IMPROVING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION USING GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS

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ABSTRACT

This study was a classroom action research aimed to improve EFL tertiary students' reading comprehension by using graphic organizer, one of teaching methods used universally to help learners to understand reading deeper, especially for retelling story outcome. The participants were 44 undergraduate students attending the researcher Reading II class. The improvement in this study was focused on the participants' skills of determining main idea, identifying topic, summarizing, and enriching vocabulary. To check students' comprehension, the researcher measured the students' reading comprehension using open-ended questions in written form, interview, as well as rubrics which are presented in both quantitative and qualitative data. The results revealed that there was no significant improvement in the participants' main idea identification and vocabulary enrichment skills. However, there was robustly significant improvement in their topic identification and summarizing skills.

Keyword*: graphic organizer, reading comprehension, main idea, topic, summarizing.*

ABSTRAK

Penelitian tindakan kelas ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan pemahaman membaca mahasiswa dengan menggunakan metode *graphic organizer*—salah satu metode yang digunakan untuk membantu pemahaman secara menyeluruh dan mendalam, khusunya untuk tujuan mengungkapkan kembali sebuah wacana. Peningkatan pemahaman dalam hal ini dibatasi pada kemampuan mengidentifikasi ide pokok dan topik, penulisan ringkasan, dan peningkatan kosa kata. Sebanyak 44 mahasiswa yang mengikuti matakuliah Reading II berpatisipasi pada penelitian ini. Untuk mengukur tingkat pembahaman mahasiswa dalam membaca, peneliti menggunakan pertanyaan terbuka dalam bentuk tertulis, wawancara, dan rubrik, yang disampaikan dalam bentuk kwantitatif dan kualitatif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa setelah tiga siklus, pemahaman ide pokok dan kosa kata mahasiswa tidak mengalami peningkatan yang signifikan, namun terjadi peningkatan yang signifikan pada aspek pemahaman topik dan penulisan ringkasan bacaan.

Kata Kunci: *graphic organizer, pemahaman membaca, ide pokok, topik, ringkasan.*

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is not only an essential but also the most important skill for learners of English because of its importance to ensure success in learning. Correia (2006) states that "Reading is a crucial skill for students of ESL and EFL, …" (p.16). in line with that, Pardede (2006) accentuated that for students who are learning a SL/FL reading is the most crucial skill to master due to several reasons. First, students can usually perform at a higher level in reading than in any other skills. They can quite accurately understand written materials that they could not discuss orally or in writing with equivalent accuracy or thoroughness. Such condition will undoubtedly enhance their motivation to learn. Second, reading necessitates very minimum requirements. Different from speaking which requires opportunities to interact with sparring partner, or from writing which needs a lot of guidance and time to practice, reading necessitates only a text and motivation. Third, reading is a service skill. After learning how to read effectively, students will be able to learn effectively by reading.

Despite its great importance reading comprehension is a big matter for EFL students. Students in Indonesia do not have reading habits

both at school and home. Much information gained relies on teachers or visual-audio media which are the simplest and fastest ways to gain information. As a result, students do not have much time to interact with books and know them well. Hui (2010) says that when students read English text, they are placed more low level or local processing strategies (p.19). Most learners may read more than three to five times, but they still cannot understand the reading content. Regarding this, there are some reasons. First, learners are lack of prior knowledge. Prior knowledge is established from cognitive information which is mostly gained from reading. There are many reading texts, especially for university levels are based on English native language countries which have different culture and experience from countries using English as second or foreign language. Thus, students do not have interest in reading books in English due to lack of culture understanding. Second, learners tend to use native language in daily conversation rather than English. This situation support learners less to practice unfamiliar words in English as part of learning. Third, in reading lessons learners are occupied to answer questions which only allow them to read parts of reading. As a consequence, they do not know the whole reading and find the enjoyment of reading.

As an English teacher in EFL class, I have observed, learned and applied graphic organizers to improve students' reading comprehension. Graphic organizer is a technique to help students to make reading content easier to understand and learn (Ellis, 2001). Based on my experience, students can separate important information from less important and has systematical framework in planning, doing act toward his or her plan and plan reflection. These guide them to be strategic learners (Ellis, 2001).

The use of graphic organizers have been proved successfully helping EFL students to reach better reading comprehension due to the fact the method makes reading an active activity so that the readers can comprehend what they read or see what lies between the lines. The idea of the importance of reading as an active activity was clearly indicated by Correia (2006) in her classification of reading into passive and active reading. Passive reading tasks do not require students to read deeply to answer the questions. The types of passive tasks of reading comprehension practice are multiple choice items, true and false form and vocabulary work e.g synonym and antonym. These are known as the most frequent types of reading comprehension practices used. Correia (2006) believes such types of exercises as reading activity in classroom will encourage passive reading behavior: to find answer to a question. They also discourage students to read between the lines or question the veracity and source of the information contained in the text. Those kinds of practice generally refer only to parts of the text, not to the text as a whole. The last reason is that it is totally neither challenging nor fun (p.17). On the other hand, active reading tasks require students to go beyond a superficial reading of the text to read "between the lines." Learners are encouraged to think not only deeply but also critically about the topic. Correia agrees (as cited in Grabe,1997) that there are strong evidence by making diagrams and tables while reading texts, students can get better understand the coherence and logic of the information being presented. As consequence "will be able to locate the main ideas and distinguish them from less important information" (p.17).

A teacher's role is to make sure that learners have prior knowledge related to concept and to provide a means for helping the students make connections between prior knowledge and new concepts. Graphic organizers can link the new information to existing knowledge easier and help learners to build schema to understand new concepts. Guastello et.al (2000) says that if prior knowledge is activated, the schema will provide a framework to which the new information can be attached and comprehension will be improved (pp.356-364).

According to Strangman, Hall, and Meyer (2003) a graphic organizer is a visual and graphic display that depicts the relationships between facts, terms, and/or ideas within a learning task. Graphic organizers are also sometimes referred to as knowledge maps, concept maps, story maps, cognitive organizers, advance organizers, or concept diagrams (pp.2-4). There are many types of graphic organizers and each of them has the core concept, which is to show connection among facts, terms and ideas of reading task. A graphic organizer is supposed to show these three components to be a communicative graphic organizer.

Ellis (2005, p.3) mentions three benefits of using graphic organizers. First, graphic organizers make content easier to understand and learn. They help students to separate important information from less important, yet interesting enough. Second, graphic organizers decrease the necessary semantic information

processing skills required to learn the material. Graphic organizers allow material to be set in sophisticated organization to be easier to understand. Third, students who use graphic organizers may become more strategic learners. Strategic learners include how a person thinks and acts when planning, executing and evaluating a task and the outcomes.

Ellis agrees with Novak and Gawin (cited in Ellis, 2005) that a concept map is a visual illustration displaying the organization of concepts and outlining the relationship among or between the concepts. Concept maps should be: hierarchical with subordinate concepts at the apex; labeled with precise linking words; and crosslink the relation between sub-branches of the hierarchy are identified. Concept maps include two key elements: concepts and propositions. Concept is a perceived regularity in events or objects designated by arbitrary label. A proposition is formed by connecting two concepts with a rational link.

Graphic organizers come in many different forms, each one best suited to organizing a particular type of information. There are thirteen main types of graphic organizers. First, a Descriptive or Thematic Map works well for mapping generic information, but particularly well for mapping hierarchical relationships. Second, organizing a hierarchical set of information, reflecting superordinate or subordinate elements, is made easier by constructing a Network Tree. Third, a Spider Map. When the information relating to a main idea or theme does not fit into a hierarchy, a Spider Map can help with organization. Fourth, a problem and solution map. This kind of map is used to show information contains cause and effect problems and solutions. Fifth, a Problem-Solution Outline helps students to compare different solutions to a problem. Sixth, A Sequential Episodic Map is useful for mapping cause and effect. Seventh when cause-effect relationships are complex and non-redundant a Fishbone Map may be particularly useful. Eighth, a Comparative and Contrastive Map can help students to compare and contrast two concepts according to their features. Ninth, another way to compare concepts' attributes is to construct a Compare-Contrast Matrix. Tenth, Continuum Scale is effective for organizing information along a dimension such as less to more, low to high, and few too many. Eleventh, a Series of Events Chain can help students organize information according to various steps or stages. Twelfth, a Cycle Map is useful for organizing information that is circular or cyclical, with no absolute beginning or ending. Thirteenth, a Human Interaction Outline is effective for organizing events in terms of a chain of action and reaction (especially useful in social sciences and humanities).

Graphic organizers have been applied in any subject areas, such as science, social studies, language arts, and math. In these subject areas, graphic organizers have been shown to have benefits that extend beyond their well-established effects on reading comprehension Graphic organizers related to operations such as mapping cause and effect, note taking, comparing and contrasting concepts, organizing problems and solutions, and relating information to main ideas or themes can give advantages in learning process. Thus, there are three important factors influencing the effectiveness of Graphic Organizers. First is grade level. Graphic Organizers cover all level in learning, from elementary to university populations. The function is the same, yet the depth of the topic discussion is different. Second is point of implementation. Graphic organizers generate larger improvements in learning when used as a follow up to reading rather than a pre-reading activity. The last is instructional context Graphic Organizers. Instructional context concept suggests that graphic organizers can be effective learning tools when implemented within a proper and precise instructional context, especially an interactive approach involving teacher modeling, student-teacher discussion, and practice with reflection.

Graphic organizers can be thought as a procedure to measure a students' declarative knowledge. Any assessments can be conceived as a combination of a task, a response format, and a scoring system. A task means to provide evidence of students' knowledge structure. A scoring system means that learners' graphic organizers can be evaluated accurately and consistently.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted at the English Teaching Study Program of the Faculty of Education and Teachers Training of the Christian University of Indonesia in the even semester of 2011/2012 Academic Year. The participants were attendees of Reading II course. The research was conducted approximately 10 weekswith time allocation 1.5 hours in one session per week. The participants had mastered the basic reading comprehension skills, like iden-

tifying topic, main ideas as well as doing skimming and scanning.

Respondents were required to be active in classroom, both in group and individual tasks. Most of the time respondents were expected to use the time for discussion and making draft. The researcher acted as facilitator and monitor for students which means the researcher was expected to encourage respondents to keep trying when they fail after several attempts. In teaching-learning process, the researcher could advise and tailor respondents' understanding in order to correcting concept misunderstandings.

There were two different kinds of reading texts, narrative and descriptive reading texts given in this research because they are simply easy to follow. The graphic organizer template samples were introduced to respondents by pasting around the classroom. The aim is along the teaching-learning process, the respondents are able to absorb positive environment, connect to the pattern and make it as habits. Ultimately, the respondents were required to design Graphic Organizers with any shapes and color.

Evaluation procedures were conducted in two types, written and oral test. Written test consisted of questions to identifying main idea, explaining certain vocabulary, identifying topic, and making summary. Oral test, interview in this matter, consisted of retelling the story and checking the correlation respondents' story with graphic organizer.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As shown in Table 1, each skill of the participants increased from Pre-Test to Post-Test of Cycle 1, yet there were variations fluctuation between Post-Test Cycle 1 to Post-Test Cycle 2 as well as between Post-Test Cycle 2 to Post-Test Cycle 3.

After doing the Direct Learning Method, respondents showed significant improvement from Pre-Test and Post-Test Cycle 1. The main idea and vocabulary skills showed significant increasing which median scores of each are 20 points to 60 points for main idea and 0 point to 30.8 points for vocabulary. In terms of topic skill, median score was still 0 in Post-Test Cycle 1. It means that the score of topic skill in Post-Test Cycle 1 had wider range than in Pre-Test. Summary had slight improvement, which median score was from 15 points to 20 points.

From the result shows in Table 1, the Direct Learning method encouraged respondents to pay more attention to reading strategies. However, the Direct Method could not encounter respondents' topic and summary skills. To identify topic and making summary (including inference skill), respondents should see a reading text as a whole story which it delivers message readers.

Table 1: Results of Reading Comprehension Tests (Overall)

Tests	Main Idea		Vocabulary		Topic		Summary	
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
Pre-Test	23.5	20	7.4	0	9.3	0	14.5	15
PT Cycle 1	46.3	60	35.2	30.8	36	0	28.3	20
PT Cycle 2	42.2	62.5	27.9	0	65.1	50	42.6	60
PT Cycle 3	47.7	75	41.1	41.7	47.7	100	29.4	60

The results between Post-Test Cycle 1 and Post-Test Cycle 2 after doing Graphic Organizer method decreased slightly in main idea and vocabulary skills and increased significantly in topic and summary skills. The mean score of main idea in Post-Test Cycle 2 showed 4.1 points lower than in Post-Test Cycle 1, even though the median score increased 2.5 points. It shows that main idea skill scores were centralized in some points, so the range in Post-Test Cycle 2 was smaller than in Post-Test Cycle 1. The mean score of Vocabulary skill in Post-Test Cycle 2 was lower 7,3 points than in Post-Test Cycle 1; and the median score dropped to 0. It occured because respondents did not manage their time in the test. They did not have much time to do vocabulary problems. On the other hand, the topic and summary skills had improving results. The mean scores of topic skills in Post-Test Cycle 2 increased to 29.1. The mean score of Summary skills in Post-Test Cycle 2 increased 14.3 points.

Graphic Organizers encouraged respondents to see the whole reading text as a picture story which it is easy to grasp by brain. As Correia (2006) suggests that active reading supports learners to locate the main ideas and distinguish them from less important information. When the picture story was drawn, it was easy for respondents to tell the topic (because it is the central, or mostly found in the story) and make summary. Paivio (as cited in Ellis, 2005) mentions that memory has two separate systems connecting each other for processing infor-

mation. One system is specialized in non-verbal imagery and the other one is specialized in dealing with language. Therefore, determining main idea and vocabulary should be supported by Graphic Organizers as long as respondents make no assumptions at all to the reading text. The ideas in reading text connect each other and are framed in a united non-verbal imagery; it is logic. The significant results are proved in topic and summarizing skills. Respondents applied what Ellis (2005) suggests that Graphic Organizer helps learners to separate important information from less important and decrease the necessary semantic information.

It is inferred that someone's prior knowledge to certain topic could affect his judgment to see the reading text as information. As Guastello (2000) says that if prior knowledge is activated, the schema will provide a framework to which the new information can be attached and comprehension will be improved. In this research, learners had had prior knowledge about the topic when they did Pre-Test. Yet, they assumed the content of reading text too quickly which lead them to the wrong perception about the content of the text. So, it should be emphasized that prior knowledge is not only about the topic itself, but included the interrelated topics. If learners have insufficient prior knowledge, guessing and making conclusion are not suggested. Learners should take the reading text as new information to enrich their knowledge.

Another reason is that time management. The respondents did not manage time well since each class got extra 20 minutes to finish their work. They were really focused to make "great" Graphic Organizer rather than "communicative" Graphic Organizer. As Ellis (2005) mentions that Graphic Organizer set the reading material in sophisticated organization which lead the content of reading is easy to understand. It can be concluded that learners were in the learning process of improving the reading comprehension.

Having Review session before Post-Test Cycle 3 showed another interesting result between Post-Test Cycle 2 and Post-Test Cycle 3. The mean scores of main idea and vocabulary skills increased 5.5 points for Main Idea and 13.2 points for vocabulary. Yet, the declination can be seen in topic and summary skills. The mean scores of topic decreased 17.4 and of summary decreased 13.2 points.

In Post-Test Cycle 3, the researcher did not instruct respondents to use Graphic Organizers as a tool to answer questions. The researcher facilitated some spaces for simple pictures if they wanted to use Graphic Organizers. The fluctuation scores could happen with several reasons. First, the respondents found the text seemed easier than before. It encouraged respondents to read attentively and answered main idea and vocabulary well. It also indicated that learners have sufficient prior knowledge of the topic. Second, the respondents using simple pictures or Graphic Organizers could improve their scores in all areas because they saw the whole picture well. Third, around 30% of respondents did not join in Review session and came in Post-Test Cycle 3. It was one of the ways for not reaching any improvement in answering questions. Fourth, around 40% respondents did not join the test, so there are score 0 influencing the calculation.

The researcher also did judgment through rubric of Tony Stead. Below are the resultsof Pre-Test, Post-Test Cycle 1, Post-Test Cycle 2 and Post-Test Cycle 3:

Table 2: Results of Reading Comprehension Using Rubric (Overall)

Tests	Literal Level				Interpretive Level			
	Memory		Translation		Interpretation		Application	
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
Pre-Test	0.9	1	0.3	0	0.9	1	0.8	1
PT Cycle 1	1.6	2	0.6	1	1.1	1	1	1
PT Cycle 2	2.3	2	1.9	1	2	2	1.8	1
PT Cycle 3	1.9	3	1.5	0	1.4	2	1.5	2

The data in Table 2 above reveal positive improvement between the Pre-Test and Post-Test Cycle 1. All mean scores increased, yet not all median levels increased. The median levels of memory category and translation category increased one level; yet interpretation and application category stayed the same.

After doing the Direct Learning method, the respondents found determining main idea and vocabulary were easier to do. This affected respondents' view to see the story clearer than before. So, they could recall the details of the story better. The respondents had not reached Interpretative Level yet, because they still saw the story of reading text as writing form. They found difficult to connect one paragraph to another as one whole story. The other factor which could increase their scores is the same reading text. They had certain way in retaining what they had seen before. This prior experi-

ence helped them to read the text easier than the first time.

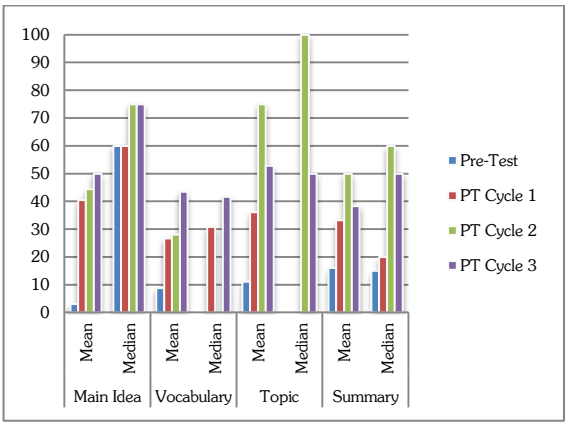
The changes results from Post-Test Cycle 1 to Post-Test Cycle increases all in range 0.2 points to 0.9 points. The memory and the application categories stayed in the same comprehension level, which were level 2 and level 1. The factor of short range score could cause memory category stayed in the same level. The application was the highest comprehension level to test. The result shows that the respondents had not reached that level yet. The translation and interpretation categories had improvement in median levels, which were to level 1 and level 2. Both mean scores increased significantly as well. It shows that respondents could rephrase better. When they felt confident to retell the story with their own words, their awareness of making conclusion, or inference was elevated. That caused the level of interpretation category was also increased.

Graphic Organizer was proved to facilitate visual images of the story. Since human mental judgment processes something faster with real things to see (in this case is pictures in Graphic Organizer), Graphic Organizer is a media to answer questions. Yet, respondents tended to copy the words from the text rather than use their own words. It is supported by Strangman, Hall, and Meyer (2003) say that Graphic Organizer is a visual and graphic display which connects between facts, terms, and/or ideas within a learning task. It is also supported by Ellis' theory (2005) that a reading material is set in sophisticated organization, in Graphic Organizer pattern, to be easy to understand.

Based on results described above, it can be concluded that there are three main reasons influencing the increasing and decreasing respondents' reading comprehension results: first is respondents' willingness in learning new method; second is readers' prior knowledge could affect their mental judgment while reading a certain text; and the third is the tendency of readers to have certain memory of what they have read which let them copy the information rather than to use their own words which can lead them to wrong perception of the facts in the reading text. The results support Paivio's theory (as cited in Ellis, 2005) that memory consists of two separate but interrelated systems which one is specialized in processing non-verbal imagery and the other one is specialized in dealing with language.

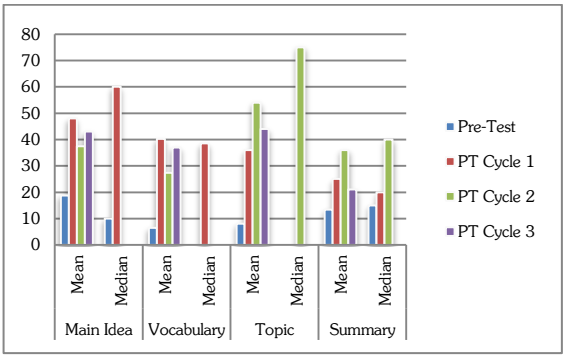
Those reasons made the researcher to divide the respondents into two sub-groups: respondents' joining all treatments and respondents' not join not all treatments. The results of sub-group joining all the treatments chart can be seen on Chart 1.

Chart 1: Reading Comprehension Results (Respondent Joining All Treatments)



The result show that the mean scores of main idea and vocabulary enrichment skills increase from one level to another. While the mean scores of Topic and Summary skills increase up to Post-Test Cycle 2, but decrease in Post-Test Cycle 3. The median scores most of skills increase up to Post-Test Cycle 2, except Vocabulary. It happened because most of the respondents did not manage their time to answer vocabulary questions. The median scores were varied in Post-Test Cycle 3. The median score of main idea stayed at the same point; that of Vocabulary was, of course, higher than before; those of Topic and Summary decrease to 50 and 50.

Chart 2: Reading Comprehension Results (Respondents Not Joining All Treatments)

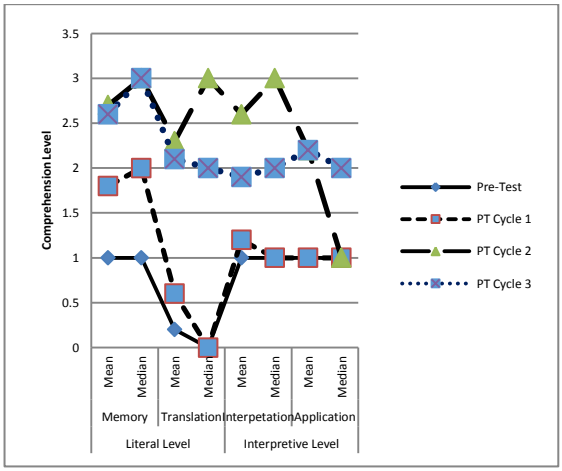


The results of respondents not joining all treatments is as seen on Chart 2. Each skill has at least one 0 score for median score. It shows that when the median score is 0, the ma-

jor respondents were absent or they did not answer the questions at all. It is found that the mean scores from all skills do not reach 55% from the target. So, it can be said that by not joining all treatments, respondents miss their chances to make some improvements

The researcher also used rubric of Tony Stead to see respondents' reading comprehension improvement. The compilation of Pre-Test, post-Test Cycle 1, Post-Test Cycle 2, and Post-Test Cycle 3 is shown as follow:

Chart 3: Reading Comprehension Results Using Rubric (Respondents Joining All Treatments)

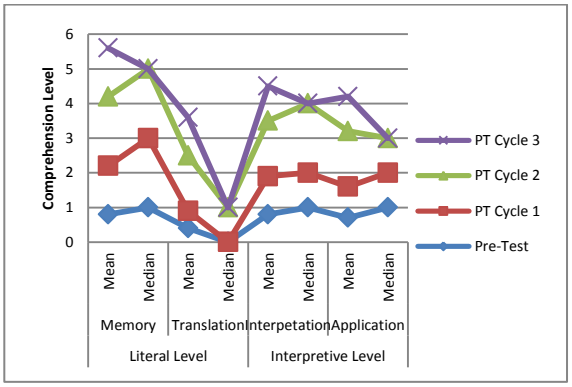


The results of mean scores from all categories increase up to Post-Test Cycle 2. The decreasing points happen in Post-Test Cycle 3. The median levels of all categories increase or stay up to Post-Test Cycle 2. The changes of levels happen to Translation and Interpretation categories.

Graphic Organizers encouraged the respondents to see the reading text as a whole story. The mean scores increased significantly in each category. The interesting thing was the application category which was its mean score increased 1.2 points; yet the median level stayed at the same level 1. It means that the score range was shorter, so level 1 was still more than the others even it was not dominant anymore. It is proved by the increasing of level in Post-Test Cycle 3 to level 2 when the mean score stayed in 2.2 points. The declination of mean scores (even it is insignificantly seen) and the median levels of translation and interpretation categories could happen because of several things. First is the optional in answering questions. Second is the tendency of copying the text as summary.

The results of Pre-Test, Post-Test Cycle 1, Post-Test Cycle 2 and Post-Test Cycle 3 for respondents not joining all treatments are seen as follow:

Chart 4: Reading Comprehension Results Using Rubric (Respondents Not Joining All Treatments)



The mean score results increased insignificantly from one Post-Test to another; and all dropped in Post-Test Cycle 3. It can be found at least one 0 level domination in each category. The median level of memory category dropped to 0 after reaching level 2. The median level of translation only reached level 1 in Post-Test Cycle 2; then dropped back to level 0. The median level of interpretation reached level 2 and it dropped to 0. It happens to the application category as well; both are never in 0 level from Pre-Test. This phenomenon happens because respondents neither answered questions nor joined the test(s). It can be concluded that these data were not valid to be research reliable data.

CONCLUSION

Graphic Organizer is a method used to make language learners easy to see the whole pictures of reading text. It encourages people to transfer written ideas into images which are more easily processed by brain. This method is easy to understand and no need to follow any particular pattern. Using color and symbols as well as no particular pattern required, Graphic Organizer encourages language learners to focus on the details of the story. It is expected when learners can identify the details of a story, they can identify topic, share the story with their own words, inference and make connection the information provided, and even give solution or ideas to reading text.

The results of respondents' reading comprehension improvement in this research are Main Ideas and Vocabulary skills have indica-

tion to improve but they are no statistically significant improvement while Topic and Summary skills are robustly improved through using Graphic Organizer. The categories (Memory, Translation, Interpretation and Application) in rubric of Tony Stead were assessed and the results are all significant to improve learners' reading comprehension through Graphic Organizers.

Recommendation

For further research, researcher recommends several points: First, Graphic Organizer could help language learners to comprehend a reading text. So, it is necessary to consider having Graphic Organizer as a part of Reading I course and/or Reading II course curriculum. Second, Graphic Organizers could help learners' confidence to present what they have read. Due to time limitation, presentation session could not be conducted. Third, it is admitted that identifying main idea and defining unfamiliar words using context clues can consistently increase if learners read more texts and practice the skills. Yet, it is not possible Graphic Organizers could help them to identify main ideas and retain the new words. The learners need more time to see the connection.

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