

TEACHING READING IN REMOTE AREAS IN INDONESIA: A FOCUS ON CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

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Received: 12 May 2018	Accepted: 16 May 2018	Published: 26 May 2018

ABSTRACT

In the process of teaching English throughout the country, more effort is needed when it comes to the teaching in remote areas. This research aims at investigating challenges faced by the teachers in remote areas and their strategies in teaching English especially reading. This study was a descriptive qualitative study which involved 14 former SM-3T teachers posted in 2013-2016. The data were collected using questionnaire via Google Form and online interviews. The data analysis was done by transcribing, coding, looking for larger categories or themes, and interpreting meaning and presenting the result.

The result of the research showed that challenges faced by the participants were related to students, media, and material. With regard to the teaching of English, especially reading skill, the teachers still focused on the teaching of language-focused learning and meaning-focused input. Since reading can be useful to help the students understand the language, the problems in the real situations caused the teachers to conduct language learning imbalance. The results imply that the teachers need to balance the learning by making sure that the meaning focused strands exist in the teaching and learning process so that the students' language learning could occur in a meaningful and contextual way.

KEYWORDS: Remote Areas, Reading, Four Strands, Meaning-Focused Input, Meaning-Focused Output, Language-Focused Learning

INTRODUCTION

The importance of English as an international language demands most people in the world to master it. A good mastery of English will help them not only to communicate, but also to learn something new as the way of preparing themselves for a better life. Because of it, English is also needed to be taught in every school in Indonesia. However, with the huge number of spread archipelago, the disparity of education equity between Indonesian areas is undeniable (Nurhayati & Dhona, 2016). This condition has created a diverse education process resulting in different outcomes. Nonetheless, the students of schools in rural area are required to follow the curriculum made by the government. Therefore, the teachers of those schools are challenged to provide good English learning for the learners regardless the inequality.

Teaching English means teaching both macro skills and micro skills of English to the students. The first term represents four language skills, namely listening, reading, speaking and writing while the latter consists of vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. The way of the English teachers in teaching that aspect may vary. A teacher may start from teaching based on receptive cycle (reading and listening) to productive cycle (writing and speaking) or from the spoken cycle (listening and speaking) to written cycle (reading and writing) – or vice versa. Since the students of rural area are rarely exposed to English, the teaching of those skills often does not run well. Lack of English exposure makes the students find it difficult to learn English as urban students do. With the lack of source for learning English, the most possible way of exposing English to them is through reading. Reading which involves the reception and understanding of language can be very useful for a teacher to help the students accustom English effectively. Reading is one of the excellent ways of providing language input (Day and Bamford 1998; Maley 2005; Nuttall 1982 in Renadya & Widodo, 2016). A reading course which is well taught can be the core of the language teaching plan as it can give rise to activities in the other language skills namely listening, speaking, and writing. Moreover, reading also provides the prospect for an advantageous focus on language features (or micro skills of English). Therefore, reading can be an effective way of showing that learning language can be enjoyable and successful (Nation, 2009).

To teach reading successfully, the teachers need to consider the way they deliver it. There are some principles or frameworks designed to enable the teachers to create effective language learning. One of the principles is called the four- strand frameworks. Nation (2007) states that a way to provide an appropriate balance of the opportunity for learning can be divided into four strands, namely meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development. This framework allows the teachers to provide a range of useful activities which extend the students opportunity in learning the language. Furthermore, this framework can be applied to every skill of language, including reading.

The teaching of reading as an effective way of introducing language to the students seems to be better when it follows the four strands framework. However, the barrier in teaching English in remote areas may 'force' the teachers to alter their way of teaching. Two questions are then emerged: What is the challenges faced by the teachers in teaching English (especially reading) in a remotes area? How is the four strands framework is implemented by the teachers in teaching reading in remotes areas? The purposes of this study are then to investigate the challenges in teaching English in remotes area and to examine the strategies (based on the four strands framework) used by the teachers in teaching reading in remotes areas. As the challenges faced by the teachers in rural areas is different from urban areas, the scope of this study is therefore to investigate the challenges faced by the teachers in conducting language learning which is beneficial for their students. It is also expected that this research will inspire the teachers in remotes areas in improving their language skills especially reading. Furthermore, the result of this research can be the inspiration for other researchers who want to examine the teaching process in remotes areas as well as the four strands framework and its application in the language learning.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Teaching English in Remote Areas: Indonesian Setting

Since education is central to each country's prospect of growing in this globalization era, Indonesia as a developing country is striving for the betterment of education. It results in the improvement of education quality in some regions which is getting better. However, the country is still struggling in providing education equality, especially in remote areas.

Low education quality creates challenges for the teachers in teaching in the remote and disadvantaged area. This issue also happens in the context of teaching English. Nurhayati & Dhona (2016) states that there are some challenges which is faced by the English teachers in the remote area, including students factor, learning material, language, environment and facilities.

The first challenge is related to the students' factors, including their orientation, their intellectual ability and their behavior. Student's orientation in learning influences their attitude and behavior (Harmer, 2007). However, in some areas considered as disadvantaged area, most of the students do not think that what they learn at school is relevant to their future (in term of job or life planning). The next issue is related to the students' intellectual ability. Since some of them did not get a proper education in elementary, it is harder for the teachers to bring them to the next level of learning, especially English language which is rarely exposed to them. The last issue regarding the students' factor is their attendance and behavior. Since some of the students have other activities outside the classroom, such as helping their parents, they may keep coming on and off regularly to the class, causing the students to miss the materials.

The next problem is related to learning materials. The challenge which is mainly faced by the teachers is material availability and quality. Since the learners' need may be different in each area, the quality of a learning material may not be fit to the condition. Furthermore, lack of electricity and internet connection in some disadvantaged area makes the teachers find it difficult to adapt or to make use of material available online.

Next is language. when teaching English in the disadvantaged area, the teachers will deal with three languages, namely English, Indonesian language, and students' local language. The students often consider English as an 'alien' language and see that there is no reason to learn it. Furthermore, lack of local language mastery becomes a problem since sometimes the teachers need to use it in explaining the material.

The last challenge is related to learning environment and facilities. Nurhayati & Dhona (2016) states that generally, learning facility in disadvantaged areas is not conducive. Learning environment which is less conducive will become an obstacle faced by the teachers in teaching English. Furthermore, the inadequate facility is very common in the place, making it possible for the student to achieve less and engage negatively.

The challenges mentioned above are not the problem to solve merely by the teachers. All related stakeholders should be involved in tacking those problems. However, teachers as the agents who are directly involved in the process of learning are the key contributor to the change, by finding a solution to be applied in the classroom with the aim of overcoming the problems.

As mentioned before, one of the challenges in teaching English is because of the lack of English exposure. Lack of English exposure makes the students find it difficult to learn English as urban students do. With the difficulty in finding material or media which may intensify the exposure of English to the students, the most possible way of exposing English to them is through reading. Reading which involves the reception and understanding of language can be very useful for the teacher to help the students accustom English effectively.

Reading and English Learning

Reading is considered as the most popular skill to teach among the four language skills in English. More illon (2007) states simple definition of reading that it is about making meaning from print information and visual as well. The

process, however, is very complex.

In order to be a good reader, a student is required to have a great deal of practice and to master the skill needed.

Oakhill, Cain, & Elbro (2014) states that there are two components in reading, namely word decoding and language comprehension. The first term refers to the ability to read single words out of context. The second term, language comprehension, refers to the ability to comprehend words, sentences, and text. Furthermore, reading ability depends on the product of this component. Oakhill, Cain, & Elbro (2014) formulates the idea which states that *Reading=Word Reading* × *Language Comprehension* ($R=WR\times LC$). In other words, instead of seeing, reading as the sum of the two components, reading is considered as the interdependence of that component. It implies that if one of the mentioned components is bad, the reading ability will be also bad. Accordingly, if a student cannot read the words or if a student does not have any skills of language comprehension, he cannot read.

There are some reading strategies which can be used to improve reading comprehension, namely predicting, visualizing, making connections, summarizing, questioning, and inferring (*Küçükoğlu*, 2013). Predicting is a strategy which can help the reader establish a purpose for their reading. Some approaches of this strategy are teacher modeling, predicting with a partner, predicting throughout texts, and so forth. Visualizing is a strategy which involves the reader in constructing images of what is read. In making connection strategy, the learners activate the prior knowledge and connect ideas in a text to their experiences. Summarizing enables the learners to organize ideas in reading because it helps them determine the important point. Questioning requires a reader to construct meaning by asking questions to them. The last strategy, inferring, is a strategy which provides the learners the opportunity to make predictions, draw conclusion, and find the meaning by making inferences.

Basically, there are two kinds of reading activities, namely intensive reading and extensive reading. Intensive reading is a reading activity which is designed to provide students the opportunity to develop particular receptive skills such as skimming, scanning, and reading for detailed comprehension. On the other hand, extensive reading is an activity in which the students can freely choose what they want to read with the aim of improving general language or pleasure (Harmer, 2007).

Reading gives early benefits for language learners because it becomes a way of understanding language. Harmer (2007) mentions that reading skill is beneficial for language acquisition for its function as provider of vocabulary as well as a model for other skills. Therefore, reading is an important skill to be taught to help the students learn better. The teachers can teach the students certain strategies to help them read better. Further more, teaching reading should bring the students to move form "learning to read" where the focus on the learning of decoding and recognizing written words to "reading to learn" where the focus is on the learning and understanding of increasingly difficult text (Oakhill, Cain, & Elbro, 2014). Related to teaching English in remote areas which represents input-poor environment, reading can be a good way to pave the way for the students to learn other macro skills (Al-Homoud & Schmitt, 2009).

The Four Strands

The principles of designing a language course have been developed over time to optimize the language learning experienced by the learners. One of principles of designing a language course which is well known and widely used is the four strands framework. The notion of the four strands framework was coined by Nation, comprising four parts:

meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning and fluency development. The basic principle of this framework is stated by Nation (2007) in Nation & Yamamoto (2012) that a language course or language classroom, which is well-balance is those which give equal time to each of the four strands.

In meaning-focused input, the learners are supposed to learn lthe anguage through reading and listening. The focus of this strand is to understand the message. Furthermore, they are supposed to do some activities where language features are small outside their present proficiency level. In meaning-focus output activities, the learners produce language through writing (for written form) and speaking (for spoken form) which the focus of comprehending what is being listened to or read. This kind of strand also pays attention in the use of language features in the form of vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation, grammar, or other features. Language-focused learning puts deliberate attention to the features of language inmeaning-focused input and meaning-focused output contexts. For example, language-focused learning occurs in reading when learners use their dictionary to find the meaning of some words or when learners learn spelling in speaking. The last strand, fluency development is a strand with the purpose of helping them to make the best use of what is already known. The learners are said to be fluent if they are able to receive and produce language at a reasonable rate(Nation & Yamamoto, 2012).

Besides applying those different strands in a set of time (in the context of the classroom), another thing which is needed to consider is the timing. Macalister (2014) points out that in relation to curriculum design, each strand should get equal time in a language course. Nation (2009) furthermore explains that to get the balance, there are many ways which can be done. The considerations will be on the local conditions, the constraint of timetable, and also a teacher preference.

Regarding the advantages of the application of the four strands framework, Nation &Yamamoto (2012) suggest that the four strands framework enables the teachers to provide various ways of helping the students to learn a certain language together with its features and skill rather than relying on the only particular way. Besides giving the opportunity to the learners to not the only focus on one skill of language, the notion of four strands can also be used to promote autonomous learning. Nation & Yamamoto (2012) state that the four strands principle can be very useful to be applied when learners decide to learn a language and want to take control their own language learning. Therefore, this framework can be a way to promote learning autonomy, giving extended opportunity for the learners to learn language whenever and wherever they are.

The Four Strands and Reading

Since the four strands framework can be interpreted as the way of providing a range of ways in helping the students to learn the language, this principle is not necessarily applied only in the whole-skill language teaching, nor limited to a particular skill. With regard to reading, Nation (2009) proposes principles which can be guidance to design a reading programme, namely meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development. In the meaning-focused input, reading practice and training should be conducted with a range of reading purpose. They can be searching for information, reading for fun, reading to learn, reading to write, and reading to critique text. Furthermore, learners should read texts which are appropriate to their level of language proficiency. It also should help the learners to improve their language proficiency by serving texts which have new vocabulary to be guessed based on the context. In meaning-focused output, on the other hand, reading activity need to be related to other language skills such as listening, speaking, and writing.

This strand actually focuses on the use of speaking and writing as the ways to provide the students the opportunity to create language. Since reading is receptive skill, the focus in this strand is on how reading can be connected to other skills.

Language-focused learning requires the learning to apply some principles regarding the language being learned. The first principle is that the learners should be assisted to develop their knowledge as well as skills which are needed for reading effectively. The skills include spelling practice, phonemic awareness activities, vocabulary learning, and grammar study. The next principle is the learners need to be taught about reading strategies. The last principle is that the students should be accustomed to various text structures such as stories, newspapers, recounts, and report. In fluency development strand, learners' fluency in reading should be developed. The process can be done by giving them material that contains language features that they have already known well. The activities can be in form of speed reading, scanning, skimming, repeated reading, and paired reading. Furthermore, they should feel motivated to read and enjoy reading. It can be done by giving them the chance to do some activities like listening to stories, shared reading, or independent reading. The last thing to consider in this strand is that learners need to read a lot. It can be done through extensive reading activity.

Applying the condition for each strand will enable the teacher to prepare a reading-based lesson. Furthermore, it will ensure that their learners are not only practicing reading but also learning how to read (Macalister, 2011).

Study on the challenges in teaching English in a remote area has been done by several researchers. Nurhayati & Dhona (2016) conducted a research about the problem faced by SM-3T teachers in remote areas. The finding of the research tells that there are some problems which caused the participants cannot apply their skill and knowledge in teaching effectively which include the problem related to the students (motivation, intellectual ability, and behavior), learning material, language, learning environment, and facilities. The research suggests that teachers' readiness experience is needed in order to conduct effective teaching in remote areas.

Regarding the four strands framework and its application in language learning (especially in reading), Macalister (2014) examines the current research on the second language (L2) reading related to the teaching reading and its relation to reading as an activity of meaning-making. He points out that greater recognition of the four strands framework will contribute to a thorough understanding of the teaching of reading, which will lead to the improvement of classroom practice.

Another research focuses more on the use of four strands in developing vocabulary mastery through a reading activity which is done by Hogain in 2012. The result suggests that the four strands framework is convincing to be used as a strategy in not only vocabulary mastery but for every language course. Furthermore, the strategy promotes the concept of input, output, fluency, and focus on form unity which can be useful to create effective learning.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research was a descriptive qualitative study. This research involved 14 former SM-3T teachers posted between 2012-2016 as participants. The data were collected by using questionnaire and interview. The questionnaire was distributed to the respondents in a form of Google forms while the interviews were done by using online interview or e-interview. Online interviews are used to collect data via the Internet with the purpose of subjecting them to study to

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deliver new evidence related to a certain question of research (Hewson, 2010 in Salmons 2012).

Online interviews were done to help the researcher in gaining data from the different participants in different places.

Data Collection Technique	Date
Questionnaire	November 28 th 2017–
Questionnaire	December 2 nd 2017
Interview	December 3 rd 2017

Table 1: The Timeline of Data Collection

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed by adapting Ma (2015) steps of analyzing qualitative data, which comprises: transcribing, coding, looking for larger categories or themes, and interpreting the meaning and present the result. Firstly, the data which were gained from questionnaire and interview were transcribed into written form. Then, the data were broken down into a small segment and then labeled. The next step was looking the data to find the categories or themes and the last step was interpreting the meaning of the data and presenting the result.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Challenges in Teaching Reading

Based on the data collected from questionnaires, 93 % of the participants taught reading at school with various reasons. The first reason is because they wanted to prepare the students to face national exam since it is in the form of reading test. The next reason is because it is stated in standard competence/ basic competency. The curriculum demands the teachers to teach their students reading text with various genre texts as well as transactional and interpersonal text. The next reason is because they wanted to teach vocabulary to the students. Introducing vocabulary through reading is considered as auseful way to enrich their vocabulary since vocabulary plays important part in understanding the language. In the process of teaching English, especially reading, the participants faced some challenges. The challenge they faced in the process of teaching reading are related to students, media, and materials.

The first problem related to the students is their vocabulary mastery. Since some students did not learn English before and they rarely met the English in their environment, their vocabulary was limited. The difficulty in memorizing vocabulary also became barrier in the students' effort to learn English. Their lack of vocabulary mastery made them find it difficult to comprehend the text given. This problem is the main reason why a participant did not teach his students' reading. Another problem related to the students is their low motivation in learning English. Low motivation in learning English was caused by some reasons, and one of them is because the teaching and learning process is less interesting. As explained by T,

"Their motivation was high at grade VII. However, it decreased at grade VIII and IX. Maybe because the teachers are not graduated from English education department so the teaching and learning process is less interesting."

Next is media. Media play an important part in the process of teaching and learning English Unfortunately, the most common problems faced by the participants in rural area is the lack of media to support teaching. It also happened to most of the participants involved in this study. The absence of electricity (which is very common in remote areas) became the reason why the participants did not use electricity-powered media such as LCD projector, notebook, and tape recorder.

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It is also difficult to find non-electricity-powered media because of the difficult access.

Finally, the participants found problems with materials. Since the textbook used in the school is from the government, some of the materials were not fit for the real condition. The participants found it difficult to find good texts which are related to students' context. Furthermore, some schools only had LKS which sometimes are low in quality (some grammar errors and out of context). This situation was worsened by the absence of internet connection which is helpful in providing various materials for the learners.

Strategies in Teaching Reading

Besides gaining data about the challenges faced by the participants in their efforts in teaching English (especially reading), this study also provides the strategies used by the participants in teaching reading especially from the point of view of the four strands framework. The study captured the data on how the participants apply the four strands i.e. meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development in teaching reading and how they put the time portion of these strands.

Meaning-Focused Input

In this principle, Nation (2009) states that practice in reading need to be done for a range of the purposes of reading. Based on the data, reading to search for information is the most popular activity in this strand, done by 97% of participants. The next popular activity is reading for fun. Some of the participants used reading as a medium of learning something new, while there is no participant who used reading to critique texts. The reason why those purpose-based reading activities are not all applied is because of the lack of motivation by the learners. Furthermore, a participant prefers to teach certain activity because the students' language proficiency is low, as explained in the interview transcript below,

R	:	Why did you choose "reading to search for information" and "reading for fun" activities in reading? How about the other activities?
A	÷	In this case, my students lacked vocabulary of Bahasa Indonesia. It will be even harder for them to learn and write English. So, I decided to use reading as a way to improve their vocabularies and to train them to understand a text.

Meaning-Focused Output

In this principle, reading need to be related to other language skills which means that listening, speaking, and writing activity could be involved in the reading. Among four skills in English language, the participants tended to relate the reading activity to writing and speaking skills (both are productive skills). 38% of participants integrated reading activity with writing activity. They used reading activity as the way of deconstructing the text by asking the students to find the information from the text, learn the generic structure and language feature of the text. Another way of relating reading to writing was by using reading activity as inspiration to write their own texts. The participants used reading activity such as reading short functional message to make the students understand the structure so that they would be able to create the text based on the example they had read.

Regarding the integration of reading activity with speaking, 38% of the participants connected the reading activity with some speaking activities. A participant asked his students to pronounce the words in the text. Some participants asked their students to read aloud the text they read and they (the participants) checked their pronunciation.

R	:	How did you relate reading to speaking?
Т	:	Mostly by asking the students to read the text, giving the correct way to pronounce

Language-Focused Learning

Teaching reading also allows the transfer of mikroskills of English such as spelling, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. Related to the study, all the participants integrated vocabulary learning in the class. 75% of participants taught spelling practice in the classroom while 29 % of the participants paid attention to teaching grammar. Phonemic awareness activities were only applied by 4 participants in this study.

Fluency Development

In this strand, the students need to be helped and 'forced' to develop their reading fluency. There are some ways to achieve this goal, such as speed reading, repeated reading, scanning, and skimming. Among those ways, most participants promoted skimming and scanning in their classroom. Some participants used independent reading as a way to help the students improve their fluency in reading.

Time Allotment to Each Strand

Besides the kind of activities which are done in the application of the four strands in reading, the concern of this notion is also about the portion allocated to apply each strand in the teaching and learning process. Nation (2009) points out that to make a well-balanced English course (or reading in this case), a teacher need to pay attention to the portion given for each strand. Based on the data, the participants did not give equal time for each strand. A participant preferred to focus on meaning-focused input, while another participant paid more attention to language-focused learning. Those preferences are influenced by some factors as explained by the interview transcript below,

R	:	In the four strands framework, a well balanced programme should give equal amount of time to each strand (meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, Language-focused learning, and fluency development). Did you do that? What is your preference?	
Τ	••	At that time, I did not put balance on those activities. If it is in percentage, It would be 1. 50%, 2. 30%, 3. 5% 4. 15%	
A	:	No. Maybe it was 90% for no.3 (language-focused learning) and 10% for no. 1 (meaning-focused input)	
R	:	Why?	
Т	:	It was because of my students' low proficiency. With their low proficiency, if I forced them to do extensive reading or learn grammar I am not sure they would understand.	
A	:	Because my focus was on improving their vocabulary. When they are good at it, it will be helpful for them to understand a text as well as grammar rules.	

DISCUSSIONS

Related to the finding on the challenges faced by the teachers in teaching English especially reading in remote areas, there are many things to consider by relevant parties. However, this discussion focuses more on the strategies done by the participants when they taught English in remotes areas, since it may show the way of tackling those challenges.

One of the important keys of the four strands framework is the notion of the teacher as a planner, not a teacher (Nation & Yamamoto, 2012). It involves making decision of what are the most salient language items which are needed to be taught to the students at a particular condition. Then, a range of learning opportunities need to be provided across the

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four strands. Typically, most of the participants tend to teach vocabulary and pronunciation which falls into languagefocused learning. Thus, it can be said that the teachers were teaching, giving an explanation and presentation of language features rather than providing a range of activities which provide meaning-focused activity.

A research reveals that when the retention is measured with the use of receptive knowledge, immediate test, that learners typically remember around 30-40% of the words that they encounter in a direct teaching activity (Folse, 2006; Hulstijn and Laufer, 2001; Keating, 2008 in Nation & Yamamoto, 2012). It means that actually, the percentage can be even higher if a teacher provides broader activities which cover the four strands. Teaching in a certain condition such as in remote areas seems to force the teachers to focus more on the teaching of language-focused learning based activities than the other three strands namely meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, and fluency development which are all based on meaning focused activities. This decision is based on the teachers' preference and belief. However, based on the notion of the four strands framework, the teachers have important to pay attention to the strands (Nation & Yamamoto, 2012). The first thing is that the teachers need to make sure that the activities which represent meaning focused strands exist in the programme or course. This can be done by confirming that the level of the input and the output are right for their students. The next thing is that important condition of some activities like repetition, creative use, retrieval and dual coding are set up through the task choice and design. The last thing is the teachers need to ensure that appropriate amounts of time are given to the meaning focused strands.

CONCLUSIONS

Since English becomes one of the compulsory subjects to teach in secondary school, the teachers who teach in remote areas may face some challenges. They can be challenges which are related to the students' factors, media, and material. While the challenges in teaching English are inevitable, especially in remote areas, reading can be a useful activity to promote effective learning. One of the many ways of creating effective (and balanced) learning is with the application of the four strands framework which focuses on the integration of meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development activity in the learning process. However, it seems that the learning process in remotes area still focuses on language-focused learning and meaning-focused input. Unfortunately, disadvantaged condition has affected the application of the four strands to be an imbalance. Therefore, the teachers need to consider what is the most important to teach without neglecting meaning focused strands since it is essential in providing a range of learning opportunity for the students as well as creating meaningful and contextual learning.

Reading is useful not only to help the students understand the language, but also to improve students' vocabulary mastery, their fluency in other language skills, their understanding of micro skills of language (such as grammar, pronunciation, and spelling) and other possible purposes. Therefore, for the teachers who find it difficult to teach English to their students like the teachers of remotes and disadvantaged area, they can start creating their successful teaching from this skill. Moreover, the reading activity can be designed with the use of the four strands framework which provide the opportunity for the students not only to learn specific skills of language but also to integrate reading with other skills.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This study was supported by my colleagues from UniversitasPendidikan Indonesia who provided insight and expertise that greatly assisted the research, although they may not agree with all the conclusions of this study. Furthermore,

thanks to my colleagues, alumni of SM-3T who have kindly supported this study by being the respondents. Finally, this study was fully funded by **Indonesia Endowment Fund for Education Scholarship or LPDP Indonesia**.

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