environment. Motivation for students is always a main element that affects their reading comprehension. So, reading motivation is vital to the learners' ability to read and comprehend texts purposefully are crucial for the students.

In Pekanbaru, many schools have adopted the National Plus curriculum including Darma Yudha Junior High School where English is used as a medium of instruction in some subjects such as English, Mathematics and Science. It means that English is used not only in English subject, but also in other subjects. This curriculum demands the students to use English more in school.

At DarmaYudha School Pekanbaru, students are taught to speak three languages, namely: Indonesian, English and Mandarin. Some students are mixed up with the language. This confusion leads to inability of the students to fully understand the complexity of the English language, thus affecting their reading comprehension ability. As a teacher in this school, based on the direct observation in teaching and learning process the teacher has observed that the students' reading comprehension ability still needs a lot of improvement. Aside from the language problem that the students faced, the materials they use in learning English also contribute to the problem. The vocabulary level of the textbook and workbook they are using is quite high for their level. If the words are unfamiliar to them, they ask their teachers to translate the words into Indonesian and at other times, they try to guess the meaning of the words.

Furthermore, based on preliminary study conducted on November 2014, one class of grade seven which consists of 24 students. They were asked to read one passage of the text book. They were given a time to read it and answer the question. After checking the answers, some of them could not condense ideas of the text; find factual information, main idea, antonym and synonym, and others. From the researcher's observation, it can be in pressed that yet they are not able to comprehend a text by considering some factors in reading comprehension, and their students' was motivation. In order to solve problems found in students' motivation and reading comprehension, some strategies can be offered for helping students in reading comprehension. One of them is problem-based learning strategy.

Problem-based learning links theory and practice by engaging students in real life problems. Higher order skills such as application, analysis and evaluation can only be achieved through a more active approach to learning. The purpose of the problem is to motivate students to learn by providing a real- world context for examining the issues involved. When learning is in context rather than as a series of isolated facts and theories, the concepts are better retained. The underlying belief of PBL is that learning is more meaningful and enjoyable when it occurs in small active groups which are self-directed (SDL). This process encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning and that of their learning group (Lieux and Luoto, 2000).

This technique entails the students' work to begin with the problem itself. It also requires the students to explore more resources other than the teacher, to include reference materials and community members, and to draw knowledge from various subject areas such as mathematics, geography, and science. Therefore, the writer assumes PBL is actually suitable for Darma Yudha Junior High School where English is also taught in content areas.

Hence, the researcher used the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) technique in assessing the students' reading comprehension and motivation. Based on the advantages of this learning technique, the researcher aims to prove its effectiveness on the reading comprehension of Grade seventh students at Darma Yudha School.

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## Literature Review

## **1. Reading**

Generally, there are two skills in Language learning, namely the receptive skill and productive skill. Receptive skill is the ability to listen and read, while productive skill is the ability to speak and write. Reading is a receptive skill in which the students are introduced and exposed to the written text.

According to Nunan (1991: 33), reading is a fluent process of combining information from the text and the background knowledge of the reader. Nuttal (1982: 18) states that the view of reading is valid at any level. A concern with meaning, and with reader's responsibility for getting meaning out of the text, is not out of place in the earnest reading lessons from a primer, although some primers make an approach difficult by providing texts in which meaning is lack equally. Hornby (2000: 27) claims that reading is the action of a person who read or an attempt to make a meaning from what an author has written.

According to Worther (1992: 3), reading is process and has meaning to the reader. There is an interaction between the reader and the text. This process involves the intentional thinking, problem solving and getting the information by the reader. This process will bear the concept of reading comprehension. Therefore, reading comprehension only happens if the reader can adapt the purpose, solve the problem and get the information clearly from the text.

## **2. Purpose of Reading**

Grabe (2009:8) also indicated several purposes of reading namely reading to search information, reading for quick understanding, reading to learn, reading to integrate information, reading to evaluate, critique and use information, and reading for general comprehension (in many cases, reading for interest or reading to entertain).

The example of reading for pleasure is people read comic or novel to refresh their mind, and the example of reading for pleasure is people read a road sign to know where to go or read the manual because they need to know how to operate it. In addition, Rivers and Temperley in Nunan (1989:33-34) said that the learners read for several purposes, such as: (1) To obtain information for some purpose or because we are curious about some topics, (2) To obtain instructions on how to perform some tasks for our work or dialy life (e.g. knowing how an appliance works), (3) To act in a play, play a game, do a puzzle, (4) To keep in touch with friends by correspondence or to understand business letters, (5) To know when or where something will take place or what is available, (6) To know what is happening or has happened (as reported in newspapers, magazines, reports). (7) For enjoyment or excitement.

In short, when a reader is engaged in reading activity for several purposes; those purposes also lead the reader to gain the important purpose of reading; comprehension.

## **3. Reading Comprehension**

Reading comprehension is one of the skills that must be developed at school. This is because the reading comprehension has become something important for students because students' success depends on their ability to read. If students' reading comprehension is lacking, it is possible to fail in learning or at least students will have difficulty in making progress. On the other hand, if the student has the ability to read

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with a good understanding, they would have a better chance to succeed in learning. The explanation below discussed several components of reading comprehension.

**a. Definition of Reading Comprehension**

Reading comprehension is the main purpose of reading activity. All readers certainly intend to have connection to the material that they read. Presley (2012:140) states that the development of comprehension skills is a long term developmental process which depends on language and text experiences from early stage of life. Learning how to decode and learning how to abstract the meanings of vocabulary words are commonly encountered in texts.

In reading comprehension, the readers are encouraged in understanding the written materials so their lexical knowledge is a crucial aspect. Besides, Tankersley stated that reading comprehension is the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language. In brief, the interaction between the readers and written materials depends on how they can illustrate the meaning of words in reading.

Having many vocabularies, prior knowledge about the reading text and students' thinking hold a big influence to students comprehension. They need to master it to maximize their ability in comprehending the written information. Dorn and Soffos (2005:14) state that comprehending involves interpreting and syntetizing ideas in ways that influence the reader's mind. A good reader will integrate four types of knowledges to expand their reading comprehension. They are: *Generic knowledge* - this is the reader's background information. It is cognitive information that the reader activates to construct meaning from the text. *Text knowledge* - Text knowledge relates to the precise message of the text including the content knowledge, vocabulary meanings and text structures. *Strategic knowledge* - Strategic knowledge is the readers' knowledge of specific strategies for problem solving, including cognitive strategy for sustaining and expanding the meaning of a text. *Reflective knowledge* - Reflective knowledge is the mind's ability to think abstractly. It involves thingking beyond the text.

Based on the explanation above, the writer then states that when the reading comprehension appears, there is a connection between the reader and the reading material, because the readers will connect their background knowledge and the new information from the text. Reading comprehension can also be called as a complex cognitive process for every reader.

**b. Influencing Factors of Reading Comprehension**

Because reading comprehension is a complex process, developing this skill is influenced by several factors. Simply stated, reading comprehension is influenced by readers' motivation, knowledge, cognitive abilities, and experience. According to Tankersley (2005:108-109), reading comprehension is influenced by four main factors; (1) Command on the linguistic structure of the text, (2) Adequate vocabulary in content area, (3) Degree of metacognitive control of the text, and (4) Adequate domain knowledge.

Comprehension problems can be caused by a variety of different factors, including those intrinsic to the individual and others related to insufficient instruction or to innappropriate materials, Westwood (2012: 33). He mentions that there are eight factors that may influence the comprehension, such as; (1) Limited of vocabulary knowledge, (2) Lack of fluency, (3) Lack of familiarity with the subject matter, (4) Difficulty level of the text (readability), (5) Inadequate use of ef fective reading

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strategies, (6) Weak verbal reasoning, (7) Problems with processing information, and (8) Problems in recalling information after reading.

In conclusion, reading comprehension is generally influenced by the readers' linguistic structure, vocabulary, metacognitive, and knowledge. By improving these factors, the readers can diminish the problems through their individual factors in reading such as, lack of vocabulary, fluency and familiarity of subject, and weaknesses in verbal reasoning, processing information and recalling information.

### **c. Ways of Improving Reading Comprehension**

Reading is a way for someone to connect the words, thoughts and ideas on a page to what the reader already knows. If the reader does not know anything about the subject, then reading itself becomes more challenging and often the reader does not get as much of the text. Consequently, the reader needs to determine the way how they read the text to maximize their comprehension. According to Grellet (1981:4), there are four main ways of reading. They are as follows:

Skimming : Quick running one's eyes over a text to get the gist of it  
Scanning : Quickly going through a text to find a particular piece of information.

Extensive

Reading : Reading longer text, usually for one's own pleasure. This is a fluency activity, mainly involving global understanding.

Intensive reading : Reading shorter text, to extract specific information. This is more an accuracy activity involving reading for details.

In conclusion, skimming, scanning, extensive reading and intensive reading can be used to read a text to get comprehension. the readers can choose one of them depend on how deep the comprehension that the readers need.

## **4. Problem Based Learning**

Problem Based Learning (PBL) is one of the Contextual Teaching Learning approaches. The contextual learning theory is based on the notion that learning can only occur when the students are able to connect content with context. That is, the students must be able to relate the lesson presented in a classroom setting to something familiar in his or her daily life. This theory is used heavily in career of working and technical education by relating much of the content in the classroom to the world of work through many different avenues, Berns (2001).

PBL starts with an issue, case, or ill-structured problem that can be researched, studied, or even "solved." "Solutions," however, do not have one correct answer. Instead, many solution paths and several good answers may be possible. Different problem-solving techniques can be applied to the initial problem, and groups or individuals generally arrive at a reasonable or possible solution.

Seng (2004: 9), states that PBL approaches in a curriculum usually includes the following characteristics:

1. The problem is the starting point of learning.
  2. The problem is usually a real-world problem that appears unstructured. If it is a simulated problem, it should be as authentic as possible.
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3. The problem calls for multiple perspectives. The use of cross disciplinary knowledge is a key feature in many PBL curricula. In any case, PBL encourages the solution of the problem by making use of knowledge from various subjects and topics.
4. The problem challenges students' current knowledge, attitudes, and competencies, thus calling for identification of learning needs and new areas of learning.
5. Self-directed learning is primary. Thus, students assume major responsibility for the acquisition of information and knowledge.
6. Harnessing of a variety of knowledge sources and the use and evaluation of information resources are essential PBL processes.
7. Learning is collaborative, communicative, and cooperative. The students work in small groups with a high level of interaction for peer learning, peer teaching, and group presentations.
8. Development of inquiry and problem-solving skills is as important as content knowledge acquisition for the solution of the problem. The PBL tutor thus facilitates and coaches through questioning and cognitive coaching.
9. Closure in the PBL process includes synthesis and integration of learning.
10. PBL also concludes with an evaluation and review of the learner's experience and the learning process.
11. The goals of PBL include content learning, acquisition of process skills and problem-solving skills, and life-wide learning.

## **5. Students Motivation**

The word *motivation* derives from the Latin *movere*, "to move". To a great extent, movement – physical activity as well as mental and social activity – defines the active process of writing. Motivation is one of the keys of success in learning because motivation is a factor that encourages the learners taking action and being active in learning process.

Reading motivation is one's own purpose, idea and desire related to the title, action and the results of the reading Guthrie and friends (2006). The students must have difficulties to read in a foreign language if they have low motivation because motivation is a significant factor in language learning.

Motivated reader is not only about students who are having fun while reading. what is meant by motivation are values, beliefs and behaviour while reading for every individual. When talking about motivation in reading, it refers to 3 aspects: (1) *Interest*, (2) *Dedication* and (3) *Confidence* (Cambria and Guthrie: 2010). An interested student reads because he enjoys it; a dedicated student reads because he believes it is important; an confident student reads because he can do it. In conclusion, reading motivation is a very important aspect in learning reading to reach achievement. Thus, every reader should have and know every aspect of reading motivation in order to develop his reading skill and get better achievement in learning.

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## Kinds of Motivations

### a. Integrative and Instrumental Motivation

The motivation is understood as *integrative* and *instrumental* motivation, as stated by Gardner and Lambert. Integrative motivation can be defined as a willingness to become a member of another ethnolinguistic group. In other words, the language is learned with intention of participating in the culture of its people.

This form of motivation is known as integrative motivation. When someone becomes a resident in a new community that uses the target language in its social interactions, integrative motivation is a key component in assisting the learner to develop some level of proficiency in the language. It becomes a necessity, in order to operate socially in the community and become one of its members. Integrative motivation refers to an individual's willingness and interest in promoting second language acquisition through social interactions with members of the target language group.

Meanwhile, instrumental motivation is desire to gain social recognition or economic advantage through knowledge of a foreign language; for instance, language is learned as the support of purpose relating to occupation. Instrumental motivation concerns an individual's primary concern for language development, apart from social goals in second language acquisition.

Instrumental motivation is generally characterized by the desire to obtain something practical or concrete from the study of a second language, Hudson (2000). With instrumental motivation the purpose of language acquisition is more utilitarian, such as meeting the requirements for school or university graduation, applying for a job, requesting higher pay based on language ability, reading technical material, translation work or achieving higher social status. Instrumental motivation is often characteristic of second language acquisition, where little or no social integration of the learner into a community using the target language takes place, or in some instances is even desired.

### b. Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

Motivation is also mechanized as two notions; they are intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. According to Harmer, *intrinsic motivation* comes from the individual. An intrinsic motivation motivates student to study because she/ he wants to study; the material is interesting, challenging, and rewarding and the student receives some kinds of satisfaction from learning. Thus, the students must be motivated by the enjoyment of learning process itself or by the desire to make themselves feel better in learning.

Intrinsic motivation also defined as engagement in an activity for the pleasure and satisfaction derived when trying to excel, to reach a new standard, or to create something new. Individuals with IM toward accomplishment focus on the process rather than the outcome of an activity and seek to feel competent and creative.

In contrast, *extrinsic motivation* comes from any numbers of outside factors. An extrinsically motivated student studies and learns for other reasons; for example the needs to pass the exam, the hope for financial reward, or the possibility of future travel. Both of the motivations work together in learning process as the psychological

mechanism that gives the students courage, energy, and attention in learning. An extrinsically motivated student studies and learns for other reasons.

Reading motivation is one of the most important factors. It receives the special focus in foreign language teaching especially on the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Reading motivation is one's own purpose, idea and desire related to the title, action and the results of the reading, Guthrie and Friends (2006). It is regarded as the most vital and necessary for learners in both a classroom context and an extracurricular environment. Motivation for students is always a main element that affects their reading comprehension. So, reading motivation is vital to the learners' ability to read and comprehend texts purposefully are crucial for the students.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

The design of this research is an experimental research. Gay and Airasian (2000:367) argued that experimental research is the type of research that can test hypotheses to establish cause-and effect relationships. The design of this research is a quasi-experimental design which is focused on the non-equivalent control group. In conducting the research, 2 classes of the second year students were involved. The first class was an experimental class and the second class was a control class. The experimental class was a class that was taught by using Problem-based Learning Strategy, meanwhile the control class was a class that was not taught by using Problem-based Learning Strategy. In this research, there were three variables; the independent variable (X) was the using of problem-based learning strategy and the dependent variable (Y) were the students' reading comprehension and motivation. This research design can be seen as follows:

O <sub>1</sub>	X	O <sub>2</sub> (Experimental Class)
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O <sub>3</sub>		O <sub>4</sub> (Control Class)

In which:

O<sub>1</sub> and O<sub>3</sub> = Pre-test

O<sub>2</sub> and O<sub>4</sub> = Post-test

X = Treatment by using Problem-based Learning Strategy

According to Gay (2000), sampling is the process of selecting a number of individuals or a study in such a way that they represented the larger group from which they were selected. The total samples of this research are 48 students which are divided into two classes, class A and F. Class VIIA, composed of 24 students are considered as the experiment class, while class VIIF, also composed of 24 students is the control group. Reside for the try out of intrumental test, VIIA was chosen. The sample is taken by *Cluster Sampling*. According to Gay (2000: 129), states that *cluster sampling* randomly selects groups, not individuals. All the members of selected groups have similar characteristics. Grade VII is chosen, since the material of English and *Bahasa Inggris* of Grade VII uses the national curriculum. The national curriculum is the prior for Darma Yudha Junior High School to face National Exam (UN). For this reason, the writer uses grade VII. The data of the research were the scores of the students' pre-test and post-test from the experimental and the control groups at the second semester of DarmaYudha Junior High School.

Table 1. The Increase of the Student Number in Reading Aspect Criteria

Aspect	Criteria
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	Pre- test					Post- test					Post- test 2				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Finding factual information (F)	1	3	4	1	9	0	0	0	4	4	0	0	1	3	9
Identifying main idea (M)	5	5	5	0	3	0	0	5	9	14	0	0	4	5	14
Locating the meaning of vocabulary (V)	5	5	6	2	3	0	0	4	12	9	0	0	5	10	8
Identifying reference (R)	10	2	2	3	1	0	1	6	9	2	0	2	6	8	2
Identifying inference (I)	5	4	3	5	1	0	0	1	16	1	0	0	0	15	3

The results of the reading assessments show that of all the five aspects, finding factual information and identifying main idea were the most significant aspects improved. The improvement of the students' reading aspects was indicated by the increase of the number of the students to the highest criteria of both aspects (see Table 1 above).

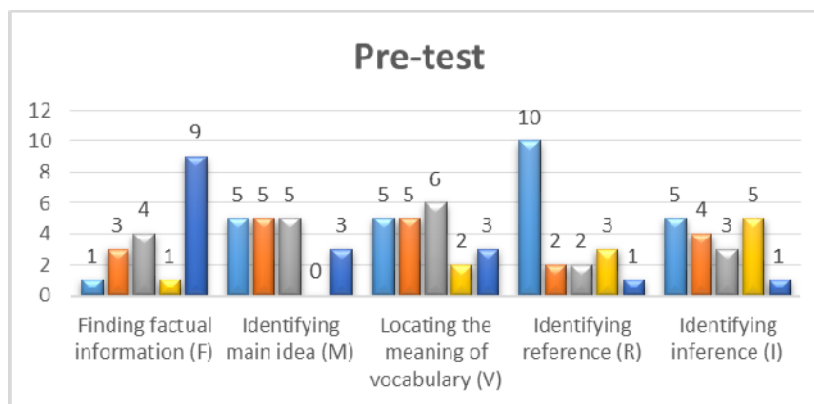


Figure 1. The Pre-test of the Student Number in Reading Aspect Criteria

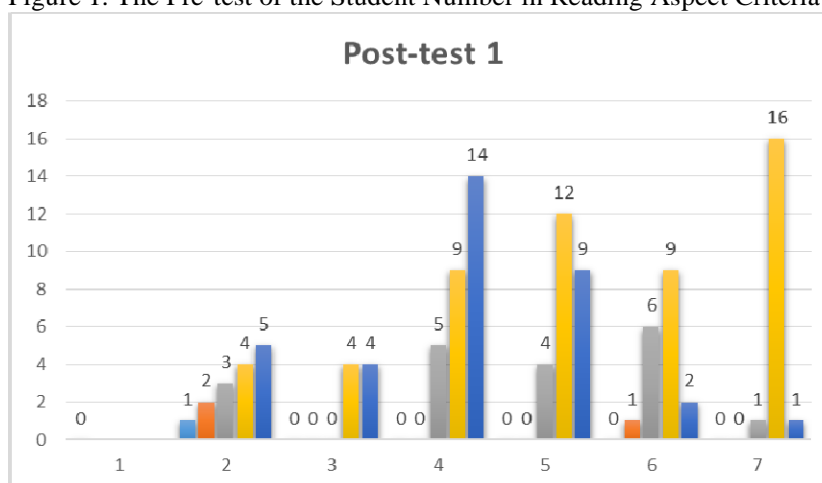


Figure 1. The Post-test 1 of the Student Number in Reading Aspect Criteria



Figure 1. The Post-test 2 of the Student Number in Reading Aspect Criteria

Before given PBL treatments, some of the students were quite hard to comprehend what the teacher said in English. After the treatments, most of them were able to comprehend it. It is proved by the increase of the number of the students in F5. Initially in the Pre-test, of 20 students, only 9 who appear to understand everything without difficulty (F5). After the treatments, in Post-test 2 it becomes 14 students.

As for vocabulary aspect, the students' vocabulary is also improved quite significantly. It was proven by the increase of the number of the students in the highest criteria of vocabulary aspect. Initially, only 3 students understand reading text with quite accurate dictions (V5). After PBL treatments, it becomes 9 students.

The other aspects identifying reference and inference are also improved. However, compared with comprehension and vocabulary aspects, they seemed to improve less significantly.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

By using PBL strategy can make the students easily predict and delimit the topic discussed or informed in the text after they read and answer the questions. Through problem-based learning students learn to become partners in the teaching/learning process where they accept responsibility for much of their learning, work successfully as a team member, deal with new and changing situations and develop lifelong learning skills. Problem-based learning then, can help students think critically, analyze and solve real world problems that will better prepare them for careers outside the classroom.

The finding of this research indicated that there was significant effect of using PBL strategy on students' reading comprehension and motivation. Based on this finding, the implication for the teachers as model and connector and facilitator in educate students in school, beside the teacher transfer the knowledge of English and teaching and learning process, it can be additional guideline for the teachers in teaching. Then the teachers should pay attention more toward students' reading comprehension and motivation in learning English. In this case, the teacher should be equipped with a lot of strategies or technique in teaching and learning process so that the students' motivation can be increased and will give effect toward students' successful in learning and also give effect toward teachers in teaching. It also gives additional knowledge for the students and teachers that with high motivation, students have more power and spirit in applying language learning strategy.

Furthermore, problem-based learning took place in successful of students in learning English. This case, give more knowledge toward students to apply more strategy learning English to reach willingness objective, and then for teachers as a facilitator in students' learning could inform more knowledge about problem-based learning strategy.

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