Strategies to Improve English Reading Comprehension

Lailan Fadila
North Sumatra State Islamic University
Email: lailanfadhila@gmail.com

Sakinah Amaliyah Dalimunthe
North Sumatra State Islamic University
Email: sakinahdalimunthe45@gmail.com

Nursakinah Siagian
North Sumatra State Islamic University
Email: sakinahsiagian82@gmail.com

Address: Jl. William Iskandar Ps. V, Medan Estate, Kec. Percut Sei Tuan, Kab. Deli Serdang, North Sumatra 20371
Author Correspondence: lailanfadhila@gmail.com

Abstract. This study explores strategies aimed at enhancing English reading comprehension. With the backdrop of a complex information era, where proficient reading skills are crucial for accessing and applying information, the study focuses on interactive reading techniques, vocabulary acquisition, prior knowledge activation, and reading fluency as key components. The research adopts a literature review approach, synthesizing findings from existing studies to identify effective strategies. The primary objective is to ascertain which methods best contribute to improved reading comprehension in educational settings. Findings indicate that interactive techniques such as group discussions and role-playing, coupled with explicit vocabulary instruction and prior knowledge activation strategies, significantly enhance comprehension levels. Furthermore, fostering reading fluency through repeated reading and guided oral sessions positively correlates with improved comprehension abilities. The study concludes that a holistic approach integrating these strategies is essential for developing proficient readers who can engage effectively with diverse texts and contexts.

Keywords: Strategy, Improve, English Reading, Comprehension.

Abstrak. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi strategi yang bertujuan untuk meningkatkan pemahaman membaca bahasa Inggris. Dengan latar belakang era informasi yang kompleks, di mana keterampilan membaca sangat penting untuk mengakses dan menerapkan informasi, penelitian ini berfokus pada teknik membaca interaktif, perolehan kosa kata, aktivasi pengetahuan sebelumnya, dan kefasihan membaca sebagai komponen utama. Penelitian ini mengadopsi pendekatan tinjauan pustaka, mensintesis temuan dari penelitian yang ada untuk mengidentifikasi strategi yang efektif. Tujuan utamanya adalah untuk memastikan metode mana yang paling berkontribusi terhadap peningkatan pemahaman membaca di lingkungan pendidikan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa teknik interaktif seperti diskusi kelompok dan permainan peran, ditambah dengan instruksi kosakata eksplisit dan strategi aktivasi pengetahuan sebelumnya, secara signifikan meningkatkan tingkat pemahaman. Selain itu, meningkatkan kefasihan membaca melalui membaca berulang-ulang dan sesi lisan terbimbing berkorelasi positif dengan peningkatan kemampuan pemahaman. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa pendekatan holistik yang mengintegrasikan strategi-strategi ini sangat penting untuk mengembangkan pembaca yang mahir dan dapat terlibat secara efektif dengan beragam teks dan konteks.

Kata kunci: Strategi, Peningkatan, Membaca Bahasa Inggris, Pemahaman.

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is a fundamental skill essential for academic success and lifelong learning. Despite its importance, many learners, especially those for whom English is a second language, struggle with comprehending texts effectively. This difficulty often stems from a lack of vocabulary, insufficient background knowledge, and inadequate reading

strategies. The National Reading Panel (2000) emphasizes the need for explicit instruction in reading strategies to enhance comprehension skills.

Moreover, studies have shown that interactive and engaging reading techniques can significantly improve comprehension outcomes (Guthrie et al., 2004). Vocabulary acquisition is also crucial, as it directly influences the ability to understand and process information (Stahl & Nagy, 2006). Activating prior knowledge before reading has been demonstrated to facilitate better understanding of new material, as it helps readers make connections with the text (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). Additionally, reading fluency, which includes accuracy, speed, and proper expression, has a strong correlation with comprehension (Rasinski, 2004).

Reading is one of the fundamental skills essential in everyday life. In today's highly complex and dynamic information era, good reading ability is necessary to access, understand, and apply information obtained from various sources. However, many people, especially children and adolescents, struggle to comprehend texts they read, particularly in English (Nidoy & Moneva, n.d.). This difficulty is caused by various factors, such as a lack of motivation and interest, the influence of the first language, and insufficient background knowledge. Good reading ability not only helps individuals access information but also enables them to communicate effectively, solve problems, and make informed decisions (Chaniago & Depi Yunaspi, 2021). Therefore, effective strategies to improve reading skills and text comprehension are highly needed.

To address these challenges, educators and researchers have developed various strategies aimed at improving reading comprehension, including interactive reading techniques, vocabulary building exercises, prior knowledge activation, and fluency training. These strategies, supported by empirical research, provide a comprehensive approach to enhancing English reading comprehension, making it imperative to explore and implement them effectively in educational settings.

This research aims to identify the most effective strategies to enhance reading skills and text comprehension in English. Thus, this study is expected to contribute to the development of better reading skills and improve individuals' ability to access and understand information from various sources.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research methodology employed in this study is library research, also known as a literature review or secondary research. This method involves the comprehensive analysis of existing academic and scholarly resources, including books, peer-reviewed journal articles,

dissertations, conference papers, and credible online sources. The primary objective is to gather, evaluate, and synthesize relevant information and findings from previous studies related to strategies for improving English reading comprehension. By systematically reviewing the literature, this research aims to identify and categorize the various strategies that have been proposed and tested, highlighting their effectiveness and applicability in different educational contexts.

The process begins with defining specific research questions and keywords to guide the search for relevant literature. Subsequently, a thorough search is conducted across multiple academic databases such as JSTOR, PubMed, Google Scholar, and educational resource centers. The collected literature is then critically analyzed to extract pertinent data, theories, methodologies, and outcomes. This analysis includes comparing and contrasting different studies to understand the commonalities and divergences in findings. Furthermore, the research identifies gaps in the existing literature, providing a foundation for future research endeavors.

The synthesis of the gathered information results in a comprehensive overview of effective strategies for improving English reading comprehension, including interactive reading techniques, vocabulary acquisition methods, prior knowledge activation, and fluency training. By leveraging existing research, this study aims to present a well-rounded and evidence-based perspective on the most effective practices, thereby contributing valuable insights to educators, policymakers, and researchers dedicated to enhancing reading comprehension skills.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Interactive Reading Techniques

Interactive reading techniques are essential in enhancing English reading comprehension by engaging students actively with the text and promoting collaborative learning (Suciani et al., 2022). These methods foster a deeper understanding and retention of material by making the reading process more dynamic and participatory.

1. Group Discussions

   Group discussions allow students to share their interpretations and insights about a text, which can lead to a richer understanding. Discussing different viewpoints helps students to see beyond their initial perceptions and consider alternative interpretations. Research has shown that collaborative discussion can significantly improve comprehension and critical thinking skills (Montera Cadiong, 2019).

2. Role-Playing

Role-playing involves students acting out scenes or characters from a text, which helps them to engage more deeply with the material. This method encourages empathy and a deeper connection to the text, enhancing comprehension. Role-playing can make abstract or complex concepts more concrete and relatable (Tompkins, 2010).

3. Peer Teaching

In peer teaching, students take turns teaching parts of the text to each other. This strategy reinforces their understanding because teaching requires a thorough grasp of the material. Peer teaching has been found to be particularly effective in improving reading comprehension among students.

4. Technology-Assisted Tools

The use of technology, such as interactive e-books and reading apps, can provide engaging ways for students to interact with texts. These tools often include features like interactive quizzes, multimedia annotations, and instant feedback, which can enhance comprehension and retention (Dalton & Proctor, 2008).

5. Guided Reading Sessions

Guided reading sessions involve the teacher working with small groups of students at their instructional reading level. During these sessions, the teacher provides targeted support and scaffolding to help students improve their comprehension skills. This personalized approach ensures that students receive the help they need to progress (Ibrahim et al., 2024).

Interactive reading techniques make the reading process more engaging and effective by encouraging active participation, collaboration, and the use of diverse learning tools. By incorporating these strategies into reading instruction, educators can help students develop stronger comprehension skills and a more profound love for reading.

Vocabulary Acquisition and Its Role in Comprehension

Vocabulary acquisition is a critical component in the development of reading comprehension skills. A robust vocabulary allows readers to understand and interpret texts more effectively, as it provides the necessary language tools to decode and make sense of the content. Without a sufficient vocabulary, readers are likely to struggle with understanding the nuances and meanings within a text, which can impede overall comprehension.

1. Relationship Between Vocabulary and Comprehension

Research consistently shows a strong correlation between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension. Vocabulary acts as a foundation for comprehension, enabling

readers to understand the meaning of words, phrases, and sentences within a text. According to (Stahl and Nagy, 2006), students with a larger vocabulary are better equipped to understand and engage with complex texts, leading to improved comprehension outcomes.

2. Strategies for Vocabulary Acquisition

   a) Explicit Instruction

   Teaching vocabulary explicitly involves direct instruction of word meanings, usage, and context. This method includes activities such as defining words, using them in sentences, and exploring synonyms and antonyms. Explicit instruction helps students to internalize and retain new vocabulary, making it easier to recognize and understand these words when encountered in texts.

   b) Contextual Learning

   Learning vocabulary in context involves exposing students to new words within the framework of a sentence or a passage. This strategy helps students to infer meanings based on the surrounding text and develop a deeper understanding of how words are used in different contexts. Contextual learning is effective because it mirrors the natural way language is acquired.

   c) Word Consciousness

   Encouraging word consciousness involves fostering an awareness and interest in words and their meanings. Activities that promote word consciousness include word games, word maps, and encouraging students to be on the lookout for interesting or unfamiliar words in their reading. This approach helps to create a more engaging and enjoyable vocabulary learning experience (Graves, 2006).

   d) Mnemonic Devices

   Mnemonic devices are memory aids that help students remember new vocabulary by associating words with images, rhymes, or other mnemonic techniques. These devices can be particularly helpful for retaining difficult or abstract words, making them easier to recall during reading.

3. Implementing Vocabulary Strategies in the Classroom

   Effective vocabulary instruction requires a multifaceted approach that integrates various strategies to cater to different learning styles. Teachers can implement a combination of explicit instruction, contextual learning, and activities that promote word consciousness and mnemonic devices to enhance vocabulary acquisition. Regular practice

and reinforcement through reading and writing activities also play a crucial role in solidifying vocabulary knowledge.

4. The Impact of Vocabulary on Comprehension

A well-developed vocabulary not only aids in decoding and understanding texts but also enhances students' ability to think critically and engage deeply with the material. Vocabulary knowledge enables readers to make connections, draw inferences, and grasp the subtleties of language, all of which are essential for proficient reading comprehension (Chaniago & Depi Yunaspi, 2021).

By prioritizing vocabulary acquisition, educators can significantly improve students' reading comprehension skills. A rich vocabulary provides the essential building blocks for understanding complex texts and fosters a lifelong love of reading.

The Impact of Prior Knowledge Activation

Prior knowledge activation plays a crucial role in enhancing reading comprehension, as it allows readers to connect new information with their existing knowledge base. When readers activate their prior knowledge before engaging with a text, they are better equipped to understand, interpret, and retain the information presented. This cognitive process involves recalling relevant background knowledge, experiences, and concepts that relate to the content of the text, which facilitates a deeper and more meaningful comprehension.

The importance of prior knowledge in reading comprehension is supported by extensive research. According to schema theory, readers' comprehension is significantly influenced by their ability to relate new information to pre-existing knowledge structures, or schemas, in their minds (Nidoy & Moneva, n.d.). These schemas help readers to predict, infer, and fill in gaps within the text, making the reading experience more coherent and understandable. For example, a student with prior knowledge about climate change will find it easier to grasp a new article on the subject because they can link the new information to what they already know (Montera Cadiong, 2019).

One effective method for activating prior knowledge is the use of pre-reading activities. Techniques such as K-W-L charts (Know, Want to know, Learned) encourage students to articulate what they already know about a topic and what they hope to learn. This process not only primes their minds for new information but also sets a purpose for reading, which can increase motivation and engagement. Another strategy is the use of discussion questions or brainstorming sessions before reading, allowing students to share their existing knowledge and set the stage for integrating new information (Suciani et al., 2022).

Additionally, visual aids such as concept maps or graphic organizers can help students to visually connect their prior knowledge with new concepts. These tools provide a structured way for students to organize their thoughts and see relationships between ideas, which can enhance comprehension and recall (Novak & Gowin, 1984). For instance, creating a concept map about a historical event before reading a detailed account can help students to see how different events and figures are interconnected.

Moreover, teachers can use storytelling or analogies related to students' personal experiences to make new content more relatable. By drawing parallels between the text and familiar concepts, students can better understand and retain new information. For example, explaining a scientific principle using everyday examples can make abstract ideas more concrete and understandable.

The activation of prior knowledge not only aids in comprehension but also in critical thinking and problem-solving. When students relate new information to what they already know, they are more likely to question, analyze, and evaluate the content critically. This process leads to a deeper level of understanding and the ability to apply knowledge in various contexts (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995).

Activating prior knowledge is a powerful strategy for improving reading comprehension. By connecting new information to existing knowledge, readers can enhance their understanding, retention, and critical engagement with texts. Educators should incorporate techniques such as pre-reading activities, visual aids, and relatable analogies to effectively activate prior knowledge and support students in becoming proficient and thoughtful readers.

Reading Fluency and Its Connection to Comprehension

Reading fluency is a critical component of effective reading and is closely linked to reading comprehension. Fluency refers to the ability to read a text accurately, quickly, and with appropriate expression. When students read fluently, they can focus their cognitive resources on understanding the text rather than on decoding individual words. This shift from decoding to comprehension allows for smoother and more efficient reading, leading to better overall understanding of the material.

Fluency encompasses several elements: accuracy in word recognition, automaticity in word decoding, and prosody, which involves the rhythm and intonation of speech. Research has shown that these elements work together to facilitate comprehension. For instance, when readers decode words automatically, they have more cognitive capacity to interpret and analyze the meaning of the text (Samuels, 2006). Similarly, appropriate prosody helps in understanding

the nuances and emotional undertones of a text, which are crucial for deeper comprehension (Rasinski, 2004).

Improving reading fluency can significantly enhance reading comprehension. One effective strategy for developing fluency is repeated reading, where students read the same text multiple times until they achieve a high level of fluency. This practice helps in solidifying word recognition and improving reading speed, which in turn frees up cognitive resources for comprehension (Therrien, 2004). Additionally, guided oral reading, where teachers or peers provide immediate feedback and support, can also promote fluency and comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Fluency training should be integrated with comprehension instruction to maximize its benefits. For example, incorporating activities that emphasize both fluency and comprehension, such as paired reading or performance reading (where students read aloud to an audience), can help students practice fluent reading while simultaneously engaging with the text on a deeper level (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003). Moreover, selecting texts that are at the appropriate level of difficulty is essential, as texts that are too challenging can hinder fluency development and comprehension.

The relationship between reading fluency and comprehension underscores the importance of holistic reading instruction. By addressing fluency, educators can help students not only read more smoothly but also understand and enjoy texts more fully. This dual focus aligns with the broader goal of the research on strategies to improve English reading comprehension, as it highlights the interconnectedness of different reading skills and the need for comprehensive instructional approaches.

Reading fluency is integral to reading comprehension. Strategies that enhance fluency, such as repeated reading and guided oral reading, contribute to better comprehension by allowing readers to allocate more cognitive resources to understanding the text. Integrating fluency training with comprehension activities ensures that students develop the skills necessary for proficient and meaningful reading.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the results and discussions on strategies to improve English reading comprehension, it can be concluded that using interactive techniques, vocabulary acquisition, prior knowledge activation, and reading fluency are crucial in enriching students' ability to comprehend texts. Techniques such as group discussions, role-playing, peer teaching, and guided reading sessions foster active student engagement, while vocabulary acquisition and

prior knowledge activation help connect new information with existing knowledge. Reading fluency, on the other hand, enables students to focus on comprehending texts comprehensively. Practical recommendations include integrated learning approaches, teacher professional development, ongoing assessment, parental involvement, and innovation in educational technology, all aimed at enhancing students' overall and sustained reading comprehension abilities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

REFERENCE

Chaniago, D., & Depi Yunaspi. (2021). The Improvement of Reading Comprehension in English Through Student Team Achievement Division (Stad). International Journal of Humanities Education and Social Sciences (IJHESS), 1(2), 201–205. https://doi.org/10.55227/ijhess.v1i2.39

Dalton, B., & Proctor, C. P. (2008). The changing landscape of text and comprehension in the age of new literacies. In J. Coiro, M. Knobel, C. Lankshear, & D. J. Leu (Eds.), Handbook of Research on New Literacies (pp. 297-324). New York, NY: Routledge.

Guthrie, J. T., Wigfield, A., & Perencevich, K. C. (2004). Motivating Reading Comprehension: Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Ibrahim, M. W., Abdullah, U., & Amalia, H. (2024). Factors Causing Reading Comprehension Difficulties Among the Seventh Graders. 7(2), 496–501.

Kuhn, M. R., & Stahl, S. A. (2003). Fluency: A review of developmental and remedial practices. Journal of Educational Psychology, 95(1), 3-21.

Montera Cadiong, A. (2019). Factors Affecting the Reading Comprehension Level of Grade VI Learners of Selected Elementary School in the District of Tanza, Cavite. International Journal on Integrated Education, 2(5), 44–53. https://doi.org/10.31149/ijie.v2i5.134

National Reading Panel. (2000). Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction.

Nidoy, C. P., & Moneva, J. (n.d.). Reading comprehension factors and performance of EFL. 9(2), 1–21.

Novak, J. D., & Gowin, D. B. (1984). Learning How to Learn. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Pressley, M., & Afflerbach, P. (1995). Verbal Protocols of Reading: The Nature of Constructively Responsive Reading. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Rasinski, T. V. (2004). Assessing Reading Fluency. Pacific Resources for Education and Learning.

Samuels, S. J. (2006). Toward a model of reading fluency. In S. J. Samuels & A. E. Farstrup (Eds.), What Research Has to Say About Fluency Instruction (pp. 24-46). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Stahl, S. A., & Nagy, W. E. (2006). Teaching Word Meanings. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Suciani, N. K., Wardana, I. K., & ... (2022). The use of KWL strategy combined with picture to improve English reading comprehension. Academic Journal on …, 2(2), 121–132. https://e-journal.unmas.ac.id/index.php/ajoes/article/view/5917

Therrien, W. J. (2004). Fluency and comprehension gains as a result of repeated reading: A meta-analysis. Remedial and Special Education, 25(4), 252-261.

Tompkins, G. E. (2010). Literacy for the 21st Century: A Balanced Approach. Boston, MA: Pearson.