

**Improving Students' Reading Comprehension by Activating  
Their Schema  
(An Action Research on VIII Grade of SMP Madinatul  
Ulum Tembelang Jombang)**

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**Abstract**

This research aims to know the improvement of students' understanding on English text through the implementation of activating schema strategy. Activating schema strategy is one of teaching strategy that focuses on how students are able to understand and comprehend English text easily by connecting their prior knowledge. This research is Classroom Action Research. The object of the research is the 8th grade students at SMP Madinatul Ulum Tembelang Jombang. Number of students consists of 38 people. The data collecting were obtained from teacher observation, field note and student questionnaire. The results of this research indicate the average score of students in English subject prior to the implementation of activating schema strategy of 59.50 (in preliminary study), while the average score after the implementation of the strategy increased up to 71.42 in cycle 2. This indicates an increasing in student learning outcomes after the implementation of this strategy. Furthermore, most students are more motivated and enjoy in teaching learning process.

*Keywords:* Activating schema strategy, understanding English text, student learning outcomes

**A. Introduction**

Nowadays, English has an important role as a means of international communication in the global era. As one of the international languages, English is commonly used in the public service, mass media, literature, text books and etc. People learn English for several purposes. As an example professional worker learn English to make communication with the clients easier, university students learn English to

explore the English literature books to improve their knowledge. Furthermore in school level, at senior high school, junior high school and also elementary school, for example, the students learn English as a compulsory subject/material.

English as second or foreign language has four skills; they are speaking, reading, listening and writing skill. Reading and listening are considered as receptive skill while speaking and writing skills are considered as productive skill. Both those receptive and productive skills have the same degree of importance. No skill is more important than others.

In most EFL classes, one of the important goals in mastering English for EFL students is able to improve their ability to read in a foreign language well. In other word all students ever want to acquire is able to understand and comprehend the English texts. So that's why for this situation reading receives a special focus. There are many reasons for this, among this is by acquiring reading they want to be able to read for information and pleasure, for their career, and for study purposes. In fact good reading texts provide good models for writing, and provide opportunities to introduce new topics, to stimulate discussion, and to study language (e.g. vocabulary, grammar and idioms). To conclude this, reading, then, is a skill which is highly valued by students and teachers alike.

But, on the other side there are some assumptions that reading is a difficult skill to be acquired, because reading comprehension is not only literally but also inferentially and critically. As all known that reading comprehension levels are literal comprehension, inferential comprehension and critical comprehension. The first level "literal comprehension" can be defined as reading for information. It focuses on ideas and information explicitly stated in the text (Anderson and Pearson, 1984 in Cahyono, 1997: 79). Meanwhile, the next level is inferential comprehension. It implies that in understanding the text, the readers need to search for information that is not directly stated in the text or implicitly stated in the text. In this case, the readers need to recognize the relationship among the main ideas and some details in the text to make inference and draw conclusion about the writer's purpose. The last level is critical comprehension that requires the readers to compare information and ideas in a text with material presented by the instructor or other authorities with the students own knowledge and experience, in order to form judgment, of various kinds (Anderson and Pearson, 1984).

There are many definitions about reading. Some experts define the term "reading" differently. Common definition about reading is a process of communicating information between a writer and a reader. It is in line with Vacca, et al., (1991) state that in reading a reader tries to understand ideas that a writer has put in a text. Furthermore, Rumelhart (1985) states that reading is a process of understanding a written language. Since it is a process of understanding the written language, it starts from viewing the linguistic surface representation and ends with certain ideas or meaning about messages intended by a writer.

Burns, et.al (1996) have another definition about reading, that reading can be viewed as a complex act which is composed of two parts: the reading process and the reading product. In reading process the focus is a process in which a reader tries to comprehend a text he/she read, while in reading product is the communication at thought and emotions from the writer to the reader.

Meanwhile for reading for comprehension, Smith as quoted by Harris and Sipay (1980:221) said that critical comprehension is the use of critical thinking during and following reading. From those statements, it can be considered that reading is as combination of literal and inferential comprehension. For this reason, literal and inferential comprehensions appear to be an essential foundation for, or pre requisite of the other aspect of critical comprehension. In concluding, critical comprehension demands that by reading we evaluate and pass personal judgment on the quality, value, accuracy and or the truthfulness of what we read.

Concerning to the teaching and learning activity in the classroom, Bruder (1986) stated that the students' ability in comprehending reading texts are affected by many factors, such as linguistic knowledge, prior knowledge and reading strategy. The first factor is linguistic knowledge; it considered the basis in how students decode meaning from text is by mastering vocabulary items and structure. Next, in prior knowledge the students bring their prior knowledge to incorporate new information in the texts. Furthermore the purpose of teaching reading should primarily be helping students acquire the strategies needed for comprehending the materials to acquire new knowledge in their subjects.

Applying a new strategy is needed if we meet some difficulties in the teaching learning process. Related to that statement, Brown (1987) stated that teacher should be more creative to look for and apply some strategies to achieve the goals of the teaching learning.

Activating schema strategy in comprehending English text is occasionally used to help the learning of a second language, since it usually requires reading many texts in the target language. If we fail to build a sufficient number of schemata when reading a text, then reading comprehension and consequently mastering another language will become very difficult. The schema theory views that human memory consists of set typical situations or frames (Nunan, 1999).

Furthermore schema theory is concerned with how knowledge is represented and organized in long-term memory (as sets of some information or schemas) and then brought to mind as new information comes in. This theory suggests that individuals relate all new information to what they already know or have experienced. In the context of reading, schema theory emphasizes the critical role of the reader's prior knowledge in comprehension. (<http://www.literacyandnumeracyforadults.com/resources/354679>)

By those all statements above, it meant that activating background knowledge is important for students understanding, because it allows them to make connections to the new information. By reminding what students already know, it is beneficial to the teacher in assisting students with the learning process because it gives an idea of what students have known and what they still need to learn. It is easy to use background knowledge to make understanding of what the text mean. In the theory of schema, while students learn about everything around the world, they will develop a schema and are allowed them to make connections to many other things. According to Piaget's schema theory, before reading something, it is essential for us to activate our prior knowledge, because when we can connect something "old" to something new, it helps us better understand the new. Moreover when students are reading they are able to access their schema and make understand of the text and use their experiences.

SMP Madinatul Ulum is one of the formal institutions of junior education level. It is located in the district Tembelang. To prepare the qualified graduates in facing globalization era, every student of SMP Madinatul Ulum should be able to master English language well. Many efforts have been conducted to achieve that goal such as preparing English textbooks and organizing English courses. Above all, the role of teachers is very essential for such goals to be attained. Many things should be prepared by the teachers to make the students enjoy learning English in the classroom. In the teaching and learning process everyday in the classroom, teacher should design the lesson plan and prepare good strategy to be applied.

This research deals with problems in the classroom faced by the teacher. Based on the preliminary study done at SMP Madinatul Ulum, it showed that the students' achievements in English subject were low, of 38 students, the mean score was 59.50.

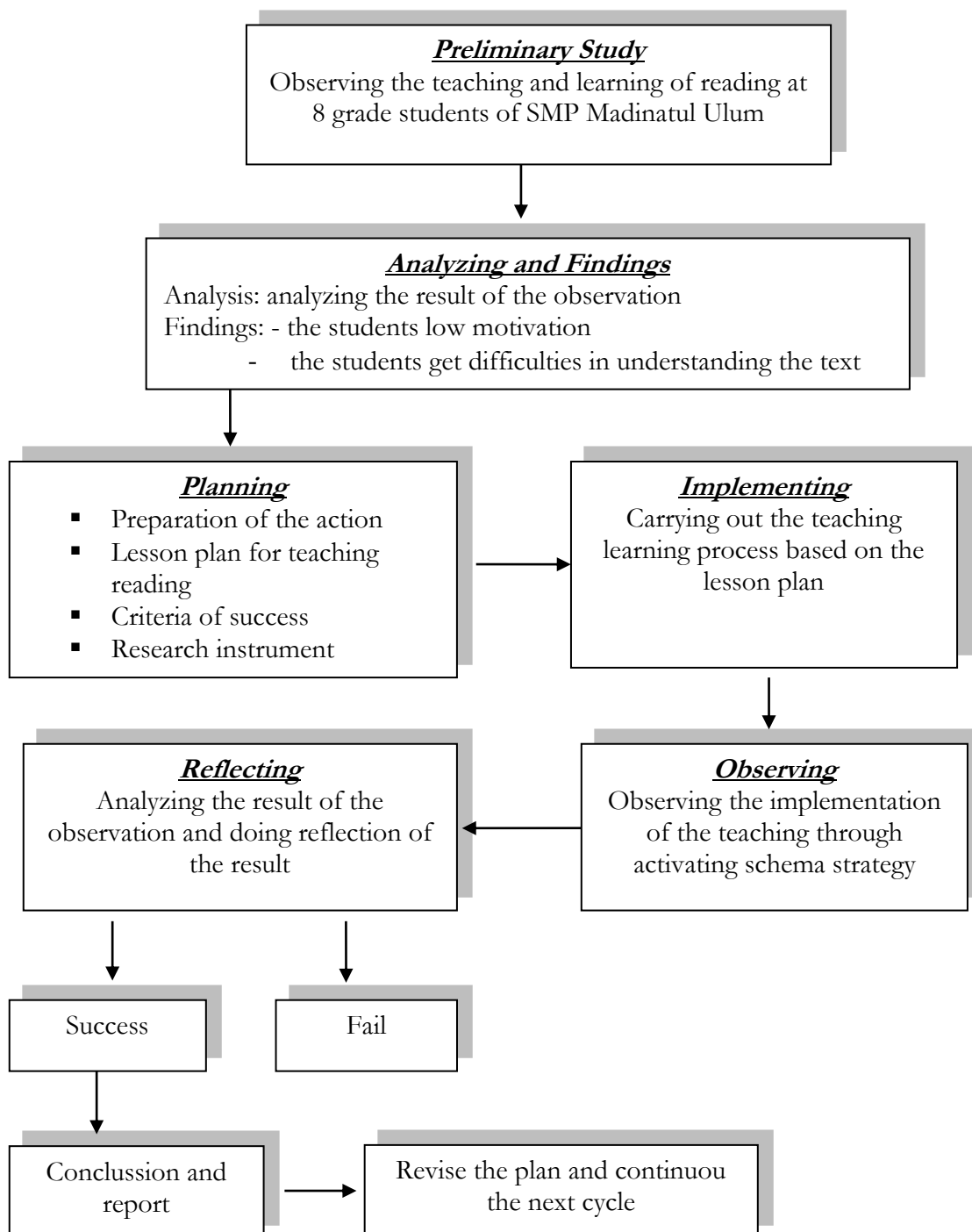
Instead of the students' low achievement, it was also found the weaknesses in English class; the students are not interested in the activities in the class, because they still had difficulties to understand the texts. The teacher does not guide how to understand the texts but only ask the students to complete the task. Moreover, the students are lack of vocabularies.

Based on the result on the preliminary study, the researcher and the teacher (as collaborator) want to solve the problem. The researcher wants to implement a strategy in the teaching learning process in the class. It aims to increase the students' achievement and also the students' motivation in learning English.

## **B. Research Methodology**

Based on the focus of the research, the design of this research is classroom action research (CAR) that focused on particular problems had by the teacher in a certain classroom. Action research is as a constructive enquiry, during which the researcher constructs his or her knowledge of specific issues through planning, acting, evaluating, refining and learning from experience. Burnard (1998:138) stated that action research is a study of an educational situation with a view to improve the quality of action within it. Furthermore action research is a form of collaborative research which aimed at finding solution for daily problems encountered by the school, improving teaching quality and student's achievement. McNiff (1992:4) stated that a classroom action research is collaborative; it involves other people as part of a shared enquiry. Therefore the researcher in this research is as practitioner and will collaborate with a collaborator. The collaborator is one of the English teachers in the school. This action research implements the cyclical process proposed by Kemmish and McTaggart (2000:595) cited in Koshy (2007:4) which consist of four steps, planning, implementing, observing and reflecting.

Figure 1. Diagram of the Classroom Action Research Procedure. Adapted from Kemmish and Mc Taggart, 2000 cited in Koshy (2007:4)



## **Planning**

In this section the researcher was carried out the planning. It covered some activities to be planned such as: preparing the teaching strategy, designing lesson plan, preparing instructional materials and media, and determining the criteria of success.

**Preparing the teaching strategy.** The strategy used in this research was activating schema strategy to increase the students' achievement in comprehending English text.

The teaching procedures are:

- First, teacher explained the reading materials will be discussed including the topic and the goals. In this step teacher thinks aloud about what she knows about the topic.
- Next, activating *prior knowledge* or making connections. Students were asked to bring to mind the knowledge (schemas) they already have about the world, words and texts, and they applied their prior knowledge to help them understand the new knowledge in the text.
- Students were asked to respond the text. The responses were written on the outline prepared by the teacher.
- Next, after making a thoughtful discussion, then the text is read. Discuss with the students about the topic before they read is help them understand the text well.
- After finishing reading, they should write the difficult words to be discussed next.
- Teacher asked the students to identify the main idea. The students determined what is the most important or central idea in the text. They draw on their prior knowledge and experience of the ways in which text is structured (for example, knowing that newspaper articles often state the main idea in the first sentence). This activity can be done individually or in group. Later, they should merge into a paragraph.
- After that the students tried to make rapid summaries (rather like making mental notes) of what they have read through the text, checked for connections and clarification and used their knowledge of topics, vocabulary and text structure to find and connect important points in the text.
- The last activity was asked questions of the text and seeked for answers. The students were asked to answer questions of the text they have read, it aimed for understanding the text they were engaged with.

**Designing lesson plan.** In this section, the lesson plan was designed on the purpose of providing the teacher with a guideline in implementing the strategy in teaching and learning activities. It covered the standard of competency, the basic competency, the indicators, the learning objectives, the instructional strategy, the instructional material, the teaching and learning activities, source of learning and media, and the assessment. In this section the researcher and collaborator were working together to design good lesson plan.

**Preparing instructional materials and media.** It was important to select appropriate materials and relevant media in teaching English because it would stimulate students to be active in learning as well as in accomplishing the assignments. Moreover, the use of appropriate materials and relevant media make

the teaching and learning process more effective and more interesting. In this research, the researcher prepares the reading material covering topics taken from any textbooks especially from Lembar Kerja Siswa (LKS) book.

**Determining the criteria of success.** To know whether the implementation of the strategy is effective or not, criteria of success are necessary to set up. In this research the researcher set 2 criteria to measure the success of the implementation as follows.

- (1) The students were actively involved during the teaching and learning process
- (2) The students' individual score was improved. It will be greater than or equal to 70. The improvement intended was that if 70% of the students achieved the scores equal to or more than 70 in the range 1-100 scale.

### **Implementing**

In carrying out this research, the researcher referred to what have been designed in the lesson plan. The teaching and learning process was carried out by the researcher and helped by a collaborator who observed the students' involvement in the teaching and learning process. Although the researcher was teaching, but also in charge of doing the same observation as the collaborator did and taken field notes. In implementing this strategy, the researcher plans 4 meetings in each cycle. In the first meeting to the third meeting the researcher teaches English subject by implementing activating schema strategy. The fourth meeting is for testing students' reading comprehension. The researcher further judges the result of the test followed by the students' responses in observation checklist, field notes and questionnaires. Whenever the results of the whole test have met the criteria of success, the cycle is ended. On the other hand, when it has not met criteria of success yet, the researcher conducts the next cycle by revising the plans and implementing the strategy based on the new plans until the criteria of success have been met.

### **Observing**

During implementing the research in the classroom, an observation and evaluation were carried out by the researcher (as the teacher) and the collaborator. According to Suyanto and Sukarnyana (2001:5) observation have some functions, first is to know the suitability for implementing and planning the action, and the second is to know how far the implementing achieves the indicators. In observing the implementation, the aspects dealing with it are data sources and research instrument and data collection. To do a careful observation and to gather the valid data, the researcher applied observation checklist, field notes, and questionnaires during the implementation of the strategy in the classroom.

### **Reflecting**

A reflection is an activity of analyzing the collected data to find out how far the strategy implemented able to solve the problem or met the criteria of success set on the purpose of the research. Suyanto (2008:17) says that reflection, basically, is a result of analysis, interpretation, and explanation of all data gathered from the implementation of the action. The result of the data analysis is related to the criteria of success and to be a base to do a reflection. In this step, all the relevant data from implementation will

be analyzed and reviewed to examine whether the action is successful or not by matching the observation results with the criteria of success. In other words, reflection is intended to see what have been done and what have not been done within the action.

In reflecting, data analysis is carried out. The qualitative data obtained during this study are classified and analyzed. It will focus on the teaching and learning process in English subject by implementing this activating schema strategy and the students' participation. If one of the criteria of success is not reached yet, other cycles will be conducted.

### **C. Findings and Discussions**

The implementation of this strategy was done in two cycles. The last meeting of each cycle was conducted to test the reading comprehension skills of the students.

#### **Result in Cycle 1**

The result of Cycle 1 dealt with students' comprehension and students' active participation based on the observation on teaching-learning process conducted in each meeting in this cycle. Test 1 which conducted in the last meeting of Cycle 1 was to evaluate the implementation of the strategy. The test was administered on April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2017. Based on the result of the test, there was an improvement of the students' mean score taken from the preliminary study to the test 1. The mean score in preliminary study was 59.50 and the mean score of the reading comprehension test in Cycle 1 was 65.57. It meant that there was great improvement on the mean score. From the score, it could be said that the improvement of the score was 6.07. However the result was not satisfactory yet, because it did not achieved the criteria of success as defined in this research, which should be at least 70 percent of the students in a total number got score greater than or equal to 70. Then, the number of the students who obtained the score of greater than or equal to 70 was 23 out of 38 students or 60.52% students. There were still 15 students or 39.48% who obtained the score less than 70.

The data gathered from the individual score of reading comprehension test in preliminary study can be seen in the Table 1.

Table 1. Students Individual Score in Preliminary Test

No.	Score Range	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
1.	0 – 55	7 students	19
2.	56 – 60	4 students	11
3.	61 – 69	13 students	35
4.	70 – 79	13students	35
5.	80 – above	0 student	0
Total number of Students		37 students	100

Table 2. The Students' score in Cycle 1

Mean Score	Number of the students who obtained the score of greater or equal to 70	Percentage
65.57	23 out of 38 students	60.52%



Note: The students' comprehension in Cycle 1, in terms of their mean score and the number of the students who obtained the score of greater or equal to 70.

Table 3. The Students' Individual Score in Cycle 1

No.	Score Range	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
1.	0 – 55	0 student	0
2.	56 – 60	4 students	11
3.	61 – 69	14 students	36
4.	70– 79	15 students	40
5.	80-100	5 students	13
Total		38 students	100

Glean from those above, the students' mean score and the students' individual score were still below the criteria of success, which required 70% students had to achieve the score greater than or equal to 70. In other words, the students' mean score increased from 59.50 in Preliminary study to be 65.57 in Cycle 1 and the students' individual score only achieved 40% of 38 students got the score of 73.33, and 13% of 38 students got the score of 80 in reading comprehension test. From those result, it can be drawn that the result of reading comprehension test did not meet the criteria of success. The next cycle therefore should be revised and be conducted.

The students' improvements, as shown on the scores taken from test 1, were the result of the implementation of this strategy in teaching learning process. Some evidence in the findings of Cycle 1 proved that the strategy can improve not only the students' average score but also active participation in teaching-learning process. Somehow, the findings also showed that the first point had met the criteria of success, but the second one failed to meet the criteria of success. Consequently, the next cycle is still needed to be conducted and some revisions of Cycle 1 should also be made to improve the students' reading comprehension skills.

### **Result in Cycle 2**

The test in Cycle 2 was conducted after the implementation of the third meeting. The test was conducted in May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2017, considering that in the first period the students' brains were still fresh. Meanwhile to keep validity of the result of the test, the teacher and the collaborator supervised them in doing the test. Then, the students' answers were corrected by both the researcher and the collaborator.

The result of the test in cycle 2 was from 38 students, there were 29 students who got equal or greater than 70 and 9 students got less than 70. In terms of the number of students obtaining the score greater than or equal to 70 in the Cycle 2 were 29 of 38 students or 76.31%. There were only 9 students or 23.68% who obtained the score less than 70. Accordingly, this result was satisfactory in that the criteria of success, which required the number of the students obtaining the score of greater than or equal to 70 were 70% of the total numbers of the students.

Table 3. The Students' Comprehension in Cycle 2

Mean Score	Number of the students who obtained the score of greater or equal to 70	Percentage
76.80	29 out of 38 students	76.31%

Note: The students' reading comprehension ability in Cycle 2, in terms of their mean score and the number of the students who obtained the score of greater or equal to 70 and 70% students did achieve the criteria of success.

Table 4. The Students' Individual Score in Cycle 2

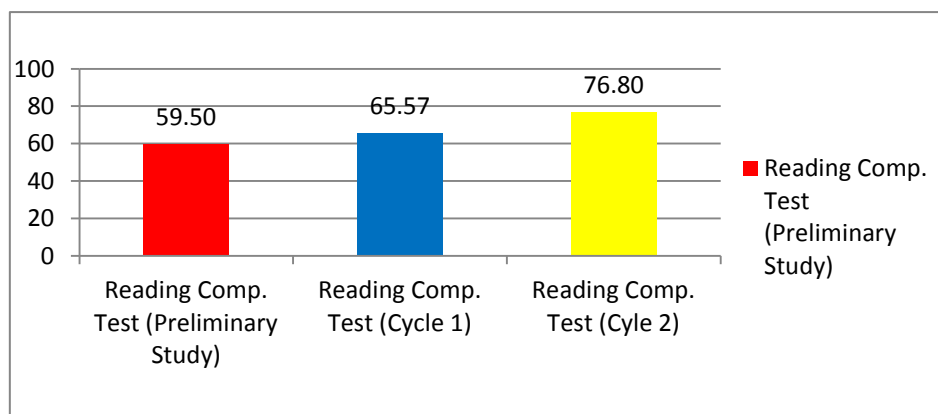
No.	Score Range	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
1.	0 – 55	0 students	0
2.	56 – 60	0 students	0
3.	61 – 69	9 students	24
4.	70 – 79	12 students	32
5	80 – above	17 students	44
Total		38 students	100

Based on the reflection above, it could be generalized that the indicators had met the criteria of success. As a result, the next cycle did not need to be continued and the researcher stopped the research, drew a conclusion, and reported the research.

#### **D. Conclusion**

Based on the findings and discussions, it can be concluded that the implementation of the activating schema strategy in English subject is effective to solve the problems of the students in comprehending English texts. It can improve the students' reading skills. The improvement of the skill in comprehending the text as reflected on the increase of the scores that students could obtain. The improvement can be seen from the increase of students' mean scores and the students' individual score percentage from preliminary study to Cycle 2. The students' mean score had improved greatly from preliminary study 59.50 to 65.57 in cycle 1 and 76.80 in Cycle 2. Besides, the students' individual score percentage had achieved to a great extent from 35% in Preliminary study, 53% in Cycle 1 to 76% in Cycle 2 equal or greater than 70% of the criteria of success predetermined. The improvement of the mean score can be seen in the figure 2.

Figure 2. The Improvement of Student's Reading Comprehension



Based on the result above, it can be concluded that this activating schema strategy is compatible to applied in the English subject especially in eight grade students of SMP Madinatul Ulum, because by implementing this strategy most of the students' problems can be solved and the students ability have been improved. The indicators are the students have high motivation in joining the reading class. Most of them seem enjoy and enthusiastic. They can also be more active during the teaching learning process and interested in reading English texts. They can easily finding main idea and supporting details of the text. Those make them get easy in comprehending the English texts. And the empirical fact indicated the succesful of the implementation of this strategy is that most of the students get high achievement in the reading test.

Furthermore, to get the data of the students' involvement in reading comprehension, the observation sheet and checklist and field notes were used to obtain the information concerning to the students' involvement or participation in the learning process or in pre-, whilst-, post-reading activities after implementing this strategy. The data showed that: (1) in the first meeting, there were 26 students out of 38 students (68%) involved actively; (2) in the second meeting, there were 30 students out of 38 students (78%) involved actively; and (3) in the third meeting, there were 33 students out of 38 students (86%) involved actively.

Moreover, the field notes revealed from Meeting 1 to meeting 3 of Cycle 2 that there were no problems found during the implementation of the action. It occurred because of the following reasons: the instruction of the strategy was given to the students clear enough and most students had understood to the strategy. As a result, most of them had discussed and participated to answer reading comprehension' questions.

In conclusion, the data of each meeting in Cycle 2 implied that the data result of the students' involvement had met the criteria of success since the students' percentage of active involvement had achieved 68%, 78% and 86% in three meetings of Cycle 2.

## **E. Suggestions**

With the above conclusions, the researcher proposes some suggestions to follow up the findings. The researcher addresses the suggestions to the English teachers, students, institution, and the future researchers.

The first suggestion goes to English teachers. The English teachers who want to improve the students' reading comprehension skills were suggested to apply this strategy since it was able to improve the students' skills in the teaching-learning process.

Based on the results of implementing this activating schema strategy in comprehending English texts, the researcher suggested that the English teachers should focus on the followings aspects in the reading activities: (1) preparing the aiding instructional media or visual in the brainstorming activities; (2) combining the activating schema strategy with other reading strategy (questioning), class discussion, and visual aids in order to find important detailed information;

Second, for students, the result of this research can give contribution to the improvement of learning to comprehend the texts for the eighth grade students of SMP Madinatul Ulum Tembelang.

Third, for institution, this activating schema strategy can become an alternative strategy that can be implemented in another lesson focuses.

Finally, the last suggestion was given to further researchers. It was suggested that they used the findings of this research as a reference in conducting similar studies in reading comprehension using different settings, such as levels of the students or difficulties of the reading materials. Furthermore, it is also expected that the findings of this research can become significant evidence to provide details about the implementation of a particular strategy in reading classes in classroom action research (CAR) design.

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